

General predicts war with China in 2 years

The Washington Post

China could be at war with the United States two years from now, a top Air Force general predicted in a bombastic and unusual memo to troops under his command, asserting a significantly shorter timeline before potential conflict than any other senior U.S. defense official to date.

Gen. Michael A. Minihan, who as head of Air Mobility Command oversees the service's fleet of transport and refueling aircraft, warned personnel to speed their preparations for a potential conflict, citing Chinese President Xi Jinping's aspirations and the possibility that Americans will not be paying attention until it is too late.

"I hope I am wrong," Minihan wrote. "My gut tells me we will fight in 2025. Xi secured his third term and set his war council in October 2022. Taiwan's presidential elections are in 2024 and will offer Xi a reason. United States' presidential elections are in 2024 and will offer Xi a distracted America. Xi's team, reason and opportunity are all aligned for 2025."

Minihan then directs airmen who are qualified to use a weapon to "fire a clip into a 7-meter target with the full understanding that unrepentant lethality matters most" sometime in February.

"Aim for the head," he said.

Minihan's memo encourages the thousands of troops under his command to prepare for war in several other regards. All personnel reporting to him should "consider their personal affairs" and be more aggressive about training, he instructs.

"Run deliberately, not recklessly," he writes. "If you are comfortable in your approach to training, then you are not taking enough risk."

The memo, first reported Friday by NBC News, is dated Feb. 1 — which is still days away — and was distributed to Minihan's subordinate commanders. An Air Force spokeswoman, Maj. Hope Cronin, verified its authenticity, writing in a statement shared with media after the memo began circulating on social media that Minihan's order "builds on last year's foundational efforts by Air Mobility Command to ready the Air Mobility Forces for future conflict, should deterrence fail."

A Pentagon spokesman, Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder, said Friday that the U.S. national defense strategy makes clear "that China is the pacing challenge of the Department of Defense" and that U.S. officials are working with allies and partners

to "preserve a peaceful, free and open Indo-Pacific."

A U.S. defense official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue, said Minihan's comments "are not representative of the department's view on China."

Before taking over at Air Mobility Command in 2021, Minihan served in a variety of influential roles in the Pacific beginning in 2013. They include a stint as the deputy commander of Indo-Pacific Command, with purview of China and Taiwan, from September 2019 to August 2021.

The general's memo coincides with an effort by the Pentagon to reset 20 years of counterinsurgency wars in the Middle East and as the Biden administration continues to equip Ukraine with billions of dollars in security assistance as it strives to fight off a Russian invasion.

In light of its concerns about China, the Pentagon has sought to expand military partnerships with willing partners throughout the Pacific. This month, the U.S. and Japanese governments disclosed that a Marine Corps unit on Okinawa will be refashioned into a force capable of hopping islands in the region and directing long-range missiles at adversaries.

More sailors push for removal of ban on beards

By ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

The Navy is facing a groundswell in its ranks and in court from people who believe the service needs to take a razor to its 38-year-old beard ban.

"Isn't it about time?" one retired sailor asked during an open question forum Jan. 19 with the Navy's top enlisted leader on the social media platform Reddit.

In response to that and related comments, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy James Honea said beards are "not a hill I want to die on."

And a recent court decision asserted that three Sikh Marine Corps recruits would likely win their case challenging requirements that they cut their hair and shave their beards. They had sued on grounds that the grooming rules violate their religious freedom rights.

A panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit unanimously ruled in December that the Corps hadn't proved that allowing the recruits to keep their beards and turbans would threaten cohesion and uniformity. The Washington Post reported Dec. 23.

The decision cleared the way for an injunction allowing the men to attend boot camp without shaving their beards or cutting their hair while their lawsuit continues.

Instituted in 1985, the Navy's ban marked a major reversal, given that for much of the service's history, sailors were allowed to wear beards.

Sailors who don't want to shave are increasingly questioning why the Navy is sticking to its 1985 policy.

Some studies, and in one case a sailor on Instagram, have shown that stubble or very short

beards don't necessarily interfere with a proper seal for a breathing mask.

But other reports have contended that a beard of almost any length can pose a serious risk to service members if they need a mask to aid breathing or protect against a chemical attack, said Lt. Cmdr. Steven Wills, a research scientist at the Arlington, Va.-based think tank CNA.

That reason, along with the challenge of policing beard length among other tasks facing commanding officers, justifies the ban, he said.

S. Korean army head lauds ties in US visit

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The top army generals from the United States and South Korea pledged on Thursday to strengthen their military alliance and deepen their collaboration in technological ventures.

The U.S. Army's chief of staff, Gen. James McConville, and his South Korean counterpart, Gen. Park Jeong-hwan, met in Washington, D.C., to sign a Korea-U.S. Strategic Vision Statement that broadly reinforced their "global comprehensive strategic alliance," according to a Friday report from National Defense Daily, the South Korean military's

news agency.

McConville likened the pledge to "a new starting point" for the two armies and said he looked forward to increasing joint projects in the future, according to the report.

Park's meeting with McConville was part of a roughly week-long trip to the United States to meet with Army leaders. On Tuesday, he visited Redstone Arsenal in Alabama, where he met with U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command.

Park said he wanted to "draw a blue print" for the South Korean military's space assets based on its experience working with the command, according to an Army

news release Tuesday.

"In a rapidly changing environment, such as the development of advanced science and technology, the reduction of troops, and the implementation of combat through minimal sacrifice, our army's power and innovation in troop ... structure are required to effectively respond to new areas, such as threats from North Korea, space and cyber," he said, according to the release.

The meetings come less than a week before U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is scheduled to visit South Korea, where he will "highlight our commitment to the region," Pentagon deputy

press secretary Sabrina Singh told reporters during a Thursday news briefing.

Seoul and Washington have recently conducted several large-scale military drills, including November's Vigilant Storm aerial exercise that included about 240 aircraft from both countries.

The joint exercises were conducted as North Korea fired roughly 75 missiles in 36 separate days of testing last year, a record. The communist regime last fired a short-range ballistic missile on Jan. 1 and is believed by U.S. and South Korean military officials to have prepared to conduct a nuclear test.

Solar effort in Hawaii may include more military homes

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The real estate company that manages thousands of homes for the U.S. Army on Oahu is set to expand a pilot program that will reduce demand and dependence on the island's electrical grid.

Lendlease Communities, which operates almost 8,000 homes on Oahu under a partnership between the Army and Island Palm Communities, has spent eight months analyzing a group of six homes clustered to share battery-stored solar power.

Last year, the company installed rooftop solar panels and storage batteries on six adjacent homes in the Aliamanu Military Reservation near Honolulu, Matt Lynn, Lendlease senior vice president of energy and utilities, said Wednesday. The homes remain connected to the grid.

"I think what makes this project unique is that the homes are connected in clusters so they can share energy between the homes wherever it's needed most," he

said. "This is a pretty unique structure that really allows the systems to be sized very efficiently and all the power generated essentially is used within the cluster of homes."

A typical single home with solar and storage normally uses little electricity during the middle of the day, resulting in a filled battery and nowhere for further solar power to be stored, Lynn said.

"So, it just has to go back to the grid or get wasted with this system," he said. "Because of the clustering, we're able to actually use every bit of energy that the solar is generating and deliver it to where it's needed most within the cluster."

The Aliamanu cluster has been operational since May.

"So we've been studying it for almost eight months, and we now feel like we're ready to scale this up," he said. "We are looking to, in the very near future, scale this up to a significant number of homes. Hundreds and ultimately thousands of homes would have this over time."

Nuke chief seeks cancer review of missile crews

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The top Air Force general in charge of the nation's air- and ground-launched nuclear missiles has requested an official investigation into the number of airmen who are reporting blood cancer diagnoses after serving at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana.

The illnesses became publicly known last week after The Associated Press obtained a military brief that at least nine missileers — those officers serving in underground bunkers near silo-based Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles and responsible for turning launch keys if ordered — were reporting diagnoses of non-Hodgkin lymphoma. One of the officers has died.

Gen. Thomas A. Bussiere, commander of Air Force Global Strike Command, which is responsible for all silo-based and aircraft-launched nuclear warheads, said in a statement Friday that he has requested the U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medi-

cine conduct a formal assessment into the reported cancers.

"Air Force Global Strike Command and our Air Force takes the responsibility to protect airmen and Guardians incredibly seriously, and their safety and health is always my top priority," Bussiere said. "While we continue to work through this process, service members and their dependents as well as former service members who may have concerns or have questions are encouraged to speak with their health care providers."

Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek added in a statement Saturday that the review will go beyond the launch officers initially identified. Similar nuclear missile facilities are located at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota and F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming.

Concern about the cancers was raised by a Space Force officer in a recent briefing to his unit. Many missileers transferred into the Space Force after it was created.

Calls for change in police culture renewed

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — An unarmed Black man dies after a videotaped beating by police. The officers involved are fired. After a thorough review of the evidence, criminal charges are swiftly filed against the offending officers.

Investigation, accountability and charges.

This is often the most Black citizens can hope for as the deaths continue. Nationwide, police have killed roughly three people per day consistently since 2020, according to academics and advocates for police reform who track such deaths.

Tyre Nichols' fatal encounter with police officers in Memphis,

Tenn., recorded in video made public Friday night, is a glaring reminder that efforts to reform policing have failed to prevent more flashpoints in an intractable epidemic of brutality.

Nearly 32 years ago, Rodney King's savage beating by police in Los Angeles prompted heartfelt calls for change. They've been repeated in a ceaseless rhythm ever since, punctuated by the deaths of Amadou Diallo in New York, Oscar Grant in Oakland, Calif., Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., and so many others.

George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis in 2020 was so agonizing to watch, it summoned a national reckoning that featured

federal legislation proposed in his name and shows of solidarity by corporations and sports leagues. All fell short of the shift in law enforcement culture Black people in America have called for — a culture that promotes freedom from fear, trust in police and mutual respect.

"We need public safety, right? We need law enforcement to combat pervasive crime," said Jason Turner, senior pastor of Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis. "Also, we don't want the people who are sworn to protect and serve us brutalizing us for a simple traffic stop, or any offense."

The five Black officers were fired and have been charged with

murder and other crimes in the Jan. 10 death of Nichols, a 29-year-old skateboarder, FedEx worker and father to a 4-year-old boy.

From police brass and the district attorney's office to the White House, officials said Nichols' killing points to a need for bolder reforms that go beyond simply diversifying the ranks, changing use-of-force rules and encouraging citizens to file complaints.

"The world is watching us," Shelby County District Attorney Steve Mulroy said. "If there is any silver lining to be drawn from this very dark cloud, it's that perhaps this incident can open a broader conversation about the need for police reform."

Economists say debt issue not yet a crisis

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — For all the sound and fury about raising the nation's debt limit, most economists have said federal borrowing is not at a crisis point ... at least not yet.

The national debt is at the core of a dispute about how to raise the government's legal borrowing authority, a mostly political argument that could turn into genuine financial trouble this summer if the United States runs out of accounting maneuvers to keep paying its bills.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy has insisted that the debt, so huge it defies most people's grasp, is already breaking the economy. President Joe Biden has countered that the government spending cuts sought by Republicans in return for a debt limit increase would break the middle class.

The political jousting masks contrasting realities: Today's \$31.4 trillion national debt does not appear to be a weight on

the U.S. economy, but the debt's path in the decades to come might risk national security and major programs including Social Security and Medicare.

The national debt is the accumulation over time of the yearly deficit. If the government cuts spending or raises taxes, it can trim the deficit and run a surplus, something that last happened in 2001. Lower levels of borrowing can contain and even reduce the cumulative debt.

At a time when high inflation already has the U.S. teetering near a recession, however, it's a potentially dangerous game to force more deficit reduction, says Megan Greene, global chief economist at the Kroll Institute.

"Spending cuts and tax hikes would kill off growth in a year when we're more likely than not to go into recession," Greene said. "It's not clear that it would put us onto a more sustainable fiscal footing at all."

Mass shootings widen divide on gun policies

Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Mass shootings have commanded public attention on a disturbingly frequent basis across the United States. But rather than provoking a unified response from elected officials, each additional shooting seems to be widening the political divide on gun policy among states.

"It's wash, rinse and repeat with these mass shootings," said Michael Anderson, a bartender who survived a mass shooting at a Colorado nightclub. "They happen, and then they happen, and then they happen — and then nothing gets done."

At least nothing that has put a halt to the violence.

In Democratic-led states with already restrictive gun laws, officials have responded to home-state tragedies with even more limits on guns — doubling down on a belief that future shootings can be thwarted by controlling access to lethal weapons.

In many states with Republican-led legislatures, high-profile

shootings appear unlikely to prompt any new firearm restrictions this year — reflecting a belief that violent people, not their weapons, are the problem.

"Obviously, no one wants to see these tragedies occur — this loss of life — but how the problem is viewed, and therefore what the response is to that problem, is night and day difference," said Daniel Webster, an American health professor at the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions.

For the third straight year, the U.S. in 2022 recorded over 600 mass shootings in which at least four people were killed or injured, according to the Gun Violence Archive. This year got off to another deadly start, including three California mass shootings in barely a week that killed two dozen people. A Saturday morning shooting in an upscale Los Angeles neighborhood that killed at least three and wounded four added to the grim toll, despite the fact California has some of the nation's strictest gun laws.

US to buy new tanks for Ukraine

By DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — New Abrams tanks will be purchased by the U.S. to supply to Ukraine because the Defense Department doesn't have any spares, delaying the shipment as Ukrainian forces prepare for an expected Russian offensive, a Pentagon spokeswoman said Thursday.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin recommended to President Joe Biden to obtain the tanks through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative — a funding program that procures military equipment from industry rather than from existing Defense Department stocks, deputy Pentagon press secretary Sabrina Singh said.

"We just don't have these tanks available in excess in our U.S. stocks," she told reporters at the Pentagon.

Singh also said Ukraine will get 31 modified M1A2s Abrams, which is the newest and most sophisticated version of the tank that first entered service in the early 1990s.

The M1A2 has advanced equipment such as an independent thermal sight and can fire at two different targets virtually at the same time without having to lock on to them

sequentially. It also has an automatic fire-fighting system in the crew compartment and can actively deflect computerized inbound missiles.

The U.S. version of the M1A2 also has armor and munitions made with depleted uranium, an extremely dense metal. However, Singh declined to provide any details about the tanks that the Ukrainians will receive. Federal policy forbids the U.S. from sending classified armor packages to other countries, according to several news reports.

Pentagon officials have said it will be several months before Ukraine receives the American battle tanks. Some experts have speculated Ukraine might not see them until late 2023 or early 2024.

"You have to remember ... these tanks are going to require training, maintenance, sustainment that's going to take a very long time," Singh said.

Singh also pushed back Thursday against criticisms that Pentagon officials reversed their review about sending Abrams tanks to Ukraine.

Last week, defense officials said the tank might not work for Ukraine due to complex maintenance requirements and because

they run on jet fuel and often need spare parts in the field. When the announcement to send the tanks came Wednesday, officials said equipment and weapons needs for Ukraine are always changing as the war against Russia evolves.

"[Our] position when it came to the Abrams has not changed," she said. "It is going to be a challenge to sustain and maintain these tanks. That said, following the [Ukrainian] contact group meeting [in Germany last week] ... Secretary [Austin] came away from those conversations feeling that we needed to provide a long-term commitment to Ukraine. That is why he recommended to the president that we provide the Abrams."

The Defense Department has not announced where Ukrainian troops will be trained on the tanks, but officials have said it will occur somewhere outside Ukraine. A group of Ukrainians are now at Fort Sill, Okla., learning how to operate the Patriot missile defense system.

"We just don't have a timeline," Singh said. "We are trying to get the training set up but ... where that's going to be and when, I just don't have that."

Iran defense factory target of drone bombing

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Bomb-carrying drones targeted an Iranian defense factory in the central city of Isfahan overnight, authorities said early Sunday, causing some damage at the plant amid heightened regional and international tensions engulfing the Islamic Republic.

The Iranian Defense Ministry offered no information on who it suspected carried out the attack, which came as a refinery fire separately broke out in the country's northwest and a 5.9 magnitude earthquake struck nearby, killing three people. However, Tehran has been targeted in suspected Israeli drone strikes amid a shadow war with its Mideast rival as its nuclear deal with world powers col-

lapsed. Meanwhile, tensions also remain high with neighboring Azerbaijan after a gunman attacked that country's embassy in Tehran, killing its security chief and wounding two others.

Details on the Isfahan attack, which happened around 11:30 p.m. Saturday, remained scarce. A Defense Ministry statement described three drones being launched at the facility, with two of them successfully shot down. A third apparently made it through to strike the building, causing "minor damage" to its roof and wounding no one, the ministry said.

Footage of the strike corresponded to a site on Minoo Street in northwestern Isfahan that's near a shopping center that includes a carpet and an electronics store.

Police seal off home of synagogue attacker

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israeli police on Sunday sealed up the east Jerusalem home of a Palestinian attacker who killed seven people and wounded three outside a synagogue, one of several punitive measures approved by Benjamin Netanyahu's Cabinet overnight.

The move came following a deadly weekend in which seven people were killed and five others wounded in two separate shootings in Jerusalem, in one of the bloodiest months in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem in several years.

The measures threatened to further raise tensions and cast a cloud over a visit next week by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The weekend shootings followed a deadly Israeli raid in the West Bank on Thursday that killed nine Palestinians. In response, Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired a barrage of rockets into Israel, triggering a series of Israeli airstrikes in response. In all, 32 Palestinians have been killed in fighting this month. Addressing the Cabinet on Sunday morning, Netanyahu said that "we sealed the home of the terrorist who carried out the horrendous attack in Jerusalem, and his home will be demolished."

"We are not seeking an escalation, but we are prepared for any scenario. Our answer to terrorism is a heavy hand and a strong, swift and precise response," he said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Governor touts tax break plan for military retirees

MD ANNAPOLIS — Maryland Gov. Wes Moore wants to expand state tax relief for military retirees.

The governor highlighted the “Keep Our Heroes Home Act” in his legislative agenda during a roundtable with veterans. It calls for expanding the military tax exemption to \$25,000 of income in tax year 2023 and \$40,000 in tax year 2024.

Now, the state allows any individual receiving military retirement, including surviving spouses, to deduct the first \$5,000 from their taxable income if they are under 55 and \$15,000 if they are 55 or older. The governor’s proposal expands the amount and eliminates the age distinction.

The governor also supports free medical and dental care for Maryland National Guard members and their families who are eligible for Tricare Reserve Select.

First lady donates her inaugural wear, masks

DC WASHINGTON — Jill Biden says her Inauguration Day outfits, now featured in a Smithsonian museum exhibit about first ladies, were a “voice for me on one of the most important days of my life.”

The dresses — one blue, one white — with matching coats and face masks “spoke to the American people then, and now they will continue speaking to generations to come,” she said, before mannequins dressed in her clothes were formally add-

ed to the exhibit.

“They will help tell not only my story, but the story of what Americans experienced together,” the first lady said at the museum.

First ladies typically donate their inaugural ball gown to the Smithsonian, but President Joe Biden had no such celebrations. He took office at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when such large indoor gatherings were discouraged.

‘Jesus Loves Me’ lawsuit spurs mask policy change

MS JACKSON — A conservative legal group said that a Mississippi school district has agreed to retract a policy that banned political or religious slogans on face masks, in response to a lawsuit from the family of a girl who was told not to wear one with the slogan “Jesus Loves Me.”

Alliance Defending Freedom represents the girl and her family in the lawsuit against Simpson County School District. The suit was filed in November 2020, when many schools in Mississippi and across the U.S. were requiring students to wear masks because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Matthew Booth and Jennifer Booth sued on behalf of their daughter, Lydia, who was in 3rd grade when she wore the mask to Simpson Central School in the Pinola community.

Museum told to hold onto disputed van Gogh work

MI DETROIT — A federal appeals court has ordered a Detroit museum to hold onto an 1888 painting by Vincent van Gogh amid a Brazi-

lian collector’s dispute with the museum over the painting.

The order from the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati comes days after U.S. District Judge George Caram Steeh in Detroit dismissed a lawsuit filed by collector Gustavo Soter’s art brokerage company, The Detroit News reported.

The suit claims Soter bought the painting of a woman with a book, titled “The Novel Reader,” in 2017 for \$3.7 million, but that a “third party” took possession of the artwork and it has been missing for nearly six years.

The oil-on-canvas painting, which the suit says is worth more than \$5 million, was part of the Detroit Institute of Arts’ recent “Van Gogh in America” exhibition.

Steeh said in his Jan. 20 ruling that the painting could not be seized because it was protected by a federal law granting immunity to foreign artwork on display in the United States.

Baker loses appeal over transgender-themed cake

CO DENVER — The Colorado baker who won a partial U.S. Supreme Court victory after refusing to make a gay couple’s wedding cake because of his Christian faith lost an appeal Thursday in his latest legal fight, involving his rejection of a request for a birthday cake celebrating a gender transition.

The Colorado Court of Appeals ruled that that the cake Autumn Scardina requested from Jack Phillips and Masterpiece Cakeshop, which was to be pink with blue frosting, is not a form of speech.

It also found that the state law that makes it illegal to refuse services to people based on protected characteristics like race, religion or sexual orientation does not violate business owners’ right to practice or express their religion.

Relying on the findings of a Denver judge in a 2021 trial in the dispute, the appeals court said Phillips’ shop initially agreed to make the cake but then refused after Scardina explained that she was going to use it to celebrate her transition from male to female.

Facility hid unregistered pot plants during audit

NV LAS VEGAS — A state board charged with overseeing Nevada’s booming marijuana industry suspended the license of a cannabis grow house near Las Vegas after inspectors said they found unregistered plants at the facility that pose an “immediate threat to public health and safety.”

Helping Hands Wellness Center is accused of using a storage closet and the facility’s attic to hide untagged and untested cannabis plants from auditors. State officials warned that plants not registered to Nevada’s regulatory “seed-to-sale” tracking system are susceptible to entering the illicit market.

The board said it conducted a monthslong investigation into Helping Hands before voting to force the North Las Vegas facility to close its doors and change the locks until business owners can address the state’s concerns.

— From wire reports



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Djokovic wins 22nd Grand Slam crown

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Novak Djokovic found this trip to Australia far less complicated, and far more successful, than that of a year ago.

Unable to enter his best event in 2022 after being deported from the country because he was not vaccinated against COVID-19, Djokovic accomplished all he could have wanted in his return: He resumed his winning ways at Melbourne Park and made it back to the top of tennis.

Only briefly challenged in the final on Sunday night, Djokovic was simply better at the most crucial moments and beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-3, 7-6 (4), 7-6 (5) for a record-extending 10th Australian Open championship and record-tying 22nd Grand Slam title overall. As a bonus, Djokovic will vault from No. 5 to No. 1 in the ATP rankings, a spot he already has held for more weeks than any other man.

“I want to say this has been one of the most challenging

tournaments I’ve ever played in my life, considering the circumstances. Not playing last year; coming back this year,” Djokovic said, wearing a zip-up white jacket with a “22” on his chest. “And I want to thank all the people that made me feel welcome, made me feel comfortable, to be in Melbourne, to be in Australia.”

And a moment later, he uttered a statement that is truly significant, given all the 35-year-old from Serbia has done on a tennis court: “This probably is the, I would say, biggest victory of my life.”

Djokovic stretched his unbeaten streak in Melbourne to 28 matches, the longest run there in the Open era, which dates to 1968. He adds trophy No. 10 to the seven from Wimbledon, three from the U.S. Open — where he also was absent last year because of no coronavirus shots — and two at the French Open, to match rival Rafael Nadal for the most by a man.

Only two women — Margaret Court, with 24, and Serena Williams, with 23 — are ahead of him.

This was also the 93rd ATP tour-level title for Djokovic, breaking a tie with Nadal for the fourth-most.

“I would like to thank you for pushing our sport so far,” Tsitsipas told Djokovic.

Djokovic was participating in his 33rd major final, Tsitsipas in his second — and the 24-year-old from Greece’s other one also ended in a loss to Djokovic, at the 2021 French Open.

Superior throughout on this cool evening under a cloud-filled sky, Djokovic was especially so in the two tiebreakers. He took a 4-1 lead in the first, then reeled off the last three points. He led 5-0 in the closing tiebreaker and, when it finished, he pointed to his temple before climbing into the stands, where he pumped his fist and jumped with his coach, Goran Ivanisevic, and other members of the entourage, and then he

collapsed, crying.

When Djokovic returned to the playing surface, he sat on his sideline bench, buried his face in a white towel, and sobbed some more.

Little doubt this is of no solace to Tsitsipas, but there is no shame in failing to defeat Djokovic in Melbourne. Challenging his dominion on those blue hard courts is every bit the monumental task that taking on Nadal on the red clay at Roland Garros is.

Perhaps surprisingly, Tsitsipas was willing to engage in the kind of leg-wearying, lung-searing back-and-forths upon which Djokovic has built his superlative career. How did that work out? Of points lasting at least five strokes, Djokovic won 43, Tsitsipas 30.

Then again, on those rare occasions that Tsitsipas did charge the net, he likely regretted the decision, because Djokovic often conjured up a passing shot that was too tough to handle.

Shiffrin must wait for record-tying 86th World Cup win

Associated Press

SPINDLERUV MLYN, Czech Republic — A shake of the head, lips pouting ... but then all smiles.

Mikaela Shiffrin was quick to take the positives after realizing she had to wait at least five more weeks before tying the World Cup record for most career wins with victory No. 86.

The American skier finished runner-up to Germany’s Lena Dürr in a slalom Sunday, the last World Cup race before the world championships, and remained one victory short of Ingemar Stenmark’s total on the all-time overall winners list among men and women. The Swede competed in the 1970s and ’80s.

“Life has changed me, but I

feel my skiing has improved over the last years,” Shiffrin said. “And I’m maybe a better skier than I’ve ever been in my life. And that’s pretty cool.”

Even though it didn’t happen Sunday, Shiffrin has returned to winning races at a similar pace to that of the 2018-19 season. She racked up a record 17 victories that year, and has already picked up 11 wins from 23 starts in the current season, including three in the past six days.

Shiffrin’s next chance to break Stenmark’s record will be in March when she resumes World Cup racing after the Feb. 6-19 worlds in France. World championship races do not count toward World Cup wins.

“I don’t have any expectations going into it,” Shiffrin said

about her next World Cup event, which will be either at the speed races in Kvitfjell, Norway, on March 4-5 or tech races in Are, Sweden, the following week.

Shiffrin had broken a tie on the all-time women’s list with former American teammate Lindsey Vonn last Tuesday. Vonn had 82 wins when she retired in 2019.

Her second place gave her an insurmountable lead in the season-long slalom standings with two races to spare. Her closest challenger, Wendy Holdener, failed to qualify for the second run and didn’t score World Cup points.

It made Shiffrin the first woman to win seven season titles in slalom, surpassing Swiss

standout Vreni Schneider, who won it six times in the 1980s and ’90s.

The women’s record for most titles in any discipline is held by Vonn, who won eight crystal globes as the best downhill skier of the season.

Racing at the resort near the Czech-Polish border where she made her World Cup debut as a 15-year-old almost 12 years ago, Shiffrin dominated a slalom on the very same course Saturday, posting the fastest times in both runs for her overall career win 85.

On Sunday, Shiffrin held a commanding first-run lead of 0.67 seconds over Dürr, but posted only the 14th-fastest time in the final run and was edged by 0.06 by the German skier.

Sooners end No. 2 Tide's streak at 9

Associated Press

NORMAN, Okla. — With Oklahoma set to join the Southeastern Conference in 2025, Sooners fans used the SEC/Big 12 Challenge to give Alabama a dose of the energy they plan to bring to the league.

After taunting the second-ranked Crimson Tide with chants of “S-E-C” and “overrated” in the second half, the fans stormed the court — a rare occurrence at Oklahoma. Grant Sherfield scored a season-high 30 points, and the Sooners beat Alabama 93-69 on Saturday.

It was the kind of moment second-year Oklahoma coach Porter Moser envisioned when he left Loyola of Chicago to take over the Sooners.

“I thought the crowd was unbelievable,” he said. “I sat there when the crowd rushed the floor — you know, my younger self might have ran out in the middle of it — and I just sat there and just said, ‘This is a vision.’ And like, this kind of excitement with the student body — I thought they were awesome. They were there early. Best crowd I’ve had since I’ve been here.”

Jalen Hill added a career-high 26 points on 9-for-11 shooting and grabbed eight rebounds. He also was assigned to guard Alabama freshman Brandon Miller, who came in averaging 19.5 points, but finished with 11 on 4-for-14 shooting.

Moser said it was a typical defensive performance for Hill.

“What he does night in and night out, the guys he guards — he’s guarding lottery picks and he is resilient,” Moser said. “He’s played a lot of minutes. And then for him to have that defensive effort and have 26 points as well. I mean, what a performance by Jalen.”

Rylan Griffen led Alabama (18-3) with 15 points and seven rebounds.

No. 3 Houston 75, Cincinnati 69: Jarace Walker had a ca-

reer-high 25 points and seven rebounds, and the host Cougars rallied from an 11-point second-half deficit to defeat the Bearcats.

J’Wan Roberts added 14 points and six rebounds for Houston (20-2, 8-1 American Athletic Conference).

Landers Nolley II had 24 points, including six three-pointers for Cincinnati (14-8, 5-4).

No. 4 Tennessee 82, No. 10 Texas 71: Olivier Nkamhoua scored 27 points and Zakai Zeigler had 22 points and 10 assists to lead host Tennessee over Texas in an SEC/Big 12 Challenge.

Josiah-Jordan James added 14 and Santiago Vescovi had 12 for Tennessee (18-3).

Sir’Jabari Rice scored 21 to lead Texas (17-4).

No. 5 Kansas State 64, Florida 50: Keyontae Johnson had 13 points and 11 rebounds against his former team, Markquis Nowell flirted with the first triple-double in program history, and the host Wildcats beat the Gators.

Nowell finished with 13 points, nine rebounds and eight assists. Kansas State improved to 18-3 to match the 1972-73 team for the best start through 21 games in school history.

No. 6 Arizona 95, Washington 72: Azuolas Tubelis had 25 points and 10 rebounds, Oumar Ballo added 21 points and 12 rebounds, and the visiting Wildcats used a big second-half run to pull away to win their fourth straight.

Kerr Kriisa added 18 points, hitting six three-pointers, for the Wildcats (19-3, 8-3 Pac-12).

No. 7 Virginia 76, Boston College 57: Armaan Franklin and Jayden Gardner scored 18 points each and the host Cavaliers used a big first-half run to take control over the Eagles for their sixth straight victory.

Virginia (16-3, 8-2 Atlantic Coast Conference) trailed 18-15

before starting an 18-4 run over the next 11 minutes and put the game away with a 16-4 second-half spurt.

No. 9 Kansas 77, Kentucky 68: Jalen Wilson scored 22 points, including one in a series of huge three-pointers down the stretch, and the visiting Jayhawks avoided their first four-game losing streak under coach Bill Self.

Wilson made nine of 18 from the field and grabbed eight rebounds for Kansas (17-4).

Oscar Tshiebwe had 18 points and nine rebounds for Kentucky (14-7), which had won its previous four.

Mississippi State 81, No. 11 TCU 74 (OT): Tolu Smith had 27 points, 13 rebounds and five assists to lead the host Bulldogs to an overtime victory.

Damion Baugh led TCU (16-5) with 19 points.

Missouri 78, No. 12 Iowa State 61: Kobe Brown scored 20 points, and D’Moi Hodge scored 17 points to help the host Tigers take down the Cyclones in the SEC/Big 12 Challenge.

Jaren Holmes led Iowa State (15-5) with 19 points.

Creighton 84, No. 13 Xavier 67: Arthur Kamula scored 20 points, the four other starters finished in double-figures and the host Bluejays earned their fourth straight Big East win.

Zach Freemantle led Xavier (17-5, 9-2) with 18 points.

No. 14 Gonzaga 82, Portland 67: Julian Strawther had a career-high 40 points, including eight three-pointers, and the visiting Bulldogs pulled away down the stretch for their 16th straight victory over the Pilots.

Anton Watson added 17 points for Gonzaga (18-4, 7-1 West Coast Conference).

West Virginia 80, No. 15 Auburn 77: Erik Stevenson scored a career-high 31 points and the host Mountaineers withstood a furious late rally from the Tigers to win an SEC/Big 12 Challenge matchup.

No. 16 Marquette 89, DePaul 69: David Joplin went 8-for-11 from three-point range for a career-high 28 points, Tyler Kolek had 24 points, 10 assists and 9 rebounds, and the visiting Golden Eagles defeated the Blue Demons.

Marquette (17-5, 9-2) has won eight of its last nine games.

No. 17 Baylor 67, Arkansas 64: Keyonte George scored 24 points, including seven in a row down the stretch, and the host Bears beat the Razorbacks in an SEC/Big 12 Challenge.

Baylor (16-5) fell behind by as many as eight points in the second half. But the Bears closed it out after Flo Thamba made two free throws for a 55-53 lead with 3:37 left.

Hofstra 85, No. 18 College Of Charleston 81: Aaron Estrada scored 25 points and Darlinstone Dubar added 18 as the visiting Pride ended the Cougars’ 20-game winning streak.

Charleston (21-2, 9-1) had not lost since falling to then-No. 1 North Carolina on Nov. 11.

Pittsburgh 71, No. 20 Miami 68: Blake Hinson tipped in a Jamarious Burton miss with 31 seconds remaining and the host Panthers closed with an 11-0 run in the final 2:26 to beat a ranked team for the third time this season.

No. 21 FAU 70, W. Kentucky 63: Brandon Weatherspoon scored 14 points and Florida Atlantic extended its winning streak to a program-record 20 games, which is now the nation’s longest.

No. 22 Saint Mary’s (Cal) 57, BYU 56: Logan Johnson had 14 points and freshman Aidan Mahaney scored all 10 of his points, including a fade-away jumper just before the buzzer, in the second half and the visiting Gaels won their 10th in a row.

No. 24 Clemson 82, Florida State 81: Chase Hunter drove the lane and drew a foul, sinking the free throw, to help the visiting Tigers escape with a win.

Celtics outlast LeBron, Lakers in OT

Associated Press

BOSTON — Lakers guard Patrick Beverly grabbed a court-side camera in an effort to show referee Eric Lewis what everyone who'd watched the replay already knew: LeBron James was fouled on his missed layup at the end of regulation.

Instead of getting the call, Beverly drew a technical foul that gave Boston the lead to start overtime and the NBA-leading Celtics went on to beat Los Angeles 125-121 on Saturday night.

"The best player on earth can't get a call. It's amazing," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "As much as you try not to put it on the officiating, it's becoming increasingly difficult."

Jaylen Brown scored 37, completing a tying three-point play with 4.1 seconds left in regulation and adding 11 more points in overtime to help the Celtics snap a three-game losing streak. Brown added nine rebounds, Jayson Tatum had 30 points and 11 rebounds, and Malcolm Brogdon scored 15 of his 26 points in the second half

of a see-saw game that had 19 lead changes — six in the fourth quarter — and 15 ties.

James had 41 points, nine rebounds and eight assists. But it was his missed layup at the end of regulation that enraged him on the court and left him simmering at his locker afterward.

"I don't understand. I don't understand what we're doing, and I watch basketball every single day," said James, who sat with a towel covering his head during overtime and barely looked up as he spoke at his locker. "I watch games every single day and I don't see it happening to nobody else. It's just weird."

Anthony Davis had 16 points with 10 rebounds, coming off the bench for the second game in a row after missing 20 with a foot injury. Beverly scored 15, twice giving the Lakers the lead in the final minute of the fourth. But he also missed a foul shot that might have clinched it, and his technical gave the Celtics the lead to start overtime, and they never trailed again.

76ers 126, Nuggets 119: Joel Embiid won the battle of MVP rivals with 47 points and 18 rebounds and host Philadelphia extended its winning streak to seven games, beating Nikola Jokic and Denver.

Nets 122, Knicks 115: Kyrie Irving scored 21 of his 32 points in the final 9½ minutes, carrying host Brooklyn to its ninth straight victory over New York. The All-Star guard also had nine assists and six rebounds.

Clippers 120, Hawks 113: Kawhi Leonard scored 32 points, including a season-high five three-pointers, Paul George added 23 points and visiting Los Angeles beat Atlanta for its fifth straight victory.

Suns 121, Spurs 116 (OT): Chris Paul scored 31 points, Mikal Bridges had 25 and visiting Phoenix escaped with an overtime victory over San Antonio.

Jazz 108, Mavericks 100: Lauri Markkanen scored 29 points, Malik Beasley added 19 and host Utah took advantage of Dallas star Luka Dončić's absence. Dončić sat out because of

a sprained left ankle.

Timberwolves 117, Kings 110: Anthony Edwards had 16 of his 34 points in the pivotal third quarter, D'Angelo Russell scored 25 points and host Minnesota held off Sacramento.

Rockets 117, Pistons 114: Kenyon Martin Jr. had a four-point possession with 31 seconds left to help visiting Houston beat Detroit in a matchup of the NBA's worst teams.

Wizards 113, Pelicans 103: Daniel Gafford had a season-high 21 points to go with 12 rebounds and five blocked shots and visiting Washington beat New Orleans for its fifth straight victory.

Raptors 123, Trail Blazers 105: Precious Achiuwa had 27 points and 13 rebounds in place of the injured OG Anunoby to lead visiting Toronto past Portland.

Bulls 128, Magic 109: DeMar DeRozan and Zach LaVine each scored 32 points, Nikola Vučević added 26 points and 13 rebounds and visiting Chicago beat Orlando.

Reinhart's overtime goal lifts Panthers over Bruins

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Sam Reinhart scored 17 seconds into overtime to cap a late scoring flurry and give the Florida Panthers a 4-3 victory over the NHL-leading Boston Bruins on Saturday night.

After David Pastrnak scored to give the Bruins the lead with 48.6 seconds left in regulation, Florida captain Aleksander Barkov tied it with 2.4 seconds remaining.

The Panthers, the NHL Presidents' Trophy winners last season, won for the first time this season when trailing going into the third period of a game. Florida had been 0-17-1 in such situations while the Bruins were 26-0-1 when leading after the first 40 minutes.

Craig Smith and Charlie Coyle also scored for Boston and Jeremy Swayman made 33 saves.

The Panthers got goals from Brandon Montour and Sam Bennett. Alex Lyon,

Florida's usual starter for its AHL team in Charlotte, stopped 37 shots.

Coyle was credited with the goal that gave Boston a 2-1 lead late in the second period after Bennett swatted the puck out of the air and scored into his own net.

Lightning 5, Kings 2: Brayden Point had a goal and an assist, and host Tampa Bay earned a franchise-record 12th consecutive home win.

Sharks 6, Penguins 4: Logan Couture had two goals and three assists, and visiting San Jose stopped a four-game skid.

Islanders 2, Golden Knights 1 (OT): Mathew Barzal scored in overtime, Semyon Varlamov made 44 saves and host New York earned its second straight victory.

Avalanche 4, Blues 2: Alex Newhook scored on his birthday for the second straight season, and host Colorado won for the seventh time in eight games.

Flyers 4, Jets 0: Carter Hart made 40 saves for his first shutout of the season to lift visiting Philadelphia over Winnipeg.

Senators 5, Canadiens 0: Claude Giroux had two goals and an assist, leading host Ottawa to its third straight victory.

Kraken 3, Blue Jackets 1: Alex Wennberg scored midway through the second period against his former team to help host Seattle beat Columbus.

Wild 3, Sabres 2 (SO): Mats Zuccarello, Kirill Kaprizov and Freddy Gaudreau scored in the shootout to lift host Minnesota.

Ducks 2, Coyotes 1 (OT): Trevor Zegras scored at 3:34 of overtime to give host Anaheim its first three-game winning streak of the season.

Oilers 7, Blackhawks 3: Tyson Barrie scored twice, Connor McDavid had his NHL-best 41st goal and host Edmonton beat Chicago.