

Russia fires 30 cruise missiles at Ukraine

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia fired 30 cruise missiles against different parts of Ukraine early Thursday in the latest nighttime test of Ukrainian air defenses, which shot down 29 of them, officials said.

One person was killed and two were wounded by a Russian missile that got through and struck an industrial building in the southern region of Odesa, according to Serhiy Bratchuk, a spokesperson for the region's military administration.

Amid the recently intensified Russian air assaults, China said its special envoy met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during talks in Kyiv earlier this week with Ukraine's chief diplomat.

Beijing's peace proposal has so far yielded no apparent breakthrough in the war. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Thursday that the warring parties needed to "accumulate mutual trust" for progress to be made.

Ukrainian officials sought during the talks to recruit China's support for Kyiv's own peace plan, according to Ukraine's presidential office. Zelenskyy's proposal includes the restoration of his country's territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian forces and holding Russian President Vladimir Putin legally

accountable for the invasion in February 2022.

Leaders of the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations gathering in Japan on Thursday were expected to denounce Russia's war and vow to keep helping Ukraine fight Moscow. They were to hold "discussions about the battlefield" in Ukraine, according to Jake Sullivan, the White House national security adviser.

A Western official said Russia had built "potentially formidable" defensive lines on Ukrainian territory, including extensive minefields, and had more than 200,000 troops along the 600-mile front line, though it is unlikely to possess credible reserves.

As Ukraine receives sophisticated weapons systems from its Western allies, the Kremlin has started losing warplanes in areas previously deemed as safe, the official said, while Kyiv has proven able to shoot down Russia's hypersonic ballistic missiles — the most advanced weapons in Moscow's arsenal.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military intelligence.

Meanwhile, Kremlin-installed authorities in occupied Crimea reported the derailment of eight train cars Thursday because of an explosion, prompting renewed suspicions about possible Ukrainian saboteur activity behind

Russian lines. Russian state media reported that the train was carrying grain.

The state news agency RIA Novosti, quoting a source within the emergency services, said the incident occurred not far from the city of Simferopol. The Crimean Railway company said the derailment was caused by "the interference of unauthorized persons" and that there were no casualties.

Ukraine officials refuse to comment on possible acts of sabotage. Ukraine's military intelligence spokesperson, Andriy Yusov, noted on Ukrainian television that Russian train lines "are also used to transport weapons, ammunition, armored vehicles."

Overnight, loud explosions were heard in Kyiv as the Kremlin's forces targeted the capital for the ninth time this month. It was a clear escalation after weeks of lull and before a much-anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensive using newly supplied advanced Western weapons.

Debris fell on two Kyiv districts, starting a fire at a garage complex. There was no immediate word about any victims, Serhii Popko, head of the Kyiv military administration, said in a Telegram post.

Ukraine also shot down two Russian exploding drones and two reconnaissance drones, according to the authorities.

Biden arrives at base in Japan ahead of G-7 summit

BY JONATHAN SNYDER

Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWA-KUNI, Japan — President Joe Biden arrived Thursday afternoon aboard Air Force One at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni south of Hiroshima to attend a summit of the world's leading industrial nations this weekend.

The president stepped from Air Force One onto the tarmac, where he was met by MCAS Iwakuni commander Col. Richard Rusnok and Sgt. Maj. Adam Gharati. Alongside them were U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel; Rear Adm. Takuhiro Hiragi, commander of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's Fleet Air Wing 31; and Iwakuni city Mayor Yoshihiko Fukuda.

Biden's visit began with a face-to-face meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Fu-

mio Kishida, whose home city of Hiroshima is the host for the Group of Seven summit this year. The city, where the United States dropped the first atomic bomb in World War II, is the backdrop for discussions expected to include the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"There will be discussions about the battlefield," national security adviser Jake Sullivan said aboard Air Force One, according to The Associated Press on Thursday. He said the G-7 leaders would work to seal off any loopholes in sanctions so their effect can be maximized, according to AP.

After landing at MCAS Iwakuni, Biden met with approximately 300 service members from the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force. The president then left the base in the Marine One

helicopter bound for Hiroshima and his brief meeting with Kishida.

Biden last traveled to Japan approximately one year ago, when he landed at Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo in the midst of a festival that was attended by thousands of Americans and Japanese visitors.

During that swing through Asia, the president met with Kishida, as well as the leaders of India, South Korea and Australia.

The G-7 summit is an international forum held annually for the leaders of the member states France, the U.S., the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Italy and Canada.

Biden cut short his trip to this year's summit by canceling his plans to visit Papa New Guinea and Australia to return to the U.S. to continue negotiations aimed at raising the federal debt limit.

Marines helo resupplies sub for 1st time

By **MATTHEW M. BURKE**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A Marine helicopter squadron from Okinawa for the first time delivered supplies to an Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine transiting the Philippine Sea, a practice integral to the Corps' island-hopping doctrine.

Two CH-53E Super Stallions on May 9 dropped "mission-essential equipment" to the USS Maine by a "vertical replenishment," according to a III Marine Expeditionary Force news release Wednesday. The Super Stallions are assigned to Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 462 of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

Airborne delivery allows Navy assets like the Maine to resupply without disrupting "maritime security operations," a key tenet of the Marine Corps' role as a "stand-in force," the statement said.

Stand-in force is a concept born from Commandant Gen. David Berger's Force

Design 2030, the operational doctrine at all levels of the Marine Corps, especially in the Pacific where the U.S. military is training to deter potential Chinese aggression and maintain open sea lanes. It calls for inserting smaller, mobile units within range of enemy missiles to seize and hold key islands and deny enemy vessels access.

The "1st MAW's persistent and forward presence makes it the backbone of the stand-in force's expeditionary capability," Col. Christopher Murray, Marine Aircraft Group 36 commander, said in the release. "The intricacies of seamlessly sustaining the force through naval integration and aviation-delivered logistics is a testament to our adaptability, readiness and ability to project power within the Indo-Pacific."

The May 9 drop was the first of its kind to an Ohio-class submarine, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing spokesman Maj. Rob Martins said in an email Thursday.

The Marine Corps does not discuss mis-

sion-specific cargo due to operational security, Martins said. Photos posted to Defense Department websites showed a black, plastic case being attached to one of the Super Stallion's integrated hoists.

The hoists secure the cargo, guide its descent to a designated area, release and retrieve the hoist cable, Martins said. The Super Stallion, a heavy-lift variant of the CH-53 helicopter, can carry 16 tons of cargo at sea level for 50 nautical miles and return.

Martins declined to discuss how often the sea-service replenishes other submarine classes in the region. He referred all submarine-related questions to Pacific Fleet's Submarine Force, which did not immediately respond to an email Thursday.

The Maine was commissioned in 1995 and is homeported at Naval Submarine Base Bangor, Wash. The nuclear-powered sub hosts 155 sailors and features an armament of MK-48 torpedoes and up to 20 Trident II D-5 ballistic missiles.

DODEA schools adopt new gender-neutral dress code

By **JENNIFER H. SVAN**
Stars and Stripes

Students at Defense Department schools will no longer have to measure the lengths of their skirts and shorts, or leave their ball caps at home on bad hair days.

The Department of Defense Education Activity has approved a new gender-neutral student dress code that goes into effect July 1 at all 160 DODEA schools in the Pacific, Europe and Americas regions, including Puerto Rico and Cuba.

The policy doesn't include language that focuses on one gender exclusively or single out styles of dress specific to a race or religion, said Joy Medley, a DODEA education specialist.

How much skin students may show above the knees will no longer be measured by inch counts or "the fingertip rule,"

which required a hemline to extend below the fingertips with arms hanging to the sides.

The updated guidelines posted on DODEA's website simply call for "tops with sleeves" and "solid clothing (not transparent or translucent) that fully covers the top and bottom, from armpit to mid-thigh."

The rules do away with myriad standards that sometimes differed between schools on the same base. Some barred spaghetti straps, halter tops, baggy pants, "excessively tight" Spandex and headbands, among other things.

DODEA is focusing on "teachable moments," where a teacher and student discuss what's permissible, Medley said.

"Our goal is for our students not to lose any instructional time" because of what they're wearing, she said.

Alkonis supporters make G-7 push for prison release

By **ALEX WILSON**
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. senator and a former national security adviser, ahead of President Joe Biden's arrival Thursday in Hiroshima for the G-7 summit, called for the return of a U.S. Navy officer imprisoned in Japan.

Robert O'Brien, formerly the national security adviser in the Trump administration, in a Wednesday tweet, asked Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to release Lt. Ridge Alkonis as a "humanitarian gesture."

Formerly a weapons officer assigned to the destroyer USS Benfold, Alkonis is 10 months into a three-year prison sentence for negligent driving that caused the deaths of two Japanese citizens and injured a third in May 2021.

"Reuniting him with his family will be seen as an act of

friendship & magnanimity by the American people," O'Brien tweeted after meeting with the sailor's wife, Brittany, in Tokyo.

The following day, as Biden was en route to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni in Japan, Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, called on Biden to return with Alkonis aboard Air Force One at the conclusion of the trip.

"This has gone on long enough," Lee said in a video tweeted Thursday by Fox News Radio reporter Ryan Schmelz. "This is a man who has faithfully served his country, and it's time for him to come home."

Lee has remained an outspoken supporter of Alkonis and critic of the way the Japanese handled Alkonis' case. Lee on March 1 accused Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi of backtracking on a deal to release the officer to U.S. custody.

Marine 1st active-duty convicted in riot

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — An active-duty Marine who entered the U.S. Capitol with two of his colleagues from Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., on Jan. 6, 2021, and then spent more than 50 minutes wandering through the building, pleaded guilty Wednesday to a misdemeanor count of illegally parading or demonstrating in the Capitol. All three Marines work in intelligence gathering, including one at the National Security Agency headquarters in Maryland.

Cpl. Micah R. Coomer, 24, is allegedly the fourth active-duty Marine from Quantico to breach the Capitol on Jan. 6, and the first active-duty military member to plead guilty in the riot. A fifth active-duty service member, Navy

sailor David Elizalde, was arrested last month in Arlington, Va., and accused of driving to the Capitol from his post on the USS Harry S. Truman, which was docked in Norfolk, Va., on the day of the riot. More than 1,000 people have been charged with participating in the attack on the Capitol.

Soon after Jan. 6, federal investigators were alerted to Coomer's Instagram account, where he posted photos from inside the Capitol during the riot and wrote that he was, "Glad to be apart [sic] of history."

Later in January 2021, according to an FBI affidavit seeking his arrest, Coomer wrote in a conversation with another Instagram user that "everything in this country is corrupt. We hon-

estly need a fresh restart. I'm waiting for the boogaloo."

When the other user asked him, "What's a boogaloo," Coomer responded, "Civil war 2."

Coomer and two other men, Sgt. Joshua Abate and Sgt. Dodge Dale Hellonen, were assigned to the Marine Corps Information Operations Center in Quantico, according to reporting by The Intercept after their arrest. All three were arrested in January of this year, and it was not clear why the case wasn't filed for two years.

Before their arrests, all three were transferred to intelligence-related posts around the country, with Abate assigned to the Marine Cryptologic Support Battalion in the NSA headquarters at Fort Meade, Md., and Hellonen

working as a special communications signals analyst at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Coomer remains on active duty as an intelligence surveillance reconnaissance system engineer at Camp Pendleton, Calif., Marine Corps officials said Wednesday. He enlisted in September 2018, the Marines said.

Abate and Hellonen's cases are pending.

Coomer, originally from Muncie, Ind., told U.S. District Judge Ana C. Reyes that he was currently stationed at Camp Pendleton near San Diego but otherwise said little during his brief hearing.

He declined to comment outside the courtroom after his plea. Reyes set his sentencing for Aug. 30.

Russian conduct toward West in Mediterranean deemed routine

Associated Press

LIMASSOL, Cyprus — A U.S. Navy commander said Wednesday there is "no significant change" in the conduct of Russian aircraft and warships toward Western naval and air assets in the eastern Mediterranean as Moscow's war in Ukraine grinds on.

Cmdr. Peter C. Flynn said Russian warplanes and naval vessels have been conducting themselves professionally, like other military forces in the region, and there's been no indication of heightened aggression or hostility.

"We obviously study what is going on in theater and you know that certainly plays a role in what we do and what we prepare for, but not a significant change" in the attitude of Russian forces, Flynn told The Associated Press aboard the USS Arleigh Burke.

The destroyer is docked at Cyprus' main Limassol port.

Russia has a naval base in Tartus, Syria, the only such facility that Moscow has outside the for-

mer Soviet Union. In 2017, Moscow struck a deal with Syrian President Bashar Assad to extend its lease on Tartus for 49 years and keep up to 11 warships there, including nuclear-powered ones.

Tartus is 112 miles from Cyprus' eastern coastline.

F-35 jets from the U.K.'s newest aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, operating off Cyprus in June 2021 had stirred the interest of Russian warplanes.

The Arleigh Burke is three months into a 4½-month patrol mission in the region. It docked in Cyprus after operating in the Red Sea and passing through the Suez Canal. Since February, the destroyer has also operated above the Arctic Circle, the Baltic and North Seas and the eastern Atlantic. The Arleigh Burke was the last U.S. Navy ship to sail in the Black Sea prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Flynn said the destroyer has recently conducted joint maneuvers with Saudi and Egyptian naval vessels.

Prosecutors: Leak suspect was warned about actions

Associated Press

BOSTON — Superiors of the Massachusetts Air National Guard member charged with leaking highly classified military documents had raised concerns internally on multiple occasions about his handling or viewing of classified information, according to a court filing Wednesday.

Justice Department lawyers made the disclosure in court papers urging a magistrate judge to keep Jack Teixeira behind bars while he awaits trial in the case stemming from the most consequential intelligence leak in years. The judge is expected to hear more arguments Friday on prosecutors' detention request and issue a ruling.

Teixeira is accused of sharing highly classified documents about top national security issues in a chatroom on Discord, a social media platform that started as a hangout for gamers. He has not yet entered a plea.

Prosecutors told the judge in their filing that Teixeira contin-

ued leaking documents even after he was admonished by superiors on two separate occasions last year over "concerning actions" he took related to classified information.

A September memo from the Air National Guard 102nd Intelligence Wing that prosecutors filed in court says Teixeira had been observed taking notes on classified intelligence information and putting the notes in his pocket. Teixeira was instructed at the time to no longer take notes in any form on classified intelligence information, the memo says.

Another memo from late October says a superior had been made aware that Teixeira was "potentially ignoring the cease-and-desist order on deep diving into intelligence information" given to him the month before. The memo says Teixeira attended a meeting and proceeded to ask "very specific questions." He was told again to focus on his job, not any "deep dives" into classified intelligence information.

Va. is South's holdout as SC gets closer to abortion ban

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va.— South Carolina became the latest state to move toward a near total abortion ban Wednesday with legislation that if enacted would leave Virginia an outlier in the South as a place where women have unrestricted access to abortions amid a rapid rise in restrictions in the year since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned.

South Carolina is among the last bastions in the region for those seeking legal abortions, but that status could end soon.

Access would be almost entirely banned after about six weeks of pregnancy — often before women know they're pregnant — under the bill that now must pass the state Senate, which previously rejected a proposal to nearly outlaw abortions but could give final passage to the new legislation next week.

And most abortions after 12 weeks of pregnancy will be banned in North Carolina beginning July 1 after the state's Republican-controlled Legislature successfully overrode the Democratic governor's veto late Tuesday.

Abortion is banned or severely restricted in much of the South, including bans throughout pregnancy in Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia. In Georgia, it's allowed only in the first six weeks.

Such restrictions are possible because the U.S. Supreme Court last year struck down the landmark

1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, which established a nationwide right to abortion.

"It would be just devastating for abortion access in the South," Jamie Lockhart, executive director of Planned Parenthood Advocates of Virginia, said of the proposed six-week ban in South Carolina, the 12-week ban in North Carolina, and a six-week ban in Florida that will take effect only if the state's current 15-week ban is upheld by the state Supreme Court.

But North Carolina Rep. Sarah Stevens, a Republican, said she sees the 12-week ban and other restrictions in North Carolina's new law as "safeguards," not obstacles to abortion.

"We seek to balance protecting unborn babies while ensuring the safety of mothers," she said Tuesday.

Stricter bans across the South would heighten Virginia's role as an access point and create a "ripple effect" as people travel from out of state to seek care, Lockhart said.

"Despite abortion providers' efforts to increase available appointments and expand access for patients through telemedicine, the dramatic influx in out-of-state patients will lead to longer wait times for people in those access states," Lockhart said.

Virginia currently allows abortions in the first and second trimesters. An abortion is allowed in the third trimester only if three doctors certify the mother's mental or physical health is at serious risk.

DeSantis signs bills on pronouns, trans care

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed bills Wednesday that ban gender-affirming care for minors, target drag shows, restrict discussion of personal pronouns in schools and force people to use certain bathrooms.

DeSantis has made anti-LGBTQ+ legislation a large part of his agenda as he prepares to seek the Republican presidential nomination. He signed the bills in front of a cheering crowd at the evangelical Cambridge Christian School in Tampa. The ceremony had a campaign-like feel, with DeSantis tossing Sharpies to a crowd, as opposed to when he privately signed measures on abortion and gun rights.

Democrats opposed the bills, and LGBTQ+ rallies were held at the Capitol during the session that ended two weeks ago. But Republicans have a super-majority in both chambers and approved the bills for DeSantis.

"It's kind of sad that we even have some of these discussions," DeSantis told the crowd.

DeSantis presented a narrative that expert panels in the nation's major medical associations have said is false, such as the idea that children are routinely being "mutilated." While he said he is protecting parents' rights, his opponents say he is denying the rights of parents with transgender kids.

"They have cloaked themselves in being the party of less government and parental rights, and what we're seeing now is the total opposite," said Democratic state Sen. Shevrin Jones, who is gay.

The gender care law also bans the use of state money for gender-affirming care and places new restrictions on adults seeking treatment.

Dancers at Los Angeles dive bar set to become only unionized strippers in US

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Dancers at a Los Angeles bar could soon become the only unionized group of strippers in the U.S.

The Actors' Equity Association labor union says owners of the Star Garden Topless Dive Bar in North Hollywood have withdrawn their opposition and agreed to recognize the strippers' union.

For 15 months, dancers at the club have sought safer workplace conditions, better pay and health insurance, among other benefits. But their unionization drive was stalled by objections and legal challenges from the club's management.

The union announced this week that management had agreed to a settlement. A formal vote count by the National Labor Relations Board has been set for Thursday.

"We're hoping what we've done to unionize this club will have laid the groundwork for any other stripper in the country who decides that they want to also have a voice in the way their workplace is run," Lilith, a dancer at Star Garden, told *The Associated Press*. Lilith asked not to be identified by her legal name in this article.

After being certified, the Star Garden dancers will join Actors' Equity, a union representing more than 51,000 workers in the entertainment industry nationwide.

In the late 1990s, dancers at San Francisco's Lusty Lady organized the Exotic Dancers Union. But that club was shuttered in 2013 — so, if Thursday's results are certified by the NLRB as expected, the Star Garden dancers will become the country's only existing unionized strippers.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Authorities capture 2nd inmate who escaped

PA PHILADELPHIA — The second of two inmates who escaped from a Philadelphia prison earlier this month was captured Wednesday morning, authorities said.

City police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw said Ameen Hurst, 18, was arrested by U.S. Marshals in West Philadelphia, but further details on the capture were not immediately disclosed.

Hurst and Nasir Grant, 24, escaped from the Philadelphia Industrial Correction Center on May 7 by cutting a hole in a fence surrounding a recreation yard, the Philadelphia Department of Prisons has said.

Officials have said the inmates were housed in the same unit, but different cells.

Grant was arrested May 11 after members of a fugitive task force who were conducting surveillance in North Philadelphia saw him leave a residence dressed as a woman. He was stopped in a car nearby.

Work on hydropower line can restart, state says

ME LEWISTON — The construction of a 145-mile transmission line in Maine will be able to resume now that the state has removed a suspension order on the project.

The New England Clean Energy Connect project is no longer suspended, as it had been since fall 2021, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection said Tuesday. The department's ruling came less than a month after a jury said that developers had a constitutional right to proceed with the

\$1 billion transmission project.

The project is designed to supply up to 1,200 megawatts of Canadian hydropower to the New England power grid.

However, state voters opposed the project in an election, and work stopped.

It was unclear exactly when the work would resume.

Fentanyl fuels string of deadly overdoses

OR PORTLAND — A series of suspected drug overdoses left at least eight people dead over the weekend in Portland, according to the city's police bureau.

Six of the deaths were likely related to fentanyl, a potent synthetic opioid. Several of those who died believed they were using cocaine, when it was actually fentanyl or a mix of the two substances, the city's police bureau said in a news release.

The deaths occurred between early Friday morning and late Saturday afternoon.

Publisher sues school district over book bans

FL TALLAHASSEE — Publisher Penguin Random House and PEN America sued a Florida school district Wednesday over its removal of books about race and LGBTQ+ identities, the latest opposition to a policy central to Gov. Ron DeSantis' agenda as he prepares to run for president.

The federal lawsuit alleges the Escambia County School District and its School Board are violating the First Amendment through the removal of 10 books from library shelves. The case does not name DeSantis as a defendant though the Republican

governor has championed policies that allow the censorship and challenging of books based on whether they are appropriate for children in schools.

"Books have the capacity to change lives for the better, and students in particular deserve equitable access to a wide range of perspectives. Censorship, in the form of book bans like those enacted by Escambia County, are a direct threat to democracy and our constitutional rights," Nihar Malaviya, CEO of Penguin Random House, said in a statement.

Sheriff agrees to review to settle bias complaint

GA SAVANNAH — A Georgia sheriff has agreed to review his department's policies on bias-free policing and other practices to settle a race discrimination complaint filed by a historically Black college on behalf of students whose bus was pulled over and searched for drugs, the U.S. Justice Department said Monday.

The April 2022 traffic stop by sheriff's deputies in Liberty County caused outrage at Delaware State University, with campus President Tony Allen saying the women's lacrosse team had been humiliated and intimidated by deputies searching their bus.

University administrators filed a complaint with the Justice Department, saying the traffic stop along Interstate 95 south of Savannah had been racially motivated and had violated the students' civil rights.

The Justice Department said in a statement that the Liberty County Sheriff's Office had agreed to examine its depart-

ment's traffic stop and search policies and "make necessary updates," as well as develop and enact new data collection procedures.

Liberty County Sheriff William Bowman, who is Black, insisted his department doesn't practice racial profiling.

Chief: Man ran at officer while holding sword

MA OXFORD — A man shot by police in Massachusetts last weekend was holding a sword over his head and running at an officer at a "full sprint," police said.

The 23-year-old man faces attempted murder and other charges in connection with the encounter in Oxford at about 6 a.m. Sunday, police Chief Anthony Saad said in a statement Tuesday.

The officer was in a marked cruiser but was not responding to a call when the suspect, on foot, abruptly entered the roadway and blocked the vehicle, Saad said.

The suspect, an Oxford resident, advanced on the cruiser while swinging the sword, so the officer put his vehicle into reverse "to create distance between him and the defendant," Saad said.

When the officer could not back up any farther due to traffic, he stepped out of the cruiser and ordered the suspect to drop the sword.

The suspect "then began a full sprint towards the officer with the sword over his head," the statement said. The officer again ordered the suspect to stop before opening fire when the man got close enough to strike.

— From wire reports

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Stars' Benn, Seguin content with roles

Associated Press

Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin were regularly among the NHL's top scorers when they first started playing together in Dallas a decade ago.

Now 30-something forwards, captain Benn and six-time All-Star Seguin are far removed from skating together on the top line, or even leading the Stars in scoring while having the two biggest contracts on the roster. Their roles have changed and they have played a little less this season on different lines, but that plan has certainly worked out well for the players — and the team that is in the Western Conference finals.

"You've seen the effect of it with the season we've had, directly on our standings, directly on our scoring, directly on the consistency of their seasons," first-year Stars coach Pete DeBoer said Wednesday. "We're not a passive stand-

around team, so you're expending a lot of energy to play the way we want to play. And I think that's benefited our team game, too, because they have that energy to do that."

Benn again played all 82 regular-season games, with 33 goals and 78 points for his best totals since 2017-18, even with an average ice time of 15:47 that was his lowest since his 2009-10 rookie season. He had 18 goals and 28 assists playing the same number of games and nearly a minute more per game last season.

"We sat down at the start of the year when he got hired, and I got to talk about individual players, myself and then obviously our group as a whole," Benn said. "You know what he wanted to bring here and change a little bit, and he's done a great job so far."

Seguin played more than a minute less a game than last season, also his fewest since

being a rookie, and had 50 points (21 goals) in 76 games. He is the only player on the Stars' roster to win a Stanley Cup, but that was as a 19-year-old with Boston in 2011, only a year after he was the second overall draft pick. The Bruins traded him to Dallas on July 4, 2013.

Game 1 of the West finals against the Golden Knights is Friday night in Las Vegas. It is the second time in four seasons for these teams to meet the conference finals, though DeBoer was on the other bench in 2020 when the Stars won in five games in the NHL's bubble in Canada. Tampa Bay then took the Stanley Cup in six games.

Seguin was playing with a torn labrum in his hip when the Stars made that Stanley Cup Final, their first in 20 years. After hip surgery and an arthroscopic procedure on his knee, there was a grueling rehab that kept him out for all but three

games at the end of the 2020-21 season and made him change how he played.

"You get slotted where you're slotted and you just want to contribute as much as you can, whether it's first PP (power play), no PP, first line, fourth line," Seguin said. "When you have a team like this, it's exciting. It's always a lot easier because you're so deep and you can kind of play anywhere."

DeBoer said he never looked at salary, ego or what they did in the past, and instead coached every player like he'd want to be coached. Dallas is the fourth different team he's taken to the conference finals.

"The teams you have a chance to win with, those guys accept that coaching, they want that coaching, they're willing to buy into that," DeBoer said. "In the places I've been where those key guys have pushed back, you know you're usually not winning."

Voters' arena rejection leaves Coyotes in limbo

Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — The Arizona Coyotes were confident more than two decades of instability were coming to a close.

A "yes" vote on a referendum for an entertainment district would allow the franchise to finally build its own arena.

When Tempe voters said no in Tuesday's election, the team was left in shock and with no clear path forward.

"What is next for the franchise will be evaluated by our owners and the National Hockey League over the coming weeks," Coyotes President and CEO Xavier A. Gutierrez said.

The Coyotes' internal polling showed the three propositions related to the arena would pass easily.

Voters had other ideas, overwhelmingly saying "no" to the

proposed \$2.3 billion Tempe Entertainment District, leaving the franchise still in a state of flux.

"The National Hockey League is terribly disappointed by the results of the public referendum regarding the Coyotes' arena project in Tempe," NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said. "We are going to review with the Coyotes what the options might be going forward."

The Coyotes have faced instability almost since moving to Arizona from Winnipeg in 1996.

The franchise shared then-America West Arena with the NBA's Phoenix Suns before moving to Glendale's Gila River Arena in 2003. When former owner Jerry Moyes took the Coyotes into bankruptcy, the NHL ran the organization for

four seasons.

A new ownership group brought hope in 2013, but turmoil resurfaced two years later, when the city of Glendale backed out of a long-term, multimillion-dollar lease agreement. The Coyotes leased the arena on an annual basis until Glendale announced it was terminating the contract after the 2021-22 season.

The Coyotes' temporary solution was to share Mullett Arena, a 5,000-seat building that's by far the smallest in the NHL, with Arizona State University.

Now the organization has to shift gears yet again after voters rejected a proposed new arena.

The Coyotes said on Wednesday they will play in Mullett Arena next season, but it is not a long-term option. Playing at

such a small arena hurts the overall league revenue and the Mullett, while nice, is not up to NHL standards.

"During the 2023-24 season, the Arizona Coyotes will play at Mullett Arena," Gutierrez said in a statement. "We remain committed to Arizona and have already started re-engaging with local officials and sites to solidify a new permanent home in the Valley."

Relocation rumors have followed the Coyotes for years and the rejection by Tempe may lead to a road out of the desert. Bettman has been adamant the franchise will remain in Arizona.

Maybe the Coyotes and league can look at relocating somewhere like Portland, Ore., Kansas City, Houston, Milwaukee or Salt Lake City.

Heat rally, beat Celtics in Game 1 of East finals

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Miami Heat needed a calming presence following a sluggish start to their latest conference finals showdown with the Boston Celtics.

Jimmy Butler provided that and a lot more.

Butler scored 35 points, including 20 after halftime, and the Heat rallied in the second half to beat the Celtics 123-116 in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals on Wednesday night.

He said his teammates have given him confidence.

“I’m playing at an incredible level because they are allowing me to do so,” Butler said. “They are not putting a limit on my game. They are trusting me with the ball, on the defensive end. I think that’s what any basketball player wants.”

Miami trailed by nine at the half before turning it around with

a franchise playoff-record 46 points in the third and outscoring Boston 66-50 in the final two quarters. It was Butler’s fifth game with 30 or more points this postseason and he added seven assists, six steals and five rebounds.

“One of the premier two-way basketball players of this association. ... That’s what we needed.” Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. “Down the stretch, Jimmy was able to do everything we needed — as a scorer and as a facilitator.”

Bam Adebayo added 20 points and eight rebounds. Kyle Lowry, Caleb Martin, Gabe Vincent and Max Strus scored 15 points apiece. The Heat went 16 of 31 from the three-point line.

The No. 8-seeded Heat have opened all three playoff series with road victories. Game 2 is Friday night in Boston.

Jayson Tatum led the Celtics with 30 points, but didn’t take a shot in the fourth quarter. Jaylen Brown finished with 22 points and nine rebounds. Malcolm Brogdon added 19 points.

Boston is just 4-4 at home during this postseason.

The Celtics, who are at their best when they’re defending and getting up more shots than their opponents, were 10 of 29 from beyond the arc.

“We lost our offensive purpose,” Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said.

The tip-off of the series marked the third time in four seasons that the Heat and Celtics have met in this round. Boston won last year’s matchup in seven games.

Wednesday’s opener felt every bit like a continuation of that most recent meeting. Boston dominated inside early on and

led by nine at halftime.

Spoelstra said his team was “more intentional” over the final 24 minutes.

Miami took a page out of the Celtics’ book and used a 13-1 run to erase that gap, tying the game at 78 in the third quarter. During the next timeout, Mazzulla was captured by TV cameras throwing a clipboard in frustration.

Boston couldn’t stop the onslaught and Miami then nudged back in front as Butler penetrated to create opportunities for his teammates.

The Heat outscored the Celtics 46-25 in the period and took a 103-91 lead into the fourth, prompting a few boos from the TD Garden crowd.

“We are just playing really good basketball,” Butler said. “More than anything, we are staying together through the good and through the bad.”

Griner, Mercury set to tip off new WNBA season

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Brittney Griner’s life and career path have taken a sharp turn over the past 18 months following a nearly 10-month detainment in Russia on drug-related charges that ended with a prisoner swap in December.

To say the Phoenix Mercury center’s journey has been complicated would be an understatement.

Now, the next chapter will be for everyone to see how good a basketball player she still is.

The early returns suggest Griner, 31, remains a formidable talent, even if she’s understandably rusty. She scored 10 points and grabbed three rebounds in her only preseason game against the Los Angeles Sparks on Friday, flashing her considerable skills but also showing there’s some work to do.

“Coach keeps telling me to give myself grace,” Griner said. “But that’s hard.”

The WNBA regular season begins Friday. With all that has happened off the court, it’s easy to forget Griner had arguably her best season in 2021. She finished second in the MVP voting after averaging 20.5 points, 9.5 rebounds and nearly two blocks per

game. She was a major reason the Mercury reached the WNBA Finals before losing to the Chicago Sky.

Mercury coach Vanessa Nygaard said she has been amazed by Griner’s ability to bounce back from an experience few athletes could fathom.

“This is a person who has been off for more than a year and she’s been battling really hard, and I thought she did some really good stuff,” Nygaard said. “I thought she did some great stuff, she’s super engaged, and it was a really joyful day for her and her family.”

Even though Griner said she had “a few more cobwebs than I thought” after her first preseason game, there’s little doubt her return is a huge positive for the Mercury. Without Griner last season, they finished with a 15-21 record.

“I love playing with BG (Brittney Griner) and who wouldn’t,” Mercury guard Moriah Jefferson said after last Friday’s preseason game. “She’s such a big body and she’s a great teammate off the court and she had a great game. She came out aggressive and had a lot of boards and put-backs with some good finishes.

“It was nice for her to be back, and we’ll

be better for next game.”

Of course, Griner’s play on the basketball court is just one part of her comeback. She’ll tour the country this season playing WNBA games with the Mercury — making stops in Los Angeles, Dallas, Indianapolis and Washington, D.C.

The exposure that came from being detained in Russia for having vape cartridges containing cannabis oil in her luggage has given Griner a platform to advocate for other Americans being detained abroad. She was already an LGBTQ+ activist since publicly coming out in 2013 and became the first openly gay athlete to be sponsored by Nike.

It’s expected that WNBA fans will be widely supportive of Griner — she got a standing ovation before the Mercury’s preseason game last week — and Nygaard said navigating the media hoopla will be a welcome challenge.

“I’m anticipating the first time we go everywhere, it’ll be the ‘BG’ game, and it’ll be a thing,” Nygaard said. “So maybe we have to get through all the cities, and then it’ll be more normal. But it’s going to be a great tour. She’s going to go into a bunch of spaces where people are really excited and supportive.”

Yankees pitcher Germán suspended

Associated Press

NEW YORK — New York Yankees pitcher Domingo Germán was suspended for 10 games Wednesday by Major League Baseball and fined an undisclosed amount for violating the sport's prohibition of foreign substances on the mound.

The penalty was announced following Germán's ejection in the fourth inning Tuesday night at Toronto for what an umpire said was "the stickiest hand I've ever felt."

"My fingers had a hard time coming off his palm," crew chief James Hoye explained after the game.

The punishment was imposed by Michael Hill, MLB's senior vice president for on-field operations. Germán did not appeal, and his suspension began with Wednesday night's game in Toronto.

Germán cannot be replaced on the roster

while he is suspended. Barring rainouts, he will be eligible to return May 28 against San Diego.

"He went over the line that umpires deemed and now we've got to live with the consequences of that," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said Wednesday in Toronto. "No one player needs to carry this load. We'll share it all and we'll do it together."

Yankees right-hander Luis Severino is expected to be activated off the injured list Sunday to start in Germán's place against the Cincinnati Reds.

A two-time All-Star, the 29-year-old Severino has not pitched for New York this season because of a right lat strain. He allowed two runs and six hits in 3½ innings Tuesday in a rehab start with Double-A Somerset.

Germán had retired his first nine batters Tuesday night. He denied Hoye's assertion, saying he didn't have anything on his hand

other than rosin.

"It was definitely just the rosin bag," Germán said through a translator. "It was sweat and the rosin bag. I don't need any extra help to grab the baseball."

Germán's ejection was the fourth since Major League Baseball started its crackdown on prohibited grip aids two years ago, and the second this season.

Hoye's crew examined the 30-year-old right-hander during an April 15 start against Minnesota, when Germán retired his first 16 batters, but allowed him to stay in that game. Hoye had asked Germán to wash rosin off his hand and some had remained on the pitcher's pinkie.

Mets pitcher Max Scherzer was suspended for sticky stuff on April 20, and Seattle's Héctor Santiago and Arizona's Caleb Smith were suspended in 2021.

Horse racing at crossroads after latest deaths

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Brad Cox sent 21 horses he trains to Churchill Downs in the days leading up to the Kentucky Derby, and all came back from their races healthy.

Still, Cox is worried. Seven horses died in 10 days at and around the famous track, thrusting horse racing into a familiar, negative spotlight during Triple Crown season. The sport, by some measures is as popular as ever, and is facing intense scrutiny over the health of its animal athletes.

"The sales are strong, and the purses are strong, people are still involved — hopefully we can keep it going," Cox said this week while preparing for the Preakness. "I think people are doing a good job of trying to keep their horses sound, healthy, happy and performing well. That's the main thing. I've got a lot of questions about Derby week and what all happened there."

He's not alone. Industry leaders have said racing is at a critical juncture, even though horse deaths are at their lowest number since they began being tracked, money is flowing and new national medication and anti-doping rules are set to take effect next week. The hope is to clean up the sport, making it fairer for those involved and perhaps more acceptable to skeptics.

"When it comes to passion about the

horse and all of that, we've got a really vibrant industry," Horseracing Safety and Integrity Authority CEO Lisa Lazarus told The Associated Press. "We're at a crossroads because of essentially what happened in the lead up to the Derby weekend, on Derby day, and obviously incidents over the last few years that shows that there's nothing more important for the sustainability of our industry than ensuring that we're taking the best care possible of our horses and the people who ride them."

The authority (HISA) is a federally mandated agency established to set uniform regulations across the U.S. Its racetrack safety program has been in place since July 1, and the Antidoping and Medication Control Program that was delayed and challenged in court is set to start Monday.

It may already be working.

According to the Jockey Club's Equine Injury Database, the rate of 1.25 fatalities per 1,000 starts (or fewer than 13 horses out of each 10,000 who race) in 2022 is the lowest since record-keeping of that number began in 2009. According to University of Bristol professor Tim Parkin, the final six months of last year was "the safest six-month period on record."

Those in charge of the sport understand the progress that has been made fades into

the background when there is a high-profile cluster of deaths like those in Kentucky this spring, at Santa Anita in California in 2019 and at Aqueduct in New York in 2011-12.

A task force spurred by the deaths at Aqueduct more than a decade ago led to reforms in the Mid-Atlantic region that reduced fatalities there by 35%. New safety measures have also been put in place since the deaths at Santa Anita four years ago.

Dr. Dionne Benson has been at the forefront of many of those steps since taking over in the aftermath of the Santa Anita situation as chief veterinary officer for the Stronach Group, which owns and operates tracks in California, Florida and Maryland — the latter of which annually hosts the Preakness at Pimlico Racecourse in Baltimore.

Fatalities at Santa Anita are down 79% from 2019 to 2022. They're down more than 85% at Pimlico, where Kentucky Derby winner Mage on Saturday is favored to win the second Triple Crown race of the year.

Among the preventative measures in Baltimore is pre-race drug tests and checkups by independent veterinarians. Benson and a surgeon will look at each Preakness horse and those in a couple of other big races this weekend, and a Maryland Racing Commission vet must clear each one to run.