

Chaos as thousands flee Afghanistan

Stars and Stripes

Terrified Afghans swarmed the runway at Kabul's airport Monday in a desperate bid to escape Taliban rule, and at least seven people died in the chaos. The U.S. military began talks with the country's new Taliban masters to allow for the evacuation of the capital to continue without interference.

Four of the Afghans who died fell from a U.S. military cargo plane after attempting to hide in a wheel well, an eyewitness told Stars and Stripes.

Throngs of Afghans had stormed the terminal building Sunday, breaking out onto the tarmac and remaining there overnight, said the eyewitness, a security worker at the airport who asked not to be named for safety reasons.

U.S. troops have taken over security operations at the airport as the U.S. and other foreign governments continue to fly their workers and citizens out of the country. The military is sending another battalion of about 1,000 troops to help safeguard the airport, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters Monday.

Two others killed were gunmen who fired on the crowds in separate incidents and were killed by U.S. forces securing the airport, Fox News and Reuters reported.

Senior U.S. officials who confirmed the deaths spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly

discuss ongoing operations.

Flights shuttling U.S. Embassy workers out of the country were delayed Monday while U.S. service members worked to clear people from the runway, officials said.

The Taliban firmly controlled the city Monday but did not attack the airport.

At a face-to-face meeting Sunday in Doha, Qatar, U.S. Central Command's Gen. Frank McKenzie won the Taliban's agreement to establish a "deconfliction mechanism" to allow the airlift to continue, The Associated Press reported, citing an official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive talks not yet publicly announced.

A CENTCOM spokesperson declined comment to Stars and Stripes on the report and the Taliban did not respond to a query.

Hundreds of Americans from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul were airlifted to the airport Sunday on short notice as the Taliban seized power with stunning speed.

After taking provincial capitals in a matter of days, the hardline Islamist militants were on Kabul's doorstep by Sunday.

Later Sunday night, the U.S. Embassy began telling Americans still in the country to shelter in place after reports of shots fired at the airfield. They continued to warn away U.S. citizens from the airport in an alert Monday afternoon.

"Do not travel to the airport until you

have been informed by email that departure options exist," the U.S. Embassy in Kabul said on its website.

On Twitter, Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., called for Americans stranded in the country to contact his office immediately.

"This situation is dire, but we'll do everything in our power to help keep you informed and to help get you out," Cotton wrote.

The people who arrived at the airport found that most commercial flights were delayed or canceled.

Some arrived with receipts for Indian visas, though their passports were still at the Indian Embassy, the security worker who spoke with Stars and Stripes said. Others were Special Immigrant Visa applicants seeking travel to the U.S., and Afghans with similar hopes of travel to NATO countries they'd supported during the 20-year war.

Some with no documents or tickets at all, pleading for asylum, also arrived. The roads to the airport were clogged with Afghans seeking refuge amid rumors that Canada had sent planes and was taking anyone seeking to leave, the airport security worker told Stars and Stripes.

The civilian side of the airport was left unsecured, the security worker said, and U.S. service members warned the crowd several times away from the military side of the facility.

Afghan president was isolated before slipping into exile

Associated Press

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani slipped out of his country Sunday in the same way he had led it in recent years — a lonely and isolated figure.

Ghani quietly left the sprawling presidential palace with a small coterie of confidants — and didn't even tell other political leaders who had been negotiating a peaceful transition of power with the Taliban that he was heading for the exit.

Abdullah Abdullah, his long-

time rival who had twice buried his animosity to partner with Ghani in government, said that "God will hold him accountable" for abandoning the capital.

Ghani's destination was not immediately known. In a social media post from an unknown location, he wrote that he left to save lives. "If I had stayed, countless of my countrymen would be martyred and Kabul would face destruction and turn into ruins that could result to a

human catastrophe for its six million residents" Ghani wrote.

Abdullah, as well as former President Hamid Karzai, who had beaten a path to Ghani's door on numerous occasions to plead with him to put compromise above retaining power, were blindsided by the hasty departure. They said they had still been hoping to negotiate a peaceful transition with the Taliban, said Saad Mohseni, the owner of Afghanistan's popular TOLO TV.

"Ghani's inability to unite the country and his proclivity to surround himself with his cadre of Western-educated intellectuals brought Afghanistan to this point," said Bill Roggio, senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a U.S.-based research institute. "As Afghanistan collapsed, he refused to deal with the problems and further isolated himself from the power brokers he needed to deal with the problem, and the Afghan people as well."

US concerns over terror threats rise

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — America's top general said the United States could now face a rise in terrorist threats from a Taliban-run Afghanistan. That warning comes as intelligence agencies charged with anticipating those threats face new questions after the U.S.-backed Afghan military collapsed with shocking speed.

Less than a week after a military assessment predicted Kabul could be surrounded by insurgents in 30 days, the world on Sunday watched stunning scenes of Taliban fighters standing in the Afghan president's office and crowds of Afghans and foreigners frantically trying to board planes to escape the country.

Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told senators on a briefing call Sunday that U.S. officials are expected to alter their earlier assessments about the pace of terrorist groups reconstituting in Afghanistan, a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press.

In June, the Pentagon's top leaders said an extremist group like al-Qaida may be able to regenerate in Afghanistan and pose a threat to the U.S. homeland within two years of the American military's withdraw-

al from the country. Two decades after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan because the Taliban harbored al-Qaida leaders, experts say the Taliban and al-Qaida remain aligned, and other violent groups could also find safe haven under the new regime.

Based on the evolving situation, officials now believe terror groups like al-Qaida may be able to grow much faster than expected, according to the person, who had direct knowledge of the briefing and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

The Biden administration officials on the call with senators — among them were Milley, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin — said U.S. intelligence agencies are working on forming a new timeline based on the evolving threats, the person familiar with the matter said.

Current and former intelligence officials on Sunday pushed back against criticism of what was widely seen as a failure by the agencies to anticipate how fast Kabul could fall. One senior intelligence official said that "a rapid Taliban takeover was always a possibility," adding: "As the Taliban advanced, they ultimately met with little resistance. We have always been clear-eyed that this

was possible, and tactical conditions on the ground can often evolve quickly." The official was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

But President Joe Biden didn't suggest such an outcome at a July 8 news conference, when he said "the likelihood there's going to be the Taliban overrunning everything and owning the whole country is highly unlikely."

The reduced U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan — down to 2,500 troops at the end of President Donald Trump's term — may have hindered intelligence efforts in Afghanistan. Retired Lt. Gen. Robert Ashley, who led the Defense Intelligence Agency until October, said having fewer Americans embedded with Afghan forces meant there was less insight into how those forces would perform.

Monitoring threats in Afghanistan will be even more difficult with U.S. troops withdrawing and the Taliban in control. Intelligence agencies in Afghanistan work side by side with troops. Without the same military presence, spies are severely limited in what they can collect about the morale of Afghan troops or support for the Taliban.

Despite Taliban vows, many Afghans skeptical

Associated Press

ISTANBUL — As the Taliban mass at the gates of Kabul, they are promising a new era of peace in Afghanistan, with amnesty for those they have been battling for two decades and a return to normal life.

But Afghans who remember the Taliban's brutal rule and those who have lived in areas controlled by the Islamic militants in recent years have watched with growing fear as the insurgents have overrun most of the country while international forces withdraw.

Government offices, shops and schools are still shuttered in areas recently captured by the Taliban, with many residents ei-

ther lying low or fleeing to the capital, Kabul. But already there are indications of a return to the harsh version of Islamic rule Afghans lived under from 1996 until 2001, when the U.S. drove the Taliban from power after the 9/11 attacks.

Many fear the Taliban will roll back two decades of gains by women and ethnic minorities while restricting the work of journalists and NGO workers. An entire generation of Afghans was raised on hopes of building a modern, democratic state — dreams that seem to have melted away before the Taliban's relentless advance.

As the insurgents reached the capital early Sunday, a photo

circulated showing the owner of a beauty salon painting over posters depicting women. Young men raced home to change out of their jeans and tee-shirts and into the traditional shalwar kamiz outfit.

Shops, government offices and schools remain closed in cities seized by the Taliban in recent days, with residents staying indoors or fleeing to Kabul because of security fears. Many appeared to be lying low until they see what kind of order the militants impose.

The Taliban have issued statements aimed at reassuring Afghans. They say there will be no revenge attacks on those who worked for the government or

its security services, and that "life, property and honor" will be respected. They are urging Afghans to remain in the country and have pledged to create a "secure environment" for businesses, embassies, and foreign and local charities.

But some of their actions send a different message.

Last month, after capturing the Malistan district of the southern Ghazni province, Taliban fighters went door to door looking for people who had worked with the government, killing at least 27 civilians, wounding 10 others and looting homes, according to the semi-official Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

S. Korea troops vaccinated prior to exercise

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — South Korean troops conducting a joint, computer-simulated exercise with their American counterparts were all vaccinated and tested for COVID-19 before training began, a military official said Monday.

A South Korean Ministry of National Defense official speaking on the customary condition of anonymity told Stars and Stripes that due to service members being in close proximity with each other, “it was very important for all of them to get vaccinated.”

The two countries are conducting a combined command-post training Aug. 16 to 26. Rather than a large-scale field exercise involving thousands of combat troops, this exercise will primarily focus on computer simulations.

U.S. Forces Korea spokesman Col. Lee Peters, citing the command’s policy, did not comment on whether American forces partic-

ipating in the joint training were all vaccinated.

Peters said that USFK, however, “can reassure you that we remain aligned with [the defense ministry] on aggressive COVID mitigation measures including conducting training with minimal essential personnel and in distributed locations.”

Less than 1% of USFK’s force is currently confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 and it “remains at a high level of readiness,” according to a command statement Monday. Over 80% of its community, including military spouses and civilian employees, are vaccinated.

Last year’s exercise was canceled out of concern for the coronavirus’s spread. During the Trump administration, the allies reduced the scale of the exercises as part of diplomatic efforts to convince North Korea to curb its development of nuclear weapons and missiles.

North Korea regularly rails against the joint military exercises and views them as a re-

hearsal of a military invasion of its country. Senior North Korean official Kim Yong Chol on Tuesday described the announcement of this year’s exercise as an “unfavorable prelude further beclouding the future of the inter-Korean relations.”

Over 93% of South Korea’s 550,000 active-duty force had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, a government spokesperson said Aug. 6. The vaccine is voluntary for South Korean troops, though many of them are pressured by leaders to get inoculated.

Seven U.S. service members tested positive for the coronavirus Wednesday and Thursday and were relocated to isolation facilities, according to a USFK statement Friday. Five of the troops were stationed at Osan Air Base, one from Camp Hovey, and one from Camp Humphreys.

Ten USFK-affiliated individuals who recently arrived on the peninsula also tested positive between July 31 and Aug. 13, the command announced Monday.

Army shooter to compete at Paralympics

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — As a youngster growing up in Corsicana, Texas, Army Staff Sgt. John Joss shot caps off bottles with his grandfather’s 1921 Remington .22-caliber rifle.

Seventeen years into his career as a soldier, he’s headed to Tokyo to shoot for gold as a member of the U.S. Paralympic team. The Paralympics open Aug. 24 and conclude Sept. 5. The shooting competition takes place at the Asaka Shooting Range in Saitama prefecture from Aug. 30 to Sept. 5.

Joss, 38, joined the Army in 2004, motivated, in part, by the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on America, and found himself deployed to Camp Taji, Iraq, with 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, “Manchu,” in early 2007.

His crew set aside their mortars to serve as a quick reaction force, which meant “driving around in Strykers (armored vehicles) looking for enemy contact,” he said in a telephone interview July 1.

Almost five months into his tour, on Memorial Day, his Stryker struck a roadside bomb. The blast shattered many of the bones in Joss’ right leg. “Everything below the mid-shin was destroyed,” he said.

The wounded soldier was evacuated to Balad Air Base north of Baghdad and on to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio where a doctor told him, “We have to cut this off,” Joss recalled.

His wounds required multiple surgeries

that had him in and out of the hospital for 18 months. But a prosthesis got him on his feet and back to regular duty by October 2009.

Joss was a mortar gunnery instructor at Fort Benning, Ga. until 2012, when his sharpshooting at a leadership course caught the attention of the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit, which he joined soon after. The unit was authorized by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956, almost exclusively to win shooting competitions and raise Army marksmanship standards, according to the U.S. Army Recruiting Command. Between 1962 and 1978, the unit led the United States to six Olympic Gold Medals and 59 individual and team championships in international competition, the command states.

Joss’ first competitive efforts were with air rifles, where he excelled, winning gold at the World Cup in Thailand in 2013 before transitioning to the 50-meter prone event with a .22-caliber rifle. He placed fifth in that event at the Rio Paralympics in 2016.

Other veterans on the U.S. Paralympic shooting team include Kevin Nguyen, who was wounded by an improvised explosive device while serving with the Army in Afghanistan, and two former Marines, Nick Beach and Marco DeLaRosa, Joss said.

The key to being a good competitive shooter is grit, Joss said.

“It’s your brain and heart trying to work against you,” he said. “It is a very mental sport.”

Okinawa governor angry over Osprey losing panel in air

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND MARI HIGA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — An Okinawa-based Marine Corps MV-22B Osprey lost a panel while in flight Thursday night, prompting the island’s governor to call for the immediate cessation of flight operations.

The 14-by-18-inch metal panel, and a 9-by-3 fairing, were missing from the tilt-rotor aircraft upon its return to Marine Corps Air Station Futenma at approximately 9:30 p.m., 1st Marine Aircraft Wing spokesman Maj. Ken Kunze wrote in an email Monday to Stars and Stripes. The flight path between the air station and the Central Training Area was mostly over water and the crew did not see the parts fall from the aircraft, Kunze said. No damage or injuries were reported.

The incident prompted Okinawa Gov. Denry Tamaki to call for the “prompt suspension of operations” and “early closure” of MCAS Futenma.

“I am infuriated over the frequent occurrence of aircraft accidents,” Tamaki said in a statement released Saturday. “Aircraft-related mishaps can lead to serious accidents.”

Kunze said the Marines would not suspend flight operations.

US mulls vaccine boosters for elderly soon

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Warning of tough days ahead with surging COVID-19 infections, the director of the National Institutes of Health said Sunday that the United States could decide in the next couple weeks whether to offer coronavirus booster shots to Americans this fall.

Among the first to receive them could be health care workers, nursing home residents and other older Americans.

Dr. Francis Collins also pleaded anew for unvaccinated people to get their shots, calling them “sitting ducks” for a delta variant that is ravaging the country and showing little sign

of letting up.

“This is going very steeply upward with no signs of having peaked out,” he said.

Federal health officials have been actively looking at whether extra shots for the vaccinated may be needed as early as this fall, reviewing case numbers in the U.S. “almost daily” as well as the situation in other countries such as Israel, where preliminary studies suggest the vaccine’s protection against serious illness dropped among those vaccinated in January.

Israel has been offering a coronavirus booster to people over 60 who were already vaccinated more than five months ago.

No U.S. decision has been

made because cases here so far still indicate that people remain highly protected from COVID-19, including the delta variant, after receiving the two-dose Pfizer or Moderna regimen or the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

But U.S. health officials made clear Sunday that they are preparing for the possibility that the time for boosters may come sooner than later.

“There is a concern that the vaccine may start to wane in its effectiveness,” Collins said. “And delta is a nasty one for us to try to deal with. The combination of those two means we may need boosters, maybe beginning first with health care providers, as well as people in

nursing homes, and then gradually moving forward” with others, such as older Americans who were among the first to get vaccinations after they became available late last year.

He said because the delta variant only started hitting the U.S. hard in July, the “next couple of weeks” of case data will help the U.S. make a decision.

Moderna President Stephen Hoge said seeing some “breakthrough” infections emerge among the vaccinated within six months has been surprising, even if most symptoms so far have not been life-threatening.

“I think that suggests we are going to need booster vaccines to get through the winter,” he said.

Haiti residents hurt in quake still waiting for help

Associated Press

LES CAYES, Haiti — Under Haiti’s burning heat, Jennie Auguste laid on a flimsy foam mattress placed on an airport’s tarmac with a lost, thousand-yard stare. A resident of the southwestern part of the Caribbean nation, Auguste had wounds in the chest, abdomen and arm after the roof of the store she worked at collapsed during a powerful earthquake over the weekend.

She flashed the occasional grimace of pain while her sister or other helpful bystanders fanned her. In the badly damaged coastal town of Les Cayes, health care was at capacity, so Auguste could only wait for space at a local hospital, or a spot on one of the small planes that ferried injured people

to Haiti’s capital.

“There has been nothing. No help, nothing from the government,” Auguste’s sister, Bertrande, said Sunday as Haitians were still trying to take stock of everything around them as the death toll from disaster soared.

The country’s Civil Protection Agency said 1,297 dead from the magnitude 7.2 earthquake had been counted by Sunday, a day after the temblor turned thousands of structures into rubble and set off frantic rescue efforts ahead of a potential deluge from an approaching storm.

Saturday’s earthquake also left at least 5,700 people injured, with thousands more displaced from destroyed or damaged

homes. After sundown Sunday, Les Cayes was darkened by intermittent blackouts, and many people slept outside again, clutching small transistor radios tuned to news, terrified of the continuing aftershocks.

The devastation could soon worsen with the coming of Tropical Depression Grace, which was predicted to reach Haiti on Monday night. The civil protection agency said Haitians must expect strong winds, heavy rain, rough seas, landslides and flooding.

Officials said more than 7,000 homes were destroyed and nearly 5,000 damaged. Hospitals, schools, offices and churches were also affected.

US opens formal investigation into Tesla’s Autopilot program

Associated Press

DETROIT — The U.S. government has opened a formal investigation into Tesla’s Autopilot partially automated driving system after a series of collisions with parked emergency vehicles.

The investigation covers 765,000 vehicles, almost everything that Tesla has sold in the United States since the start of

the 2014 model year. Of the crashes identified by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration as part of the investigation, 17 people were injured and one was killed.

NHTSA said it has identified 11 crashes since 2018 in which Teslas on Autopilot or Traffic Aware Cruise Control have hit vehicles at scenes where first responders have used flashing

lights, flares, an illuminated arrow board or cones warning of hazards. The agency announced the action Monday in a posting on its website.

Autopilot has frequently been misused by Tesla drivers, who have been caught driving drunk or even riding in the back seat while rolling down a California highway.

The agency has sent investi-

gative teams to 31 crashes involving partially automated driver assist systems since June of 2016. Such systems can keep a vehicle centered in its lane and a safe distance from vehicles in front of it. Of those crashes, 25 involved Tesla Autopilot in which 10 deaths were reported, according to data released by the agency.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Lightning injures 4 hikers on Grandfather Mountain

NC LINVILLE — Four hikers were injured at one of North Carolina's most popular tourist attractions when lightning from a fast-approaching storm struck near them, a Grandfather Mountain official said.

One of the hikers — part of a group of seven walking around MacRae Peak — was taken to the hospital following the strike, according to Landis Taylor with the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation.

The hikers involved in the severe weather were recovering at home, state Department of Natural and Cultural Resources spokeswoman Michele Walker said.

The injuries happened on the portion of Grandfather Mountain that is designated as a state park, Taylor said. The remaining two-thirds of the mountain, which includes the iconic Mile High Swinging Bridge, is operated by the foundation.

Arrests for drugs, drunk driving down at rally

SD STURGIS — Data from the South Dakota Highway Patrol shows that arrests for drugs and drunken driving are down at this year's Sturgis Motorcycle Rally compared to last year.

According to the Highway Patrol, DUIs are down 14% while misdemeanor drug arrests dropped 34% and felony drug arrests declined by 8%.

According to the patrol, citations and warnings are up from last year. Citations climbed 20% and warnings are up 23%.

Meade County Sheriff Ron

Merwin said earlier that his deputies are generally looking past enforcing possession of small amounts of marijuana. The use of medical marijuana became legal in South Dakota on July 1, but the state is still developing regulations.

Millions of health fund spent at adult website

FL TAMPA — A former accounts manager for a nonprofit affiliated with the University of South Florida's medical school pleaded guilty to embezzling almost \$13 million, spending most of it at an adult website with some of it coming back to him.

The Tampa Bay Times reported that Ralph Puglisi, 59, faces up to 20 years in prison under the deal, which was recently filed in Tampa's federal court. Puglisi had worked for the University Medical Service Association, which provides staffing and support for USF Health and other medical providers in the Tampa Bay area.

According to court documents, Puglisi spent almost \$12 million at an adult website that allows users to subscribe to channels belonging to specific women, who disrobe and engage in sex acts on live video.

Firm helps get \$1.8M in unpaid ambulance bills

MS VICKSBURG — A city in Mississippi has hired a firm to collect more than \$1.8 million in ambulance bills unpaid since as early as 2013.

The Vicksburg Board of Mayor and Aldermen voted to retain Franklin Collection Services Inc.

of Tupelo to reduce or eliminate the backlog, The Vicksburg Post reported.

The city's fire department has run emergency medical service in Vicksburg since 1969, because the local ambulance company went out of business. It also sends ambulances to Warren County residents under an agreement with the county's board of supervisors.

Woman arrested in teen son's overdose death

AZ CHANDLER — Chandler police arrested a 39-year-old Mesa woman on suspicion of child abuse in her 15-year-old son's overdose death at a Chandler home last April.

A police statement said Jamie M. Barrett was arrested a day after the Maricopa County Medical Examiner notified police that the son died from toxic effects of fentanyl, an opioid more powerful than heroin.

According to police, investigators found that cellphone records indicated that Barrett asked her son to purchase fentanyl pills days before his death and offered to give him one.

According to the police statement, Barrett called 911 on April 10 to report her son was nonresponsive and foaming at the mouth, and she later told police that marijuana vape pens used by her son were possibly laced with fentanyl.

Turtles trapped, moved to help restore pond

MA QUINCY — Turtles in a Quincy pond were being temporarily relocated so the city can start a \$1.4 million pond restoration project.

Volunteers from the New England Herpetological Society were trapping the turtles and taking them to the New England Wildlife Center in Weymouth, The Patriot Ledger reported.

The trapping process, which involves sardine-baited "hoop traps," was expected to take four days, according to a news release.

The contractors are scheduled to begin restoration work on Aug. 27. The plan is to dredge sediment from the pond and create a gravel stormwater treatment wetland on the north side, the city said.

Warning flags used to track great white shark

ME CAPE ELIZABETH — Maine's plan to use shark warning flags this year came into play when a great white shark was spotted off Cape Elizabeth.

The eight-foot juvenile shark named "Tuck" was detected by a tracking device off Crescent Beach State Park, the Portland Press Herald reported. The Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands said this is the first year the shark warning flags are in use, and it was the first time the system was used at Crescent Beach.

The warning was used as a response to the tracking signal and not any sightings of a shark. Dozens of swimmers ignored it and continued swimming amid the searing heat and oppressive humidity.

The flag is purple with an outline of a shark on it. The state adopted it this year after a great white shark fatally bit swimmer Julie Dimperio Holowach near Bailey Island last year.

— From wire reports

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and Military News

Conferences look to trim SEC's power

Associated Press

The Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten and Pac-12 are exploring ways to counter the Oklahoma-Texas expansion and curtail the Southeastern Conference's growing power in college football.

The commissioners of the ACC, Big Ten and Pac-12 have discussed how creating an alliance between leagues that span the country could provide both financial benefits and policy-making pull as the NCAA begins to hand off more responsibilities to conferences.

The discussions were first reported by The Athletic. Two people with knowledge of the discussions confirmed them to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, as no one has been authorized by the conferences to speak publicly about the talks. The conversations were described as conceptual and exploratory.

There are two important events on the horizon that could influence how quickly some type of agreement — formal or otherwise — between the three conferences comes together: The next meeting regarding College Football Playoff expansion is scheduled for Sept. 28. And the NCAA has called for a special constitutional convention that is expected to convene no later than Nov. 15.

There is no obvious precedent in big-time college sports of an alliance of conferences, so this could be whatever the leagues involved make of it.

In this case, there are two areas where the conferences believe working together has potential to fortify all three: scheduling and revenue.

The untapped revenue-generating poten-

tial in college football is in creating more big games, or maybe better described as games between big brands.

A scheduling agreement among the ACC, Big Ten and Pac-12 could lead to more made-for-TV marquee games: Think Southern California-Clemson, Ohio State-Miami, Penn State-Florida State or Oregon-Michigan.

Of course, those types of games happen already. Oregon is at Ohio State and Washington plays at Michigan on Sept. 11.

An alliance could make those juicy matchups more frequent, with the hope that they unlock more revenue in media rights agreements and ticket sales.

The Pac-12's current TV deals with Fox and ESPN expire in 2024 and new commissioner George Kliavkoff's job is to figure out how to increase both revenue and exposure for a league that has been falling behind its peers in both.

The ACC has the opposite issue, being locked into its exclusive deal with ESPN until 2036.

The conference's new commissioner, Jim Phillips, is charged with finding ways to keep up with the SEC and Big Ten money-making machines in the absence of the bump that would come from going back on the market.

The Big Ten's current deals with Fox and ESPN are up in 2023. Commissioner Kevin Warren is in a more fortuitous position than his counterparts from the Pac-12 and ACC. The Big Ten's value is comparable to the SEC's. Still, there has to be some concern within the conference that the addition of Texas and Oklahoma to the SEC no later

than 2025 makes the Big Ten less relevant and lucrative.

The SEC's addition of Texas and Oklahoma gave the conference two more national brands to add to a roster that already includes the star power of Alabama, LSU, Florida, Georgia, Auburn and Texas A&M.

When it happens, the SEC will certainly increase the number of conference games it plays from eight to nine, and maybe even 10. Meanwhile, the SEC's new deal with ESPN gives the network exclusive rights to all of its football starting in 2024.

An SEC Saturday could include enough high-profile games, with prime slots on ESPN platforms, including the 3:30 p.m. showcase on ABC, that it overshadows the rest of college football.

A game of the week featuring some combination of the best teams in the other three conferences is a potential way to push back.

The College Football Playoff expansion plan now under discussion was created by the commissioners of the SEC, the Big 12, the Mountain West and Notre Dame's athletic director.

Barely two months after the 12-team plan was unveiled, SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey announced that the conference was inviting in Oklahoma and Texas, crippling the Big 12 and creating a path to turning an expanded CFP into a mini-SEC tournament.

The SEC's power play has not gone over well in other conferences.

An alliance between traditional Rose Bowl partners, the Big Ten and Pac-12, along with the ACC could be a way of containing the SEC's growing influence over college football.

Allmendinger gets 1st Indy win in crash-marred race

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — AJ Allmendinger screamed in elation after winning Sunday at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Just about everyone else left the world-famous speedway frustrated, angry or bewildered by a bizarre Brickyard 200 finish that involved 16 wrecked cars, two red flags, a spin out of the race leader and a penalty all in the final five laps to help Allmendinger reach victory lane.

The 39-year-old Allmendinger

beat Ryan Blaney across the yard of bricks by 0.929 seconds to pick up his second career Cup win in his fourth start of the season. It was also the first win for Kaulig Racing in the team's seventh start.

"Oh my God, I just won at Indy. Shank I just wanted to be like you," Allmendinger shouted to the crowd, referencing Michael Shank's win at the Indianapolis 500. "It was just survival of the fittest."

Allmendinger's other victory

also came on a road course — Watkins Glen in 2014.

Indianapolis' 14-turn, 2.439-mile road course certainly proved to be a challenge for everyone on this wild crossover weekend. After watching one IndyCar and two NASCAR Xfinity Series drivers go airborne in the sixth turn Saturday, track officials removed the "turtle" there.

On Sunday, drivers were having trouble with the chicane in the back-to-back fifth and sixth

turns. The damaged obstacle, NASCAR officials said, had deteriorated by the end of the race. Whether that was because of three consecutive days of practice, qualifying and racing was unclear.

When pole-winning driver William Byron ran over the curbing with five laps left, it was chaos. His No. 24 car veered off course and eight more drivers quickly followed him, immediately bringing out a yellow and eventually the first red flag.

Tribe's McKenzie nearly perfect in win

Associated Press

DETROIT — Indians starter Triston McKenzie retired the first 23 Detroit batters in order before Harold Castro lined a single to right with two out in the eighth inning and Cleveland beat the Tigers 11-0 on Sunday.

"It was a pretty good fastball, but I didn't get it past him," McKenzie said. "So it wasn't good enough."

The 24-year-old right-hander stunned the Comerica Park crowd of 25,684 hoping to see Miguel Cabrera's 500th homer. Instead, they gave McKenzie a standing ovation after Castro's hit and another after he finished the inning with his 11th strikeout.

"I started thinking about it in

the third inning, I knew I was perfect through the first time through the order, but I didn't change my routine," he said. "If I had to sum today up in one word, it would be 'comfortable.' I got into my groove right away and just kept going."

McKenzie (2-5) came within four outs of breaking baseball's longest no-hit drought. The Indians haven't had one since Len Barker's perfect game on May 15, 1981, against the Toronto Blue Jays.

"We knew in the first inning that he was really on his game," Detroit's Jonathan Schoop said. "By the fourth or fifth inning, we were hoping someone was going to get a hit, and Harold saved us with a big swing."

McKenzie, who has bounced between the Indians and Triple-A this season, pitched eight innings for the first time in his major league career.

"I was keeping an eye on him, but he was cruising," Cleveland interim manager DeMarlo Hale said. "You don't get a chance to throw one of those very often."

Tigers pitcher Drew Hutchison (0-1) allowed six runs while only getting five outs in his first major league game since a five-game stretch in the Texas Rangers rotation in Aug. 2018. Hutchison went 1-1 with an 8.86 ERA, and had pitched for four Triple-A teams and another in the American Association before getting the call from Detroit.

"I was excited to be back in

the majors, but nothing that affected my performance," he said. "All I can do is wipe this out of my memory and move forward."

Cleveland took control of the game with a six-run second inning.

With runners on first and third and no outs, Owen Miller hit a grounder to second baseman Schoop. Instead of going for a double play, Schoop threw home to get Bradley Zimmer, but catcher Grayson Greiner dropped the throw, allowing the run to score.

Tigers manager A.J. Hinch said he would have rather seen Schoop take the double play, but the second baseman went with his instincts.

Padres' Tatis homers twice in his return from IL

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Fernando Tatis Jr. homered twice and drove in four runs in his return from the injured list, and the San Diego Padres beat the Arizona Diamondbacks 8-2 on Sunday.

The 22-year-old Tatis had four hits, helping the Padres snap a four-game losing streak. Playing right field for the first time in his professional career and batting lead-off, Tatis posted his fifth multihomer game this season and No. 8 for his career.

Jake Cronenworth's two-run homer in the fifth lifted San Diego to a 4-1 lead. Reiss Knehr (1-0) got the win.

Yankees 5, White Sox 3: Rougned Odor hit a two-run homer and Nestor Cortes pitched six solid innings, leading New York to the victory at Chicago.

Luke Voit also hit a two-run homer in the ninth for the Yankees, who went 5-1 in the season series against the White Sox.

Red Sox 6, Orioles 2: Eduardo Rodriguez pitched six effective innings, J.D. Martinez hit a three-run homer and host Boston sent Baltimore to its 11th straight loss.

The Red Sox have won four of five games after losing 10 of 12 and falling out of first place in the AL East.

Dodgers 14, Mets 4: Max Muncy hit a pair of two-run homers and Max Scherzer worked out of some trouble over six solid in-

nings, leading Los Angeles to sweep of a three-game series at New York.

Muncy homered in the second off Carlos Carrasco and in the sixth off Yennsy Diaz. In between, he flew out to the warning track in center in the fourth against Jake Reed. The two-homer game was the second of the season for Muncy, who went deep twice against the Colorado Rockies on July 17. It was the seventh multihomer game of his career.

Cardinals 7, Royals 2: Nolan Arenado homered for the third straight game, and St. Louis completed an in-state sweep at Kansas City.

In the second inning, Arenado and Tyler O'Neill hit back-to-back homers for the second time in three games. The two-run shot for Arenado was No. 25 on the year, and O'Neill's shot was his 20th.

Braves 6, Nationals 5: Dansby Swanson homered for the third straight game, and Atlanta won at Washington to sweep the series.

Swanson hit a two-run drive to center to increase the Braves' lead to 3-0 in the third. It was his 24th of the season, a total that includes two from Saturday and another Friday for four of Atlanta's 11 homers in the three-game set.

Reds 7, Phillies 4: Jonathan India homered and scored three times, leading Cincinnati to the win at Philadelphia.

India drove Aaron Nola's third pitch deep to left-center for his 15th homer. The rookie also singled and scored on Shogo Akiyama's two-run double in the third and singled and scored again on Tyler Naquin's bases-loaded walk in the fifth.

Marlins 4, Cubs 1: Jazz Chisholm Jr. and Jesús Aguilar homered, and host Miami handed Chicago its 11th straight loss.

Giants 5, Rockies 2: Tommy La Stella had three hits and two RBIs for host San Francisco, and Alex Wood pitched into the seventh inning to win his fifth straight decision.

Blue Jays 8, Mariners 3: Teoscar Hernández, Randal Grichuk, Corey Dickerson and Marcus Semien homered, powering Toronto to the win at Seattle.

Angels 3, Astros 1: Reid Detmers pitched six innings of three-hit ball to earn his first major league victory, and host Los Angeles avoided a three-game sweep.

Brewers 2, Pirates 1: Willy Adames scored twice and Christian Yelich had two hits, helping Milwaukee to the road win.

Twins 5, Rays 4: Jorge Polanco hit a game-ending sacrifice fly in the ninth inning to lift host Minnesota to the win.

Rangers 7, Athletics 4: Rookie DJ Peters connected on a pair of two-run homers for host Texas, and Kolby Allard was solid in his first win in two months.

Pritchard, Mitchell shine in Summer League

Associated Press

Payton Pritchard arrived at the NBA Summer League in Las Vegas looking to take advantage of the opportunity to show he deserves major minutes this upcoming season with the Boston Celtics.

Mission accomplished.

The second-year point guard was one of the biggest stars in Las Vegas before leaving the team due to a prior family engagement. He averaged 20.3 points, 8.7 assists and 5.7 rebounds in three games while helping the unbeaten Celtics reach Tuesday night's championship game against the Sacramento Kings (4-0).

That's good news for Boston, which parted ways with Kemba Walker this offseason. Pritchard may be in line for a more prominent role in Boston's backcourt that includes Marcus Smart at point guard.

Pritchard shot 57.7% from three-point range and his 1.38 points per possession ranks first among all Summer League players. He also protected the basketball well, averaging 1.3 turnovers per game.

While he won't play in the title game, Pritchard gave the Celtics something to think about before leaving.

"That is what separates good point guards from great ones — the ability to make people around you better and get people shots and just being able to control the game," said Pritchard, who averaged 7.7 points and 1.8 assists last year in 66 games for the Celtics. "That is what I'm trying to become and I'm going to keep working on that."

The Kings reached the championship game behind a balanced scoring attack and

a consistently strong defense ignited by first-round draft pick Davion Mitchell. His numbers aren't eye-popping, but there's no denying what he brings on defense.

Mitchell earned the nickname "Off Night" while helping Baylor to an NCAA national championship last season — as in, whoever he's guarding is going to have an off night.

"That's his bread and butter, the way he attacks the game, the way he defends it," said Kings Summer League head coach Bobby Jackson. "He's a really really great on-ball defender. He has to get better off the ball and we've talked about it. But he sets the tone at the top of the key offensively and defensively for us."

Here are some of the other Summer League standouts:

■ **Cam Thomas, Nets:** Thomas is leading the NBA Summer League in scoring, averaging 27 points per game while probably making some NBA general managers wish they hadn't passed on drafting him. The 27th overall pick in 2021 had a 31-point night that included a game-winning three-pointer in sudden death double overtime Thursday followed by a 36-point performance Sunday. The LSU product is shooting 36% from three-point range.

■ **Cade Cunningham, Pistons:** The No. 1 overall pick in the NBA draft hasn't disappointed, averaging 18.7 points and 5.7 rebounds per game. There are surely some Detroit fans who'd like to see him with the ball in hands more often than what they've seen this summer given his passing ability. But he'll need to cut down on his turnovers

(4 per game) moving forward.

■ **Paul Reed, 76ers:** The 76ers already have an All-Star center in Joel Embiid, but G League MVP Paul Reed could bring some quality depth to Philly. Check out Reed's numbers in an overtime loss Sunday night to the Timberwolves: 27 points, 20 rebounds, four assists, four steals and four blocks. Reed is averaging 17.5 points, 12.5 rebounds and 2.5 blocks per game in Las Vegas.

■ **Immanuel Quickley, Knicks:** Like Pritchard, Quickley is another second-year point guard who appears to have taken a major step forward in his game, averaging 21.8 points and eight assists per game. He's only shooting 25% from three-point range, but the 2020 first-round draft pick has shown promise that he could really begin to emerge in his second season.

■ **Rockets Rookies:** The Houston Rockets had three picks in the first round, including Jalen Green at No. 2 overall. Green played well in three game appearances, averaging 20.3 points per game while shooting 52.6% from three-point range and 92.9% from the free throw line. But the Rockets have also gotten a big boost from 6-foot-9 center Alperen Sengun, who is averaging 15 points, 11 rebounds and three blocks.

■ **Desmond Bane, Grizzlies:** The second-year guard has quietly had a productive summer and is third in the league in scoring at 24 points per game while shooting an eye-catching 69.2% from beyond the arc. He could be a nice complement to point guard Ja Morant this season.

Federer will miss Open, needs third knee surgery

Associated Press

Roger Federer will miss the U.S. Open and be sidelined for months because he needs a third operation on his right knee, a procedure he said will leave him with "a glimmer of hope" that he can return to competition.

Federer announced the news Sunday via a video message on Instagram.

"I've been doing a lot of checks with the doctors, as well, on my knee, getting all the information as I hurt myself further during the grass-court season and Wimbledon," Federer said.

"Unfortunately they told me for the medium- to long-term, to feel better, I will need surgery, so I decided to do it. I will be on crutches for many weeks and then also out of the game for many months."

The 40-year-old Federer, who has 20 Grand Slam singles titles to share the men's record with Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, acknowledged there was a chance his playing career could be over, but he said he would rehab the knee with the goal of making another comeback.

"I want to be healthy. I want to be running around later, as well, again, and I want to give myself a glimmer of hope, also, to return to the tour in some shape or form," Federer said. "I am realistic, don't get me wrong. I know how difficult it is at this age right now to do another surgery and try it."

Federer missed more than a year of action after first having his knee repaired shortly after the 2020 Australian Open in February of that year. He had a follow-up procedure that June.

He returned to Grand Slam

action at the French Open in late May and then pulled out of the tournament after three victories. His most recent match was a loss at the Wimbledon quarterfinals last month, and he cited the knee injury in withdrawing from the Tokyo Olympics.

The season's last Grand Slam tournament, the U.S. Open, starts Aug. 30 in New York. Nadal is dealing with a foot injury, and Djokovic pulled out of tune-up tournaments, saying he needed to rest and recuperate following the Olympics, where he failed to win a medal.