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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

US sends aid to Thailand and Myanmar

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The United States is sending military personnel to its ally Thailand and monetary assistance to Myanmar to help the neighboring countries recover from a devastating 7.7-magnitude earthquake that struck the area Friday.

More than 2,000 people were dead in Myanmar's second largest city, Mandalay, near the quake epicenter, where the smell of decaying bodies blanketed the streets, according to The Associated Press on Monday.

In Thailand's capital, home to more than 5 million people, the death toll rose to 18 with 33 injured and 78 missing as of Monday morning, Bangkok's city hall announced on its Facebook page that day.

An undisclosed number of personnel from U.S. Indo-Pacific Command were coordinating

with their Thai military counterparts and first responders on "everything from debris clearing to personnel recovery," command spokesman Maj. Matthew Gregory said Monday.

The exact number of personnel was "in flux as the situation continues to evolve," but included U.S. Army engineers, U.S. Navy Seabees, K9 handlers and others, he told Stars and Stripes by email Monday. The Seabees are the Navy's construction battalions.

"Specialized [search-and-rescue] personnel, engineers and capabilities from around the Indo-Pacific are responding during this solemn time and we will continue to support those affected by the 7.7 earthquake as requested by our Ally," Gregory wrote.

Myanmar and Thailand share 1,500-mile border. Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is em-

broiled in a civil war that began following a coup d'état in 2021.

A partial ceasefire to facilitate relief efforts was announced Saturday by the National Unity Government, the country's government-in-exile that's fighting Myanmar's ruling military, the AP said in a separate report Monday.

Gregory declined to comment on whether INDOPACOM troops would assist in recovery efforts in Myanmar.

The U.S. Embassy in Myanmar announced Sunday that the U.S. would provide \$2 million in aid "through Myanmar-based humanitarian assistance organizations," according to the embassy website.

In addition, a U.S. Agency of International Development emergency response team is deploying to Myanmar to "identify the people's most pressing needs, including emergency

shelter, food, medical needs, and access to water," the embassy wrote.

The announcement came just two days after President Donald Trump informed Congress that his administration would move to cut most of the remaining jobs at USAID, Reuters reported Saturday.

Rep. Gregory Meeks, D-N.Y., the ranking member on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said Trump's decision to gut USAID was reckless and that China and Russia are "already filling in the gaps" left by a lack of U.S. foreign assistance, according to a Friday statement posted to the committee's website.

China on Saturday announced it would send two rescue teams and give 100 million yuan, or about \$13.7 million, to Myanmar in aid, according to the China International Development Cooperation Agency.

Naval Academy ends affirmative action in admissions

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The U.S. Naval Academy will no longer consider race, ethnicity or sex as a factor for admission to the service institution, a response to an executive order by President Donald Trump, according to federal court documents made public Friday.

The change in policy was made in February by Vice Adm. Yvette Davids, the academy's superintendent, in response to an executive order issued by President Donald Trump in January, according to a court filing by the U.S. Justice Department in the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The president's order on Jan. 27 said that "every element of the Armed Forces should operate

free from any preference based on race or sex." It also directed the secretary of defense to conduct an internal review with respect to all "activities designed to promote a race- or sex-based preferences system," including reviews at the service academies.

"Under revised internal guidance issued by the Superintendent on Feb. 14, 2025, neither race, ethnicity, nor sex can be considered as a factor for admission at any point during the admissions process, including qualification and acceptance," according to the court filing made public Friday.

The decision comes after a federal judge ruled in December that the academy could continue considering race in its admissions

process. In that case, the judge found that military cohesion and other national security factors mean the school should not be subjected to the same standards as civilian universities.

During a two-week bench trial in September, attorneys for the academy argued that prioritizing diversity in the military makes it stronger, more effective and more widely respected.

The case against the policy was brought by the group Students for Fair Admissions, which was appealing the judge's decision.

The Justice Department asked in the filing on Friday to suspend the current briefing schedule in the case while the parties consider the change in the academy's policy.

The parties require a reasonable amount of time to discuss the details of the Academy's new policy and to consider the appropriate next steps for this litigation, including whether this litigation is now moot and, if so, whether the district court judgment should be vacated," the Justice Department wrote.

Edward Blum, president of Students for Fair Admissions, praised the academy's decision.

"Students for Fair Admissions welcomes the announcement that the U.S. Naval Academy will end its unfair and illegal race-based admissions policies. Racial discrimination is wrong and racial classifications have no place at our nation's military academies," Blum said in a statement.

US airstrikes kill 3 in Yemen, Houthis say

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates—Suspected U.S. airstrikes struck around Yemen's rebel-held capital overnight into Monday morning, attacks that the Iranian-backed Houthis said killed at least three people.

The full extent of the damage wasn't immediately clear. The attacks followed a night of airstrikes early Friday that appeared particularly intense compared to other days in the campaign that began March 15.

The strikes around Sanaa, Yemen's capital held by the Houthis since 2014, and Hajjah governorate also wounded 12 others,

the rebels said.

Their Al-Masirah satellite news channel aired footage of broken glass littering homes in Sanaa after the concussive blast of the bombs, but continued not to show the targets of the attacks — suggesting the sites had a military or intelligence function. Strikes there killed one person, the rebels said.

Another strike targeting a pickup truck in Hajjah killed two people and wounded a child, the Houthis said. It marked the first, publicly known time the American strikes targeted a vehicle in this campaign.

An Associated Press review

has found the new American operation against the Houthis under President Donald Trump appears more extensive than those under former President Joe Biden, as the U.S. moves from solely targeting launch sites to firing at ranking personnel as well as dropping bombs in cities.

The new campaign of airstrikes, which the Houthis now say have killed at least 61 people, started after the rebels threatened to begin targeting "Israeli" ships again over Israel blocking aid entering the Gaza Strip. The rebels in the past loosely defined what constitutes an Israeli ship,

meaning other vessels could be targeted.

The Houthis had targeted over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels and killing four sailors from November 2023 until January of this year. They also launched attacks targeting American warships, though none has been hit so far.

The attacks greatly raised the Houthis' profile as they faced economic problems and launched a crackdown targeting any dissent and aid workers at home amid Yemen's decadelong stalemate war that has torn apart the Arab world's poorest nation.

Lowest-paid troops set to get a boost in pay next month

By ZADE VADNAIS

Stars and Stripes

Junior enlisted service members will soon see a significant boost in their pay as the Pentagon rolls out a targeted raise aimed at improving quality of life for the military's lowest-paid ranks.

The increase applies to active-duty members in the E-1 to E-4 pay grades and will appear beginning with the mid-month paycheck for April.

It amounts to an additional 10% raise on top of the 4.5% base pay increase that went into effect for all service members on Jan. 1.

An E-1 with more than four months but less than two years of service will see their monthly base pay increase by \$211, while an E-4 with 10 years of service will earn \$335 more per month under the new pay structure, according to updated pay charts published by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service.

E-5s with less than 10 years of service will also receive a targeted raise ranging from 3% to 8%, depending on time in service. The adjustments were made to ensure

that E-4s receiving the new 10% raise do not earn more than E-5s with comparable experience.

Troops with four years of service will now earn \$3,081 per month as an E-3, \$3,525 as an E-4, and \$3,802 as an E-5, not including any eligible special pay, allowances for housing and location-based cost-of-living expenses.

The pay bump is part of a broader effort to address long-standing concerns over junior enlisted compensation and retention. Military family advocates and independent reviews had noted that base pay had not kept pace with inflation, particularly for junior enlisted personnel.

A 2023 report from the Rand Corp. found that more than a quarter of junior enlisted troops had experienced food insecurity at some point during the previous year. Also in 2023, a sweeping quality-of-life review was launched by the Defense Department. The pay raise was included in the most recent National Defense Authorization Act.

Service members can view pay charts on the DFAS website.

Vehicle, bodies of 3 US troops pulled from bog in Lithuania

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Three U.S. soldiers missing in Lithuania were found dead after their submerged armored vehicle was pulled from a muddy bog, U.S. Army Europe and Africa said Monday.

Search operations are underway for a fourth missing soldier, the Army said.

The M88A2 Hercules armored recovery vehicle was extracted after a nearly weeklong operation that involved hundreds of personnel from multiple countries.

The names of the fallen soldiers, all members of the 1st Armored Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, weren't immediately released, pending next-of-kin notifications.

"The Soldiers we have lost in this tragedy were not just Soldiers — they were a part of our family," Maj. Gen. Christopher Norrie, commander of the 3rd Infantry Division, said in a statement. "Our hearts are heavy with a sorrow that echoes across the whole Marne Division, both

forward and at home."

Norrie added that the search "isn't finished until everyone is home."

The accident happened near the city of Pabrade at a base about 6 miles from the border with Belarus. The area has been a training hub for U.S. forces for many years.

The lengthy recovery operation was complicated by the terrain. It involved moving an extensive amount of heavy equipment to soft ground near the bog, where the vehicle was submerged some 15 feet under water and thick sludge.

Dredging vehicles, water pump systems and special loading ramps were among the assets involved.

U.S. Navy divers also were called in to support the effort. On Sunday, the divers made it through a thick layer of mud to reach the soldiers' vehicle and were able to attach cables.

The armored vehicle was hoisted out of the muck later that night, Lithuanian defense officials said.

Hegseth's brother serving key role in Pentagon

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's younger brother is serving in a key position inside the Pentagon as a Department of Homeland Security liaison and senior adviser, Hegseth's office confirmed.

The high-profile job has meant meetings with a UFC fighting champion, a trip to Guantanamo Bay and, right now, traveling on the Pentagon's Boeing 747 as Hegseth makes his first trip as defense secretary to the Indo-Pacific.

Phil Hegseth's official title is senior adviser to the secretary for

the Department of Homeland Security and liaison officer to the Defense Department, spokesman Kingsley Wilson said in a statement Thursday.

"Phil Hegseth, one of a number of talented DHS liaisons to DOD, is conducting touch points with U.S. Coast Guard officials on the Secretary's Indo-Pacific trip," which includes stops in Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines and Japan, Wilson said in response to a query by The Associated Press.

Border security, the responsibility of DHS, has been highlighted as one of the top priorities for President Donald Trump, and

thousands of U.S. troops have been deployed to the border to assist DHS with curbing illegal immigration.

It's common for the Defense Department and other federal agencies to have liaisons. Each military branch sends liaisons to Capitol Hill. The Pentagon, State Department and others all use interagency liaisons to more closely coordinate and keep tabs on policy.

But it is not common for those senior-level positions to be filled by family members of the Cabinet heads, said Michael Fallings, a managing partner at Tully Rinckey PLLC, which specializes in

federal employment law.

Based on Phil Hegseth's publicly available resume, his past experience includes founding his own podcast production company, Embassy and Third, and working on social media and podcasts at The Hudson Institute.

It's not the first time Phil Hegseth has worked alongside his older brother. When Pete Hegseth was CEO of Concerned Veterans for America, a nonprofit that fell into financial difficulty during his time there, he paid his brother \$108,000 to do media relations for the organization, according to federal tax records.

Trump complains about both Putin and Zelenskyy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump lashed out at both Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Sunday, expressing frustration with the Russian and Ukrainian leaders as he struggles to forge a truce to end the war.

Although Trump insisted to reporters that "we're making a lot of progress," he acknowledged that "there's tremendous hatred" between the two men, a fresh indication that negotiations may not produce the swift conclusion he promised during the campaign.

Trump began voicing his criticisms in an early morning interview with NBC News while he was at Mar-a-Lago, his private club in Florida.

He said he was "angry, pissed off" that Putin questioned Zelenskyy's credibility.

The Russian leader recently said that Zelenskyy lacks the legitimacy to sign a peace deal and suggested that Ukraine needed external governance.

Trump said he would consider adding new sanctions on Russia, which already faces steep financial penalties, and using tariffs to undermine its oil exports.

The Republican president

rarely criticizes Putin, and he's previously attacked Zelenskyy's credibility himself.

For example, Trump has suggested that Ukraine caused the war that began with a Russian invasion three years ago, and he's insisted that Zelenskyy should hold elections even though it's illegal under Ukraine's constitution to do so during martial law.

On his flight back to Washington on Sunday evening, Trump reiterated his annoyance toward Putin but somewhat softened his tone.

"I don't think he's going to go back on his word," he said. "I've known him for a long time. We've always gotten along well."

Asked when he wanted Russia to agree to a ceasefire, Trump said there was a "psychological deadline."

"If I think they're tapping us along, I will not be happy about it," he said.

Trump soon pivoted to criticize Zelenskyy.

"He's trying to back out of the rare earth deal," Trump said, referring to negotiations over U.S. access to critical minerals in Ukraine. "And if he does that he's got some problems. Big, big problems."

Musk gives out \$1M to 2 in Wisconsin before court vote

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Elon Musk gave out \$1 million checks on Sunday to two Wisconsin voters, declaring them spokespeople for his political group, ahead of a Wisconsin Supreme Court election that the tech billionaire cast as critical to President Donald Trump's agenda and "the future of civilization."

"It's a super big deal," he told a roughly 2,000-person crowd in Green Bay on Sunday night, taking the stage in a yellow cheesehead hat. "I'm not phoning it in. I'm here in person."

Musk and groups he supports have spent more than \$20 million to help conservative favorite Brad Schimel in Tuesday's race, which will determine the ideological makeup of a court likely to decide key issues in a perennial battleground state.

Musk has increasingly become the center of the contest, with liberal favorite Susan Crawford and her allies protesting Musk and what they have said is the influence he wants to have on the court.

"I think this will be important for the future of civilization," Musk said. "It's that's significant."

He noted that the state high court may well take up redistricting of congressional districts, which could ultimately affect which party controls the U.S. House.

"And if the (Wisconsin) Supreme Court is able to redraw the districts, they will gerrymander the district and deprive Wisconsin of two seats on the Republican side," Musk said. "Then they will try to stop all the government reforms we are getting done for you, the American people."

A unanimous state Supreme Court on Sunday refused to hear a last-minute attempt by the state's Democratic attorney general to stop Musk from handing over the checks to two voters, a ruling that came just minutes before the planned start of the rally. The court gave no rationale for its decision.

Two lower courts had already rejected the legal challenge by Democrat Josh Kaul, who has argued that Musk's offer violates a state law. "Wisconsin law prohibits offering anything of value to induce anyone to vote," Kaul argued in his filing. "Yet, Elon Musk did just that."

Ice cuts power in Great Lakes region

Associated Press

KALAMAZOO, Mich. — Three children died after a tree struck their vehicle in Michigan as powerful storms swept across the region, authorities said, and more potentially dangerous weather was forecast for Monday across parts of the Southeast.

The victims were a 2-year-old girl, her 4-year-old brother and an 11-year-old girl who was their cousin, the Kalamazoo County sheriff's office said.

Three more people were injured Sunday in the crash in Climax Township, about 130 miles west of Detroit.

Investigators said a tree

struck the vehicle. Kalamazoo County had been under a severe thunderstorm warning at the time, one of several Sunday in southern Michigan.

More than 300,000 power outages were reported Monday in Michigan, while more than 100,000 outages were posted for Wisconsin and Indiana. Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula remained a mess, with thousands of trees down because of freezing rain that struck Saturday. The Alpena News said it couldn't publish a newspaper because it had no power, like the rest of Alpena County.

In Valparaiso, Ind., investigators believe severe crosswinds

blew over a tractor trailer on Sunday afternoon, killing the driver. The vehicle was traveling on the property of Pratt Industries when the accident happened, the Porter County Sheriff's Office said in a news release. The driver, Jagbir Singh, 34, of Ontario, Canada, was found outside of the passenger compartment and had died of his injuries.

Storms packing powerful winds in southwest Ohio toppled a church steeple, damaged homes and flipped over campers Sunday night, authorities said. No injuries were reported.

One school district north of Cincinnati said it would be

closed Monday because of storm damage.

Storm damage was reported in several counties in Tennessee, including Maury and Humphreys counties, WSMV-TV reported. Humphreys County Sheriff Chris Davis reported damage across the county, including a roof taken off a house. The homeowners were trapped inside, but not injured.

Clusters of thunderstorms accompanied by strong to severe wind gusts and perhaps a few tornadoes could spread across much of the Southeast on Monday, according to the weather service's Storm Prediction Center.

DOJ to dismiss challenge to election law

Associated Press

ATLANTA — U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi on Monday instructed the Justice Department to dismiss a lawsuit challenging a sweeping election overhaul that Georgia Republican lawmakers passed in the wake of President Donald Trump's 2020 election loss in the state.

The lawsuit, filed in June 2021 under former President Joe Biden, alleged that the Georgia law was intended to deny Black

voters equal access to the ballot. Bondi said the Biden administration was pushing "false claims of suppression."

The law was part of a trend of Republican-backed measures that tightened rules around voting, passed in the months after Trump lost his reelection bid to Biden, claiming without evidence that voter fraud cost him victory.

The fallout was swift after Republican Gov. Brian Kemp signed the law in March 2021,

with the CEOs of Atlanta-based Delta Air Lines and Coca-Cola voicing criticism and Major League Baseball's commissioner deciding to move that year's All-Star Game from Atlanta's Truist Park.

Kemp and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, both Republicans who drew Trump's ire when they refused to help overturn his 2020 election loss in Georgia, strongly denounced the Justice Department lawsuit when it was filed.

Known as SB 202, the law added a voter ID requirement for mail ballots, shortened the time period for requesting a mailed ballot and resulted in fewer ballot drop boxes available in populous metro Atlanta counties that lean Democratic and have a significant Black population.

The law also banned the distribution of food and water by various groups and organizations to voters standing in line to cast a ballot.

Israel prepares to move operation deeper into Gaza

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Israel's military on Monday issued sweeping evacuation orders covering Rafah and nearby areas, indicating it could soon launch another major ground operation in the Gaza Strip's southernmost city.

Israel ended its ceasefire with the Hamas militant group and renewed its air and ground war earlier this month. At the beginning of March it cut off all sup-

plies of food, fuel, medicine and humanitarian aid to pressure Hamas to accept proposed changes to the truce agreement.

Israel's military ordered Palestinians to head to Muwasi, a sprawl of squalid tent camps along the coast. The orders came during Eid al-Fitr, a normally festive Muslim holiday marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan.

Last May, Israel launched a major operation in Rafah, on the

border with Egypt, leaving large parts in ruins. The military seized a strategic corridor along the border as well as the Rafah crossing with Egypt, Gaza's only gateway to the outside world not controlled by Israel.

Israel was supposed to withdraw from the corridor under the ceasefire it signed with Hamas in January but later refused to do it, citing the need to prevent weapons smuggling.

Dozens gathered at a funeral

for some of the 15 emergency responders killed by Israeli fire in Rafah last week. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies called it the deadliest attack on its medics in several years.

The United Nations humanitarian office said the dead included eight Red Crescent workers, six members of Gaza's Civil Defense, which operates under the Hamas-run government, and a U.N. worker.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Air Force jet, Delta plane diverted at airport

VA ARLINGTON — A U.S. passenger flight preparing to leave the nation's capital and an incoming military jet received instructions to divert and prevent a possible collision, officials said.

Delta Air Lines Flight 2983 was cleared for takeoff at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport on Friday around 3:15 p.m., the same time four U.S. Air Force T-38 Talon aircraft were inbound, the Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement. The jets were heading for a flyover of Arlington National Cemetery when the Delta aircraft received an onboard alert of a nearby aircraft. Air traffic controllers "issued corrective instructions to both aircraft," according to the FAA, which intends to investigate.

Taliban reportedly release detained American

DC WASHINGTON — An American woman detained for weeks in Afghanistan by the Taliban has been released from custody, according to a person familiar with the matter and a social media post Saturday from a longtime U.S. diplomat.

Faye Dail Hall, who was detained in February on charges of using a drone without authorization, was released as part of a deal that Qatari negotiators helped broker, said the person, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the negotiations.

The person said that Hall was taken to the Qatari Embassy in Kabul, the Afghan capital, and

was in good health, and that arrangements were being made for her to return to the U.S.

In a post on X, a former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, confirmed Hall's release with a photograph of her and said she would "soon be on her way home."

At least 1 dead after plane crashes into home

MN BROOKLYN PARK — At least one person in a small plane traveling from Iowa to Minnesota died after the aircraft crashed into a house in a Minneapolis suburb Saturday, a city official said.

The residents of the home were not hurt, Brooklyn Park spokesperson Risikat Adesao-gun said. But the house was destroyed.

It was not yet known how many people were aboard the single-engine SOCATA TBM7, the Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement.

The agency said the aircraft departed from the Des Moines International Airport with a destination of the Anoka County-Blaine Airport, located in another Minneapolis suburb.

Top vaccine official resigns from FDA

MA BOSTON — The top vaccine official with the Food and Drug Administration has resigned and criticized the nation's top health official for allowing "misinformation and lies" to guide his thinking behind the safety of vaccinations.

Dr. Peter Marks sent a letter to Acting FDA Commissioner Sara Brenner on Friday saying that he would resign and retire

by April 5 as director of the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research.

In his letter, Marks said he was "willing to work" to address the concerns expressed by Robert F. Kennedy Jr., about the safety of vaccinations. But he concluded that wasn't possible.

"It has become clear that truth and transparency are not desired by the Secretary, but rather he wishes subservient confirmation of his misinformation and lies," he wrote.

Marks oversaw the agency's rapid review and approval of COVID-19 vaccines and treatments during the pandemic.

The resignation follows news Friday that HHS plans to lay off 10,000 workers and shut down entire agencies, including ones that oversee billions of dollars in funds for addiction services and community health centers across the country.

2 killed, 4 injured in shooting at a house party

WA SEATTLE — Two people were killed and four others injured during an early morning shooting at a house party in Tacoma, Wash., authorities said Saturday.

The Pierce County Sheriff's Department, in a statement on social media, said one male juvenile was in custody. They did not provide his age.

Shortly before 12:30 a.m., deputies were notified of 30 to 40 young people running and screaming from a house party, with several callers reporting a fight had broken out in the street. Before deputies arrived, shots were fired, and people and vehicles fled.

Deputies attempted lifesaving measures on one male at the

site, but he died, the statement said. Five others went to local hospitals on their own. The department said it later learned another male had died of injuries at a hospital.

Those who were shot ranged in age from 16 to 21.

Nearby homes and vehicles were damaged by the gunfire, the department said.

Musk sells X to his xAI in \$33B all-stock deal

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Elon Musk has sold social media site X to his own xAI artificial intelligence company in a \$33 billion all-stock deal, the billionaire announced on Friday.

Both companies are privately held, which means they are not required to disclose their finances to the public.

Musk said in a post on X that the move will "unlock immense potential by blending xAI's advanced AI capability and expertise with X's massive reach." He said the deal values xAI at \$80 billion and X at \$33 billion. Musk, who serves as CEO of Tesla and SpaceX as well as an adviser to President Donald Trump, bought the site then called Twitter for \$44 billion in 2022, gutted its staff and changed its policies on hate speech, misinformation and user verification and renamed it.

He launched xAI a year later.

It's not clear if the move will change anything for X users — xAI already uses data from X user posts to train its artificial intelligence models and paying X users have access to its AI chatbot, Grok, while nonpaying users can ask the chatbot 10 questions every 2 hours.

— From wire reports

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Auburn, Houston fill all No. 1 Final Four

Associated Press

ATLANTA — John Broome held his injured right arm through most of Auburn's Elite Eight postgame celebration.

That didn't keep the star forward from climbing a ladder to cut down the net he then wore around his neck.

Broome had 25 points and 14 rebounds and the Tigers took command with 17 unanswered points in the first half to beat Michigan State 70-64 on Sunday and complete a sweep of No. 1 seeds advancing to the Final Four.

"You talk about delivering again at the biggest moments," Auburn coach Bruce Pearl said of Broome.

The Tigers (32-5) earned their second Final Four trip, while the Spartans (30-7) fell short in their bid to send coach Tom Izzo to his ninth national semifinal. Pearl also led Auburn to its only previous Final Four appearance, in 2019.

The South Region champion Tigers, the top overall seed in the NCAA Tournament, became

the last of the No. 1 seeds to advance to the Final Four — joining Florida, Duke and Houston.

Auburn will face the Gators, who beat Texas Tech 84-79 in the West Region final, in an all-Southeastern Conference semifinal on Saturday in San Antonio.

"Unfortunately there will only be one SEC team playing for the national championship," Pearl said, also wearing a net around his neck.

Jaxon Kohler led Michigan State with 17 points and 11 rebounds. Jaden Akins had 15 points.

Broome fell on his right arm while attempting to block a shot with 10:37 remaining and left the game. He was escorted to the locker room for a quick examination. Broome, the Associated Press SEC player of the year and a first-team All-America selection, appeared to hurt his right elbow on the fall.

Broome returned with 5:29 remaining, drawing an immediate ovation from Auburn fans. He had the elbow wrapped and

sank a 3-pointer less than a minute later. He also grabbed a rebound with one hand.

"It was a scary moment," Broome said. "I went down but my team had my back."

Broome said he was told by a team doctor "nothing serious" was wrong with the elbow, which appeared to bend at an ugly angle on his fall.

"I bet he'll be sore tomorrow," Pearl said.

Broome made 10 of 13 shots from the field, including each of his two 3-pointers.

"That's why he's an All-American," Izzo said. "That's why he's a player of the year candidate. Did a hell of a job. ... We did most of the things we wanted to do except guard Broome a little better."

Auburn was the only Elite Eight team to win each of its first three March Madness games by double digits, including its 78-65 Sweet 16 victory over Michigan. Michigan State rallied for a 73-70 win over Mississippi in the Sweet 16.

The Spartans led 8-6 before

the Tigers took command with the 17-0 run. Michigan State was held scoreless for 5:46 while missing 10 consecutive shots during the Auburn run.

A 3-pointer by Broome capped the run for a 23-8 lead.

The Tigers led 33-24 at half-time. The Spartans pulled within five points at 35-30 early in the second half but got no closer.

Houston 69, Tennessee 50: The Cougars' relentless defense confused and harassed the Vols and carried them into their seventh Final Four and first since 2021, with L.J. Cryer scoring 17 points.

Emanuel Sharp scored 14 of his 16 points after halftime for top-seeded Houston (34-4) and was named the region's Most Outstanding Player.

Houston extended the nation's longest active winning streak to 17 games. The Cougars had been eliminated as a No. 1 seed in the Sweet 16 in each of the past two years, but this time coach Kelvin Sampson's team has a shot at the program's first national title.

Gamecocks in 5th straight Final Four, UCLA first ever

Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Dawn Staley took a victory lap around the court, giving high-fives to fans and South Carolina's band and even autographing the rear end of a baby's pants.

The Gamecocks' coach has her team back in a familiar place — the Final Four of the women's NCAA Tournament. This time, South Carolina had to grind out a close game to get there.

Chloe Kitts scored 14 points and the defending champion Gamecocks reached the national semifinals for a fifth straight year, beating Duke 54-50 on Sunday.

"It is not going to look pretty. It's not. There's stretches in each game that does not look

pretty," Staley said. "Some of it's not going to look as smoothly as us coaches and players envision. How we practice. But you certainly have to get down and play the kind of game that's presented in front of you. We'll do that. If we're not scoring a lot of points, we'll up our defense."

South Carolina did just that.

Now, Staley's top-seeded Gamecocks are two wins away from becoming the first team to repeat as champions since UConn won four straight from 2013-16. South Carolina will play the winner of the Texas-TCU game Monday night.

The Final Four will be Friday night in Tampa, Fla.

The Gamecocks (34-3) were stymied for most of the game by Duke's stingy defense. South

Carolina came in averaging 80.5 points, but points were difficult to come by Sunday.

"I thought they forced us into taking some bad shots that almost ended our season, really, especially in the first half," Staley said.

The game was tied at 46-all when Sania Feagin, who finished with 12 points, hit a jumper to put the Gamecocks ahead with 4:21 left. Kitts, who was named the Most Outstanding Player of the region, added two free throws 42 seconds later to make it 50-46.

UCLA 72, LSU 65: Lauren Betts had 17 points and seven rebounds despite spending the entire second quarter on the bench, and the top overall seeded Bruins reached their first Fi-

nal Four of the women's NCAA Tournament with a victory over the Tigers.

The 6-foot-7 Betts added six blocks for UCLA (34-2), which will face the winner of Monday's game between USC and UConn.

Gabriela Jaquez had 18 points and eight rebounds for the Bruins and Timea Gardiner finished with 15 points, helping to pick up the slack. Betts went to the bench after committing two first-quarter fouls.

"Credit to my teammates for holding it down while I was out," Betts said during the trophy ceremony.

UCLA won a national title in 1978 in the pre-NCAA era of women's basketball, but this was its first NCAA regional final victory in three tries.

Marlins get 3rd walk-off win in 4 games

Associated Press

MIAMI — Griffin Conine hit a home run, Derek Hill scored the winning run from third on a wild pitch in the bottom of the ninth and the Florida Marlins beat the Pittsburgh Pirates 3-2 on Sunday.

The Marlins won three games with walk-offs to take the opening four-game series. Miami is the first team to win its first three games of the season in that manner since Tampa Bay in 2003.

Andrew McCutchen hit a lead-off homer in the top of the second inning but Nick Fortes hit an RBI double to left that drove in Hill to make it 1-1 going into the third. The 38-year-old McCutchen now has 800 career extra-base hits, third-most among active players (behind Freddie Freeman with 885 and Paul Goldschmidt with 833).

Yankees 12, Brewers 3: Aaron Judge homered in his first at-bat, Jazz Chisholm Jr. homered twice and host New York went deep four more times in a win over Milwaukee, a day after becoming the third team in major league history to hit nine homers in a game.

The Yankees hit a total of 15 homers and scored 36 runs as they swept the three-game series.

Giants 6, Reds 3: Matt Chapman hit a two-run homer and He-

liot Ramos homered for the second time in the series as visiting San Francisco beat Cincinnati.

Reds right-hander Nick Martinez (0-1) retired the first 13 batters before Ramos launched his 1-1 pitch into the left-field stands to put the Giants ahead 1-0.

Blue Jays 3, Orioles 1: Chris Bassitt pitched six innings to win his first start of the season, George Springer hit a two-run single as host Toronto beat Baltimore.

Tyler Heineman added a solo home run, his first, as the Blue Jays split the four-game series with their AL East rivals.

Rays 6, Rockies 4: Brandon Lowe hit a two-run home run in the bottom of the first and host Tampa Bay never trailed in its win over Colorado.

Taj Bradley (1-0) pitched six innings, allowing two runs on five hits with seven strikeouts for the Rays and Jonny DeLuca went 3 for 4. Pete Fairbanks, who had 48 saves in 56 opportunities over the past two seasons, allowed two hits with two strikeouts in a scoreless ninth and earned his first save of the season.

Diamondbacks 10, Cubs 6: Lourdes Gurriel Jr. hit a game-tying, two-run homer, Josh Naylor had the go-ahead RBI double and host Arizona used an eight-run

eighth inning to rally past Chicago for a split of the four-game series.

The Diamondbacks trailed 6-2 in the eighth but sent 12 batters to the plate in a stunning rally. Eli Morgan (0-1) came on in relief before giving up a string of hits, starting with a two-run double to Geraldo Perdomo. Gurriel followed with his game-tying homer, Gabriel Moreno singled and Naylor brought him home with a double to deep center for a 7-6 lead.

Cardinals 9, Twins 2: Victor Scott II and Pedro Pages each hit three-run homers to propel host St. Louis to a win over Minnesota.

Nolan Gorman also homered for the Cardinals, who swept the series and are off to a 3-0 start for the first time since 2006.

Nationals 5, Phillies 1: Josh Bell and Nathaniel Lowe homered, and host Washington avoided a season-opening series sweep with a victory over Philadelphia.

Bell, who was 0 for 9 to begin his second stint with the Nationals, ripped an Aaron Nola fastball into the center-field seats for a three-run homer in the fourth inning. Lowe ended Nola's day with a two-run shot to center in the sixth.

Rangers 3, Red Sox 2: Wyatt

Langford and Adolis García hit solo home runs in the sixth inning to send host Texas over Boston.

The homers came after the Red Sox scored twice in the top of the inning off Texas' bullpen to spoil Jacob deGrom's first start of the season. DeGrom allowed two hits in five shutout innings but was lifted after nearing his pitch count at 73.

Guardians 6, Royals 2: Tanner Bibee pitched shutout ball into the seventh inning, Kyle Mazzardo hit a two-run homer and Gabriel Arias and Daniel Schneemann added solo shots as visiting Cleveland beat Kansas City.

Mariners 2, Athletics 1: Julio Rodríguez hit a towering 438-foot, two-run homer in the sixth to give host Seattle the lead and Bryan Woo (1-0) pitched six dominant innings and they beat the Athletics.

Angels 3, White Sox 2: Kyren Paris homered on the first pitch he saw after a lengthy rain delay and visiting Los Angeles rallied to beat Chicago.

Padres 5, Braves 0: Nick Pivetta threw seven innings of one-hit ball and Manny Machado returned to the lineup and hit an RBI double as host San Diego beat punchless Atlanta to sweep a season-opening, four-game series.

NASCAR's Hamlin ends 10-year win drought at Martinsville

Associated Press

MARTINSVILLE, Va. — At the track he loves to dominate, Denny Hamlin was back on top with a new face atop his pit box.

The Joe Gibbs Racing star ended an agonizing 10-year winless streak at Martinsville Speedway, holding off teammate Christopher Bell in his home state to secure a spot in the NASCAR Cup Series playoffs.

Hamlin, who was raised a few hours away in the Richmond suburb of Chesterfield, leads active Cup drivers with six victories at Martinsville. But Sunday was his first checkered flag on the 0.526-mile oval in southwest Virginia since March 29, 2015, and also his first with crew chief Chris Gayle, who joined the team this season.

Driving a Camry that "certainly felt like the

old days" after the team overhauled its setup, Hamlin led a race-high 274 of the final laps after taking the lead from Chase Elliott.

With the 55th victory of his career (tying NASCAR Hall of Famer Rusty Wallace for 11th on the career list), the 44-year-old Hamlin also snapped a 31-race winless streak since last April at Dover.

"Chris Gayle, all the engineers, the pit crew, everybody really just deciding they were going to come here with a different approach than the last few years," Hamlin said. "It was just amazing. It did everything I needed it to do. Just so happy to win with Chris. Gosh, I love winning here."

Gayle was a surprise replacement for long-time crew chief Chris Gabehart, who moved into an executive role at Joe Gibbs Racing af-

ter leading Hamlin to 23 victories from 2019-24.

In what he called a "very unique" arrangement, Gayle was moved into the position without any other significant personnel changes on the team. Surrounded by familiar faces, Hamlin said he has meshed well with Gayle, who was previously the crew chief for Ty Gibbs.

"Chris has had a tough go of it," Hamlin said. "When we didn't have a great weekend, social media people were just out to get him. They think he's been the problem for all of these years. It's just not the case. He's had the tough task of having such young drivers his whole career. That is really hard to do. I think having someone as laid back as I am for the first time in his career is probably making his job a lot easier."

Cavaliers top Clippers, reach 60 wins

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Jarrett Allen scored 25 points, Donovan Mitchell added 24 and the Cleveland Cavaliers held off the Los Angeles Clippers 127-122 on Sunday afternoon.

Evan Mobley had 22 points as Cleveland reached 60 wins for the third time in franchise history, and the first since the 2009-10 season. The Cavaliers (60-15) moved 4½ games ahead of Boston for the top spot in the Eastern Conference.

Allen and Mitchell also had 12 rebounds, while Mitchell was three assists shy of a triple-double.

“Celebrate the small victories, and we will,” said Mitchell. “It’s been a great year. All of our sacrifices and hard work is paying off. It is big for the organization and the city.”

The only other times Cleveland reached the 60-win mark were in LeBron James’ last two seasons of his first stint with the Cavs. Allen recognized how meaningful it was to do something again for the first time

without James. The Akron native remains an icon in Northeast Ohio after he led Cleveland to the region’s first professional sports title in 52 years in 2016.

“Whether we like it or not, LeBron is the face of this city and has done so much. It is tough to break away from that notion or the records, the first to do it with LeBron here,” he said. “We’re trying to do something special and hopefully we can.”

Norman Powell had 34 points for the Clippers, who were without Kawhi Leonard due to right knee injury management. James Harden added 24 points.

Knicks 110, Trail Blazers 93: OG Anunoby and Mikal Bridges each scored 28 points and host New York dominated the second half for a victory over Portland.

Bridges scored 21 in the final two periods as the Knicks outscored the Trail Blazers 60-35 after halftime. New York made 27 of 42 shots (64%) across the final 24 minutes after trailing 58-50 at the break.

Josh Hart added 14 points, nine assists and eight rebounds

for the Knicks. Karl-Anthony Towns shot just 4-for-13 but had 10 points and 11 rebounds.

Pelicans 98, Hornets 94: Jose Alvarado had a go-ahead three-point play on a reverse layup with 31 seconds left and host New Orleans outlasted Charlotte.

With the Pelicans down 94-93 after Nick Smith Jr.’s 3-pointer, Alvarado scored on the drive and drew a foul on DaQuan Jeffries to set up the three-point play. Jeffries then threw the ball away, and Keion Brooks Jr. iced it with a layup.

Warriors 148, Spurs 106: Brandin Podziemski scored 27 points and visiting Golden State rang up its highest total of the season in a rout of San Antonio.

The Spurs also gave up the most points to an opponent this season in losing their fourth straight.

Hawks 145, Bucks 124: Zacharie Risacher scored a season-high 36 points, Dyson Daniels added 22 points and five steals while becoming Atlanta’s single-season leader as it beat

slumping Milwaukee.

Trae Young had 19 points and 19 assists, and Georges Niang finished with 17 points for the visiting Hawks, who snapped a two-game skid.

Timberwolves 123, Pistons 104: Julius Randle had 26 points and eight rebounds and Anthony Edwards added 25 points and host Minnesota beat Detroit in a game that was interrupted by a second-quarter fight.

Tempers flared after the Pistons fouled Timberwolves forward Naz Reid. Five players — including Reid and teammate Donte DiVincenzo — were ejected, along with Detroit head coach J.B. Bickerstaff and Minnesota assistant Pablo Prigioni.

Raptors 127, 76ers 109: R.J. Barrett scored 31 points and visiting Toronto beat Philadelphia for its eighth straight loss.

Rockets 148, Suns 109: Jalen Green scored 33 points for visiting Houston, and Phoenix star Kevin Durant left with a leg injury in the Rockets’ romp over the Suns.

Hellebuyck makes 23 saves as Jets beat Canucks

Associated Press

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Connor Hellebuyck made 23 saves, Kyle Connor had a goal and an assist and the NHL-leading Winnipeg Jets beat the Vancouver Canucks 3-1 on Sunday for their third straight victory.

Mason Appleton gave Winnipeg a 2-1 lead at 6:24 of the third period, and Cole Perfetti completed the scoring with 7:49 to go.

Pius Suter scored for Vancouver with 1:55 left in the first period. Connor tied it at 9:26 of the second with his 38th goal of the season.

Thatcher Demko made 24 saves for the Canucks, who lost ground in the wild-card race, going 2-2-2 on a six-game trip.

Canadiens 4, Panthers 2: Nick Suzuki scored to lead visiting Montreal to a win over Florida.

Suzuki scored on a snap shot with 17:58 left in the third period to put Montreal ahead 3-2. Juraj Slafkovsky and Lane Hutson each got an assist on the goal.

Patrik Laine, Brendan Gallagher and Slafkovsky also scored for Montreal.

Sabres 8, Capitals 5: Alex Tuch and Tage Thompson each scored twice and visiting Buffalo beat Washington.

Ryan McLeod, Sam Lafferty, Jack Quinn and Peyton Krebs also scored for the Sabres, winners of four of the last five.

Alex Ovechkin scored his 890th career goal, Jakob Chy-

hrun had two goals and Aliaksei Protas and Pierre-Luc Dubois also scored for the Capitals, who have lost three straight games for the second time this season.

Utah 5, Blackhawks 2: Alexander Kerfoot had a goal and two assists and Karel Vejmelka stopped 27 shots to help visiting Utah beat Chicago.

Defenseman Mikhail Sergachev had a goal and an assist. Nick DeSimone and Kailer Yamamoto each scored their first goals of the season, and Logan Cooley also scored.

Hurricanes 6, Islanders 4: Seth Jarvis scored twice, Sebastian Aho had a goal and two assists, and host Los Angeles set a team record for home victories in a season, beating San Jose.

Dmitry Orlov, Mark Jankowski and Logan Stankoven also scored for the Hurricanes, who have won two straight.

Penguins 1, Senators 0 (OT): Sidney Crosby scored a power-play goal in overtime and host Pittsburgh beat Ottawa.

Maple Leafs 3, Ducks 2: Steven Lorentz scored the tie-breaking goal on an artful deflection with 8:25 to play, and visiting Toronto blew a two-goal lead before rallying for a victory over Anaheim.

Kings 8, Sharks 1: Adrian Kempe and Warren Foegele scored twice, Andrei Kuzmeko had a goal and two assists, and host Los Angeles set a team record for home victories in a season, beating San Jose.