

China rebukes Hegseth for threat label

Associated Press

BEIJING — China on Sunday denounced U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth for calling the Asian country a threat, accusing him of touting a Cold War mentality as tensions between Washington and Beijing further escalate.

The foreign ministry said Hegseth vilified Beijing with defamatory allegations the previous day at the Shangri-La Dialogue, a global security conference. The statement also accused the United States of inciting conflict and confrontation in the region.

“Hegseth deliberately ignored the call for peace and development by countries in the region, and instead touted the Cold War mentality for bloc confrontation,” it said, referring to the post-World War II rivalry between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union.

“No country in the world de-

serves to be called a hegemonic power other than the U.S. itself,” it said, alleging that Washington is also undermining peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific.

Hegseth said in Singapore on Saturday that Washington will bolster its defenses overseas to counter what the Pentagon sees as rapidly developing threats by Beijing, particularly in its aggressive stance toward Taiwan.

China’s army “is rehearsing for the real deal,” Hegseth said. “We are not going to sugarcoat it — the threat China poses is real. And it could be imminent.”

The Chinese statement said the matter of Taiwan is China’s internal affair and that the U.S. should “never play with fire” with it.

The statement also alleged that Washington, along with its Asian allies, had deployed offensive weaponry in the South China Sea, was “stoking flames and cre-

ating tensions in the Asia-Pacific” and “turning the region into a powder keg.”

Spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang of China’s defense ministry called Hegseth’s comments a provocation and said they distorted China’s policy positions.

The U.S. and China had reached a deal last month to cut President Donald Trump’s tariffs from 145% to 30% for 90 days, creating time for negotiators from both sides to reach a more substantive agreement. China also reduced its taxes on U.S. goods from 125% to 10%.

But it’s uncertain if a trade war truce will last. Trump in a social media post on Friday said he would no longer be “nice” with China when it comes to trade and accused Beijing of breaking an unspecified agreement with the U.S.

Tensions escalated anew after the U.S. said on Wednesday it

would start revoking visas for Chinese students studying there.

At the Singapore forum on Sunday, Philippines Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro scoffed at the idea that the U.S. was the problem.

The Philippines has been involved in increasingly violent clashes with China over competing claims in the South China Sea.

Teodoro said what the Chinese government saw as fair might be contrary to the norms accepted by the rest of the world.

The Chinese Embassy in Singapore in separate Facebook posts described Teodoro’s remarks as “groundless accusations” and argued that the South China Sea Islands are China’s inherent territories.

The “troublemaker” is not China, it said, and cited what it said were recent illegal intrusions by the Philippines into the waters adjacent to two reefs.

Navy ends research experimentation on dogs and cats

BY LINDA F. HERSEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy announced the termination of all research testing on cats and dogs, after facing increased pressure from lawmakers and animal rights groups.

Calling the end to the experiments long overdue, Navy Secretary John Phelan has ordered the service surgeon general to review all medical research programs to ensure they align with ethical practices and “true scientific necessity.”

“It gives me great pleasure to terminate all Department of the Navy’s testing on cats and dogs, ending these inhumane practices and saving taxpayer dollars,” Phelan said on social media.

The Navy secretary thanked the administration of President Donald Trump, including Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and the Department of Government Efficiency for vetting and ending contracts that fund experiments on dogs and cats.

“This is a taxpayer-funded problem,” said Anthony Bellotti, president of the White Coat Waste Project, a nonprofit watchdog that tracks animal testing by federal agencies.

The group estimated the federal government spends \$20 billion annually on research studies using dog and cats as test subjects.

The end to the Navy’s tests followed a recent social media campaign by activist Laura Loomer of Florida against the federal gov-

ernment conducting studies using cats and dogs.

Loomer, who hasties to Trump, has a podcast called “Loomer Unleashed” that she used to share information on experiments that White Coat Waste Project said it obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

“President Trump is helping ensure funding is not allowed any longer. He is receptive to ending these contracts,” Loomer said last week on her podcast.

The Trump administration last month pulled the plug on a \$10 million study funded by the Defense Department that involved giving electroshocks to cats in experiments on constipation and incontinence, according to White Coat Waste Project.

Justin Goodman, senior vice president for advocacy and public policy at White Coat Waste Project, said the study was dropped, after Loomer and Elon Musk objected to the tests. Lawmakers also objected to them.

He said the Navy then moved last week to eliminate experiments using dogs and cats.

“Taxpayers shouldn’t be forced to pay for pet abuse in Navy-funded labs,” Goodman said.

The animal rights group PETA praised the Navy’s elimination of testing using dogs and cats, but it also urged additional restrictions, including a ban on the use of dogs, cats, nonhuman primates, marine animals and other animals “currently permitted in Army weapon-wounding tests.”

AFRICOM: Militants seek coastal access

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Attacks by Islamic militants are surging in western Africa, where the U.S. is struggling to track terrorist movements in the wake of a pullout of forces from the region, the top American general for Africa missions said Friday.

U.S. Africa Command's Gen. Michael Langley said fighters from a mix of groups are taking over large swaths of territory across the Sahel, which has become the "epicenter" for terrorism in Africa.

Al-Qaida and Islamic State

group affiliates are operating in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria, he said.

"One of the terrorists' new objectives is gaining access to the West African coast," Langley said in a call with reporters. "If they secure access to the coastline, they can finance their operations through smuggling, human trafficking and arms trade."

AFRICOM's efforts in the region have been hindered by the 2024 U.S. withdrawal from drone bases in Niger, which were hubs for surveillance across western Africa. A 2023 coup in Niger brought an end to

the long-standing American partnership with that country.

The concerns over increased attacks in West Africa and a similar situation on the other side of the continent in Somalia come as the Pentagon reassesses its strategy in Africa.

In Somalia, several hundred U.S. troops are part of a mission to help local forces in their battle against the al-Qaida-aligned group known as al-Shabab. ISIS Somalia also has grown there.

Langley said AFRICOM has stepped up efforts against the militants in Somalia, launching more than 25 airstrikes so far

this year. That's already more than double the number of strikes conducted in all of 2024, he said.

Langley was in Kenya last week for a meeting with African defense leaders. He did not say whether the U.S. would further reduce troop levels, but he emphasized that African militaries will need to shoulder more of the security burden.

Such comments are in line with a Pentagon push to get allies and partners to play a larger role in their respective regions so the United States can focus more on China in the Asia-Pacific region.

Treated PFAS water at Yokota base safe to release

By SETH ROBSON
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The Japanese government on Friday gave the U.S. military the green light to release about 400,000 gallons of treated water from this airlift hub in western Tokyo.

Japanese officials collected treated water samples during a May 14 visit to Yokota. Air Force officials also briefed them on

plans to reduce the contamination and discharge the water from the base, according to a statement Friday from the ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs and the Environment. The water had been contaminated with PFOS and PFOA and was being stored in a reservoir and at a fire-training facility on base, the statement said.

U.S. officials initially reported PFOS and PFOA concentrations in the untreated water at about

1,240 nanograms per liter. After treatment using granular activated carbon filters, the concentration fell to well below 50 nanograms per liter, according to the statement. Tests by Japan's Defense Ministry, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and U.S. Forces Japan showed PFOA in the treated water was below 2 nanograms per liter. PFOS levels were under 2 nanograms per liter in the Japanese tests and under 4 nanograms per liter in

the U.S. test, the statement said.

Officials from Yokota's 374th Airlift Wing did not immediately respond to an email requesting comment Friday.

Japan's provisional safety guidelines for PFOS and PFOA in public water supplies is 50 nanograms per liter, based on levels considered unlikely to cause health effects over a lifetime. The standard for tap water is expected to be finalized in April 2026.

Space Force HQ in Colo. 'not sustainable' long-term

By SVETLANA
SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — New military construction would be needed to support a permanent U.S. Space Command headquarters in Colorado, a government watchdog found.

A new report by the Government Accountability Office states the command's posture in Colorado Springs, where it oper-

ates out of four separate buildings, is "not sustainable long-term" due to struggles with staffing, communications and space restrictions. The GAO report also outlines how the Air Force decided on Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Ala., as the cheaper and preferred location for Space Command's permanent headquarters.

The report highlights several challenges with keeping Space

Command headquartered at Peterson Space Force Base in Colorado Springs, where the command has been temporarily based since its inception in 2019. As of October 2024, the command had filled 1,024 of 1,379 authorized positions and hired about 380 contractor personnel in lieu of civilian hires, which are intended to comprise 60% of staff. The struggle to hire partly stems from the uncertainty of

the command's final location, the report states.

The Air Force has said relocating to Huntsville would cost \$426 million less than staying in Colorado Springs, but the GAO said the cost estimates "were incomplete and did not fully compare alternatives' costs across the command's entire life cycle."

A decision on a final basing location is expected to come soon.

Steel tariffs likely to raise grocery prices

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President Donald Trump's doubling of tariffs on foreign steel and aluminum could hit Americans in an unexpected place: grocery aisles.

The announcement Friday of a staggering 50% levy on those imports stoked fear that big-ticket purchases from cars to washing machines to houses could see major price increases. But those metals are so ubiquitous in packaging, they're likely to pack a punch across consumer products from soup to nuts.

"Rising grocery prices would be part of the ripple effects," says Usha Haley, an expert on trade and professor at Wichita State University, who added that the tariffs could raise costs

across industries and further strain ties with allies "without aiding a long-term U.S. manufacturing revival."

Trump's return to the White House has come with an unrivaled barrage of tariffs, with levies threatened, added and, often, taken away, in such a whip-lash-inducing frenzy it's hard to keep up. He insisted the latest tariff hike was necessary to "even further secure the steel industry in the U.S."

That promise, though, could be at odds with his pledge to reduce food costs.

Rising grocery prices, Trump has said, were among the biggest reasons voters swung his way. A look around a supermarket makes clear how many

products could be impacted by new taxes on steel and aluminum, from beer and soda to dog food to can after can of beans, fruit, tomato paste and more.

"It plays into the hands of China and other foreign canned food producers, which are more than happy to undercut American farmers and food producers," insists Can Manufacturers Institute president Robert Budway. "Doubling the steel tariff will further increase the cost of canned goods at the grocery store."

Budway says production by domestic tin mill steel producers, whose products are used in cans, has dramatically decreased in recent years, making manufacturers reliant on im-

ported materials. When those prices go up, he says, "the cost is levied upon millions of American families."

Beyond the obvious products — canned foods like tuna, chicken broth and cranberry sauce — economists warn of a spillover effect that tariffs can have on a gamut of items. If the cost to build a store or buy a truck to haul food rise, the prices of products may follow.

Most Americans will never buy a tractor, but Babak Hafezi, who runs a global consulting firm and teaches international business at American University, says a price spike in such a big-ticket item vital to food production will spill down to all sorts of other items.

White House releases partial budget proposal

The Washington Post

The White House Office of Management and Budget released hundreds of budget documents early Friday evening that left out key projections that administrations of both parties have publicly disclosed for decades up to now.

With little fanfare, the budget office released 1,224 pages that spell out its spending plans in detail, expanding on the abbreviated "skinny budget" it unveiled last month.

So far, though, the administration has only addressed the portion of federal outlays known as discretionary spending, which doesn't cover programs such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid that make up the bulk of the federal budget.

Typically, the White House releases a comprehensive budget proposal each year that provides 10-year estimates of federal spending, revenue and deficits, as well as projections of economic growth, interest rates

and other important indexes. These numbers are hotly contested and typically initiate a debate over the White House's priorities.

But the Trump administration appears to be trying to avoid that debate, at least for now, by ignoring the traditional process.

OMB spokeswoman Rachel Cauley said the administration is waiting until Congress finishes working on the president's tax legislation before it releases economic or deficit projections. Any estimates or deficit figures released now would "not be accurate" because negotiations over the bill are not concluded, she said.

She added that the administration had released a budget, pointing to the less detailed proposal unveiled earlier this year.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the tax bill would add more than \$2 trillion to the federal debt over the next decade.

Family, friends of fugitives from New Orleans arrested

AP/Report For America

NEW ORLEANS — The 10 men who escaped from a New Orleans jail more than two weeks ago by cutting out a hole behind a toilet received help from at least 15 people, many of them friends and family who provided food, cash, transport and shelter, according to court documents.

Records reviewed by The Associated Press show how some of the fugitives received aid before and after their escape — including from a number of people named in police reports but not yet facing charges.

A former jail employee is accused of driving escapee Lenton Vanburen to a relative's home and helping him FaceTime family the day of the escape, while another friend later offered him a hiding place in a vacant apartment he had been hired to repaint.

Others sent money via apps, lied to authorities during interrogation and messaged or called the fugitives, police say. Some

are now held on bonds \$1 million or higher and most face the felony charge of accessory after the fact.

In a city with an entrenched mistrust of the criminal justice system, authorities on Thursday raised the reward to \$50,000 per fugitive. They stressed that friends and family are key to capturing the two remaining escapees, convicted murderer Derrick Groves and Antoine Massey, who faces kidnapping and rape charges.

"We understand that some of you might be reporting a friend, a loved one, a relative and albeit not easy, it is critical to your safety and the safety of the public that you report them," Jonathan Tapp, special agent in charge of FBI New Orleans, said Thursday.

After the audacious escape in the early hours of May 16, a woman who police described as "associated" with Groves "picked up" and transported escapee Vanburen to a relative's residence, the documents show.

Ukraine says its drone attack destroys 41 aircraft in Russia

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A Ukrainian drone attack has destroyed more than 40 Russian planes deep in Russia's territory, a Ukrainian security official told The Associated Press on Sunday, while Russia pounded Ukraine with missiles and drones a day before the two sides meet for a new round of direct talks in Istanbul.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to disclose operational details, said the attack took over 18 months to execute and was personally supervised by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The operation saw drones transported in containers carried by trucks deep into Russian territory, he said. The drones reportedly hit 41 planes stationed at several airfields on

Sunday afternoon, including A-50, Tu-95 and Tu-22M aircraft, the official said. Moscow has previously used Tupolev Tu-95 and Tu-22 long-range bombers to launch missiles at Ukraine, while A-50s are used to coordinate targets and detect air defenses and guided missiles.

Russia's Defense Ministry in a statement confirmed the attacks, which spanned five airfields. The FPV drones damaged aircraft and sparked fires on air bases in the Irkutsk region, more than 2,500 miles from Ukraine, as well as Russia's northern Murmansk, it said. Strikes were repelled in the Amur region in Russia's Far East and in the western regions of Ivanovo and Ryazan, the ministry said.

The attack came the same day

as Zelenskyy said Ukraine will send a delegation to Istanbul for a new round of direct peace talks with Russia on Monday.

In a statement on Telegram, Zelenskyy said that Defense Minister Rustem Umerov will lead the Ukrainian delegation. "We are doing everything to protect our independence, our state and our people," Zelenskyy said.

Ukrainian officials had previously called on the Kremlin to provide a promised memorandum setting out its position on ending the war before the meeting takes place. Moscow had said it would share its memorandum during the talks.

Russia on Sunday launched the biggest number of drones — 472 — on Ukraine since the full-scale invasion in February 2022, Ukraine's air force said.

Iran touts its nuke agency cooperation

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The Iranian foreign minister spoke by phone with the director of the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog agency early Sunday morning after a report from the agency said Iran is further increasing its stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels.

Writing on Telegram, Abbas Araghchi said he stressed Iran's "continuous cooperation" in his conversation with Rafael Mariano Grossi, the head of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency. The IAEA did not immediately return a request for comment about the phone call.

The confidential IAEA report, which was seen by The Associated Press on Saturday, raised a stern warning, saying that Iran is now "the only non-nuclear-weapon state to produce such material" — something the agency said was of "serious concern."

Araghchi emphasized to Grossi that all of Iran's nuclear activities are within the framework of agreements and being monitored by the IAEA. The IAEA said in a separate report that Iran's cooperation with the agency has been "less than satisfactory" when it comes to uranium traces discovered by IAEA inspectors at several locations in Iran that Tehran has failed to declare as nuclear sites.

Araghchi also asked Grossi to ensure "that certain parties do not exploit the agency for political agendas against the Iranian people." European nations could take further steps against Iran based on the comprehensive report, leading to a potential escalation in tensions between Iran and the West.

Iran's deputy foreign minister on Sunday published a detailed response, rejecting many of the report's findings.

UK seeks to send message to Moscow with increase in its defense spending

Associated Press

LONDON — The U.K. is about to see the biggest increase in defense spending since the end of the Cold War as it seeks to send "a message to Moscow," the British defense secretary said Sunday.

John Healey said the Labour government's current plans for defense spending will be enough to transform the country's military following decades of retrenchment, though he does not expect the number of soldiers — currently at a historic low — to rise until the early 2030s.

He said plans for defense spending to hit 2.5% of national income by 2027, which amounts to an extra \$17 billion or so a year, were "on track" and that there was "no doubt"

it would hit 3% in the next parliament in the early 2030s.

The government will on Monday respond to a strategic defense review, overseen by Healey and led by Lord George Robertson, a former NATO secretary general and defense secretary in a previous Labour government.

It is expected to be the most consequential review since the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, and make a series of recommendations for the U.K. to deal with the new threat environment, both on the military front and in cyberspace.

Like other NATO members, the U.K. has been compelled to take a closer look at its defense spending since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in

February 2022.

"This is a message to Moscow," Healey told the BBC. "This is Britain standing behind, making our armed forces stronger but making our industrial base stronger, and this is part of our readiness to fight, if required."

Healey also said Russia is "attacking the U.K. daily" as part of some 90,000 cyber attacks from state-linked sources that were directed at the U.K.'s defense over the last two years. A cyber command to counter such threats is expected to be set up as part of the review.

"The tensions are greater but we prepare for war in order to secure the peace," he said. "If you're strong enough to defeat an enemy, you deter them from attacking in the first place."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

2 men charged in fatal human smuggling case

MN MINNEAPOLIS — More than three years after a family of four from India froze to death while trying to cross into the U.S. along a remote stretch of the Canadian border in a blizzard, two men face sentencing in Minnesota on human smuggling charges for their roles what prosecutors call an international conspiracy.

Federal prosecutors have recommended nearly 20 years in prison for the alleged ringleader, Harshkumar Ramanlal Patel, and nearly 11 years for the driver who was supposed to pick the family up, Steve Anthony Shand.

They said the victims, Jagdish Patel, 39; his wife, Vaishaliben, who was in her mid-30s; their 11-year-old daughter, Vi-hangi; and 3-year-old son, Dharmik, froze to death. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police found their bodies just north of the border between Manitoba and Minnesota on Jan. 19, 2022.

The family was from Dingucha, a village in the western Indian state of Gujarat, as was Harshkumar Patel. Patel is a common Indian surname, and the victims were not related to the defendant.

Ex-cop who fatally shot naked man pleads guilty

GA ATLANTA — A former Georgia police officer who shot and killed an unarmed, naked man pleaded guilty Wednesday to a charge of aggravated assault and won't serve any additional time behind bars.

After Robert "Chip" Olsen,

63, entered his plea, DeKalb County Superior Court Judge LaTisha Dear Jackson sentenced him to 15 years with 12 years commuted to time served, with the balance to be served on probation, prosecutors said in a news release.

Olsen was responding to a call of a naked man behaving erratically at an Atlanta-area apartment complex in March 2015 when he killed 26-year-old Anthony Hill, a Black Air Force veteran who had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. Olsen, who was a DeKalb County police officer at the time, said he was acting in self-defense.

A jury in 2019 found Olsen guilty of one count of aggravated assault, two counts of violating his oath of office and one count of making a false statement. He was sentenced to serve 12 years in prison, followed by eight years of probation. He appealed his conviction of aggravated assault and one count of violation of his oath, and the Georgia Court of Appeals last year overturned those convictions.

Man's 378-year sentence voided due to fake claims

CA WOODLAND — A Northern California man's 378-year sentence for sexual assault has been overturned by a judge who said there was strong evidence that his adopted daughter made up the accusations to punish him and improve her prospects of remaining in the U.S.

Ajay Dev, 58, was released May 23 after 16 years in prison for 76 convictions of sexual assault on a minor and related charges, the San Francisco

Chronicle reported.

Dev, an immigrant from Nepal who worked as a water engineer, was visiting the South Asian nation with his wife in 1998 when they decided to adopt 15-year-old Sapna Dev, part of their extended family, and bring her to live with them in Davis, Calif.

In early 2004, Sapna Dev's boyfriend broke up with her, and she accused Ajay Dev of causing the breakup, Superior Court Judge Janene Beronio said in her ruling. Later she told police that Ajay Dev had had sex with her two or three times a week for three or four years until she moved out of his home, the judge said.

Four witnesses who had not been contacted by Dev's trial lawyers testified at a recent hearing that Sapna Dev had told them that her accusations against him were lies or were motivated by her anger at him, the Chronicle reported.

Harvard to hand over early enslaved people photos

MA BOSTON — Harvard University will relinquish 175-year-old photographs believed to be the earliest taken of enslaved people to a South Carolina museum devoted to African American history as part of a settlement with a woman who says she is one of the subjects' descendants.

The photos of the subjects identified by Tamara Lanier as her great-great-great-grandfather Renty, whom she calls "Papa Renty," and his daughter Delia will be transferred from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology to the International African American Mu-

seum in South Carolina, the state where they were enslaved in 1850 when the photos were taken, a lawyer for Lanier said.

The settlement ends a 15-year battle between Lanier and the university to release the 19th-century daguerreotypes, a precursor to modern-day photographs. Lanier's attorney Joshua Koskoff told The Associated Press that the resolution is an "unprecedented" victory for descendants of those enslaved in the U.S.

2 arrested after Air Force student's lake crash death

TX DALLAS — An 18-year-old woman about to begin her first year at the U.S. Air Force Academy was killed when a personal watercraft hit her kayak on a Texas lake over Memorial Day weekend, setting off a pursuit by law enforcement that ended in the arrests of two people.

Ava Moore died following the collision on Lake Grapevine, a popular boating and fishing destination near Dallas. She had recently graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy Preparatory School.

Authorities said the woman accused of operating the personal watercraft is charged with felony manslaughter. She is accused of fleeing the lake in a vehicle with a man who was charged with two misdemeanors, including one related to hitting two cars as they left the scene. Both are Venezuelans who had entered the U.S. illegally in 2023, authorities said.

Moore had accepted an appointment to join the academy, according to a news release from the institution.

— From wire reports

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Pacers top Knicks, reach Finals vs. Thunder

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Pascal Siakam and Tyrese Haliburton made sure the Indiana Pacers gave their fans a celebration they waited 25 years to see again.

Siakam had 31 points and Haliburton scored 11 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter, carrying the Pacers to a 125-108 victory over the New York Knicks on Saturday night for a 4-2 series win and their first trip to the NBA Finals since 2000.

It's just the second time in franchise history they'll play for the championship. The series begins Thursday at Oklahoma City.

"Pascal and Tyrese put us on their backs and made sure we would not lose," coach Rick Carlisle told the gold-clad crowd that was on its feet for the waning minutes and the postgame party.

"But our work has just begun."

Siakam won the Larry Bird Trophy as the Eastern Conference finals MVP. Bird is the only other coach to take Indiana to the Finals. Haliburton finished with 13 assists and Obi Toppin added 18 points and six rebounds against his former team.

OG Anunoby led the Knicks with 24 points. Karl-Anthony Towns had 22 points and 14 rebounds, while Jalen Brunson added 19 points as the Pacers' relentless ball pressure forced New York into 17 turnovers.

"There were stretches where we played very good defense and stretches where we didn't," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. "I think once you dig into it and you look at it, was it our defense? Or was it our turnovers? I think it was probably a combination of both."

Whatever the explanation, New York is headed home again courtesy of Indiana. The Knicks still haven't played in the finals since 1999.

It was a magical night at Gainbridge Fieldhouse — from the festive pregame atmosphere through the roaring ovation for the starters as they departed with 47.2 seconds to go to Reggie Miller's presentation of the Eastern Conference's Bob Cousy Trophy to Pacers owner Herb Simon on TNT's final NBA broadcast. Miller was one of the telecast's color analysts.

And yet, it was a tough, physical game that didn't always follow Indiana's preferred style.

Whether it was Towns limping after drawing a foul or Haliburton holding his jaw when he took a shot that knocked him to the ground, the tone was set early —

and never really changed with so much at stake.

The Pacers finally broke open a close game by opening the second half on a 9-0 run, then extended their lead to 78-63 courtesy of three straight 3-pointers — two from Thomas Bryant and one from Andrew Nembhard.

But when New York answered with eight straight to cut the deficit to 78-71, Indiana responded with another 9-0 run to take its biggest lead of the game, and the Knicks were forced to play catch-up the rest of the night.

"This is no time to be popping champagne," said Carlisle, who won the 2011 title as coach of the Dallas Mavericks. "When you get to this point of the season, it's two teams and it's one goal. So it becomes an all or nothing thing and we understand the magnitude of it."

Panthers to set NHL mark for games in 3-year span

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — The Florida Panthers don't play hockey every day. It only seems like that's the case.

When the Panthers take the ice for Game 1 of the Stanley Cup Final in Edmonton on Wednesday night, it will be the team's 309th game over the past three seasons and one that ties the NHL record for most games in a three-year span. And that, obviously, means they'll break the record in Game 2 on Friday.

There is no downside to making the Stanley Cup Final in three consecutive seasons, though there has been one unintended consequence — Florida is playing a ton of hockey. It's simultaneously tiring and exhilarating.

"We will have more energy for this series than any of the three prior," coach Paul Maurice said. "And I'm sure it's true of Edmonton as well. But the regular season was more of a grind for us this year than either of the two previous. And then in each round, it seemed a bigger build to excitement just because the light is at the end of the tunnel. There are no more than seven games left to this season, no matter what. So you will see a new energy source from both teams in this series."

Dallas (1997-98 through 1999-2000) and Detroit (2006-07 through 2008-09) hold the record for most games in a three-year span with

309; the Panthers' Game 5 win in Carolina to clinch the Eastern Conference title was their 308th in three seasons, putting them on the brink of passing those clubs.

And two Florida players — Sam Reinhart and Gustav Forsling — have played almost every one of those games. Both have made 303 appearances for the Panthers in these three years; they have a chance to pass Pittsburgh's Phil Kessel for the most by any NHL player ever in a three-year span.

Kessel played in all 307 of the Penguins' games from 2015-16 through 2017-18.

"That is crazy," Forsling said. "I didn't know that stat. That is crazy, for sure. It's a lot of preparation and a lot of recovery and you have to do the right things. Otherwise, you're going to be struggling out there — because that's a lot of hockey. And mentally, you've got to take days off and not think about hockey as much. I have a son now; that takes my mind off things."

The Oilers are going to move up the list as this series goes on.

Game 1 against Florida will be Edmonton's 300th in the last three years; if the series goes seven games, the Oilers' 306 games would be the seventh-most in a three-year span behind the Panthers, those Stars and Red Wings teams with 309, along with Pittsburgh (2015-16 through 2017-18), Colorado (1999-2000

through 2001-02) and Detroit (1995-96 through 1997-98) with 307 each.

"This last stretch of the last couple of years has been some of the most fun I've had playing hockey," Edmonton star Connor McDavid said after the Western Conference final. "I look forward to what's going to be an exciting month."

Florida set the tone for deep runs with grueling training camps, though that's just one small part of the story. Strength and conditioning is an everyday thing during the season as well, along with constant advising from nutritionists, a sports science department and others tasked with drawing out the best path to peak performance. The Panthers will be up to about 67,000 air miles logged this season — far more than most NHL teams — after the first two games of the Cup final; they tend to stay in cities after games instead of flying home late at night in order to keep some semblance of a normal sleep schedule.

"It is before practice, after practice, every day, so that's kind of the mindset and culture that we build here," Florida defenseman Aaron Ekblad said. "A lot of guys on this team don't even drink anymore. It isn't the old NHL where you have beers after games every game. We can't afford that because we cannot afford to get behind the eight ball at all during the season. That's where our team is at now."

Swiatek turns it on to beat Rybakina

Associated Press

PARIS — Iga Swiatek turned things around at Roland-Garros after dropping eight of the first nine games against 12th-seeded Elena Rybakina in the fourth round Sunday, putting together a 1-6, 6-3, 7-5 victory to extend her bid for a record fourth consecutive French Open championship.

The big-serving and hard-hitting Rybakina — who won Wimbledon in 2022 — got off to a stunning start, leading 5-0 after less than 20 minutes and grabbing 24 of the initial 32 points. She was responsible for 10 of the match's first 12 winners.

"I needed to do something to get back in the match and, honestly, with her playing like that, I didn't have a lot of hope," Swiatek said afterward.

There was more of the same early in the second set. Swiatek double-faulted to close the first game, then turned to her team in the stands with her palms up and said something; soon she was down 2-0.

That, though, is when Swiatek suddenly transformed back into what she's been so often in recent seasons, but not over the

past 12 months: a seemingly invincible force on red clay who has won four of the past five titles at the French Open, where she is 39-2 for her career and unbeaten in her past 25 contests.

That certainly seemed in danger at the outset in Court Philippe-Chatrier, where Swiatek had trouble dealing with Rybakina's power and repeatedly was forced into errors. Given the rough stretch since June 2024 for Swiatek, a 23-year-old from Poland, maybe it would not have been entirely shocking for her to take a loss Sunday.

After all, Swiatek hasn't reached the final of any event since earning the trophy in Paris a year ago and has slid from No. 1 to No. 5 in the WTA rankings.

That rut includes a surprising exit in the semifinals at the 2024 Summer Olympics, which were contested at Roland-Garros; she ended up with the bronze medal. Then, later last season, she was banned for a total of one month after testing positive for a banned substance; her explanation was accepted that the result was unintentional and caused by a contaminated medicine.

On Tuesday, Swiatek will play No. 13 Elina Svitolina, a three-time major semifinalist but 0-4 in previous French Open quarterfinals.

Svitolina saved three match points earlier Sunday to get past 2024 runner-up Jasmine Paolini 4-6, 7-6 (6), 6-1.

In the day's first men's match, Tommy Paul beat No. 25 Alexei Popyrin 6-3, 6-3, 6-3 to become the first American man in the quarterfinals at Roland-Garros since Andre Agassi in 2003. The 28-year-old Paul, who is seeded 12th, was coming off consecutive five-setters but breezed to this victory.

There haven't been multiple U.S. men in the French Open quarterfinals since 1996, when Jim Courier and Pete Sampras both made it that far. Agassi was the last from the country in the men's semifinals at the French Open when he won the championship in 1999 to complete a career Grand Slam.

Later Sunday, No. 13 Ben Shelton and No. 15 Frances Tiafoe played their fourth-round matches with a chance to join Paul in the quarterfinals.

All of the top eight women's

seeds reached the fourth round; No. 4 Paolini was the first to exit.

Swiatek was almost the next, but she pulled out the tight win.

One key moment across the 2½ hours that perhaps presaged Rybakina's unraveling came when she was a point away from a second break in the second set and had the chance to strike a forehand into an empty section of the court. Instead, she hit it right at Swiatek. When the ball came back over the net, Rybakina netted a jumping overhead.

Soon, Swiatek was playing better, imposing herself on groundstroke exchanges as she tends to, in part by moving closer to the baseline.

Her returns became more effective as Rybakina's first-serve percentage dipped from 56% in the first set to 45% in the second and 43% in the third.

In the second set, Swiatek reeled off five straight games and, in one burst, 10 straight points.

Still, not all was smooth sailing in the third for Swiatek. Not at all.

She faced three break points while trailing 3-2 but escaped from that predicament.

Kavan's complete game leads Texas over Oklahoma

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Texas pitcher Teagan Kavan pitched a complete game while mourning the death of her 97-year-old grandmother, and the Longhorns defeated four-time defending national champion Oklahoma 4-2 in the Women's College World Series on Saturday.

Kavan told the team the woman the players knew as 'Miney' had passed away Saturday morning. Kavan wears number 17 because her grandmother was born on November 17, 1928.

Even with that on her mind, Kavan was able to focus and pull through. She said she never

considered sitting out.

"It's not easy, obviously," she said. "But I think what helped me is at the end of the day, it's just a game. I think it put it into perspective. I'm just chucking a yellow ball, and people are running and turning left. And so I just wanted to have fun."

Kayden Henry and Joley Mitchell hit solo home runs to provide run support for Texas.

Mitchell was honored to offer support, emotionally and on the field.

"When Teagan told us this morning, it was honestly my worst nightmare," Mitchell said. "I was scared that's what it

was when she texted us this morning. But she told us, the first thing she said she's good and she's ready to go today. So Teagan Kavan is my hero today."

The Longhorns (53-11) advanced to the semifinals Monday and need just one win to reach the championship series for the third time in four years.

Oklahoma (51-8) remains alive in the double-elimination format. The Sooners will play Oregon in an elimination game on Sunday.

Texas Tech 3, UCLA 1: NiJaree Canady gave up just four hits and struck out seven, and

the Red Raiders defeated the Bruins to reach the Women's College World Series semifinals for the first time.

Texas Tech (52-12) needs one win against Oregon or Oklahoma on Monday to reach the best-of-three championship series.

UCLA (55-12) is still alive in the double-elimination format. The Bruins will play Tennessee in an elimination game Sunday.

Saturday's contest matched programs with very different histories. UCLA has a record 12 World Series championships while the Red Raiders just won their first World Series game Thursday in their first ever trip.

Muncy hits 2 HRs in Dodgers' rout

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Max Muncy hit two three-run homers and tied his career high with seven RBIs, helping the Los Angeles Dodgers rout Aaron Judge and the New York Yankees 18-2 on Saturday.

The Dodgers pounded out 21 hits and their runs were their most ever against the Yankees, whose only runs came on Judge's 20th and 21st homers. Los Angeles set a record for runs by a National League team against the Yankees.

The Dodgers batted around in the first two innings, pummeling Yankees starter Will Warren (3-3). He needed 39 pitches in the first when the Dodgers led 4-0 on RBI singles by Will Smith and Muncy, a sacrifice fly by Michael Conforto and Tommy Edman's RBI double.

Los Angeles was just getting started.

Muncy's 400-foot blast in the second was his 200th career homer and chased Warren. Edman had a RBI double and Kim followed with his second career homer, a 412-foot shot with two outs off Brent Headrick that made it 10-0. He and Shohei Ohtani, waiting to bat, bowed their heads to each other after Kim scored.

Muncy went deep off Mark Leiter Jr. with a 410-foot shot in the fifth and Andy Pages added a solo shot in the seventh. Rookie Dalton Rushing had his first major-league homer, a 3-run shot off position player Pablo Reyes in the eighth.

Dodgers starter Landon Knack (3-2) allowed one run and five hits in six innings with six strikeouts.

Cubs 2, Reds 0: Drew Pomeranz, Ben Brown, Brad Keller and Daniel Palencia combined on a one-hitter, and Chicago beat visiting Cincinnati.

Chicago used Pomeranz as an opener in front of Brown, and the strategy worked on a cool, blustery afternoon at Wrigley

Field. Pomeranz pitched a 1-2-3 first before Brown struck out nine in six dominant innings for the NL Central leaders.

Blue Jays 8, Athletics 7: George Springer hit two of Toronto's four home runs and the Blue Jays held on to beat the visiting Athletics for their fourth straight win.

Springer had a solo shot in the third inning off right-hander Gunnar Hoglund and added another in the fifth.

Royals 1, Tigers 0: Vinnie Pasquantino's one-out single in the eighth inning drove in Nick Loftin with the game's only run as host Kansas City defeated Detroit, snapping its five-game winning streak.

Pasquantino dropped to seventh, from his usual third spot, in the Royals lineup because of Detroit's starter left-hander Tarrik Skubal. He blooped a hit into short left field off Beau Brieske (1-2). Loftin had two of KC's four hits, including a double in the eighth.

Braves 5, Red Sox 0: Spencer Schwellenbach struck out 11 in 6½ innings on his 25th birthday to help Atlanta beat visiting Boston.

Schwellenbach (4-1) allowed five hits and didn't walk a batter. He rebounded against the Red Sox after giving up a grand slam to Rafael Devers in a 10-4 loss May 18 in Boston.

Cardinals 2, Rangers 0: Sonny Gray struck out 10 while allowing only four singles in seven innings and Willson Contreras had a part in both runs as visiting St. Louis beat Texas.

Gray's 19th game with double-digit strikeouts made the 35-year-old right-hander in his 13th big league season the 10th active pitcher with 1,800 career strikeouts. Gray (6-1) threw 64 of 91 pitches for strikes and had only one walk.

Marlins 1, Giants 0: Edward Cabrera pitched 5⅓ scoreless innings, Javier Sanoja had an RBI single and hosting Miami

beat San Francisco.

Giants starter Robbie Ray retired the last 15 batters he faced in seven innings. Ray (7-1), trying to become the first eight-game winner this season, scattered two hits, walked three and struck out nine.

Mets 8, Rockies 2: Juan Soto hit his first homer in more than three weeks and hosting New York sent Colorado to another series loss with a win.

The Rockies, whose 9-49 record is the worst in the modern era through 58 games, are the first team in history to open a season with 19 straight series losses. Colorado has lost a major league-record 22 straight series dating back to last September.

Rays 16, Astros 3: Junior Caminero hit two of visiting Tampa Bay's season-high five home runs and Zack Littell threw his first career complete game as it sailed to a victory over Houston.

Littell allowed 10 hits and three runs with six strikeouts. The Rays have won each of Littell's last seven starts and he's 5-0 in that stretch.

Orioles 4, White Sox 2: Jackson Holliday hit his first career leadoff home run, Jorge Mateo slugged his first homer of the season and host Baltimore defeated Chicago.

Dean Kremer allowed one run in six innings to win his second consecutive start for Baltimore, which has won five of seven for the first time this season. The Orioles clinched their third home series victory of the season and their first since taking two of three from the New York Yankees on April 28-30.

Brewers 17, Phillies 7: Rhys Hoskins hit two three-run homers against his former team, Jackson Chourio homered among his four hits and drove in five runs, and Milwaukee beat host Philadelphia.

Hoskins had his 13th career multi-homer game, and first since 2022 when was on the

Phillies.

Guardians 7, Angels 5: Gabriel Arias hit a go-ahead two-run double with two outs in the seventh inning and Cleveland rallied from a four-run deficit to end visiting Los Angeles' eight-game road winning streak.

Carlos Santana homered off Angels reliever Ryan Zeferjahn (2-1) leading off the seventh to tie it at 5-all. Daniel Schneemann singled and stole second before Bo Naylor walked. Arias doubled to center field on a 3-2 pitch.

Mariners 5, Twins 4 (11): Cole Young hit a fielder's choice in the 11th inning in his major league debut for his first RBI, giving Seattle a home victory over Minnesota.

Promoted from Triple-A Tacoma prior to the game, Young hit a dribbler up the first-base line off Cole Sands (3-2) to plate Miles Mastrobuoni. The throw from first baseman Ty France was not in time.

Seattle catcher Cal Raleigh hit 22nd home run of the year in the third to tie the Los Angeles Dodgers' Shohei Ohtani for the major league lead.

Pirates 5, Padres 0: Andrew McCutchen homered into the second deck in left field off Dylan Cease, Bailey Falter combined with three relievers on a two-hitter and Pittsburgh beat host San Diego to snap a 10-game losing streak to the Padres.

McCutchen's 396-foot shot leading off the fifth was his fourth of the season and left him one shy of tying Roberto Clemente for third on the Pirates' career list at 240.

Nationals 11, Diamondbacks 7: Luis García Jr. had a double and three RBIs during a 10-run first inning for visiting Washington, who held on late to beat reeling Arizona.

Washington has won 11 of 15 games and scored at least nine runs in four straight games. Arizona has dropped nine of 10.