

Iran fires missiles at US forces in Qatar

By LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

Iran on Monday launched missile attacks on U.S. forces at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the nation announced on state media Monday, as Tehran retaliates for the severe damage caused to its nuclear sites by American forces a day earlier.

Explosions were heard over Qatar on Monday night, following an earlier advisory for Americans to shelter in place amid reports that an Iranian attack on U.S. forces in the Middle East could be imminent.

Qatar issued a statement condemning the Iranian attack on the air base and said that no casualties had been reported as of 8:20 p.m. local time.

“Qatari air defenses successfully intercepted a missile attack targeting Al-Udeid Air Base,” the Qatari Defense Ministry said in a post on X.

Iran said the number of missiles launched at Qatar was the same as the number of bombs dropped by the U.S. military on Iranian nuclear sites, The Asso-

ciated Press reported.

Iran attacked U.S. forces using short-range and medium missiles, a U.S. official said.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, confirmed that there were no reports of casualties and added that the attack was no longer occurring as of Monday night local time in Qatar.

The official could not confirm whether there had been an attack on U.S. forces in Iraq, as had been earlier reported.

Iran has not claimed that it had launched a direct attack there. In the past, Iranian-backed militias have launched attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq.

The alert earlier in the day from the U.S. Embassy in Doha came after President Donald Trump authorized strikes on three high-profile Iranian nuclear facilities early Sunday morning.

The embassy said it issued the advisory out of “an abundance of caution.” The United Kingdom issued its own advisory, urging British nationals in

Qatar to shelter in place until further notice.

Qatar closed its airspace on Monday, according to The Associated Press.

Air sirens were also heard in Bahrain, the headquarters for U.S. Naval Forces Central Command. An all-clear message was sent out shortly afterward. Bahrain has also closed its airspace “as a precautionary measure in light of recent regional developments,” according to a statement from its transportation ministry.

Al Udeid Air Base is one of the largest U.S. military installations in the Middle East. The base acts as forward headquarters for U.S. Central Command and Air Forces Central Command.

It has been operating under restricted access since at least Friday, according to the embassy.

Air Forces Central Command referred to the embassy announcement when asked whether Monday’s advisory affected military personnel there.

Around the globe, leaders were watching closely to see how Tehran responds to the U.S. attacks, which were characterized by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth as a precision strike that devastated Iran’s nuclear program.

The White House has urged Iran to rejoin diplomacy talks and warned that any retaliation would result in severe consequences.

But some leaders in Tehran were calling for strikes against U.S. bases in the Middle East, where the Council on Foreign Relations estimates that some 40,000 American troops are deployed. Al Udeid houses thousands of troops.

The State Department had already advised U.S. citizens in Qatar to exercise increased caution in the wake of the airstrikes Sunday on three Iranian uranium enrichment facilities.

Throughout the region, U.S. personnel are on high alert. At Naval Support Activity Bahrain, base access is restricted to mission-critical personnel only.

USS Blue Ridge back in Japan after historic deployment

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The amphibious command ship USS Blue Ridge steamed into Tokyo Bay on Monday, concluding a summer deployment that covered 16,000 miles in three months around the Indo-Pacific.

Scores of sailors in dress whites manned the rails of the Navy’s oldest operational warship as it pulled into Berth No. 9, where around 60 people gathered to welcome loved ones

home after 81 days at sea.

For Maria Ramirez, wife of Marine Gunnery Sgt. Israel Ramirez, it was an emotional day.

“The last few days are always full of anticipation — being ready for him to get home,” she told Stars and Stripes pierside on Monday. “We’re glad to have him home.”

As the flagship of the U.S. 7th Fleet, the Blue Ridge, headquartered in Yokosuka, regularly makes lengthy deployments with multiple port calls at Pacific nations.

Beginning April 3, the Blue Ridge traveled a distance equivalent to two-thirds of the Earth’s circumference and made six port calls in five countries, said ship commander Capt. Nicholas DeLeo.

Those visits often include “Big Top Receptions,” which typically include visits with high-level officials such as deputy prime ministers or ministers of defense.

“We’re always looking for opportunities to work together [with other countries] in the fu-

ture,” DeLeo said Monday. “To be able to actually walk onto a pier and meet some of these allies and partners face-to-face and discuss future operations is priceless.”

Among its port calls was a historic visit to Wellington, New Zealand. The visit marked the Blue Ridge’s first-ever stop in the island nation and just the third U.S. warship to visit in four decades.

A 1987 New Zealand law bans visits by nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed warships.

NATO agrees defense spending must go up

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

NATO leaders are poised to meet President Donald Trump's demand for big increases in defense spending that will enable Europe to take on more responsibility for its defense, the bloc's top official said Monday.

During the two-day summit in the Dutch city of The Hague that kicks off Tuesday, allies will agree to dedicate 5% of their gross domestic product to defense, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said during a news conference in Brussels.

"This is a quantum leap that is ambitious, historic and fundamental to securing our future," Rutte said.

Trump's push for allies to dedicate 5% of GDP, up from

the current 2% benchmark, is expected to deliver a jolt for nations that have faced heavy criticism from Washington over the years for lackluster military spending.

In the run-up to the summit, Trump administration officials have insisted that members provide clear timelines for hitting the 5% benchmark.

In recent days, there have been questions about whether all 32 allies are on board with the plan. Spain, for example, has said it will be unable to hit the 5% mark.

Still, Rutte's assertion that allies have reached a consensus indicates that there are unlikely to be any last-minute vetoes of the initiative, which requires unanimous agreement among NATO leaders.

The push for stronger militaries in Europe comes as the U.S. aims to shift more of the Pentagon's focus to countering China.

Some analysts say most European leaders have gotten the Trump administration's message on the need for more spending.

"This recognition will only strengthen NATO and should have occurred long ago," wrote James Goldgeier, an expert on U.S.-European relations at the Brookings Institution, ahead of the NATO summit.

Another aim for Europe coming out of The Hague summit would be assurances that if the U.S. reduces troop levels on the Continent, it will be "an orderly transition process of shifting the burden rather than a sudden, uncoordinated U.S. retreat,"

Goldgeier said.

Rutte did not detail how the new NATO spending benchmark would be enforced or what the timeline would be for hitting the mark.

The 2% benchmark was agreed upon in 2014, with an implementation date of no later than 2024. Last year, 23 allies met the mark. All 32 members will reach the target this year, Rutte said.

In 2029, allies will assess progress toward the 5% benchmark, said Rutte, who left open the possibility that allies might need to raise levels even further.

With increased spending, allies also have pledged to hit new capability targets that will add a fivefold increase in air defense capabilities, Rutte said.

Photos of US base found during arrest of 'tourist'

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — An Azerbaijani man suspected of espionage had thousands of photographs of a U.S.-Greek military facility on the island of Crete stored on various devices, authorities in Greece say.

A search of the man's hotel room in Chania uncovered more than 5,000 photos of the naval and air force base that includes U.S. Naval Support Activity Souda Bay, Greek broadcaster EPT News reported, citing unidentified Greek officials.

The 26-year-old was arrested Sunday in a joint operation by Greek police and national intelligence agency authorities, according to EPT News.

He had requested a room with a view of the bay and left the hotel only twice for visits to a

nearby mini market, EPT News reported. The broadcaster said he told authorities he was in Greece for tourism but has not cooperated with investigators.

Most of the images were of military ships leaving and entering the facility. The photos were found on a laptop, phone, camera and USB storage device, officials told EPT News.

It wasn't clear whether U.S. military authorities were involved in the raid or who may have received the photos. The man has specialized encryption software on his laptop.

Dozens of U.S. Navy and NATO ships visit NSA Souda Bay each year for supplies, repairs and rest. It is the only NATO deep-water facility in the Mediterranean Sea that can accommodate a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier pier side.

Bills aim to end DODEA student cellphone use

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

A bipartisan group of lawmakers in Congress is pushing for phone-free classrooms in the Pentagon's 161 schools worldwide, calling smartphones disruptive to education.

A pair of bills introduced last week in the Senate and House armed services committees would require the Department of Defense Education Activity to prohibit students from using or possessing their phones during school hours.

Both bills would remove local control of student cellphone use in DODEA, which currently allows individual schools flexibility in setting those policies, agency spokeswoman Jessica Tackaberry said.

Sen. Jim Banks, an Indiana Republican and Navy Reserve

veteran who served in Afghanistan, is sponsoring the Restoring our Educational Focus on Children of U.S. Servicemembers at DODEA Act, with Sen. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., according to a joint statement.

"Cell phones in the classroom distract from learning and lead to all kinds of issues for students," Banks said.

In the House, the Mission Unplugged Act was introduced by two Virginia legislators, Democratic Rep. Eugene Vindman, a retired Army officer, and GOP Rep. Jen Kiggans, a former Navy helicopter pilot, according to a joint statement Wednesday.

The proposal would require all DODEA schools to adopt policies prohibiting students from using or possessing their smartphones from the start of the first period to the end of the last.

Dangerous heat wave in eastern US

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Millions of people across the Midwest and East endured dangerously hot temperatures again on Sunday as a sprawling heat wave that gripped much of the U.S. was expected to last well into this week.

Most of the northeastern quadrant of the country from Minnesota to Maine was under some type of heat advisory. So were parts of Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana and Mississippi, the National Weather Service said.

Sunday marked the second day of extreme heat across the Midwest and East Coast. Heat indexes on Sunday hit 103 degrees in Chicago and 101 degrees on Saturday in Madison, Wis., turning the city's annual naked bike ride into a sweaty affair. The heat index in Pittsburgh reached 105 degrees and hovered around 104 degrees in Columbus, Ohio.

Philadelphia's public health department declared a heat emergency through Wednesday evening. Officials directed residents to air-conditioned libraries, community centers and other locations and set up a "heat line" staffed by medical professionals to discuss conditions and illnesses made worse by the heat.

Forecasters warned the heat index in Cromwell, Conn., would reach 105 degrees on Sunday, making for a steamy day during the final round of the PGA Travelers Championship. Fans sought shelter under trees and on air-conditioned benches. Many lined up for water at a hydration station near the ninth green.

The heat is expected to persist this week with an eastward shift. New York City was expected to see highs around 95 degrees on Monday and Tuesday. Boston is on track for highs approaching 100 degrees on Tuesday, and temperatures in Washington, D.C., were expected to hit 100 degrees on Tuesday and Wednesday.

GOP bill eases gun regulation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The massive tax and spending cuts package that President Donald Trump wants on his desk by July 4 would loosen regulations on gun silencers and certain types of rifles and shotguns, advancing a longtime priority of the gun industry as Republican leaders in the House and Senate try to win enough votes to pass the bill.

The guns provision was first requested in the House by Georgia Rep. Andrew Clyde, a Republican gun store owner who had initially opposed the larger tax package. The House bill would remove silencers — called "suppressors" by the gun industry — from a 1930s law that regulates firearms that are considered the most dangerous, eliminating a \$200 tax while removing a layer of background checks.

The Senate kept the provision on silencers in its version of the bill and expanded upon it, adding short-barreled, or sawed-off, rifles and shotguns.

Republicans who have long

supported the changes, along with the gun industry, say the tax infringes on Second Amendment rights. They say silencers are mostly used by hunters and target shooters for sport.

Democrats are fighting to stop the provision, which was unveiled days after two Minnesota state legislators were shot in their homes, as the bill speeds through the Senate. They argue that loosening regulations on silencers could make it easier for criminals and active shooters to conceal their weapons.

The gun language has broad support among Republicans and has received little attention as House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., work to settle differences within the party on cuts to Medicaid and energy tax credits, among other issues. But it is just one of hundreds of policy and spending items included to entice members to vote for the legislation that could have broad implications

if the bill is enacted within weeks, as Trump wants.

Inclusion of the provision is also a sharp turn from the climate in Washington just three years ago when Democrats, like Republicans now, controlled Congress and the White House and pushed through bipartisan gun legislation. The bill increased background checks for some buyers under the age of 21, made it easier to take firearms from potentially dangerous people and sent millions of dollars to mental health services in schools.

Passed in the summer of 2022, just weeks after the shooting of 19 children and two adults at a school in Uvalde, Texas, it was the most significant legislative response to gun violence in decades.

Three years later, as they try to take advantage of their consolidated power in Washington, Republicans are packing as many of their longtime priorities as possible, including the gun legislation, into the massive, wide-ranging bill that Trump has called "beautiful."

Face-covering sparks free speech debate

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Many of the protesters who flooded the streets of Los Angeles to oppose President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown wore masks or other face coverings, drawing scorn from him.

"MASKS WILL NOT BE ALLOWED to be worn at protests," Trump posted on his social media platform, adding that mask-wearing protesters should be arrested. Protesters and their supporters argue Trump's comments and repeated calls by the Republican president's allies to ban masks at protests are an attempt to stifle popular dissent.

Trump's post calling for a ban on masks came after immigration raids sparked protests, which in-

cluded some reports of vandalism and violence toward police.

It's not a new idea. Legal experts and First Amendment advocates warn of a rising number of laws banning masks being wielded against protesters and their impacts on people's right to protest and privacy amid mounting surveillance. The legal question became even more complicated when Democratic lawmakers in California introduced legislation aiming to stop federal agents and local police officers from wearing face masks.

Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin called the California bill "despicable."

At least 18 states and Washington, D.C., have laws that restrict

masks and other face coverings, said Elly Page, senior legal adviser with the International Center for Not-For-Profit Law. Page also raised concerns about the laws being enforced inconsistently and only against movements the federal government doesn't like.

People may want to cover their faces while protesting for a variety of reasons, including to protect their health, for religious reasons, to avoid government retaliation, to prevent surveillance and doxing, or to protect themselves from tear gas, said Tim Zick, law professor at William & Mary Law School.

"Protecting protesters' ability to wear masks is part of protecting our First Amendment right to peacefully protest," Zick said.

Israel expands war to symbolic sites in Iran

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Israel on Monday expanded its war against Iran to include targets associated with the country's struggling theocracy, striking the gate of a Tehran prison notorious for holding political activists and hitting the headquarters of the military force that suppressed recent protests.

As plumes of thick smoke rose over Tehran, Israel was attacked with yet another barrage of Iranian missiles and drones. The persistent fire has become a reality for civilians in both countries since Israel started the war to target Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program.

On the 11th day of the conflict, Israel said it attacked "regime targets and government repression bodies in the heart of Tehran," but Israeli officials insisted they did not seek the over-

throw of Iran's government, their archenemy since the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The Israeli military warned Iranians that it would continue to attack military sites around Tehran over "the coming days" as its focus has shifted to symbolic targets as well. The military issued the warning on the social platform X, though Iranians are struggling to access the outside world as an internet shutdown has crippled the country.

The latest strikes came only hours after President Donald Trump openly raised the possibility himself after just a day earlier inserting America into the war with its unprecedented stealth-bomber strike.

"If the current Iranian Regime is unable to MAKE IRAN GREAT AGAIN, why wouldn't there be a Regime change???" he asked on his Truth Social

website.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt later described Trump as "simply raising a question." However, suggestions of overthrowing the Iranian government drew new anger from Tehran, which insists it will not negotiate at this time.

In the Tehran strikes, Israel blew open a gate at Evin prison. Iranian state television shared black-and-white surveillance footage of the strike at the facility known for holding dual nationals and Westerners often used by Iran as bargaining chips in negotiations with the West.

Evin also has specialized units for political prisoners run by the paramilitary, all-volunteer Revolutionary Guard, which answers only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

There were no immediate re-

ports of casualties in Iran or significant damage, though the semiofficial Tasnim news agency said there had been a power cut reported outside of Tehran following the Israeli strikes.

Iranian state television also aired footage it described as being shot inside Evin, with prisoners under control inside the facility. However, the Washington-based Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran expressed worry about the condition of prisoners there.

"Many families of current detainees have expressed deep concern about the safety and condition of their loved ones held inside the prison," it said.

In Israel, at least 24 people have been killed and more than 1,000 wounded in the war. Israeli strikes on Iran have killed at least 950 people and wounded 3,450 others, according to the group Human Rights Activists.

Nations condemn deadly church bombing in Syria

Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria — The death toll from an attack on a church in Syria has gone up to 25, state media said Monday.

The attack Sunday on the Mar Elias Greek Orthodox church during a Divine Liturgy in Dweil'a near Damascus was the first of its kind in Syria in years and comes as Damascus under its de facto Islamist rule is trying to win the support of minorities. As President Ahmad al-Sharaa struggles to exert authority across the country, there have been concerns about the presence of sleeper cells of extremist groups in the war-torn country.

The ministry and most witnesses said a gunman entered the church and started firing at the people there before detonating his explosive vest.

SANA, citing the Health Min-

istry, said 63 other people were wounded in the attack. Father Fadi Ghattas told The Associated Press after the attack that some 350 people were praying at the church.

The United States, the European Union and governments across the Middle East condemned the attack, decrying it as a terrorist attack.

No group immediately claimed responsibility, but the Syrian interior minister has blamed the extremist Islamic State group.

Since the toppling of Bashar Assad and his family's decades-long dictatorial rule of Syria last December in a lightning insurgency, al-Sharaa has been pushing to win the support of Syria's non-Sunni-Muslim minority groups who are concerned about life under Islamist rule.

Russia attacks Ukraine at night with drones, missiles

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian drones and missiles killed at least 14 civilians and injured several dozen others in Ukraine in overnight attacks, local officials said Monday, with nine deaths reported in the capital, Kyiv, where an apartment building partially collapsed.

Russia fired 352 drones and decoys overnight, as well as 11 ballistic missiles and five cruise missiles, Ukraine's air force said. Air defenses intercepted or jammed 339 drones and 15 missiles before they could reach their targets, a statement said.

The strikes came nearly a week after a Russian attack killed 28 people in Kyiv, 23 of them in a residential building that collapsed after a direct missile hit.

Russian forces for several months have been trying to drive

deeper into Ukraine as part of a summer push along the roughly 620-mile front line, though the Institute for the Study of War said progress has failed to make significant gains.

"Russian forces are largely relying on poorly trained infantry to make gains in the face of Ukraine's drone-based defense," the Washington-based think tank said late Sunday.

Russia also has pounded civilian areas with long-range strikes in an apparent attempt to weaken Ukrainian morale.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said preliminary data indicated that Russian forces used North Korean missiles in the Kyiv strike.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine's defense and new ways to pressure Russia would be the main topics in his visit to Britain on Monday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

6 people dead, 2 missing after boat capsizes

CA SOUTH LAKE TAHOE — Six people were confirmed dead and two others were missing after a boat capsized on Lake Tahoe in California, officials said.

The U.S. Coast Guard and the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office responded Saturday afternoon to D.L. Bliss State Park following reports of 10 people in the water, officials said. Two people were rescued and taken to a local hospital.

Winds of about 30 knots and swells of up to 8 feet were reported around the time the 27-foot gold Chris-Craft vessel flipped over, Coast Guard officials said.

Rescue workers and divers searched the area Saturday evening and resumed their search Sunday morning.

Video obtained by KCRA-TV showed moored boats at a nearby marina crashing into one another amid strong gusts. The extent of the damage wasn't immediately known Sunday.

DOJ challenges giving immigrants in-state fees

KY FRANKFORT — President Donald Trump's administration has asked a federal judge to strike down a Kentucky regulation that it said unlawfully gives undocumented immigrants access to in-state college tuition.

The U.S. Justice Department's lawsuit said the regulation violates federal immigration law by enabling undocumented students to qualify for the lower tuition rate at Kentucky's public colleges and uni-

versities, while American citizens from other states pay higher tuition to attend the same schools.

"Federal law prohibits aliens not lawfully present in the United States from getting in-state tuition benefits that are denied to out-of-state U.S. citizens. There are no exceptions," the suit said.

1 killed, 9 hurt in shooting at Juneteenth event

SC ANDERSON — One woman was killed and at least nine others were wounded during a shooting at a Juneteenth celebration in South Carolina, authorities said.

More than 100 law enforcement officers and rescue workers responded Saturday night to the outdoor event in Anderson, according to the sheriff's office. No arrests had been reported by Sunday afternoon.

Laporshia Janae Gray Cobb, 35, died from a gunshot wound to the abdomen, according to the county coroner's office. Nine others were taken to area hospitals, two with severe injuries.

Investigators don't believe the shooting was politically motivated.

Detectives are continuing to investigate, officials said.

Massive sculptures stolen in mysterious heist

CA LOS ANGELES — The two towering sculptures comprising thousands of pounds of bronze and stainless steel took artist and filmmaker Sir Daniel Winn more than a year to complete.

They vanished in a weekend. Police believe that on June 14

or 15 at least one thief made off with both "Icarus Within" and "Quantum Mechanics: Homme," — sculptures valued at a combined \$2.1 million — from a warehouse in Anaheim Hills. Other artwork and valuables inside the warehouse that would have been easier to move were untouched. Authorities have scant details about the heist.

The life-sized "Quantum Mechanics: Homme" artwork, composed of lucite, bronze and stainless steel, depicts a winged and horned man and was featured in the award-winning short film "Creation" in 2022. It's valued at \$1.8 million.

A second Winn piece, "Icarus Within," based partially on the sculptor's chaotic childhood escape from Vietnam, is a steel and bronze sculpture that also stands 8 feet tall, weighs a ton, and is valued at \$350,000.

Mayor's aide misuses city email for reelection event

NY NEW YORK — Mayor Eric Adams is hosting a kickoff event for his reelection campaign this coming week — and an aide in his office violated city rules by using his government email account to advertise the gathering, the Daily News has learned.

The "special campaign announcement" is set to take place Thursday morning on the steps of City Hall, per a poster the aide, Grant Yanney, sent to a list of dozens of city government colleagues and others, according to a source who provided The News with a copy of the message.

Under local law, municipal employees like Yanney cannot use "any city resources," in-

cluding email accounts, for "any political activity," according to the city Conflicts of Interest Board.

Yanney, who has worked for Adams since joining his Brooklyn borough president's office in 2021, acknowledged he shouldn't have sent the message from his city government account, calling it an "honest mistake."

Blaze destroys buildings and forces evacuations

UT PINE VALLEY — A fast-moving fire fueled by high winds on Friday has destroyed a dozen structures, including homes, and forced some in a rural area of southwest Utah to evacuate.

The Forsyth Fire started Thursday in the Pine Valley Mountains and has already burned about 2.3 square miles, said Karl Hunt, a spokesperson for the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands. It has forced people to evacuate from the Pine Valley Community and nearby campgrounds, although the number of people who have fled was not immediately clear.

The blaze, which is about 15 miles northeast of St. George and includes steep, mountainous terrain, has also threatened 400 structures.

By Friday evening, the fire remained uncontained despite 150 people battling the blaze, including two hotshot crews from Utah and Nevada, according to Hunt. Teams were using helicopters, more than a dozen engines and water tenders.

The cause of the fire has not been determined and is under investigation, Hunt said.

— From wire reports

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SGA leads Thunder past Pacers for title

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander walked off the court for the final time this season, collapsed into the arms of coach Mark Daigneault and finally smiled.

It was over.

The climb is complete. The rebuild is done. The Oklahoma City Thunder are champions.

The best team all season was the best team at the end, bringing the NBA title to Oklahoma City for the first time. Gilgeous-Alexander finished off his MVP season with 29 points and 12 assists, and the Thunder beat the Indiana Pacers — who lost Tyrese Haliburton to a serious leg injury in the opening minutes — 103-91 in Game 7 of the NBA Finals on Sunday night.

“It doesn’t feel real,” said Gilgeous-Alexander, the Finals MVP. “So many hours. So many moments. So many emotions. So many nights of disbelief. So many nights of belief. It’s crazy to know that we’re all here, but this group worked for it. This

group put in the hours and we deserve this.”

Jalen Williams scored 20 points and Chet Holmgren had 18 for the Thunder, who finished off a season for the ages. Oklahoma City won 84 games between the regular season and the playoffs, tying the 1996-97 Chicago Bulls for third most in any season.

Only Golden State (88 in 2016-17) and the Bulls (87 in 2015-16) won more.

It’s the second championship for the franchise. The Seattle SuperSonics won the title in 1979; the team moved to Oklahoma City in 2008. There’s nothing in the rafters in Oklahoma City to commemorate that title.

In October, a championship banner is finally coming. A Thunder banner.

“They behave like champions. They compete like champions,” Daigneault said. “They root for each other’s success, which is rare in professional sports. I’ve said it many times and now I’m going to say it one

more time. They are an uncommon team and now they’re champions.”

The Pacers led 48-47 at the half even after losing Haliburton to what his father said was an Achilles tendon injury about seven minutes into the game. But they were outscored 34-20 in the third quarter as the Thunder built a 13-point lead and began to run away.

“Deflated, but proud of everything we’ve accomplished,” Pacers guard TJ McConnell said.

Bennedict Mathurin had 24 points and 13 rebounds for Indiana, which still is waiting for its first NBA title. The Pacers — who were 10-15 after 25 games and were bidding to be the first team in NBA history to turn that bad of a start into a championship — had leads of 1-0 and 2-1 in the series, but they simply didn’t have enough in the end.

Home teams improved to 16-4 in NBA Finals Game 7s. And the Thunder became the seventh champion in the last seven sea-

sons, a run of parity like none other in NBA history.

Pacers forward Pascal Siakam was part of the Toronto team that won in 2019, Thunder guard Alex Caruso was part of the Los Angeles Lakers team that won in the pandemic “bubble” in 2020, Milwaukee won in 2021, Golden State in 2022, Pacers forward Thomas Bryant and Denver prevailed in 2023, and Boston won last year’s title.

And now, the Thunder get their turn. The youngest team to win a title in nearly a half-century has reached the NBA mountaintop.

The Thunder are the ninth franchise to win a title in NBA Commissioner Adam Silver’s 12 seasons. His predecessor, David Stern, saw eight franchises win titles in his 30 seasons as commissioner.

“It really hurts on the one hand,” Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said. “On the other hand, this team has given all of Pacer Nation something to be very proud of.”

Haliburton leg injury early started Pacers downfall

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — This is not how Indiana star Tyrese Haliburton saw the season ending.

He was outside the locker room, a walking boot on his right leg, standing on crutches, greeting his teammates as they came off the floor at the end of their season. There were hugs. There were tears.

The end, by any measure, was heartbreaking. And the pain of Game 7 of NBA Finals is going to linger over the Pacers for a long, long time.

Haliburton — who was playing with a strained right calf — tumbled to the court in a heap, immediately began punching the floor in frustration and needed to be helped to the lock-

er room in Game 7 of the NBA Finals against the Oklahoma City Thunder on Sunday night.

Indiana had a one-point lead at halftime, but in the end, the Pacers lost their best player, then their verve, then their shot at the NBA title. The Thunder won 103-91, after the Pacers managed only 43 points in the second half.

“Doesn’t surprise me at all,” Pacers guard TJ McConnell said when asked if he was surprised Haliburton was there at the end to console teammates. “That’s who he is as a person, a teammate. He put his ego aside constantly. He could have been in the locker room feeling sorry for himself after something like that happened, but he wasn’t. He was up greeting us. ... That’s

who Tyrese Haliburton is. He’s just the greatest, man.”

John Haliburton, Tyrese’s father, told ABC late in the first half it was an Achilles tendon injury, as the replays of the play clearly indicated. An MRI is still likely to confirm that, but there are simple tests — without a need for imaging — that doctors typically use to determine whether there is a serious injury to the tendon.

The Pacers quickly ruled out Haliburton for the rest of Game 7 with that they called a lower right leg injury, and replays appeared to show something popping in the back of his leg. The injury happened with 4:55 left in the first quarter.

Haliburton put no weight on the leg and had his face

wrapped in towels as he was taken to the Pacers’ locker room for evaluation. Virtually the entire Indiana playing, coaching and medical staff surrounded him on the court once he got hurt. Even Thunder star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander quickly went over, touched Haliburton on the head as the Pacers guard lay face-down on the court and offered a kind word.

“All of our hearts dropped,” Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said. “But he will be back.”

To their credit, the Pacers tried to rally for their teammates. But the Thunder were the best team in the league all season, finishing 68-14 — and in the second half Sunday night, with the title on the line, they were much the best again.

LSU sweeps Coastal Carolina for title

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Coming out of last season, LSU coach Jay Johnson couldn't have foreseen the national championship this group of tenacious Tigers is taking back to Baton Rouge.

"It was probably a year ago today," he said, "we had 12 players in our program that actually played on the field for us in 2024. Twelve."

Then, quoting his mentor and LSU baseball patriarch Skip Bertman, Johnson said: "We ended up with some really good fortune."

LSU knocked previously unbeaten Coastal Carolina ace Jacob Morrison out of the game with a four-run fourth inning, and the Tigers won their second national title in three years Sunday with a 5-3 victory in the College World Series finals.

The Tigers (53-15) completed a two-game sweep of the Chanticleers (56-13), who entered the finals on a 26-game winning streak and on Sunday saw coach Kevin Schnall and first base coach Matt Schilling eject-

ed in the bottom of the first inning.

LSU gave the Southeastern Conference its sixth straight national title in baseball and 11th in 16 years. It was LSU's eighth, all since 1991 and second most all-time behind USC's 12.

The 2023 team was led by Paul Skenes and Dylan Crews, the top two picks in the MLB amateur draft that year, and slugger Tommy White. It was built to win a championship.

The good fortune Johnson referred to was mixing those 12 returning players from last season with a talented freshman class that mostly showed up intact after the draft and was rated No. 1 in college baseball, along with 10 transfers — including three ranked in the top 10 in the portal rankings. The team coalesced quickly.

Coastal Carolina won the national title in 2016 and was trying to become the first team since 1962 (Michigan) to win the championship in its first two CWS appearances. The Chanticleers hadn't lost consecutive

games since dropping two in a row at Troy on March 22 and 23.

With five-time champion coach Bertman watching from the stands, LSU tied it at 1 in the third on Ethan Frey's RBI double and went up 5-1 in the fourth on two-run singles by Chris Stanfield and Derek Curiel.

Coastal Carolina pulled within 5-3 in the seventh against LSU starter Anthony Eyanson when No. 9 batter Wells Sykes hit his fourth homer of the season.

That brought on Chase Shores for his fourth appearance of the CWS. The 6-foot-8 right-hander touched 100 mph with his fastball while retiring the first five batters he faced before Dean Mihos, who homered in the second, singled through the right side leading off the ninth.

With Tigers fans on their feet and chanting "L-S-U, L-S-U," Shores struck out Ty Dooley and got Sykes to ground into a game-ending double play. The Tigers' dugout emptied and the

celebratory dogpile behind the mound ensued, and the players then walked around the warning track in a line high-fiving fans leaning over the wall.

The Chanticleers had won 15 straight when Morrison (12-1) started. Morrison's 3⅓ innings marked his shortest start of the season and the five runs against him were the most he has allowed.

LSU entered having won 13 games in a row in which one of its top two pitchers — Kade Anderson and Eyanson — started.

Walker Mitchell was at bat with two outs and Sebastian Alexander had just stolen second base when Schnall went to the top steps of the dugout, gestured at plate umpire Angel Campos with three fingers and began shouting at him.

The NCAA said Schnall was arguing balls and strikes, was given a warning and thrown out when he did not leave immediately. Schilling was tossed for comments he made as the confrontation with umpires continued near the plate.

Briscoe stretches fuel thin to win at Pocono Raceway

Associated Press

LONG POND, Pa. — Chase Briscoe got the cold facts when the third-generation driver's career took an unexpected turn, leaving his lame-duck NASCAR team for the sport's most coveted available seat with powerhouse Joe Gibbs Racing.

The message was clear at JGR — home of five Cup driver titles and a perennial contender to win another one.

"You don't make the playoffs," Briscoe said, "you don't race in this car anymore."

The Toyotas were better at JGR, sure. So were the championship standards set by Joe Gibbs and the rest of the organization.

Briscoe's eyes are wide open now, a first-time winner for JGR

and, yes, he is indeed playoff bound.

Briscoe returned to victory lane Sunday at Pocono Raceway, stretching the final drops of fuel down the stretch to hold off Hamlin for his third career Cup victory and first with his new race team.

"I've only won three races in the Cup Series, right? But this is by far the least enjoyable just because it's expected now," Briscoe said. "You have to go win. Where at SHR, you really felt like you surprised the world if you won."

Briscoe raced his way into an automatic spot in NASCAR's playoffs with the win and gave the No. 19 Toyota its first victory since 2023 when Martin Truex Jr. had the ride.

Briscoe lost his job at the end of last season at Stewart-Haas Racing when the team folded and he was tabbed to replace Truex — almost a year to the day for his win at Pocono — in the four-car JGR field.

Hamlin, who holds the track record with seven wins, appeared on the brink of reeling in Briscoe over the final, thrilling laps only to have not enough in the No. 11 Toyota to snag that eighth Pocono win.

Briscoe made his final pit stop on lap 119 of the 160-lap race, while Hamlin — who returned after missing last week's race following the birth of his son — made his final stop on 120. Hamlin's team radioed to him that they believed Briscoe would fall about a half-lap short on fuel —

only for the first-year JGR driver to win by 0.682 seconds.

Briscoe has been on bit of a hot streak and had his fourth top-10 finish over the last six races, including a seventh-place finish in last week's ballyhooed race in Mexico City. He became the 11th driver to earn a spot in the 16-driver field with nine races left until the field is set and made a winner again of crew chief James Small. Small stayed on the team through Truex's final winless season and Briscoe's winless start to this season.

The race was delayed 2 hours, 10 minutes by rain and the conditions were muggy by the time the green flag dropped. Briscoe led 72 laps and won the second stage.

He'll certainly settle for a ride to victory lane.

Phillies top Mets, reclaim first place

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Kyle Schwarber and Edmundo Sosa homered, Jesús Luzardo tossed 6⅓ scoreless innings and the Philadelphia Phillies regained sole possession of first place in the NL East with a 7-1 victory over the slumping New York Mets on Sunday night.

Nick Castellanos added two doubles and an RBI for the Phillies, who have won nine of 11 after taking two of three games in the series against their division rivals. Philadelphia (47-31) moved one game ahead of New York in the standings.

Francisco Lindor homered late for the Mets, who have lost eight of nine.

Luzardo (7-3) allowed three hits with seven strikeouts and a walk.

The Phillies did their damage against David Peterson (5-3) in the fourth when they scored five runs. Schwarber led off with his 24th homer, a drive off the batter's eye in center field. After an RBI single by Otto Kemp made it 2-0, Sosa hit a three-run shot on an 84 mph slider into Philadelphia's bullpen in right-center.

Sosa also singled and doubled.

Mariners 14, Cubs 6: Donovan Solano homered twice and drove in five runs, helping visiting Seattle outslug Chicago for the win.

Seiya Suzuki homered twice and drove in three runs for the Cubs in their third loss in four games. Chicago trimmed Seattle's lead to 5-4 when Suzuki hit a two-run shot off Logan Gilbert (2-2) with two down in the fifth.

Yankees 4, Orioles 2: Jazz Chisholm Jr. hit a go-ahead, two-run double off the right-center field wall in a three-run eighth inning, leading host New York over Baltimore.

New York boosted the lead when Gary Sánchez dropped shortstop Gunnar Henderson's throw on LeMahieu's grounder, allowing Chisholm to slide

across the plate.

Tigers 9, Rays 3: Riley Greene had three hits and Wenceel Pérez and Parker Meadows each homered and drove in three runs and Detroit snapped a three-game losing streak with a road win against Tampa Bay at Steinbrenner Field.

Pérez broke a 1-1 tie with a two-run blast in the seventh inning off Garrett Cleavinger (0-3). Dillon Dingler added two hits and an RBI for Detroit, which maintained the best record in the majors (49-30).

Marlins 5, Braves 3: Kyle Stowers ended a 31-game home run drought, Sandy Alcántara pitched six strong innings and host Miami beat Atlanta in the rubber game of their three-game series.

Alcántara (4-8) allowed three runs and six hits, walked two and struck out four.

White Sox 4, Blue Jays 2: Miguel Vargas hit a tiebreaking double in the eighth inning and visiting Chicago rallied to beat Toronto.

Vargas had two hits and drove in a pair as the White Sox won a series for the first time since taking two of three against Kansas City from June 6-8.

Pirates 8, Rangers 3: Tommy Pham went 3-for-3 and drove in three runs, Spencer Horwitz and Bryan Reynolds also had three hits, and host Pittsburgh used a five-run fifth inning to beat Texas and avoid a three-game sweep.

Pham tied it 2-all with a sacrifice fly in the fourth and capped the fifth-inning rally with an RBI double for a 7-2 advantage. He drove in Pittsburgh's final run with a double in the seventh.

Horwitz went 3-for-4 with two doubles. He scored three runs and drove in two as the Pirates finished with 15 hits.

Brewers 9, Twins 8: Rhys Hoskins homered, doubled and drove in two runs as Milwaukee completed a three-game sweep of Minnesota with an away vic-

tory.

Brewers starter Quinn Pries was pulled after throwing 76 pitches in 3⅓ innings. The win went to Rob Zastryzny (2-1), who pitched two-thirds of an inning.

Rockies 4, Diamondbacks 2: Mickey Moniak hit a three-run homer to cap a four-run fifth inning, Antonio Senzatala won his second straight start, and major league-worst Colorado snapped a three-game skid with a victory over visiting Arizona.

The Rockies (18-60) avoided the worst record through 78 games in the modern era. The 1907 St. Louis Cardinals and 1932 Detroit Tigers also went 18-60.

Reds 4, Cardinals 1: Andrew Abbott retired the final 18 batters he faced in seven commanding innings, and visiting Cincinnati avoided a three-game sweep with a win against St. Louis.

Cincinnati extended the lead when Elly de la Cruz doubled to lead off the sixth and scored on Gavin Lux's RBI groundout.

Giants 9, Red Sox 5: Heliot Ramos doubled home two runs to highlight San Francisco's decisive seventh inning after an earlier two-run single, and the Giants rallied to beat visiting Boston.

Casey Schmitt and Mike Yastrzemski each hit solo home runs in the fifth against Red Sox starter Luis Giolito and Willy Adames connected in the eighth.

Padres 3, Royals 2: Jose Iglesias tied the game with two-run, two-out, bases-loaded pinch-hit single in the seventh inning and then drove in the winning run with a grounder in the ninth for host San Diego, who beat Kansas City to take two of three.

Iglesias hit a soft bouncer to shortstop Bobby Witt Jr., who fielded it, spun around and threw home too late to get Luis Arraez.

Dodgers 13, Nationals 7: Shohei Ohtani pitched one hitless inning in his second mound start of the season before hitting a three-run triple and a two-run homer, and Max Muncy had a grand slam and a three-run homer in host Los Angeles' victory over Washington.

Ohtani recorded two strikeouts while throwing 18 pitches, allowing his only baserunner on an error when Mookie Betts dropped a popup in the sun.

Ohtani then had his most productive offensive game in some time, delivering two huge hits in the late innings. He cleared the bases with a drive into the right field corner during the Dodgers' seven-run seventh, and he added his 26th homer in the eighth to put LA up 13-3.

Guardians 3, Athletics 0: Slade Cecconi pitched a career-high seven innings and Emmanuel Clase escaped a bases-loaded jam in the ninth to lead visiting Cleveland to a victory over the Athletics in the rubber game of their series.

Cecconi (3-3) allowed six hits and a walk in his seventh start for Cleveland after making 17 for Arizona over the previous two seasons.

Clase gave up a walk and singles to Tyler Soderstrom and JJ Bleday to load the bases before finishing for his second straight save and 18th in 21 opportunities.

Astros 8, Angels 7: Mauricio Dubón homered twice and Josh Hader stayed perfect in 19 save chances this season by getting Mike Trout to line out to center field with a runner on second as visiting Houston held off Los Angeles in the rubber game of their series.

Dubón's second career multi-homer game began with a lead-off shot against starter Kyle Hendricks in the fifth inning for the Astros' first run. Dubón added a two-run drive off Hunter Strickland for a 6-5 lead in the sixth.