

Russia implies link between attack, jet crash

Associated Press

Russia's aviation chief said Friday that a Ukrainian drone attack was underway in the Russian region that an airliner was destined for before it diverted and crashed earlier this week.

Dmitry Yarov, of Rosaviatsia, didn't comment on statements by an Azerbaijani lawmaker and some aviation experts who blamed Wednesday's Azerbaijan Airlines crash on Russian air defenses responding to a Ukrainian attack.

The plane was flying from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, when it turned toward Kazakhstan and crashed while making an attempt to land there. The crash killed 38 people and left all 29 survivors injured.

Azerbaijan Airlines on Friday blamed the crash on unspecified "physical and technical interference" and announced the suspension of flights to several Russian airports. It didn't say where the interference came from or provide any further details.

Authorities in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia have been tight-lipped about a possible cause pending an official probe. But a member of Azerbaijan's parliament, Rasim Musabekov, told the Azerbaijani news agency Turan on Thursday that the plane was fired on while in the skies over Grozny and urged Russia to offer an official apology.

Asked about Musabekov's statement, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment, saying that it will be up to investigators to determine

the cause of the crash.

"The air incident is being investigated, and we don't believe we have the right to make any assessments until the conclusions are made as a result of the investigation," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters.

Yarov, the Russian aviation chief, said that as the plane was preparing to land in Grozny in deep fog, Ukrainian drones were targeting the city, prompting authorities to close the area to air traffic.

Yarov said that after the captain made two unsuccessful attempts to land in Grozny, he was offered other airports but decided to fly to Aktau in Kazakhstan, across the Caspian Sea.

"The situation in the area of Grozny airport was quite difficult," he said in a statement. "There are many circumstanc-

es that it's necessary to investigate jointly."

Investigators from Azerbaijan are working in Grozny as part of the crash probe, the Azerbaijani Prosecutor General's office said in a statement.

As the probe began, some aviation experts pointed out that holes seen in the plane's tail section suggested that it could have come under fire from Russian air defense systems fending off a Ukrainian drone attack.

Ukrainian drones have previously attacked Grozny and other areas in the country's North Caucasus.

FlightRadar24 said in an online post that the aircraft faced "strong GPS jamming" that interfered with flight tracking data. Russia has extensively used sophisticated jamming equipment to fend off drone attacks.

Ukraine: N. Korean troops suffering heavy losses

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — North Korean troops are suffering heavy losses in the fighting in Russia's Kursk region and facing logistical difficulties as a result of Ukrainian attacks, Ukraine's military intelligence said Thursday.

The intelligence agency said Ukrainian strikes near Novoivanovka inflicted heavy casualties on North Korean units.

It said North Korean troops also faced supply issues and even shortages of drinking water.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said earlier this week that 3,000 North Korean troops have been killed or wounded in the fighting in the Kursk region. It marked the

first significant estimate by Ukraine of North Korean casualties several weeks after Kyiv announced that North Korea had sent 10,000 to 12,000 troops to Russia to help it in the almost three-year war.

The casualty disclosure came as the Biden administration was pressing to send as much military aid as possible to Ukraine before President-elect Donald Trump takes over in January.

Ukrainian forces launched an incursion into the Kursk region in August, dealing a significant blow to Russia's prestige and forcing it to deploy some of its troops from eastern Ukraine, where they were pressing a slow-moving offensive.

The Russian army has been

able to reclaim some territory in Kursk from Ukrainian forces but has failed to dislodge them.

At the same time, Russia has sought to break Ukraine's resistance with waves of strikes with cruise missiles and drones against Ukraine's power grid and other infrastructure.

The latest attack on Christmas involved 78 missiles and 106 drones, striking power facilities, Ukraine's air force said. It claimed to have intercepted 59 missiles and 54 drones and jammed 52 other drones.

On Thursday, Russia attacked Ukraine with 31 exploding drones. Twenty were shot down and another 11 didn't reach their target due to jamming, the Ukrainian air force

said.

As part of the daily barrage, Russian forces also struck a central market in Nikopol in the Dnipropetrovsk region with a drone, wounding eight people, according to local authorities.

Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened Thursday that Russia could again hit Ukraine with the new Oreshnik hypersonic ballistic missile that was first used in a Nov. 21 strike on the Ukrainian city of Dnipro.

Speaking to reporters, Putin said Russia has just a few Oreshnik missiles but added that it wouldn't hesitate to use them on Ukraine.

Putin said Russia has launched serial production of the new weapon.

Finland stops Russia-linked vessel over damaged cable

Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany — Finnish authorities detained a ship linked to neighboring Russia as they investigate whether it damaged a Baltic Sea power cable and several data cables, police said, in the latest incident involving disruption of key infrastructure in the region.

Finnish police and border guards boarded the vessel, the Eagle S, early Thursday and took over the command bridge, Helsinki Police Chief Jari Liuku told a news conference. The vessel was being held in Finnish territorial waters, police said.

The Eagle S is flagged in the Cook Islands but was described by Finnish customs officials and the European Union's executive commission as part of Russia's shadow fleet of fuel tankers. Those are aging vessels with obscure ownership, acquired to evade Western sanctions amid

the war in Ukraine and operating without Western-regulated insurance. Russia's use of the vessels has raised environmental concerns about accidents given their age and uncertain insurance coverage.

The Eagle S' anchor is suspected of causing damage to the cable, Yle television reported, relying on police statements.

The EU's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, said in a statement that the incident was "the latest in a series of suspected attacks on critical infrastructure" and commended the Finnish authorities "for their swift action in boarding the suspected vessel."

The ship "is part of Russia's shadow fleet, which threatens security and the environment, while funding Russia's war budget," said Kallas, a former Estonian prime minister. "We will propose further measures, in-

cluding sanctions, to target this fleet."

The Estlink-2 power cable, which brings electricity from Finland to Estonia across the Baltic Sea, went down on Wednesday. The incident follows damage to two data cables and the Nord Stream gas pipelines, both of which have been termed sabotage.

The Estonian government met in emergency session over the incident. The shadow tankers "are helping Russia to earn funds that will aid Russian hybrid attacks," Prime Minister Kristen Michal said at a news conference.

He said repairs to the cable could take as long as seven months.

Two data cables — one running between Finland and Germany and the other between Lithuania and Sweden — were severed in November.

China slaps sanctions on 7 firms over aid to Taiwan

Associated Press

BEIJING — The Chinese government placed sanctions on seven companies on Friday in response to recent U.S. announcements of military sales and aid to Taiwan, the self-governing island that China claims as part of its territory.

The sanctions also come in response to the recent approval of the U.S. government's annual defense spending bill, which a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement said "includes multiple negative sections on China."

China objects to American military assistance for Taiwan and often imposes sanctions on related companies after a sale or aid package is announced. The sanctions generally have a limited impact, because American defense companies don't sell arms or other military goods to China.

The seven companies being sanctioned are Insitu Inc., Hudson Technologies Co., Saronic Technologies, Inc., Raytheon Canada, Raytheon Australia, Aerkomm Inc. and Oceanering International Inc., the Foreign Ministry statement said. It said that "relevant senior executives" of the companies are also sanctioned, without naming any.

Any assets they have in China will be frozen, and organizations and individuals in China are prohibited from engaging in any activity with them, it said.

U.S. President Joe Biden last week authorized up to \$571 million in Defense Department material and services and military education and training for Taiwan. Separately, the Defense Department announced that \$295 million in military sales had been approved.

China launches amphibious assault ship

Associated Press

BANGKOK — China launched a new amphibious assault ship Friday, capable of launching fighter jets and designed to strengthen the navy's combat ability in distant seas.

The Sichuan, the first ship of the 076 type, is China's largest such ship yet, displacing 40,000 tons and equipped with an electromagnetic catapult which will allow fighter jets to launch off its deck, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

Developed by Chinese researchers, it's also equipped with an "arrestor technology" which allows fighter jets to land on its deck.

China's first amphibious assault ships, the type 075, launched in 2019.

China's People's Liberation Army Navy, or PLAN, has been working on modernizing its forces for more than a decade, with the aim of being able to operate globally rather than being restricted to waters near the Chinese mainland. China first managed to launch fighter jets with the new electromagnetic technology on its indigenously made aircraft carrier, the Fujian, which launched two years ago.

Chinese military expert Song Zhongping compared the Sichuan to a "light aircraft carrier," according to the Global Times.

The ship will undergo further testing, including sea trials.

China has the largest navy in the world and is consistently trying to upgrade its fleet. Recently, researchers found that the country is working on designing a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, which would allow it to deploy its ships in distant waters without needing a base to refuel.

The U.S. currently has 11 aircraft carriers, all nuclear powered, allowing it to keep multiple strike groups deployed around the world at all times, including in the Asia-Pacific.

Most blame insurance practices in CEO death

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Most Americans believe health insurance profits and coverage denials share responsibility for the killing of UnitedHealthcare's CEO — although not as much as the person who pulled the trigger, according to a new poll.

In the survey from NORC at the University of Chicago, about 8 in 10 U.S. adults said the person who committed the killing has “a great deal” or “a moderate amount” of responsibility for the Dec. 4 shooting of Brian Thompson.

Despite that, some have cast Luigi Mangione, the 26-year-old suspect charged with Thompson's murder, as a heroic figure in the aftermath of his arrest, which gave rise to an outpouring of grievances about insurance companies. Police say the words “delay,” “deny” and “depose” were scrawled on the ammunition investigators found at the scene, echoing a phrase commonly used to describe insurer tactics to avoid

paying claims.

UnitedHealthcare has said Mangione was not a client.

About 7 in 10 adults say that denials for health care coverage by insurance companies, or the profits made by health insurance companies, also bear at least “a moderate amount” of responsibility for Thompson's death. Younger Americans are particularly likely to see the murder as the result of a confluence of forces rather than just one person's action.

The poll finds that the story of the slaying is being followed widely. About 7 in 10 said they had heard or read “a lot” or “some” about Thompson's death.

Multiple factors were seen as responsible. About half in the poll believe that at least “a moderate amount” of blame is rooted in wealth or income inequality, although they did not think other factors like political divisions in the U.S. held the same level of responsibility.

Patients and doctors often

complain about coverage denials and other complications interfering with care, especially for serious illnesses like cancer and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS. Insurance industry critics frequently point to company profits in questioning whether the interests of patients are their top focus.

UnitedHealthcare made more than \$16 billion in profit last year, before interest and taxes, on \$281 billion in revenue. Insurers frequently note that most of their revenue goes back out the door to pay for care. UnitedHealthcare said this month that it pays about 90% of medical claims when they are submitted. The insurer has not provided details about how many claims that involves.

Americans under 30 are especially likely to think a mix of factors is to blame for Thompson's death. They say that insurance company denials and profits are about as responsible as the killer for his death. About 7 in 10 U.S. adults between 18 and 29

say “a great deal” or “a moderate amount” of responsibility falls on profits made by health insurance companies, denials for coverage by health insurance companies or the person who committed the killing.

Young people are also the least likely age group to say “a great deal” of responsibility falls on the person who committed the killing. Only about 4 in 10 say that, compared with about 6 in 10 between 30 and 59. Roughly 8 in 10 adults over 60 say that person deserves “a great deal” of responsibility.

About two-thirds of young people place at least a moderate level of blame on wealth or income inequality, in general.

People under 30 are more likely to place blame on the media, with 54% saying that compared with about one-third of older adults.

Frustrations with health insurers, coverage and the complicated U.S. health care system have been simmering for years among patients.

Man indicted in burning death of woman in subway

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The man accused of burning a woman to death inside a New York City subway train has been indicted on state charges, a prosecutor said Friday.

The development comes days after Sebastian Zapeta's arrest and police questioning, in which authorities say he claimed not to know what had happened although he identified himself in photos and surveillance video showing the fire being lit.

Zapeta's indictment will remain under seal until he is arraigned on the new charges.

The harrowing episode Sunday morning on a stopped F train at Brooklyn's Coney Island station has renewed concerns

about safety in the nation's largest mass transit system.

Zapeta, 33, who federal immigration officials said is a Guatemalan citizen who entered the U.S. illegally, was initially charged in a criminal complaint with murder and arson.

Such filings are often a first step in the criminal process because, in New York, all felony cases require a grand jury indictment to proceed to trial unless a defendant waives that requirement.

According to prosecutors, Zapeta approached the woman who may have been sleeping, set her clothing on fire with a lighter and then fanned the flames with a shirt. She has yet to be identified.

NY to charge fossil fuel firms for climate damage

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — Large fossil fuel companies would have to pay fees to help New York fight the effects of climate change under a bill signed Thursday by Gov. Kathy Hochul.

The new law requires companies responsible for substantial greenhouse gas emissions to pay into a state fund for infrastructure projects meant to repair or avoid future damage from climate change.

Lawmakers approved the bill earlier this year to force big oil and gas companies to contribute to the cost of repairs after extreme weather events and resiliency projects such as coastal wetland restoration and up-

grades to roads, bridges and water drainage systems.

“The Climate Change Superfund Act is now law, and New York has fired a shot that will be heard round the world: the companies most responsible for the climate crisis will be held accountable,” said state Sen. Liz Krueger, a Democrat who sponsored the bill.

“The planet's largest climate polluters bear a unique responsibility for creating the climate crisis, and they must pay their fair share to help regular New Yorkers deal with the consequences,” Krueger said.

The biggest emitters of greenhouse gases between 2000 and 2018 would be subjected to the fines.

Israeli troops storm, burn Gaza hospital

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Israeli troops stormed one of the last hospitals operating in northern Gaza on Friday, igniting fires and forcing many staff and patients outside to strip in winter weather, the territory's health ministry said.

Kamal Adwan Hospital has been hit multiple times over the past three months by Israeli troops waging an offensive against Hamas fighters in surrounding neighborhoods, according to staff. The ministry said a strike on the hospital a day earlier killed five medical staff.

Israel's military said it was conducting operations against Hamas infrastructure and militants in the area of the hospital, without details. It repeated claims that Hamas fighters operate inside Kamal Adwan but provided no evidence. Hospital officials have denied that.

The Health Ministry said troops forced medical person-

nel and patients to assemble in the yard and remove their clothes. Some were led to an unknown location, while some patients were sent to the nearby Indonesian Hospital, which was knocked out of operation after an Israel raid this week.

Israeli troops during raids frequently carry out mass detentions, stripping men to their underwear for questioning in what the military says is a security measure as they search for Hamas fighters. The AP doesn't have access to Kamal Adwan, but armed plainclothes members of the Hamas-led police forces — tasked with keeping security and officially separate from the group's armed wing — have been seen in other hospitals.

The Health Ministry said Israeli troops also set fires in several parts of Kamal Adwan, including the lab and surgery department. It said 25 patients and 60 health workers remained in the hospital out of 75 patients

and 180 staff who had been there. The account could not be independently confirmed, and attempts to reach hospital staff were unsuccessful.

"Fire is ablaze everywhere in the hospital," an unidentified member of the staff said in an audio message posted on the social media accounts of hospital director Hossam Abu Safiya. The staffer said some evacuated patients had been unhooked from oxygen. "There are currently patients who could die at any moment," she said.

Since October, Israel's offensive has virtually sealed off the northern Gaza areas of Jabaliya, Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya and leveled large parts of them. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were forced out but thousands are believed to remain in the area, where Kamal Adwan and two other hospitals are located. Troops raided Kamal Adwan in October, and on Tuesday troops stormed and evacuated the Indonesian Hos-

pital.

The area has been cut off from food and other aid for months, raising fears of famine. The U.N. says Israeli troops allowed just four humanitarian deliveries to the area from Dec. 1 to 23.

The Israeli rights group Physicians for Human Rights-Israel this week petitioned Israel's High Court of Justice seeking a halt to military attacks on Kamal Adwan. It warned that forcibly evacuating the hospital would "abandon thousands of residents in northern Gaza." Before the latest deaths Thursday, the group documented five other staffers killed by Israeli fire since October.

Israel launched its campaign in Gaza vowing to destroy Hamas after the group's Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel in which militants killed around 1,200 people and abducted some 250 others. Around 100 Israelis remain captive in Gaza, around a third believed to be dead.

German president dissolves parliament, sets election

Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany — German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on Friday ordered parliament dissolved and set new elections for Feb. 23 in the wake of the collapse of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition, saying it was the only way to give the country a stable government capable of tackling its problems.

Scholz lost a confidence vote on Dec. 16 and leads a minority government after his unpopular and notoriously rancorous three-party coalition collapsed on Nov. 6 when he fired his finance minister in a dispute over how to revitalize Germany's stagnant economy.

Steinmeier said he made the decision because it was clear af-

ter consultation with party leaders that there was no agreement among Germany's political parties on a majority for a new government in the current parliament.

Once parliament is dissolved, the election must be held within 60 days.

Leaders of several major parties agreed earlier on the election date of Feb. 23, seven months earlier than originally planned.

Steinmeier warned about outside interference in the poll, saying it is "a danger to democracy, whether it is covert, as was evidently the case recently in the Romanian elections, or open and blatant, as is currently being practiced particularly intensively on platform X."

Chinese man sentenced to death for killing 35

Associated Press

BEIJING — A court in China has sentenced a man to death for killing 35 people last month by driving into a crowd, in an attack that raised national concern about mass killings.

Fan Weiqiu, 62, was venting his anger because he was unhappy with his divorce settlement, the court in the southern city of Zhuhai said as it handed down the sentence on Friday. The victims were exercising at a sports center.

The court statement said Fan's "criminal motive was extremely despicable, the nature of the crime was extremely vile, the means of crime were particularly cruel, and the consequences of the crime were particularly severe, resulting in

great social harm."

The attack was one of several in China in late October and November and spurred Chinese leader Xi Jinping to order local governments to take steps to prevent future "extreme cases." The order prompted vows from local leaders to examine personal disputes that could trigger aggression, from marital troubles to disagreements over inheritance.

Fan's sentence was the second one handed down in quick succession just weeks after the recent attacks. A driver who injured 30 people when he drove into elementary students and parents in Hunan province received a suspended death sentence with a two-year reprieve earlier this week.

Late interception seals win for Seahawks

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The Seattle Seahawks made just enough plays to boost their fading playoff hopes by beating the struggling Chicago Bears on Thursday night.

Now, they'll be rooting for the Arizona Cardinals to beat the Los Angeles Rams this weekend.

Riq Woolen intercepted Caleb Williams' late pass and the Seahawks squeezed past Chicago 6-3 on Thursday night to hand the Bears their 10th straight loss.

Jason Myers kicked field goals on the game's first possession and near the end of the second quarter. Leonard Williams had two of Seattle's seven sacks, and Woolen sealed the win in the closing minute.

Chicago (4-12) had a fourth down at the Seattle 40 with 20 seconds remaining. The Seahawks (9-7) brought the blitz, and a leaping Woolen picked off a pass intended for Keenan Allen at the 22, ending Williams' NFL rookie-record string of

passes without an interception at 353.

"We're in the mode of, control what we can control," Seattle coach Mike Macdonald said. "We know what's coming next week. We're going to spend this weekend getting our minds and bodies and spirits right to go play a game. We're praying that it's for the division championship."

Geno Smith threw for 160 yards, and the sluggish Seahawks came away with a win they sorely needed after dropping two in a row. They came in trailing the NFC West-leading Rams by a game with two remaining.

"We still are seeing it as a possibility," Williams said. "In a way, we're trying to say, 'Let's control the controllables and let the other things fall into place as they will.'"

■ **Playoff path:** Seattle's most likely route to the playoffs is by having the Rams lose to Arizona on Saturday and beating Los Angeles to close the regular season. The Seahawks

were in control of their postseason destiny before losing to Minnesota last week.

"Honestly, we shouldn't be in this position," Smith said. "That's the main thing, is understanding that we've got to control our destiny when we can. But yeah, I'm going to be a big Kyler Murray fan on Saturday. If they get it done, they get it done. But we're going to go into this last week of the season with the same mindset no matter what."

■ **Skid continues:** Chicago has two double-digit losing streaks in general manager Ryan Poles' three seasons. The Bears dropped the final 10 games two years ago as part of a franchise-worst 14-game slide that stretched into 2023. They've never lost more than 10 straight in one season, and fans chanted "Sell the team!" near the end of this one.

Chicago's defense did its part. But it was a rough night for the offense.

Williams extended his NFL-leading total and individual

franchise record for sacks to 67. The Bears broke their previous mark of 66 sacks allowed in 2004, when they used four quarterbacks.

Williams acknowledged the hits are taking their toll. But he also vowed to grow from the experience.

"Frustrating, annoyed but learning, I would say," he said. "I definitely think this is going to be good for me. I'm excited about this last game and excited about the future."

■ **Road win:** Smith completed 17 of 23 passes, and the Seahawks improved to 6-1 on the road.

Noah Fant had 43 yards receiving, and Zach Charbonnet ran for 57.

Chicago is 0-4 since interim coach Thomas Brown replaced the fired Matt Eberflus.

Williams was 16 for 28 with 122 yards. It was a big drop from the previous week, when he threw for 334 yards and two touchdowns against NFC leader Detroit following a string of shaky performances.

Cowboys shutting down Lamb over shoulder issue

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — The Dallas Cowboys are shutting down CeeDee Lamb with two games remaining after their 2023 All-Pro receiver spent the second half of the season dealing with a sprained right shoulder.

The team said Thursday that additional exams revealed enough damage to keep Lamb off the field Sunday at Philadelphia and in the final game at home against Washington. The team said surgery was not ex-

pected to be required.

Dallas was eliminated from playoff contention a few hours before last weekend's 26-24 victory over Tampa Bay.

The decision on Lamb means the Cowboys will finish the regular season with at least five former Pro Bowlers on injured reserve.

Among the others are quarterback Dak Prescott, who was limited to eight games before a season-ending hamstring tear, and right guard Zack Martin.

The seven-time All-Pro made it through 10 games before deciding on season-ending ankle surgery.

Defensive end DeMarcus Lawrence didn't play after Week 4 because of a foot injury, and cornerback Trevon Diggs battled a variety of injuries while playing 11 games before a knee injury ended his season.

Lamb initially injured his right shoulder when it hit the turf hard twice in a 27-21 loss at Atlanta on Nov. 3. He kept play-

ing and had at least 100 yards in each of his last two games — both victories — before getting shut down.

The 25-year-old Lamb sat out the entire offseason and preseason in a contract dispute after getting career highs in catches (an NFL-best 135), yards receiving (club-record 1,749) and touchdowns (12) in 2023.

The holdout finally ended with a \$136 million, four-year extension in late August.

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Toledo beats Pitt in bowl-record 6 overtimes

Associated Press

DETROIT — Tucker Gleason ran for one overtime score and threw for four more as Toledo beat Pittsburgh 48-46 in a bowl-record six overtimes at the GameAbove Sports Bowl at Ford Field on Thursday.

The game surpassed the previous mark set 48 hours earlier when South Florida beat San Jose State 41-39 in the Hawaii Bowl on Tuesday.

Pitt freshman Julian Dugger, making his college debut, ran for two overtime scores and threw for two more, but his incomplete pass in the sixth overtime ended the game.

After Gleason and Dugger traded rushing touchdowns in the first overtime, each team got a field goal in the second. Each threw two-point passes in the third overtime, and Gleason got another in the fourth to make it 44-42.

Dugger was sacked, apparently ending the game, but the Rockets were called for holding. Dugger was ruled short on a sneak attempt, sending Toledo rushing onto the field for a second time, but replay ruled he crossed the plane.

In the fifth overtime, Dugger made it 46-44 with a scoring

pass to Gavin Bartholomew, but Gleason tied it with his fifth scoring pass of the game. The sixth put Toledo back in front, and Dugger was pressured into a bad throw to end the game.

The Panthers played without starting quarterback Eli Holstein (leg) and backup Nate Yarnell (transfer portal). David Lynch, a redshirt freshman walk-on, started his first game but was pulled in the third quarter after throwing two interceptions.

Rate Bowl

Kansas State 44, Rutgers 41

PHOENIX — Dylan Edwards ran for 196 yards and scored his third touchdown on a 36-yard run in the fourth quarter, helping Kansas State rally past Rutgers in the Rate Bowl on Thursday night.

The Scarlet Knights (7-6) led by 10 at halftime and went up 34-17 on Ja'shon Benjamin's 7-yard touchdown catch on the opening drive of the second half. But Edwards and the Wildcats (9-4) stormed back.

Edwards scored on a 65-yard touchdown run and, after an interception thrown by Rutgers' Athan Kaliakmanis, Garrett Oakley caught a 13-yard touch-

down pass to pull Kansas State within five. The Wildcats failed 2-point conversions after both touchdowns.

Rutgers briefly regained momentum, going up 41-29 early in the fourth quarter on Antwan Raymond's 1-yard TD run on a fake tush push.

Kansas State answered with Avery Johnson's 9-yard touchdown pass to Jadon Jackson. Edwards followed with his 36-yard score, capping an impressive night in place of DJ Giddens, who opted out of the bowl game to prepare for the NFL draft.

Kansas State closed it out by stopping Rutgers on fourth down near midfield with just under two minutes left.

68 Ventures Bowl

Arkansas St. 38, Bowling Green 31

MOBILE, Ala. — Jaylen Raynor passed for 221 yards and two touchdowns to go with a rushing score, and Zak Wallace had 99 yards rushing and a TD to help Arkansas State beat Bowling Green in the 68 Ventures Bowl.

Wallace scored on a 14-yard run with 3:10 left in the fourth quarter for a 38-24 lead. He carried the ball on the last six plays

of the drive, gaining 59 yards on the eight-play, 68-yard march. It was his 11th rushing touchdown of the season, nine coming in the past six games.

Rahkeem Smith returned the ensuing kickoff 58 yards to give Bowling Green a short field. Five plays later, Smith made a 23-yard catch in the end zone to cut it to 38-31.

Hunter Summers easily recovered the onside kick and Wallace powered through the middle of the defense for a 19-yard gain to seal it.

Corey Rucker added 107 yards receiving and two touchdowns for Arkansas State (8-5), which won a bowl game for the first time since 2019 — the same year it last won eight games in a season.

Rucker caught a long pass from Raynor and raced for a 79-yard touchdown for a 24-14 lead with 4:13 left in the first half. Following a fumble recovery by Noah Collins, Raynor found Rucker for a 6-yard TD to make it 31-21 early in the third.

Connor Bazalak threw for 390 yards and three touchdowns for Bowling Green (7-6). Harold Fannin Jr. had 17 catches for a career-high 213 yards and a touchdown.

At least 65M tune in for Netflix NFL Christmas games

Associated Press

LeBron James and the NBA are going to have make room for the NFL on Christmas.

That shouldn't be a problem. Both leagues were winners on Wednesday.

Netflix set records as the most-streamed NFL games in U.S. history while the NBA had its best holiday numbers in five years, according to Nielsen.

The NFL and Nielsen said 65 million U.S. viewers tuned in for at least one minute of one of the two NFL games.

The Baltimore Ravens' 31-2 victory over the Houston Tex-

ans averaged 24.3 million while Kansas City's 29-10 win at Pittsburgh averaged 24.1, according to early viewer figures released by Nielsen on Thursday.

The NBA's five-game slate averaged about 5.25 million viewers per game across ABC, ESPN and its platforms, according to the league and Nielsen.

"I love the NFL," James jokingly said in his televised post-game interview Wednesday night. "But Christmas is our day."

However, Wednesday's ratings showed that there is room for both.

Even though the NBA had the sports calendar to itself on Dec. 25 for many years, the NFL has now made Christmas one of its tentpole events during the regular season, joining Kickoff Weekend and Thanksgiving.

Hans Schroeder, the executive vice president of NFL Media, took James' comments in jest while also being joyful about the first season of the league's three-year partnership with Netflix.

"The numbers speak for themselves and LeBron can have his own view, and I'm sure more people will look at that be-

cause of this," he said.

"But, you know, we're focused on the NFL and we're thrilled with the results this year with the Christmas on Netflix and we're excited to continue to build that over the next couple of years."

Both NFL games surpassed the previous mark of 23 million for last season's AFC wild-card game between the Miami Dolphins and Chiefs on Peacock.

Viewership for Ravens-Texans peaked with the Beyoncé Bowl. The nearly 13-minute halftime performance averaged more than 27 million viewers.

Thunder beat Pacers for 9th straight win

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander tied his career high with 45 points to lead the Oklahoma City Thunder to a 120-114 victory over the Indiana Pacers on Thursday night.

Gilgeous-Alexander hit 15 of 22 shots and all 11 free throws in Oklahoma City's ninth consecutive victory.

Jalen Williams scored 20 points and Isaiah Hartenstein had 11 points and 13 rebounds for the Thunder.

Andrew Nembhard scored 23 points and Pascal Siakam added 22 points and 10 rebounds for the Pacers, who had their five-game winning streak snapped. Bennedict Mathurin finished with 18 points and Myles Turner had 11 rebounds.

After Tyrese Haliburton scored to give the Pacers a 107-103 lead, the Thunder answered with an 8-0 run to go ahead 111-107 with 1:39 remaining.

■ **Heat 89, Magic 88:** Tyler Herro hit a 19-foot jumper with 0.5 seconds left to give Miami a win over Orlando.

Jalen Suggs, who scored 29 points for the Magic, missed a long jumper at the buzzer.

Herro finished with 20 points to help the Heat come back from an early 17-point deficit and avenge a loss to the Magic last Friday in which they squandered a 22-point fourth-quarter lead.

Alec Burks scored 11 of his 17 points in the fourth quarter for Miami, and Jaime Jaquez Jr. added 15 points.

■ **Wizards 113, Hornets 110:** Jordan Poole's 3-pointer with 8.1 seconds remaining lifted Washington to a victory over Charlotte.

In a matchup of two of the league's worst teams, the Wizards (5-23) beat Charlotte (7-23) for the second straight week. Washington blew a 21-point second-quarter lead but ultimately prevailed in a back-and-forth final minute.

The Hornets led by one and

had Josh Green at the line with 38.3 seconds left. Green missed both free throws, and a tip-in by Wizards rookie Alex Sarr put Washington up 109-108 with 14.8 seconds remaining.

Charlotte took the lead back when Mark Williams dunked home an alley-oop pass from LaMelo Ball with 12.3 seconds to play, but after a Washington timeout, Poole made a step-back 3 from near the top of the key.

Brandon Miller missed a 3 at the other end for Charlotte, and Ball's desperate attempt at a putback was unsuccessful. Justin Champagnie made a free throw with 1.6 seconds left for the Wizards to complete the scoring.

Poole finished with 25 points and Bilal Coulibaly had 20 for the Wizards.

Ball scored 31 for the Hornets.

■ **Hawks 141, Bulls 133:** Jalen Johnson had a career-high 30 points and Atlanta rallied from a late 21-point deficit by scoring 50 points in the fourth quarter in a win over Chicago.

Atlanta trailed 124-107 with 6:23 remaining in the game and used a 23-2 run to take its first lead since the first quarter.

Johnson added 15 rebounds and Trae Young scored 27 points, surpassing the 11,000 career point mark, and added 13 assists as the Hawks won their second straight.

Zach Levine scored a season-high 37 points in the loss. Jevon Carter scored 19 of his 26 points in the first quarter as the Bulls lost their third straight despite shooting 54% (53 for 98) from the floor.

■ **Rockets 128, Pelicans 111:** Jalen Green scored 30 points in less than 30 minutes on the court, and Houston cruised to a victory over New Orleans.

Fred VanVleet hit seven 3-pointers and finished with 25 points for Houston, which has won four straight and six of seven while climbing to second

place in the highly competitive Western Conference.

Cam Whitmore added 27 points off the bench and center Alperen Sanguin had 10 points and 13 rebounds for the Rockets, who led by 30 in the second half and sat their starters for most of the fourth quarter.

Trey Murphy had 21 points for the Pelicans, who have lost eight in a row and 17 of 18.

Brandon Boston and Dejounte Murray each scored 17 points, and CJ McCollum added 13 for New Orleans, which, like Houston, limited starters to 31 or fewer minutes of playing time after it became clear the game would not be competitive.

■ **Nets 111, Bucks 105:** Cam Johnson scored 29 points, Noah Clowney added 20 and Brooklyn rallied late for a victory over the Milwaukee.

Nic Claxton had 13 points for the Nets, who had lost eight of 10 before making 16 of 38 3-pointers against a Milwaukee squad that was playing a third straight game without Giannis Antetokounmpo and Damian Lillard.

With their top two scorers out, the Bucks got 21 points from Khris Middleton, 20 from Brook Lopez, 18 from Bobby Portis and 14 from Gary Trent Jr. while shooting 50.7% from the floor and 39.5% on 3-point attempts.

■ **Grizzlies 155, Raptors 126:** Jaren Jackson Jr. had 21 points, 11 rebounds and three blocks, Zach Edey also scored 21 points and grabbed 16 rebounds, and Memphis set a franchise scoring record in blowing out Toronto.

Desmond Bane added 19 points, Jaylen Wells scored 17 and Ja Morant had 15 points and nine assists as Memphis won for the third time in four games.

Toronto lost its ninth straight and fell to 1-14 on the road. RJ Barrett led the Raptors with 27 points, and Scottie Barnes added 26. Chris Boucher finished with 15.

Both teams played porous de-

fense for three quarters and each had reached 100 points before the fourth started. A burst by Memphis in the third took the lead to 22.

■ **Trail Blazers 122, Jazz 120:** Deni Avdija and Shaedon Sharpe each scored 27 points, and Scoot Henderson made a tiebreaking jumper with 0.1 seconds remaining as Portland beat Utah.

Henderson finished with 18 points and 10 assists, Deandre Ayton added 18 points and 12 rebounds, and Jerami Grant scored 14 points for Portland.

Lauri Markkanen scored 25 points on 8-for-14 shooting to lead Utah. Collin Sexton added 19 points and Svi Mykhailiuk had 18 points.

Trail Blazers head coach Chauncey Billups was away from the team following the recent death of his grandmother and will miss their next game against Dallas on Saturday as well. Assistant coach Nate Bjorkgren is filling in as acting head coach in Billups' absence.

■ **Pistons 114, Kings 113:** Jaden Ivey converted a four-point play with 3 seconds left and Detroit rallied past Sacramento.

With the Pistons trailing by three, Ivey made a 3-pointer in the right corner and was fouled by De'Aaron Fox. Ivey hit the free throw to cap a 19-point comeback in the second half.

Fox missed a halfcourt shot at the buzzer.

Cade Cunningham scored 33 points to lead the Pistons. Malik Beasley added 22 off the bench, including six 3-pointers.

The Kings, who played without Domantas Sabonis (illness), led 68-53 at halftime after shooting 54% in the half.

Fox paced Sacramento with 26 points, and Trey Lyles had 20 off the bench.

Lyles had 15 at halftime. He scored 13 unanswered points in the second quarter to spark a 17-4 run by the Kings.

Detroit Red Wings fire coach, name McLellan as replacement

Associated Press

The Detroit Red Wings fired coach Derek Lalonde on Thursday and named Todd McLellan as his replacement, a major change by general manager Steve Yzerman more than a third of the way through another disappointing season in the place known as "Hockeytown."

The move the day after Christmas comes with the Red Wings on a three-game skid and having lost nine of their past 12. They've lost 21 of their first 34 games this season and are above only the lowly Buffalo Sabres in the Eastern Conference.

Lalonde was nearly midway through his third season with Detroit after winning the Stanley Cup twice as an assistant with Tampa Bay. Yzerman inherited Jeff Blashill as coach when he left the Lightning for the Red Wings in 2019 and hired Lalonde in the summer of 2022

with the goal of getting the team back in the playoffs.

Despite signing three-time Stanley Cup champion Patrick Kane in 2023 and re-signing him last offseason, the success has not approached the Red Wings' glory days when they won the Cup four times between 1996-97 and 2007-08 — three times with Yzerman as captain and once with him working in the front office. Instead, their playoff drought is on track to reach a ninth year — second-longest in the league behind Buffalo.

Associated coach Bob Boughner was also fired and Trent Yawney hired to work on McLellan's staff as an assistant. McLellan signed a multiyear contract to start his fourth NHL head coaching job after stints with San Jose, Edmonton and Los Angeles.

McLellan, 57, coached his team to the playoffs in nine of

the 14 full seasons he was in charge behind the bench. He returns to the Motor City after getting his first job in the league as a Red Wings assistant in 2005 and serving under coach Mike Babcock on the 2008 title run.

The Melville, Saskatchewan, native was hired by the Sharks just after and led them on three trips to the West final. Most recently, McLellan was fired by the Kings in February during the All-Star break and interviewed for other vacancies since.

This is the fourth coaching change around the NHL this season and 15th this calendar year, counting Rick Bowness' retirement in Winnipeg. The Boston Bruins in November fired Jim Montgomery, who was hired by the St. Louis Blues less than a week later, and the Chicago Blackhawks replaced Luke Richardson with Anders Sorensen in early December.

Miami hoops coach quits

Associated Press

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Jim Larrañaga insists he still loves the University of Miami, still loves the game of basketball, still loves mentoring players, still loves coaching.

He doesn't love what college basketball has become. And with that, he's leaving.

The 75-year-old Larrañaga stepped down Thursday, effective immediately, and will be replaced by associate head coach Bill Courtney — one of his best friends for the past three decades — for the remainder of the season.

"I'm exhausted," Larrañaga said. "I've tried every which way to keep this going."

Larrañaga joins a long line of prominent college basketball coaches — Virginia's Tony Bennett and Villanova's Jay Wright among them — who have left their jobs in recent years citing the changes in the game and the challenge of coaching in the name, image and likeness era of college sports.

For Larrañaga, those changes began presenting themselves when he had eight players — all of whom said they were happy at Miami — enter the transfer portal after the Hurricanes went to the Final Four in 2023.

"The opportunity to make money someplace else created a situation that you have to begin to ask yourself as a coach, what is this all about?" Larrañaga said. "And the answer is, it's become professional."

The decision by Larrañaga ends a 14-year run as coach of the Hurricanes — and, presumably, a 41-year college head-coaching career that saw him win 744 games at Miami, American International, George Mason and Bowling Green. He took Miami to the Final Four in 2023 and took George Mason to the Final Four in 2006.

The Hurricanes are 4-8 this season and only 5-19 in their past 24 games.

2 die during stormy night at yacht race

Associated Press

Two sailors on separate boats died in boom accidents two hours apart on a storm-ravaged first night of the annual Sydney to Hobart race.

The Cruising Yacht Club of Australia in Sydney, which administers the yacht race, said Friday that one sailor each on entrants Flying Fish Arcos and Bowline were killed after being struck by the boom, a large horizontal pole at the bottom of the sail.

New South Wales Police Superintendent Joe McNulty identified the two dead sailors as a 55-year-old man from Western Australia (on Flying Fish Arcos) and a 65-year-old man from South Australia (on Bowline).

He said the crews on both

boats, which had been seized by police for evidence, were "doing it pretty tough at the moment."

"We've got police getting talking to them, doctors and counseling. They're assisting with our inquiries. They are shaken up by what they've seen ... and they didn't give up."

Officials later said a sailor was washed overboard on another boat, but was rescued. That crew member was from Hobart yacht Porco Rosso, and he drifted a kilometer from the yacht before being rescued.

The incident triggered the crew member's emergency position-indicating radio beacon, a safety device that must be worn by all sailors in the race.

"That is one of the most terrifying experiences that you can

have," said David Jacobs, vice-commander of the CYCA. "(And) it was at night, which makes it tenfold more scary."

The deaths come 26 years after six sailors were killed in storms during the 1998 running of the race, which triggered a state coronial inquest and mass reforms to the safety protocols — including the radio beacon on all sailors — that govern the race. There have been 13 fatalities in the 79-year history of the race, with four of those deaths resulting from sailor heart attacks.

The fleet was continuing its passage to Constitution Dock in Hobart, Tasmania, with the first boats expected to arrive early Saturday morning. The race is 628 nautical miles long.