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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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N. Korea: ICBM has range to reach US

BY KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea—North Korea declared Wednesday that it has achieved its long-sought goal of becoming a nuclear power after firing a powerful missile it said could hit any point in the United States, dealing a new challenge to President Donald Trump.

The launch shattered more than two months of relative calm and came just more than a week after Trump put the North back on a list of state sponsors of terrorism. The U.S., South Korea, Japan and the United Nations chief strongly condemned the provocation and urged the North to halt its weapons program.

In recent months, Trump has threatened to unleash “fire and fury” and to “totally destroy” the communist state if needed to defend the homeland or its allies. His tone was more muted after Wednesday’s test.

“I will only tell you that we will take care of it,” the president told reporters at the White House, where he was holding a budget meeting with Republican congressional leaders.

“It is a situation that we will handle,” Trump said.

The intercontinental ballistic missile, which was fired at a steep angle from an area north of Pyongyang, flew for more than 50 minutes. It traveled nearly 600 miles and reached an altitude of up to 2,800 miles before crashing into the sea off the coast of Japan, military officials said.

North Korea gave roughly the same distances, which were farther than ICBMs launched on July 4 and July 28.

“It went higher, frankly, than any previous shot they’ve taken,” Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said at a White House meeting with Trump. “The bot-

tom line is it is a continued effort to build a ballistic missile threat that endangers world peace, regional peace and certainly the United States.”

Defiant message

It was the first missile test since Sept. 15 and sent a clear message of defiance against Trump’s campaign to isolate the regime by punishing it with tough economic sanctions and pressuring its main ally, China, to withdraw its support.

North Korea put its famous TV anchor, Ri Chun Hee on the air to declare the test a success. She read a government statement claiming the new Hwasong-15 had improved on capabilities demonstrated by the two ICBMs launched in July and could be armed with a “super-large heavy nuclear warhead” that could strike the “whole U.S. mainland.”

She also said North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, whom Trump has mocked as “Little Rocket Man,” observed the launch and “declared with pride that now we have finally realized the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force, the cause of building a rocket power.”

The North also reiterated its insistence that its aim is to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity from “U.S. imperialists.”

Unlike past years when Pyongyang was usually believed to be exaggerating its claims of advances, experts agreed it has made surprisingly swift progress toward its goal of developing a nuclear-capable missile that could target the U.S. mainland.

The communist state already is believed to have the ability to strike South Korea and U.S. bases elsewhere in the region with an arsenal of conventional weapons and tens of thousands

of soldiers massed near the heavily fortified border that divides the peninsula.

David Wright, an arms control expert with the Union of Concerned Scientists, said the results from Wednesday’s test suggested that the missile would have a range of more than 8,100 miles if fired on a standard trajectory.

“Such a missile would have more than enough range to reach Washington, D.C., and in fact any part of the continental United States,” he said in a statement.

However, he said it was likely the North Koreans used a mock warhead that was lighter than the real thing to increase the range.

“If true, that means it would be incapable of carrying a nuclear warhead to this long distance, since such a warhead would be much heavier,” he said.

Kim Tae-woo, a military studies professor at South Korea’s Konyang University, said North Korea appears to have mastered the technology needed to attack the U.S., but he doesn’t believe it will do so.

“This is kind of a game, brinkmanship diplomacy. That doesn’t mean that North Korea is ready to go to war against a superpower,” he said in a telephone interview. “North Korea in fact wants to acquire a lot of concessions from the U.S.”

The adversaries have been locked in a standoff since the North Koreans began pursuing nuclear weapons after the 1950-53 Korean War ended in an armistice instead of a peace treaty.

Washington insists it will never accept the North as a nuclear power, while Pyongyang maintains its nuclear program is not up for negotiation. However, U.S. officials have suggested the idea of direct talks with North Korea if it showed

restraint. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson strongly condemned the launch but said in a statement that “diplomatic options remain viable and open, for now.”

Olympics worries

Key U.S. ally South Korea responded by firing from a land-based missile battery off the peninsula’s east coast along with strikes from a fighter jet and a navy destroyer minutes after the North Korean missile took flight.

“This training shows that our military is watching North Korea’s military trends 24 hours a day and ... can strike precisely anytime on the ground, at sea and in the air in case of provocations,” the military said on its Facebook page.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in, meanwhile, warned the government won’t tolerate such provocations and urged the North to return to dialogue as he convened an emergency National Security Council meeting.

He also told officials to try to prevent any negative effect on the Olympics, which begin on Feb. 9 in the South Korean resort area of Pyeongchang, just 50 miles south of the border. The International Olympic Committee has promised the games will be safe amid concern that security fears may hurt attendance.

U.S. and Japanese officials had been expecting another test since radio signals indicated North Korea was preparing for a launch, but the timing just a few hours after midnight local time took many by surprise.

Japan tracked the missile but didn’t try to destroy it or initiate a public warning system because there was no imminent threat to the population or territory, said Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga.

US troops in Afghanistan to assume more risk next year

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States will send more troops onto the battlefield alongside Afghan forces next year as part of a revamped strategy designed to “turn the corner” on the 16-year war against the Taliban, the top American commander in Afghanistan said Tuesday.

U.S. troops will accompany Afghan units at the Kandak level next year, placing them closer to the front lines than most American soldiers have operated in recent years as they have advised primarily at the brigade and corps levels from the relative safety of forward operating bases, said U.S. Army Gen. John Nicholson, the commander of American and NATO forces in Afghanistan. Advising from the Kandak level — the Afghans’ equivalent of an American battalion — will put U.S. troops in a better position to provide Afghan commanders advice during the fight as well as increasing their ability to call for American support such as air power, artillery or medical evacuation, he said.

“Yes, there will be greater risk, absolutely,” Nicholson told reporters from Kabul.

He said as many as 1,000 U.S. troops would likely conduct patrols and missions with Afghan forces at any given time once the fighting season begins in

the spring.

Nicholson said the United States would go to “great lengths” to ensure American troops near the front lines are as well-protected as possible.

Since 2001, 1,863 U.S. servicemembers have been killed in action in Afghanistan and more than 20,000 have been wounded, according to Pentagon data. In 2017, 11 American troops have been killed in action there.

The move is part of President Donald Trump’s new strategy for South Asia that he unveiled during the summer. The plan is designed to defeat the Taliban and terrorist groups in Afghanistan and also lend stability to the region that includes Pakistan and India.

The United States has already added some 3,000 troops to bring its total in Afghanistan to about 14,000 and lifted several restrictions on using airpower against the Taliban. Calling the new strategy “a game changer,” Nicholson said the adjustments were already making a difference in the long-running war that he has characterized as a stalemate since last year.

“That’s why I express confidence that we are on our way to a win,” he said Tuesday.

In addition to moving American combat advisers closer to the front lines to help Afghans hunt down Taliban fighters in

simultaneous offensive operations across the country, the United States has stepped up its bombing campaign.

In 2017, U.S. aircraft have dropped 3,554 munitions against Taliban, al-Qaida and Islamic State targets through October, compared with dropping 1,337 bombs in 2016, according to U.S. Air Forces Central data.

The new strategy aims to drive Taliban leadership to negotiate a cease-fire within two years. To achieve that, Nicholson said Afghan forces will need to gain control of 80 percent of Afghanistan’s nearly 36 million people by 2019.

As of August, the government controlled or influenced only 56.8 percent of the country’s 407 districts, a 1 percent decline during the past six months and a more than 6 percent decline from the same period last year, according to the most recent report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. The Taliban controlled or influenced 13 percent of the population, a 2 percent increase in its territory from the previous six months, the same report found. The rest of the nation is contested.

Nicholson on Tuesday provided a more optimistic assessment, announcing the Afghans controlled about 64 percent of the population and the Taliban control about 12 percent.

US Navy boosts patrols in Black Sea

BY SCOTT WYLAND
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The USS James E. Williams sailed into the Black Sea this week, the second U.S. warship in the past three months to patrol a region where fighting has increased between Ukrainian government troops and separatists backed by Russia.

Another Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, the USS Porter, completed a similar mission in August.

The current patrol demonstrates the Navy’s more frequent presence in the Black Sea, where its ships once visited sporadically.

Russia has viewed the U.S. naval presence as aggressive posturing since 2014, when it annexed the Crimean Peninsula and began backing separatist forces fighting in eastern Ukraine. U.S. and European sanctions against Moscow have ratcheted tensions throughout much of Eastern Europe.

On Tuesday, Ukrainian media reported that a government soldier was killed and two others wounded in shelling by militants in the country’s east.

The Navy doesn’t attribute any particular significance to the increased frequency of its Black Sea patrols. Destroyers are there to augment allied defenses and protect waters of economic and military importance, officials said.

Besides its security patrol, the destroyer crew will train with the Ukrainian and Turkish navies, said Capt. Tate Westbrook, who oversees ships in the 6th Fleet theater.

Some analysts say Washington must maintain a military presence in the region to assure allies concerned about Russian military activities.

Sailor, 22, found dead aboard aircraft carrier

Associated Press

BREMERTON, Wash. — Officials say a 22-year-old sailor was found dead on an aircraft carrier Saturday afternoon while the ship was at Naval Base Kitsap in Bremerton.

The Kitsap Sun reported Tuesday that the U.S. Navy

identified the sailor as Akiree Pointer, an engineman fireman recruit from Arlington, Texas.

Stennis spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Frederick Martin said Pointer, who was found on the USS John C. Stennis, showed no obvious and apparent cause of death.

Martin said the command is

investigating.

Pointer attended Navy basic training at the Naval Recruit Training Center in Great Lakes, Ill., before joining the aircraft carrier.

The Stennis is in port in Bremerton preparing for its next scheduled deployment.

AFRICOM outlines its mission in Somalia

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Somalia's new government offers the country its best chance for "lasting peace in over a generation," and the U.S. military will continue to build up local forces to fight Islamic militants rooted there, U.S. Africa Command said Wednesday.

"Our policy is to support Somalia-led efforts to encourage members of the al-Shabab and [Islamic State] to defect and pledge support to the Somali Government," AFRICOM said in a 1,600-word statement that sought to explain its mission in the east African country.

"When that is not possible, our military policy to target these groups is in accordance with the laws of armed conflict and in support of our broader stabilization goals."

AFRICOM launched nine airstrikes in Somalia this month, bringing the total for the year to about 30. As U.S. military operations have accelerated in Somalia, the purpose of the campaign and role of American troops have come under increased scrutiny.

The U.S. aim is to establish "a secure enough environment for the broader diplomacy efforts related to national reconciliation and the building of a viable, capable and representa-

tive government in Somalia," AFRICOM commander Gen. Thomas Waldhauser said in the Wednesday statement.

Part of what is driving U.S. efforts is a sense that Somalia's new government, led by President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, could help unify a country that has been in a state of collapse for 30 years.

Mohamed, who was inaugurated in February, is a dual U.S. citizen who worked at the New York Department of Transportation before becoming president.

He ran for office on an anti-corruption platform.

The U.S. campaign is also part of a broader effort to dem-

onstrate that Somalia's military is gaining capability.

That could give the multinational African Union Mission in Somalia — a military coalition that has led the fight against al-Shabab for a decade — the incentive to extend its deployments beyond 2019, AFRICOM said.

Still, Somalia constantly ranks as one of the most corrupt nations in the world, according to international indexes.

The clan-based country also has no history of an effective central government, which raises questions about the long-term prospects of trying to establish order.

Mixed verdict reached in trial over Benghazi attack

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Libyan militant was convicted Tuesday of terrorism charges stemming from the 2012 Benghazi attacks that killed the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans. But a federal jury found him not guilty of murder, the most serious charge associated with the rampage he was accused of orchestrating.

The federal jury in Washington deliberated for five days before returning its verdict against Ahmed Abu Khattala. Prosecutors accused him of directing an attack aimed at killing personnel and plundering maps and other property from the U.S. mission in Benghazi. Defense attorneys said the evidence against him was shoddy.

The mixed verdict spares him a life sentence, but it could still result in Khattala, 46, spending decades in prison.

U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens was killed in the attack, along with a State Department information management officer. Two more Americans died in a mortar attack at a nearby CIA complex.

The Sept. 12, 2012, attack

became political fodder in the 2012 presidential campaign, with Republicans accusing President Barack Obama's administration of intentionally misleading the public and stonewalling congressional investigators, though officials denied any wrongdoing. Some in Congress were particularly critical of then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's handling of the conflict.

The trial was one of the most significant terrorism prosecutions in recent years in a U.S. civilian court, even though the Trump administration had argued such suspects are better sent to the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Rather than being sent to Guantanamo, Khattala was brought to the U.S. in 2014 and questioned over 13 days aboard a Navy transport ship headed to the U.S. He was interrogated for days to obtain national security intelligence before being advised of his rights.

A new team of FBI investigators then pressed him some more, this time to produce evidence prosecutors could present at trial.

AF: Dozens of criminal histories not given to FBI

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Air Force said Tuesday that in addition to failing to alert the FBI to the criminal history of the former airman who massacred 26 people at a Texas church on Nov. 5, it has discovered "several dozen" other such reporting omissions.

This was the most specific acknowledgement by the Air Force that its failure to report Devin P. Kelley's criminal history was part of a pattern of reporting lapses.

The several dozen cases that were not reported have since been presented to the FBI to update its database, Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek said.

The Air Force Inspector General is reviewing compliance with reporting requirements in 60,000 cases involving serious offenses dating to 2002.

In a written statement on progress in its investigation, the Air Force blamed gaps in "training and compliance measures" for the lapse involving Kelley, who had been convicted of assaulting his then-wife and stepson in 2012. The fingerprint

card and the report on the outcome of his court-martial were not submitted to the FBI by Air Force personnel at Kelley's base in New Mexico. If reported, that information should have stopped him from buying weapons.

Kelley was sentenced to 12 months in confinement and given a bad conduct discharge. He left the Air Force in 2014.

The Air Force inspector general is undertaking an in-depth review of the service's compliance with long-standing requirements to report certain criminal history information to the FBI for inclusion in databases used to conduct background checks of gun buyers. It is part of a broader Pentagon-wide review of compliance with these requirements.

Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson has previously acknowledged that Kelley's criminal history should have been reported to the FBI but was not.

In its statement Tuesday, the Air Force said its review found that the reporting failure in the Kelley case was by Office of Special Investigation officials and Air Force security force personnel at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico.

UN war crimes convict poisons himself in court

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Croatian state TV reported Wednesday that a convicted Croat war criminal has died after swallowing what he said was poison seconds after a United Nations judge confirmed his 20-year sentence for involvement in crimes during the Bosnian war of the 1990s.

In a stunning end to the final case at the U.N.'s International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Slobodan Praljak yelled, "I am not a war criminal!" and appeared to drink from a small bottle.

Tribunal spokesman Nenad Golceviski, when asked if he could confirm the death, said: "I have no information to share at this point."

The courtroom where the dramatic scene unfolded was sealed off and Presiding Judge Carmel Agius said that it was now a "crime scene" so that Dutch police could investigate. Police in The Hague declined comment on the case.

Praljak, 72, had been in the tribunal's custody ahead of the hearing and it was not clear how he could have got access to poison or how he apparently managed to smuggle it into the tightly guarded courtroom.

Agius had overturned some of Praljak's convictions but upheld others and left his sentence unchanged. Praljak, standing to listen to the judgment, then produced what appeared to be a small bottle, threw back his head and seemed to pour something into his mouth.

Agius shut down the hearing and cleared

the courtroom.

The hearing later resumed and, ultimately, all six Croats charged in the case had their sentences, ranging from 25 to 10 years, confirmed. Judges overturned some of their 2013 convictions, but left many unchanged.

The other suspects showed no emotion as Agius reconfirmed their sentences for their involvement in a campaign to drive Muslims out of a would-be Bosnian Croat ministate in Bosnia in the early 1990s.

Dutch police, an ambulance and a fire truck quickly arrived outside the court's headquarters and emergency service workers, some of them wearing helmets and with oxygen tanks on their backs, went into the court shortly after the incident. An ambulance later left the building, but it could not be confirmed if Praljak was inside.

Wednesday's hearing was the final case at the groundbreaking tribunal before it closes its doors next month. The tribunal, which last week convicted former Bosnian Serb military chief Gen. Ratko Mladic of genocide and other crimes, was set up in 1993, while fighting still raged in the former Yugoslavia. It indicted 161 suspects and convicted 90 of them.

The appeals judges upheld a key finding that late Croat President Franjo Tudjman was a member of a plan to create a Croat mini-state in Bosnia, but that finding, which angered Croat leaders, was largely overshadowed by Praljak.

Police arrest man in Tampa serial killings

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Police have arrested a man and said they will charge him with murder in a string of killings that terrorized a Tampa neighborhood.

Tampa Police Chief Brian Dugan announced at a news conference that Howell Emanuel Donaldson, 24, would be charged with four counts of first-degree murder.

The tip that led police Tuesday to Donaldson came from one of his co-workers at an Ybor City McDonalds, which is near the Seminole Heights neighborhood that has seen four fatal shootings since early October.

News outlets reported that Donaldson asked an employee at the restaurant to hold a bag with a loaded semiautomatic gun Tuesday afternoon while he went to a nearby business to get a payday loan. The employee told her manager about the gun and the manager alerted a Tampa police officer who was doing paperwork at a table in the restaurant.

When Donaldson returned to the restaurant, police were waiting.

Residents and police had been on edge since Oct. 9, when Benjamin Mitchell, 22, was shot to death.

Two days later, Monica Hoffa, 32, was slain. On Oct. 19, Anthony Naiboa, 20, was killed after taking the wrong bus home from his new job. On Nov. 14, Ronald Felton, 60, was killed.

All of the October victims were either getting on or off a city bus or were at a bus stop when they were shot, police said.

NBC fires Lauer, cites 'inappropriate ... behavior'

Associated Press

NBC News fired longtime "Today" show host Matt Lauer on Wednesday for "inappropriate sexual behavior," making him the second morning television show personality to lose his job because of sexual misconduct charges in a week.

Lauer's co-host Savannah Guthrie made the announcement at the top of Wednesday's "Today" show. Last week, CBS News fired Charlie Rose after complaints from several

women who worked for him.

NBC News Chairman Andrew Lack said the network had received a complaint from a colleague on Monday night, but gave no details of the alleged misconduct. A review determined it was a clear violation of company standards, he said. It was the first complaint lodged against Lauer, but Lack said in a memo to staff that "we were also presented with reason to believe this may not have been an isolated incident."

Lauer, 59, has hosted "Today" for two decades. When paired with Katie Couric, "Today" was the longtime ratings leader and was highly lucrative for NBC. It now runs second in the ratings to ABC's "Good Morning America."

Many "Today" show viewers took out their anger for the unsightly 2012 firing of co-host Ann Curry on Lauer, sending the show plunging in the ratings. But NBC stuck with Lauer, and the show had steadied with

his pairing with Guthrie. The show runs for four hours, with Lauer and Guthrie hosting the first two.

Lack, in his memo, said that "we are deeply saddened by this turn of events. But we will face it together as a news organization — and do it in as transparent a manner as we can." There were reports that, before the firing, some media organizations were looking into Lauer's behavior. He is married with three children.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man arrested after skull found in trunk

CA ANGELS CAMP — Authorities have identified the Northern California man found with methamphetamine and a human skull during a traffic stop.

Angels camp police said Joshua Davis, 41, of Murphys, was arrested on charges of possessing methamphetamine, disturbing or removing human remains and driving with a suspended license. He also was cited for a parole violation.

Police said Monday that Davis' car was pulled over Nov. 22 for failing to halt at a stop-sign limit line. They said a search of the car before it was to be towed revealed methamphetamine behind the fuel door and the skull in the trunk.

Authorities are trying to determine the skull's identity.

Man driving 90 mph had lots of pot in car

CT CLINTON — Police said a Rhode Island man pulled over for driving 90 mph on an interstate in Connecticut had more than 9 pounds of marijuana in his car.

A Connecticut state trooper pulled over Mohamed Jones, 21, of Providence, on Interstate 95 north in Clinton just before 1 a.m. Sunday.

The trooper wrote in his report that he smelled "an odor consistent with fresh marijuana to be coming from the interior of the vehicle."

A search of the trunk yielded nine clear, heat-sealed bags of pot inside a large blue cloth bag.

Jones was held on a \$100,000 bond on charges of reckless driving, possession with intent to sell and possession of a controlled substance.

Police: Man shoots goose at city park

WA KENNEWICK — Police said the case of a man who shot a goose from a car at a Kennewick park has been given to the Benton County prosecutor for possible charges.

The Tri-City Herald reported Monday that the man, who hasn't been named, could face charges including firing a weapon in the park as well as wildlife violations.

Kennewick police said someone called emergency dispatchers Nov. 19 to complain about a man who shot a goose in Columbia Park.

Police said they found a dead, banded goose in the park that appeared to have been shot with a small-caliber round. Officer Jason Kiel said a witness got the suspect's license plate.

Stolen pit bull puppies recovered, back home

ME HANCOCK — A Maine man said his four puppies that were stolen over the weekend have been returned to him.

Owner Jeffrey Long said four of his six purebred pit bull puppies were stolen from his home Sunday afternoon. The Hancock County Sheriff's Department said late Monday that three of the four puppies were returned to Long's family.

Long said Tuesday that all four of the puppies were back home.

Driver stuck on tracks escapes; car struck

NE CEDAR CREEK — Authorities said a woman was able to leave her vehicle before it was struck by a train in eastern Nebraska.

The Cass County Sheriff's

Office said deputies were sent to the crash site in Cedar Creek about 11:30 p.m. Monday.

The 35-year-old Omaha woman told deputies that her vehicle had become stuck on the tracks, but she managed to get out in time to escape injury when the train reached the crossing. The sheriff's office said she was arrested on suspicion of drunken driving.

State issues drug OD kit for police dogs

ID BOISE — The Idaho State Police has issued an overdose reversal drug that troopers can administer to police dogs that are in danger of inhaling harmful substances during searches.

Sgt. Ken Yount told KTVB-TV that the agency has issued an injectable form of naloxone.

Yount said dogs are trained to sniff out and locate controlled substances. That can include powerful forms of heroin and fentanyl that are up to 100 times stronger than morphine.

He said the rapid, intense sniffing dogs use to locate the drugs could cause them to get a fatal dose.

Girl choking on a coin is saved by quick teen

MO WENTZVILLE — A fast-acting teenager is being credited with saving the life of a girl in suburban St. Louis.

KSDK-TV reported that Kaelie Burk was on a bus heading home from Wentzville Middle School when someone threw a quarter that somehow went into her mouth and lodged in her throat.

As Kaelie began to choke, Austin Medlock quickly stood up and performed the Heimlich maneuver, something he learned in health class at Wen-

tzville's Holt High School.

The quarter didn't come completely out but dislodged enough that Kaelie could breathe. She was taken to a hospital, and doctors were able to remove the coin.

Man arrested in deadly attack with sword

FL LAKE WORTH — A Florida man is accused of killing another man with a 3-foot sword.

Palm Beach sheriff's spokeswoman Teri Barbera said in a news release Sunday that George C. Livingston, 51, is being held without bond on a second-degree murder charge. The booking sheet described the charge as "murder dangerous depraved without premeditation."

The body of David Beckett, 58, was found covered in blood near the railroad tracks in Lake Worth on Saturday afternoon.

Complaints may end big Yule lights display

CT FAIRFIELD — A Connecticut family's intricate Christmas display could be forced to turn off its 300,000 lights after complaints from neighbors about traffic and parking restrictions.

The Connecticut Post reported the Halliwell family's huge decorative display in Fairfield drew about 30,000 visitors last holiday season.

Police plan to make some roads one-way and establish temporary parking restrictions while the display is up this year, preventing some residents from parking outside their homes.

Neighbor Nadine Losquadro submitted a petition asking town officials and police to come up with an alternative plan.

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Manning benched after 210 straight starts

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — The Eli Manning era with the New York Giants may be coming to an end.

And if it is, it's an ugly ending.

The Giants announced on Tuesday the two-time Super Bowl MVP was being benched for the first time in more than 13 years so they could evaluate the other quarterbacks on the roster over the final month of a lost-and-injury-filled season.

The decision to sit Manning, 36, was totally unexpected, especially with five games left in the regular season.

It was clear the decision hurt and annoyed Manning, who has been the face of the Giants (2-9) since they made a bold draft day trade with the then-San Diego Chargers in 2004 to swap first-round picks and get the No. 1 overall selection to the Meadowlands.

Manning expressed his unhappiness but once again he played the good soldier, voicing his support for veteran Geno Smith, who will start against Oakland on Sunday.

His emotional pain was all over his face. His eyes welled

with tears talking to reporters. His chin quivered when asked about how much this hurt. His face got red the more he talked.

Coach Ben McAdoo gave Manning the option of starting to keep his streak of 210 consecutive starts alive, but he didn't want any part of that.

"You start knowing you are going to come out of the game to keep a streak alive, maybe, that's not what it is about," Manning said.

"It's not a preseason game where you are going to start to the half, the next week a quarter, a series, that's not fair. That's not fair to me, not fair to Geno, not how you play. You play to win. When you are named the starting quarterback you think it's your job to go win the football game.

"If you are going to play a little bit, I didn't think it was the right way to play," said Manning, who became the Giants' starting quarterback 10 games into his rookie season in 2004, which was about a month or so before Eagles quarterback Carson Wentz turned 12 years old.

Manning's voice broke when asked how this one hurt, noting

it was one of his hardest days as a Giant.

"It's been a hard day to handle this, but (I'll) hang in there and figure it out," he said.

Manning spoke with the media for less than four minutes. He then took his backpack and left the locker room.

McAdoo said he made the decision to start Smith over the weekend, and co-owner John Mara and general manager Jerry Reese were in agreement.

"This is not a statement about anything other than we are 2-9, and we have to do what is best for the organization moving forward, and that means evaluating every position," Reese said in a statement.

"I told Eli this morning that an organization could not ask for any more in a franchise quarterback. He has been that and more. Nobody knows what the future holds, but right now, this is what we think is best for the franchise."

McAdoo, the second-year head coach, said the organization needed to learn more about Smith and rookie third-round draft pick Davis Webb in the final weeks of the season. Smith took four snaps in a blow-

out loss to the Rams. Webb has not played.

McAdoo refused to say if this was the end of the Manning era.

"I have a lot of confidence in Eli as a player, as a quarterback," McAdoo said. "But at this point, it's my responsibility for the organization to make sure we take a look at Geno and at some point take a look at Davis and give them the opportunity to show what they can do."

Manning and Smith were told about the decision on Tuesday, and later the team was filled in.

McAdoo also plans to give Webb an opportunity, but probably not this week. Manning, who recently passed the 50,000-yard mark, will be the backup.

Webb called Manning the best teammate he has ever had.

"If you had a Mount Rushmore of not only New York Giants, but New York athletes, he'd be on it," Webb said.

Manning's streak is the second-longest streak by a quarterback in NFL history, behind Brett Favre's 297.

Marrone says Jaguars need to change running game

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Jacksonville's vaunted ground game has veered off course.

The Jaguars were mostly listless while trying to run the ball in a 27-24 loss at Arizona on Sunday that ended the team's four-game winning streak. Rookie Leonard Fournette finished with 25 yards on 12 attempts — both season lows — and failed to gain at least 10 yards on any carry for the second time in three weeks.

It's a huge concern for a team built to run the ball and play great defense.

"It's something we have to change," coach Doug Marrone said Monday. "We want to be able to run the football and

put ourselves in manageable situations. I think that's going to help us along with our play-action game and being able to take shots — basically what our philosophy has been the whole time.

"I've got to do a better job, and the coaches, of putting those guys in a good position, schematically, and being able to take advantage of some of these heavy fronts that we see."

The Jaguars (7-4) still lead the league in rushing, averaging 154.3 yards a game, but have been under that mark in each of the last three games. The last time they eclipsed their average was in a Week 7 victory at Indianapolis.

Jacksonville hosts the Colts

(3-8) on Sunday. It's the first of three consecutive home games and a chance to get the ground game back on track.

It should help that right tackle Jermei Parnell (knee) and guard Patrick Omameh (quadriceps) are expected to return after missing time. Parnell sat out the last three games, and Omameh missed two straight.

"I think it's important anytime you get someone back that's played," Marrone said.

Getting receiver Allen Hurns (ankle) back would help, too.

Without Hurns, the Jaguars have veteran Marqise Lee and two rookies at receiver. Although Dede Westbrook and Keelan Cole have shown glimpses of talent, they haven't

done enough to stop teams from stacking the line of scrimmage against Fournette.

Since missing one game because of a sprained right ankle and another for violating a team rule, Fournette has run 57 times for 169 yards. He averaged 2.96 yards a carry against Arizona, Cleveland and the Los Angeles Chargers, and failed to score in any of those games.

He really struggled against the Cardinals.

Jacksonville finished with 91 yards rushing, with 62 of those by quarterback Blake Bortles.

"It was tough," Bortles said.

Marrone suggested that getting backup running backs Chris Ivory and T.J. Yeldon more involved could help.

Clemson moves to top of CFP rankings

Associated Press

Clemson, Auburn, Oklahoma and Wisconsin will enter championship weekend positioned to earn a playoff spot with just one more victory.

But a potential Alabama-Ohio State controversy looms.

Clemson moved up to No. 1 in the final College Football Playoff rankings before the semifinals are set by the selection committee on Sunday.

Alabama fell from No. 1 to fifth in the new rankings Tuesday night after losing to Auburn, and Georgia was sixth. Miami slipped after taking its first loss of the season last week from No. 2 to seventh, just ahead of Ohio State at eighth.

"It's close separation from team No. 5 Alabama, six Georgia, seven Miami, eight Ohio State. Those teams are close," said committee chairman Kirby Hocutt, the athletic director at Texas Tech. "Very little separation in the committee's eyes between teams five through eight."

Each of the top four teams plays a conference title game this Saturday against another highly ranked team, creating potential play-in playoff games. Clemson faces Miami in the Atlantic Coast Conference championship; Auburn and Georgia play for the Southeastern Conference title; Wisconsin faces Ohio State for the Big Ten title; and Oklahoma faces No. 11 TCU for the Big 12 title.

If the top four win out, the semifinals likely would fall into place: Clemson would face Wisconsin in the Sugar Bowl semifinal on New Year's Day by virtue of giving the top seed a regional advantage, and Auburn and Oklahoma would play in the Rose Bowl semifinal.

It is likely Miami would jump into the top four by beating No. 1 Clemson and winning the ACC and same goes for Georgia if it can win a rematch against Auburn. The intrigue would start if Oklahoma and/or Wisconsin lose.

The selection committee could be faced with a choice between Alabama (11-1) and Ohio State (10-2). The Crimson Tide's résumé has no wins against teams currently in the top 15 and they are done playing, but the Buckeyes have two losses by double digits, including a 31-point blowout at Iowa.

Penn State is ninth and Southern California is the highest ranked Pac-12 team at No. 10.

The questions

What is a conference championship worth?

That could be the deciding factor between Alabama and Ohio State if it comes down to those two schools. For those who want to try to read between the lines, Hocutt mentioned conference titles a few times Tuesday night. It is important to remember that the

committee's protocol states when teams are similar conference titles should be used as essentially a tiebreaker. As of right now, Hocutt is saying the Buckeyes and Tide are close. It's also important to remember that this stuff is subjective so be cautious about reading too much into anything.

"I will be prepared and able to answer that question next Sunday," Hocutt said when asked about whether Ohio State and Alabama were close enough so that a conference title could be the difference.

Stay tuned.

Can Clemson lose to Miami and get in?

Looks like it, especially if Auburn wins the SEC, but it likely will require a loss by either Wisconsin or Oklahoma.

Clemson's résumé is heavy with victories against winning teams, including beating Auburn back in September. That could give the Tigers a trump card on Alabama, which just lost to Auburn.

The only thing the other potential two-loss contenders, such as Ohio State, TCU or Southern California, would have on Clemson is a conference title. Would that be enough to drop the defending national champions all the way out of the top four? The Tigers might have some cushion.

Does the committee hate UCF, the American Athletic

Conference and Group of Five teams in general?

Hate is a strong word. But UCF, the only other unbeaten team in FBS other than Wisconsin, moved up just one spot to No. 14 after beating USF (10-2) last week in a dramatic and thrilling game. Washington (10-2) and Stanford (9-3) both jumped the Knights.

That ranking prompted this tweet from UCF athletic director Danny White: "You've got to be kidding me!!!"

The Knights play Memphis, the committee's 20th-ranked team, on Saturday for the AAC championship. The winner will get the Group of Five's guaranteed spot in a New Year's Six bowl game, but those teams are not even an afterthought in the playoff conversation.

UCF is the highest scoring team in the country, but Hocutt said overall strength of schedule and some defensive shortcomings were holding back UCF.

"The Selection Committee had questions as to are they as balanced of a team as some others that are ranked just above them, and we analyzed their schedule, have they really been tested on the defensive side of the ball this year, and if so, by who, and based on that conversation, we ranked them in that 14th spot this week," Hocutt said.

NBA roundup

LeBron ejected for first time, but Cavs extend streak

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Kevin Love scored 32 of his 38 points in the first half, LeBron James was ejected for the first time in his career and the Cleveland Cavaliers extended their longest winning streak since 2015 to nine games by downing the Miami Heat 108-97 on Tuesday night.

Love had his way with every

defender Miami put on him, finishing 10-for-16 from the field and 14-for-17 on free throws. He scored 22 in the first quarter and the Cavs opened a 27-point lead before halftime.

Dwyane Wade added 17 points for Cleveland, which has shaken off a slow start and is again playing like the team to beat in the Eastern Conference.

James added 21 points before he was slapped with two technical fouls and tossed with 1:59 left in the third quarter and the Cavs leading by 23. It was the first time James was thrown out in 1,082 career games.

Wizards 92, Timberwolves 89: Otto Porter Jr. hit a 22-foot jumper with 25 seconds remaining, lifting visiting Washington to the victory.

Bucks 112, Kings 87: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 19 of his 32 points in the third quarter, helping Milwaukee to the runaway road win.

Jazz 106, Nuggets 77: Derrick Favors scored 24 points, and host Utah put away Denver with a dominant second half.

Suns 104, Bulls 99: At Chicago, Devin Booker scored 33 points, and Phoenix held on.

College basketball roundup

Graham leads Kansas to rout of Toledo

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan.—Devonte Graham's shot hadn't been falling lately, so the Kansas point guard had been content to dish out nearly 10 assists per game, a number that ranked second in the nation.

Well, his shot finally fell Tuesday night.

Graham hit five three-pointers and poured in a career-high 35 points — and still racked up five assists without a turnover — to lead the second-ranked Jayhawks to a 96-58 rout of Toledo and extend the Jayhawks' best start in seven years.

"I've been putting up some shots at night," said Graham, explaining that assistant coach Kurtis Townsend had been telling him to hold his follow-through. "Just listening to him

and getting in the gym."

Graham wasn't the only hot hand against the Rockets.

Malik Newman added 17 points, often cruising in for easy layups. Svi Mykhailiuk hit five three-pointers and had 15 points. And big man Udoka Azubuike dunked his way to 12 points.

The Jayhawks (6-0) finished 12-for-20 from beyond the arc and shot 59 percent from the field, though emptying their bench early kept them from hitting the 100-point mark for the third straight game. They also forced 20 turnovers by a Toledo team that had committed 25 total over its last three games.

"That's a very, very good basketball team," Rockets coach Tod Kowalczyk said. "I'm not a Kansas basketball historian by

any stretch, but in 30 years of coaching, that's as good a team as I've seen."

No. 8 Wichita St. 112, Savannah St. 66: Samajae Haynes-Jones scored a season-high 31 points to lead the host Shockers.

Five other Wichita State players (5-1) scored in double figures against the fast-paced Tigers (2-6). Leading scorer Landry Shamet did not play in the second half after re-injuring his right ankle.

Darral Willis had 14 points and 12 rebounds for Wichita State, while Rashard Kelly had 12 points and 10 rebounds. Austin Reaves scored 12 for the Shockers, and Conner Frankamp and Rauno Nurger added 10 each.

No. 21 Xavier 76, No. 16 Baylor 63: At Cincinnati, J.P.

Macura scored 15 of his 19 points in the first half as the Musketeers surged ahead to stay.

Xavier (6-1) recovered from its first loss — against Arizona State — by controlling the boards and putting together decisive runs in each half. The Musketeers never trailed after an opening 21-8 spurt.

Purdue 66, No. 17 Louisville 57: Vince Edwards scored 15 points and Carsen Edwards and Dakota Mathias spurred a late run to lead the host Boilermakers in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

Purdue (6-2) beat its second straight ranked opponent — and won for the first time since its 41-week streak in the Top 25 ended. Carsen Edwards and Mathias both finished with 13 points.

NHL roundup

Vasilevskiy makes 34 saves as Lightning blank Sabres

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The NHL's highest-scoring team leaned on its defense to snap a two-game losing streak.

Andrei Vasilevskiy made 34 saves in his second shutout of the season, and the Tampa Bay Lightning got goals from defensemen Mikhail Sergachev and Dan Girardi in a 2-0 victory over the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday night.

"When you're on a little bit of a slide, we're just trying to get back to basics," Lightning forward Tyler Johnson said. "Keep it simple, get pucks to the net and get some of those dirty goals."

Tampa Bay is off to the best start in franchise history (17-5-2) but had lost consecutive games for the first time this season.

Vasilevskiy leads the NHL with 16 wins and has six career shutouts in 101 starts.

"He's one of, if not the best

goalie in the world right now," Johnson said.

Robin Lehner stopped 24 shots for the Sabres, who were held scoreless for the second straight game and have lost nine of 10.

"It wasn't a bad performance but not good enough," Lehner said. "Good enough is not enough right now. We need to claw back. We need to do something special."

The Sabres pulled Lehner to gain an extra attacker for the final 4:09 of the game.

"We have to have some attitude when we start the game," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "This is our home rink. We've got to get out and establish a forecheck, show more emotion on the ice."

Lightning captain Steven Stamkos, the NHL's leading scorer, went without a goal for the fifth straight game and has added just one point to his league-high tally during that stretch. Linemate Nikita Kuch-

erov had an assist for his second point in five games and is now one point behind Stamkos for the NHL lead with 35.

"They've produced at such a high rate, there are going to be games or little spurts where you're not going to get a point," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "The big thing is we won the game and they didn't score."

Sharks 3, Flyers 1: Joe Thornton scored the go-ahead goal late in the first period and visiting San Jose extended Philadelphia's longest losing streak in nearly 10 years to nine games.

Islanders 5, Canucks 2: Calvin de Haan and Jordan Eberle scored goals one minute apart in the first period to spark host New York to a win over Vancouver.

Blue Jackets 3, Hurricanes 2 (SO): Cam Atkinson and Artemi Panarin scored in the shootout to give host Columbus a win over Carolina.

Panthers 5, Rangers 4: Denis Malgin scored with 1:09 left and visiting Florida recovered after giving up two three-goal leads to beat New York.

Kings 4, Red Wings 1: Dustin Brown and Anze Kopitar scored 2:10 apart late in the second period to put visiting Los Angeles ahead and it went on to beat Detroit.

Predators 3, Blackhawks 2: Pekka Rinne made 37 saves to lead host Nashville to a win over Chicago.

Oilers 3, Coyotes 2 (OT): Ryan Nugent-Hopkins scored 4:20 into overtime as host Edmonton defeated Arizona for its second win in a row.

Maple Leafs 4, Flames 1: Roman Polak scored his first goal of the season and Frederik Andersen made 19 saves as visiting Toronto beat Calgary.

Stars 3, Golden Knights 0: Radek Faksa scored three goals and Ben Bishop registered his second shutout of the season, as visiting Dallas blanked Vegas.