

US, S. Korean fighter jets show resolve

BY DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — U.S. and South Korean fighter jets flew together Tuesday in a display of force two days after an unprecedented missile barrage by North Korea.

Sixteen aircraft, including the F-35A Lightning II, F-15K Slam Eagle and KF-16, showcased South Korea's "strong capabilities and will to launch precision and prompt strikes in response to any [North Korean] provocations," according to a South Korean Defense Ministry news release.

Four F-16 Fighting Falcons from the U.S. Air Force took part in the drills, the release said.

Aircraft formations armed with precision-guided weapons flew over the West Sea, also known as the Yellow Sea, according to the ministry.

"The fighters executed flying to respond to the enemy's threats overwhelmingly in an at-

tack flight formation in airspace over the West Sea," the news release said.

At least four F-35A fighters were part of the exercise, according to video footage released by the ministry.

"Our troops are currently tracking and monitoring relevant moves in preparation for additional [North Korean] provocation, cooperating closely with the U.S. side and maintaining their firm readiness posture," the release said.

The show of force comes after North Korea fired eight short-range ballistic missiles toward the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan, on Sunday morning. The South Korean military estimated the missiles flew between 68 and 416 miles at altitudes of 16 to 56 miles. The North has fired a record 28 missiles in 17 rounds of tests so far this year.

U.S. Forces Korea and the South Korean army responded on Monday by launching eight missiles of their own.

The U.S. Army fired one and South Korea

launched seven missiles "to demonstrate the ability of the combined [U.S.-South Korean] force to respond quickly to crisis events," according to statements from USFK and the Defense Ministry.

The allies said the missile exercise demonstrated their ability to strike back at North Korea's "origin of provocation."

Joint military drills in response to the North's missile tests were muted under the previous South Korean president, Moon Jae-in.

During the final weeks of Moon's administration in March, however, the South Korean military fired several missiles and dropped Joint Direct Attack Munition bombs roughly two hours after North Korea fired an intercontinental ballistic missile.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, who was inaugurated two months later, vowed to bolster the U.S.-South Korean alliance and signaled he would respond to the North's provocations with the military's strength.

RIMPAC set to return with navies from 26 nations

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Navies from 26 nations will participate in the massive Rim of the Pacific maritime exercise that kicks off later this month in Hawaii, the Navy said.

The more than two dozen nations, 38 surface ships and four submarines mark a return in full to the biannual drills that were significantly downsized in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The exercise, held primarily on and around the Hawaiian Islands with a few events off Southern California, begins June 29 and runs to Aug. 4, the Navy said in a May 31 news release.

Slated to participate are forces from Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In addition to the watercraft, participants

will also send about 170 aircraft, the Navy said. The roughly 25,000 personnel involved will also include members of land forces from nine nations.

Drills this year will involve everything from disaster relief to warfighting, the Navy said.

"The relevant, realistic training program includes amphibious operations, gunnery, missile, anti-submarine and air defense exercises, as well as counter-piracy operations, mine clearance operations, explosive ordnance disposal, and diving and salvage operations," the Navy said.

Most of the participating nations were at RIMPAC in 2018, with the exception of Denmark and Ecuador.

Vietnam joined in 2018 for the first time but has not returned since.

In 2020, only Australia, Brunei, Canada, France, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore and the U.S. participated in the drills, which lasted only two weeks. All events were held at sea, eschewing the shore-based activities that have always been a routine part of RIMPAC.

China participated for the first time in 2014, just as Beijing had commenced building artificial islands in the South China Sea by dredging sand onto small coral atolls, which it then set about militarizing with aircraft hangars and runways.

China's inclusion in RIMPAC was aimed at bringing the nation into the so-called rules-based international order that has dominated the Pacific since World War II.

China, however, continued its island-building efforts, and was disinvented from RIMPAC in 2018.

The National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2022, which President Joe Biden signed in December, approved of and encouraged the invitation of Taiwan to RIMPAC. The Navy does not disclose its invitation list, but Taiwan's navy is not among those announced as joining the drills.

Taiwan's participation in the exercise would undoubtedly be greeted with alarm by Beijing, which considers the island just off its southeast coast to be a renegade province that must be unified with the mainland at some point, by force if necessary.

US: N. Korea nuke test would bring 'swift' response

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — A nuclear test by North Korea will prompt a “swift and forceful response,” a senior U.S. diplomat said in Seoul on Tuesday, according to the Yonhap News Agency.

North Korea would face unified action by several countries should it detonate a nuclear device in violation of existing U.N. Security Council resolutions, Wendy Sherman, deputy secretary of state, told reporters, according to Yonhap.

Starting in 2006, the Security Council imposed a broad range of economic sanctions

on the North for developing nuclear weapons and conducting ballistic missile tests.

“The entire world will respond in a strong and clear manner,” Sherman said, according to the Yonhap report. “We are prepared.”

She traveled to Seoul on Monday as part of a 10-day tour of the Indo-Pacific region that includes meetings with officials from South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam and Laos.

Sherman’s comments come as U.S., South Korean and Japanese government officials warn that the communist regime may soon conduct its seventh nuclear weapons test

and its first since 2017.

Activity at North Korean test sites, including the Punggye-ri underground facility the communist regime supposedly demolished in 2018, may indicate an upcoming test, Director General Rafael Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency said at a board meeting Monday.

Grossi described North Korea’s actions as “deeply regrettable” and urged it to “comply fully with its obligations under relevant UN Security Council resolutions,” according to his opening statement.

IAEA inspectors were expelled from North Korea in 2009.

Push on to save 5 ships from Navy retirement

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers will push to save five ships that the Navy is slating for retirement, rejecting the service branch’s proposal to decommission 24 ships in its fiscal 2023 budget.

The House Armed Services Committee’s subpanel on seapower and projection forces plans to prohibit the Navy from cutting the cruiser USS Vicksburg as well as four landing dock ships from its fleet, according to committee aides. Lawmakers will recommend the changes to the full House committee this week as it drafts the National Defense Authorization Act, an annual sweeping military policy and funding bill.

The USS Vicksburg, a Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser that launched in 1991, is nearing the end of a nearly \$500 million modernization overhaul in Virginia that began in 2020. Rep. Kay Granger, the ranking Republi-

can of the House Appropriations Committee, admonished Navy officials at a hearing last month for seeking to decommission the cruiser.

“At a time when the ship is still in its maintenance period, the Navy is proposing to scrap it,” the Texas congresswoman said. “If the Navy experts expect Congress to support its vision for this fleet, it must do a much better job of managing the inventory it has.”

Other cruisers on the Navy’s chopping block include USS Bunker Hill, USS Mobile Bay, USS San Jacinto and USS Lake Champlain. Retirements are also planned for two Los Angeles-class submarines, two oilers, two expeditionary transfer docks and all nine of the Navy’s Freedom-class littoral combat ships, some of which have been in service less than five years.

One of the four landing dock ships that lawmakers are hoping to keep — the Whidbey Island-class USS Tortuga — is undergoing the

same service-life extension repairs as the USS Vicksburg.

Navy officials said decommissioning will save about \$3.6 billion in the next five years, allowing the Navy to get rid of aging ships and systems that are expensive to maintain and instead invest in unmanned platforms and other technology. The “divest to invest” strategy has repeatedly frustrated lawmakers who are warily eyeing China’s rapidly growing fleet.

Congress last year reversed the Navy’s plan to retire seven cruisers, forcing the service to hang on to two, and ordered the Navy to build 13 ships instead of a requested eight. Next year’s proposed \$180 billion Navy budget also calls for building eight ships — a plan that Rep. Elaine Luria, a Virginia Democrat and retired Navy commander, described as “anemic.”

“The Navy has no strategy,” Luria tweeted in March. “Stop saying you do, because if you did you would be able to explain how this fleet size will allow us to defend Taiwan.”

Panel falls from USAF jet during Japan air show

By HANA KUSUMOTO
AND SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A small panel fell off an Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon during an air show Sunday in Japan, according to American and Japanese officials.

The four-pound panel, measuring approximately 10 inches by 10 inches, fell

from a fighter assigned to Misawa Air Base, home of the 35th Fighter Wing in northeast Japan, a Chugoku-Shikoku Defense Bureau spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone Tuesday.

Japanese government officials typically speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

The panel was missing during an inspec-

tion after the jet, from the 13th Fighter Squadron, made a demonstration flight during an air show at the Japan Air-Self Defense Force’s Hofu Kita Air Base in Yamaguchi prefecture, the spokesman said.

The Defense Ministry has asked Misawa Air Base to investigate, inform the ministry as new information comes out and take preventative measures, the spokesman said.

Much money missing from Afghan pullout

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

Unspecified millions of dollars remain unaccounted for some 10 months after the Afghan government disintegrated during the frantic withdrawal of U.S. personnel last summer, a government watchdog report issued Tuesday said.

It remains unclear whether any stolen money was provided by the United States, John Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, said in the interim report. Some high-ranking Afghan government officials and staffers stuffed money into their pockets and fought over piles of cash in the final hours before the Taliban took over the country, said the SIGAR report.

“With Afghan government records and surveillance videos from those final days now in Taliban hands, SIGAR is unable to determine how much money was ultimately stolen, and by whom,” the report said.

The interim report is part of a probe into allegations that former President Ashraf Ghani took millions of dollars with him when he fled his palace via helicopter last August. Those allegations are most likely exaggerated, although some money was taken, the investigation found.

It’s now believed that approximately \$500,000, much of it belonging to the Afghan government, left the country when Ghani, his family and close allies flew to neighboring Uzbekistan on

three helicopters.

Investigators are still waiting for answers from questions sent to Ghani, Sopko said.

Investigators gathered firsthand accounts from senior officials in the Afghan government who fled the country with Ghani.

“Everyone had \$5,000 to \$10,000 in their pockets. ... No one had millions,” one former senior official who flew on the helicopters told investigators.

The Afghan Ambassador to Tajikistan Mohammad Zahir Agbar accused Ghani last year of stealing “\$169 million from the state coffers” on his flight out of the country, but he declined to provide evidence at the time and to the authors of the report.

It is unlikely that much money

was loaded into the helicopters, which were overburdened with family and staff, the report said. Such a sum in hundred-dollar bills would have weighed 2 tons and formed a block 7.5 feet long, 3 feet wide and 3 feet tall.

Presidential guards left behind after Ghani’s escape fought over \$5 million discovered at the palace, the report said. This money was allegedly ferried out of the palace by the guards, but the authors of the report were unable to draw any definitive conclusion about the fate of these millions.

Other former Afghan security officials said the country’s spy agency and the \$70 million in its coffers were looted, but the report’s authors said they were unable to verify these accounts.

Marine honored for rescuing sailors in mishap off Okinawa

By FRANK ANDREWS
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HANSEN, Okinawa — A little more than a year after the ordeal, a Marine first lieutenant was decorated for helping save a man from drowning after a sailing mishap off the Okinawa shore.

Brig. Gen. Brian Wolford pinned the Navy and Marine Corps Medal onto 1st Lt. Steven Ladine, 25, from Whitinsville, Mass., during a formation Tuesday at Camp Hansen.

Ladine, of the 9th Engineer Support Battalion, was walking along the beach near Onna village on May 15, 2021, when he spotted an overturned outrigger sailing canoe just offshore, he told Stars and Stripes on Tuesday.

“I thought for a second, they might be OK, then I said, ‘You can’t just flip a sailboat back over easily,’ so I put on my fins and goggles and swam out to them,” he said.

A sudden gust of wind had flipped the 21-foot-long sailboat, tossing its two occupants, driving the mast into the sea bottom and trapping Tom Burkard’s right leg

between the mast and the hull. Burkard’s sailing buddy, Marine Lt. Col. Caleb Eames, surfaced clear of the boat.

“I came up out of the water, got my bearings, I looked around and I didn’t see Tom,” Eames told Stars and Stripes by phone Monday. “I swam around to the other side—still didn’t see him. ... Then I spotted Burkard’s body underneath the hull.”

Eames grabbed Burkard’s chin and pulled him to the surface but could only get his nose and mouth above the waterline, Eames said.

Eames, 45, said he worked to free Burkard, but the boat weighed flat on the collapsed mast, holding Burkard fast.

“I was giving up hope when I heard a voice say, ‘Hey you guys need help?’” Eames said.

“When Ladine showed up and he was 10 to 15 feet away from me, his head popped out of the water, and I was just like, ‘Oh lord Jesus, thank you,’” Burkard told Stars and Stripes by phone Monday.

Eames leaned on the keel while Ladine went underwater and freed Burkard from the mast.

Russia claims significant military gains in Donbas

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia on Tuesday claimed to have taken control of 97% of one of the two provinces that make up Ukraine’s Donbas, bringing the Kremlin closer to its goal of fully capturing the eastern industrial heartland of coal mines and factories.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Moscow’s forces hold nearly all of Luhansk province. And it appears that Russia now occupies roughly half of Donetsk province, according to Ukrainian officials and military analysts.

After abandoning its bungled attempt to storm Kyiv two months ago, Russia declared that taking the entire Donbas is its main objective. Moscow-backed separatists have been battling Ukrainian government forces in the Donbas since 2014, and the region has borne the brunt of the Russian onslaught in recent weeks.

Early in the war, Russian troops also took control of the entire Kherson region and a large part of the Zaporizhzhia region,

both in the south. Russian officials and their local appointees have talked about those regions either declaring their independence or being folded into Russia.

But in what may be the latest instance of anti-Russian sabotage inside Ukraine, Russian state media said Tuesday that an explosion at a cafe in the city of Kherson wounded four people. Tass called the apparent bombing in the Russian-occupied city a “terror act.”

Shoigu said Moscow’s forces have seized the residential quarters of Sievierodonetsk and are fighting to take control of an industrial zone on the city’s outskirts and nearby towns.

Sieverodonetsk and nearby Lysychansk have seen heavy fighting in recent weeks. They are among a few cities and towns in the Luhansk region still holding out against the Russian invasion, which is being helped by local pro-Kremlin forces.

Luhansk Gov. Serhiy Haidai conceded that Russian forces control the industrial outskirts of Sievierodonetsk.

Proud Boys charged with seditious conspiracy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The former top leader of the far-right Proud Boys extremist group and other members were charged with seditious conspiracy for what federal prosecutors said was a coordinated attack on the U.S. Capitol to stop Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's 2020 electoral victory.

The latest indictment against Henry "Enrique" Tarrío, the former Proud Boys chairman, and four others linked to the group comes as the U.S. House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, riot prepares to begin public hearings this week to lay out

its findings.

The indictment Monday alleges that the Proud Boys conspired to forcibly oppose the lawful transfer of presidential power. Tarrío and the others — Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl and Dominic Pezzola — were previously charged with different conspiracy counts.

They are scheduled to stand trial in August in Washington, D.C.'s federal court.

The seditious conspiracy charges are among the most serious filed so far, but aren't the first of their kind. Eleven members or associates of the anti-government Oath Keepers militia

group, including its founder and leader Stewart Rhodes, were indicted in January on seditious conspiracy charges in a serious escalation in the largest investigation in the Justice Department's history.

Three Oath Keepers have already pleaded guilty to the rarely used Civil War-era charge that calls for up to 20 years in prison. The indictment alleges that the Oath Keepers and their associates prepared in the weeks leading up to Jan. 6 as if they were going to war, discussing things like weapons and training.

Tarrío, the group's top leader, wasn't in Washington, D.C.,

when the riot erupted, but authorities said he helped put into motion the violence that day.

Police arrested Tarrío in Washington two days before the riot and charged him with vandalizing a Black Lives Matter banner at a historic Black church during a protest in December 2020. Tarrío was released from jail on Jan. 14 after serving his five-month sentence for that case.

An attorney for Tarrío said his client "is going to have his day in court."

"And we intend to vigorously represent him through that process," said Nayib Hassan.

NY raises age for owning semiautomatic rifle to 21

AP/Report for America

ALBANY, N.Y. — New Yorkers under age 21 will be prohibited from buying semiautomatic rifles under a new law signed Monday by Gov. Kathy Hochul, making the state among the first to enact a major gun control initiative following a wave of deadly mass shootings.

Hochul, a Democrat, signed 10 public safety-related bills, including one that will require microstamping in new firearms, which could help law enforcement solve gun-related crimes.

Another revised the state's "red flag" law, which allows courts to temporarily take away guns from people who might be a threat to themselves or others.

"In New York, we are taking bold, strong action. We're tightening red flag laws to keep guns away from dangerous people," Hochul said at a press conference in the Bronx.

New York's Legislature passed the bills last week, pushing the changes through after a pair of mass shootings involving 18-year-old gunmen using semiautomatic rifles. Ten Black people died in a racist attack on a

Buffalo supermarket May 14. A Uvalde, Texas, school shooting took the lives of 19 children and two teachers 10 days later.

The quick action in New York further illustrated the sharp divide between Republican and Democratic leaders on how to respond to gun violence.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said after the massacre of children in Uvalde that government should increase security in schools and resources for mental health, but the Republican has said stricter gun laws are ineffective. Fellow Republican Gov. Bill Lee of Tennessee echoed similar sentiments Monday, a day after gunfire near a Chattanooga nightclub left three people dead and multiple people wounded.

In New York, most people under age 21 had already been banned from owning handguns. People age 18 and over will still be allowed to own other types of long guns, including shotguns and bolt-action rifles.

Part of New York's new law will also require all purchasers of semiautomatic rifles to get a license, something now required only for handguns.

Axon halts Taser drone plan as 9 on ethics board resign

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Axon, the company best known for developing the Taser, said Monday that it was halting plans to develop a Taser-equipped drone after a majority of its ethics board resigned over the controversial project.

Axon's founder and CEO Rick Smith said the company's announcement last week — which drew a rebuke from its artificial intelligence ethics board — was intended to "initiate a conversation on this as a potential solution." Smith said the ensuing discussion "provided us with a deeper appreciation of the complex and important considerations" around the issue.

As a result, "we are pausing work on this project and refocusing to further engage with key constituencies to fully explore the best path forward," he said. The development was first reported by Reuters.

The board had voted 8-4 a few weeks ago to recommend Axon not proceed with a pilot of the Taser drone and had concerns about introducing weaponizing drones in over-policed communities of color.

But after the mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, the company announced it was beginning development of the drone. Smith told The Associated Press last week he made the idea public in part because he was "catastrophically disappointed" in the response by police who didn't move in to kill the suspect for more than an hour.

The board issued a rare public rebuke of the project, saying it was a dangerous idea that went far beyond the initial proposal the board had reviewed for a Taser-equipped police drone. It said it had "pleaded with the company to pull back" before the announcement and that many of them believed it was "trading on the tragedy of the Uvalde and Buffalo shootings."

Smith had rejected that idea in an interview with the AP last week and said he was pressing ahead because he believed the Taser drone could be a viable solution to save lives. He contended the idea needed to be shared as part of the public conversation about school safety and effective ways for police to safely confront attackers.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police seek thieves who stole \$30K in rare coins

CT BRISTOL — Police in Connecticut are searching for two suspects they said stole more than \$30,000 in rare coins and cash from a dealer they followed from a trade show.

According to Bristol police, the suspects followed the dealer from a trade show in West Springfield, Mass., to the parking lot of Bristol Eastern High School.

Soon after the dealer left the car, one of the suspects allegedly smashed the car's window, stole the coins and fled in a car with another suspect.

Leaders to campaign for Muhammad Ali stamp

KY LOUISVILLE — The Muhammad Ali Center and Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer have announced a public awareness campaign for the boxing legend's image to appear on a U.S. Postal Service stamp.

According to a news release, the U.S. Conference of Mayors will have voted on a resolution to support Muhammad Ali's image on a postal stamp and encourages public support. A social media campaign — called #GetTheChampASstamp — will encourage public involvement.

It can take up to three years for the Postal Service to launch a new stamp. The process includes submitting historical information and review by a Postal Service's Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee. Criteria includes honoring those "extraordinary and enduring individual contributions to American society, history, and culture, or environment" and who have achieved "widespread

national appeal or significance."

"Muhammad once said, 'I should be on a postage stamp because that's the only way I'll ever get licked!,'" said Marilyn Jackson, president and CEO of the Muhammad Ali Center, in a statement.

Man arrested for taking car with disabled person

WI MADISON — Police in Madison have arrested a man who allegedly stole a car with a disabled person still in it.

Police Officer Ryan Kimberley said in a statement that the disabled person's caregiver got out of the vehicle to get some food and left the engine running when a 43-year-old man got into the vehicle and drove off.

Police located the vehicle about 45 minutes later and arrested the man after he pulled into the University Hospital parking lot. The person with disabilities wasn't hurt.

Kimberley said the man told the disabled person to get out, but the person couldn't due to disabilities and persuaded the man to drive to the hospital.

Officer kills coyote after several attacks

VA SPRINGFIELD — A northern Virginia police officer fatally shot a presumably rabid coyote that had bitten several people after the animal also attacked him, authorities said.

The Fairfax County officer was searching a wooded area for the coyote, which had bitten three people and two dogs in the vicinity a day earlier.

The coyote bit the officer, who fired his gun to end the attack, the

department tweeted. The animal was found dead nearby, and the officer was taken to a hospital for treatment.

Lt. Dan Spital said the officer and community members who were bitten are expected to make a full recovery.

Spital said authorities suspect the animal was rabid. Testing to confirm whether it had the disease will be conducted, he said.

House now unlivable after being hit by truck

CA ORANGE — A suburban Southern California home was deemed uninhabitable after a pickup truck slammed into it in a suspected DUI crash, authorities said.

The pickup sideswiped a parked car, veered off the road and slammed through the front of the house in Orange, police said.

Photos from the scene showed the dark-colored pickup nearly fully inside the one-story home.

Nobody inside the residence was injured. The driver of the truck, a 55-year-old from Villa Park, was treated for minor injuries before being arrested on suspicion of DUI, Orange police Sgt. Phil McMullin said.

The crash caused a minor gas leak, which was quickly stopped, the Orange County Register reported. The home was red-tagged, meaning it's not safe to inhabit, the Register said.

Original Gerber baby Ann Turner Cook dies at 95

FL TAMPA — Ann Turner Cook, whose cherubic baby face was known the world over as the original Gerber baby, has died. She was 95.

Gerber announced Cook's

passing in an Instagram post.

"Many years before becoming an extraordinary mother, teacher and writer, her smile and expressive curiosity captured hearts everywhere and will continue to live on as a symbol for all babies," the company said.

Cook was 5 months old when a neighbor, artist Dorothy Hope Smith, drew a charcoal sketch of her that was later submitted for a contest Gerber was holding for a national marketing campaign for baby food.

The image was a hit, so much so that it became the company's trademark in 1931 and has been used in all packaging and advertising since.

State unveils 2.5-mile trail made out of tires

TN MEMPHIS — Tennessee officials said one of the longest rubber-bearing trails in the United States has opened at T.O. Fuller State Park.

According to a news release, Tennessee State Parks, the Department of Transportation and local leaders cut the ribbon on the new 2.5-mile hard-surface walking biking trail.

Volunteers and local contractors gathered more than 24,000 tires that had been illegally dumped in the park to make the trail. Patriot Tire Recycling in Bristol transformed the tires into crumbs, which were then returned to the park for trail construction.

"This is a quintessential example of recycling in full circle, collecting dumped material then converting it into positive use," said David Salyers, commissioner of Tennessee's Department of Environment and Conservation.

— From wire reports

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Avs earn berth in Stanley Cup Final

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Artturi Lehkonen is sending a team to the Stanley Cup Final for the second straight season.

Lehkonen scored 1:19 into overtime, and Colorado rallied to beat the Edmonton Oilers 6-5 Monday night, completing a four-game sweep in the Western Conference finals and propelling the Avalanche into the Stanley Cup Final for the first time since 2001.

Colorado will take on the winner of the Eastern Conference finals between the New York Rangers and two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay Lightning. The Rangers lead that series 2-1.

Lehkonen repeated his feat of last season, when he scored in OT in Game 6 to send the Montreal Canadiens to the Final against eventual repeat champion Tampa Bay.

“Cale (Makar) took the shot,” Lehkonen said. “I got a tip on

it. It landed straight on my blade. I basically had an empty netter in front of me, so tap it in.”

Lehkonen becomes the second player in NHL history, and first in 83 years, to score an overtime goal to send his club into the championship series more than once in his career. Toronto’s Gordie Drillon accomplished the feat in 1938-39.

“Everybody knows how good he is, how resilient he is,” Mikko Rantanen said of fellow Finn Lehkonen, acquired by Colorado at the trade deadline. “He checks, he defends hard, he kills penalties, plays on the power play, he scores big goals, goes to the hard areas. What else can you ask for from a player — a trade acquisition. It’s fun to watch, and I’m really happy that we got him, and he’s shown why we gave quite a bit for him.”

Cale Makar, Devon Toews, Gabriel Landeskog, Nathan

MacKinnon and Rantanen also scored for for the Avalanche. Pavel Francouz stopped 30 of 35 shots.

“Our main thing is just trying to be resilient, making sure that every single night we bring that same game,” Makar said. “Sometimes it might not be pretty, but at the end of the day we’re just going to try to get the job done.”

Zach Hyman scored twice for the Oilers. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Connor McDavid and Zack Kassian also scored for Edmonton. Leon Draisaitl had four assists and goalie Mike Smith finished with 36 saves.

“I don’t think anyone necessarily expected us to be here,” Draisaitl said. “With that being said, we expected to be here, we want to be here and we want to be even further. I’m proud of the group, but obviously we’re disappointed.”

McDavid sees the Oilers’ playoff run as a move in the

right direction.

“It feels like it’s steps,” McDavid said. “Every team goes through it. You become a playoff team, then you get there most years and they go on a little bit of a run. They learn that lesson and then it’s their time to win. You look at a Colorado team that has been in that situation many, many times and obviously they are knocking on the door right now. This is a step in the right direction.”

The teams combined for six goals during the third period — four by the Avalanche, who rallied from a 4-2 deficit despite being outshot 15-13.

“It was a great comeback win, for sure,” Lehkonen said. “We were talking in the second intermission that we just got to find our game and we can pull through this.”

Colorado improved to 11-2 in the playoffs, including a perfect 7-0 on the road.

Mickelson is last sign-up for Saudi-backed league

Associated Press

Phil Mickelson, a chief recruiter for a Saudi-funded rival league to the PGA Tour, is ending his four-month hiatus by adding his name to the 48-man field for the LIV Golf Invitational that starts Thursday outside London.

Mickelson will be joining Dustin Johnson, Sergio Garcia and three other former major champions in a 54-hole tournament at Centurion Golf Club with \$25 million in prize money and \$4 million going to the individual winner.

“I am ready to come back to play the game I love but after 32 years this new path is a fresh start, one that is exciting for me at this stage of my career,” Mickelson said in a statement on social media.

Mickelson also said he would

be playing the last two majors, starting June 16 in the U.S. Open at The Country Club outside Boston.

He said the “transformative” new league would allow him to focus on a healthier approach to life on and off the course. Mickelson did not mention the signing fee, which is likely to be every bit of the \$125 million or more reportedly paid to Johnson.

It will be Mickelson’s first time playing since Feb. 6 at the Saudi International, where he first began to draw attention to how he was leaning when he accused the PGA Tour of “obnoxious greed” in an interview with Golf Digest.

Two weeks later, Alan Shipnuck published excerpts from his unauthorized biography on Mickelson in which the six-time

major champion acknowledged Saudi Arabia’s human rights atrocities, including the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, but said it was worth getting involved if it meant gaining leverage to make changes on the PGA Tour.

Mickelson also said he and three other top players paid attorneys to write the operating agreement of the new league. He later apologized for what he said were reckless comments, without mentioning the PGA Tour.

But then he was out of view for four months, skipping the Masters and the PGA Championship, which he had won the year before at age 50 to become the oldest major champion in history.

The decision could mean the end of Mickelson’s own career on the PGA Tour because

players who defect are likely to face suspensions for violating tour regulations by playing overseas without a release.

Mickelson has 45 career PGA Tour victories and has amassed nearly \$100 million in career earnings on the PGA Tour and PGA Tour Champions. He won his first tour event in 1991 when he was an amateur at Arizona State and his most recent title last year at the PGA.

Even as Mickelson was the leader in trying to get players to join, his name was left off the original field list that was released on Tuesday. The Daily Telegraph reported Johnson, at No. 15 the highest-ranked player in the world, received upward of \$125 million to join.

Johnson said on Monday that he has resigned his Tour membership.

Escobar hits for the cycle in Mets' win

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Eduardo Escobar hit a two-run triple with two outs in the ninth inning to complete his first cycle, giving him six RBIs in boosting Carlos Carrasco (7-1) and the New York Mets to an 11-5 win Monday night against the San Diego Padres.

Escobar tripled off Tim Hill over the head of right fielder Nomar Mazara in a four-run ninth. The switch-hitter pulled into third base and pumped his fist as teammates cheered in the dugout nearby.

The third baseman hit a two-run moonshot homer that sailed well over the party deck atop the right field wall off Craig Stammen with no outs in the eighth. It was his fifth. It was the 11th cycle in Mets history and the first since Scott Hairston on April 27, 2012.

It was also the first cycle at Petco Park, which opened in 2004.

New York tagged Blake Snell (0-3) with three runs in a plodding first inning that took 27 minutes while the left-hander threw 43 pitches.

Red Sox 1, Angels 0: Michael Wacha pitched a three-hitter for his first shutout in five years and visiting Boston handed Los Angeles its 12th straight defeat. Christian Vázquez had an RBI single in the second inning and the Red Sox won their fifth in a row.

The Angels matched their longest slide in a single season, last done to end the 1988 schedule.

Wacha (4-1), who hadn't worked into the eighth inning since 2018, threw 105 pitches for his second career complete game in 190 starts and first since a three-hit shutout for St. Louis at the New York Mets on July 18,

2017. It was the first complete-game shutout by a Boston pitcher in three years. The veteran right-hander outpitched Noah Syndergaard (4-4), who went six strong innings for Los Angeles, and lowered his ERA to 1.99 in his first season with the Red Sox.

Angels star Mike Trout had a first-inning single off Wacha to end an 0-for-26 drought, the longest hitless run of his career.

Mariners 7, Astros 4: Manager Scott Servais was ejected for his role in a benches-clearing scuffle in the ninth inning of the win for visiting Seattle, a game in which Cal Raleigh had a career-high four RBIs and Julio Rodriguez hit a late two-run shot.

With two outs in the ninth, Houston's Héctor Neris plunked Ty France in the back. Players and coaches on both sides began chirping at each other, and Servais led the way as the Mariners' bench emptied to confront the Astros near home plate. Servais and Houston first base coach Omar Lopez were ejected, and both benches were given warnings.

Seattle starter Robbie Ray (5-6) allowed eight hits and four runs — three earned — while walking three in five innings. Diego Castillo pitched a scoreless ninth for his third save.

Astros starter Cristian Javier (3-3) struggled, allowing six hits and five runs in 3⅓ innings after entering the game 3-0 with a 0.40 ERA in six career games, with three starts against the Mariners.

Reds 7, Diamondbacks 0 (7): Hunter Greene allowed a bunt single to begin the game and then faced the minimum through seven innings, retiring his final 20 batters as host Cincinnati defeated Arizona in a rain-shortened game.

Brandon Drury hit his 10th homer of the season. Kyle Farmer and Tyler Stephenson each had a two-run double.

The start was delayed 13 minutes due to showers, then a larger line of storms moved in and halted play with two outs in the bottom of the seventh. After another 46-minute delay, the game was called.

The second overall pick in the 2017 draft, Greene (3-7) yielded a bunt single down the third base line by Daulton Varsho to begin the game. Varsho was caught stealing to complete a double play after Josh Varsho struck out. Greene never permitted another baserunner.

Madison Bumgarner (2-5) threw 30 pitches in the first inning, but the Reds managed just one run and left the bases loaded. The veteran left-hander needed 108 pitches to get through five innings.

Blue Jays 8, Royals 0: Bo Bichette hit one of three Toronto home runs and five pitchers combined on a two-hitter to win at Kansas City.

Ross Stripling (2-1) earned the win as he allowed just one hit over five innings, matching his season high. He struck out two and didn't walk a batter. Stripling pitched more than four innings for just the second time this season. Stripling, who made his sixth start, has been used out of the bullpen eight times.

Bichette's home run was the first Blue Jays hit of the night after the game was delayed 2:05 because of weather.

Daniel Lynch (2-5) took the loss. He allowed six runs on six hits, with two walks and four strikeouts in 5⅓ innings.

Woods says he will skip U.S. Open to let his leg heal

Associated Press

Tiger Woods withdrew from the U.S. Open on Tuesday, saying that his damaged right leg needs more time to get stronger to contend in the majors.

Woods made a surprise return at the Masters, just 14 months after he broke bones in his right leg and ankle in a February 2021 car crash outside Los Angeles. He made the cut at Augusta National, then played the PGA Championship at Southern Hills.

Even though he made another

cut, Woods was limping badly on Saturday and withdrew after the third round, the first time he had withdrawn on the weekend at a major.

Woods posted Tuesday on social media, "My body needs more time to get stronger for major championship golf."

He said he hopes to be ready to play in a charity pro-am event in Ireland ahead of the British Open at St. Andrews, where he won two of his three claret jugs.

This will be the sixth time in

the last 12 years Woods does not play the U.S. Open, which he has won three times, most recently at Torrey Pines in 2008 when he had a double stress fracture in his left leg and shredded knee ligaments that required reconstructive surgery when the event was over.

He last played in 2020 at Winged Foot and missed the cut.

Before the previous two majors, Woods sent the internet buzzing, with private plane tracking sites indicating he was

at Augusta National and Southern Hills a week or so early for a scouting trip, a clear sign he was thinking about playing.

There was no such flight to Boston this time. Woods last competed at The Country Club at Brookline in 1999, when he won his singles match against Andrew Coltart as part of an amazing American rally to win the Ryder Cup.

"We're disappointed we won't see him in Boston," said Mike Whan, the CEO of the USGA.

Oklahoma, Texas move into WCWS finals

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Jocelyn Alo wasn't going to let Oklahoma lose twice in one day.

The record-setting slugger hit two homers, including a grand slam, and the top-seeded Sooners beat No. 5 UCLA 15-0 in the second game of a doubleheader on Monday to advance to the Women's College World Series finals.

UCLA needed to beat defending national champion Oklahoma twice to advance to the championship series, and the Bruins won the first game 7-3 thanks to two homers from Maya Brady, the niece of seven-time Super Bowl champion Tom Brady. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback tweeted his reaction to the performance.

Alo took command for the powerhouse Sooners in the second game, backing a two-hitter from Hope Trautwein (21-1), who struck out six and threw just 67 pitches in a game that was shortened to five innings

because of the mercy rule.

"We were just in the locker room just kind of resetting, and I went into that game with all the confidence knowing we would walk out of it with the W," Alo said. "No one beats us — no one beats the Sooners twice. I think we really just stuck to our game plan and kind of zoned in on what it was that we needed to do."

Oklahoma (57-3) will defend its title against Big 12 rival Texas in a best-of-three championship series starting Wednesday. Texas beat the Sooners earlier in the season, but Oklahoma topped the Longhorns 7-2 in a World Series game on Saturday.

Alo, the two-time USA Softball Collegiate Player of the Year, increased her Division I career-record home run total to 120. She went 4-for-4 and scored three runs.

"It's just impressive," UCLA coach Kelly Inouye-Perez said. "The strength factor is one thing. There's different types

of hitters that have great hands and they have some that are really strong. I think she has both. She has the ability."

Texas 6, Oklahoma State 5: Courtney Day hit a three-run homer for the second straight game, this one sparking her team's rally from a five-run deficit, and the unseeded Longhorns shocked the seventh-seeded Cowgirls to advance to the finals.

Texas advanced to play its biggest rival, No. 1 seed and defending national champion Oklahoma. In this version of the Red River Rivalry, Oklahoma will seek its sixth national title while Texas tries for its first.

The Longhorns (47-20-1) blanked the Cowgirls 5-0 in the first game of Monday night's doubleheader. Texas needed to win two games in the double-elimination format to advance to the finals, while Oklahoma State only needed one victory.

In the second game, Hailey Dolcini (24-11) worked five strong innings in relief for the

Longhorns, allowing one hit — a two-run homer by Karli Petty that put Oklahoma State ahead 5-0 in the third inning.

It looked like the Cowgirls would roll from there. But after an infield single and a one-out walk in the fourth, Day hit a drive that glanced off the top of the fence and over it to get Texas within 5-3.

Then Oklahoma State gave away the lead in the fifth with two defensive miscues on one play.

With two runners on, Bella Dalton singled to right, and right fielder Petty bobbled the ball, allowing Jordyn Whitaker to score from second. First baseman Hayley Busby cut off the throw but threw wildly to second, and the ball rolled all the way to the outfield wall as Mia Scott scored the tying run and Dalton came in behind her to make it 6-5.

Oklahoma State (48-14) had won all four previous meetings with the Longhorns this season.

Super regional matchups set in NCAA baseball

Associated Press

Matchups for the NCAA baseball super regionals were set Monday night after No. 2 national seed Stanford, No. 3 Oregon State, No. 8 East Carolina and eight other teams won regionals.

The best-of-three super regionals begin Friday and Saturday and will determine the field for the College World Series in Omaha, Neb., beginning June 17.

The matchups: Notre Dame (38-14) at No. 1 national seed Tennessee (56-7), Connecticut (49-14) at Stanford (45-15), Auburn (40-19) at Oregon State (47-16), Oklahoma (40-21) at No. 4 Virginia Tech (44-12), Louisville (41-19-1) at No. 5 Texas A&M (40-18), Texas (45-19) at East Carolina (45-19), Missis-

sippi (35-22) at Southern Mississippi (47-17) and Arkansas (41-19) at North Carolina (42-20).

Stanford will play in a third straight super regional after coming back from two runs down in the ninth inning to post a 4-3 walk-off win over Texas State. Drew Bowser and Tommy Troy hit back-to-back homers to tie it, and freshman pinch-hitter Trevor Haskins singled in the winning run.

Matthew Gretler hit a tie-breaking homer for Oregon State in the seventh inning, and No. 1 starter Cooper Hjerpe pitched the last two innings in his first relief appearance to secure a 7-6 victory over Vanderbilt.

"I felt good, and I told them if you need me, I'm ready," said Hjerpe, who was working on

two days' rest after throwing 100 pitches over 6⅔ innings Friday.

East Carolina's eight-run seventh inning broke open a 13-2 victory over Coastal Carolina.

Auburn won a regional on its home field for the first time since 1999, beating UCLA 11-4 in the completion of a game suspended Sunday night because of rain.

Cameron Masterman's tie-breaking homer in the eighth inning sent Louisville to an 11-9 victory over Michigan and into the super regionals for the seventh time since 2013.

Southern Mississippi is back in the super regionals for the first time since 2009 after taking the lead in the ninth on a sacrifice fly to beat LSU 8-7.

Tim Elko homered three times and Kemp Alderman hit a

grand slam in Mississippi's 22-6 rout of Arizona.

Gage Gillian and Davis Palermo combined to pitch 5⅓ innings of one-hit shutout relief to help send North Carolina to a third straight super regional with a 7-3 win over VCU.

Peyton Graham homered during a four-run eighth inning that erased a two-run deficit, and Oklahoma beat Florida 5-4 to return to supers for the first time since 2013.

Connecticut held off Maryland 11-8 and became the first current Big East team since St. John's in 2012 to win a regional.

Arkansas' Hagen Smith escaped a bases-loaded jam with his team up two runs in the eighth, and the Razorbacks knocked off No. 7 Oklahoma State 7-3.