

Violence, tensions escalate in Gaza, Israel

Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — Israel killed a string of senior Hamas military figures Wednesday and pounded three multistory towers as it hammered the Gaza Strip with airstrikes and militants in the territory fired barrages of rockets. Dozens have died in the most severe outbreak of violence since a 2014 war, with no resolution in sight.

The fighting has taken on many hallmarks of that devastating 50-day conflict between Israel and Hamas, but with a startling new factor: a burst of fury from Israel's Palestinian citizens in support of those living in the territories as well as counterviolence by Jewish Israelis.

In response, Israel deployed border guards in two mixed Arab-Jewish cities that saw unrest in previous days, including the burning of a Jewish-owned restaurant and a synagogue, the fatal shooting of an Arab man and attacks on Arab-owned cars. It was a rare use of the paramilitary force, which normally puts down protests by Palestinians in the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

Palls of gray smoke rose in Gaza, as Israeli airstrikes struck apartment towers and hammered multiple Hamas security installations. In Israel, hundreds of rockets fired

by Gaza's Hamas rulers and other militants at times overwhelmed missile defenses and brought air raid sirens and explosions echoing across Tel Aviv, Israel's biggest metropolitan area, and other cities.

The death toll in Gaza rose to 53 Palestinians, including 14 children and three women, according to the Health Ministry. At least 320 have been wounded, including 86 children and 39 women. Six Israelis were killed by rocket fire, including the first death of an Israeli soldier in this round of conflict, along with three women and a child. Dozens in Israel have been wounded.

There was no sign that either side is willing to back down. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to expand the offensive, saying "this will take time." Hamas has called for a full-scale intifada, or uprising. The last such uprising began in 2000 and lasted more than five years.

The latest eruption of violence began a month ago in Jerusalem, where heavy-handed police tactics during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers ignited protests and clashes with police. A focal point was the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a site sacred to Jews

and Muslims.

Late Monday, Hamas, claiming to be "defending Jerusalem," launched a barrage of rockets at the city, escalating the ground tensions into a new Israel-Hamas punching match.

Since then, militants have fired more 1,050 rockets from Gaza, according to the Israeli military, and Israel has conducted hundreds of strikes in the tiny territory where 2 million Palestinians have lived under a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade since Hamas took power in 2007. Two infantry brigades were sent to the area, indicating preparations for a possible ground invasion.

On Wednesday, Israel stepped up its targeting of Hamas' military wing.

The military and internal security agency said they carried out a "complex and first-of-its-kind operation" that killed the Hamas commander in charge of Gaza City, the highest-ranking Hamas military figure killed by Israel since 2014, and several other senior militants involved in rocket production.

In one of the fiercest attacks, Israeli fighter jets dropped two bombs on a 14-story building in Gaza City, collapsing it.

Army wants to make missile fuel using gut bacteria

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

Military researchers are helping "scale up" the use of *E. coli* to produce fuel for Hellfire missiles, part of a larger push to manufacture small batches of specialty chemicals in cheaper and cleaner ways using microbes.

The use of gut bacteria to make missile propellant is a "larger proof of concept" for the Army's expansion of biological manufacturing capabilities.

The hope is that it will wean the U.S. military off chemicals derived from crude oil in "costly petrochemical facilities" and often available through limited suppliers, the Combat Capabilities Development Command Chemical Biological Center said in a statement.

"Many crucial chemicals are either manufactured by a single source domestically, or worse yet, inside foreign nations that may not always be willing to supply us," said Peter Emanuel, the center's senior research scientist for bioengineering.

Emanuel leads the center's biomanufacturing initiative, part of what he calls a "manufacturing revolution that can make the United States self-sufficient."

Growth in the bioindustrial sector could see the U.S. face off with China in a superpower manufacturing technology race in the coming years, officials said, but it could also provide an economic boost while reducing the financial and environmental costs of manufacturing.

Biomanufacturing relies on bacteria and other microorganisms with modified DNA to produce materials that are costly or im-

possible to obtain otherwise, including high-energy chemical compounds used in explosives.

The Army's biomanufacturing facility cultivates the microbes that it uses to ferment liquid held in large, shiny steel vats, "just like in a microbrewery," its statement said.

The production of Hellfire missile fuel will be the first major proof-of-concept project for the center's expanded and upgraded facility at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., and will address an immediate defense need, officials said.

The facility will produce the fuel's chemical precursor, called BT, which the Defense Department currently gets from a single U.S. supplier. Other DOD labs will help manufacture the final product, called BTTN.

Clinic for Marines being built on Guam

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

The Navy has awarded a \$45 million contract to build a medical and dental clinic at a new Marine Corps base on Guam.

A joint venture between Guam's Core Tech, the Hawaiian Dredging Construction Company and Japan's Kajima Corp. will build the facility at Camp Blaz, according to a Monday statement from Naval Facilities Engineering Command Pacific.

The clinic will include pharmacy, physical therapy, radiology, laboratory, logistics,

optometry, occupational health and dental departments, the statement said.

Blaz, near Andersen Air Force Base, is being built to accommodate the move of 5,000 members of the III Marine Expeditionary Force off Okinawa over the next five years.

The camp was commissioned in September as the first new Marine installation since Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany opened in Georgia on March 1, 1952.

The new clinic being funded by the Japanese government, according to the Navy

statement. Japan is paying for \$3 billion worth of projects for the Marines' relocation with the United States spending another \$5.7 billion.

Work on the clinic is scheduled to be complete by May 2023, the Navy said.

"This state of the art Medical and Dental Facility ... will be operational in time to support the Force Flow of Marines from Okinawa to Guam," Will Boudra, director of the Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Pacific Guam Program Management Office, said in the statement.

Minuteman decision to shape US nuke policy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — For 50 years, the Minuteman missile has been armed and ready, day and night, for nuclear war on a moment's notice. It has never been launched into combat from its underground silo, but this year, it became the prime target in a wider political battle over the condition and cost of the nation's nuclear arsenal.

Minuteman was not intended to last this long, so it's overdue to be replaced or refurbished. Some see this as a moment to push for scrapping it altogether, abandoning one leg of the traditional nuclear "triad" — weapons that can be launched from land, sea and air. Most in Congress favor keeping the land-based leg by replacing Minuteman with a new missile; President Joe Biden's position is not yet clear.

The outcome of the fight will likely steer nuclear policy and strategy for decades to come. It could influence how U.S. allies in Europe and Asia view the reliability of America's nuclear "umbrella" — the security net that has allowed most of them to forgo developing nuclear weapons of their own. Some argue that it could make the difference between war and peace in an era of rising Chinese military power.

Navy Adm. Charles Richard, who as head of U.S. Strategic Command is in charge of nuclear warfighting plans, said Minuteman is so old that Air Force technicians have had to perform magic to keep it fully functional while coping with severely limited spares for components such as missile launch switches.

"I'm afraid there's a point where they

won't be able to pull the rabbit out of the hat and the system won't work," he told a House hearing April 21. Asked later by a reporter if he meant Minuteman had become unreliable, Richard said it's safe and dependable for now, but with "no more margin" for delay in replacing it.

Stephen Schwartz, a nonresident senior fellow at the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, said Richard's statements are reminiscent of alarming claims made during the Cold War about needing new weapons.

"Time and again, officials have warned us 'the sky is falling,' and it is never true," Schwartz said. "Congress should critically examine the historical record and apply some healthy skepticism to such testimony."

Richard applauds a bipartisan push in Congress to preserve and modernize the entire nuclear arsenal at a cost, depending on how you define it, of more than \$1 trillion. Opponents include a former defense secretary, William Perry, who has become an outspoken critic of Minuteman. The Pentagon's current leader, Lloyd Austin, has been publicly noncommittal on Minuteman, but favors preserving the nuclear triad.

The consensus in Congress is that age is eroding the three main pillars of U.S. nuclear strength — long-range bomber aircraft like the 1960s-era B-52, submarines armed with Trident ballistic missiles, and the Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs. Relatively few oppose building new-generation bombers and submarines. The most contentious debate is over whether, when and how to replace Minuteman.

Arguments over Minuteman boil down to this: Given its age and the nuclear challenges posed by Russia and China, should it be phased out in favor of a new-generation ICBM? Or should it be refurbished at lesser cost, to be replaced later? Or should it be phased out, period, with no replacement?

The debate reveals a long-standing American divide. On one side is the view that ICBMs are indispensable to the strategy for deterring any adversary from attempting a nuclear attack upon the United States or its allies.

A key piece of the argument is that ICBMs in their 400 underground silos in five Great Plains states act as a "warhead sink," or sponge, to absorb the first blow in a nuclear war. The argument is that an attacker would need to expend so many weapons destroying these silos that they would see little chance of winning and thus would be deterred from attacking in the first place.

The opposing view is that ICBMs are overkill, given the large amount of firepower in the more elusive sea- and air-based segments of the nuclear arsenal, and that ICBMs make nuclear conflict more likely because an American president might feel compelled to launch one upon a warning of attack that turned out to be a false alarm. Once it's launched from its silo, an ICBM cannot be recalled.

Biden has not publicly addressed the issue. In March, the White House released interim national security guidance promising to "take steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy" but offering no details.

Trump officials defend Capitol riot response

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Two senior Trump administration officials defended their actions during the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol in testimony before Congress on Wednesday, with former acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller standing behind every decision he made that day.

Miller told the House Oversight Committee that he was concerned before the insurrection that sending troops to the building could fan fears of a military coup and cause a repeat of the deadly Kent State shootings.

His testimony, in the latest in a series of congressional hearings centered on the riot, is aimed at rebutting broad criticism that military forces were too slow to arrive even as pro-Trump rioters violently breached the building and stormed inside. The panel's chairwoman, Rep. Carolyn Mal-

oney, D-N.Y., made clear at the outset of the hearing that she planned to dive into the hour-long gap between when military support was first requested and when it was received.

"The federal government was unprepared for this insurrection, even though it was planned in plain sight on social media for the world to see," Maloney said. "And despite all the military and law enforcement resources our government can call upon in a crisis, security collapsed in the face of the mob and reinforcements were delayed for hours as the Capitol was overrun."

Republicans sought immediately to change the focus to the civil unrest that arose from racial justice protests, suggesting that Democrats outraged over the Capitol riot failed to strongly condemn violence last June in the days following George Floyd's death in Minneapolis.

"What is wrong is when indi-

viduals take to crime, violence and mob tactics," said Rep. James Comer, of Kentucky, the committee's top Republican. "This was wrong on Jan. 6, and this was wrong last summer when several cities across the country were attacked by rioters."

Miller was joined by former acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen, who is also testifying for the first time about the Justice Department's role in the run-up to the riot.

Miller said he was determined that the military have only limited involvement, a perspective he said was shaped by criticism of the aggressive response to the civil unrest that roiled American cities months earlier, as well as decades-old episodes that ended in violence, such as the shooting of four Americans at Kent State University by Ohio National Guard members in 1970.

Miller is the most senior Pentagon official to participate in hearings on the riot. The sessions so far have featured finger-pointing about missed intelligence, poor preparations and an inadequate law enforcement response.

The Capitol Police have faced criticism for being badly overmatched, the FBI for failing to share with sufficient urgency intelligence suggesting a possible "war" at the Capitol and the Defense Department for an hourslong delay in getting support to the complex despite the violent, deadly chaos unfolding on TV.

In his prepared remarks, Miller defended his resistance to a heavy military response as being shaped in part by public "hysteria" about the possibility of a military coup or concerns that the military might be used to help overturn the election results.

Scramble on for new fuel routes after pipeline hack

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — State and federal officials are scrambling to find alternate routes to deliver gasoline in the Southeast U.S. after a hack of the nation's largest fuel pipeline led to panic-buying that contributed to more than 1,000 gas stations running out of fuel.

There is no gasoline shortage, but if the pipeline shutdown continues past the weekend, it could create broader fuel disruptions.

The Colonial Pipeline, which delivers about 45% of what is consumed on the East Coast, was hit on Friday with a cyberattack by hackers who lock up computer systems and demand a ransom to release them. The attack raised concerns, once again, about the

vulnerability of the nation's critical infrastructure.

A large part of the pipeline resumed operations manually late Monday, and Colonial anticipates restarting most of its operations by the end of the week, U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said.

The disruption, however, is taking place at the time of year when Americans begin to become more mobile, especially as the nation emerges from the pandemic.

The national average price for a gallon of gasoline ticked above \$3 for the first time since 2016 Wednesday, according to the AAA auto club. Prices begin to rise around this time every year and the AAA auto club said Wednesday that the average price hit \$3.008 nationally.

Number of kids traveling alone at US border with Mexico eases in April

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The number of unaccompanied children encountered on the U.S. border with Mexico in April eased from an all-time high a month earlier, while more adults were found coming without families, authorities said Tuesday.

Authorities encountered 17,171 children traveling alone, down 9% from 18,960 in March, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection, but still well above the previous high of 11,475 reported in May 2019 by the Border Patrol, which began publishing numbers in 2009.

Overall, the Border Patrol's 173,460 encounters with migrants on the Mexican border in April were up 3% from 169,213 in March, the highest level since

April 2000. The numbers aren't directly comparable because a solid majority of those stopped in April were quickly expelled from the country under federal pandemic-related powers that deny rights to seek asylum.

Border Patrol encounters with people coming in families fell in similar proportion to unaccompanied children — down 10% to 48,226 from 53,406 in March. Slightly more than one of three family encounters resulted in pandemic-related expulsions.

The numbers offer the latest read on one of the most serious challenges to Joe Biden's young presidency. Despite some encouraging news in April on unaccompanied children and families, Biden has a lot riding on a new "humane" asylum system that has yet to be unveiled.

House GOP ousts Cheney as No. 3 leader

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans ousted Rep. Liz Cheney from her post as the chamber's No. 3 GOP leader on Wednesday, punishing her after she repeatedly rebuked former President Donald Trump for his false claims of election fraud and his role in inciting the Jan. 6 Capitol attack.

Meeting behind closed doors for less than 20 minutes, GOP lawmakers used a voice vote to remove the Wyoming congresswoman from her leadership post, the latest evidence that challenging Trump can be career-threatening.

She was Congress' highest-ranking Republican woman, a daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, and her removal marked a jarring turnabout to what's been her fast rise within the party.

Cheney has refused to stop repudiating Trump and defiantly signaled after the meeting that she intended to use her overthrow to try pointing the party away from him.

"I will do everything I can to ensure that the former president never again gets anywhere near the Oval Office," she told reporters.

Cheney's fate had been clear for some time with Trump, House Minority Leader

Kevin McCarthy, of California, and No. 2 GOP leader Steve Scalise, of Louisiana, all arrayed against her. GOP lawmakers complained that Cheney's offense wasn't her view of Trump but her persistence in publicly expressing it, undermining the unity they want party leaders to display in advance of next year's elections, when they hope to win House control.

Even so, stripping Cheney, 54, of her leadership job stood as a striking, perhaps defining moment for the GOP.

One of the nation's two major parties was in effect declaring an extraordinary requirement for admission to its highest ranks: fealty to, or at least silence about, Trump's lie that he lost his November reelection bid due to widespread fraud. In states around the country, officials and judges of both parties found no evidence to support Trump's claims that extensive illegalities caused his defeat.

Cheney's replacement was widely expected to be Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., who entered the House in 2015 at age 30, then the youngest woman ever elected to Congress. Stefanik owns a more moderate voting record than Cheney but has evolved into a vigorous Trump defender who's echoed some of his unfounded claims about

widespread election cheating.

It was initially unclear when the separate vote on Cheney's replacement would occur.

Wednesday's voice vote averted a specific public gauge of how much support Cheney may have had, though it had become clear that sentiment among the 212 House Republicans was strongly for her removal. Cheney, who did little to try to rally support among her colleagues, made clear that she was plunging ahead on her anti-Trump path.

Cheney has told Republicans she intends to remain in Congress and seek reelection next year in her solidly pro-Trump state. The former president has said he'll find a GOP primary challenger to oppose her.

In an audacious signal that she was not backing down, Cheney took to a nearly empty House chamber Tuesday night to deliver an unapologetic four-minute assault on her GOP adversaries and defense of her own position.

"Remaining silent and ignoring the lie emboldens the liar," she said, adding, "I will not sit back and watch in silence while others lead our party down a path that abandons the rule of law and joins the former president's crusade to undermine our democracy."

GOP resists Dems' voter access bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans in the U.S. Senate mounted an aggressive case against Democrats' sweeping election and voter-access legislation, pushing to roll back proposals for automatic registration, 24-hour ballot drop boxes and other changes in an increasingly charged national debate.

The legislation, a top priority of Democrats in the aftermath of the divisive 2020 election, would bring about the largest overhaul of U.S. voting in a generation, touching nearly every aspect of the electoral process. It would remove hurdles to voting erected in the name of election security and curtail the influence of big money in politics.

At the end of a long, contentious day, the Rules Committee deadlocked 9-9 on Tuesday over advancing the bill to the full Senate in its current form. That leaves it to Democratic leader Chuck Schumer to try to invoke a special process to force it ahead.

Though it is federal legislation, Republicans are fighting a national campaign against it rooted in state battles to restrict new ways of voting that have unfolded during the pandemic. On Tuesday, the Arizona Legislature sent the governor a bill that would make it easier to purge infrequent voters from a list of those who automatically get mail-in ballots, the latest battleground state to push through changes likely to take months or years to finally settle in court.

GOP Senate leader Mitch McConnell, of Kentucky, is so determined to stop the legislation that he made a rare appearance at Tuesday's Rules Committee session in Washington. McConnell and other Republicans on the panel argued for a wave of amendments against key sections of the bill, which Democrats turned aside in an hourslong voting session. McConnell declared, "Our democracy is not in crisis" and said he wasn't about to cede control of elections to new laws "under the false pretense of saving it."

China's population ages as nation lost workers in 2010s

Associated Press

BEIJING — The number of working-age people in China fell over the past decade as its aging population barely grew, a census showed Tuesday, complicating Chinese leaders' efforts to make a more prosperous and influential nation.

The total population rose to 1.411 billion people last year, up 72 million from 2010, according to the once-a-decade census. Slow growth fell closer to zero as fewer couples had children.

That adds to challenges for Chinese leaders who want to create a richer society and increase its global influence by developing technology industries and self-sustaining economic growth from consumer spending.

The population of potential workers aged 15 to 59 fell to 894 million last year, the National Bureau of Statistics reported. That would be down 5% from a 2011 peak of 925 million. The percentage of children in the population edged up compared with 2010, but the group aged 60 and older grew faster.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police arrest man after video shows tiger in yard

TX HOUSTON — A Texas man free on bond from a murder charge was returned to custody Monday after neighbors found a pet tiger wandering around a Houston neighborhood.

Houston police tweeted Monday night that Victor Hugo Cuevas, 26, was charged with felony evading arrest.

Video of the Sunday night encounter shows the tiger coming face-to-face with an armed off-duty Waller County sheriff's deputy, police said.

When officers arrived, Cuevas put the animal in a white Jeep Cherokee and drove off, Houston police Cmdr. Ron Borza said Monday. Police said the tiger's whereabouts are not known.

"If that tiger was to get out and start doing some damage yesterday, I'm sure one of these citizens would have shot the tiger," Borza said.

Tigers are not allowed within Houston city limits unless a handler, such as a zoo, is licensed to have exotic animals.

Lightning sends chunk of highway through truck

FL WALTON COUNTY — A lightning strike in Florida launched a chunk of highway pavement through a truck windshield and injured two people inside the vehicle, according to fire officials.

The Walton County Fire Rescue responded to the accident on Interstate 10 near DeFuniak Springs, news outlets reported. Photos shared by the department on social media showed the Ford pickup's windshield and back window shattered.

Walton County Sheriff's Office spokesperson Corey Dobridnia told the Tallahassee Democrat that the two occupants of the vehicle suffered minor lacerations from the smashed glass and "will be fine."

Parts of Mackinac Bridge steel grating on auction

MI ST. IGNACE — History lovers have a chance to own pieces of the original Mackinac Bridge with parts of the bridge's steel grating placed on auction.

Barrels that weigh about 470 pounds and contain around 140 pieces of grating are on sale until May 18 when the auction closes. The pieces range in size.

Dozens of bids have already been placed with prices reaching over \$500 a barrel. The bridge connects Michigan's two peninsulas over the Straits of Mackinac.

6K pounds of wipes daily clog city's sewage system

AK ANCHORAGE — Officials in Anchorage have reported that the city's sewer system is clogging up because people are flushing wipes and other items — a problem worsened by the pandemic as people continue to spend more time at home.

Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility spokesperson Sandy Baker said up to 6,000 pounds of wipes entered the sewer system daily since the coronavirus pandemic started, Alaska's News Source reported.

The wipes combine with grease, oils and fats that can block pipes if not removed and even cause sewage to back up into residential neighborhoods and homes.

Baker urged people to be mindful of what they flush down toilets and remember the three P's — "pee, poo and toilet paper."

New cat settles in at Mount Washington

NH NORTH CONWAY — There's a new feline prowling about the highest peak in the Northeast.

Nimbus, a gray shorthair who shares his name with large, gray clouds that bring precipitation, has been a resident at the Mount Washington Observatory since April 14.

The observatory staff have had a cat at the 6,288-foot summit, called the "home of the world's worst weather," since 1932.

Nimbus succeeds Marty, a black Maine coon cat who became ill and died last fall.

Man accused of driving into group, killing mom

TX KATY — A Texas man is facing a murder charge after authorities allege he killed his mother when he drove into a group of people who had been fighting in the parking lot of a suburban Houston restaurant, according to authorities.

Homer Lopez, 20, was charged with murder and two counts of failing to stop and render aid after he struck three people, including his mother, Crystal Lopez, outside a restaurant in the Houston suburb of Katy.

Crystal Lopez, 35, died at the scene, according to the Harris County Sheriff's Office.

A group of people had been outside Pinchy's Tex-Mex Restaurant when they were struck, authorities said.

Two people were hospitalized while two others were treated at the scene.

Investigators believe the incident began as a fight inside the restaurant that continued in the parking lot.

Identity theft hits state hard during pandemic

KS WICHITA — Identity theft rose sharply last year during the COVID-19 pandemic, and no place was hit harder than Kansas.

The Wichita Eagle reported that 43,211 Kansans alerted the Federal Trade Commission in 2020 that someone had stolen or tried to steal their identity. That was 2,272 more cases than in 2019.

Kansas' 1,802% year-over-year increase was the highest among the states and more than three times the national average. Rhode Island was next, with an increase of 1,002%.

Sinkhole drains much of the water out of lake

MO EUREKA — A large sinkhole is draining a lake at Lone Elk Park in St. Louis County.

Park officials said the lake level has dropped substantially thanks to the massive sinkhole in the man-made lake. It's the second time in the last five years that a sinkhole there has drained water. The sinkhole in 2016 was in the same area where the new one was revealed.

Park officials used concrete slurry to patch the sinkhole in 2016. Plans are still being formulated to address the new hole.

In the meantime, the park is adding signage to keep people away.

— From wire reports



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Reporting World, National and Military News

Frantic final days await NBA season

Associated Press

This didn't happen last year.

There was no frantic final few days of the NBA regular season, replete with all the jostling for playoff positioning as well as a scoring race that might go down to the wire. And there's never been the added layer of eight teams going to a play-in tournament, which, given its popularity, can already be considered a success before it even starts.

A year ago, there only was something called seeding games that a few teams chose to sleep-walk through, in a bubble, without fans, with eight teams already home for the summer—or spring, summer and fall, as it turned out.

This year, things are much closer to normalcy.

Welcome back, chaos. Welcome back, drama. You were missed.

Here's a short list of just some of the things that the final few days of the regular season will decide, in no particular order: the No. 3 vs. No. 6 and No. 4 vs.

No. 5 playoff matchups in both the Eastern and Western Conferences; the four opening matchups for the play-in tournament that is now less than a week away; the scoring race between Golden State's Stephen Curry and Washington's Bradley Beal; and home-court advantage throughout the entirety of the NBA playoffs.

Oh, and all that is happening in the same week that NBA legends Kobe Bryant, Kevin Garnett and Tim Duncan finally go into the Basketball Hall of Fame, along with two-time NBA champion coach Rudy Tomjanovich and five others — Kim Mulkey, Tamika Catchings, Barbara Stevens, Eddie Sutton and Patrick Baumann.

Much is happening, indeed. A compressed NBA season that seemed in jeopardy so many times this winter because of virus-related issues is on the cusp of being completed, in full, 72 games for all 30 teams.

It's pretty much a lock that Philadelphia will be the No. 1

seed in the East playoffs, and Utah has the inside track on the No. 1 seed for the West playoffs as well as the top overall spot going into the postseason. And realistically, there are 11 teams in each conference vying for 10 spots in either the postseason or the play-in round, so it's not like there's going to be a surprise team that gets onto the brackets that will be set when the curtain comes down on the NBA's 75th regular season on Sunday.

But there is still much to decide. A look at some of what's left:

The play-in

The reason this is already a success is because it's one of the few things that is dominating conversations within the league right now, with the exception of Russell Westbrook's run to triple-double history and if the Los Angeles Lakers will have enough time to get themselves together for a title defense.

Imagine this: LeBron James and the Lakers vs. Curry and

Golden State in a play-in game.

Yes, ratings will be just fine if that happens.

Or how about another possible play-in game: Gordon Hayward and Charlotte (if he's back from injury) vs. Kemba Walker and Boston. Probably safe to say such a matchup might mean something to those guys if they face their former clubs with so much at stake.

The scoring title

Washington's Beal won't play again until late this week, at a minimum, because of a hamstring injury so Curry's target score for the scoring crown might be set.

Beal is averaging 31.41 points per game. Curry is the leader, averaging 31.75 through Tuesday. And don't think this doesn't matter to those guys — Curry needed 22 points on Saturday night to keep the scoring lead after learning that Beal had just scored 50; he went out and got 49.

The potential is there for the closest scoring race in years.

Herro ball: Heat defeat Celtics, earn playoff spot

Associated Press

BOSTON — Tyler Herro scored 24 points and the Miami Heat clinched a playoff spot and sent the Boston Celtics to the brink of the play-in tournament Tuesday night with a 129-121 victory.

Miami moved into a tie with idle Atlanta for fifth place in the Eastern Conference. The surging Heat won for the 10th time in 13 games. They have three games left in the regular season.

Bam Adebayo and Duncan Robinson each scored 22 points, Kendrick Nunn had 18 and Goran Dragic 17 for Miami. They swept the two-game series in Boston.

Kemba Walker led the Celtics in their regular-season

home finale with 36 points. Jayson Tatum scored 33 and Evan Fournier 20. Boston has lost seven of 10.

Lakers 101, Knicks 99 (OT): Talen Horton-Tucker made the go-ahead three-pointer with 21.1 seconds remaining in overtime, and Los Angeles improved its hopes of avoiding the play-in tournament and prevented visiting New York from clinching a postseason berth.

Warriors 122, Suns 116: Jordan Poole hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 1:43 left, Andrew Wiggins scored the next time down and finished with 38 points and host Golden State rallied past Phoenix.

Nuggets 117, Hornets 112: Michael Porter Jr. and Nikola Jokic each scored 30 points,

and Denver won at Charlotte to snap a two-game slide.

Grizzlies 133, Mavericks 104: Ja Morant had 24 points, eight assists and seven rebounds as host Memphis used a third-quarter burst to beat Dallas.

Nets 115, Bulls 107: Kevin Durant had 21 points and eight assists, and Brooklyn won at Chicago despite Zach LaVine's 41 points.

Pacers 103, 76ers 94: Domantas Sabonis had his ninth triple-double of the season and Caris LeVert added 24 points to help host Indiana end Philadelphia's eight-game winning streak.

Clippers 115, Raptors 96: Kawhi Leonard scored 20 points, Paul George added 16

and visiting Los Angeles led all the way in a win over Toronto.

Bucks 114, Magic 102: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 27 points and host Milwaukee kept up its chase of the No. 2 seed in the Eastern Conference with a victory over Orlando.

Kings 122, Thunder 106: Terence Davis matched his season high with 27 points, Buddy Hield had 21 and host Sacramento beat Oklahoma City to keep its slim playoff hopes alive.

Timberwolves 119, Pistons 100: Karl-Anthony Towns scored 28 points and Anthony Edwards added 22 as Minnesota won at undermanned Detroit in a game with significant lottery implications.

Bieber extends strikeout record to 20

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — On a night when Shane Bieber's pitch count climbed much faster than his strikeout total, he still came out on top.

That's why he's an All-Star and the reigning Cy Young winner.

"He competes like crazy," Cleveland Indians manager Terry Francona said.

Bieber pitched out of some early trouble before extending his own strikeout record and César Hernández hit a two-run homer, sending the Indians to a 3-2 win over the Chicago Cubs on Tuesday.

Bieber (4-2) struck out eight and has now fanned at least that many in 20 consecutive starts, a major league mark he builds on every time out. The right-hander's streak was in jeopardy, but he got Nick Martini for strikeout No. 8 in the seventh — on his 117th pitch.

"He made some mistakes," Francona said. "I also thought he threw some strikes maybe that weren't called that didn't help. That's part of the game. But you look up and he's 6½ and two runs and pitched pretty damn good."

Astros 5, Angels 1: Shohei Ohtani struck out 10 in an impressive duel with Lance McCullers Jr., and host Houston broke loose against the Los Angeles bullpen.

Ohtani allowed one run and four hits with one walk in seven innings, his longest start of the season. The two-way star then moved to play right field, and Yuli Gurriel homered during the Astros' four-run eighth.

Dodgers 6, Mariners 4: Gavin Lux hit a

dramatic three-run homer in the eighth inning, and struggling Los Angeles rallied late at home to beat Seattle.

Lux's first homer of the season came off Rafael Montero (3-2) and helped the defending World Series champions open a nine-game homestand with just their sixth win in 21 games.

Mets 3, Orioles 2: Patrick Mazeika got his second walkoff RBI in four career games with a fielder's choice grounder in the ninth inning, helping banged-up New York rally to beat visiting Baltimore.

The Mets have won six straight.

Athletics 3, Red Sox 2: Chris Bassitt struck out a season-high 10 over seven effective innings and Oakland won at Boston.

Matt Chapman and Elvis Andrus hit RBI singles for the A's in the seventh inning as the Athletics broke a 1-all tie.

Diamondbacks 11, Marlins 3: Madison Bumgarner threw seven shutout innings, Asdrúbal Cabrera had four hits including a three-run homer, and host Arizona beat Miami.

Bumgarner (4-2) gave up just four hits that all came in different innings. He added a sacrifice fly at the plate for his first RBI of the season.

Yankees 3, Rays 1: Jordan Montgomery pitched six strong innings, Aaron Judge and Gary Sánchez homered, and New York won at Tampa Bay for the second time in seven games this season.

Yankees slugger Luke Voit went 0-for-3 in his first game this season. He had knee surgery on March 29.

Giants 4, Rangers 2: Logan Webb set a career high with 10 strikeouts in six innings and host San Francisco beat Texas.

Swept in the two-game series, the Rangers dropped to 0-5 against NL opponents this year.

Cardinals 6, Brewers 1 (11): Paul Goldschmidt and Tyler O'Neill homered off Brad Boxberger in the 11th inning and St. Louis won at Milwaukee for its fourth straight victory.

Goldschmidt broke a 1-all tie when he sent the first pitch he saw from Boxberger (0-1).

Blue Jays 5, Braves 3: Vladimir Guerrero Jr. homered and visiting Toronto took advantage of Atlanta's indecisive fielding in the eighth inning.

Phillies 6, Nationals 2: Bryce Harper treated heckling fans to a long home run, Andrew Knapp delivered a key pinch-hit in place of injured catcher J.T. Realmuto and Philadelphia won at Washington.

Pirates 7, Reds 2: Troy Stokes Jr. drove in runs with each of his first two major league hits, JT Brubaker pitched six strong innings and host Pittsburgh beat Cincinnati.

Tigers 8, Royals 7: Robbie Grossman singled home the winning run in the bottom of the ninth inning and host Detroit, after squandering a seven-run lead late, recovered to beat skidding Kansas City.

White Sox 9, Twins 3: José Abreu hit a tiebreaking two-run homer in the sixth inning and host Chicago beat Minnesota for its fourth straight win.

Short-handed Padres, hit by COVID, top Rockies

Associated Press

DENVER — Already minus star Fernando Tatis Jr. and two backups before the first pitch because of COVID-19 concerns, the San Diego Padres then needed to pull Wil Myers and Eric Hosmer in the middle of the game for virus-related reasons.

The short-handed Padres wound up beating Colorado 8-1 on Tuesday night, boosted by Manny Machado's home run and five RBIs, but suddenly found themselves in a precarious position.

San Diego manager Jayce Tin-

gler said he had anticipated being able to play Wednesday's doubleheader at Coors Field as scheduled.

"You never really plan out these scenarios, but we know things are going to come up," he said. "Our guys are going to be ready. If they're coming from Triple-A or whatever, we've got a lot of faith in our minor league crew that's preparing these guys and they're going to come in. At the end of the day, we're planning on 14 innings tomorrow. We've got (Yu) Darvish and (Blake) Snell going and we're go-

ing to be ready to play ball."

"Obviously it's not ideal, but I want to give credit to our guys tonight. We had a lot of hectic things going on," he said. "We had a short bench and everybody stepped up and filled in."

Tatis tested positive for COVID-19 and was put on the injured list earlier in the day. The dynamic shortstop was joined by utility players Jurickson Profar and Jorge Mateo, who were sidelined prior to the series opener as part of Major League Baseball's contact tracing health and safety protocols.

Myers knocked into the right-field wall in the first inning while catching Garrett Hampson's deep fly ball. Myers appeared to be shaken up on the play and was checked by team trainers, and remained in the game.

But in the third, he was replaced in right field by Tucupita Marcano.

While he did bang his elbow on the play, Myers was removed when the team learned he had tested positive for the virus, Tingler said. Hosmer was subbed out of first base in the seventh for contact tracing.

Jets secure third place in North Division

Associated Press

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Blake Wheeler had two goals and two assists, Connor Hellebuyck stopped 24 shots for his fourth shutout of the season, and the Winnipeg Jets beat the Vancouver Canucks 5-0 Tuesday night to clinch third place in the North Division.

Kyle Connor had a goal and two assists, Mark Scheifele added a goal and an assist and Mason Appleton also scored for the Jets. Hellebuyck finished with his 24th career shutout.

Winnipeg, which needed just one point to secure third, will face the second-place Edmonton Oilers in the first round of the playoffs. Toronto and Montreal will meet in the other division series.

Wheeler said securing a solid victory so close to the playoffs was big.

“You’ve got to give the guys a

lot of credit to keep pushing and kind of keep doing the right things and the same things,” he said. “Ultimately when it comes to playoff time, it’s a lot harder to score goals and that’s the way you score goals. You just keep doing the same things over and over again with that blind faith that you’re going to get rewarded for it.”

It was also revealed Tuesday earlier this season Wheeler continued playing despite having cracked ribs. But the Jets captain said there was never a doubt in his mind that he would play.

“I still felt like I was able to help the team and that was the most important thing for me,” he said. “Certainly I wasn’t myself but if I was holding us back that would’ve been a different story but our team was still going in the right direction.”

Braden Holtby finished with 31 saves for Vancouver, which remained last in the North.

Capitals 2, Bruins 1: Michael Raffl scored from a tight angle with 1.8 seconds remaining, Alex Ovechkin saw his first extended action since April 22 and host Washington beat short-handed Boston in the teams’ regular-season finale.

“Right now, I’m 100%,” said Ovechkin, the Capitals’ all-time leading scorer. “I didn’t feel any soreness. I feel comfortable. That’s the most important thing. This time of year, you have to be smart and you have to think about the future, not only regular season.”

Ovechkin had previously tried to return from his lower-body injury on May 3 against the New York Rangers, but quickly changed course after 39 seconds of ice time. Despite missing 11 games of the short-

ened 56-game season, he remains Washington’s leading goal scorer with 24 goals and is fourth in points with 42.

“I tried to play in New York,” he said. “But I didn’t feel comfortable and, obviously, we don’t want to make a risk and that was a smart move.”

Carl Hagelin also scored and Vitek Vanecek stopped 25 shots for the Capitals in a game between teams that will meet in the first round. The Capitals also welcomed center Nicklas Backstrom back from a lower-body issue that kept him out for one game.

Curtis Lazar scored for the Bruins, who chose to rest regularly and field largely a reserve squad. That included nine players that entered Tuesday with fewer than 10 games this year and only six with 40 or more. Jeremy Swayman made 30 saves for Boston.

Medina Spirit set to run as favorite in Preakness

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Medina Spirit is set to run in the Preakness on Saturday to go for the second leg of the Triple Crown, as long as the Kentucky Derby winner passes a series of additional drug tests.

Maryland racing officials reached an agreement with trainer Bob Baffert on Tuesday to allow Medina Spirit and his other horses to enter races this weekend at Pimlico Race Course subject to extra testing and monitoring. If Medina Spirit, who failed a postrace drug test after winning the Kentucky Derby, comes back clean in test results expected Friday, he is likely to be the favorite to win the Preakness.

“We reached an agreement with Mr. Baffert and his lawyers that allows for additional testing, additional monitoring — essentially a watchlist to ensure the integrity of the sport

leading up to the race,” Maryland Jockey Club lawyer Alan Rifkin said. “We’re very pleased to have that and we appreciate Mr. Baffert’s patience and the way in which his lawyers went about it.”

Medina Spirit, fellow Baffert-trained Preakness colt Concert Tour and filly Beautiful Gift, who is expected to run in the Black-Eyed Susan Stakes on Friday, are all subject to the extra scrutiny.

“Baffert has given these consents to further the interests of horse racing and the public,” lawyer Craig Robertson wrote in a letter to the Maryland Jockey Club. “The integrity of the sport is of the utmost importance to Mr. Baffert, and by consenting to this testing regimen and monitoring, he reaffirms his commitment and dedication to the sport.”

Medina Spirit drew the No. 3 post in a field of 10 horses for

the Preakness as the 9-5 morning-line favorite. Concert Tour drew the outside 10th post and is the second choice in the wagering at 5-2.

Ram drew the No. 1 post at 30-1, Keepmeinmind the No. 2 at 15-1, Crowded Trade the No. 4 post at 10-1, Midnight Bourbon the No. 5 post at 5-1, Rombauer the No. 6 at 12-1, France Go de Ina the No. 7 at 20-1, Unbridled Honor the No. 8 at 15-1 and Risk Taking the No. 9 at 15-1.

Keepmeinmind and Midnight Bourbon are the only Kentucky Derby horses returning for the Preakness to challenge Medina Spirit. Trainer Brad Cox opted to skip the race with Mandaloun, who would be named the Derby winner if Medina Spirit is disqualified, and Essential Quality, who went off as the 3-1 Derby favorite.

Medina Spirit won that race May 1 as a 12-1 long shot. He

won’t be anywhere close to that if he gets to the Preakness.

“To me, if everyone runs their race that we have seen from them in the past, I think this is Medina Spirit’s race to lose,” NBC Sports analyst Matt Bernier said.

Baffert earlier Tuesday said it was brought to his attention that a veterinarian treated Medina Spirit with an antifungal medication to treat dermatitis that includes the steroid betamethasone. Medina Spirit failed a post-Derby drug test because of the presence of betamethasone.

Stronach Group chief veterinarian officer Dr. Dionne Benson said at the Preakness draw that test results on the three Baffert horses are expected back Friday. This is an additional layer of blood testing from blood taken last week, Monday and Tuesday on top of the usual postrace tests.