

## Iran says gas field hit; Trump hints at war end

*Bloomberg News*

Iran said the United States and Israel struck its giant South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf, the latest attack on energy assets in the regionwide conflict.

Oil prices jumped after Iranian state TV reported the air strike, which raised fears of further risks to global crude and gas supplies. Gulf producers have significantly reduced output during the 19-day war, particularly due to the effective shuttering of the Strait of Hormuz.

If confirmed, the assault would mark the first time the U.S. and Israel have targeted Iran's upstream oil and gas facilities since starting the war on Feb. 28. The Islamic Republic has responded with strikes on Israel and Arab states, upending financial and energy markets.

President Donald Trump — who has repeatedly complained about a lack of interest from erstwhile allies in joining the war or helping to secure the

Strait of Hormuz — said on social media early Wednesday that perhaps countries other than the U.S. should take responsibility for the critical waterway, which separates Iran from Oman.

"I wonder what would happen if we 'finished off' what's left of the Iranian Terror State, and let the Countries that use it, we don't, be responsible for the so called 'Straight?'" he said.

Iran launched fresh waves of missiles and drones at the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait after confirming the assassination of its security chief, Ali Larijani. It also struck Tel Aviv, killing two people. Israel and the U.S. maintained their bombardment of Iran.

European gas futures pared some losses after the South Pars news. Brent futures rose as much as 1.8% to trade briefly above \$105 a barrel.

Iran's military vowed to avenge the death of Larijani as

well as that of Gholamreza Soleimani, the head of the Basij paramilitary unit, which maintains internal security in Iran. Israel said Iranian Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib has also been killed.

The U.S. said it dropped 5,000-pound bunker-buster munitions on Iranian missile sites near the Strait of Hormuz late Tuesday. That's part of Trump's efforts to reopen the vital waterway to commercial vessels.

Iran, meanwhile, has been moving its own oil through the strait at close to prewar levels. Crude loadings at Kharg Island also appear to continue undisturbed, despite U.S. strikes on the export hub.

"We need to design new arrangements for the Strait of Hormuz and the way ships pass through it in the future," Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told Al Jazeera. The rules should "guarantee that safe passage through the strait takes

place under specific conditions."

Trump again said the U.S. would soon be ready to end the war.

"If we left right now, it would take them 10 years to rebuild," Trump said at the White House on Tuesday. "We're not ready to leave yet. But we'll be leaving in the near future."

Trump threatened to expand strikes on Kharg Island after weekend attacks on military installations there. The president has abandoned efforts to recruit partners from Europe and Asia to help reopen Hormuz with naval escorts. That was after most countries showed reluctance or flat-out refused to join such a mission, which military analysts say would be risky without a ceasefire.

In Iran, a strike hit an area at the Bushehr nuclear power plant, according to Russia's state atomic firm Rosatom, which operates the facility.

## USS Nimitz retirement delayed to maintain 11 carriers

*Stars and Stripes*

The scheduled retirement of the USS Nimitz will be delayed, and the Navy's oldest aircraft carrier will serve about 10 months longer than planned.

The Nimitz will remain active through March 2027, the Navy confirmed. It had been scheduled to begin the decommissioning process this year. Breaking Defense first reported the extension.

Extending the Nimitz's service will allow the Navy to maintain a minimum of 11 active aircraft carriers, as mandated by Congress. The USS John F. Kennedy, the Navy's next Ford-class aircraft carrier, is scheduled to

be delivered and officially commissioned in March 2027.

The Pentagon released details in an announcement Friday, stating that a contract was issued to Huntington Ingalls Inc. in Newport News, Va., "for advance planning and long-lead-time material procurement to prepare and make ready for the accomplishment of the inactivation and defueling of USS Nimitz."

Work "is expected to be completed by March 2027."

The Nimitz departed its Bremerton, Wash., homeport for the final time on March 7 for military exercises.

"Nimitz is deploying to the

U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility this spring as part of U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet's Southern Seas 2026 deployment," Lt. Cmdr. Peter Pagano, a spokesman for the carrier, said in a March 8 email sent from aboard the ship.

The Nimitz, which is shifting its homeport from Kitsap to Naval Station Norfolk, Va., had returned to Bremerton in December from what was expected to be its final deployment.

During that deployment, the ship's Carrier Air Wing 17 took part in strikes against ISIS targets in Somalia.

Overall, squadrons embarked

on the Nimitz completed more than 8,500 aircraft sorties, while its jets, reconnaissance planes, and helicopters logged approximately 17,000 flight hours. Port visits included Malaysia, Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

The nearly 51-year-old carrier, commissioned in May 1975, has served in conflicts and crises spanning the end of the Vietnam War, the Iranian Revolution, the Gulf of Sidra incident, two decades of the Cold War, Operation Desert Storm, the aftermath of 9/11, and wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, as well as numerous lesser-known operations around the globe.

# 'Smorgasbord of danger' in Ford laundry

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — A potent mixture of flammable materials, equipment pushed beyond its limits and human error could be behind a fire last week aboard the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford, according to a shipping expert.

"It's just a smorgasbord of danger all put together," said Sal Mercogliano, an adjunct professor at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.

The Ford, along with nearly 4,500 personnel, is operating in the Red Sea in support of Operation Epic Fury, the ongoing joint American and Israeli military campaign against Iran.

The carrier left Norfolk, Va., in late June for a then-routine deployment to Europe that unexpectedly included duty in the Caribbean Sea and the Middle East.

That extended time at sea also could have been a factor in the March 12 fire in the main laundry areas, Mercogliano said.

"Equipment that normally would be serviced and taken down may be running at levels past when they need to run," Mercogliano said. "Anytime

you go past normal operating hours, the chances of mechanical and human error increase."

Three sailors aboard the ship were injured as a result of the fire, which the Navy said was fully contained the same day.

None of the injuries were life-threatening, and two of the sailors have since returned to duty, while the third remains in stable condition after being flown off the ship for treatment.

It's not clear how the fire started, and the Navy has released few details. The fire did not impact the ship's propulsion plant, and Ford remains fully operational, the Navy said at the time.

The cause of the Ford fire is under investigation, a U.S. military official said Tuesday.

"As it is being investigated, the ship's forces are inspecting and overhauling affected spaces," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The official didn't say whether crew living quarters had been affected. But there are indications the fire may have displaced hundreds of sailors, potentially destroying bedding

and personal possessions.

On Tuesday, the Navy Exchange said it had liquidated its inventory of black boots available for sale at several bases in Europe in support of Ford.

The New York Times reported this week that more than 600 sailors and crew members had been uprooted by the fire, sleeping on the floor and on tables. It took more than 30 hours to fully extinguish the fire, according to the NYT report.

Also on Tuesday, USNI News reported that Ford would soon leave the Red Sea to undergo repairs at U.S. Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete, citing an unnamed senior U.S. official.

Military officials contacted by Stars and Stripes would not say whether Ford would depart the Middle East, citing operational security.

Shipboard laundry and dry-cleaning facilities on aircraft carriers are vast areas situated in the lower deck areas of vessels.

They house industrial washers capable of extracting dirt, grease and other gunk from fabric and powerful dryers that can churn out as much as 100 pounds

of clean uniforms and other items per cycle for thousands of personnel.

The facilities also include pressers, irons and other equipment and piles of clothing, bedding and other items in various stages of laundering.

They require huge amounts of electricity and generate significant heat, requiring ample air conditioning to keep sailors and equipment cool.

Electrical problems and delayed maintenance of equipment, including uncleaned lint filters in laundry areas, are among the chief causes of fires on ships, said a Navy sailor not authorized to comment publicly and who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Those fires most commonly happen in mechanical spaces, laundry areas and berthings, where high temperatures and combustible materials are factors, the sailor said.

If Ford's firefighters, known as damage controlmen, couldn't immediately put out the fire, they would have sealed the area to isolate the blaze, Mercogliano and the sailor said.

That method takes time for flames and heat to subside.

## New Marine unit puts capabilities to test in Arctic

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

A new U.S. Marine Corps unit designed to fight in shadowy gray zones is getting its first real test in the Arctic, where NATO is honing its response to potential aggression in the High North.

The Corps' new Multi-Domain Task Unit brings specialized intelligence and cyberwarfare capabilities to the alliance's new Arctic Sentry mission focused on increased allied vigilance in the region, Marine Forces Europe and Africa said in a statement

Thursday.

Maj. Gen. Daniel Shipley, commander of MARFOREUR/AF, said the debut of the unit in the ongoing exercise Cold Response in Norway centers on giving commanders advanced capabilities and necessary information before a conflict starts.

"It's about creating a force that can act decisively at a moment's notice, and much of that happens in the information environment," Shipley said.

Ranging from signals intelligence and reconnaissance to cy-

berdefense and joint targeting powers, the unit's capabilities can supplement and enhance those of other NATO forces in the region, the statement said.

Maneuvering in what's termed the gray zone has been an area of focus for the U.S. and allied militaries in countering Russia, which often uses tactics such as cyberattacks, disinformation and sabotage to gain an advantage without triggering a full-scale conflict.

The incorporation of the high-tech Marine unit in Arctic drills

shows how the alliance is preparing for a potential fast-moving crisis in the increasingly strategic High North.

In February, NATO launched its Arctic Sentry mission to bolster its presence amid concerns about Russian and Chinese activity in the region.

Cold Response, hosted by Norway, is operating in conjunction with the broader NATO effort.

Both the Marine Corps and the Army have been focused on developing multidomain teams in recent years.

# Gabbard deflects on prewar advice for Trump

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Democratic senators pressed the government's top intelligence official at annual worldwide threats hearings Wednesday about the war with Iran, including whether she had advised President Donald Trump that Tehran was likely to block the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial passageway for oil and gas from the Persian Gulf, if attacked.

Tulsi Gabbard, the director of national intelligence, repeatedly deflected questions about the intelligence she had offered the Republican president.

That exasperated Democrats who tried to use a rare public forum to extract answers about the widening conflict in the Middle East.

She sidestepped when asked by Virginia Sen. Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee,

whether she had advised Trump that Iran would attack Gulf nations and shut down the strait if the country was targeted by U.S. strikes.

"I have not and won't divulge internal conversations. I will say that those of us within the intelligence community continue to provide the president with all of the best objective intelligence available to inform his decisions," she said.

Trump has urged allies to help safeguard the waterway and ease a chokepoint on the region's oil exports. He complained Tuesday that NATO and most other American allies have rejected his calls.

The annual congressional hearings involving the most senior intelligence officials are taking place at a time of scrutiny over the U.S. military campaign in the Middle East and heightened concerns about terrorism at home after recent at-

tacks at a Michigan synagogue and Virginia university.

The focus was on the war, and among the issues expected to be raised was reporting that outdated intelligence likely led to the United States firing a missile that hit an elementary school in Iran and killed more than 165 people. The outdated targeting data was reported to have come from the Defense Intelligence Agency, whose director, Lt. Gen. James H. Adams, was to testify. The White House has said the strike is under investigation.

The hearings, which continue Thursday in the House, are also likely to delve into the administration's internal debate over the war, given the resignation this week of Joe Kent as director of the National Counterterrorism Center. Kent said Tuesday that he could not "in good conscience" back the war and did not agree that Iran posed an

imminent threat to the U.S.

Hours later, Gabbard, whose office oversaw Kent's work, wrote on social media that it was up to Trump to decide whether Iran posed a threat.

Trump has sought to distance himself from Kent. CIA Director John Ratcliffe tried to do the same Wednesday when he was asked whether intelligence supported Kent's assessment that Iran was not an imminent threat.

"The intelligence reflects the contrary," Ratcliffe said.

Apart from Iran, Gabbard was pressed on her presence at an FBI search in January of an election hub in Fulton County, Ga., where agents seized voter data from the 2020 presidential election. Her appearance at a domestic law enforcement operation raised eyebrows given that Gabbard's office is meant to focus squarely on foreign threats.

## Rubio: Cuba moves lacking, needs 'new people' in charge

*Miami Herald*

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Tuesday that measures announced by Cuba on Monday to allow Cubans living abroad to own private businesses on the island are not "dramatic enough" to fix the country's dire economic problems and that the country needs "new people" in charge.

"Cuba has an economy that doesn't work, and a political and governmental system that can't fix it, so they have to change dramatically. What they announced yesterday is not dramatic enough. It's not going to fix it, so they've got some big decisions to make over there," he told reporters.

In response to another question, Rubio insisted that Cuba's economy does not work and has survived thanks to subsidies, first from the Soviet Union and

later from Venezuela.

"They don't get subsidies anymore, so they are in a lot of trouble, and the people there don't know how to fix it, so they have to get new people in charge," he said.

Rubio's comments are the clearest indication yet that the Trump administration, which is in talks with Cuba, does not view the announced changes as sufficient for the United States to ease pressure on the communist island. Rubio suggested last month that Cuba could reform its economy as a first step to ease U.S. pressure, adding that the U.S. is not expecting Cuba to change overnight.

President Donald Trump cut off most oil supplies to the island in an attempt to pressure Cuban leaders to negotiate changes to the country's six-decade-old communist system.

## DOD official unaware of any plans to invade Cuba

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A Department of Defense official on Tuesday referred to Cuba as a "significant threat," but said he was not aware of plans to strike the country as lawmakers readied a resolution barring military intervention in Cuba without congressional approval.

The comments from Joseph Humire, the acting assistant secretary for defense for homeland defense and Americas security affairs, came a day after President Donald Trump raised the possibility of "taking" Cuba while speaking to reporters at the White House.

"I mean, whether I free it, take it — I think I could do anything I want with it, if you want to know the truth," Trump said

Monday, when asked to clarify his statement.

Trump's remarks raised concerns among some members of the House Armed Services Committee on Tuesday that the military could take action similar to the January raid carried out in Venezuela, which seized the country's leader.

Humire, in testimony to the committee, described Cuba as one of the United States' "strongest intelligence adversaries" and said it was involved in "pretty much every threat" from the Western Hemisphere, pointing to its alignment with criminal groups, work with external state actors and security presence in Venezuela.

But he said he was not familiar with any plans to invade Cuba, deferring to the White House "on those decisions."

# Mullin put on spot in stormy DHS hearing

*New York Daily News*

Sen. Markwayne Mullin, R-Okla., faced harsh questioning about the partial government shutdown that has roiled air travel and President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown at his confirmation hearing to be Department of Homeland Security secretary.

The former mixed martial arts fighter vowed to take a less partisan and confrontational approach to the job than predecessor Kristi Noem, even as both parties traded barbs.

"My goal in six months is that we're not in the lead story every single day," Mullin said in his opening statement.

The hearing came as the monthlong partial shutdown

has started to cause widespread problems for travelers and Transportation Safety Administration screeners are forced to work without receiving paychecks.

Lines at security checkpoints have stretched out the door at airports in some spring break hot spots and have topped an hour at some times at New York's JFK, LaGuardia and Newark airports.

"We have to get DHS funded," Mullin said. "We have to set the partisan side down."

"We're playing with fire," he added.

The hearing started with an ugly back-and-forth with Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., who called Mullin a liar and accused him

of promoting violence because Mullin said he understood why a neighbor sucker-punched Paul.

"Everybody in this room knows I'm very, very blunt," Mullin said.

Paul even aired a video of Mullin expressing support for physical violence against political opponents.

"You think a violent attack is just fine," Paul said. "You offer no apology and no regret."

Mullin a second-term Oklahoma senator, has been tapped to replace Noem at the helm of the government's third-largest department.

Democrats have refused to fund all of DHS without significant reforms to the immigra-

tion crackdown, including mandating that agents stop wearing masks and identify themselves, and calling for independent probes of alleged misconduct, especially the killings of Minneapolis protesters Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti.

Mullin apologized for accusing Pretti in the days after the shooting of plotting to attack federal agents and said he wouldn't prejudge investigations into future misconduct.

He also said agents should get warrants from judges before entering private homes or businesses, unless they are actively pursuing suspects, a concession that would mark a significant shift from current policy.

## Meteor seen in Ohio caused blasts heard as far as New York

*New Haven (Conn.) Register*

A fiery asteroid that broke up in the skies of Ohio on Tuesday morning caused explosions heard as far as New York and Virginia, officials say.

In a release, the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration said eyewitnesses in Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsyl-

vania, Virginia, the District of Columbia and the Canadian province of Ontario filed reports to the American Meteor Society of a very bright daylight fireball seen at about 9 a.m. Tuesday.

NASA said the meteor was also detected by the Geostationary Lightning Mapper on a satellite and several cameras in the region. They said an analysis of

all currently available data places first visibility of the meteor at an altitude of 50 miles above Lake Erie, off the beaches of Lorain in northern Ohio.

The space rock flew east at about 40,000 mph, NASA said, adding the fireball formed around an asteroid that was about 6 feet in diameter and weighed seven tons. They said it traveled over 34 miles through

the upper atmosphere before fragmenting 30 miles over Valley City, Ohio.

NASA said the fragments then continued on to the south, producing meteorites in the vicinity of Medina County, Ohio.

The asteroid unleashed an energy of 250 tons of TNT when it fragmented, NASA said, which caused a pressure wave that spread through the ground.

## Allegations against Cesar Chavez rock labor movement

*Los Angeles Times*

LOS ANGELES — Cesar Chavez, the iconic labor leader, is accused of sexually assaulting two underaged girls in the 1970s as well as fellow farmworker leader Dolores Huerta in the 1960s, according to an investigation from The New York Times.

The newspaper interviewed two women who said they were sexually abused by Chavez — one repeatedly — when they were children.

Huerta told the paper she was raped by Chavez in 1966.

"Mr. Chavez drove her out to

a secluded grape field in Delano, Calif., parked and forced her to have sex inside the vehicle. She said she chose not to report the assault to the police because of their hostility toward the movement, and she feared that no one within the union would believe her," the paper reported.

In an Instagram post, Huerta said for the last 60 years she's kept this secret because, "I believed that exposing the truth would hurt the farmworker movement I have spent my entire life fighting for."

Huerta said she experienced two separate sexual encounters with Chavez. She became pregnant from both encounters and later arranged for the children to be raised by other families.

The New York Times' investigation found Chavez fathered four children out of wedlock with three women and that there had been "whispers within the movement" for decades about his conduct.

The paper reported that a handful of Chavez's relatives and former farmworker leaders have been aware of allegations

of sexual misconduct for years but found no evidence that they made any efforts to investigate.

The revelations come a day after the United Farm Workers said it would not participate in celebrations of Chavez due to "troubling allegations."

Chavez, who died in 1993, is a national figure credited with improving the lives of migrant farmworkers in California and beyond and giving voice to Mexican American struggles.

The Navy's dry cargo ship USNS Cesar Chavez bears his name.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### SpaceX celebrates birthday with launch

**FL** ORLANDO — SpaceX has lit many more candles than needed for its birthdays since it was founded by Elon Musk in 2002.

It lit one more Saturday at 8:37 a.m. with a Falcon 9 rocket that launched from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station's Space Launch Complex 40 flying another 29 Starlink satellites to orbit.

For the company's 24th birthday, which also fell on National Pi Day in deference to the date being 3/14, the launch commentator had a special countdown and felicitations.

"10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, Pi, 2, 1, ignition, engines full power and lift-off. Go SpaceX. Go Falcon. Happy Birthday," he said.

This particular candle, as in the first-stage booster, was flying for the sixth time and made another successful recovery landing downrange on the dronship Just Read the Instructions stationed in the Atlantic.

The launch marked the 18th of the year on the Space Coast, all but one of which have been flown by SpaceX.

### Council rejects law enforcement mask ban

**MD** TOWSON — A Baltimore County Council bill that would have barred law enforcement officers from wearing masks while on duty and required them to visibly display identification failed Monday night after not garnering support from anyone but the bill sponsor.

Introduced by Councilman Izzy Patoka, a Pikesville Democrat who's running for county executive, the measure came on the heels of concerns about the conduct of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers across the country after two American citizens, Renee Good and Alex Pretti, were fatally shot by immigration agents in Minneapolis.

"To me, ICE is wearing masks for one of two reasons ... One is to create a level of fear, and secondly, to create a sense of terror, and I just don't think it's right," Patoka said at a council meeting Monday.

Other government bodies have advanced similar legislation.

### Actress 'still speechless' after stolen ring found

**IL** CHICAGO — Joe Hakimian gestures toward the glittering rings sitting inside glass cases at his downtown jewelry shop, Hakimian Imports. There's the rare-colored gems he picked up at estate sales, and a sparkling 8-carat diamond that covers the finger. He even had an 18k gold brooch shaped like a tennis racket for sale this week.

But perhaps one of the most unique rings that ever entered the doors of the nearly 50-year-old business is no longer in Hakimian's possession. That's because it's back where it belongs — on the finger of the famous actress Lily Collins.

The star's engagement ring was stolen about three years ago from a hotel in Los Angeles, but somehow it recently ended up at a trade show in New York,

where Hakimian unknowingly bought it. As a big believer in "good karma," he said he quickly returned the ring when he learned its origins.

"Having this home means SO much to us," she wrote in an Instagram story, next to a selfie with the ring prominently displayed. "I'm still speechless it's back on my finger."

Collins is best known for her starring role on the Netflix show "Emily in Paris." She married Charlie McDowell in 2021 after getting engaged the previous year.

### ICE releases Columbia protester from detention

**TX** ALVARADO — A New Jersey resident who was arrested during a 2024 pro-Palestinian protest at Columbia University was released from federal immigration custody on Monday, her lawyers said.

Leqaa Kordia, a 33-year-old Palestinian woman, was held for more than a year in a Texas detention center, where she said she had a seizure and faced inhumane conditions.

Kordia was not a student at Columbia, but was one of five people linked to the Morning-side Heights campus whom New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani urged President Donald Trump to drop their immigration cases against. Kordia, whose April 2024 NYPD arrest at Columbia was sealed, was taken into U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody just under a year later, in March 2025.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security said Kordia's student visa had expired

and accused her of providing financial support to people in "nations hostile to the U.S." — an allegation that Kordia's lawyers have denied, and said may refer to payments she made to Palestinian family members.

### E. coli outbreak involving cheese hits 3 states

**MD** SILVER SPRING — E. coli illnesses in Florida, Texas and California have been linked by investigators to cheese from the Fresno, Calif., company Raw Farm, the FDA announced Monday morning.

There have been five people sickened in California, one in Florida and one in Texas from Sept. 1 through Feb. 13. Two people have been hospitalized. None have died. Four of the seven people are 3 years old or younger, the FDA said.

"Whole genome sequencing analysis of E. coli isolates from ill people shows that they are all closely related genetically to each other," the FDA said. "This means that people in this outbreak are likely to share a common source of infection."

The FDA said of the seven people sickened, three have been interviewed and all three said they ate Raw Farm Raw Cheddar Cheese.

E. coli O157:H7 is a Shiga toxin-producing form that can lead to hemolytic uremic syndrome or HUS, a form of kidney failure that can be deadly.

As the CDC notes, most people infected with a form of Shiga toxin E. coli get better after five to seven days of stomachaches, vomiting and diarrhea, which can be bloody.

— From wire reports

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Reporting World, National and Military News

# Venezuela stuns US to win 1st WBC title

Associated Press

MIAMI—Eugenio Suárez and his Venezuelan teammates stood on the stage behind second base with shiny medals draped over their proud chests, belting out their national anthem accompanied by tens of thousands of fans who remained in the ballpark a half-hour after the final out.

Back home, people were singing their praises, too.

Venezuela won the World Baseball Classic for the first time Tuesday night, beating the United States 3-2 in the championship game on Suárez's tiebreaking double in the top of the ninth inning.

"They were with us here in our hearts," Venezuela captain Salvador Perez said of his countrymen. "The World Series, as you all know, is one of the most important championships in the major leagues, but when you fight for your country, that goes beyond. That feeling, the country where you were born and raised, the sacrifices made by our parents, those people that helped us,

that's why this means a lot to me and to Venezuela."

Bryce Harper's two-run homer with two outs in the eighth tied the score for the U.S., but Suárez hit a go-ahead double in the ninth and Daniel Palencia pitched a perfect bottom half.

"Baseball wanted us to fail, to fall down," Venezuela manager Omar López said. "You put aside your individuality and you are going to achieve those results."

Venezuela acting President Delcy Rodríguez declared Wednesday a National Day of Joy and made it a non-working holiday except for essential workers.

"My country needs that championship," star outfielder Ronald Acuña Jr. said, wiping tears from his eyes. "I just want to make my people proud. That's what I did today."

In the capital of Caracas, thousands also sang the anthem as they gathered in the Plaza de la Juventud (Plaza of Youth) to the racket of honking horns from cars and motorcycles.

"I'm overjoyed. It's too much for me!" high school student Yorleiny Mestra said. "The United States is a superpower, and the fact that we beat them makes me very proud of Venezuela."

Maikel Garcia's third-inning sacrifice fly and Wilyer Abreu's fifth-inning homer off rookie Nolan McLean built a 2-0 lead before a roaring, pro-Latin America sellout crowd of 36,190 at loan-Depot park. Left-hander Eduardo Rodríguez and a string of lights-out relievers limited the Americans to two hits through the seventh.

"We were feeling at home. There were more Venezuelan fans than American fans," Garcia said.

Bobby Witt Jr. walked with two outs in the eighth and Harper drove the second straight changeup from Andrés Machado over the center-field fence.

Boston's Garrett Whitlock started the ninth instead of San Diego's Mason Miller, perhaps baseball's best reliever, because U.S. manager Mark DeRosa

promised the Padres he would use Miller only in a save situation.

Luis Arraez walked, and pinch-runner Javier Sanoja stole second just ahead of catcher Will Smith's one-hop throw. Sanoja came home when Suárez doubled to the left-center gap on a full-count changeup. Suárez spread his arms wide and pointed to the sky at second base while teammates streamed from the dugout to greet Sanoja at the plate.

"We're warriors," Abreu said. "We're going to fight for that game to win it."

López awoke Tuesday to three text messages denying him use of pitchers, but said he successfully negotiated to lift the restrictions.

Garcia was selected the tournament MVP after hitting .385 with a WBC-high 10 hits and seven RBIs.

"They underestimated Venezuela because we had never won anything, but we are powerful," Garcia said.

## WNBA reaches deal on new CBA with players' union

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The WNBA and its players' union reached an agreement in principle on a transformational new collective bargaining agreement early Wednesday morning.

Specifics still need to be finalized over the next few weeks as lawyers on both sides work on the new CBA. A term sheet should be done in the next day or two. It will then need to be ratified by the players and then approved by the league's Board of Governors.

"I just want to say we have aligned on key elements of a new collective bargaining agreement together. We still need to finalize a formal term sheet, but the progress made in these discussions marks a transformative step forward for players and the league," WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert said. "It underscores a shared commitment to the continued growth of the game. So we'll share additional details as they become available."

The deal is expected to greatly increase player salaries with million dollar players — a first for the league entering its 30th season that will start on time. That would increase salaries fourfold from last season.

"For the first time, player salaries are tied to a truly meaningful share of league revenue, driving exponential growth in the salary cap, increasing average compensation beyond half a million dollars and raising the standard across facilities, staffing and support," WNBA president Nneka Ogumike said.

The agreement is set to reflect the league's skyrocketing growth and popularity. Attendance, viewership and investment from stakeholders has increased to historic levels over the past few years.

"The deal is going to be transformational," union vice president Breanna Stewart said. "It's going to build and help create a system where everybody is getting exactly what they deserve and more from on the court and off the court aspects."

The deal came after the two sides spent the past eight days in intense in-person negotiations that lasted for more than 100 hours. They came to the agreement at about 2:20 a.m. Wednesday after spending more than 10 hours of discussions Tuesday.

"This is historical for women's sports. I told Cathy it's not just for the players that are entering the league or the players that aren't already here," Ogumike added. "We're just really grateful to be able to come to a deal. We're proud of ourselves."

The deal comes 17 months after the players opted out of their previous agreement and five months after the previous deal was initially set to expire, with talks often becoming contentious.

"We opted out because what we were giving to this league and what we were getting back didn't match," union executive committee member Alysha Clark said. "You could feel the growth everywhere, but it wasn't showing up for the players the way it should. So we stayed with it until it did."

# Mark's late 3 lifts Texas over NC State

*Associated Press*

DAYTON, Ohio — Tramon Mark hit a fadeaway jumper from just inside the 3-point line with 1.1 seconds left, and Texas survived a late rally to beat N.C. State 68-66 on Tuesday night in a First Four matchup of power conference teams that limped into March Madness.

Mark scored 17 points to lead the Longhorns (19-14), who had lost five of six entering the NCAA Tournament. Texas moved into the bracket as the No. 11 seed in the West region and will face sixth-seeded BYU on Thursday night in Portland, Ore.

“When you lose the last couple, what you don’t want is a continuation of holding on to those negative feelings,” Longhorns coach Sean Miller said. “It was not easy. We practiced a couple days not knowing if we were in the tournament, took a couple days off. We came up here with a clear mind, a good spirit.”

Texas led 62-53 on Chendall

Weaver’s two free throws with 2:56 left, but the Wolfpack (20-14) — who also lost five of six before getting sent to Dayton — scored 10 points in a span of 1:12. Paul McNeil Jr. hit two 3s before Mark beat the shot clock with a fadeaway.

Darrion Williams connected from deep to get N.C. State within one. The Wolfpack then forced a turnover by Dailyn Swain, and Tre Holloman made one of two free throws to tie it at 66-all.

The Longhorns ran down most of the game clock before Mark connected from 19 feet, and N.C. State couldn’t get a shot off before the buzzer.

“This one is definitely a first for me, just the way the game was going, the way the game felt,” Mark said. “We had a big lead; they started making some shots. Then I was able to silence the crowd with a big shot like that.”

Mark finished with 17 points, Matas Vokietaitis scored 15 and Swain added 13 for Texas.

Weaver had his first career double-double with 11 points and 10 rebounds.

Williams led the Wolfpack with 21 points. Quadir Copeland scored 16 and McNeil finished with 11.

“You are who you are in pressure moments,” N.C. State coach Will Wade said. “We tried to mask some stuff and we couldn’t do it. That’s why we’re here, and that’s why we’re heading home.”

It was the second meeting this season between the schools. The Longhorns beat the Wolfpack 102-97 on Nov. 26 to claim fifth place in the Maui Invitational. Tuesday night’s game was more of a defensive struggle.

Texas built a 25-15 lead, but then went scoreless over the final 4:06 of the first half. N.C. State finished the half on a 14-5 run to cut its deficit to 30-29 at halftime.

Swain played for Xavier under Miller in last year’s First Four when the Musketeers beat

the Longhorns in a similarly tight game, 86-80. Miller took the Texas job five days later and Swain followed him to Austin.

“Same feeling, two great games, two games I also didn’t play my best in,” Swain said. “I don’t know if it’s the arena or what, but we all kept our composure. They hit really tough shots and Coach Miller calmed us down like, hey, we’re going to win this game.”

The Wolfpack are facing another offseason rebuild via the transfer portal with seven seniors on the roster.

“Well, they’re disappointed, and we’ll certainly help them as they move forward,” Wade said. “Our focus is going to turn to making sure we get the right guys to come in and help us win in the future.”

Texas is the third school Miller has taken to March Madness, and he’ll have to devise a plan to contain one of the best players in the country, BYU’s AJ Dybantsa.

# Howard holds off UMBC for first Tournament victory

*Associated Press*

DAYTON, Ohio — Bryce Harris had 19 points and 14 rebounds, and sank a turnaround jumper with 13 seconds remaining that sent Howard to its first NCAA Tournament victory in program history, 86-83 over UMBC in the First Four on Tuesday night.

Ose Okojie scored a career-high 23 points to lead the Bison (24-10), who entered with an 0-4 record in March Madness and had to hold off a late rally by the Retrievers (24-9).

“We’ve done a lot of things in our program, but let’s check off the box of winning an NCAA game today,” Howard coach Kenneth Blakeney said.

DJ Armstrong Jr.’s 3-pointer with 43 seconds left got UMBC within 83-81. After Harris’ jum-

per as the shot clock expired gave Howard a four-point lead, Jah’Likah King made a layup to make it 85-83.

Isaiah Brown made one of two free throws and Armstrong couldn’t convert a 3 at the buzzer, sealing a trip to Buffalo for the Bison, who enter the Midwest Region bracket as the No. 16 seed and will face top-seeded Michigan on Thursday.

“Run, clock, run,” Blakeney said of his thoughts in the final moments. “We went from, I want to say, a three-possession game to a two-possession game to a one-possession game.”

Blakeney also led Howard, one of the country’s premier historically Black universities, to the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference title and NCAA Tournament appearances in 2023 and

’24.

UMBC was seeking its first March Madness win since it shocked top overall seed Virginia in 2018, becoming the first No. 16 seed to knock off a No. 1. The Retrievers lost in the second round that year and this was the first NCAA Tournament appearance since for the suburban Baltimore school, located 31 miles north of the Bison campus in Washington.

King led UMBC with 19 points, Armstrong had 17 and Caden Diggs scored 15.

Cedric Taylor III scored 16 points for Howard, going 9-for-10 at the free-throw line before fouling out in the final minute.

The Bison led for all but the first 1:21 and took a 13-point lead in the first half. Okojie scored 16

points before halftime, helping Howard to a 49-41 advantage at the break.

Harris, the MEAC player of the year who averaged 17.4 points, hit his second 3-pointer of the night to give the Bison a 61-48 lead early in the second half before UMBC rallied.

“We’ve been in games like this before,” Okojie said. “At this big stage, there’s no time for fear. There’s no time for worry.”

Okojie picked up his fourth foul with 12:33 left and the Retrievers started putting the squeeze on the Bison, setting up the tense finish.

“My teammates need me,” Okojie said. “So to be solid and play those 12 minutes with not fouling is discipline, truly discipline, and trusting in my abilities.”

# SGA scores 40 as Thunder win 10th straight

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 40 points and the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Orlando Magic 113-108 Tuesday night for their 10th straight win.

Chet Holmgren added 20 points and 12 rebounds for Oklahoma City and Ajay Mitchell had 16 points, five of them during a mid-fourth quarter run that put the Thunder ahead to stay.

Paolo Banchero had 32 points, 10 rebounds and five assists for Orlando. Jalen Suggs added 14 points for the Magic, who lost on a second straight night after a seven-game win streak of their own.

Gilgeous-Alexander's record 129th game scoring 20 or more points was accomplished on 14-for-27 shooting and 9-for-11 free throws. He hit 3 of 5 3-point shots, the final one giving OKC a 102-96 lead with 3:11 remaining.

**Pistons 130, Wizards 117:**

Jalen Duren had 36 points and 12 rebounds for Eastern Conference-leading Detroit, which lost fellow All-Star Cade Cunningham to back spasms in the first half of a victory over host Washington.

Cunningham was hurt early in the first quarter while diving for a loose ball. He played for a few more minutes before being taken out at the 6:40 mark, and the team said during the second quarter he would not return.

Reserve Daniss Jenkins added 15 points for the Pistons, who have won four of five and sent the Wizards to their 13th straight loss.

**Knicks 136, Pacers 110:** Josh Hart scored a season-high 33 points on 12-for-13 shooting, including 5-for-5 from 3-point range to lead host New York over Indiana.

OG Anunoby scored 26 points and Karl Anthony Towns added 22 points and 11 rebounds in the Knicks' fourth straight win.

**Hornets 136, Heat 106:** La-

Melo Ball had 30 points and 13 assists, and host Charlotte pulled away in a huge fourth quarter to beat short-handed Miami.

Coby White scored 24 points off the bench and rookie Kon Knueppel added 22 as the Hornets won for the ninth time in 12 games. Brandon Miller scored 16 for Charlotte, which is 10th in the Eastern Conference.

**Timberwolves 116, Suns 104:** Julius Randle scored 32 points and Bones Hyland had 22 points off the bench to help host Minnesota offset absence of All-Star Anthony Edwards and beat Phoenix.

Ayo Dosunmu added 19 points and Rudy Gobert had 19 rebounds for the Timberwolves, who are 7-4 without Edwards this season. The NBA's third-leading scorer will miss the next week or two with knee inflammation.

**Cavaliers 123, Bucks 116:** Evan Mobley had 27 points and a season-high 15 rebounds, and

James Harden also scored 27 as visiting Cleveland opened a three-game trip by beating short-handed Milwaukee.

In a game featuring 11 ties and 16 lead changes, Cleveland pulled ahead for good 103-100 on Sam Merrill's 3-pointer with 6:55 remaining, which started an 8-0 run.

**Spurs 132, Kings 104:** Victor Wembanyama had 18 points and eight rebounds, and visiting San Antonio beat Sacramento.

Wembanyama shot 7-for-14 with a pair of 3-pointers and three assists to help the Spurs to their first win at Golden 1 Center in more than two years.

**Nuggets 124, 76ers 96:** Christian Braun had 22 points, Nikola Jokic finished with 14 assists and host Denver routed Philadelphia.

The Nuggets kept pace with Minnesota in a tight Western Conference race. There are 1½ games separating the third-place Los Angeles Lakers and the Timberwolves in sixth.

# Caufield nets 40th, sending Canadiens past Bruins in OT

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Cole Caufield scored 4:38 into overtime as the Montreal Canadiens edged the Boston Bruins 3-2 in a rivalry matchup Tuesday night.

Caufield tapped a pass from Nick Suzuki into the back of the net for his 40th of the season, becoming the first Canadien to reach the mark since Vincent Damphousse in 1993-94.

Suzuki and Josh Anderson also scored while Jakob Dobes made 26 saves for Montreal, which snapped a two-game losing skid.

Brendan Gallagher picked up an assist in his 900th NHL game, all for the Canadiens.

Pavel Zacha had both goals for the Bruins, and Jeremy Swayman stopped 28 shots.

**Sabres 2, Golden Knights 0:** Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 27 saves to record his first shutout of the season and visiting Buffalo defeated Vegas.

Josh Doan and Josh Norris scored for the Sabres, who opened their four-game road trip with their 10th win in 11 games since the

Olympic break.

**Blue Jackets 5, Hurricanes 1:** Charlie Coyle had a goal and three assists, Danton Heinen scored his 100th career goal and host Columbus beat Carolina.

Mason Marchment, Denton Mateychuk and Mathieu Olivier also scored for the Blue Jackets, who have gotten points in a season-high 10-straight games (6-0-4). Cole Sillinger and Adam Fantilli each added two assists, and Jet Greaves stopped 27 shots.

**Islanders 3, Maple Leafs 1:** Calum Ritchie had a goal and an assist on a pair of first-period power plays as visiting New York beat Toronto.

Brayden Schenn scored his first goal since being acquired from St. Louis ahead of the trade deadline, and Emil Heineman also scored for the Islanders, who have won nine of 12.

**Wild 4, Blackhawks 3 (OT):** Mats Zuccarello scored 3:09 into overtime, and visiting Minnesota stopped a three-game slide by topping Chicago.

Marcus Johansson had a goal and two as-

ists as the Wild improved to 3-0 against the Blackhawks this season. Vladimir Tarasenko and Ryan Hartman also scored, and Brock Faber had three assists.

**Predators 4, Jets 3 (SO):** Ryan O'Reilly scored the lone goal in the shootout to lift visiting Nashville over Winnipeg.

O'Reilly beat Connor Hellebuyck to the glove side in the first round of the shootout. Predators' netminder Juuse Saros secured the win by stopping Gabriel Vilardi, Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor.

**Oilers 5, Sharks 3:** Max Jones and Zach Hyman scored third-period goals, Adam Henrique had a pair of assists and host Edmonton rallied without star forward Leon Draisaitl for a big win over San Jose.

**Canucks 5, Panthers 2:** Elias Pettersson scored twice, including the 200th goal of his NHL career, and host Vancouver held over Florida.

**Lightning 6, Kraken 2:** Nikita Kucherov scored three goals for his sixth career hat trick and added two assists as visiting Tampa Bay beat Seattle.