

Artillery exchange in Ukraine reported

The Washington Post

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine and Russian-backed separatists accused each other Thursday of violating a cease-fire in the eastern part of the country, a potential flash point in what Western officials have said are Russian preparations for a possible attack by growing forces massed near Ukraine's borders.

In Moscow, the Russian government expelled the U.S. Embassy's second-ranking diplomat, Deputy Chief of Mission Bart Gorman, the State Department confirmed Thursday. No reason was immediately given for the expulsion of Gorman, whom a department spokesperson described in a statement as "a key member of the Embassy's senior leadership team." The statement called the move "unprovoked" and "an escalatory step" and said the United States is "considering our response." A State Department official said later that Gorman departed last week.

Separately, Russia on Thursday made public a written response to U.S. proposals submitted Jan. 26 regarding Moscow's demands on halting NATO expansion. "In the absence of the readiness of the American side to agree on firm, legally binding guarantees of ensuring our security by the United States and its allies, Russia will be forced to respond, including through the implemen-

tation of military-technical measures," it said.

The letter from the Russian Foreign Ministry did not elaborate on "military-technical measures" but again denied any plans for a "Russian invasion" of Ukraine, as has been officially claimed by the U.S. and its allies since last fall. It added that "claims of 'Russian responsibility for the escalation' cannot be interpreted other than as an attempt to pressure and devalue Russian proposals on security guarantees."

The Ukrainian military reported 29 cease-fire violations up and down the border before noon, the vast majority of them with weapons that violate previous agreements.

Separatists rained down artillery, mortar rounds and other munitions at the front, the military said in a statement posted to social media. In the village of Stanytsia Luhanska near Luhansk, an artillery strike blew a hole through a kindergarten building. Three adults suffered concussions, officials said. No children were reported injured.

The Ukrainian military said the village was struck by 32 artillery rounds.

It was not clear whether the reported shelling in the Luhansk region of eastern Ukraine amounted to more than the usual flare-ups in an eight-year war there, but the U.S. has warned that Russia could instigate an incident as a pretext for an attack.

At the White House, President Joe Biden told reporters Thursday that the threat of invasion remains "very high" and that Russia may be creating an excuse to do so.

"We have reason to believe that they are engaged in a false flag operation to have an excuse to go in," Biden said before departing on trip to Ohio. "Every indication we have is they're prepared to go into Ukraine, attack Ukraine."

He added that "my sense is it will happen in the next several days."

But he said a diplomatic resolution is still possible, which is why he sent Secretary of State Antony Blinken to address the U.N. Security Council on Thursday.

In New York, Blinken told the council that a potential Russian false flag action could include a "fabricated so-called terrorist bombing inside Russia," a fake mass grave, a staged drone attack on civilians or a "fake, even a real, attack using chemical weapons."

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, attending a NATO meeting in Brussels, told reporters that the reports of shelling are "certainly troubling" and that the U.S. is still gathering details.

"But you know we've said for some time that the Russians might do something like this in order to justify a military conflict, so we'll be watching this very closely," Austin said.

More virus rules fall as CDC hints better days ahead

Associated Press

The nation's leading health officials said Wednesday that the United States is moving closer to the point that COVID-19 is no longer a "constant crisis" as more cities, businesses and sports venues began lifting pandemic restrictions around the country.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said during a White House briefing that the government is contemplating a change to its mask guidance in the coming weeks. Noting recent declines in COVID-19 cases, hospital admissions and deaths, she acknowledged "people are so eager" for health officials to ease masking rules and other measures de-

signed to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

"We all share the same goal — to get to a point where COVID-19 is no longer disrupting our daily lives, a time when it won't be a constant crisis — rather something we can prevent, protect against and treat," Walensky said.

With the omicron variant waning and Americans eager to move beyond the virus, government and business leaders have been out ahead of the CDC in ending virus measures in the last week, including ordering workers back to offices, eliminating mask mandates and no longer requiring proof of vaccine to get into restaurants, bars and sports and entertainment arenas.

Philadelphia officials on Wednesday said the city's vaccine mandate for restaurants was immediately lifted, though indoor mask mandates remain in place for now. At Disney World, vaccinated guests will no longer have to wear masks at the Florida theme park starting Thursday. Professional sports teams including the Utah Jazz and Washington Wizards and Capitals have stopped requiring proof of vaccine for fans.

The most populous county in Washington — where Seattle is located — announced Wednesday that it will no longer require COVID vaccination checks to enter restaurants, bars, theaters and gyms beginning March 1.

Army general suspended amid toxic climate probe

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The general in charge of Army logistics has been suspended from his duties amid an inspector general investigation into allegations that he fostered a toxic command climate in his Pentagon office, service officials said Wednesday.

Lt. Gen. Duane Gamble, the Army's deputy chief of staff for logistics, will remain suspended "pending the final outcome of a Department of the Army inspector general investigation into allegations of creating or fostering a counterproductive leadership environment," Cynthia O. Smith, a top Army spokeswoman, wrote in an emailed statement. That investigation, which dates back to 2020, has examined whether Gamble — who is white — had made racist statements or favored white subordinates, according to another Army official who spoke Wednesday on the condition of anonymity.

Smith declined to provide a specific comment on the nature of the investigation and did not say when the probe was likely to be completed.

Gamble is a 37-year veteran of the Army who commissioned into the service as an ordnance officer after graduating from Western Maryland College (now McDaniel

College), according to his official biography. He has served multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan and led other top Army logistics units, including U.S. Army Sustainment Command and the 21st Theatre Sustainment Command. He became the Army's deputy chief of staff for logistics, known as the G-4, in September 2019. He was charged with overseeing the Army's logisticians and setting policy for the service's myriad logistics operations, from sustaining combat to moving soldiers and their families from one installation to another.

The general was referred to the Army IG in 2020 for investigation after subordinates reported his behavior had contributed to falling morale within his office, according to the senior Army official. The allegations included "more than one" instance in which Gamble made "racially insensitive" statements, said the official, who did not have direct knowledge of such incidents but had been made aware of them.

Among the allegations, Gamble was accused of regularly degrading Black officers for their job performance or work ethic, while praising white officers who appeared to others to perform their work similarly, the official said.

Officials say US exit in Somalia aided terrorists

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

U.S.-backed forces in Somalia are now outgunned by Africa's largest terrorist group, raising concerns that a 2021 decision to pull out American troops and curtail airstrikes has helped the militants' insurgency expand, two senior officials said Thursday.

"It probably is not an effective long-term strategy," said one of the defense officials, who was authorized to speak on background about security conditions in Africa.

Special operations forces had been assisting local units for several years in battling al-Shabab, which is linked to al-Qaida. But shortly before leaving office, President Donald Trump ordered some 700 U.S. troops out of Somalia.

Since then, U.S. Africa Command has also halted most airstrikes in the country. The new administration of President Joe Biden has sought to limit drone strikes in Somalia and elsewhere.

By comparison, the United States conducted 63 strikes against Islamic militants in Somalia in 2020. AFRICOM, however, has come under criticism in the past by advocacy groups that have said the attacks on al-Shabab threaten civilians.

But with fewer airstrikes and less U.S. military involvement on the ground, al-Shabab is showing signs of resurgence in Somalia, the defense officials said.

"We are placing less pressure on them," one of the defense officials said.

With a force estimated at between 5,000 and 7,000 fighters, the terrorist group now has more freedom of movement and therefore the ability to attack more often, the officials said.

Still, although al-Shabab advertises ambitions to go after Western targets outside Somalia, it lacks the capacity to attack the U.S. homeland, the officials said.

For years, the U.S. has worked to strengthen Somalia's fledgling army, especially the country's Danab, or Lightning, advanced infantry brigade.

Before the 2021 withdrawal, U.S. special operations troops maintained a small but steady presence in the country and served as battlefield advisers to local forces.

Pentagon gets target budget number for next year from White House office

Bloomberg News

The Pentagon has received the key number it needs to plan its budget for fiscal 2023: a target figure from the White House budget office that incorporates revised inflation estimates, according to officials familiar with the process.

The fiscal 2023 estimate — covering Oct. 1, 2022, through September 2023 — is closer to 4% than the 2.6% placeholder assumption that the Office of Management and Budget originally gave the Pentagon for its planning purposes, according to the officials, who declined to

disclose the target number issued last Friday.

Back-and-forth talks between the Defense Department and OMB normally wrap up in December but took longer as defense officials advanced their concern that the fastest inflation in a generation will erode Pentagon purchasing power. The Pentagon didn't submit its desired budget package until mid-January.

Officials following defense budget deliberations said they don't expect the full federal budget to come out before mid-March at the earliest.

NY judge hears Trump subpoena appeal

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A judge heard arguments Thursday in former President Donald Trump's fight to avoid being questioned under oath in a New York investigation into his business practices.

New York Attorney General Letitia James is seeking to enforce subpoenas her office issued in December to Trump and his two eldest children, Ivanka and Donald Trump Jr.

James, a Democrat, said her civil investigation has uncovered evidence Trump's company used "fraudulent or misleading" valuations of assets like golf clubs and skyscrapers to get loans and tax benefits.

She wants her investigators

to be able to question Trump and his children, both of whom have been executives in the Trump Organization.

"The Trumps must comply with our lawful subpoenas for documents and testimony because no one in this country can pick and choose if and how the law applies to them," James said in a statement. "We will not be deterred in our efforts to continue this investigation and ensure that no one is above the law."

In a statement Tuesday, Trump railed against what he called a "sham investigation of a great company that has done a spectacular job for New York and beyond" and a racially motivated "continuation of a

Witch Hunt the likes of which has never been seen in this Country before."

In a court filing this week, James included a letter from Trump's longtime accounting firm advising him to no longer rely on years of financial statements it prepared based on his company's valuations, given the questions about their accuracy.

Testifying in a civil investigation could be a potential peril for the Trumps, if they did anything wrong. Anything they say could be used against them in a parallel criminal investigation being overseen by the Manhattan district attorney's office.

Even if ordered to comply

with the subpoenas, however, they would be free to invoke their Fifth Amendment right to remain silent at any time in a deposition. Trump's son, Eric Trump, and the Trump Organization's finance chief Allen Weisselberg did so hundreds of times when they were questioned by investigators in 2020.

The subpoena dispute is now before state Judge Arthur Engoron. He previously sided with James on other matters relating to the probe, including making Eric Trump testify after his lawyers abruptly canceled a scheduled deposition.

Engoron ruled immediately in that matter and ordered Eric Trump to sit for a deposition within 14 days.

Ex-Interior head accused of misusing position, lying

Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — Former U.S. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke misused his position to advance a commercial development project that included a microbrewery in his Montana hometown and lied to an agency ethics official about his involvement, federal investigators said Wednesday.

The investigation by the Interior Department's inspector general found that Zinke continued work on the commercial project through a nonprofit foundation in the resort community of Whitefish even after he committed upon taking office to break ties with the foundation.

Zinke, a former Navy SEAL who is now running for Congress, also gave incorrect and incomplete information to an Interior Department ethics official who confronted him over his involvement and ordered agency staff to help him with the project in a misuse of his position, according to the investigator's report.

The Great Northern Veterans

Peace Park Foundation was created by Zinke and others in 2007 to build a community sledding hill in Whitefish, a tourist town about 25 miles from Glacier National Park and near the Montana-Canada border. The BNSF Railway company donated several acres of land to the foundation in 2008 to establish the park.

After being named Interior secretary in 2017, Zinke agreed to stop providing the foundation with his services.

But after resigning as the foundation's president and while he was employed as the Interior Secretary, Zinke engaged in "repeated, ongoing substantive negotiations" with developers about the use of foundation property for the commercial project known as 95 Karrow, investigators said.

Zinke's campaign blasted the investigative report as "a political hit job" and said in a statement that the involvement of Zinke's family with the foundation led to the restoration of railroad land into a park where children can sled.

Fla. House passes GOP bill 15-week abortion ban

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Republicans in the Florida House of Representatives early Thursday approved a ban on abortions after 15 weeks, moving to tighten access to the procedure ahead of a U.S. Supreme Court decision that could limit abortion rights in America.

The GOP-controlled House passed the 15-week abortion ban after several hours of debate between Democrats who said the measure would impose an unnecessary burden on women and Republicans who said they were protecting the unborn.

"This is the right to life and to give up life is unconscionable to me," said Republican Rep. Dana Traubly, who disclosed that she previously had an abortion but has "regretted it every day since."

Republicans in several state legislatures are moving to place new restrictions on abortion after the U.S. Supreme Court sig-

naled it would uphold a Mississippi law prohibiting abortions after 15 weeks and potentially overturn the landmark Roe v. Wade decision. A decision in that case is expected later this year.

Florida's bill contains exceptions if the abortion is necessary to save a mother's life, prevent serious injury to the mother or if the fetus has a fatal abnormality. The state currently allows abortions up to 24 weeks of pregnancy.

Republicans have repeatedly rejected attempts from Democrats to add additional exceptions in the bill for pregnancies caused by rape, incest or human trafficking.

"As a woman it is my right to make decisions about my body and what is in the best interest of my family," said Rep. Robin Bartleman, a Democrat. "God forbid your 11-year-old is raped and pregnant and you find out after 15 weeks, you don't get to get your daughter that abortion, that's what this law says."

Weekly jobless claims up; still historically low

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Applications for U.S. unemployment benefits rose last week but remain near historically low levels, reflecting relatively few layoffs across the economy.

Jobless claims rose by 23,000 to 248,000 for the week ending Feb. 12, the Labor Department reported Thursday. Claims were revised upward to 225,000 the previous week.

Yet the four-week average for claims, which compensates for weekly volatility, fell by 10,500 to 243,250. It was the second straight week of declines after rising for five straight weeks as the omicron variant of the coronavirus spread, disrupting business in many parts of the United States.

In total, fewer than 1.6 million Americans

were collecting jobless aid the week that ended Feb. 5, a decrease of about 26,000 from the previous week.

First-time applications for jobless aid generally track the pace of layoffs, which are back down to fairly healthy pre-pandemic levels.

Earlier this month, the Labor Department reported a surprising burst of hiring in January, with employers adding 467,000 jobs. It also revised upward its estimate for job gains in November and December by a combined 709,000. The unemployment rate edged up to a still-low 4% from 3.9%, as more people began looking for work, but not all of them securing jobs right away.

Even as the omicron variant spread quickly earlier this winter, employers have been eager to hire. That winter spike in in-

fections briefly tripped up the country's strong recovery from 2020's virus-caused recession, but employers appear confident in long-term growth.

Massive government spending and the vaccine rollout jumpstarted the economy as employers added a record 6.4 million jobs last year. The U.S. economy expanded 5.7% in 2021, growing last year at the fastest annual pace since a 7.2% surge in 1984, also coming after a recession.

An overheated U.S. economy has spawned inflation not seen in four decades, leading the Federal Reserve to ease its monetary support for the economy. The Fed has signaled that it would begin a series of interest-rate hikes in March, reversing pandemic-era policies that have fueled hiring and growth, but also stubborn inflation.

Feds set to take on exploitation of supply chain

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department is launching an initiative aimed at identifying companies that exploit supply chain disruptions in the United States to make bigger profits in violation of federal antitrust laws.

The program, unveiled Thursday by the Justice Department's antitrust division and the FBI, comes amid ongoing supply chain struggles and labor shortages in the U.S. that have plagued retailers since the coronavirus pandemic began. Justice Department lawyers worry that companies may "seek to exploit supply chain disruptions for their own illicit gain," the department said. And, if that's the case, the Justice Department and the FBI will prosecute antitrust violations they uncover, the department says.

Those violations could include agreements between individuals and businesses to fix prices or wages or to rig bids, prosecutors say.

The U.S. government has also formed a working group focused on supply chain collusion — meant to share intelligence and detect global schemes — with officials in several other countries, including the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

"Temporary supply chain disruptions should not be allowed to conceal illegal conduct," said Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Kanter, who runs the antitrust division.

Freedom Convoy braces for police crackdown in blockaded Ottawa

Associated Press

OTTAWA, Ontario — Police poured into downtown Ottawa on Thursday in what truckers feared was a prelude to a crackdown on their nearly three-week, street-clogging protest against Canada's COVID-19 restrictions.

Work crews in the capital began erecting fences outside Parliament, and for the second day in a row, officers handed out warnings to the protesters to leave. Busloads of police converged on the area.

"It's high time that these illegal and dangerous activities stop," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declared in Parliament, not far from where the more than 300 trucks were parked.

"They are a threat to our economy and our relationship with trading partners," he said. "They are a threat to public safety."

Many of the protesters in the self-styled Freedom Convoy reacted to the warnings with scorn.

"I'm prepared sit on my ass and watch them hit me with pepper spray," said one of their leaders, Pat King.

As for the big rigs parked bumper-to-bumper, he said: "There's no tow trucks in Canada that will touch them."

Ottawa represented the movement's last stronghold after weeks of demonstrations and blockades that shut down border crossings into the U.S., inflicted economic damage on both countries and created a political cri-

sis for Trudeau.

The protests have shaken Canada's reputation for civility and rule-following and inspired similar convoys in France, New Zealand and the Netherlands.

Early this week, Trudeau invoked Canada's Emergencies Act, empowering law enforcement authorities to declare the blockades illegal, tow away trucks and punish the drivers by arresting them, freezing their bank accounts and suspending their licenses.

The occupation has infuriated many Ottawa residents.

"We've seen people intimidated, harassed and threatened. We've seen apartment buildings that have been chained up. We have seen fires set in the corridors. Residents are terrorized," said Canadian Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino.

The protests around the country by demonstrators in trucks, tractors and motor homes initially focused on Canada's vaccine requirement for truckers entering the country but soon morphed into a broader attack on COVID-19 precautions and Trudeau's government.

The movement has drawn support from right-wing extremists and veterans.

Fox News personalities and U.S. conservatives such as former President Donald Trump have egged on the protests, and Trudeau complained on Thursday that "roughly half of the funding to the barricaders here is coming from the United States."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Missing woman rescued from rugged terrain

NV RENO — A woman who had been reported missing was rescued after being found clinging to a tree in rugged terrain in the western outskirts of metro Reno.

Fire crews and other other responders used ropes and a basket to rescue the woman from a steep, rocky and wet slope several hundred feet below a road Monday night, local media outlets reported.

A young man hiking in the area called 911 after spotting the woman, who had been last seen at her residence at about 8 a.m.

The woman appeared to be uninjured but was taken to a hospital for examination.

Woman charged after leaving newborn baby

NE OMAHA — A 27-year-old woman is facing a felony child abuse charge after she gave birth on a sidewalk in southeast Omaha and abandoned the baby, police said.

Trinity Shakespeare was booked into the Douglas County jail Tuesday after she was released from the hospital, police said in a news release.

Officers were called Sunday morning by witnesses who were caring for a newborn boy. They reported a woman gave birth and then walked away from the child.

The temperature at the time was around 16 degrees, with wind chills in the single digits.

Emergency responders took the baby a hospital. He was expected to survive the exposure to the cold, police said Tuesday.

City issues \$138K fine over removal of trees

OR SALEM — Salem has issued a fine of more than \$138,000 for the removal of 100-plus trees in south Salem.

According to the city, 48 of those trees were Oregon white oaks, which are protected, The Statesman Journal reported. The fine was issued to the property owners, property manager and a local tree service connected to the vacant property.

The owners will also be required to plant new trees that are equal in value to the trees removed.

Officials told the Statesman Journal in December a permit application for the tree removal was neither submitted nor approved by Salem's planning department. Following public concern over the tree removal and questions from the Statesman Journal, staff in December began investigating.

City dedicates statue of Apollo 13 astronaut

MS BILOXI — A city on the Mississippi Gulf Coast has unveiled a statue to honor an Apollo 13 astronaut who grew up there.

The Sun Herald reported a crowd turned out Sunday in Biloxi to cheer 88-year-old Fred Haise Jr. He left his handprints in concrete and pulled a drape to reveal the 8-foot statue that depicts him in his spacesuit.

The original ceremony was planned for the 50th anniversary of Apollo 13 in April 2020 but was canceled because of COVID-19. Sunday's event went on despite the death of Haise's

wife, Patt, less than a week earlier.

Two days after launch, an oxygen tank exploded on board Apollo 13, forcing the crew to abandon their moon landing. The harrowing mission was depicted in a 1995 movie directed by Ron Howard.

Haise survived Apollo 13 and an airplane crash as a test pilot. He spent the past 15 years helping build Infinity Science Center in south Mississippi to inspire students to embrace science and technology.

2 get prison for stealing \$500K watch from diner

CA BEVERLY HILLS — Two men were each sentenced Monday to 12 years in prison for the brazen armed robbery of a man's \$500,000 watch while he was dining outdoors in Beverly Hills, prosecutors said.

The suspects wore hoods and one of them put a gun to the head of the watch's owner as he sat at Il Pastaio restaurant last March, investigators said. A woman was shot in the leg during a struggle over the rose-gold Richard Mille RM 11-03 Flyback Chronograph watch and the gun. She was not seriously hurt.

Malik Lamont Powell, 21, and Khai McGhee, 18, each pleaded guilty in September to three felonies including conspiracy to commit robbery.

New law lets EMTs treat, transport police dogs

MA BOSTON — First responders in Massachusetts will be allowed to treat and transport injured po-

lice dogs to veterinary hospitals under legislation signed in to law Tuesday by Gov. Charlie Baker.

Nero's bill was named for the K9 partner of slain Yarmouth Police Sgt. Sean Gannon.

Gannon was fatally shot in 2018 while serving an arrest warrant. Nero was also shot, but because of state law, EMTs weren't allowed to treat or transport him.

Nero had to be rushed to the animal hospital in the back of a police cruiser and survived the shooting.

The new law will permit emergency personnel to treat injured police dogs and bring them to veterinary facilities, as long as there are no injured people still requiring a hospital transport.

Sheriff: More than 160 dogs seized from home

SC PICKENS — Sheriff's deputies and animal rescue groups have removed 166 dogs from a South Carolina woman's property after they said the animals were found living in poor conditions.

The animals were taken from the 68-year-old woman's home in Pickens County after deputies secured a search warrant on Tuesday, WYFF-TV reported.

The woman was charged with ill-treatment of animals and a rabies control violation, said Chad Brooks of the Pickens County Sheriff's Office.

The dogs were taken to the Pickens County Animal Shelter and another area shelter, where they will be held pending an outcome of the criminal case, Brooks said.

— From wire reports

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Valieva falls flat in figure skating final

Associated Press

BEIJING — A Russian woman was standing atop the figure skating podium at the Beijing Games on Thursday night.

It just wasn't the one anyone expected. Even the fact that there was a podium was a surprise.

Anna Shcherbakova, the overlooked world champion, delivered a clean performance in her free skate at historic Capital Indoor Stadium to win a stunning gold medal, while teammate Kamila Valieva — at the center of the latest Russian doping controversy — tumbled out of the medals altogether with a mistake-filled end to her Olympic dream.

Shcherbakova landed both of her quads to finish with 255.95 points, edging out another teammate, Alexandra Trusova, who landed five somewhat shaky quads of her own to finish four points back in second place.

Kaori Sakamoto of Japan grabbed the bronze medal to break up the expected Russian sweep of the Olympic podium.

With the fewest quads among coach Eteri Tutberdize's "Quad Squad," the 17-year-old Shcherbakova instead relied on back-to-back clean programs with peerless artistry and unmatched skill. It culminated in her free skate Thursday night, when Shcherbakova landed her opening quad flip-triple toe loop combination and never looked back.

She followed in the footsteps of Adelina

Sotnikova and Alina Zagitova to give Russia three consecutive gold medals.

Meanwhile, Valieva was left sobbing in the kiss-and-cry area. The 15-year-old phenom was heavily favored to win Olympic gold but is headed home with nothing from the women's program and a looming investigation into her positive drug test.

Valieva was shaky on an opening quad salchow, then stepped out on a triple axel and fell altogether on a quad toe loop-triple toe loop combination. Valieva fell again on her other quad toe loop, keeping her from completing that combination, and spun out on another jump late in the program — though by that point, her fate was sealed.

The calamitous performance only made Shcherbakova's look better.

Moments after Valieva walked between the curtains and out of the arena, workers began setting up for a flower ceremony that the International Olympic Committee said would not take place if she was in the top three. Medals will be handed out Friday at a ceremony that would not have occurred in Beijing if Valieva had reached the podium.

Valieva tested positive for a banned heart medication at the Russian championships in December, but the result was not revealed until last week, after she helped to win a team gold medal — now also in doubt.

She was cleared to compete earlier this week by the Court of Arbitration for Sport,

which ruled that she had protected status as a minor and would suffer "irreparable harm" if she was not allowed to perform. The court did not rule on the full scope of the case, leaving that to anti-doping investigators.

Valieva has claimed the drug triggering her positive, trimetazidine, entered her system by accident. But the World Anti-Doping Agency filed a brief stating that two other substances she acknowledged taking, L-carnitine and Hypoxen — both legal — undercut the argument that a banned substance could have been ingested in error.

"You use all of that to increase performance," U.S. Anti-Doping Agency CEO Travis Tygart said.

In the meantime, IOC President Thomas Bach tried to appease angry American skaters by offering Olympic torches to those who helped win their team silver medals. The Associated Press learned late Wednesday. The torches are meant to serve as hold-over gifts while the world awaits the resolution of Valieva's doping case.

"It's unfortunate that we aren't able to get our medals," said Karen Chen, who competed in the team event for the U.S. and finished 16th in the women's program Thursday night. "I have yet to see the torch, but once that is like given to us, I think it will be such a special moment that we will cherish forever."

Shiffrin's games: 5 individual races, no medals, 3 DNFs

Associated Press

BEIJING — There was simply no way to predict this. Not for anyone, including Mikaela Shiffrin herself.

That the American skier would go 0-for-5 in individual races at the Beijing Olympics, leaving without a medal from any and with a best showing of ninth place, was hard enough to imagine beforehand.

That she would not even manage to finish three of those events — the three that are her best, including Thursday's Alpine combined — was among the most surprising developments of the entire 2022 Games.

"I'm certainly questioning a lot," Shiffrin said. "I'm really disappointed. And really frustrated."

She arrived in China as one of the biggest stars of ski racing — or any sport. Owner of three Olympic medals, two golds and a silver. Six world championship golds. Three overall World Cup titles.

Still, the 26-year-old from Colorado just never displayed her enviable technique and talent or big-moment gumption at the National Alpine Skiing Center in the brown, craggy mountains of Yanqing zone about 55 miles northwest of central Beijing.

"This is incredibly difficult for her as a person," U.S. head women's Alpine coach Paul Kristofic said. "We had big expectations coming here, and it hasn't gone the way we hoped, of course."

Shiffrin's latest subpar performance came in the second leg of the combined, which adds the times from one downhill run and one slalom run.

She was fifth-fastest in the downhill, certainly in contention for a higher finish, perhaps even a gold. What she needed to do, and could not, was stay upright for 50 seconds or so — long enough to get to the bottom of the slope as a light snow descended.

Trouble came after about 10 gates and 10 seconds. She lost her balance, could not regain it, and ended up landing on her hip.

Shiffrin sat for a few moments in the snow. When she rose, she shook her head, then looked up at the hill, as though trying to

figure out exactly where things went wrong.

Afterward, Shiffrin said she could imagine people back home thinking before the slalom portion of the combined: "This could just be the medal that salvages everything, after all."

But instead, she said, "I just feel like a joke."

It was as hard for her to believe as for anyone else.

"Beyond walking away from the Games with no medals — no individual medals — the most disappointing thing is I had multiple opportunities to ski slalom on this track," Shiffrin said, "and I, well, you know, failed in all of them."

Shiffrin now plans to enter the team event on Saturday, when the Alpine schedule concludes.

Reinhart, Ekblad goals lift Panthers

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Florida Panthers just kept getting better as the game went on after a long layoff. That was enough to erase a late deficit then pounce for an overtime winner in a matchup of two of the Eastern Conference's best teams.

Sam Reinhart tied it in the final minute of regulation, then Aaron Ekblad got free for a breakaway goal just 16 seconds into OT to give the Panthers a 3-2 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes on Wednesday night, an abrupt turnaround to a game Florida otherwise controlled despite being behind late.

Florida never led in regulation but outshot the Hurricanes 22-8 over the final two periods in a matchup of the conference's top two teams in terms of points percentage, as well as marking the Panthers' first game in more than two weeks

due to the All-Star break.

"For us coming off that break, it was grinding game," interim Panthers coach Andrew Brunette said. "And we were very ready to grind, ready to do the little things, to find a way.

"We didn't have our best game with the puck, but I thought we did a lot of the right things. We defended in packs. We kept them a little bit to the outside. And we had energy, and I thought we got better as the game went on — especially in the third period."

Aleksander Barkov also scored a highlight-reel goal in the second period for Florida, which had notched a franchise-record 12 wins in January along with scoring 74 goals for the highest single-month output by any NHL team in more than 26 years.

Avalanche 2, Golden Knights 0: Gabriel Landeskog broke a scoreless tie early in the third

period, Darcy Kuemper stopped 29 shots and visiting Colorado defeated Vegas.

Colorado's victory spoiled the long-awaited debut of Jack Eichel, who was in action for the first time since being acquired from Buffalo and becoming the first NHL player to play after having artificial disk replacement surgery on his neck in November.

Mikko Rantanen added an insurance goal late in the third for the Avalanche, beating Vegas goalie Laurent Brossoit, who made 23 saves.

Jets 6, Wild 3: Mark Scheifele had the fifth hat trick of his career and added an assist to lead host Winnipeg over Minnesota.

Cole Perfetti had a goal and assist, and Kyle Connor and Paul Stastny scored for the Jets as well. Blake Wheeler added four assists. Connor Hellebuyck made 33 saves for Winnipeg, which is 4-2-1 in its last

seven games.

Joel Eriksson Ek, Mats Zuccarello and Dmitry Kulikov scored for the Wild, who are 11-2-1 in their last 14 games. Their two losses have been to Winnipeg. Zuccarello added an assist and Kirill Kaprizov had two assists. Cam Talbot stopped 25 shots.

Flames 6, Ducks 2: Elias Lindholm scored twice and added an assist, extending his goal streak to six games, as host Calgary beat Anaheim and extended its winning streak to eight games.

For the Pacific Division-leading Flames, it's their longest winning streak since rattling off 10 in a row in 2016-17, which is tied for the franchise record.

Dillon Dube, Andrew Mangiapane, Johnny Gaudreau and Matthew Tkachuk also scored for Calgary (28-13-6). Flames defenseman Rasmus Andersson had a career-best three points with three assists.

Poulin leads Canada women to gold in win over US

Associated Press

BEIJING — Marie-Philip Poulin reminded everyone of her Captain Clutch reputation. And Canada regained its place atop the women's hockey world.

It was only fitting that Poulin delivered at a time her team needed it most by scoring twice, including her third Olympic gold medal-clinching goal, in Canada's 3-2 win over the defending champion United States at the Beijing Games on Thursday.

After winning gold in her first two Olympics, Poulin learned to appreciate how significant capturing her third was, coming four years after losing it to the Americans at the Pyeongchang Games.

"I just got shivers," she said. "That 2018 was very hard, very hard. And I think when

you take some time to reflect on what you need to do better as a team and personally," Poulin added. "We did that and I'm very happy that we're resilient and we're able to put that back in the past and win that gold today."

Ann-Renee Desbiens stopped 38 shots and Sarah Nurse had a goal and assist in a game where the Canadians built a 3-0 lead and hung on for the win. Nurse set the single Olympic tournament record with 18 points.

The Canadians finished 7-0 by showcasing a dynamic, deep and relentless offensive attack to capture their fifth Olympic title in seven tournaments, with four coming against the Americans in what has been one of sports' fiercest and longest-running rivalries.

Canada can now boast hold-

ing both the Olympic and world championship titles at the same time, and for the first time since 2012. The win at Beijing comes nearly six months after Poulin's overtime goal sealed Canada's 3-2 victory over the U.S. at worlds, which ended the Americans' run of winning five consecutive tournament titles.

"It was a long haul of silvers and a lot of soul-searching in the program," said Brianne Jenner, named the tournament MVP for tying a single Olympic record with nine goals. "I think this group didn't really shy away from it. We were like, 'Let's be bold, let's be brave, let's go out and see what we can do.'"

Hilary Knight, the Americans' only consistent threat in the tournament, scored her team-leading sixth goal on a shorthanded rush to cut the def-

icit to 3-1. Amanda Kessel scored with 13 seconds remaining during a mad scramble in front for a power-play goal and with the U.S. net empty for an extra attacker.

"We can't get down that many goals. It's really tough to bounce back," Knight said. "It's devastating. It's heartbreaking. ... It feels like we let our country down."

Alex Cavallini stopped 18 shots in her fourth tournament start.

The Americans, who have two Olympic golds, settled for their fourth silver medal, with all losses coming against Canada.

The U.S. didn't have enough defense to contain the Canadians' aggressive forechecking attack, nor the offense to match them.

Paul ejected, but Suns still beat Rockets

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Devin Booker scored 24 points, Deandre Ayton added 23 and the NBA-leading Phoenix Suns extended their winning streak to seven games, rallying after Chris Paul was ejected to beat the Houston Rockets 124-121 on Wednesday night.

Bulls 125, Kings 118: DeMar DeRozan scored 38 points and broke an NBA record set by Hall of Famer Wilt Chamberlain to help host Chicago beat Sacramento. DeRozan became the first player in NBA history to score 35 or more points and shoot 50% or better in seven consecutive games.

Lakers 106, Jazz 101: LeBron James scored 15 of his 33 points in the fourth quarter as host Los Angeles overcame an injury to Anthony Davis and a 12-point, fourth-quarter deficit to beat Utah.

Nuggets 116, Warriors 116: Monte Morris hit a three-pointer over Stephen Curry from the right wing as the buzzer sounded and the basket held up on replay review, sending Denver to a win at Golden State.

Nets 111, Knicks 106: Rookie Cam Thomas led Brooklyn back from a 28-point deficit with 16 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter, stunning host New York.

Trail Blazers 123, Grizzlies 119: Jusuf Nurkic had 32 points and eight rebounds, Anfernee Simons added 31 points and six assists and Portland overcame Ja Morant's 44-point performance to win at Memphis.

Pistons 112, Celtics 111: Jerami Grant hit the winning basket and scored 24 points to help visiting Detroit end an eight-game losing streak and Boston's nine-game winning streak.

Hawks 130, Magic 109: All-Star starter Trae Young had 22 points and six assists, and Atlanta rolled to a win at Orlando.

Pacers 113, Wizards 108: Tyrese Haliburton had 21 points and 14 assists, Terry Taylor added 18 points and nine rebounds and host Indiana beat Washington.

Raptors 103, Timberwolves 91: Gary Trent Jr. got 30 points in his home state, Pascal Siakam added 17 points, eight rebounds and nine assists and Toronto won at Minnesota.

Spurs 114, Thunder 106: Keldon Johnson scored 22 points and San Antonio won at Oklahoma City.

Rutgers shocks No. 12 Illinois

Associated Press

PISCATAWAY, N.J. — Rutgers isn't just beating ranked teams. It is dominating them with a relentless hard-nosed style of play.

No. 12 Illinois became the fourth straight ranked team to fall to the Scarlet Knights, getting beat 70-59 on Wednesday night. Rutgers' run is almost sure to get Steve Pikiell's team a ranking for the first time this season and a berth in the NCAA Tournament for a second straight season.

Pikiell wasn't ready to claim anything after the game, saying he will wait under March 13 for the official NCAA Tournament announcement.

"I think we can play anybody," Pikiell said. "We can play anybody, any place and win games in any tournament."

Cliff Omoruyi had 15 points, 13 rebounds and a reverse alley-oop dunk in a game-breaking second run for the Scarlet Knights.

No. 1 Gonzaga 86, Pepperdine 66: Drew Timme scored 19 points, Chet Holmgren had 18 points and 17 rebounds and Andrew Nembhard added a career-high 14 assists to lead the Bulldogs to a win over the host Waves.

Timme threw down an alley-oop dunk on a pass from Nembhard just six seconds in, and it was that kind of game for both teams.

Gonzaga (22-2, 11-0 West Coast Conference) never trailed and has won 15 consecutive games since its last loss against Alaba-

ma in December.

No. 2 Auburn 94, Vanderbilt 80: Freshman forward Jabari Smith scored a season-high 31 points and made seven three-pointers to lead the host Tigers to a victory over the Commodores.

Walker Kessler added 22 points to help Auburn (24-2, 12-1 Southeastern Conference) overcome a slow start against Vanderbilt (13-12, 5-8).

No. 5 Purdue 70, Northwestern 64: Zach Edey had 14 points and eight rebounds, and the visiting Boilermakers moved into first place in the Big Ten with a rugged victory over the Wildcats.

Capping a stretch of eight games in 21 days, Purdue (23-4, 12-4) held Northwestern to 35% shooting and controlled the glass with a 39-34 rebounding advantage.

No. 11 Texas Tech 83, No. 7 Baylor 73: Kevin Obanor scored 21 of his 23 points in the second half while rediscovering his long-range shot and finished with 13 rebounds, as the host Red Raiders beat the Bears, completing a regular-season series sweep of the reigning national champions.

No. 24 UConn 70, Seton Hall 65: Adama Sanogo had 20 points and 16 rebounds, and the host Huskies beat the Pirates.

No. 25 Alabama 80, Mississippi State 75: Jahvon Quinerly had 21 points and eight assists to lead the host Crimson Tide to a win over the Bulldogs.

Nelson leads Navy past American

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Tyler Nelson had 14 points and eight rebounds as Navy defeated American 55-46 on Wednesday night.

John Carter Jr. had 10 points for the Midshipmen (18-8, 11-4 Patriot League), who earned their fourth consecutive win.

Greg Summers, whose 10 points per game entering the matchup was second for Navy, failed to make a shot from the floor (0-for-5).

Both teams set season lows for scoring in the first half as the Midshipmen led 22-14 at intermission.

Stacy Beckton Jr. had 13 points and nine rebounds for the Eagles (7-19, 3-11). Johnny O'Neil added 10 points, eight rebounds and four blocks.

Navy improves to 2-0 against American on the season.

Boise State 85, Air Force 59: Marcus Shaver Jr. had 20 points as the Broncos rolled past the host Falcons.

Max Rice had 14 points for Boise State

(20-6, 11-2 Mountain West Conference). Lukas Milner added 13 points. Mladen Armus had 10 points and six assists.

The Broncos scored 45 first-half points, a season best for the team.

A.J. Walker had 19 points for Air Force (10-14, 3-10), which has lost six consecutive games. Jake Heidebreder added 18 points.

Boise State improves to 2-0 against the Falcons for the season.

Colgate 100, Army 90: Jack Ferguson scored 22 points and Nelly Cummings scored 20 points and the visiting Raiders won their eighth straight game.

Tucker Richardson had 18 points, six rebounds and six assists for Colgate (16-11, 12-2 Patriot League). Ryan Moffatt added 16 points and six assists.

The Raiders are 2-0 when scoring at least 100 points this season. They scored a season-high 52 points before halftime.

Jalen Rucker tied a career high with 29 points for the Black Knights (13-14, 7-8).