

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## Bataan makes brief visit to Bahrain

BY JOSHUA KARSTEN

*Stars and Stripes*

MANAMA, Bahrain — The USS Bataan pulled into Bahrain over the long President's Day weekend, but it doesn't appear the crew had much time off.

The amphibious assault ship left the island Monday after transiting the narrow Strait of Hormuz last week, making it the first "big deck" navy vessel to do so in 2020.

Bataan's crew of over 3,000 sailors and Marines sailed for the Middle East early last month, after increased tensions with Iran led the Navy to cancel the ship's par-

ticipation in a Morocco-based exercise. The ship also stopped for a port visit and training in Aqaba, Jordan, last month.

U.S. 5th Fleet officials did not immediately respond for comment regarding the Bahrain stop, but a routine visit — such as the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln's visit in November — typically sees an influx of service members flooding base establishments. That wasn't apparent during Bataan's visit.

The main hint of the stop came from Navy pictures of a Monday visit from 5th Fleet's second-in-command, Rear Adm. Curt Renshaw, at Khalifa Bin Salman Port.

Photos released Tuesday said that Bataan and its embarked 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit are in the region "to reassure allies and partners and preserve the freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce in the region," which is a standardized Navy statement used for most major deployments.

The port visit comes after tensions in the region following the January killing by the U.S. of Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, and retaliatory rocket attacks on an air base in Iraq that left more than 100 U.S. service members with traumatic brain injuries.

## US, Greece hold drill after finalizing major base deal

*Associated Press*

LITOCORO, Greece — Army aviation forces from Greece and the United States took part in a live-fire training exercise Wednesday at the foot of Mount Olympus, marking deepening defense ties between the two countries.

Greece is ramping up its military cooperation with the U.S. and France — and purchases of equipment from the two allies — amid wariness of worsening relations with Turkey over disputed sea and air space boundaries, including drilling rights in the East Mediterranean.

The chief of the Greek army and the U.S. ambassador to Greece watched the training drill conducted with attack helicopters in northern Greece. Washington and Athens finalized a defense agreement three weeks ago that gives American forces expanded access to Greek military bases.

"The U.S.-Greece relationship is stronger than it has ever been," U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt said. "Our defense ties and our defense cooperation is an essential component of that."

After a financial crisis that lasted nearly a decade, Greece

is working to modernize its navy, upgrade its fleet of F-16 fighter jets and to strengthen military ties with traditional allies as well as Turkey's regional rivals, including Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

"The rule is to make the best use of limited resources, to get the most bang for our buck, and that is something that we are continuing to do," said Panagiotis Tsakonas, a professor of international relations and security studies at the University of Athens.

The revised Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement between Greece and the U.S.

was signed in October and ratified last month. It provides for increased joint U.S.-Greece and NATO activities at Greek military bases and facilities in Larissa, Stefanovikio, and Alexandroupolis, as well as infrastructure and other improvements at a U.S. Navy installation on the island of Crete.

The training drill on Wednesday involved rescuing wounded soldiers behind enemy lines with Apache and Black Hawk helicopters. The American participants were from the 3rd Squadron of the 17th Cavalry Regiment, based at Hunter Army Airfield in Georgia.

## Report confirms some claims about ex-Naval War College head

*Associated Press*

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — A draft of a naval inspector general report found that several claims involving a retired senior officer who was removed as president of the U.S. Naval War College could be substantiated, though the report does not recommend further punish-

ment, according to The Providence Journal.

The newspaper reported Tuesday that the "tentative report of investigation" into retired Rear Adm. Jeffrey Harley's management of the college in Newport, R.I., was forwarded to the Defense Department and chief of naval operations

for their review and recommendations, if any — a process that could take weeks or months. The draft report found that among the substantiated claims, Harley served alcohol on campus without proper authorization, the newspaper reported. Twelve allegations were determined to be unsubstantiated, and seven

were substantiated, according to the report. Harley contested the substantiated findings.

Harley was removed as president in June, days after The Associated Press reported he was under investigation for allegedly spending excessively, abusing his hiring authority and otherwise behaving inappropriately.

## Site offers deployed troops free adult videos

BY STEVE BEYNON  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — It's a nice gesture to send friends or loved ones deployed overseas care packages full of energy drinks, tobacco or snacks. Now you can add to the list personalized sexy videos from adult film stars — and it's free of charge.

CamSoda, a pornography website, launched an online video greeting service last week called "Camo Cards," which allows someone to book and send a personalized video greeting from a selection of adult models to his or her significant other or a friend deployed overseas. Your service member's morale will no longer have to rely completely on a portable hard drive to store personal viewing material while serving abroad.

The cam website validates a service member's Internet Protocol address, so that person would still need internet access. IP addresses are used to confirm the location of a device.

"With the current unexpected deployment of our troops, we know that stress level of military personnel and their loved ones is at an all-time high," CamSoda Vice President Daryn Parker said in a prepared statement. "Leveraging our CamSoda network, we are offering users the chance to send a free greeting from some of the most beautiful and sexy cam models on the planet."

People who want to send a message to a deployed service member can request a specific adult actress, including Brandi Love, Lisa Ann and Sara Jay. Requests can also be made for a specific outfit to be worn and a "desired level of naughtiness."

Lt. Col. Christian Mitchell, Defense Department spokesman, said the Pentagon "typically [doesn't] comment when stores or other organizations offer discounted [or] free products."

# Army base in S. Korea restricts access amid coronavirus threat

BY KIM GAMEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — The Daegu Army garrison restricted access and imposed self-quarantine for any U.S. troops who recently attended a local church linked to a cluster of new coronavirus infections Wednesday, as South Korea's infection toll surpassed 50.

The top U.S. commander in South Korea also raised the risk level for the military community on the divided peninsula to moderate.

U.S. Army Garrison Daegu, about 155 miles southeast of Seoul, also recommended that members of the military community avoid public places and transportation in the city, including stores, restaurants and other heavily congested areas until a trace investigation is completed.

Schools on the base and several other activities were to be closed on Thursday, the garrison said, adding that conditions would be assessed the next day as South Korean authorities work to determine who has come in contact with infected patients.

"Travel to and from Daegu will be limited to mission essential only for service members. Families and (Defense Department) civilians are discouraged from traveling to and from Daegu," the garrison said.

"All visitors who are not performing mission essential or official business will be denied access to USAG Daegu military installation for the next 24 hours. This directive will be reassessed daily."

The garrison also warned people to expect delays at the gates due to a health screening questionnaire.

The measures were implemented after health authorities said that at least 15 South Koreans confirmed to have been

## US Army Japan orders new quarantine for 7

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Seven people associated with U.S. Army Japan who spent two weeks potentially exposed to the new coronavirus on a cruise ship in Yokohama must spend another 14 days quarantined at home, officials said Tuesday.

The Japanese government is expected to release the seven, who fall under the status of forces agreement in Japan, from the ship over the next few days, according to a post on U.S. Army Japan's official Facebook page. A SOFA defines the legal status of the U.S. armed forces stationed in host countries. It governs uniformed service members, civilian Defense Department employees and their families.

The seven spent two weeks aboard the Diamond Princess, a cruise ship at anchor in Yokohama Bay, after the virus, called COVID-19, was discovered on board as the vessel was en route to Japan.

After completing the additional observational quarantine, the seven will be "free and safe to interact in the [U.S. Army Japan] community" as long as they show no symptoms, according to the Facebook post. The Army has provided temporary accommodations for those in quarantine whose homes share a common heating and air conditioning system.

No U.S. Army Japan personnel have tested positive or shown symptoms of the coronavirus to date, the post said. The Army did not provide further information Wednesday.

Naval Forces Japan said no Navy SOFA personnel were aboard the ship. Pacific Air Forces and 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force did not respond to requests for information on Wednesday.

The Japanese government Wednesday began releasing passengers from the ship who live in the country. All passengers are set to leave the Diamond Princess by Friday, according to the Japan Times newspaper.

infected with COVID-19 had attended the same church.

"All service members who've attended the New World Church (Sin Cheon Ji Gyo hoe) since Feb. 9 will undergo a mandatory self-quarantine — and is highly recommended for family members, civilians and contractors — until KCDC completes their contact trace procedures to determine who has been exposed to COVID-19," USFK commander Gen. Robert Abrams said in a separate statement.

The pneumonia-like disease has killed nearly 2,000 people — nearly all in mainland China — and infected tens of thousands more in nearly 30 countries, including South Korea and the United States.

The Daegu garrison, which includes Camp Walker and Camp Henry, said it was aware of several new cases reported in Daegu, including the 31st patient who was reportedly a carrier.

# Boeing finds debris in 737 Max fuel tanks

Associated Press

Boeing said Tuesday that it found debris contaminating the fuel tanks of some 737 Max jets that it built in the past year but was unable to deliver to airline customers.

A Boeing official said that the debris was discovered in “several” planes but did not give a precise number. Boeing built about 400 undelivered Max jets before it temporarily halted production last month.

The fuel tank debris was discovered during maintenance on parked planes, and Boeing said that it immediately made corrections in its production

system to prevent a recurrence. Those steps include more inspections before fuel tanks are sealed.

A Boeing spokesman said the issue would not change its belief that the Federal Aviation Administration will certify the plane to fly again this summer.

An FAA spokesman said the agency knows that Boeing is conducting a voluntary inspection of undelivered Max planes.

The FAA “increased its surveillance based on initial inspection reports and will take further action based on the findings,” said spokesman

Lynn Lunsford.

Metal shavings, tools and other objects left in planes during assembly can raise the risk of electrical short-circuiting and fires.

Mark Jenks, Boeing’s general manager of the 737 program, said in a memo to employees who work on the 737, “During these challenging times, our customers and the flying public are counting on us to do our best work each and every day.”

Jenks called the debris “absolutely unacceptable. One escape is one too many.”

Max jets were grounded around the world last March

after two crashes killed 346 people. Boeing is conducting test flights to assess updates to a flight-control system that activated before the crashes on faulty signals from sensors outside the plane, pushing the noses of the aircraft down and triggering spirals that pilots were unable to stop.

While investigators examining the Max accidents have not pointed to production problems at the assembly plant near Seattle, Boeing has faced concerns about debris left in other finished planes such as the 787 Dreamliner, which is built in South Carolina.

## Trump fires off more tweets about DOJ

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Against the wishes of Attorney General William Barr, President Donald Trump continued to tweet Wednesday about the Justice Department, relaying the sentiments of conservative allies that Barr should “clean house” and target those involved in the Russia investigation.

Amid a spate of more than a dozen morning tweets and retweets, Trump also shared the views of a conservative commentator who noted past instances of presidents getting involved in criminal cases and asserted that Trump has a “constitutional obligation” to speak up about corruption in the department.

The tweets could put Trump further at odds with Barr, who has warned the president about weighing in on Justice Department criminal cases on Twitter. He has also told those close to Trump that he is considering resigning over the president’s refusal to stop doing so.

Trump retweeted several Twitter posts from Tom Fitton, president of the conservative activist group Judicial Watch, who claimed that Trump was

“the victim of a seditious conspiracy” by the Justice Department and the FBI that led to the investigation of possible coordination between his 2016 presidential campaign and Russia.

Trump also retweeted a suggestion by Fitton that Trump should pardon his former national security adviser Michael Flynn, who pleaded guilty in December 2017 to lying to the FBI about his contacts with then-Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak and is awaiting sentencing.

Late last week, Barr publicly warned Trump in an interview with ABC News that his tweets about Justice Department cases “make it impossible for me to do my job.”

Trump, White House officials said, is not entirely receptive to calls to change his behavior, and he has told those around him that he is not going to stop tweeting about the Justice Department. They said that Trump sees highlighting FBI and Justice Department misconduct as a good political message. make Barr’s job more difficult.

He later acknowledged to reporters that his tweeting does make Barr’s job more difficult.

## Former junk bond king Milken among 11 pardons

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump issued a pardon Tuesday to Michael Milken, the disgraced former junk bond king who later became a prominent Los Angeles philanthropist, in a mass clemency to 11 convicted felons that marked a dramatic expansion of the president’s intervention in judicial matters since his Senate impeachment acquittal.

Among those whose sentences were commuted was former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who has served eight years of a 14-year prison term for trying to sell the open U.S. Senate seat that Barack Obama held before he entered the White House.

Trump also granted clemency to Bernard Kerik, who led the New York Police Department after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Kerik was sentenced to four years in prison in 2010 for tax fraud and lying to investigators.

The president made clear that he had not ruled out pardoning his longtime friend and informal adviser Roger Stone, who is scheduled to be sentenced in federal court Thursday despite Trump’s demand on Twitter earlier Tuesday that the case should be “thrown out.”

Henry Pontell, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, viewed Trump’s slew of pardons and commutations as “a president normalizing and trivializing white-collar crimes.”

“If you’re going to control these sorts of behaviors, you need sentences that serve as a deterrent,” Pontell said. “Trump is saying, ‘It’s too harsh and it’s really not that big of a deal anyway.’”

Some Democrats offered harsh criticism of the president’s actions. The pardons “perhaps represent Trump’s most dangerous abuse of power precisely because the pardon power is unfettered and cannot be reviewed by Congress or the courts,” said Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr., D-N.J., an outspoken critic of Trump’s past pardons.

Trump also issued pardons to former San Francisco 49ers owner Edward DeBartolo Jr., who was convicted in a gambling fraud scandal; Ariel Friedler, an entrepreneur who pleaded guilty to accessing a protected computer; Paul Pogue, who underpaid his taxes; David Safavian, who obstructed justice, and Angela Stanton, who served six months of house arrest for her role in a car theft ring.

# Abbott: Leaders suspected pilot of MH370

Associated Press

PERTH, Australia — Former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott has said the “top levels” of the Malaysian government long suspected that the disappearance of a plane almost six years ago was a mass murder-suicide by the pilot.

Abbott was prime minister when Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 carrying 239 people vanished on March 8, 2014, while flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

Australia, working on Malaysia's behalf, coordinated what became the largest search in aviation history, but it failed to find the plane before being ended in 2017.

Speaking in a Sky News documentary to air Wednesday and Thursday, Abbott said high-ranking Malaysian officials believed veteran pilot Zaharie Ahmad Shah deliberately downed the jet.

“My very clear understanding, from the very top levels of the Malaysian government is that from very, very early on, they thought it was murder-suicide by the pilot,” said Abbott, who was Australia's prime minister from 2013-15.

“I'm not going to say who said what to whom, but let me reiterate, I want to be absolutely crystal clear, it was understood at the highest levels that this was almost certainly murder-suicide by the pilot.”

A Malaysian-led independent investigation report released in 2018 said the plane's course was changed manually but did not name a suspect and raised the possibility of “intervention by a third party.”

Investigators, however, said the cause of the disappearance couldn't be determined until the wreckage and the plane's black boxes are found.

The Malaysian Ministry of Transport did not immediately respond to questions from The Associated Press about the remarks from the former Australian leader.

Malaysia has had a change of government since the plane's disappearance, after Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad

ousted the government led by Najib Razak, whose party had ruled Malaysia since its independence in 1957.

The pilot's family has long denied he was suicidal. The 2018 investigative report said there was no evidence of abnormal behavior or stress in the two pilots and none of the passengers had pilot training.

Abbott said he did not believe conspiracy theories centered on the Malaysian government, which owns Malaysia Airlines.

“I've read all these stories that the Malaysians allegedly didn't want the murder-suicide theory pursued because they were embarrassed about one of their pilots doing this. I have no reason to accept that,” he said.

## US woman who hid baby faces kidnapping charge

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — An American woman charged with human trafficking for allegedly attempting to smuggle a 6-day-old baby out of the Philippines inside a sling bag was arrested on an additional count of kidnapping, authorities said.

Jennifer Talbot from Utah, who was out on bail while facing the human trafficking charge, was presented to reporters in Manila on Wednesday by officials from the

National Bureau of Investigation, a government anti-crime investigative agency. Talbot wore an orange shirt and had a mask on, with her left arm in a sling.

She pulled down her mask and said, “I object to this press conference without my attorney and the embassy present.”

Talbot had planned to board a Delta Air Lines flight to the United States with the baby Sept. 4, according to prosecutors. After discovering the baby, airline staff called immigration personnel, who

arrested Talbot at the airport. The baby was turned over to government welfare personnel.

The prosecutors said that Talbot presented an affidavit at the airport, allegedly from the baby's mother giving consent for the newborn to travel to the U.S., but it had not been signed by the mother.

Officials said no government travel approval had been issued for the baby, prompting them to file human trafficking charges last year against Talbot.

## Senator defends meeting with Iran's foreign minister

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sen. Chris Murphy on Tuesday defended a weekend meeting he held with Iran's foreign minister in Europe after his actions were questioned in conservative media and as President Donald Trump suggested that they may have violated U.S. law.

The Connecticut Democrat said that his Saturday meeting with Mohammed Javad Zarif was important because it is “dangerous not to talk to one's enemies.” Murphy said that he wanted to see Zarif because there has been no United States

diplomatic channel with Iran since Trump withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal two years ago.

“I have no delusions about Iran — they are our adversary, responsible for the killing of thousands of Americans and unacceptable levels of support for terrorist organizations throughout the Middle East,” he wrote in a Medium post.

On hearing of the meeting, Trump said it sounded as though Murphy had violated an obscure, little-used federal law known as the Logan Act that bars private citizens from conducting official diplomacy.

The 1799 law makes it a felony for unauthorized Americans to negotiate with governments in disputes with the U.S. Logan Act charges have only been filed against two people, both in the 19th century, and neither were convicted.

“Is there anything that I should know because that sounds like to me a violation of the Logan Act,” Trump said, recalling his reaction when he was told of the meeting.

Perhaps expecting criticism for the meeting from the administration, Murphy wrote that he “cannot conduct diplomacy on behalf of the whole

of the U.S. government, and I don't pretend to be in a position to do so. But if Trump isn't going to talk to Iran, then someone should.”

Murphy said that he raised numerous contentious issues in his conversation with Zarif on the sidelines of an international security conference in Munich, Germany.

Zarif said Wednesday that he believes his meeting with Murphy had spooked the Trump administration.

“Trump and Pompeo are afraid of a senator hearing facts from the Iranian foreign minister,” Zarif told reporters.

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## 2 Lamborghinis stolen from dealership crash

**MA** WAYLAND — A pair of Lamborghini SUVs worth a total of more than \$400,000 stolen from a Boston-area dealership were involved in a crash several hours later, police said.

The Lamborghinis and a third vehicle crashed in Malden, Capt. John Amirault said, shortly after police received reports of two Lamborghinis drag racing through city streets.

A white Lamborghini had front-end damage, and a black Lamborghini had rear end damage. A red Kia was also involved. The Kia's driver was taken to the hospital.

One suspect, an 18-year-old man from Cambridge, was caught but police said they are looking for two others.

## Dog, puppies doing well after found in snowdrift

**MN** RED LAKE — Authorities said a dog and her six puppies are recovering and growing fast after being found alone in a snowdrift in northwestern Minnesota.

Officials with Red Lake Rose's Rescue Shelter said a family discovered the dog lying with her litter in more than a foot of snow not far from a wooded area, according to the Star Tribune. The family drove the puppies and their mother to the rescue operation on the Red Lake Indian Reservation.

## Tacks damage tires in police parking lot

**NC** HICKORY — Someone put down metal tacks in the parking lot of a North Carolina municipality's police department, damaging the tires of both police and civilian vehicles, authorities

said.

The Hickory Police Department recovered more than 50 half-inch-long black metal tacks after damage reports came in, a department news release said.

Police are hopeful that a review of video footage will generate images of whoever performed the vandalism or of the perpetrator's vehicle, the Hickory Daily Record reported.

## Try for sparkler record fails on technicality

**WY** GILLETTE — An attempt in Wyoming to break a world record for the most sparklers lit simultaneously failed on a technicality.

Guinness World Records officials ruled each participant was required to light his or her own sparkler during the attempt in Gillette, The Gillette News Record reported.

The attempt in August was part of the Pyrotechnics Guild International's 50th annual convention.

The event had an apparatus for lighting multiple sparklers. Volunteers with torches lit sparklers and distributed them to participants.

More than 1,700 people attended and 2,500 sparklers were lit. The current record is 1,713.

## Judge: Top floors of new tower have to go

**NY** NEW YORK — A judge ordered the developers of a condo tower under construction in New York City to remove several floors from the top of the building because it is too tall.

State Supreme Court Justice W. Franc Perry's ruling instructs the Department of Buildings to revoke the building permit for the nearly com-

pleted tower on Manhattan's Upper West Side and remove floors that exceed the zoning limit, The New York Times reported. The number of floors to be removed from the 52-story tower is not yet known, but the newspaper said it could be 20 or more.

A lawyer representing the project said the developers would appeal the Feb. 13 decision.

## Lost ring found 47 years later in Finland

**ME** BRUNSWICK — A high school class ring that was lost in Maine in 1973 was found in a forest in Finland.

Debra McKenna, 63, lost the ring in Portland when she was a student at Morse High School, the Bangor Daily News reported. She said the ring was largely forgotten until a sheet metal worker found it under 8 inches of soil in a Finnish forest 47 years later.

The ring belonged to McKenna's late husband Shawn, who gave McKenna the ring before he left for college, and she accidentally left it in a department store.

McKenna said she cried when the ring arrived in the mail at her Brunswick home last week.

## 20 departments help extinguish fire

**OH** SOUTH CHARLESTON — A large blaze at an Ohio business that supplies wood pallets was put out by firefighters with help from 20 departments, a fire official said.

The pallets burn quick and hot, so the blaze "had a head start" on crews responding to BDL Supply in South Charleston, Madison Township Fire and EMS Chief Christopher

Clark told the Springfield News-Sun.

There were an estimated 65 fire response vehicles at the scene, roughly halfway between Columbus and Dayton.

## Bowhunting group says bear set world record

**NJ** MORRIS COUNTY — A bowhunting organization said a 700-pound bear shot in New Jersey last fall set a world record as the largest black bear killed with a bow and arrow in North America.

The Pope and Young Club, a bowhunting and conservation organization, said the bear killed Oct. 14 in Morris County toppled a record set in 1993 by a hunter in California. The new record was announced after a special panel of judges was assembled Feb. 8 in Harrisburg, Pa., during the Great American Outdoors Show, the group said.

The bear, preserved through taxidermy, is to be displayed at the Pope and Young Annual Convention in Virginia in March.

## Man charged with DUI twice in one day

**RI** PROVIDENCE — Rhode Island State Police arrested 11 people on driving under the influence charges over Valentine's Day weekend, including a man who was pulled over twice, officials said.

Patrick Cahill, 61, of Warwick was arrested shortly before 3 a.m. Friday and charged with driving under the influence of liquor and/or drugs, first offense.

Officials said Cahill pleaded no contest to the charge in court later in the morning, but was pulled over again that night in East Greenwich and charged with DUI, second offense.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

# NBA season gets set for frenetic finish

Associated Press

CHICAGO — And now, they rest.

Until Thursday, anyway. That's when the NBA comes back for a frantic eight-week sprint to the finish of the regular season, with teams having from anywhere between 25 and 29 games left to play before the 16-team field for the playoffs is set.

The All-Star Game is over, Team LeBron defeating Team Giannis 157-155 in Chicago on Sunday night. Most players scurried onto private jets not long after the final buzzer for quick little getaways — places such as Miami, Turks and Caicos, and the Bahamas (where some union meetings were held) were among the destinations.

So, the players will try to enjoy their last bit of relaxation as the playoff push is about to get real.

"Obviously, when you come to All-Star weekend, basketball is going to be the main thing and the main thing only," Los

Angeles Lakers star LeBron James said in Chicago. "That's why you're here. That's what you see every day. We're dedicated to this weekend for not only ourselves and our family, but for the fans. So, I try to find a couple days after All-Star, after Sunday, to kind of just get away from the game, try to freshen back up and get ready for the last run of the regular season."

There are 12 teams that start Thursday: Milwaukee, Detroit, Miami, Atlanta, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Charlotte, Chicago, Memphis, Sacramento, Houston and Golden State. Every other team resumes play Friday except for the Los Angeles Clippers, who get a couple of extra days of break and won't get back on the floor until Saturday afternoon.

For the most part, the post-season teams are largely set. Milwaukee could clinch a playoff berth as early as this weekend. The Bucks — 46-8

— are quietly on pace for the third-best regular season in NBA history. They're seven games in the loss column ahead of Toronto in the race for No. 1 in the Eastern Conference, four losses clear of the Lakers in the race for the league's best overall record.

"Our job is to take it, obviously, day by day," said Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo, the NBA's reigning MVP. "We want to win as many games as possible, but our goal is to win the whole thing. So, obviously, as I said, you want to win every game. If you win every game, that would be great. But we cannot lose focus. We can't lose track of our actual goal, which is get better every day, keep learning every day, and win the whole thing."

Toronto, a team that many suspected would freefall after Kawhi Leonard and Danny Green left for the Los Angeles Clippers in free agency, hits the break with the NBA's third-best record at 40-15. The Raptors,

Boston, Miami, Philadelphia and Indiana can pretty much start making their East playoff plans. Out in the Western Conference, the Lakers, Denver, the Clippers, Utah, Houston, Oklahoma City and Dallas all have separated themselves in the playoff race as well.

That's 13 teams for 16 spots. In the East, Brooklyn and Orlando will seek to hang on to the last two spots. Out West, No. 8 Memphis has a four-game lead on Portland and is five games up on San Antonio — a team that hasn't missed the playoffs since 1997, but has some serious work to do in order to extend that streak.

"It feels good to be in a winning situation," Lakers All-Star big man Anthony Davis said. "I think being No. 1 in the West, we have something good going over there in L.A. I'm excited about our team. I'm excited about our chemistry. I'm excited for the second half of the season and see what we can accomplish."

## First-year Cavaliers coach Beilein stepping down

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Cavaliers first-year coach John Beilein will end a rough season by stepping down after 54 games, according to multiple reports Tuesday night.

The former Michigan coach, who was a surprising hire by the Cavs last year because of his age (67) and lack of any pro experience, is expected to say goodbye to staff and players Wednesday when they return from the All-Star break, ESPN.com reported, citing anonymous league sources.

Beilein signed a five-year contract — the final year was a club option — in May. ESPN said he and the Cavs negotiated a financial settlement that will pay him a portion of the remaining money on his 2019-20 contract.

Cleveland is just 14-40 — the worst record in the Eastern

Conference — and Beilein struggled to gain his players' confidence or respect while the losses piled up.

Associate head coach J.B. Bickerstaff is expected to take over on an interim basis for Beilein. Bickerstaff coached in Memphis for nearly two full seasons before being fired last year. He was also Houston's head coach in 2015-16.

Beilein's departure continues a troubling pattern for the Cavs, who have been plagued by coaching instability and nearly constant change over the past few years. Bickerstaff is Cleveland's seventh coach since 2013.

Beilein never got comfortable in his short time with the Cavs. He struggled to adjust to the pro game with its more demanding travel schedule and lack of practice time. Everything was so different than in

college, where Beilein didn't have to juggle massive egos and deal with players making much more money.

The losing took its toll on Beilein, who admitted being beaten down before the Cavs went their separate ways at the All-Star break. As it turned out, Cleveland's first win at home since Dec. 23 that snapped a 12-game losing streak on Feb. 12 at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse was Beilein's final game.

When they hired Beilein, the Cavs felt his extensive college background would give him an advantage in developing Cleveland's young players like guards Collin Sexton and Darius Garland. However, Beilein had a hard time connecting with his players and several veterans grumbled publicly and privately about his style.

There was a troubling stretch when veteran star forward

Kevin Love expressed his frustration with teammates and the Cavs' direction. Love later apologized, but it was clear to everyone around the team that Beilein wasn't working out and something had to change.

Beilein also had his share of missteps. He inadvertently called his players "thugs" during a team meeting and while his apology was accepted, it didn't help his cause within the locker room.

Beilein also had to deal with his son Patrick's resignation as coach at Niagara. The younger Beilein cited personal reasons for leaving the program before his first game.

It's not clear what will be next for Beilein, who went 571-325 at Canisius, Richmond, West Virginia and Michigan. He took the Wolverines to the NCAA Tournament nine times in 12 seasons.

# Manfred apologizes for trophy remark

Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred apologized Tuesday for what he called a disrespectful reference to the World Series trophy as a “piece of metal.”

Even before being asked about it, Manfred said he made a mistake with those comments while trying to deliver a rhetorical point in an interview two days earlier.

“I referred to the World Series trophy in a disrespectful way, and I want to apologize for it,” Manfred said. “There’s no excuse for it. ... It was a mistake to say what I said.”

MLB players, already upset with Manfred’s handling of the Houston Astros’ sign-stealing scandal and some of his comments in trying to explain it, became further infuriated by his “piece of metal” comment during a lengthy interview with ESPN on Sunday, the same day he spoke in Florida.

Even NBA superstar LeBron James joined the anti-Astros chorus, voicing his anger on social media Tuesday.

While speaking at the Cactus League media day in the Arizona desert, Manfred also pledged Tuesday to protect Oakland right-hander Mike Fiers, the ex-Astros pitcher who became the whistleblower when he went public in November to The

Athletic.

“We will take every possible step to protect Mike Fiers wherever he’s playing, whether it’s in Houston or somewhere else,” Manfred said. “Mike did the industry a service.”

The Astros play their first road game of the regular season March 30 at the A’s, who won 97 games each of the past two years to finish second to Houston in the AL West both times.

Cubs lefty Jon Lester, a three-time World Series champion — with the Boston Red Sox in 2007 and 2013, and Chicago in 2016 — had some choice words for the commissioner earlier Tuesday.

“That’s somebody that has never played our game. You play for a reason, you play for that piece of metal. I’m very proud of the three that I have,” Lester said at Cubs camp in Mesa, Ariz. “If that’s the way he feels, then he needs to take his name off the trophy.”

James sent a two-part tweet Tuesday imploring Manfred to listen to the upset players. The three-time NBA champion and four-time MVP said he would be irate and uncontrollable if he found out he had been cheated out of a championship.

“Listen here baseball commissioner listen to your....players speaking today

about how disgusted, mad, hurt, broken, etc etc about this,” James wrote in part, adding, “you need to fix this for the sake of Sports!”

Atlanta Braves outfielder Nick Markakis spoke out earlier Tuesday, saying he believed the commissioner had completely mishandled the situation with the Astros and that “every single guy over there deserves a beating.”

The commissioner said MLB reached out to the players’ association for player cooperation after early efforts in making progress in the investigation were unsuccessful. Manfred said cooperation came in exchange for blanket immunity for players.

“One of the principal complaints seems to be that the Houston players were not disciplined,” Manfred said. “And that lack of discipline immunity was negotiated with the union that represents the players.”

Union head Tony Clark said Tuesday night that “any suggestion that the association failed to cooperate with the commissioner’s investigation, obstructed the investigation, or otherwise took positions which led to a stalemate in the investigation is completely untrue. We acted to protect the rights of our members, as is our obligation under the law.”

## WHO: Too early to say virus will imperil Olympics

Associated Press

GENEVA — Despite a coronavirus outbreak spreading from China, a top World Health Organization official said Tuesday it’s much too soon to say whether the Tokyo Olympics are at risk of being cancelled or moved.

Tokyo organizers and the International Olympic Committee have repeatedly said they have no contingency plans for the July 24-Aug. 9 Summer Games since the WHO declared a global health emergency last month.

The U.N. agency’s emergencies program director, Michael Ryan, said Tuesday the sporting event was “way too far” away to consider giving advice that would affect Tokyo’s hosting of the Olympics.

“We are not there to make a decision for that,” Ryan said.

A respected Japanese virologist on Wednesday said if the Tokyo Olympics were tomorrow, the games probably couldn’t be held because of the fast-spreading virus from Wuhan, China.

“We need to find the best way to have a safe Olympics,” Dr. Hitoshi Oshitani said, speaking in Tokyo.

“Right now we don’t have an effective strategy, and I think it may be difficult to have the Olympics (now). But by the end of July, we may be in a different situation.”

The Tokyo Olympic organizing committee and the International Olympic Committee have repeatedly said over the last few weeks that they are following the advice of the World Health Organization and that the games will go on.

The Geneva-based WHO has been in regular contact with the

IOC in nearby Lausanne since the virus known as COVID-19 emerged in December.

“We don’t give them judgments,” Ryan said. “We assist them with their risk assessment. We will be working closely with them.”

With every passing day, the impact of the virus seems to spread, and so does the fallout: Olympic qualifying events are canceled or postponed, travel gets difficult, and athletes and families are left wondering. Not to mention sponsors and broadcasting networks that have invested billions of dollars in the Olympics.

Oshitani, a former adviser with the WHO who worked on the SARS outbreak almost 20 years ago, said he was hopeful but showed some uncertainty.

“I’m not sure (of) the situation in Japan at the end of July,”

he said, answering in English. “But probably we will not have large outbreaks in Japan in July.”

Oshitani said he was most concerned about a “Wuhan-type” of outbreak taking place in Africa or other parts of Asia and having cases imported into Japan. He said if that happened “it may get difficult to have” the Olympics. But he also suggested Japan might be able to handle it.

“So what we have to do now is try to prevent such a thing from happening,” he added, saying the Japanese government should support countries so they don’t have “that kind of situation.”

The outbreak has infected more than 75,000 people globally. China has reported 2,004 deaths among 74,185 cases on the mainland.

## NHL roundup

# Blues end losing streak at five games

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Ivan Barbashev scored twice and the St. Louis Blues snapped a season-worst five-game losing streak with a 3-0 defeat of the New Jersey Devils on Monday.

Jaden Schwartz also scored and Jordan Binnington made 17 saves for his seventh career shutout and second this season as the defending Stanley Cup champions and Western Conference leaders won for the first time since Feb. 4.

**Flyers 5, Blue Jackets 1:** Travis Konecny had a goal and two assists, and host Philadelphia beat Columbus.

Kevin Hayes, Sean Couturier, Philippe Myers and Jakub Voracek also scored for the Flyers

(33-20-7, 73 points), who moved a point ahead of Columbus (30-19-12, 72 points) and into third place in the Metropolitan Division with the win.

**Hurricanes 4, Predators 1:** Andrei Svechnikov and Nino Niederreiter each scored in the second period, and Jordan Staal and Sebastian Aho also scored to lead Carolina.

Justin Williams had two assists as the Hurricanes won their fourth straight in Nashville. Goalie Petr Mrazek made 28 saves and improved to 9-1-0 against the Predators.

**Jets 6, Kings 3:** Blake Wheeler had two goals and an assist in his 700th game with the franchise and host Winnipeg beat Los Angeles.

Nikolaj Ehlers had a goal and two assists and Patrik Laine scored a goal into an empty net and added one assist. Jansen Harkins and Mason Appleton also scored, and Connor Hellebuyck stopped 31 shots.

**Red Wings 4, Canadiens 3:** Andreas Athanasiou scored his second goal with 5:15 remaining in regulation to cap host Detroit's three-goal third period.

The Red Wings swept the season series against Montreal earning four of their NHL-low 15 victories against the Canadiens. Detroit goaltender Jonathan Bernier did not give up a goal in the third period and finished with 19 saves.

**Senators 7, Sabres 4:**

Artem Anisimov and Jean-Gabriel Pageau had two goals each to lead host Ottawa.

Vladislav Namestnikov, Drake Batherson and Anthony Duclair also scored for the Senators on a night they retired Chris Phillips' jersey in a pregame ceremony. Craig Anderson stopped 23 shots to pick up his 200th win with the franchise.

**Penguins 5, Maple Leafs 2:** Sidney Crosby had a goal and three assists to help host Pittsburgh beat Toronto.

Bryan Rust had a goal and two assists, and Jason Zucker, Teddy Blueger and Anthony Angello also scored as Pittsburgh moved past Washington into first place in the Metropolitan Division.

## College basketball roundup

# Top-ranked Baylor extends winning streak to 23 games

Associated Press

NORMAN, Okla. — Jared Butler scored 22 points and top-ranked Baylor beat Oklahoma 65-54 Tuesday for its Big 12-record 23rd consecutive win.

The Bears broke a tie with Kansas, which won 22 straight during the 1996-97 season.

Mark Vital had 10 points and Freddie Gillespie grabbed 10 rebounds for Baylor (24-1, 13-0 Big 12). Bears guard MaCio Teague, the team's leading scorer in Big 12 play, sat out for the second straight game with a wrist injury.

Kristian Doolittle had 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Sooners (16-10, 6-7), who hosted a No. 1 team for the first time in 23 years.

**No. 5 Dayton 66, VCU 61:** Jalen Crutcher scored 18 points and the Flyers won their 15th in a row, holding held off a late challenge from the host Rams.

Obi Toppin added 12 points and Trey Landers 11 for Dayton (24-2, 13-0 Atlantic 10), the

highest-ranked team ever to play on VCU's home floor.

The Rams (17-9, 7-6) closed to within one possession several times in the last seven minutes, the last on Vince Williams' putback with 27 seconds left, but Dwayne Cohill made a pair of free throws with 22.4 seconds left and the Flyers held on.

**No. 7 Maryland 76, Northwestern 67:** Jalen Smith had 22 points and a career-high 19 rebounds for his ninth consecutive double-double, and the host Terrapins extended their winning streak to nine games.

Smith achieved his 17th double-double of the season by halftime. In two games against Northwestern this season, the 6-foot-10 sophomore has 47 points and 30 rebounds.

Anthony Cowan Jr. scored 19 for Maryland (22-4, 12-3 Big Ten), which never trailed in improving its record at home to 15-0.

**No. 8 Florida State 82, Pittsburgh 67:** Patrick Wil-

liams scored 16 points, Anthony Polite had 10 points and six rebounds and the host Seminoles pulled away in the second half.

Williams, a freshman forward, scored in double figures for the 10th time this season as FSU (22-4, 12-3 ACC) improved to 14-0 at home.

**Illinois 62, No. 9 Penn State 56:** Ayo Dosunmu scored 24 points and the visiting Illini snapped a four-game losing streak by beating the Nittany Lions.

Kofi Cockburn added 14 points for Illinois (17-9, 9-6 Big Ten), which led most of the way and ended Penn State's eight-game winning streak. Dosunmu returned to the lineup after missing Saturday's loss at Rutgers after suffering an injury to his left knee is a win over Michigan State on Feb. 11.

The win also snapped Illinois' six-game losing streak against Penn State.

**No. 10 Kentucky 79, LSU 76:** Immanuel Quickley scored

21 points and the Wildcats made a timely string of three-pointers to win on the road.

Nick Richards scored 13 points and blocked six shots for Kentucky (21-5, 11-2 SEC), which has won five straight and nine of 10.

**No. 15 Creighton 73, No. 19 Marquette 65:** Ty-Shon Alexander scored 22 points and Marcus Zegarowski added 17, leading the visiting Bluejays to the win.

Creighton (21-6, 10-4 Big East) won for the eighth time in nine games, including road victories over three ranked teams.

**No. 17 West Virginia 65, Oklahoma State 47:** Miles McBride had 11 points in his first start, Sean McNeil also scored 11 and the host Mountaineers took over early in the second half to give coach Bob Huggins his 879th career victory to tie North Carolina's Dean Smith for sixth all-time among Division I coaches.