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FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 2026

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Trump: No Iran talks without its surrender

*Associated Press*

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — President Donald Trump on Friday appeared to rule out talks with Iran absent its “unconditional surrender.” Israeli warplanes bombed Beirut and Tehran as Iran launched more retaliatory strikes against Israel and Gulf countries on the seventh day of the war.

The strikes in Lebanon were the heaviest since a 2024 ceasefire ended the last war between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah, who fired rockets at Israel in the opening days of the war now underway. More than 95,000 people have fled Beirut’s suburbs and southern Lebanon after sweeping Israeli evacuation warnings.

The U.S. and Israel have battered Iran with strikes, targeting their military capabilities, leadership and nuclear program.

The stated goals and timelines for the war have repeatedly shifted, as the U.S. has at times suggested it seeks to top-

ple Iran’s government or elevate new leadership from within.

The war has escalated to affect more than a dozen countries across the Middle East. London police said Friday that four men have been arrested on suspicion of aiding Iran by spying on the Jewish community. Iran has been linked to previous attacks abroad on Iranian dissidents, Israelis and Jewish targets.

Qatar’s energy minister warned that the war could “bring down the economies of the world,” predicting a widespread shutdown of Gulf energy exports that could send oil to \$150 a barrel. Saad al-Kaabi told the Financial Times newspaper that even if the war ended immediately it could take “weeks to months” to resume normal exports after an Iranian drone strike on Qatar’s largest liquefied natural gas plant earlier in the war.

In a social media post on Friday, Trump said that after

Iran’s surrender, “and the selection of a GREAT & ACCEPTABLE Leader(s),” that the U.S. and its allies would help rebuild Iran, making it “economically bigger, better, and stronger than ever before.”

Those comments were likely to raise further questions about the endgame of the war launched a week ago by the United States and Israel. The war has killed at least 1,230 people in Iran, more than 200 in Lebanon and around a dozen in Israel, according to officials in those countries. Six U.S. troops have been killed.

Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian wrote on social media that “some countries” had begun mediation efforts in the conflict, without elaborating.

On Thursday, Trump urged the Iranian people to “help take back your country,” promising the U.S. would grant them “immunity,” without elaborating.

Trump also told media outlets that he should be involved in choosing a replacement for Su-

preme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in the opening strikes of the war. Trump spoke dismissively of Khamenei’s son, Mojtaba Khamenei — a front-runner to replace his father — calling him “a lightweight.”

Iranian state television reported Friday that a leadership council had started discussing how to convene the country’s Assembly of Experts, which will select the new supreme leader.

Buildings associated with the 88-member clerical panel have been attacked during the Israeli-American air campaign. Israel has said it would target the next supreme leader if he poses a threat.

Israel’s military said Friday it had launched “a broad-scale wave of strikes” on Tehran, Iran’s capital, and that over the past week it has heavily bombed an extensive underground bunker that Iran’s leaders had planned to use during the hostilities.

## US Embassy issues security alert amid rallies in Pakistan

*Associated Press*

ISLAMABAD — Hundreds of minority Shiites rallied Friday in Pakistan’s capital and elsewhere in the country to denounce the killing of Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in U.S.-Israeli strikes, as the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad issued a security alert warning Americans of possible violence.

Amid heavy police presence, about 300 protesters staged a sit-in in Islamabad, holding posters of Khamenei and chanting “Death to America” and

“Death to Israel.” Islamabad police had parked shipping containers on roads leading to the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad to prevent any potential escalation.

Pakistani authorities said the protesters had agreed not to march toward the embassy in Islamabad, located about 1.8 miles from the sit-in. The protesters planned to end their sit-in later Friday.

Security was also beefed up in the port city of Karachi, where hundreds of Shiites stormed the U.S. Consulate on Sunday,

smashing windows and attempting to set the building on fire. Police used batons, tear gas, and live fire to disperse the crowd.

The violence left 10 protesters dead in Karachi, and at least 13 were killed in northern cities, including Skardu and Gilgit.

In Karachi, Shiite protesters gathered on Friday some 2.5 miles from the consulate.

Separately, smaller groups of Sunni protesters also rallied in Islamabad and Karachi on Friday against the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran. The protests were

held far from the U.S. diplomatic missions. No violence was reported.

In a security alert ahead of the demonstrations, the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad urged Americans in the country to limit their movement outside. Also, an updated advisory warned U.S. citizens against travel to Pakistan’s southwestern Balochistan province, northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir due to risks of “terrorism and kidnapping.”

# Officials: Russia aiding Iran intelligence

*The Washington Post*

Russia is providing Iran with targeting information to attack American forces in the Middle East, the first indication that another major U.S. adversary is participating — even indirectly — in the war, according to three officials familiar with the intelligence.

The assistance, which has not been previously reported, signals that the rapidly expanding conflict now features one of America's chief nuclear-armed competitors with exquisite intelligence capabilities.

Since the war began Saturday, Russia has passed Iran the locations of U.S. military assets, including warships and aircraft, said the three officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the matter's sensitivity.

"It does seem like it's a pretty comprehensive effort," one of the people said.

Reached by *The Washington Post* on Friday, Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, de-

clined to comment on the intelligence findings. Moscow has called for an end to the war, which it labeled an "unprovoked act of armed aggression."

The extent of Russia's targeting assistance to Iran was not entirely clear. The Iranian military's own ability to locate U.S. forces has been degraded less than a week into the fighting, the officials said.

Six U.S. troops were killed and several others were injured by an Iranian drone attack Sunday in Kuwait.

Iran has fired thousands of one-way attack drones and hundreds of missiles at U.S. military positions, embassies and civilians, even as the joint American-Israeli campaign has hit more than 2,000 Iranian targets — including ballistic missile sites, naval assets and the country's leadership.

"The Iranian regime is being absolutely crushed," said a White House spokeswoman, Anna Kelly, without commenting on any Russian aid to Iran.

"Their ballistic missile retaliation is decreasing every day, their navy is being wiped out, their production capacity is being demolished and proxies are hardly putting up a fight."

The CIA and the Pentagon declined to comment.

When asked this week about his message to Russia and China, which are among Iran's most powerful backers, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said that he didn't have one and that "they're not really a factor here."

Two of the officials familiar with Russia's support for Iran said that China did not appear to be aiding Iran's defense, despite close ties between the two countries.

In a statement, the Chinese Embassy in Washington referred to Beijing's diplomatic efforts to engage with partners in the region since the war began and said that the conflict should be "immediately ceased."

Analysts said that the sharing

of intelligence would fit the pattern of Iran's strikes against U.S. forces, including command and control infrastructure, radars and temporary structures, like the one in Kuwait where six service members were killed.

The CIA's station at the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's capital, also was struck in recent days.

Iran is "making very precise hits on early warning radars or over-the-horizon radars," said Dara Massicot, an expert on the Russian military at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "They're doing this in a very targeted way. They're going after command and control," she added.

Iran possesses only a handful of military-grade satellites, and no satellite constellation of its own, which would make imagery provided by Russia's much more advanced space capabilities highly valuable — particularly as the Kremlin has honed its own targeting after years of war in Ukraine, Massicot said.

## Sri Lanka takes custody of Iranian vessel off its coast

*Associated Press*

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Sri Lanka began transferring more than 200 sailors from an Iranian vessel to shore Friday after the ship sought assistance while anchored outside the country's waters, as tensions mounted in the Indian Ocean following the sinking of an Iranian warship by a U.S. submarine.

Sri Lankan navy spokesperson Cmdr. Buddhika Sampath said 204 sailors of the IRIS Bushehr were brought to the Welisara Naval Base near the capital, Colombo. They underwent border control procedures and medical tests, but none were found to have health issues.

About 15 others have been left aboard the ship with Sri Lankan naval personnel for assistance because they had reported a fault with the ship.

The Iranian sailors are interpreting operational instructions, manuals and logs for their Sri Lankan counterparts because the ship will be in Sri Lankan custody until further notice, Sampath said.

The ship will be taken to the port of Trincomalee in eastern Sri Lanka, Sampath said.

The Sri Lankan government took custody of the Bushehr after the U.S. sank an Iranian warship, the IRIS Dena, off Sri Lanka's coast Wednesday. The strike marked one of the rare in-

stances since World War II in which a submarine sank a surface warship, and highlighted the expanding scope of the U.S.-Israeli military campaign against Iran.

The Dena had participated in naval exercises hosted by India before heading into international waters on its way home. At least 74 countries had joined the events, according to India's Defense Ministry, including the U.S. Navy, which conducted reconnaissance aircraft and maritime patrol drills.

The Indian navy received a distress signal from the Dena but by the time it launched a search and rescue operation, the Sri Lankan navy had al-

ready begun its own rescue efforts, the ministry said.

The Sri Lankan navy rescued 32 sailors and recovered 87 bodies.

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said late Thursday that authorities decided to take control of the IRIS Bushehr after discussions with Iranian officials and the ship's captain, after one of its engines failed.

"We have to understand that this is not an ordinary situation. It's a request by a ship belonging to one party to enter into our port. We have to consider that according to the international treaties and conventions," he told journalists Thursday night.

# House narrowly rejects war powers bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House narrowly rejected a resolution Thursday to curb President Donald Trump's powers in the Iran war, an early sign of unease in Congress over the rapidly widening conflict that is reordering U.S. priorities at home and abroad.

It's the second vote in as many days, after the Senate defeated a similar measure. Lawmakers are confronting the sudden reality of representing wary Americans in wartime and all that entails — with lives lost, dollars spent and alliances tested by a president's unilateral decision to go to war with Iran.

While the tally in the House, 212-219, was expected to be tight, the outcome provided a clarifying snapshot of political support for, and opposition to, the U.S.-Israel military oper-

ation and Trump's rationale for bypassing Congress, which alone has the power to declare war.

At the Capitol, the conflict has quickly carried echoes of the long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and many Sept. 11-era veterans now serve in Congress.

"Donald Trump is not a king, and if he believes the war with Iran is in our national interest, then he must come to Congress and make the case," said Rep. Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

House Speaker Mike Johnson warned that it would be "dangerous" to limit the president's authority while the U.S. military is already in conflict.

"We are not at war," said Johnson, R-La., a close ally of Trump, contradicting others.

He said the operation is limited in scope and duration, and the "mission is nearly accomplished."

Trump's Republican Party, which narrowly controls the House and Senate, largely sees the conflict with Iran not as the start of a new war, but the end of a government that has long menaced the West. The operation has killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, which some view as an opportunity for regime change, though others warn of a chaotic power vacuum.

Republican Rep. Brian Mast of Florida, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, publicly thanked Trump for taking action against Iran, saying the president is using his own constitutional authority to defend the U.S. against the "imminent threat" the country

posed.

Mast, an Army veteran who worked as a bomb disposal expert in Afghanistan, said the war powers resolution was effectively asking "that the president do nothing."

For Democrats, Trump's attack on Iran, influenced by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is a war of choice that is testing the balance of powers in the Constitution.

"The framers weren't fooling around," said Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., arguing that the Constitution is clear that only Congress can decide matters of war. "It's up to us."

Crossover coalitions emerged among those in Congress. Two Republicans joined most Democrats in voting for the war powers resolution, while four Democrats joined Republicans to reject it.

## GOP Texas lawmaker ends reelection bid after scandal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republican Rep. Tony Gonzales of Texas said late Thursday he was withdrawing from his reelection race, after having admitted an affair with a former staff member who later died by suicide, but he vowed to finish out his term in Congress.

He had faced calls from GOP leadership to end his reelection bid, and from others in Congress to resign.

"After deep reflection and with the support of my loving family, I have decided not to seek re-election," Gonzales said in a statement posted late Thursday to X.

The move is the latest in a quickly changing situation that stunned Capitol Hill and resulted in a House Ethics Committee investigation into his conduct. Gonzales' decision to bow out of the race appears to clear the

field. On Tuesday, he had been forced into a May runoff against Brandon Herrera, a gun manufacturer and YouTube gun-rights influencer who narrowly lost to him in the 2024 primary.

House Speaker Mike Johnson and the GOP leadership earlier Thursday had called on Gonzales to withdraw from reelection after Gonzales, a day earlier, acknowledged a relationship that has upturned the political world in his home state and in Washington.

"We have encouraged him to address these very serious allegations directly with his constituents and his colleagues," said Johnson, Majority Leader Steve Scalise, Whip Tom Emmer, and GOP Conference Chairwoman Lisa McClain in a statement.

"In the meantime, Leadership has asked Congressman Gonzales to withdraw from his race for reelection."

## US, Venezuela agree to restore diplomatic ties

Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela — The United States and Venezuela agreed to reestablish diplomatic relations in a major shift in a historically adversarial relationship, the State Department said on Thursday.

The move comes after rounds of Trump administration officials have visited the South American nation following a U.S. military operation that deposed former President Nicolás Maduro in January. Since then, the Trump administration has been stepping up pressure on Maduro loyalists now in power to accept its vision for the oil-rich nation.

Relations between the two countries were cut off in 2019, during the first Trump administration, in a decision by Maduro. They closed their embassies mutually after President Donald Trump gave public sup-

port to Venezuelan opposition lawmaker Juan Guaidó, who claimed to be the nation's interim president in January that year. That prompted U.S. diplomatic staff to move to neighboring Colombia.

The State Department in a statement on Thursday said that talks between the countries were "focused on helping the Venezuelan people move forward through a phased process that creates the conditions for a peaceful transition to a democratically elected government."

The announcement was made at the end of a two-day visit by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum to Venezuela.

Acting President Delcy Rodríguez, formerly Maduro's vice president, said on state television that such steps "will strengthen relations between our two countries."

# Man sentenced for parents' deaths in assassination plot

*Associated Press*

WAUKESHA, Wis. — A Wisconsin teenager who killed his parents and stole their money to fund his plan to kill President Donald Trump with a bomb dropped from a drone was sentenced to life in prison on Thursday.

Nikita Casap, 18, pleaded guilty in January to two counts of first-degree intentional homicide in Waukesha County Circuit Court in connection with the shooting deaths of his mother, Tatiana Casap, and stepfather, Donald Mayer, in 2025. Prosecutors dropped seven other charges in a plea deal, including two counts of hiding a corpse and theft.

First-degree intentional homicide carries a mandatory life sentence. The only question as Judge Ralph Ramirez began the sentencing hearing Thursday afternoon was whether he would make Casap eligible for parole at some point.

Calling Casap's offenses "horrific" and "inexplicable," Ramirez ultimately handed down two life sentences with no chance at extended supervision, the term the Wisconsin criminal justice system uses for parole. The judge said he didn't have a "crystal ball" that would tell him when Casap would change, if ever.

"I choose to find he's not eligible for extended release because I do not know ... when and if and whether a profound and significant change can occur," Ramirez said.

According to a criminal complaint, investigators believe Casap shot his stepfather and mother at their home in the village of Waukesha on or around

Feb. 11, 2025.

He lived with the decomposing bodies for two weeks before fleeing across the country in his stepfather's SUV with \$14,000, jewelry, passports, his stepfather's gun and the family dog, according to the complaint. He was eventually arrested during a traffic stop in Kansas on Feb. 28 after four days on the run.

Federal authorities have accused Casap of planning his parents' murders, buying a drone and explosives and sharing his plans with others, including a Russian speaker. They said in a federal search warrant that he wrote a manifesto calling for Trump's assassination and was in touch with others about his plot to overthrow the U.S. government.

"The killing of his parents appeared to be an effort to obtain the financial means and autonomy necessary to carrying out his plan," that warrant said.

Detectives found several messages on Casap's cellphone from January 2025 in which Casap asks how long he will have to hide before he is relocated to Ukraine. An unknown individual responded in Russian, the complaint said, but the document doesn't say what that person told Casap.

Casap appeared to tremble as he listened to both sides make their cases. He gave a tearful speech, saying that he loved his mother and he was worried about her all the time. He said he wasn't as close with Mayer, but Mayer still treated him like a son.

"I thought I was part of a revolution," he said. "I thought I was part of a war. I told myself bad things had to happen."

# US slashed surprising 92,000 jobs last month

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — American employers unexpectedly cut 92,000 jobs last month, a sign that the labor market remains under strain. The unemployment rate blipped up to 4.4%.

The Labor Department reported Friday that hiring deteriorated from January, when companies, nonprofits and government agencies added a healthy 126,000 jobs. Economists had expected 60,000 new jobs in February.

Revisions also cut 69,000 jobs from December and January payrolls.

The job market had been expected to rebound this year from a lackluster 2025 when the economy, buffeted by President Donald Trump's erratic tariff policies and the lingering effects of high interest rates, generated just 15,000 jobs a month.

Construction companies cut 11,000 jobs last month, which likely reflects reflect frigid weather. And health care firms shed 28,000 jobs after a four-

week strike by more than 30,000 nurses and other front-line workers at Kaiser Permanente in California and Hawaii.

The outlook for the job market — and the entire economy — is clouded by the war with Iran.

Employers were reluctant to hire last year because of uncertainty over President Donald Trump's tariffs — and the unpredictable way he rolled them out.

High interest rates, engineered by the Federal Reserve to combat a burst of inflation following the COVID-19 pandemic, also weighed on the job market in 2025.

The impact of Trump's aggressive trade policies may recede in 2025. His import taxes became smaller and less erratic after he reached a trade truce last year with China and deals with leading U.S. trade partners such as Japan and the European Union. A lot of businesses have also learned how to offset the costs of the tariffs, often by passing them along to customers via higher prices.

# Britney Spears arrested on suspicion of DUI in Calif.

*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — Britney Spears was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs near her Southern California home and released, authorities said. A statement from Spears' representative calls the arrest "inexcusable."

The California Highway Patrol said officers received a report shortly before 9 p.m. Wednesday that someone in a black BMW 430i was driving fast and erratically on U.S. 101 in Newbury Park, Calif., in Ventura County near the Los Angeles County line.

The 44-year-old pop star, the

only person in the car, exited the freeway and pulled over, a CHP statement said. She appeared to be impaired, took a series of field sobriety tests, was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence of a combination of alcohol and drugs and was taken to a Ventura County jail, the CHP said. Chemical test results are pending and the case remains under investigation.

Spears was booked early Thursday morning and released at about 6 a.m., according to jail records.

"This was an unfortunate incident that is completely inexcusable," a statement from a Spears representative said.

# Ukraine says Hungary seized \$80 million

Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary — Hungarian authorities have detained seven Ukrainian citizens and seized two armored cars carrying large amounts of cash across Hungary on suspicion of money laundering, officials said Friday.

Ukraine accused Hungary's pro-Russian government of taking the Ukrainians hostage and illegally seizing millions of dollars in cash.

"We will not tolerate this state banditism," Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha wrote on X on Friday. "Everyone who is responsible for taking and holding our citizens hostage will

be held accountable."

The seven detained Ukrainians were employees of the Ukrainian state-owned Oschadbank, who were traveling in two armored cars that were carrying the money between Austria and Ukraine as part of regular services between state banks, Sybiha said.

The shipment apprehended by Hungary included 40 million U.S. dollars as well as 35 million euros and 19.8 pounds of gold — worth around \$1.5 million at current prices — according to a separate statement by Oschadbank.

Hungary's National Tax and Customs Administration con-

firmed Friday that it had detained the Ukrainian citizens and seized the two armored cash-transport vehicles. It added it was conducting criminal proceedings on suspicion of money laundering.

In a later statement, Hungary's Government Information Center said the seven Ukrainians would be expelled from Hungarian territory on Friday since among them were a former general of the Ukrainian Security Service, a former major of the Ukrainian Air Force and "individuals with military experience."

The statement did not detail why, if the Ukrainians were sus-

pected of money laundering, they would be released from custody and expelled.

The incident further inflamed rising tensions between Hungary and Ukraine, which are embroiled in a bitter feud over Hungary's access to Russian oil through a pipeline that crosses Ukrainian territory.

Oil shipments through the Druzhba pipeline have been interrupted since Jan. 27. Ukraine says a Russian drone strike damaged the pipeline's infrastructure, and that repairing it carried risks to technicians. It said that even if restored, it would remain vulnerable to further Russian attacks.

## 4 men arrested in UK on suspicion of aiding Iran

Associated Press

LONDON — London police said Friday that four men have been arrested on suspicion of aiding Iran by spying on the Jewish community.

In a statement, the Metropolitan Police said the suspects — one Iranian and three dual British-Iranian nationals — were taken into custody on suspicion of assisting a foreign intelligence service. The men, who were arrested at addresses in and around north London shortly after 1 a.m., are suspected on spying on locations and individuals.

Police said the men arrested are aged 22, 40, 52 and 55 and that searches are ongoing at the addresses as well as other properties nearby.

Six other men were also ar-

rested on suspicion of assisting an offender and have been taken into custody, the force said.

"We understand the public may be concerned, in particular the Jewish community, and as always, I would ask them to remain vigilant and if they see or hear anything that concerns them, then to contact us," said Commander Helen Flanagan, who is in charge of counterterrorism policing in London.

The arrests come as the U.S. and Israel continue to strike Iran, which has kept up retaliatory strikes on Israel, U.S. bases and across the region. Britain is not involved in offensive operations but is assisting in regional defense.

Iran-related spying in the U.K. is an increasing concern for British authorities.

## Islamic militants abduct over 300 people in Nigeria

Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria — Islamic militants attacked a town in northeastern Nigeria on Friday, abducting more than 300 people, including women and children, local officials said.

The attack happened in the town of Ngoshe in Borno state, according to Bulama Sawa, an official from the Gwoza area. He told The Associated Press the attack was likely in retaliation for an operation by the military that killed three commanders of the militant Boko Haram group.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for Friday's attack. Nigeria is battling a complex security crisis from different armed groups. The United States has sent troops to the West African nation to help ad-

vice its military on the fight against insecurity.

Separate attacks this week also took place in the communities of Konduga, Marte, Jakana, and Mainok between Wednesday and early Friday, according to a military spokesperson.

The spokesperson, Uba Sani, said the troops were able to repel the attacks on the communities of Konduga, Marte, Jakana and Mainok, but "a number of brave soldiers paid the supreme price in the line of duty," along with a senior officer.

He did not elaborate on military casualties.

Sani described the assaults as "failed attacks" and "increasing desperation of terrorist elements under sustained operational pressure across the theatre."

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# Ohtani hits grand slam at World Baseball Classic

Associated Press

Japanese fans don't get to see Shohei Ohtani in person very often. They got an eyeful on Friday in a sellout at the Tokyo Dome.

Lia Chan and her husband How and other family members flew in from Singapore — about a seven-hour flight to Tokyo — just to watch Ohtani play in the World Baseball Classic.

"And baseball is not even popular in Singapore," said Lia, who was seated a few rows behind home plate. "We know about baseball, we watch it, but when Ohtani came along, it's just gone out of proportions."

Ohtani hit a grand slam in the second inning — in the first, he doubled on the first pitch of the game but didn't score — as Japan hammered Taiwan 13-0 in Pool C at the World Baseball Classic. It was Japan's first game of four in pool play.

The game was called after seven innings under the mercy rule, which is being used in the WBC. The game is called after five innings if a team leads by 15 runs or more, or after seven if the lead is 10 or more.

After threatening in the first, Japan exploded for 10 runs in the second inning.

Japan, batting first as the designated visiting team, put the

first three runners on base — a walk, a single and a hit-by-pitch. Kenya Wakatsuki fouled out to the catcher, bringing up Ohtani for the dramatic slam to right field off starter Hao-Chun Cheng.

Japan added six more runs in the inning, which lasted 28 minutes. Reliever Chih-Wei Hu finished the inning, but not before Japan batted around and Ohtani got his third hit of the game — a single — and his fifth RBI in the inning.

And only two innings had been played.

Japan scored three more in the third, this time off the third pitcher, Tzu-Chen Sha, to push the lead to 13-0.

Left in the shadows was Japan's starting pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto, last season's World Series MVP with the Dodgers.

After long rests between innings, Yamamoto got into trouble in the third, walking two and loading the bases with the help of an error.

He was replaced by Shoma Fujihira, who struck out An-Ko Lin to end the threat.

Yamamoto struck out three, walked two and allowed no hits and was the winner. Cheng got the loss.

Ohtani led off the fourth and

lined out on a leaping catch by first baseman Nien-Ting Wu as he tried for the cycle — a single, double, triple and a home run. He needed a triple to complete the cycle, and the leaping catch might have prevented it.

Japan is the defending WBC champion and the favorite from Pool C to reach the quarterfinals. Japan is also a favorite to reach the final in Miami on March 17, perhaps against the United States.

On Saturday in Pool C, Taiwan faces the Czech Republic and Japan plays South Korea.

Ohtani spoke to the crowd after the game, bowing and tipping his cap.

"It was a good game and we got off to a good start, so I think it was all because of your support," he said to rising applause as he spoke in Japanese. "I think the battles will continue, but if the fans and the team can come together and cheer it will encourage us. So please support us."

Starting and winning pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto also, of course, credited Ohtani in a post-game press conference away from the field.

"This was our first game of the tournament and to score the first run is always difficult," he

said. "But Shohei hit a huge home run to give us the momentum. So I tip my cap to him."

**Australia beats the Czech Republic 5-1:** A three-run homer from Chicago White Sox infielder Curtis Mead helped Australia to remain unbeaten in Pool C.

Australia is lining up among the favorites from Tokyo to reach the quarterfinals along with home team Japan.

Mead's homer in the third put Australia up 3-1 after the Czechs failed to convert a double play early in the inning that eventually gave Mead a chance to bat. Australia added two runs in the ninth, including a solo home run by Alex Hall.

The Czechs took a 1-0 lead in the bottom of the second on a sacrifice fly by Vojtech Mensik.

Josh Hendrickson was the winning pitcher and Tomas Ondra got the loss.

Australia improved to 2-0 in Pool C and the Czechs fell to 0-2. Australia reached the quarterfinals three years ago in the last WBC but lost to Cuba 4-3.

The Australians have several players with MLB organizations including Mead. There's also Travis Bazzana, the first pick in the 2024 MLB amateur draft taken by the Cleveland Guardians.

## Injured Astros All-Star Peña won't play in WBC

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Houston Astros All-Star shortstop Jeremy Peña will miss the World Baseball Classic with a broken right ring finger, the team announced on Thursday.

Astros manager Joe Espada told reporters at the team's spring training complex that Peña was being sent to a hand specialist for assessment of some damage to the nail area on the finger after fielding a hard groundball for the Dominican Republic national team during

an exhibition game on Wednesday.

The Astros said later that Peña was diagnosed with a fracture in the tip of the finger and will be re-evaluated in two weeks. The Dominican Republic plays its first game of the WBC on Friday in Miami against Nicaragua, and the tournament championship game is on March 17.

"Jeremy left because he had an injury in the finger. The image was not clear enough," Dominican Republic general man-

ager Nelson Cruz said in Miami at the team's WBC workout Thursday. "Today we did an MRI. He went to a finger specialist, and he had a fracture in the finger. He's going to be out for two weeks. So, we'll have to make a replacement."

Cruz didn't announce the replacement, other than saying the team hopes to have that person in place in time for Friday's WBC game.

"We have a great team. Jeremy was part of this team," Dominican Republic manager Al-

bert Pujols said. "We have been preparing ourselves. Unfortunately, he won't be able to be with us. ... We are going to make the best possible decision."

The Astros open the regular season on March 26 at home against the Los Angeles Angels, putting Peña's availability for opening day in question.

The 28-year-old Peña is coming off a career-best season in 2025, when he made his first All-Star team and batted .304 with an .840 OPS and 20 stolen bases.

# James breaks Abdul-Jabbar's FG record

Associated Press

DENVER — LeBron James surpassed Kareem Abdul-Jabbar for the most field goals in NBA history, but his night ended with a disheartening loss and a sore left elbow.

James hit a turnaround 12-foot jumper over Zeke Nnaji with 12 seconds left in the first quarter of the Los Angeles Lakers' 120-113 loss to the Denver Nuggets on Thursday night to surpass Abdul-Jabbar's mark.

"My name being mentioned with some of the greatest to ever play this game has always been humbling and pretty cool," James said. "It's a pretty cool thing. I grew up watching and reading, idolizing a lot of the greats. And if I ever was able to be a part of the NBA, I wanted to be in position where I could be named with some of the greats by doing something right."

The record-breaking bucket gave James 15,838 career field goals in his unprecedented 23rd NBA season. Abdul-Jabbar had 15,837 baskets when the sky-hook-wielding big man ended his 20-year career in 1989 as the NBA's career scoring leader. Karl Malone is a distant third with 13,528 field goals.

James finished with 16 points on 7-of-11 shooting, but it was his all-around game that kept the Lakers close after the Nuggets jumped out to a 16-3 lead in their wire-to-wire win. James had a team-high eight assists, three steals and a big block.

"He's been a complete player for 23 years," Lakers coach J.J. Redick said. "... He's just a phenomenal basketball player."

Nikola Jokic concurred, saying, "He's definitely a legendary player."

James passed Abdul-Jabbar to become the top scorer in NBA history in February 2023. James was already the top scorer in NBA playoff history, and he surpassed 50,000 career points in the regular season and postseason combined a year ago.

James has already attempted more field goals than any NBA player — 31,274 entering Thursday night, including more than 7,500 3-pointers.

Abdul-Jabbar, the low-post virtuoso who made more than 50% of his shots in 19 straight seasons to start his career, attempted only 28,307 field goals — and just 18 of them were 3-pointers after the shot was in-

troduced to the league midway through his career.

James hurt his left elbow and left the game after a layup that pulled Los Angeles to 110-106 with four minutes to go. He and Jokic banged into each other as James scored and James fell to the floor, bracing himself with his right arm but injuring his left. No foul was called and James said the officials told him the contact was "marginal."

"It's pretty sore right now. It feels like a funny bone situation," said James, who returned with 2:05 left and the Lakers trailing by a point. The Lakers, however, never were able to overcome the Nuggets — or leapfrog them in the standings.

Asked if he was concerned about the severity of the injury, James said, "We'll see what happens over the next couple of days. Hopefully, I wake up tomorrow and it doesn't feel too much worse than it does now — or if it feels better, that would be great."

So, James wasn't really in the mood to look back over his career and relish making more baskets than anyone who ever played the game.

"I don't know, right now it

doesn't hit me at all," James said. "Obviously, what I feel is my elbow and I feel the loss.

"Obviously, it's a pretty cool feat. But it's hard for me to kind of wrap my head around it and what it looks like. It's something, one, that I've never had a goal to have that record ... but it's a pretty cool feat; it's an unbelievable feat."

Abdul-Jabbar was a career 55.9% shooter, while James has hit 51.6% of his shots.

James tied Abdul-Jabbar's record with his second basket of the game, an alley-oop dunk from Luka Doncic.

Now 41, James regularly sets NBA records for longevity and career achievements — most recently becoming the oldest player to get a triple-double last month.

Even more history awaits James later in March, barring injury — and left elbow now willing: The Lakers' visit to the Nuggets was the 1,606th regular-season game of his career, putting him just five games behind Robert Parish (1,611) for the most in NBA history. James already holds the league's career record for playoff games with 292.

## Rookie Cooper Flagg has mixed return to Mavericks

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Mavericks rookie Cooper Flagg was back in the starting lineup for Dallas against the Orlando Magic on Thursday night after missing eight games with a foot injury. He had a mixed return to action.

The No. 1 pick in last year's NBA draft was sidelined with a left mid-foot sprain and had last played at Phoenix on Feb. 10. But, the Mavericks didn't hesitate to go directly to their rookie star in crunch time.

Dallas put the ball in Flagg's hands at the end of a game and the 19-year-old came through

with a big three-point play with 37.3 seconds left that gave the Mavericks a four-point lead.

But, it wasn't quite enough this time.

Flagg missed a mid-range jump shot in the final seconds and the Mavericks lost 115-114 to Orlando. It was their 15th loss in 17 games.

But, nobody was disappointed.

"Obviously we've been in a lot of those situations throughout the season, (and we) haven't won a ton of them, but it's about learning experiences for us right now," Flagg said. "We've got to learn, we've got to get bet-

ter. We're going to be in a ton of these situations moving forward into next year. I'm pretty comfortable at this point."

Flagg scored 18 points on 7-for-22 shooting in 26 minutes and finished with five rebounds, six assists and four blocks, including three in the fourth quarter after he had taken a couple of hard fouls.

"He had some incredible blocks there," Dallas coach Jason Kidd said. "I think he got a little upset when he got hit after the whistle. But I thought his energy picked up on the defensive end and he got us going."

The 6-foot-9 Flagg was on a

record-setting roll when he got injured, having put up consecutive games of 49, 34, 36 and 32 points.

He is the youngest NBA player to score 45 points, and he joined Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Kelly Tripucka as the only rookies to post 49-point games with 65% shooting.

"Coop is going to be a superstar in this league," said Klay Thompson, who scored 24 points for the Mavericks. "It's been a pleasure to be his teammate, and I'll be excited to tell future generations that I got to play with him in his rookie season."

# Rangers rout Maple Leafs for home win

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Alexis Lafreniere scored the go-ahead goal on a deflection in the third period, and the New York Rangers beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 6-2 on Thursday night to pick up their first regulation win at home in more than three months.

It was the Rangers' 19th game at Madison Square Garden since defeating St. Louis on Nov. 24. They had lost 13 of 18 since, with the only victories during that stretch coming in overtime or a shootout.

Falling behind 13 seconds in, they rallied to win for just the eighth time in 28 home games all season.

Jaroslav Chmelar scored his first career NHL goal a few minutes after Lafreniere put the Rangers up, bringing some joy to the team and crowd at the three-quarter mark of a season that long ago went off the rails.

Playing on the eve of the trade deadline, who was not in uniform for New York and Toronto to safeguard them from injury was just as notable if not more notable than who was on the ice.

The Rangers scratched centers Vincent Trocheck and Sam Carrick. The Maple Leafs for a second consecutive night opted not to dress defenseman Oliver Ekman Larsson and forwards Scott Laughton and Bobby McMann. Roster management was the reason given.

Toronto, which traded center Nicolas Roy to Colorado earlier Thursday, lost its sixth game in a row coming out of the Olympic break. The Leafs' longest-active playoff streak is well on its way to ending at nine.

**Sabres 5, Penguins 1:** Ryan McLeod and Alex Tuch scored short-handed goals and Buffalo beat Pittsburgh.

McLeod now has a league-best five short-handed goals this season. Josh Norris added a power-play goal, Owen Power scored and Mattias Samuelsson scored an empty-net goal for the

Sabres, who won their fifth straight game.

Tage Thompson established a career-best, nine-game point streak with an assist. Buffalo has points in 10 straight road games, matching the longest road point streak in franchise history.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen stopped 26 shots for the Sabres, who are 11-2-1 in their last 14 games.

**Blue Jackets 4, Panthers 2:** Jet Greaves made 26 saves, Mathieu Olivier scored twice and Columbus dealt another blow to Florida's playoff hopes with a victory.

Two-time defending champion Florida is in danger of becoming the first Cup-winning team to miss the playoffs the following season since Los Angeles in 2014-15. Ten points behind Boston for the final wild-card spot in the East, the Panthers have lost the first four games of a trip that ends Friday night in Detroit.

Defenseman Ivan Provorov had a goal and two assists and Boone Jenner also scored to help Columbus, fighting for a wild-card spot in the East, win its third straight.

Defenseman Niko Mikkola and Sam Bennett scored for Florida in a 5:36 span of the third period.

Gustav Forsling appeared to tie it with 2:55 to go, but Columbus successfully challenged for goaltender interference. Olivier then put it away with an empty-netter with 1:42 left.

**Mammoth 3, Flyers 0:** Vitek Vanecek stopped 16 shots in his 100th career win and Dylan Guenther assisted on two Utah goals as it beat Philadelphia.

Nick Schmaltz and Clayton Keller scored in the second period for the Mammoth, and Michael Carcone added an empty-net goal at 18:12 of the third.

Vanecek earned his first shutout of the season and the 11th of his career.

After a scoreless first period,

the Mammoth outshot the Flyers 14-7 in the second period and took a lead they never relinquished.

**Predators 6, Bruins 3:** Matthew Wood scored twice to lead Nashville to a victory over Boston.

Filip Forsberg had a goal and two assists, and Nicolas Hague, Erik Haula and Luke Evangelista also scored for the Predators. Juuse Saros made 20 saves for Nashville, which snapped a three-game losing streak. The Predators trail the Seattle Kraken for the Western Conference's second wild card by three points.

Charlie McAviy and Viktor Arvidsson each had a goal and an assist and Morgan Geekie also scored for Boston. Joonas Korpisalo made 24 saves for the Bruins, who have lost two of their last three games. Boston is one point ahead of Columbus for the Eastern Conference's second wild card.

Hague scored the game's first goal at 13:53 of the opening period on a slap shot between Korpisalo's pads.

Wood made it 2-0 at 1:24 of the second with a short-handed goal.

**Jets 4, Lightning 1:** Connor Hellebuyck made 26 saves, Mark Scheifele had a goal and an assist and Winnipeg beat Tampa Bay.

Morgan Barron, Gustav Nyquist and Kyle Connor, into an empty net, also scored for Winnipeg. The Jets improved to 25-26-10, extending their home winning streak against Tampa Bay to five games.

Nyquist scored his first goal in 41 regular-season games dating to last season. He gave Winnipeg a 3-1 lead at 5:34 of the third period.

Brayden Point scored for Tampa Bay, and Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 26 shots. The Lightning have lost four straight to fall to 38-18-4.

Point scored at 1:52 of the third period to spoil Hellebuyck's shutout bid. Jake

Guentzel picked up his 39th assist, matching his total last season.

**Senators 4, Flames 1:** Dylan Cozens scored a power-play goal 6:33 into the third period to snap a tie and lift Ottawa to a win over Calgary.

Brady Tkachuk found Cozens alone in front and he beat Devin Cooley on the blocker side to give the Senators a 2-1 lead. Tim Stutzle and Shane Pinto added empty-netters for the final score. Lars Eller also had a goal as the Senators, who are 7-1-2 in their last 10 games, moved four points behind the Boston Bruins for the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

Eller's goal ended a 34-game goalless drought. His last goal came on Oct. 30 against Calgary.

Linus Ullmark made 19 stops to improve to 8-0-3 in his last 11 decisions.

Martin Pospisil scored his first goal of the season for Calgary and Cooley made 33 saves.

**Kings 5, Islanders 3:** Artemi Panarin scored his first goal in a Kings uniform, and Los Angeles beat New York for the club's first victory under interim head coach D.J. Smith.

Panarin, Mikey Anderson and Adrian Kempe had a goal and an assist apiece for the Kings, and Darcy Kuemper made 31 saves. Samuel Hoenig and Alex Laferriere also scored in just Los Angeles' second victory since January.

Kings captain Anze Kopitar had an assist while playing his 1,500th game, becoming the 25th player in NHL history to hit the mark. The Slovenian center, who is retiring this spring after 20 seasons in Los Angeles, is just five points away from passing Marcel Dionne to become the Kings' career scoring leader.

Bo Horvat scored an improbable goal off a faceoff taken with a second left in the second period for the Islanders, but it didn't prevent a second straight blowout loss for New York in Southern California.