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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Tensions rise as N. Korea fires missiles

BY DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea launched several ballistic missiles off its western coast on Monday, coinciding with the start of Freedom Shield, an annual large-scale military exercise conducted by the United States and South Korea.

The missiles were fired toward the Yellow Sea at around 1:50 p.m., according to a text message sent to reporters by South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff. No further details were immediately available.

The launches mark North Korea's first ballistic missile test in nearly two months. In January, the regime fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles that traveled roughly 155 miles be-

fore landing in the Sea of Japan, or East Sea. On Feb. 26, it launched several cruise missiles that flew approximately 990 miles in a circular flight pattern off its coast.

Pyongyang has framed its missile tests as a response to joint military drills between the U.S. and South Korea, which it views as a provocation. On Sunday, North Korea's Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning Freedom Shield and warning that the exercise would spur the "radical growth" of its nuclear arsenal.

The ministry, through the state-run Korean Central News Agency, described Freedom Shield as an "aggressive and confrontational war rehearsal."

"All the facts go to clearly show the multi-domain and all-

round offensive nature of Freedom Shield," the statement said. "Obviously, the U.S. intends to push the situation in the Korean Peninsula and the region to an uncontrollable phase."

The ministry warned that the exercise would "inevitably lead to a serious strategic misjudgment" and prompt "the radical growth of the nuclear force."

The statement came a day after KCNA reported that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspected a nuclear-powered submarine under construction at an undisclosed location. The vessel, if completed, would represent a significant step for a navy that has traditionally relied on diesel-powered submarines.

"We should ensure that incomparably threatening warships fulfill their mission as ... a

nuclear power, capable of containing the inveterate 'gunboat diplomacy' of the hostile forces," KCNA said.

The U.S. and South Korean militaries have repeatedly described Freedom Shield as defensive drills designed to reinforce their security posture. It is the first of two major exercises held annually on the Korean Peninsula, with the second, Ulchi Freedom Shield, scheduled for August.

Roughly 19,000 South Korean troops will participate in Freedom Shield on land, air and sea, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. U.S. Forces Korea, which oversees 28,500 American service members in the country, does not disclose its troop participation numbers, citing operational security.

US says it will stay involved in Europe amid exit claims

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — NATO continues to prepare for military exercises involving the United States this year and beyond, the alliance said in response to recent media reports that the U.S. was preparing to withdraw from such drills.

U.S. Army Col. Martin O'Donnell, spokesman for Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, said NATO continues to "plan and execute exercises" with all 32 member states.

The exercises "increase our collective readiness to deter potential threats against the Euro-Atlantic, and defend its one billion inhabitants," O'Donnell said in a statement Sunday.

The comments came following a report Friday by Sweden's

Expressen newspaper that allies were notified the U.S. would no longer take part in the planning of NATO military exercises in Europe after 2025.

The newspaper, citing unnamed Swedish sources, said the move was related to the U.S. intention to focus more on military activities in the Asia-Pacific region.

While U.S. officials have said planning for U.S. involvement in NATO exercises continues, there has been more focus on having European allies play a bigger role.

"These exercises include U.S. forces, but also see more and more European forces training solely with other European forces like during last month's Steadfast Dart (exercise)," he said.

Questions about the future shape of NATO drills comes amid broader uncertainty about the role of the U.S. military in Europe.

Allies have speculated that President Donald Trump intends to make significant cuts to the size of the American force on the Continent.

While the Defense Department has said there are no immediate plans for a drawdown, questions have swirled in European defense circles about what the Pentagon's priorities — namely, border security and deterring China — will mean.

In January, Italian media, citing diplomatic sources, reported that the U.S. plans to cut 20,000 troops in Europe.

Meanwhile, Britain's Telegraph newspaper, also citing un-

named officials, reported Friday that Trump is considering pulling some 35,000 troops out of Germany.

The uncertain situation has stoked fears among European leaders that the U.S. may no longer be committed to ensuring security in Europe, where the U.S., by its own design, has played a leading military role since the end of World War II.

Germany's expected next chancellor, Friedrich Merz, said last month that Europe must prepare to achieve security independence from the U.S. as quickly as possible.

Merz has also said Germany must consider nuclear weapons protection agreements with France and the United Kingdom should the U.S. pull back in Europe.

Marines roll up sleeves as spring arrives

BY AARON KIDD
Stars and Stripes

The arrival of spring in the Marine Corps is not measured by cherry blossoms or rising temperatures alone. It's marked by the annual rolling of uniform sleeves, a ritual as predictable as the Cyber Awareness Challenge.

On Sunday — as daylight saving time took effect in the U.S. — Marines around the world folded back the sleeves of their combat utility uniforms, signaling the transition to warmer months.

The tradition, long ingrained

in the Corps' culture, is a shift that separates the service from its sister branches, which keep their sleeves down year-round. The change applies only to Marines in garrison environments; those in operational or deployed settings continue to wear sleeves down for protection.

The ritual, however, does not always proceed on schedule. Last year, Marines stationed in Japan and South Korea were granted a reprieve when an unseasonably cold spring delayed the transition for several weeks. This year, the practice has resumed as planned.

A stop-motion video posted Saturday on Marine Corps Installations Pacific's Facebook page humorously reminded Marines of the importance of the practice. The video shows a lance corporal dozing off as his blouse autonomously removes itself from a hanger and rolls up its sleeves. "Sleeves up doesn't happen by magic — put in the work," the post read. "Roll 'em tight, look sharp."

Despite its seemingly simple nature, the process of rolling sleeves is governed by strict standards. Folds must be crisp and even, with the camouflage

pattern properly aligned. Achieving the perfect roll is often a matter of pride and practice.

Rolling sleeves up and down has been a part of Marine life for decades, with one notable interruption. In 2011, then-Commandant Gen. James Amos ordered sleeves to remain down throughout the year, citing uniformity and protection from the elements. The decision was met with widespread resistance from Marines who viewed the sleeve roll as a symbol of tradition. The policy was reversed in 2014.

Marines expand F-35B presence in Japan

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A third Marine Corps squadron of F-35B Lightning II fighters arrived in Japan over the weekend, marking the latest step in the service's efforts to modernize its deployed forces in the Indo-Pacific.

The squadron — Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 214, also known as the Black Sheep — arrived Friday from Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., according to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. The deployment is

the first rotational assignment for the F-35B under the Marines' Unit Deployment Program, which cycles units through the region to bolster readiness.

The aircraft will temporarily support flight operations at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni under Marine Aircraft Group 12, the wing said in a statement Monday. The group includes two permanently based Marine F-35B squadrons, an aerial refueling squadron and logistics and support squadrons.

"Our focus during this deployment is threefold," Lt. Col. Robert Guyette, the squadron's commander, said in the release. "To seamlessly integrate within Marine forces, joint forces, and regional allies and improve warfighting readiness as a combined force, refine our ability to operate from austere locations, and align with key Marine Corps concepts like Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations to maximize survivability and airpower projection."

Expeditionary Advanced

Base Operations emphasize mobility, allowing forces to disperse to smaller, harder-to-target locations. The strategy has become central to Marine Corps planning as the Pentagon seeks to counter China's growing military presence in the region.

"The F-35B's ability to operate from austere locations, integrate with joint networks, and provide enhanced battlespace awareness makes it a force multiplier," Col. Kyle Shoop, commander of Marine Aircraft Group 12, said in the release.

Court-martial begins for Air National Guard leaker

Associated Press

BEDFORD, Mass. — A court-martial convened on Monday for Massachusetts Air National Guard member Jack Teixeira, who was sentenced in federal court last year to 15 years in prison for leaking highly classified military documents after the most consequential national security breach in years.

Teixeira, 22, pleaded guilty

last year to six counts of willful retention and transmission of national defense information under the Espionage Act. He faces additional military charges of disobeying orders and obstructing justice in the court-martial, held at Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts.

His lawyer argued for dismissal of the obstructing justice

charge. Lt. Col. Bradley Poronksy said that it would amount to double jeopardy because it already came up at Teixeira's November sentencing.

Military prosecutors said the court-martial is appropriate given that obeying orders is the "absolute core" of the military.

The judge took the matter under advisement and postponed the proceeding until Thursday.

The leaks exposed to the world unvarnished secret assessments of Russia's war in Ukraine, including information about troop movements in Ukraine and the provision of supplies and equipment to Ukrainian troops. Teixeira also admitted posting information about a U.S. adversary's plans to harm U.S. forces serving overseas.

USAID purge done; State to run what's left

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Monday the Trump administration had finished its six-week purge of programs of the six-decade-old U.S. Agency for International Development, and said he would move the 18% of aid and development programs that survived under the State Department.

Rubio made the announcement in a post on X. It marked one of his relatively few public comments on what has been a historic shift away from U.S. foreign aid and development, executed by Trump political appointees at State and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency teams.

Rubio in the post thanked DOGE and "our hardworking staff who worked very long hours to achieve this overdue and his-

toric reform" in foreign aid.

President Donald Trump on Jan. 20 issued an executive order directing a freeze of foreign assistance funding and a review of all of the tens of billions of dollars of U.S. aid and development work abroad. Trump charged that much of foreign assistance was wasteful and advanced a liberal agenda.

Rubio's social media post Monday said that review was now "officially ending," with some 5,200 of USAID's 6,200 programs eliminated. Those programs "spent tens of billions of dollars in ways that did not serve, (and in some cases even harmed), the core national interests of the United States," Rubio wrote.

"In consultation with Congress, we intend for the remaining 18% of programs we are keeping ... to be administered more ef-

fectively under the State Department," he said. Democratic lawmakers and others call the shutdown of congressionally-funded programs illegal.

The State Department in one of multiple lawsuits it is battling over its rapid shutdown of USAID had said earlier this month it was killing more than 90% of USAID programs. Rubio gave no explanation for why his number was lower, and no details of what programs were spared or how the State Department would run them.

In the weeks after Trump's order, one of his appointees and transition team members, Pete Marocco, and Musk pulled USAID staff around the world off the job through forced leaves and firings, shut down USAID payments overnight and terminated aid and development contracts by

the thousands.

Contractors and staffers running efforts ranging from epidemic control to famine prevention to job and democracy training stopped work. Aid groups and other USAID partners laid off tens of thousands of their workers in the U.S. and abroad.

Lawsuits brought by some of the nonprofit groups and businesses that had partnered with USAID say the form-letter contract terminations purge eliminated even programs that Rubio had said he wanted to save, violated the contract terms and stiffered aid groups and businesses of billions of dollars.

The shutdown has left many USAID staffers and contractors and their families still overseas, many of them awaiting U.S.-paid back payments and travel expenses back home.

HHS makes buyout offer to most of its workers

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Most of the 80,000 federal workers responsible for researching diseases, inspecting food and administering Medicare and Medicaid under the auspices of the Health and Human Services Department were emailed an offer to leave their job for as much as a \$25,000 payment as part of President Donald Trump's government cuts.

Workers cannot start opting in until Monday and have until 5 p.m. on Friday to submit a response for the so-called voluntary separation offer. The email was sent to staff across the department, which includes the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, and the National Institutes of Health as well as the Food and Drug Administration, both in Maryland.

The mass email went out to a "broad population of HHS employees," landing in their inboxes days before agency heads are due

to offer plans for shrinking their workforces. HHS is one of the government's costliest federal agencies, with an annual budget of about \$1.7 trillion that is mostly spent on health care coverage.

The agency oversees health insurance for roughly half the country through Medicare for older adults and Medicaid for disabled and poor Americans.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Trump's health secretary, has hinted at plans at deep cuts to the staff. Last year, he promised to immediately clear out 600 employees at the NIH, the nation's biomedical research arm. He has not gone that far, but in an interview last month shortly after being sworn in, Kennedy said he wanted to remove some workers from the public health agencies.

"I have a list in my head," Kennedy said of potential firings at the agency. He said some workers "made really bad decisions" on nutrition guidelines.

Immigration agents arrest Palestinian activist in NYC

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Federal immigration authorities arrested a Palestinian activist Saturday who played a prominent role in Columbia University's protests against Israel, a significant escalation in the Trump administration's pledge to detain and deport student activists.

Mahmoud Khalil, a graduate student at Columbia until this past December, was inside his university-owned apartment Saturday night when several Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents entered and took him into custody, his attorney, Amy Greer, told The Associated Press.

Greer said she spoke by phone with one of the ICE agents during the arrest, who said they were acting on State Department orders to revoke Khalil's student visa. Informed by the attorney that Khalil was in the United States as a permanent resident with a green card, the agent said they were re-

voking that instead, according to the lawyer.

A Department of Homeland Security spokesperson confirmed the arrest in a statement Sunday, describing it as "in support of President Trump's executive orders prohibiting anti-Semitism." Khalil's arrest is the first publicly known deportation effort under Trump's promised crackdown on students who joined protests against the war in Gaza. The administration has claimed participants forfeited their rights to remain in the country by supporting Hamas.

As ICE agents arrived at Khalil's Manhattan residence Saturday night, they also threatened to arrest Khalil's wife, an American citizen who is eight months pregnant, Greer said.

Khalil is currently being held in an immigration detention center in Louisiana, according to ICE's online detainee database, which lists his birthplace as Syria.

Talks on new Ukraine security force set

Associated Press

PARIS — Military officials from more than 30 nations will take part in Paris talks on the creation of an international security force for Ukraine, a French military official said Monday.

Such an international force would aim to dissuade Russia from launching another offensive after any ceasefire in Ukraine comes into effect.

The long list of participants in Tuesday's discussions will also include Asian and Oceania nations that will join remotely, the French official said. The international makeup of the meeting offers an indication of how broadly France and Britain — which are working together on plans for the force — are casting their net as they aim to build what the French

official described as a coalition of nations "able and willing" to be part of an effort to safeguard Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire.

The French military official spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the blueprint for the force that is shrouded in secrecy and the Paris talks that will consider it.

The force being envisaged by France and Britain would aim to reassure Ukraine and deter another large-scale Russian offensive after any ceasefire, the official said. It could include heavy weaponry and weapons stockpiles that could be rushed within hours or days to aid in Ukraine's defense in the event of a Russian attack that shatters any truce, the official said.

The French-British blueprint

will be presented to military officials from more than 30 nations in the first part of Tuesday's talks, the official said.

The talks' second part will include "more precise and concrete" discussions where the participants will be invited to say whether and how their militaries might be able to contribute, the official said.

"It's not, 'This is what we need,'" the official said. "It's more, 'What are you bringing to the pot?'"

The official stressed, however, that the ultimate decision on whether nations take part in the force would be taken at a political level, by government leaders.

Army chiefs or their representatives from nearly all of the 32 nations of the NATO military alliance will attend the Pa-

ris talks — with the notable exception being the United States.

The official said the United States wasn't invited because European nations want to demonstrate that they can take responsibility for a large part of the post-ceasefire security framework for Ukraine.

Also attending will be the chiefs of staff of Ireland and Cyprus and a representative from Austria — all nations that are not NATO members but are in the European Union.

Australia and New Zealand, which are Commonwealth nations, as well as Japan and South Korea, will listen into the talks remotely, the official said.

Ukraine will be represented by a military official who is also a member of the country's security and defense council.

Iran says it's open to talks on militarization of nukes

Associated Press

Iran said Sunday it would consider negotiations with the United States if the talks were confined to concerns about the militarization of its nuclear program.

In a statement posted on X, the country's U.N. mission said: "If the objective of negotiations is to

address concerns vis-à-vis any potential militarization of Iran's nuclear program, such discussions may be subject to consideration."

A day earlier, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei had rejected talks with the U.S., because he said they would be aimed at im-

posing restrictions on Iran's missile program and its influence in the region.

Khamenei's remarks came a day after President Donald Trump acknowledged sending a letter to him seeking a new deal with Tehran to restrain its rapidly advancing nuclear program and

replace the nuclear deal he withdrew America from during his first term in office.

Khamenei said U.S. demands would be both military and related to the regional influence of Iran. He said such talks would not solve problems between Iran and the West.

Noem names new ICE leaders, moves to ID leakers

Associated Press

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem on Sunday announced new leadership at the agency tasked with immigration enforcement as she also pledged to step up lie detector tests on employees to identify those who may be leaking information about operations to the media.

"The authorities that I have under the Department of Homeland Security are broad and extensive and I plan to use every single one of them to

make sure that we're following the law, that we are following the procedures in place to keep people safe and that we're making sure we're following through on what President Trump has promised," Noem told CBS' "Face the Nation."

While these polygraph exams are typically not admissible in court proceedings, they are frequently used by federal law enforcement agencies and for national security clearances.

"The Department of Homeland Security is a national se-

curity agency," DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin said in a statement. "We can, should, and will polygraph personnel."

White House officials have previously expressed frustration with the pace of deportations, blaming it in part on recent leaks revealing cities where authorities planned to conduct operations.

Noem's announcement of two new leadership appointments within the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement comes less than two months into the

Trump administration and demonstrates the importance that the administration places on carrying out the president's deportation agenda.

Todd Lyons, the former assistant director of field operations for the agency's enforcement arm, will serve as acting ICE director. Madison Sheahan, secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and Noem's former aide when she was governor of South Dakota, has been tapped to be the agency's deputy director.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Gene Hackman, wife's cause of death revealed

NM SANTA FE — Forensic experts came to a heartrending conclusion about the manner of death for actor Gene Hackman: he died of heart disease with complications from Alzheimer's disease on an empty stomach a week after a rare, rodent-borne disease took the life of his wife at their home in Santa Fe.

The partially mummified remains of Hackman, 95, and Betsy Arakawa, 65, were discovered Feb. 26 when maintenance and security workers showed up at the home and alerted police.

Authorities unraveled the mysterious circumstances and revealed that Arakawa likely died Feb. 11 at home from hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, a rare but potentially fatal disease spread by infected rodent droppings.

Hackman, in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's, apparently was unaware that his wife was dead.

"He was in a very poor state of health. He had significant heart disease, and I think ultimately that's what resulted in his death," chief medical investigator Dr. Heather Jarrell said.

Man who targeted women waiting for ride sentenced

CO DENVER — A Denver man was sentenced to 290 years to life in prison for targeting women and falsely posing as the driver of the vehicles they had requested on ride-hailing apps in order to kidnap and sexually assault them, prosecutors said.

John Pastor-Mendoza, 43,

was convicted in October of kidnapping 12 women, sexually assaulting two of them and attempting to sexually assault seven others, Denver District Attorney John Walsh said in a statement. Pastor-Mendoza was also found guilty of one count of robbery.

Investigators said that between 2018 and 2022, Pastor-Mendoza sought out seemingly intoxicated women outside clubs and bars in downtown Denver. The women told investigators that they had been waiting for the ride they had called on apps such as Lyft and Uber.

Transportation chief calls street murals unsafe

DC WASHINGTON — Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy sent a letter to D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser saying that murals and artwork on District roadways are unsafe and asked the District's Department of Transportation to identify potential areas of "roadway noncompliance" and plans for addressing them within 30 days.

In a letter that echoed remarks President Donald Trump has made about the city, Duffy said he was writing to Bowser to request "assistance in making Washington, D.C. safe and beautiful once again and restoring our pride in our Nation's Capital."

The letter was one of three Duffy sent to regional leaders: Duffy asked Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner and WMATA CEO Randy Clarke to produce reports on their efforts to reduce crime at Union Station and in the Washington Metro system, respectively. Duffy cannot dictate changes in those agencies or in D.C.'s traffic manage-

ment, but the city and the transportation agencies rely to varying degrees on federal funds.

8 hurt when driver plows vehicle into dealership

CA INGLEWOOD — Eight people were injured when a driver plowed a vehicle into a CarMax location in the Los Angeles area.

Two people were critically hurt at the dealership in Inglewood, while the other six had minor injuries, Los Angeles County Fire Department spokesperson Jonathan Torres said.

Video of the aftermath posted on social media showed a damaged SUV backing into the building, followed by an employee rushing out. The vehicle pivoted in a lobby area and drove out of the opposite end of the building.

CarMax said the driver was a customer whose vehicle had been appraised. He was later arrested.

Pilot error likely caused crash that killed family

TN NASHVILLE — A fiery small plane crash in Tennessee last year that killed a Canadian family of five was most likely the result of an error by the father, who was piloting the plane, according to a National Transportation Safety Board report released.

A yearlong investigation of the March 4, 2024, crash found no mechanical problems with the plane, although the fuel selector was between the "off" position and the left main tank position.

"This setting would starve the engine of fuel and was likely the

result of the pilot changing the fuel selector handle in preparation for landing," according to the report.

The Piper PA-32RT single-engine plane crashed within Nashville city limits alongside Interstate 40, frightening passing motorists. It burst into flames in grass just off the highway and behind a Costco on the city's westside, about 3 miles south of Nashville's John C. Tune Airport.

US headed toward hospital bed shortage

DC WASHINGTON — The United States may face a shortage of hospital beds by 2032, a recent analysis in JAMA Network Open warns.

The study found that hospital admissions have remained 11 percentage points higher since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and that an aging population and dwindling number of hospital beds because of labor shortages and hospital closures could exacerbate the problem.

Researchers used weekly hospital occupancy data collected by the Department of Health and Human Services between 2020 and 2024, when the agency required the reporting as part of coronavirus tracking.

By 2035, the researchers project, annual hospitalizations will rise from 36 million in 2025 to 40 million in 2035 because of the aging U.S. population, with a national occupancy of about 85% of available staffed adult beds.

That would constitute a shortage, the researchers write, with the "dangerous threshold" arriving as soon as 2032.

— From wire reports

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Leonard, Clippers beat Kings at OT buzzer

Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — Kawhi Leonard's hook shot at the buzzer lifted the Los Angeles Clippers over the Sacramento Kings 111-110 in overtime on Sunday night to tighten their grip on eighth place in the West.

Leonard dribbled to the top of the key with 21.6 seconds remaining and let the clock tick down before making his winning move through defenders in the lane. The ball bounced on the rim before going in. He finished with 17 points.

"Players make big-time plays and he's done it throughout his entire career," teammate James Harden said. "For him to step up and hit a game winner like that, it shows the confidence in the type of player he is."

Harden had 29 points, nine rebounds and 11 assists for the Clippers, who won their third in a row. Ivica Zubac had 22 points and 14 rebounds.

DeMar DeRozan had 31 points and 10 assists and Zach LaVine added 30 points for the ninth-place Kings. They fell to 0-3 against Los Angeles this season. Jonas Valanciunas had 17 rebounds.

Thunder 127, Nuggets 103: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 40 points and host Oklahoma City defeated Denver in a matchup between the top two teams in the Western Conference.

Gilgeous-Alexander had eight assists and made all eight of his free throws for the West-leading Thunder, who won their seventh straight game and improved to 53-11. Jalen Williams added 26 points, nine rebounds and eight assists.

Suns 125, Mavericks 116: Devin Booker scored 24 points, Kevin Durant had 21 points, nine rebounds and eight assists and visiting Phoenix beat injury-depleted Dallas.

Bradley Beal scored 19 points and Grayson Allen added 17 as the Suns pulled within 1½ games of the Mavericks for the 10th seed in the Western Conference, the final spot in the play-in tournament.

Grizzlies 107, Pelicans 104: Ja Morant scored 32 points and Desmond Bane added 30 to lead visiting Memphis past New Orleans.

Morant also had six assists and three steals for the Grizzlies, who came back from a 64-57 deficit at halftime.

Timberwolves 141, Spurs 124: Anthony Edwards scored 25 points on 10-for-15 shooting to lead host Minnesota past San Antonio for their fifth consecutive victory and highest score this season.

Naz Reid had 20 points and seven rebounds and Julius Randle added 14 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds for the Timberwolves, who never

trailed on their way to a season-best eight games above the .500 mark (37-29).

Cavaliers 112, Bucks 100: Max Strus had 17 points to lead a balanced scoring attack as NBA-leading Cleveland defeated host Milwaukee for its 14th consecutive victory.

The Bucks' Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 30 points and moved into 50th place on the NBA's career scoring list. He increased his career total to 20,077 to pass Tom Chambers, who scored 20,049 from 1981-98.

76ers 126, Jazz 122: Lonnie Walker IV and Quentin Grimes scored 25 points apiece and host Philadelphia earned a victory over Utah.

Pistons 119, Trail Blazers 112: Cade Cunningham scored 28 points, Tobias Harris added 20 points on 9-for-13 shooting and visiting Detroit defeated Portland.

Bills reportedly give Allen \$330M with new deal through 2030

Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — NFL MVP Josh Allen was rewarded Sunday with a contract extension worth \$330 million, including an NFL record \$250 million guaranteed, which makes him among the league's highest-paid players.

The Buffalo Bills announced the agreement, while two people with knowledge of the deal revealed the contract's value to The Associated Press. The people spoke on condition of anonymity because the Bills did not release that figure, which was first reported by ESPN.com.

The deal adds two years to Allen's contract and locks the 28-year-old in through the 2030 season.

Cleveland quarterback DeShaun Watson's five-year contract signed in 2022 set the previous record in featuring \$230 million in guarantees, per Spotrac.com. The total value of Allen's new contract ranks second behind Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes, who signed a 10-year, \$450 million deal in 2020.

Allen's new contract follows his seventh NFL season in which he became the third Buffalo player to earn NFL MVP, and first since running back Thurman Thomas did so in 1991.

Garrett gets record non-QB deal

Myles Garrett is staying in Cleveland after the Browns gave him a record four-year contract extension that makes the four-time All-Pro edge rusher the highest-paid non-quarterback in NFL history.

A person with knowledge of the details told The Associated Press that Garrett's deal includes \$122.8 million guaranteed, an average annual salary of \$40 million with a total value of \$204.8 million. The person spoke Sunday on condition of anonymity because Cleveland hadn't announced terms.

Garrett, the 2023 AP Defensive Player of the Year, had asked for a trade last month but the Browns were adamant about keeping the 29-year-old star in Cleveland.

Garrett, a first-round pick in 2017, had 14 sacks and 22 tackles for loss last season. He has 102½ sacks in his eight seasons with the Browns.

Rams sign Adams to 2-year deal

LOS ANGELES — Receiver Davante Adams agreed to terms on a two-year deal with the Los Angeles Rams on Sunday, bringing the three-time All-Pro back to his native California.

Adams' deal could be worth up to \$46 million with the Rams, who will move on from Super Bowl 56 MVP Cooper Kupp with Adams and Puka Nacua as the primary playmakers for Matthew Stafford.

Adams has been one of the NFL's best receivers for nearly a decade, starting with his decorated tenure with the Packers. He has six career 1,000-yard receiving seasons, including an active streak of five consecutive years, along with two 997-yard seasons.

Metcalf traded to Steelers

PITTSBURGH — The Steelers finally have their established big-play wide receiver.

The Seattle Seahawks are sending two-time Pro Bowler D.K. Metcalf to Pittsburgh for at least a second-round pick, sources with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press on Sunday night.

Metcalf had requested a trade from the Seahawks last week. His exodus comes during a tumultuous stretch for Seattle, which released Tyler Lockett — the franchise's second all-time leading receiver — last Wednesday and then dealt quarterback Geno Smith to the Las Vegas Raiders late Friday.

Caps top Kraken, Ovi gets 886th goal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Alex Ovechkin scored his 886th career goal into an empty net to seal the Washington Capitals' 4-2 victory over the Seattle Kraken on Sunday, moving nine back of breaking Wayne Gretzky's NHL record and helping the Eastern Conference leaders win their fourth game in a row.

Ovechkin backhanded the puck in from center ice with 1:31 left, sending the crowd into jubilation and chants of "Ovi! Ovi!" His 33rd goal of the season was also his 1,600th career point.

Connor McMichael scored the go-ahead goal a few minutes earlier, not long after a line brawl nearly broke out and all five skaters on each team were sent to the penalty box, where players kept jawing at each other before Washington's Brandon Duhaime was escorted to the bench and down the tunnel to the locker room for his 10-minute misconduct. The post-whistle pushing and shoving

kept flaring up and went on for some time as officials worked to keep Tom Wilson and John Hayden from fighting.

Martin Fehervary and Dylan Strome also scored and Charlie Lindgren made 30 saves for Capitals, who padded their comfortable lead atop the East and the Metropolitan Division.

Shane Wright and Jordan Eberle scored and Joey Daccord stopped 20 of the 23 shots he faced for the Kraken, who were unable to string together back-to-back wins on the weekend.

Devils 3, Flyers 1: Cody Glass scored a goal in his first game with New Jersey, helping his new team defeat host Philadelphia.

Glass, who was acquired in a trade with Pittsburgh at the deadline Friday, scored 11:10 into the first period, snapping a wrist shot past Philadelphia goalie Ivan Fedotov to open the scoring.

Penguins 3, Wild 1: Sidney Crosby scored twice, Evgeni

Malkin also had a goal and Tristan Jarry made 30 saves and had an assist to help visiting Pittsburgh snap a four-game skid with a victory over Minnesota.

Jarry made his first start since being sent to the minors Jan. 16 as the Penguins won for only the second time in regulation in their last 11 games.

Hurricanes 4, Jets 2: Mark Jankowski scored two goals and host Carolina beat Winnipeg.

Logan Stankoven and Seth Jarvis also scored for the Hurricanes, who won their fourth straight game. Frederik Andersen stopped 20 shots.

Blue Jackets 7, Rangers 3: Adam Fantilli scored three goals for his second career hat trick, and visiting Columbus beat New York.

Mathieu Olivier had one goal, Dante Fabbro added a goal and an assist, and Justin Danforth also scored as the Blue Jackets won for the fifth time in seven games. Zach Werenski and Dmitri Voronkov each had two

assists, and Daniil Tarasov stopped 30 shots.

Kings 6, Golden Knights 5: Adrian Kempe scored the winner in visiting Los Angeles' victory over Vegas.

Quinton Byfield, Warren Foegele, Anze Kopitar, Trevor Moore and Brandt Clarke also scored for the Kings. David Rittich stopped 27 shots in the win.

Stars 4, Canucks 1: Mikael Granlund scored his first goal for Dallas and the visiting Stars beat Vancouver.

Thomas Harley, Jason Robertson and Mikko Rantanen also scored for Dallas. Ceci and Matt Duchene each contributed a pair of assists.

Ducks 4, Islanders 1: Sam Colangelo scored twice, Lukas Dostal stopped 31 shots and host Anaheim beat New York. Drew Helleson and Mason McTavish also scored for the Ducks.

Tony DeAngelo spoiled Dostal's shutout bid with just under 5 minutes remaining, and Marcus Hogberg finished with 23 saves for the Islanders.

Bell holds off Hamlin for third straight Cup victory

Associated Press

AVONDALE, Ariz. — Christopher Bell was just ahead of Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Denny Hamlin after a late restart, in good position to win his third straight NASCAR Cup Series race.

Another restart led to some tense moments — enough to make his team owner feel a bit queasy.

Bell survived a late drag race with Hamlin to become the first NASCAR Cup Series driver to win three straight races in the NextGen car, edging his teammate by 0.049 seconds to win the second-closest race in Phoenix Raceway history on Sunday.

"It worked out about as opposite as I could have drawn

it up in my head," Bell said. "But the races that are contested like that, looking back, are the ones that mean the most to you."

Bell started 11th in the 312-mile race after winning at Atlanta and Circuit of America the previous two weeks. The JGR driver moved toward the front early and remained there most of the afternoon, taking the lead out of the pits on a late caution.

Bell stayed out front on two late restarts, holding off his teammate by the nose of his car on the final one to become the first driver to win three straight races since Kyle Larson in 2021. He's the fourth driver in Cup Series history to win three times in the first

four races and the first since Kevin Harvick in 2018.

"We've had four races this year, put ourselves in position in all four and managed to win three, which is a pretty remarkable batting average — something that will be hard to maintain, I believe," Bell's crew chief Adam Stevens said.

The Phoenix race was the first since Richmond last year to give teams two sets of option tires. The option red tires have much better grip but start to fall off after about 35 laps, creating an added strategic element.

Bell was among those who had a set of red tires left for the final stretch and used it to his advantage, pulling away from Hamlin on a restart with

17 laps left.

Hamlin pulled alongside Bell's No. 20 Toyota over the final two laps after the restart and seemed to be slightly ahead at the white flag. The teammates bumped a couple times while jockeying for position, but Bell barely managed to keep ahead of Hamlin, crossing the checkered flag with a wobble for his 12th career Cup Series win. He led 105 laps.

"I kind of had position on the 20, but I knew he was going to ship it in there," Hamlin said. "We just kind of ran out of race track there."

Kyle Larson finished third, Josh Berry fourth and Chris Buescher rounded out the top five.

No. 8 Michigan St. rolls past Michigan

Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich.—Tre Holloman scored a career-high 20 points, Jase Richardson had 18 points and No. 8 Michigan State beat No. 17 Michigan 79-62 on Sunday.

The Spartans (26-5, 17-3 Big Ten) closed the regular season with seven straight wins, including five against AP Top 25 teams.

Michigan State won the Big Ten's first basketball title with 18 teams by three games over the Wolverines and No. 13 Maryland.

With 37.2 seconds left, the rivals pushed and shoved one another at center court, where Spartans seniors have kissed the logo before leaving their final home game since 1995.

Michigan's Phat Phat Brooks and L.J. Cason were standing at center court after teammate Justin Pippen made the first of two free throws.

Holloman approached the two Wolverines, pushed Cason's chest with his right hand and Brooks responded with a two-handed push.

That triggered a brief scrum before officials, Michigan coach Dusty May and Michigan State assistants separated the emotionally charged players.

"That's what rivalries are all about," Spartans coach Tom Izzo said. "If everybody is out there hugging and kissing, it's probably not a rivalry."

Izzo has won 11 Big Ten titles, tying the record Purdue's Ward "Piggy" Lambert set in 1990 and

Indiana's Bob Knight matched in 1993.

"Are we not allowed to stand at half court while they're shooting free throws?" May asked sarcastically. "They earned the right to rub our noses in it. We have to play better. We have to get tougher. We move on, and we have to compete for another (Big Ten Tournament) championship this week."

The Wolverines (22-9, 14-6) have lost a season-high three consecutive games.

Michigan's Vladislav Goldin had 29 points and Danny Wolf didn't help offensively until it was too late, scoring 15 of his 18 points in the second half.

May's debut has been better than expected, but the Wolverines are playing their worst

basketball of the season at the wrong time.

Key moment

Richardson made a 3-pointer with 8:56 left, ending Michigan's 14-0 run to put Michigan State up by 14.

Key stat

The Spartans turned the game into a rout during the first half, converting the Wolverines' 11 turnovers into 18 points to lead 50-28.

Up next

Michigan State will be the top-seeded team at the Big Ten Tournament and Michigan will be among the four teams with two byes that will play Friday in Indianapolis.

High Point wins Big South title, earns first NCAA bid

Associated Press

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn. — Bobby Pettiford scored 17 points off the bench and High Point rallied from a 15-point second half deficit to defeat Winthrop 81-69 in the Big South championship Sunday, giving the Panthers their first trip to the NCAA Tournament.

The Eagles led by 10 points at halftime and 48-33 with 15 minutes remaining. Pettiford nailed a 3-pointer and followed it with a layup to start a 14-0 run that got High Point within 48-47. Three and a half minutes later, Trae Benham's 3-pointer broke a 52-all tie and the Panthers led for the first time since they were 14-13.

High Point (29-5) led the rest of the way although Winthrop was within 75-69 with a minute to go. The Eagles did not score again, however, and the Panthers went 6-for-6 from the free-throw line to close out their first Big South Championship title. High Point has won the Big South regular season title six

times.

The Panthers' 14th straight win was due in large part to 50 points from their bench, 44 in the second half. In addition to Pettiford's 17, Abdoulaye Thiam had 12, Benham had eight points and 10 rebounds, and Terry Anderson added eight points. Kezza Giffa, who scored 16, was the only starter with more than six points.

Winthrop (23-11) had five players scored in double digits, led by Kelton Talford's 15.

Missouri Valley

Drake 63, Bradley 48: Bennett Stirtz scored 24 points, Tavion Banks added 13 and the top-seeded Bulldogs defeated the No. 2-seed Braves to win Arch Madness for the third consecutive time.

Drake (30-3) will be making its eighth NCAA Tournament appearance and fourth in five years. It won the Missouri Valley Conference regular-season championship for the first time since 2019.

A 3-pointer by Demarion Burch gave Bradley a 27-24 lead with four minutes left in the first half, but the Braves did not score again until 15:20 remained in the second half. The Bulldogs finished the first half with a 7-0 run to lead 31-27 and Drake added the first six points of the second half.

Hannah led Bradley with 19 points that included 7-for-11 shooting.

Atlantic Sun Conference

Lipscomb 76, North Alabama 65: Joe Anderson scored 12 of his team-high 23 points in the final four minutes to help power the top-seeded Bisons over the Lions to win the Atlantic Sun Conference tournament championship and claim an automatic berth into the NCAA Tournament.

Lipscomb (25-9) finished tied with North Alabama (24-10) for the regular-season championship with 14 wins and was the No. 1 tournament seed. The Bisons needed overtime to get

past sixth-seeded Queens in the semifinals. The Lions were seeded second.

Jacari Lane's jumper gave North Alabama the lead with 11:46 left and Donte Bacchus converted a three-point play for a 53-49 edge. Jacob Ognacevic hit three of four free throws, Will Pruitt hit from 3 for a 55-53 lead and Gyasi Powell hit a 3 with 4:13 left to put Lipscomb in front for good.

Summit League

Omaha 85, St. Thomas-Minnesota 75: JJ White scored 29, Marquel Sutton had 22 points and a career-high 18 rebounds and the Mavericks beat the Tommies in the championship game of the Summit League Tournament.

Top-seeded Omaha (22-12) had already earned the automatic NCAA Tournament berth because No. 2 seed St. Thomas (24-10) is in its final year of post-season ineligibility after making a rare leap from Division III to Division I.