

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 2023

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Ukraine keeps pushing for F-16s before meeting

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Whether to supply Kyiv with F-16 fighter jets likely will be up for discussion when United States defense officials meet with dozens of partners and allies in Brussels next month.

NATO has announced that the Ukraine Defense Contact group will meet at alliance headquarters Feb. 14, following up on a Jan. 20 conference at Ramstein Air Base, where the question of whether to supply Ukraine with tanks loomed over the agenda.

Soon after that meeting, the U.S. agreed to send Abrams tanks and Germany overcame its earlier reluctance to allow its Leopard tanks, which are owned by several allies, to be supplied to Ukraine.

But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, while expressing gratitude for the tank decision, has said his country also needs F-16s and other advanced weapons to beat Russia.

Poland, which flies U.S.-made F-16s, has said it would need U.S. and NATO approval to provide Ukraine with its jets.

Ukraine presidential office head Andrii Yermak said Monday on the social media network Telegram that “work on obtaining F-16 fighters continues,” adding that “we have positive signals from Poland.”

Earlier on in the war, the U.S. rejected Ukrainian pleas for combat jets, in part due to concerns of the war’s escalation should the aircraft strike Russian territory. But U.S. officials have left room for reconsidering their stance in light of battlefield developments.

“We have not ruled in or out any specific systems,” U.S. deputy national security adviser Jon Finer said Thursday on MSNBC. “We will be discussing this very carefully as we do all assistance decisions with the Ukrainians, and we’ll be tailoring our assistance ... for the phase of the fight they’re in.”

Last year, Poland pledged to transfer

its 28 Soviet-era MiG-29s to Ukraine, but the offer was scuttled amid miscommunication over how the planes would be delivered.

Germany continues to reject calls to supply Ukraine with fighter aircraft. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told Tagesspiegel on Sunday that “the question of combat aircraft” had already been considered and rejected.

Germany, however, initially promised Ukraine only helmets and small supplies as Russian troops massed on the country’s borders last year. Berlin has incrementally agreed to send advanced weapons systems amid pressure from allies.

Scholz added that he will do everything he can to ensure that “Russia’s war against Ukraine does not become a war between Russia and NATO.”

The upcoming Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting coincides with a gathering of NATO defense ministers Feb. 14-15, in Brussels.

Turkey may OK Finland’s membership in NATO first

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey could greenlight Finland’s membership in NATO before that of Sweden, if the military alliance and both Nordic countries agree to it, the Turkish foreign minister said Monday.

Mevlut Cavusoglu defined Finland’s application as “less problematic” than that of Sweden. Turkey has accused Stockholm of failing to take concrete steps to crackdown on groups that Ankara considers to be terrorists. More recently, Turkey has been incensed by Quran-burning protests that were staged outside the Turkish embassies in Stockholm and Copenhagen by an anti-Islam activist who holds Swedish and Danish citizenship.

“In my opinion, it would be

fair to differentiate between the problematic country and the less problematic country,” Cavusoglu told journalists during a joint news conference with his visiting Portuguese counterpart. “We believe that if NATO and these countries take such a decision, we can evaluate (Finland’s bid) separately.”

Sweden and Finland applied jointly to become members of the military alliance, dropping their longstanding military nonalignment following Russia’s war on Ukraine.

NATO requires unanimous approval to admit new members. Turkey has been delaying the ratification process of the Swedish and Finnish bids in its parliament.

Turkey has accused the gov-

ernment in Stockholm of being too lenient toward groups it deems as terror organizations or existential threats, including Kurdish groups.

“Some steps were taken in Sweden, such as constitutional amendments and legal amendments,” Cavusoglu said. “Unfortunately, there have been steps back, due to the provocations of groups that want to prevent Sweden from joining NATO.”

On Sunday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also suggested that Ankara might sign off on Finland’s application in a “shock” to Sweden.

He said Turkey had provided a list of 120 people it wants extradited from Sweden, a demand that was part of a mem-

orandum signed in June that averted Turkey’s veto of the Nordic nations’ joint application.

Turkey is demanding the extradition of alleged PKK militants as well as some followers of Fethullah Gulen, the Muslim cleric accused of the 2016 attempted coup.

Following last week’s protests, Erdogan warned Sweden not to expect support for its membership bid. Turkey also indefinitely postponed a key meeting in Brussels that would have discussed membership for Sweden and Finland.

Sweden’s chief negotiator Oscar Stenström told Swedish Radio early Sunday that the three-way talks have been suspended to avoid worsening the situation.

DOD seeks health solutions in Japan

By KELLY AGEE

Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Pentagon officials at a town hall Monday on this airlift base in western Tokyo offered few answers to hundreds of Defense Department civilian employees questioning their loss of access to military health care.

Gilbert Cisneros Jr., undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, and Seileen Mullen, acting assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, hosted the hourlong town hall at the base theater.

Working groups behind the scenes at the Pentagon are looking for solutions to the health care problem in Japan, Mullen said during the session.

DOD employees lost access to ongoing medical care at U.S. bases in Japan for most chronic conditions Jan. 1, when the Defense Health Agency implemented a congressional mandate to prioritize treatment for active-duty service members, their families and others covered by the military health plan Tricare Prime. Some services are still available, including urgent care and labor and delivery.

“So, we have come up with some solutions,” Mullen said to about 400 people, twice the number at a previous town hall here on the same subject Jan. 5.

“But we have not come up with any-

thing permanent yet because we wanted to come out and find out what you all think of what your issues are, and are the things that we’re thinking about actually going to meet your needs.”

At previous town halls at Yokota and Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni earlier this month and at Yokosuka Naval Base south of Tokyo in December, DOD civilians complained, among other issues, of DHA’s short notice of the change, the impracticality of the space-available appointment regimen now in place at U.S. military hospitals for DOD employees in Japan, and the unpredictable nature of obtaining medical care from Japanese providers. Some civilian employees of Stars and Stripes are affected by the changes.

The DHA Indo-Pacific director, Army Maj. Gen. Joseph Heck, in October advised DOD civilians and their families in Japan to find ongoing medical care from Japanese providers.

However, neither the Japanese government nor the country’s health care providers were formally apprised before Jan. 1 of the changes to health care for U.S. civilians in Japan, a spokesman for U.S. Forces Japan, Marine Gunnery Sgt. Jonathan Wright, told Stars and Stripes in an email Friday.

The reaction by DOD civilians —

teachers, contractors, employees at base exchanges and commissaries, for example — caused a stir in Washington.

The Japan Civilian Medical Advocacy, a Facebook group, started a petition drive asking Congress to rethink the changes; it has so far gathered 2,460 signatures. The group also conducted email and phone campaigns to further stoke attention among their congressional representatives.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, wrote Mullen and DHA’s newly appointed director, Army Maj. Gen. Telita Crosland, on Jan. 23 questioning the motive and asking the agency to justify cutting DOD employees in Japan out of the military health care system.

But Pentagon phones started to ring in October after Heck announced the DHA changes in the Pacific, Mullen said. U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel traveled to Washington to confer with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin about the change.

“OK, time to pay attention to what the heck is going on in Japan,” Mullen said.

On Tuesday, Mullen and Cisneros are scheduled for similar town halls in the morning at Yokosuka and in the afternoon at Camp Zama, the headquarters southwest of Tokyo of U.S. Army Japan.

Tokyo lodges protest over Chinese vessels in waters

By MATTHEW M. BURKE

AND KEISHI KOJA

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Tokyo lodged a diplomatic complaint with Beijing on Monday after a flotilla of Chinese government vessels entered waters claimed by Japan around the Senkakus, five islets and three barren rocks in the East China Sea, according to Japanese government statements.

Four Chinese Coast Guard ships following Japanese fishing and commercial craft passed the 12-mile territorial limit around the Senkakus between 2:47 a.m. and 6:07 a.m. Monday, a Japan Coast Guard spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone

that day.

All four vessels exited those waters without incident by 2 p.m., he said.

Japan’s Foreign Affairs Ministry lodged a complaint with the Chinese Embassy in Japan and with the Chinese government in Beijing on Monday morning, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone. Some government officials in Japan are required to speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

The first Chinese ship approached Minamikojima from the southeast and entered the 12-mile limit at 2:47 a.m., according to the coast guard spokesman. He said the vessel appeared to be armed with a deck-mounted machine-gun.

It was followed by another approaching south of Uotsurijima at 4:31 a.m.; a third entering from the south-southwest of Minamikojima at 4:31 a.m.; and a final ship entering southeast of Minamikojima at 6:07 a.m., the spokesman said.

A contingent of Japan Coast Guard vessels positioned themselves between the Chinese and Japanese ships and warned the Chinese vessels to leave the area, he said.

The first Chinese vessel departed the waters south of Uotsurijima at 12:35 p.m.

The incident was the second this year in which Chinese vessels intruded into Japanese waters, the spokesman said. The last happened on Jan. 10.

Ga. prosecutor may charge Trump in election probe

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Former President Donald Trump and his allies have been put on notice by a prosecutor, but the warning didn't come from anyone at the Justice Department.

It was from a Georgia prosecutor who indicated she was likely to seek criminal charges soon in a two-year election subversion probe. In trying to block the release of a special grand jury's report, Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis argued in court last week that decisions in the case were "imminent" and that the report's publication could jeopardize the rights of "future defendants."

Though Willis, a Democrat, didn't mention Trump by name, her comments marked the first time a prosecutor in any of several current investigations tied to the Republican former president has hinted that charges could be forthcoming. The remarks ratcheted anticipation that an investigation focused, in part, on Trump's call with Georgia's secretary of state could conclude before ongoing federal probes.

"I expect to see indictments in Fulton County before I see any federal indictments," said Clark Cunningham, a Georgia State University law professor.

Besides the Georgia inquiry, a Justice Department special counsel is investigating Trump over his role in working with allies to overturn his loss in the 2020 presidential election and his alleged mishandling of clas-

sified documents.

Trump had appeared to face the most pressing legal jeopardy from the probe into a cache of classified materials at his Florida resort, and that threat remains. But that case seems complicated, at least politically, by the recent discovery of classified records at President Joe Biden's Delaware home and at a Washington office. The Justice Department tapped a separate special counsel to investigate that matter.

Willis opened her office's investigation shortly after the release of a recording of a Jan. 2, 2021, phone call between Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger. In that conversation, the then-president suggested that Raffensperger, a fellow Republican, could "find" the votes needed to overturn Trump's narrow election loss in the state to Biden, a Democrat.

"All I want to do is this: I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have," Trump said on the call.

Since then, the investigation's scope has broadened considerably, encompassing among other things: a slate of Republican fake electors, phone calls by Trump and others to Georgia officials in the weeks after the 2020 election, and unfounded allegations of widespread election fraud made to state lawmakers.

In an interview, Trump insisted he did "absolutely nothing wrong." He said he felt "very confident" that he would not be indicted.

Biden, McCarthy to discuss debt limit in person

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said Sunday he is looking forward to discussing with President Joe Biden a "reasonable and responsible way that we can lift the debt ceiling" when the two meet Wednesday for their first sit-down at the White House since McCarthy was elected to the post.

McCarthy, R-Calif., said he wants to address spending cuts along with raising the debt limit, even though the White House has ruled out linking those two issues together as the government tries to avoid a potentially devastating financial default.

The speaker pledged that cuts to Social Security and Medicare would be off the table.

"I know the president said he didn't want to have any discussion (on cuts), but I think it's very important that our whole government is designed to find compromise," McCarthy told CBS' "Face the Nation." "I want to sit down together, work out an agreement that we can move forward to put us on a path to balance — and at the same time not put any of our debt in jeopardy at the same time."

Asked whether he would make a guarantee, McCarthy said, "There will not be a default," though he suggested that declaration depended on the willingness of Biden and Democrats to negotiate.

The White House on Sunday confirmed Wednesday's meeting on "a range of issues." It said Biden looked forward to "strengthening his working relationship" with McCarthy and to asking about the speaker's plan on spending, noting that the first House bill passed by Republicans this year to slash IRS funding would ultimately increase the deficit.

"The President will ask Speaker McCarthy if he intends to meet his Constitutional obligation to prevent a national default, as every other House and Senate leader in U.S. history has done," the White House said. "He will underscore that the economic security of all Americans cannot be held hostage to force unpopular cuts on working families."

McCarthy was elected speaker on a historic post-midnight 15th ballot early on Jan. 7, overcoming holdouts from his own ranks and tensions that have tested the new GOP majority's ability to govern.

California sees more rain, snow in south after weekend system

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Rain and snow fell across Southern California early Monday while the northern half of the state turned windy and frosty in the aftermath of the weekend weather system.

The California Highway Patrol escorted Interstate 5 traffic over Tejon Pass north Los Angeles due to snow. Chains were required for travel on several other Southern California mountain routes.

The low-pressure system moved through Northern California on Sunday, leaving blustery and cold conditions in its wake.

Frost and freeze warnings were issued for parts of the coast and the interior.

The storm was modest compared to the atmospheric river-fueled storms that pounded California from late December to the middle of this month.

In the Eastern Sierra, the storm added a few inches of snow at the Mammoth Mountain ski resort, which reported its totals so far this season are nearly 43 feet at its summit and 32 feet at the main lodge.

State officials said Thursday that California has twice as much snow in the Sierra Nevada compared to its historical average.

Sixth officer fired in Nichols arrest

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — A sixth Memphis Police Department officer has been disciplined for his involvement in the brutal beating and arrest of Tyre Nichols, a department spokeswoman said Monday.

Officer Preston Hemphill was relieved of duty shortly after the Jan. 7 arrest of Nichols, who died three days later at a hospital, Memphis police spokeswoman Karen Rudolph said.

She did not disclose Hemphill's role in the arrest.

Rudolph said information on disciplinary action taken against Hemphill was not immediately released because Hemphill was not fired and the department typically releases information about officers who are relieved of duty after an investigation ends.

Nichols' family and others closely watching developments surrounding his brutal arrest and killing in Memphis were awaiting word of additional disciplinary action against officers who were at the scene but have not been fired or charged.

Highly anticipated video footage released Friday showed five Memphis Police Department officers using a stun gun, a baton and their fists as they pummeled Nichols

during a nighttime arrest Jan. 7 after he was pulled over on suspicion of reckless driving. Nichols, a 29-year-old father, was heard calling for his mother and seen struggling with his injuries as he sat helpless on the pavement. He died at a hospital three days later.

The five officers have been fired and charged with second-degree murder and other alleged offenses stemming from the arrest, which has shocked many for its brutality and revived calls for police reform around the country.

Memphis police and the Shelby County district attorney have said an investigation into the actions of law enforcement officers who reported to the scene of the arrest was ongoing. A Memphis police spokeswoman said Monday that information will be released when it becomes available.

In addition to the five officers, who chatted and milled about for several minutes as Nichols sat on on the ground in obvious pain, two Shelby County sheriff's deputies have been relieved of duty without pay while their conduct is investigated. And, two Memphis Fire Department department workers were also removed from duty over Nichols' arrest.

But the video showed other officers who also responded to the scene. Memphis Police Director Cerelyn "CJ" Davis has not said if an officer who was involved in the initial traffic stop and could be heard saying, "I hope they stomp his ass" as Nichols ran away has been disciplined.

Calls for more officers to be fired or charged have been loud and persistent from the Nichols family, their lawyers and community activists who have peacefully protested in Memphis since the video was released. The video was evocative of the arrest of George Floyd in 2020 and officers' failure to intervene.

On Saturday, Nichols' stepfather, Rodney Wells, told The Associated Press that the family was going to "continue to seek justice and get some more officers arrested."

"Questions were raised before the video was released, I raised those questions," Wells said. "I just felt there was more than five officers out there. Now, five were charged with murder because they were the main participants, but there were five or six other officers out there that didn't do anything to render any aid. So they are just as culpable as the officers who threw the blows."

Fed poised to introduce smaller interest rate hike

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve is poised this week to raise its benchmark interest rate for an eighth time since March. But the Fed will likely announce a smaller hike for a second straight time, and it could change some key wording in its post-meeting statement about future rate increases.

A change in its statement, if there is one, could be seen as signaling an eventual pause in the Fed's aggressive drive to raise borrowing costs. Chair Jerome Powell is still likely to stress, though, that the Fed's campaign to conquer high inflation is far from over.

When its latest meeting ends Wednesday, the 19-member policymaking committee is ex-

pected to raise its key short-term rate, which affects many business and consumer loans, by a quarter-point. In doing so, it would elevate the rate to a range of 4.5% to 4.75%, its highest level in 15 years. The Fed's move would follow a half-point rate hike in December and four three-quarter point hikes before that.

Last year's substantial rate increases reflected near-unanimous agreement among Fed officials that they needed to move quickly to jack up borrowing costs to cool the worst inflation outbreak in more than 40 years. With uncertainty so high, several of the officials have said they favor smaller rate hikes, to allow time to evaluate the impact of their policies.

Blinken urges calm in Israel-Palestinian clash

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Israel and the Palestinians on Monday to ease tensions following a spike in violence that has put the region on edge. The bloodshed has alarmed the Biden administration as it attempts to find common ground with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new government.

Yet aside from appeals for de-escalation, Blinken did not publicly offer any particular ideas for calming the situation and it was not immediately clear from his meeting with Netanyahu that the administration would be proposing any. Blinken will meet Tuesday with Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.

"We're urging all sides now to take urgent steps to restore calm, to de-escalate," Blinken said after meeting Netanyahu. "We want to make sure that there's an environment in which we can, I hope at some point, create conditions where we can start to restore a sense of security for Israelis and Palestinians alike, which of course is sorely lacking."

Blinken arrived during one of the deadliest periods of fighting in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem. An Israeli military raid Thursday killed 10 Palestinians in the flashpoint West Bank town of Jenin, while a Palestinian gunman killed seven people outside a synagogue in an east Jerusalem settlement on Friday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

25 arrested for falsified nursing diploma scheme

FL MIAMI — Federal authorities in Florida have charged 25 people with participating in a wire fraud scheme that created an illegal shortcut for aspiring nurses to get licensed and find employment.

Recently unsealed federal grand jury indictments allege the defendants took part in a scam that sold more than 7,600 fraudulent nursing degree diplomas from three Florida-based nursing schools, federal officials said. Prosecutors said the scheme also involved transcripts for people seeking licenses and jobs as registered nurses and licensed practical/vocational nurses. The defendants each face up to 20 years in prison.

The fake diplomas and transcripts qualified those who purchased them to sit for the national nursing board exam. If they passed, they were able to obtain licenses and jobs in various states, prosecutors said.

The schools involved — Siena College, Palm Beach School of Nursing and Sacred Heart International Institute — are now closed.

Woman in squad car hit by train suing police

CO DENVER — A woman who was seriously injured when the parked patrol car she was detained in was hit by a freight train filed a lawsuit against police Thursday, accusing three officers of acting recklessly and failing in their duty to take care of her while she was in their custody.

Yareni Rios was handcuffed and put in the back of a patrol car that was parked on railroad tracks on Sept. 16. The lawsuit alleges the train tracks were “plainly visible” to the arresting officer.

The passenger’s side back door had been left open and Rios screamed for help and tried to get out after hearing the train, the lawsuit said.

Rios had been arrested after a report of an alleged road rage incident involving a gun before the crash and has since been charged with felony menacing.

State sees more deaths linked to pregnancies

MS JACKSON — Deaths from pregnancy complications have become more prevalent in Mississippi, and racial disparities in the health of those who give birth have widened in recent years, according to a report released Thursday by the state’s Department of Health.

The Mississippi Maternal Mortality Report shows an 8.8% increase between 2013-16 and 2017-19, with the latter period being the most recent one analyzed by researchers.

Black, non-Hispanic women had a rate four times higher than white, non-Hispanic women. Meanwhile, the rate increased by 25% for Black women while falling 14% among white women. Of the maternal deaths directly related to pregnancy, 87.5% were determined to be preventable.

The grim figures arrive as the state is expecting more births each year as a result of the U.S. Supreme Court decision last summer overturning the 1973

Roe v. Wade ruling, which had established a nationwide constitutional protection for abortion. The court used a Mississippi case to overturn the case, a legal effort the state’s leaders have lauded.

Lawyer sentenced for police car firebombing

NY NEW YORK — A lawyer who purchased gasoline that another lawyer used in firebombing an unoccupied New York City police car during protests over George Floyd’s death in 2020 was sentenced Thursday to a year and a day in prison.

Colinford Mattis, appearing in federal court, was also ordered to pay just over \$30,000 to the New York Police Department for the destroyed vehicle.

Mattis and Urooj Rahman were arrested May 30, 2020, as demonstrations and protests raged over the killing of Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis.

Both Mattis and Rahman have been disbarred. Rahman was sentenced in November to 15 months in prison.

Lawmaker again pushes no-permit conceal carry

NE LINCOLN — A Nebraska lawmaker is taking another shot at trying to pass a bill that would not only allow people to carry concealed handguns without a permit, it would prohibit the state’s cities and counties from issuing local laws to do so within their borders.

Sen. Tom Brewer, of Gordon, defended the bill in a recent hearing before the Legisla-

ture’s Judiciary Committee that drew more than 100 people. Brewer brought with him a state attorney general’s opinion that determined such a law would need to be implemented statewide.

Brewer has introduced the measure every year since 2017. This year, his proposal has 25 cosponsors and is again listed as his priority bill, increasing the odds that lawmakers will debate it on the Senate floor.

According to the U.S. Concealed Carry Association, permit-less concealed carry is already allowed in 25 conservative-leaning states.

Lawsuit: Resorts used vendor to fix hotel rates

NV LAS VEGAS — A federal lawsuit in Nevada is seeking class-action damages for countless hotel patrons who booked rooms in Las Vegas since 2019, alleging that most hotel-casinos on the Las Vegas Strip have used a third-party vendor to illegally fix prices.

The complaint filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Las Vegas alleges that casino giants MGM Resorts International and Caesars Entertainment, along with Treasure Island and Wynn Resorts, share information with a company that used pricing algorithms to “maximize market-wide prices.”

It accuses the resorts and Rainmaker Group Unlimited, a revenue management company owned by Cendyn Group, of “algorithmic-driven price-fixing ... at the expense of consumers and in violation of antitrust laws.”

— From wire reports

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Chiefs top Bengals on late kick for AFC title

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Patrick Mahomes was forced to rely on his badly sprained right ankle rather than his strong right arm when the Kansas City Chiefs were desperately driving with a chance to win the AFC championship.

The All-Pro quarterback, missing three wide receivers to injuries and battered himself, took off on a third-down play near midfield in another gut-check game with the Cincinnati Bengals. Mahomes strained to reach the mark he needed and was headed out of bounds when he felt the hands of Joseph Ossai send him sprawling into the bench.

The mad dash, coupled with the 15-yard penalty for a late hit, was all Kansas City needed.

Harrison Butker strode confidently onto the field, sent a 45-yard kick through cold, gusting wind over the crossbar with 3 seconds to go, and put the

Chiefs back in the Super Bowl for the third time in four years with a 23-20 victory.

“I don’t think we have any cigars,” Mahomes said with a smile, “but we’ll be ready to go in the Super Bowl.”

It was vindication for the AFC West champs, who had lost three straight to their newfound nemeses, including a three-point overtime loss in last year’s conference title game. All of those defeats were by three points.

Now, the Chiefs are headed back to the big game.

Awaiting them is coach Andy Reid’s old team, the Eagles, in the first matchup of Black quarterbacks in the Super Bowl with Mahomes and Philadelphia’s Jalen Hurts. It will also feature a brother-against-brother showdown between Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce and Philadelphia center Jason Kelce.

“I’ve watched them all year,”

Mahomes said. “It’s going to be a great challenge for us. But I’m going to celebrate this first.”

Mahomes, who hurt his ankle against Jacksonville in the divisional round, threw for 326 yards and two touchdowns, even though he was missing three of his wide receivers to injuries by the end. Marquez Valdes-Scantling led with 116 yards and a touchdown, while Travis Kelce — bad back and all — had seven catches for 78 yards and a score.

“It’s a tough bunch. My heart goes out to them, man, they’re tough guys,” Reid said. “They worked so hard this week. Pat and Kelce were both banged up a little bit. They pushed through and great things happened.”

Burrow, who was sacked five times and wobbly by the end, finished with 270 yards passing to go with a touchdown and two interceptions for the Bengals. Tee Higgins had six catches for

83 yards and the score.

“We’re not going to make it about one play. There were plenty of plays we left on the field today that could have put us in a better position,” Bengals coach Zac Taylor said. “The character of this football team, that’s never going to change. We’ve got the right people in the locker room, the right men leading this team and this organization.”

“I know that this is a team that our city and our fan base can be proud of,” Taylor added. “They represent themselves the right way, and we’re going to fight, scratch and claw to be back in this position next year.”

The Chiefs ran roughshod over an ailing Bengals offensive line missing two starters to injury with another bothered by a sore knee.

Burrow was sacked three times in the first quarter alone and the Bengals offense did not gain a single yard.

Hurts, Eagles top 49ers for NFC title, soar into Super Bowl

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Jalen Hurts can conduct a singalong about as well as he can orchestrate the kind of punishing scoring drives that sent the Eagles into the Super Bowl.

At the end of one more triumph, Hurts stood on the stage on the field — as his Eagles teammates passed around the NFC championship trophy — and clutched a microphone in front of what was suddenly Philadelphia’s largest karaoke joint. His rendition of the team fight song was a tad off-key.

Hurts may not sing as well as he can score, but it was another memorable moment in a season full of them. And the Eagles don’t believe they’re done yet.

“We’ve got new moments,” Hurts said. “New moments and new times.”

Hurts had one of Philadelphia’s four rushing touchdowns and the Eagles soared into the Super Bowl, forcing both of San Francisco’s quarterbacks out of the game with injuries and beating the wounded 49ers 31-7 in the NFC championship game on Sunday.

The Eagles, who won the Super Bowl five years ago with a different coach and quarterback, will try to do it again behind the formidable duo of Hurts and coach Nick Sirianni. Philadelphia will play former Eagles coach Andy Reid’s Kansas City Chiefs.

“We get to do it because we did it better than anyone in the NFC this year,” Sirianni said.

Hurts had a modest game by his standards after a season in which he was a finalist for MVP. He was 15-for-25 passing for 121 yards and ran for 39, improving to 16-1 as a starter this season. The Eagles (16-3) lost two games that he missed with a sprained right shoulder.

Hurts sat alone at his locker dressed all in purple and he took a few puffs of a cigar as the Eagles celebrated around him. He understood there was one more game to win.

“I never knew how far we’d go,” Hurts said, “but I never said it couldn’t be done.”

Miles Sanders ran for two touchdowns and linebacker Haason Reddick made the hit that forced 49ers rookie quarterback Brock Purdy out of the game with an elbow

injury. Reddick also recovered a fumble by Purdy’s replacement, Josh Johnson, who later suffered a concussion.

That forced Purdy back into the game, but his injury was clearly a factor as the 49ers all but gave up on the passing game, even while trailing by multiple scores. Purdy said he was unable to throw the ball more than 10 yards after his elbow got hurt.

Philadelphia police greased traffic and light poles in what proved again to be a futile attempt to slow the postgame revelry. The city now has its beloved Birds in the Super Bowl just three months after the Philadelphia Phillies reached the World Series.

“When you guys go into our indoor (practice facility), there’s always that picture in the back part of it of the 2017 NFC championship game, and it’s just the electricity of the stadium,” said Sirianni, who was hired two years ago to replace the Eagles’ Super Bowl-winning coach, Doug Pederson. “We’re looking forward to getting another picture up there of this special moment that we had.”

Giannis scores 50 as Bucks rip Pelicans

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Giannis Antetokounmpo has said he wants to keep producing outstanding performances that he can show his kids one day when they're old enough to appreciate them.

The two-time MVP added one more to the list Sunday night.

Antetokounmpo scored 50 points while playing only 30 minutes as the Milwaukee Bucks rolled to a 135-110 victory over the slumping New Orleans Pelicans. Antetokounmpo shot 20-for-26 from the floor — including 3-for-4 from three-point range — and 7-for-12 from the foul line.

"They might say, 'Daddy, you're boring. You're lame. We don't want to see your highlights. We've heard so much about you. We want to watch Scooby-Doo' or whatever the case might be," Antetokounmpo said. "I'm just going to keep creating the way people in the past created, the way I can go back and watch Magic Johnson highlights, Kevin Garnett highlights, Kobe Bryant highlights,

Allen Iverson highlights, KD's, LeBron's. They've created so much art throughout the years, and we can go back and see it and admire what they did."

Antetokounmpo's 50 points were five off the career high he set Jan. 4 against Washington.

Jrue Holiday scored 17 and Brook Lopez added 15 for the Bucks, who shot 55.2%.

New Orleans never led and lost its eighth straight. The Pelicans were playing for the second consecutive night — they lost 113-103 at home to the Wizards on Saturday — and were missing their top three scorers.

Zion Williamson hasn't played since Jan. 2 due to a strained right hamstring. Brandon Ingram (toe injury on left foot) and CJ McCollum (sprained right thumb) were also out Sunday.

Jose Alvarado stepped up to lead the Pelicans with 18 points, while Trey Murphy III and Jonas Valanciunas had 16 each.

"I thought our effort was there," Pelicans coach Willie Green. "I thought we fought. It just wasn't enough tonight."

Hornets 122, Heat 117: Terry Rozier scored 31 points, P.J. Washington had 27 and host Charlotte stopped Miami's three-game win streak.

LaMelo Ball scored 13 of his 19 points in the fourth quarter as Charlotte improved to 7-16 at home. Gordon Hayward was a 7-for-7 from the field for 20 points.

Rozier also had seven assists and six rebounds. He was 11 for 19 from the field, including a 5-for-11 performance from three-point range. Jimmy Butler scored 28 points for Miami, and Tyler Herro had 24.

Charlotte shot 54.2% from the field and outrebounded Miami 47-36.

Grizzlies 112, Pacers 100: Ja Morant had 27 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds, Jaren Jackson Jr. added 28 points and host Memphis overcame a lackluster first half to defeat Indiana.

Brandon Clarke had 13 points, hitting all five of his shots as Memphis snapped a five-game losing streak and ran its home record to 21-3. It was

Morant's fifth triple-double of the season and second in a row.

Benedict Mathurin, the sixth pick in the 2022 draft, led the Pacers with 27 points and eight rebounds. Aaron Nesmith had 16 points and Myles Turner added 15 points.

Cavaliers 122, Clippers 99: Cedi Osman tied his career-high with 29 points, Darius Garland had 16 points and 10 assists, and host Cleveland led Los Angeles wire-to-wire for a win.

All-Star starter Donovan Mitchell had 11 points in his return for Cleveland after missing three games with a strained groin. Osman, a member of Turkey's national team, drained all seven three-point attempts on Turkish Heritage Night.

Brandon Boston Jr. scored 24 points and Moses Brown had 13 points and 16 rebounds for Los Angeles, which had its five-game winning streak snapped. Paul George and Kawhi Leonard didn't dress for the Clippers because of knee issues and Reggie Jackson didn't play because of a sore right Achilles.

Edey's 38, No. 1 Purdue overwhelm Michigan State

Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Purdue center Zach Edey donned Sunday's postgame prizes with pride.

A bloody lip felt like a championship belt, and the homemade T-shirt his mother handed him was a reminder of how far his all-around game has come in three college seasons.

Edey scored a career-high 38 points and grabbed 13 rebounds, leading No. 1 Purdue to a 77-61 victory over Michigan State.

"When they started hacking me, it got me going a little bit. They busted my lip in the second half," Edey said with a smile. "They always play super physical."

Perhaps not surprisingly, the two best games of his career both came against Michigan State over the past two weeks. This time, his mother, Julia, rewarded him with a shirt bearing a new nickname, "Big Maple," on the front and a new moniker, "He's not just tall, eh?" on the back.

Edey, who had 32 points and 17 rebounds in a 64-63 win at Michigan State on Jan. 16, appreciated the gesture after going 15-for-24 from the field. He also had three assists and a career-best three steals.

No. 23 Providence 70, Villanova 65: Jared Bynum scored 17 of his 19 points after halftime and hit a key jumper and two free throws late, lead-

ing the visiting Friars to the win.

Ed Crosswell scored 14 points, Bryce Hopkins had 13 and Devin Carter chipped in 12 for Providence (17-5, 9-2 Big East), which trailed by seven midway in the second half before rallying.

Cam Whitmore had 21 points for Villanova (10-11, 4-6), which returned to the court after an eight-day layoff. Eric Dixon added 14 points and Caleb Daniels and Brandon Slater had 10 apiece for the Wildcats.

Iowa 93, Rutgers 82: Kris Murray scored 24 points, Ahron Ulis added 16 and the host Hawkeyes defeated the Scarlet Knights.

Iowa (13-8, 5-5 Big Ten), boasting the conference's top offense for five years running and averaging 80.7 points per game this season, became the first team to score 80 points on Rutgers (14-7, 6-4) this season. Rutgers entered with the Big Ten's stingiest defense, yielding 58.1 points to its opponents.

Murray sank eight of 16 shots with a three-pointer and made seven of nine free throws for Iowa. He added six rebounds. Ulis went 5-for-9 shots with two three-pointers.

Aundre Hyatt came off the bench to hit four three-pointers, scoring 16 to lead Rutgers. Clifford Omoruyi contributed 15 points and eight rebounds.

Hall of Famer, two-time MVP Hull dies

Associated Press

CHICAGO — When Bobby Hull got the puck, he was tough to stop. He had blazing speed, a hard slap shot and tons of confidence.

Long before today's biggest stars took the ice, "The Golden Jet" put on quite a show.

Hull, a Hall of Fame winger and two-time NHL MVP who helped the Chicago Blackhawks win the Stanley Cup in 1961, has died. He was 84.

The Blackhawks and the NHL Alumni Association announced Hull's death on Monday. There were no further details provided by either organization.

The Blackhawks said Hull "delivered countless memories to our fans, whom he adored. Generations of Chicagoans were dazzled by Bobby's shooting prowess, skating skill and overall team leadership that led to 604 career goals, a franchise record that remains to this day. We send our deepest sympathies to the Hull family."

Hull was one of the most prolific forwards in NHL history, scoring 610 times during his 16-year career with Chicago, Hartford and Winnipeg. Nicknamed "The Golden Jet" for his speed and blond hair, he also collected 303 goals while playing for the Jets in the World Hockey Association for seven seasons.

While Hull starred on the ice, he faced legal and family issues in his personal life.

Hull was convicted of assaulting a police officer who intervened in a dispute with then-wife Deborah in 1986. He also was accused of battery, but that charge was dropped after Deborah told authorities she didn't want to testify against her husband, a state attorney told the Chicago Tribune.

Hull's second wife, Joanne, accused him of abuse during an interview with ESPN for a 2002 show.

A Russian newspaper reported in 1998 that Hull said Adolf Hitler "had some good ideas." Hull denied making the com-

ment, calling it "false and defamatory."

Hull was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1983 and his No. 9 sweater was retired by the Blackhawks that same year. He was estranged from the team for a while before he was named a Blackhawks ambassador in a ceremony with former teammate Stan Mikita in 2008. Hull and Mikita have adjacent statues outside the United Center.

"Bobby Hull will always be remembered as one of the greatest Blackhawks players of all time. He was a beloved member of the Blackhawks family," team owner Rocky Wirtz said in a statement.

Hull and Mikita powered Chicago to the franchise's third championship in 1961, beating Montreal and Detroit in the playoffs. Hull had two goals and five assists as the Blackhawks eliminated the Red Wings in six games in the Final.

The Pointe Anne, Ontario, native remains Chicago's career

leader for regular-season and playoff goals. He is second to Mikita on the franchise points list with 1,153.

Hull left the Blackhawks after the 1971-72 season when he was selected by Winnipeg in the WHA draft. The Jets lured Hull away from the NHL with hockey's first \$1 million contract, according to his bio on the Hall of Fame website.

The NHL and WHA merged in 1979, and Hull played 27 games with Winnipeg and Hartford in his final season before retiring.

Hull had 560 assists in 1,063 regular-season NHL games. In addition to his two Hart trophies, he was a three-time winner of the Art Ross Trophy awarded to the league leader in points and took home the 1965 Lady Byng Memorial Trophy for sportsmanship combined with stellar play.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman in a statement called Hull "a true superstar with a gregarious personality."

Aho scores in 4th straight as Hurricanes top Bruins

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Sebastian Aho scored a goal for the fourth straight game and the Carolina Hurricanes beat the Boston Bruins 4-1 on Sunday in a matchup of the teams with the two best records in the NHL.

Paul Stastny scored on a second-period power play, Seth Jarvis posted a goal in the third, and Jordan Staal added a short-handed empty-netter as the Hurricanes won their fifth game in a row and extended their points streak to eight games (7-0-1).

"We know that team was the cream of the crop," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "They're lapping everyone right now and I think it was a good test."

Frederik Andersen, playing for the first time since he left Wednesday night's game in Dallas with an upper-body injury, made 24 saves.

Pavel Zacha scored for the Bruins, who lead the NHL with 81 points but have lost three games in a row for the first time this season. Linus Ullmark stopped 32 shots.

"There's a reason why they're at the top of the standings," Aho said. "So we needed to bring our best."

With Saturday's loss at Florida, the Bruins suffered consecutive losses for the first time this season. So this turned out to be an unusual weekend.

"On a back-to-back like this, you have to rely on your goaltender to make enough saves and

unfortunately I didn't do that," Ullmark said.

Boston was a season-worst 0 for 6 on power plays, now failing to score with man advantages in its past three games.

Aho stole the puck at his defensive blue line took off on a breakaway for his 21st goal of the season with 9:08 left in the first. He has seven goals during his scoring streak.

"He seems to have picked that step up again," Brind'Amour said. "He's playing at a high level, that's for sure."

After Carolina's four successful penalty kills through 30½ minutes, the Hurricanes scored on a power play as Stastny converted from in front of the net with 7:55 left in the second. It was his fourth.

Maple Leafs 5, Capitals 1: Morgan Rielly scored his first goal of the season and host Toronto beat Washington.

Michael Bunting had a goal and an assist, and William Nylander, Pierre Engvall and Zach Aston-Reese also scored for Toronto. John Tavares had two assists and Ilya Samsonov made 23 saves in his sixth straight start.

Nicklas Backstrom scored and Darcy Kuemper allowed four goals on 20 shots before being replaced by Charlie Lindgren with 5:40 left in the third. Lindgren finished with six stops.

The Maple Leafs honored Tavares, who played the 1,000th regular-season game of his career, before puck drop.