

Civilians flee embattled Ukraine city

Effort to relieve encircled port city in jeopardy after reported Russian shelling

Associated Press

LIVIV, Ukraine — Buses carried civilians out of an embattled Ukrainian city Tuesday along a safe corridor agreed to by the two warring sides, while a parallel effort to relieve the besieged port of Mariupol was thrown into jeopardy by reports of renewed Russian shelling.

Europe's worst refugee crisis since World War II grew even more severe, with U.N. officials reporting that 2 million people have now fled Ukraine.

Moscow's forces have laid siege to Ukrainian cities and cut off food, water, heat and medicine in a growing humanitarian disaster. But for days, attempts to create corridors to safely evacuate civilians have stumbled amid continuing fighting and objections to the proposed routes.

On Tuesday, a convoy of buses packed with people fleeing the fighting moved along a snowy road from Sumy, a northeastern city of a quarter-million people, according to video from the Ukrainian communications agency. Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said they were headed southwest to the Ukrainian city of Poltava, and included students from India and China.

Hours before the convoy reached Sumy, overnight strikes killed 21 people there, including two children, Ukrainian authorities said.

Meanwhile, buses emblazoned with red cross symbols carried water, medicine and food toward the encircled southern port of Mariupol, scene of some of the worst desperation. Vereshchuk said the vehicles would then ferry civilians out of the city of 430,000 people.

But soon after officials announced that buses were on their way, Ukrainian authorities said they had learned of shelling on the escape route.

It was unclear whether the supply convoy made it to Mariupol. And it appeared unlikely that civilians would be able to board the buses to get out.

The deputy mayor of Mariupol cast

doubt on the evacuations, telling the BBC that Russian forces continued to pound areas where people were trying to gather ahead of being taken out. He said some roads were blocked, while others were mined.

"So we cannot establish sustainable cease-fire and safety route at the moment," Serhiy Orlov said. "So we still have ... a city in blockade."

The city is without water, heat, working sewage systems or phone service. Residents have been getting water from streams or by melting snow.

Corpses lay in the city's streets, and authorities planned to start digging mass graves for all the dead.

With the electricity out, many people are relying on their car radios for information, picking up news from stations broadcast from areas controlled by Russian forces or Russian-backed separatists.

Looting has become widespread for food, clothes and even furniture, with locals referring to the practice as "getting a discount."

In a video address from an undisclosed location, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said a child had died of dehydration in Mariupol, another sign of the city's desperation.

Nearly two weeks into the fighting, Russian forces have captured a swath of southern and coastal Ukraine but have seen their advances stopped in many areas — including around Kyiv, the capital — by nimble Ukrainian fighters targeting Moscow's armored columns.

Thousands of people are thought to have been killed, both civilians and soldiers, though the actual number remains unknown.

The fighting has caused global economic turmoil, with energy prices surging worldwide and stocks plummeting. It also threatens the food supply of millions around the globe who rely on crops farmed in the fertile Black Sea region.

Western countries have rushed weapons to Ukraine and moved to slap Vladimir Putin's Russia with sanctions.

In a further effort to punish Russia, U.S. President Joe Biden decided to ban Russian oil imports, according to a person who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the matter before an announcement. Also, Shell announced it will stop buying oil and gas from Russia.

Ukraine's military said Ukrainian forces continued defense operations in the Mariupol suburbs. The military said "demoralized" Russian forces are engaging in looting, commandeering civilian buildings and setting up firing positions in populated areas. The claims could not be independently verified.

The battle for Mariupol is crucial because its capture could allow Moscow to establish a land corridor to Crimea, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014.

Oleksiy Kuleba, governor of the Kyiv region, said Ukraine was also making arrangements to get people out of the suburb of Irpin.

Elsewhere, as Ukraine pleaded for more warplanes, Poland said it would give all of its MiG-29 fighter jets to the United States, apparently agreeing to an arrangement that would allow them to be used by Ukraine's military. Ukrainian pilots are trained to fly Soviet-era fighter jets.

Late Tuesday, Zelenskyy released a video showing him standing near the presidential offices in Kyiv.

Behind him were piles of sandbags, a snow-dusted fir tree and a few cars.

It was the second video in 24 hours showing him near the country's seat of power, apparently made to dispel any doubts about whether he had fled the city.

"Snow fell. It's that kind of springtime," he said in a soft voice. "You see, it's that kind of wartime, that kind of springtime. Harsh. But we will win."

Hypersonic woes may hurt US chase of rivals

Bloomberg

U.S. efforts to catch up with China and Russia in developing hypersonic weapons may be set back after Lockheed Martin's air-launched missile suffered three consecutive test failures that left it on a tight schedule.

That's put in doubt the Pentagon's goal to declare it America's first combat-ready hypersonic weapon and approve initial production by Sept. 30.

China and Russia have conducted test launches and fielded their versions of the new weapons, which can travel five times the speed of sound and maneuver in flight like a cruise missile, making them harder to detect and shoot down.

The U.S. weapon faces several hurdles in a development phase now expected to cost at least \$1.4 billion before it can be found to have "early operation capabili-

ty." The Air Force hasn't yet released an estimate of total acquisition costs or said how many of the weapons it wants.

The latest hurdle: successfully conducting fourth and fifth tests of its booster motor by June 30. Their timing will be contingent on the results of a failure review board for the third test that was to be complete by the end of last month, according to the Air Force program office.

If successful, those tests would be followed by the program's key flight test of a fully operational missile between July and September. Added to that is completion of a production readiness review to assess Lockheed's capability to manufacture and integrate hardware for delivery.

The hypersonic Air-Launched Rapid Response Weapon is a fast-track "rapid prototype" program that's intended to cut months, if

not years, off its development and deployment in the face of rapid progress by adversaries.

The weapon is intended to be dropped from a B-52H bomber and accelerated by its booster motor before a solid glide body separates and flies at hypersonic speeds to its target.

Russia said last month that it test-fired a hypersonic missile, sending a message to the U.S. and NATO allies in advance of its invasion of Ukraine.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has asserted that hypersonic weapons will make up the core of Russia's non-nuclear deterrence capability in the future. The United States said Russia has deployed its Avangard Hypersonic Glide Vehicle and its Tsirkon hypersonic anti-ship and land-attack missile.

China is investing heavily in hypersonic weapons as well, putting

one in orbit in July that flew 25,000 miles in more than 100 minutes of flight, according to the top U.S. nuclear commander.

Russia and China are able to press ahead on new weapons without the oversight by lawmakers and the public that can slow testing and deployment under the Pentagon's acquisition system.

Heidi Shyu, the Defense Department's undersecretary for research and engineering, said through a spokesperson that she's "supportive of the Air Force's aggressive efforts to accelerate development," but "the Sept. 30 operational capability date is a very aggressive schedule."

The Air Force is also hedging its bets on the declaration date. Its program office said in a statement that it "continues to aggressively pursue" an early operational capability "while maintaining high standards of technical rigor."

Pentagon to permanently close Hawaii fuel facility

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Navy's massive underground fuel storage facility in Honolulu at the center of widespread well-water contamination will be permanently shut down, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced Monday.

"After close consultation with senior civilian and military leaders, I have decided to defuel and permanently close the Red Hill bulk fuel storage facility in Hawaii," Lloyd Austin said in a statement. "This is the right thing to do."

Jet fuel from the World War II-era tanks seeped into one of three wells that the Navy uses to provide water to military housing communities on and near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

The contamination became acute following a spill in November, displacing thousands of residents from their homes due to oily and stinky tap water that sickened many people. Most of those displaced have been living in hotels for more than three months.

There has long been local opposition to the continued use of the tanks, which have had numerous leaks for past decades.

The multistep process for closing the facility will begin with the formulation of an action plan no later than May 21 by the Navy and Defense Logistics Agency to defuel the tanks, Austin said. The goal is to have the tanks emptied within 12 months, he said.

They now hold roughly 150 million gallons of fuel. The Navy suspended operations at the facility in late November.

Activity seen at dismantled N. Korean nuke testing site

BY DAVID CHOI

Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea appears to have launched a construction project at the site of a nuclear testing facility dismantled in 2018, according to commercial satellite imagery seen by U.S.-based analysts.

Two analysts from the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies saw "very early signs of activity" at the Punggye-ri site, including "construction of a new building, repair of another building, and what is possibly some lumber and sawdust," according to the report published Monday.

"The construction and repair work indicate that North Korea has made some decision about the

status of the test site," Jeffrey Lewis, director of the center's East Asia Nonproliferation Program, and Dave Schmerler, a senior research associate, wrote in the report. "One possibility is that North Korea plans to bring the test site back to a state of readiness to resume nuclear explosive testing."

Punggye-ri is in the mountains of northeast North Korea, where Pyongyang has conducted six known nuclear tests since 2006.

Punggye-ri was supposedly dismantled by North Korea in 2018. North Korea's state-run news agency claimed the country invited international journalists to observe as it blew up the Punggye-ri site. Although journalists documented the explosion, experts were not invited to observe and assess whether the site was permanently disabled.

US announces ban on Russian oil imports

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden announced Tuesday that the United States will ban all Russian oil imports, toughening the toll on Russia's economy in retaliation for its invasion of Ukraine, but he acknowledged it will bring costs to Americans, particularly at the gas pump.

The action follows pleas by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to U.S. and Western officials to cut off the imports, which had been a glaring omission in the massive sanctions put in place on Russia over the invasion. Energy exports have kept a steady stream of cash flowing to Russia despite otherwise severe restrictions on its financial sector.

"We will not be part of subsidizing Putin's war," Biden declared, calling the new action a

"powerful blow" against Russia's ability to fund the ongoing offensive.

He warned that Americans will see rising prices, saying, "Defending freedom is going to cost."

Biden said the U.S. was acting in close consultation with European allies, who are more dependent on Russian energy supplies. The European Union this week will commit to phasing out its reliance on Russia for energy needs as soon as possible, but filling the void without crippling EU economies will likely take some time.

Unlike the U.S., which is a major oil and gas producer, Europe relies on imports for 90% of its gas and 97% of its oil products. Russia supplies 40% of Europe's gas and a quarter of its oil. The U.S. does

not import Russian natural gas.

The issue of oil sanctions has created a conflict for the president between political interests at home and efforts to impose costs on Russia. Though Russian oil makes up only a small part of U.S. imports, Biden has said he was reluctant to ban it, cutting into supplies here and pushing gasoline prices higher.

Inflation is at a 40-year peak, fueled in large part by gas prices, and that could hurt Biden heading into the November midterm elections. He said two weeks ago that he wanted "to limit the pain the American people are feeling at the gas pump."

Gas prices have been rising for weeks due to the conflict and in anticipation of potential sanctions on the Russian energy sector.

The average price for a gallon of gasoline in the U.S. hit a record \$4.17 Tuesday, rising by 10 cents in one day, and up 55 cents since last week, according to auto club AAA.

Biden said it was understandable that prices were rising, but cautioned the U.S. energy industry against "excessive price increases" and exploiting consumers.

Even before the U.S. ban, many Western energy companies including ExxonMobil and BP moved to cut ties with Russia and limit imports.

Shell, which purchased a shipment of Russian oil this weekend, apologized for the move on Tuesday amid international criticism and pledged to halt further purchases of Russian energy supplies.

Russia space chief, ex-astronaut trade Twitter jabs

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

A former American astronaut and the head of Russia's space agency have been fighting a bilingual battle in cyberspace over the war in Ukraine.

Former NASA astronaut and Navy Capt. Scott Kelly started slugging it out last week on Twitter with Dmitry Rogozin, head of Roscosmos, the state corporation in charge of Russia's space program.

Rogozin, a former Russian deputy prime minister and ambassador to NATO, on March 3 tweeted a video of workers covering up the flags of the United States, Japan and other nations on a Soyuz rock-

et at Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

"The launchers at Baikonur decided that without the flags of some countries, our rocket would look more beautiful," Rogozin tweeted in Russian.

In response on Sunday, Kelly tweeted, also in Russian: "Without those flags and the foreign exchange they bring in, your space program won't be worth a damn. Maybe you can find a job at McDonald's if McDonald's still exists in Russia."

That set off a volley of tweets between the pair, with Kelly calling Rogozin a child and the Russian describing the former astronaut as "defiant and destruc-

tive." Rogozin eventually blocked the ex-astronaut on the platform.

On Monday, Kelly shared a screenshot of a deleted tweet in which Rogozin wrote in English: "Get off, you moron! Otherwise the death of the [International Space Station] will be on your conscience."

In the post-Cold War era, the U.S. and Russia cooperated to build and operate the space station. For several years, after NASA retired its space shuttles, Russian rockets alone carried American astronauts to space.

Sanctions imposed on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine, however, have raised questions about future cooperation.

Biden turns to Supreme Court in Navy vaccine case

Bloomberg

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden's administration asked the U.S. Supreme Court to intervene on an emergency basis in a clash with 35 Navy special operations forces who are refusing on religious grounds to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

The Defense Department is

seeking to partially block a federal judge's order requiring the Navy to deploy the sailors without regard to their unvaccinated status.

"A SEAL who falls ill not only cannot complete his or her own mission, but risks infecting others as well, particularly in close quarters, including on submarines," Solicitor General Elizabeth Pre-

logar argued in court papers, filed Monday. "The Navy has a compelling interest in avoiding those foreseeable risks, especially given the transmissibility and virulence of COVID-19."

In his Jan. 3 order, U.S. District Judge Reed O'Connor of Texas also prohibited the Navy from enforcing its vaccine mandate

against the group, but the administration isn't asking the Supreme Court to immediately lift that part of the order while the litigation goes forward.

Justice Samuel Alito, who handles emergency requests from Texas, asked the group to respond to the administration's request by March 14.

High court rejects GOP redistricting plans

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a victory for Democrats, the Supreme Court has turned away efforts from Republicans in North Carolina and Pennsylvania to block state court-ordered congressional districting plans.

In separate orders late Monday, the justices are allowing maps selected by each state's Supreme Court to be in effect for the 2022 elections. Those maps are more favorable to Democrats than the ones drawn by the states' legislatures.

In North Carolina, the map will most likely give Democrats an additional seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2023.

The Pennsylvania map will also likely lead to the election of more Democrats, the Republicans have said, as the two parties battle for control of the House in the midterm elections

in November.

The justices provided no explanation for their actions, as is common in emergency applications on what is known as the "shadow docket."

While the high court did not stop the state court-ordered plans from being used in this year's elections, four conservative justices indicated they want it to confront the issue that could dramatically limit the power of state courts over federal elections in the future. The Republicans argued that state courts lack the authority to second-guess legislatures' decisions about the conduct of elections for Congress and the presidency.

"We will have to resolve this question sooner or later, and the sooner we do so, the better. This case presented a good opportunity to consider the issue, but unfortunately the court has

again found the occasion inopportune," Justice Samuel Alito wrote in a dissent from the Supreme Court's order, joined by Justices Neil Gorsuch and Clarence Thomas.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh made a similar point, but said he didn't want to interfere in this year's electoral process, which already is underway. The filing deadline in North Carolina was Friday.

The state courts were involved because of partisan wrangling and lawsuits over congressional redistricting in both states, where the legislatures are controlled by Republicans, the governors are Democrats and the state Supreme Courts have Democratic majorities.

In Pennsylvania, Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf vetoed the plan the Republican-controlled Legislature approved, saying it was

the result of a "partisan political process." The state, with a delegation of nine Democrats and nine Republicans, is losing a seat in the House following the 2020 Census.

Republicans said the map they came up with would elect nine Democrats and eight Republicans. State courts eventually stepped in and approved a map that will probably elect 10 Democrats, the GOP argued.

North Carolina is picking up a seat in the House because of population gains. Republican majorities in the Legislature produced an initial plan most likely to result in 10 seats for Republicans and four for Democrats. The governor does not have veto power over redistricting plans in North Carolina.

After Democrats sued, the state's high court selected a map that will likely elect at least six Democrats.

Joro spiders could spread to much of US East Coast

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Researchers say a large spider native to East Asia that proliferated in Georgia last year could spread to much of the East Coast.

The Joro spider's golden web took over yards all over north Georgia in 2021, unnerving some residents. The spider was also spotted in South Carolina, and entomologists expected it to spread throughout the Southeast.

A new study suggests it could spread even farther than that. The Joro appears better suited to colder temperatures than a related species, researchers at the University of Georgia said in a paper published last month.

It has about double the metabolism, a 77% higher heart rate and can survive a brief freeze that kills off its relatives, the study found.

The researchers also noted that Joros are found in much of Japan, which has a similar climate to the United States.

"Just by looking at that, it looks like the Joros could probably survive throughout most of the Eastern seaboard here, which is pretty sobering," study co-author Andy Davis said in a statement.

The Joro — *Trichonephila clavata* — is part of a group of spiders known as orb weavers for their highly organized, wheel-shaped webs. Joro females have colorful yellow, blue and red markings on their bodies and can measure three inches across when their legs are fully extended.

Their impact on native species and the environment is also not clear, though some researchers believe they are benign.

Alleged '20th hijacker' freed from Gitmo after 2 decades

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Saudi prisoner at the Guantanamo Bay detention center who was suspected of trying to join the 9/11 hijackers has been sent back to his home country for treatment for mental illness, the Department of Defense said Monday.

Mohammad Ahmad al-Qahtani was flown back to Saudi Arabia, to a treatment facility, from the U.S. base in Cuba after a review board including military and intelligence officials concluded he could be safely released after 20 years in custody.

The 46-year-old prisoner has suffered from mental illness, including schizophrenia, since childhood, according to medical examinations and records obtained by his lawyers. The United States dropped plans to try him after a Bush administration legal official concluded he had

been tortured at Guantanamo.

With his release, there are now 38 prisoners left at the detention center. He is the second released under President Joe Biden, who has said he intends to close the facility.

"The United States appreciates the willingness of Saudi Arabia and other partners to support ongoing U.S. efforts toward a deliberate and thorough process focused on responsibly reducing the detainee population and ultimately closing of the Guantanamo Bay facility," the Department of Defense said in a statement announcing the repatriation of al-Qahtani.

Only half the men held there have been cleared for release, however, and no decision has been made about what to do with the rest, including those who still face trial by military commission.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

'The Batman' screening sees real bat in theater

TX AUSTIN — Moviegoers in Austin, Texas, got to see more than one type of bat during a screening of "The Batman" this weekend.

An actual bat was spotted swooping around inside the theater, putting the movie on pause while management called animal control and tried — unsuccessfully — to get the critter out, KXAN reported.

Guests were offered their money back, but most chose to stick it out and watch the film "bat and all," according to one moviegoer.

The Moviehouse & Eatery by Cinépolis said the bat was likely released into the theater as a prank.

Maki, lemur stolen from zoo, dies at 22

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Maki, a ring-tailed lemur who made headlines when he was stolen from the San Francisco Zoo & Gardens in 2020 and then found and returned, has died at the age of 22, the zoo announced.

Maki died after suffering from acute kidney disease and advanced age, the zoo said in a statement. He was among the zoo's oldest lemurs. The median life expectancy of a ring-tailed lemur is around 16 years.

"The fact that Maki survived his ordeal to thrive among his group for more than a year and a half is truly remarkable," said Tanya M. Peterson, CEO and executive director of San Francisco Zoological Society.

In October 2020, a thief broke through a locked door leading to

the lemur enclosure and took the aged, arthritic animal. A day later, a 5-year-old boy spotted Maki in the parking lot of a church preschool in Daly City, about 5 miles from the zoo.

A suspect was arrested and charged with violating the Endangered Species Act.

Mystery dust sparks worry among fishermen

MS GULFPORT — Charter fishing captains and others along the south Mississippi coast said a mysterious black dust has circulated in the air and water near the Gulfport Harbor.

The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality is investigating, The Sun Herald reported.

"Everybody started talking about it. Everybody thought it was something different," said Brian Ware, captain of Fish Assassin Saltwater Charters.

Some worry it could be harmful, though they don't know for sure what it is. Boats have been covered in a fine black dust, staining the sides of their vessels, the newspaper reported. The particles have also drifted onto the water in the harbor.

Airport 'serial stowaway' pleads guilty, sentenced

IL CHICAGO — A 70-year-old woman with a history of slipping past security at airports and sneaking onto flights was sentenced to more than three years in prison for trespassing at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport in 2019.

After Marilyn Hartman pleaded guilty to felony counts of criminal trespass and escape

from electronic monitoring, Cook County Judge Peggy Chiampas sentenced her to 18 months for the trespassing charge and two years for the escape charge.

The hearing marks the latest chapter in a yearslong odyssey of a woman dubbed the "serial stowaway" who has sneaked into airports in Chicago, Hawaii, San Francisco, Florida and elsewhere and tried — sometimes successfully — to board passenger jets without a ticket.

Lottery winner indicted for false claim to \$191K

AZ PHOENIX — A woman who won the Arizona Lottery has been indicted of falsely claiming that she was entitled to some \$191,100 in prize money, even though she worked at the gas station where she bought the ticket.

The Arizona Attorney General's office said the State Grand Jury charged Barbara Kay White, 50, of Casa Grande, Ariz., with one count of theft, one count of fraudulent schemes and practices.

The indictment said White was not eligible to receive prizes from the lottery because she worked at a lottery retailer in Casa Grande, a community east of Phoenix. She allegedly checked a box declaring she was not a lottery retailer or an employee of a lottery retailer when she picked up the cash prize June 20, 2020.

Paul Revere bell returns home after long journey

MA BOSTON — A bronze bell cast in 1834 in Paul Revere's Massachusetts foundry is coming home —

capping a nearly two-century, cross-country odyssey that saw it hauled by oxcart to churches in Ohio before languishing for decades in a California garage.

After a weeklong journey across the United States, the historic bell is being returned to the site where it was created 188 years ago, said Kiley Nichols, a spokesperson for the Paul Revere Heritage Site in Canton, just south of Boston.

The museum said that the 1,000-pound bell was made by the Revolutionary War patriot's son, Joseph Warren Revere, who took over his father's foundry in 1804.

Police in Canton planned to ceremonially escort the truck carrying the bell to the Paul Revere Heritage Site, a sprawling 9-acre facility that preserves Revere's legacy.

Man rescued from water after accident on bridge

LA PLAQUEMINE — One person was rescued from Atchafalaya River Basin waters in south Louisiana after an accident on an Interstate 10 bridge in Iberville Parish.

Maj. Monty Migliacio of the Iberville Parish Sheriff's Office told Louisiana news outlets that the man was in the water for a little over 20 minutes before a fishing boat rescued him from waters beneath the span.

Early reports indicate a car had stalled on the interstate and was on the shoulder when another vehicle rammed it. The impact sent the man over the side of the bridge and into the water. It was not immediately clear whether he was in the car when the accident happened.

— From wire reports

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Jean-Baptiste big 3 in OT seals bid for Chattanooga

Associated Press

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — David Jean-Baptiste dribbled into the frontcourt and launched a long, game-winning three-pointer over three defenders to lift Chattanooga to a 64-63 overtime victory over Furman in the Southern Conference championship game Monday night, claiming the conference's automatic berth into the NCAA Tournament.

Mike Bothwell put the Paladins in front 63-61 with a layup with 4.3 seconds left. The Mocs opted not to call a timeout and Jean-Baptiste took the inbounds pass, wove his way through defenders and across the mid-court line and launched a pull-up shot that ripped cleanly through the net.

Bothwell scored 11 consecutive points, including a step-back three-pointer with four seconds left in regulation that forced the extra period and a three-point play to start overtime. His jumper with 2:30 left in extra time put Furman up 56-53.

Jean-Baptiste tied the game with a three, but Alex Hunter answered with a three to put Furman back in front with 1:41 to go.

Darius Banks drove for a contested layup for Chattanooga, but the Paladins' Jalen Slawson was called for blocking and had to

leave the game with a suspected head injury while Banks hit both free throws.

Bothwell drove to the basket and dished to Garrett Hien for an open layup to put Furman up by three. A.J. Caldwell knocked down a three to get the Mocs even at 61-61 with 27 seconds left before Bothwell scored his go-ahead layup.

Silvio De Sousa scored 17 points and grabbed 14 rebounds to lead Chattanooga (27-7, 14-4). Jean-Baptiste hit three three-pointers — two in overtime — to finish with 13 points and Malachi Smith added 12 points, eight rebounds and four assists.

Bothwell finished with 24 points to lead the Paladins (22-12, 12-6). Hunter added 12 points on four three-pointers.

The Southern Conference has never sent two teams to the NCAA Tournament.

"Not sure what to say after that one. These are the days where I'm always going to look back and remember why I love doing my job. What an awesome game," said head coach Lamont Paris. "We had good movement and Malachi was moving downhill with a purpose. What a big time pass from him. Creating and delivering for A.J. to hit that shot, that was such a big time play from Malachi."

Georgia State beats Louisiana, claims Sun Belt's automatic bid

Associated Press

PENSACOLA, Fla. — Corey Allen scored 29 points as third-seeded Georgia State won the Sun Belt Conference tournament for the fourth time in eight years, beating Louisiana 80-71 on Monday night.

Eliel Nsoseme had 12 points and 13 rebounds for the Panthers. Jalen Thomas scored 12 points and Kane Williams added 10. Georgia State has won 10 consecutive games and 12 of its past 13.

After the Panthers' comfortable lead was cut to three at 55-52 with 7:28 remaining, Nsoseme converted a three-point play, Allen made two free throws followed by a three-pointer and Georgia State wrapped up an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament.

The Ragin' Cajuns sent Georgia State to the free-throw line on seven consecutive possessions beginning at the 2:15 mark and

the Panthers made the last 12 of 13 attempts in that stretch. Georgia State made 22 of 24 free throws in the game.

Jordan Brown had 24 points and eight rebounds for eighth-seeded Louisiana. Greg Williams Jr. scored 15 points and Jalen Dalcourt 10. The Ragin' Cajuns defeated No. 9 UT Arlington, No. 1 Texas State and No. 4 Troy to reach the championship game. Louisiana is the first team seeded eighth or lower to reach the Sun Belt championship game.

Georgia State built a 21-12 lead with 11:48 remaining in the first half and led by 7-11 points for nearly all of the next 22 minutes of play. Georgia State led 42-33 at halftime, and while neither team managed to shoot as much as 35% in the first 12 minutes of the second half, Louisiana went on a 6-0 run to draw within three before Georgia State pulled away.

No. 1 Gonzaga, St. Mary's set up a title showdown

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Gonzaga looked unstoppable for nearly 35 minutes, its free-flowing offense creating open shots, its defense smothering San Francisco at every turn.

The final five minutes turned into a grind as the Dons ratcheted up the intensity.

The Zags are headed back to the West Coast Conference tournament title game, but it got much tougher than they expected after building a massive lead.

Gonzaga will face St. Mary's in the tournament title game for the fifth time in seven years.

Drew Timme scored 27 points, Chet Holmgren added 17, and the top-ranked Zags reached the WCC championship game for the 25th straight year by holding off San Francisco 81-71 Monday night.

"It's just what we do — that's Zag basketball," Timme said. "We just kind of got away from it and got back to doing what we do best."

Gonzaga (25-3) worked the ball into the paint early and often, pushing around the smaller Dons while racing to a 24-point second-half lead. San Francisco (24-9) mounted a late comeback, pulling within eight while holding the Zags without a field goal for the final 5:33.

Gonzaga made four free throws down the stretch to win its 14th straight opening WCC tournament game. Andrew Nembhard had 17 points and nine assists while leading the offense. Holmgren had seven rebounds and blocked six shots.

St. Mary's 75, Santa Clara 72: Tommy Kuhse scored 27 points, Logan Johnson hit two free throws with 3.6 seconds left after blocking a shot and the Gaels held off a late rally to beat the Broncos.

St. Mary's (25-6) shut down one of the nation's best-shooting teams for most of the night, building a 15-point lead.

Santa Clara (21-11) came charging back, pulling within 73-71 on Keshawn Justice's three-pointer with 42 seconds left, and got the ball back after Jalen Williams blocked Kuhse's layup attempt.

Williams then drove the lane in an attempt to give the Broncos the lead, but was blocked by Johnson. Williams' three-point attempt at the buzzer hit the side of the rim.

Justice and Josip Vrankic led Santa Clara with 17 points each.

Rodgers reportedly agrees to stay put

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Aaron Rodgers is planning to come back to the Green Bay Packers for an 18th season, a move that keeps the reigning MVP off the trade market and answers the question that had dominated NFL offseason discussions.

NFL Network and Pat McAfee, the host of “The Pat McAfee Show” on SiriusXM and YouTube, both reported that Rodgers is returning to the Packers next season. Rodgers makes a weekly appearance on McAfee’s show during the season.

NFL Network reported that Rodgers, 38, had agreed to a four-year, \$200 million contract that includes \$153 million in guaranteed money. McAfee disputed those num-

bers and said that “the contract has not been done,” but added that Rodgers has agreed to return to the Packers.

Rodgers’ decision comes nearly a month after he won his second straight MVP award. The four-time MVP quarterback has spent his entire career in Green Bay.

He said he wanted to make an announcement on his future before the start of the free agency period that begins next week. The reports of his decision surfaced the same day the Packers face a deadline whether to give All-Pro receiver Davante Adams a franchise tag.

Rodgers wanted to avoid a repeat of 2021, when his status was uncertain until the start of training camp after he skipped Green

Bay’s mandatory minicamp.

The questions about his future stemmed from Rodgers’ disagreements with team management at the time. Rodgers said on multiple occasions over the last few months that his relationship with team officials had improved significantly.

Rodgers’ plans had been the subject of much speculation ever since the Packers traded up four spots to take Utah State quarterback Jordan Love with the 26th overall pick in the 2020 draft. After referring to his future as a “beautiful mystery” late in the 2020 season, Rodgers skipped Green Bay’s organized team activities and mandatory minicamp in a standoff with team management.

Matthews scores 40th in Leafs’ win

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Auston Matthews became the first player to score 40 goals this season, Petr Mrazek made 31 saves and the Toronto Maple Leafs held off the Columbus Blue Jackets 5-4 on Monday night.

Matthews and linemates Mitch Marner and Michael Bunting each had a goal and an assist, and Ilya Mikheyev and Alexander Kerfoot also scored as Toronto snapped a two-game losing streak. T.J. Brodie had two assists.

The Maple Leafs jumped out to a 3-0 lead in a dominant first period. Columbus had tied it by early in the third period, but couldn’t get a go-ahead tally.

“I think just the start that we had was really positive, (then) letting them back in the game, but I thought just our bench and our team as a whole just stayed poised and confident,” Matthews said. “And we just kept playing and scored a couple big goals to give ourselves a lead.”

Elvis Merzlikins, starting his third game in four days for the Blue Jackets, made 28 saves, but it wasn’t enough to prevent a third straight loss for Columbus, which dropped a back-to-back over the weekend.

Panthers 6, Sabres 1: Aleksander Barkov had a goal and two assists as visiting Florida won its third straight game.

Anthony Duclair added a goal and an assist. Noel Acciari, Carter Verhaeghe, and Patric Hornqvist also scored during a four-goal second period. Former Sabres player Brandon Montour opened the scoring for the Panthers, who lead the NHL in averaging more than four goals per game. They have

outscored opponents 15-3 during their win streak.

Mason Marchment had three assists, and Sam Reinhart one in his first game back in Buffalo following an offseason trade. Spencer Knight made 28 saves to win his first Panthers start since Feb. 1 after getting called up from the minors.

Kings 3, Bruins 2 (OT): Trevor Moore tied the game with 26 seconds left in regulation, and Andreas Athanasiou scored on a breakaway in overtime for visiting Los Angeles.

Boston never trailed in regulation, taking a 2-1 lead into the third period thanks to a goal and an assist from Craig Smith.

But with the goalie pulled in the final minute, the Kings won a faceoff in the offensive zone and Moore slid home a rebound to tie it.

Avalanche 5, Islanders 4: Cale Makar had two goals and an assist, Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and two assists, and visiting Colorado held on.

J.T. Compher and Devon Toews also scored for the Avalanche, who led 5-1 midway through the third and ran out the clock on New York’s rally. Colorado ended its first two-game skid since losing two straight in early November.

Anders Lee had two power-play goals and an assist for the Islanders.

Flames 3, Oilers 1: Tyler Toffoli had two goals to lead host Calgary past Edmonton.

Johnny Gaudreau added a goal and an assist for the Flames (34-14-7), who remained atop the Pacific Division with their 14th win in 16 games. Jacob Markstrom stopped 27 of 28 shots in front of a season-high 17,246 at the Saddledome.

Despite vitriol, MLB owners and players close gap

Associated Press

NEW YORK — For all the vitriol, Major League Baseball owners and locked-out players have closed the gap in recent weeks and are negotiating on similar frameworks for a new collective bargaining agreement.

With the lockout in its 96th day Monday, the sides remained apart to various degrees on three of the most significant items: the luxury tax, pre-arbitration bonus pool and minimum salary.

MLB told the union on Monday that Tuesday was the last possible day to reach an agreement that would allow a 162-game schedule, along with full salary and service time, a deadline first reported by The Athletic.

A late Tuesday morning bargaining session was held ahead of that deadline. Union chief negotiator Bruce Meyer and general counsel Ian Penny headed a team that left MLB’s office shortly after 11 a.m. and headed back to the players’ association, about three blocks away. Openers on March 31 were among 91 games already canceled, and Commissioner Rob Manfred appeared to be on the verge of calling off more.

“This is a horrible, horrible situation. Everyone on the Yankees, everyone in Major League Baseball shares the blame, players, owners, executives for where we are. It’s a really bad look, especially (with) what’s going on in the world,” Yankees president Randy Levine said Monday.

Popovich ties Nelson for NBA career wins record

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Gregg Popovich tied Don Nelson's NBA record with his 1,335th career victory as a coach in the San Antonio Spurs' 117-110 win over the Los Angeles Lakers on Monday night.

Popovich, in his 26th season, will try to pass Nelson when San Antonio hosts the Toronto Raptors on Wednesday night.

The Spurs had lost four straight with Popovich on the precipice of matching the record, and they were in danger of extending that skid with a late collapse against the struggling Lakers, who were without star LeBron James due to a sore left knee.

Dejounte Murray had 26 points and 10 rebounds, and Jakob Poeltl and Josh Richardson each had 18 points. Richardson was making his first start with San Antonio.

Talen Horton-Taylor had 18 points to lead Los Angeles and Russell Westbrook, Malik Monk and Carmelo Anthony added 17 points each.

Popovich has five NBA titles and is a lock for enshrinement in the NBA Hall of Fame after a career in which he's coached Spurs greats including David Robinson, Tim Duncan, Tony Parker and Manu Ginobili. Robinson sat courtside Monday, and Popovich jokingly told him to check into the game during a timeout.

This isn't the same San Antonio team from Robinson's prime. The team is 25-40, already assured of a third straight losing season after 22 consecutive finishes over .500. Monday's game nearly got away, too.

The Lakers pulled within 108-105 on Horton-Taylor's jumper with 5:40 left, and the

Spurs were scoreless for nearly four minutes before Poeltl's free throw with 37.4 seconds left. Los Angeles never got closer than three, though.

The Lakers were without James and Anthony Davis. James was a late scratch on Monday after scoring a season-high 56 points Saturday in a victory over the Golden State Warriors.

Los Angeles had lost four straight and seven of eight prior to James' highest point total with the Lakers, which matched the third-highest of his career.

Los Angeles remained in the game by cutting to the rim without the ball for open layups, drives to the basket and San Antonio's poor free-throw shooting. The Spurs were 16 for 30 on free throws, including 6 for 14 in the third quarter.

Tip-ins

Lakers: James has missed 17 games this season due to various injuries, including abdomen and ankle ailments. Los Angeles coach Frank Vogel is hopeful James will play Wednesday in Houston. ... Westbrook collected his third foul with 11:38 left in the first half. He finished with five fouls in 35 minutes.

Spurs: Devin Vassell, Lonnie Walker IV and Keita Bates-Diop all missed the game with an undisclosed illness. Popovich said it was not COVID-19 related. ... Poeltl picked up two fouls in the first 1½ minutes and spent the remainder of the first quarter on the bench.

Up Next

Lakers: At Houston on Wednesday.

Spurs: Host Toronto on Wednesday.

Jokic's triple gets Nuggets past Warriors

Associated Press

DENVER — Nikola Jokic had his second triple-double in two nights with 32 points, 15 rebounds and 13 assists, leading the Denver Nuggets to a 131-124 win over short-handed Golden State on Monday.

Jokic has recorded triple-doubles in 11 of his last 23 games, and leads the league with 18 this season. The reigning NBA MVP was coming off a 46-point, 12-rebound and 11-assist game in a 138-130 victory over New Orleans on Sunday.

Monte Morris and Jeff Green added 18 points apiece for the Nuggets.

76ers 121, Bulls 106: Joel Embiid had 43 points and 14 rebounds, as host Philadelphia beat Chicago in a showdown between two of the Eastern Conference's top teams.

Heat 123, Rockets 106: Victor Oladipo scored 11 points in his first game in nearly a year, Tyler Herro scored 21 of his 31 points in the second quarter and host Miami beat Houston.

Mavericks 111, Jazz 103: Luka Doncic had 35 points and a season-high 16 rebounds, and host Dallas held on against Utah in a matchup of possible first-round playoff foes.

Knicks 131, Kings 115: Julius Randle hit eight three-pointers and scored 17 of his career-high 46 points in the third quarter as New York rallied from a 20-point deficit to win at Sacramento.

Timberwolves 124, Trail Blazers 81: Karl-Anthony Towns had 27 points and 13 rebounds as host Minnesota routed Portland for the second time in three days.

Pistons 113, Hawks 110 (OT): Cade Cunningham had 28 points and 10 assists, lifting host Detroit over Atlanta.

FIFA allows foreign players to leave clubs in Russia

Associated Press

LONDON — FIFA intervened to allow foreign players and coaches based in Russia to leave their clubs on Monday, although only for the rest of the season.

Clubs in other countries will be allowed to sign up to two players who had been at clubs in Russia or Ukraine outside of the normal transfer window periods.

Ukraine's league has been

suspended since war engulfed the country, and its players are also allowed to temporarily leave until June 30.

FIFPRO and the organization representing the world's soccer leagues — the World Leagues Forum — sought permission for Russia-based players to terminate their contracts. But they were told by FIFA that players and coaches "will have the right

to unilaterally suspend their employment contracts with the (Football Union of) Russia-affiliated clubs in question until the end of the season in Russia," which is June 30.

Global players' union FIFPRO criticized the FIFA decision as "too timid."

"It will be hard for players to find employment for the remainder of the season with un-

certainty looming over them and, within a few weeks, they will be in a very difficult situation once again," the Netherlands-based union said in a statement.

After Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, FIFA suspended the country's teams from international soccer games last week but has yet to suspend its soccer federation or officials.