

Israeli leader rules out Gaza cease-fire

Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip — The United States urged Israel on Friday to ensure more humanitarian aid gets into Gaza and to do more to protect Palestinian civilians, as Israel's prime minister said there would be no cease-fire in the nearly month-old war until Hamas releases hostages. The leader of the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group stoked fears that the conflict could widen by promising more attacks along the Lebanon border.

Israeli troops tightened their encirclement of Gaza City, the focus of their campaign to crush the enclave's ruling Hamas militants, who launched a brutal attack on Israeli communities that started the war.

But ever since that Oct. 7 assault, there have been concerns the conflict could ignite fighting on other fronts, and Israel and the Iranian-backed militant group Hezbollah have repeatedly traded fire along the Lebanon border.

In his first public speech since the war began, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said his group had "entered the battle" with the past weeks' unprecedented cross-border fighting. "We will not be limited to this," he said, suggesting escalation was possible. Still, Nasrallah stopped short of announcing that Hezbollah is fully engaging in the war.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on his third trip to Israel since the war began, reiterated U.S. support for Israel in the war, saying it has the right to defend itself. But he said a "humanitarian pause" was needed to boost aid deliveries to Palestinian civilians amid growing alarm over the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

After meeting Blinken, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel "refuses a temporary cease-fire that doesn't include a return of our hostages," referring to some 240 people Hamas abducted during its attack. He said Israel

was pressing ahead with its military offensive with "all of its power."

Blinken said there had to be a substantial and immediate increase in humanitarian aid to Gaza, where "we need to do more to protect Palestinian civilians." Without that, "there are no partners for peace," he said, adding that it was critical to restore the path toward a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Hezbollah, an ally of Hamas, attacked Israeli military positions in northern Israel with drones, mortar fire and suicide drones on Thursday. The Israeli military said it retaliated with warplanes and helicopter gunships, and spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said civilians were wounded in the Hezbollah attacks.

"We are in a high state of readiness in the north, in a very high state of alert, to respond to any event today and in coming days," he said.

Blinken said the U.S., which

has deployed aircraft carriers and other forces in the eastern Mediterranean, was committed to ensuring that no "second or third front" opens in the conflict, referring to Hezbollah.

In his speech, Nasrallah said his militia is not deterred by U.S. warnings, saying: "Your fleets in the Mediterranean ... will not scare us."

A war with Hezbollah would be devastating for both Israel and Lebanon. Hezbollah is much stronger than Hamas, with an arsenal of some 150,000 rockets and missiles, some believed to be precision-guided weapons capable of striking deep inside Israel.

Israel has promised to unleash vast destruction in Lebanon if all-out war erupts, accusing Hezbollah of hiding its military installation in the midst of residential areas. The two enemies fought a monthlong war in 2006. Renewed fighting could also risk drawing Iran, which backs both Hamas and Hezbollah, into the conflict.

House approves nearly \$14.5B in military aid for Israel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House approved a nearly \$14.5 billion military aid package Thursday for Israel, a muscular U.S. response to the war with Hamas but also a partisan approach by new Speaker Mike Johnson that poses a direct challenge to Democrats and President Joe Biden.

In a departure from norms, Johnson's package required that the emergency aid be offset with cuts in government spending elsewhere. That tack established the new House GOP's

conservative leadership, but it also turned what would typically be a bipartisan vote into one dividing Democrats and Republicans. Biden has said he would veto the bill, which was approved 226-196, with 12 Democrats joining most Republicans on a largely party-line vote.

Johnson, R-La., said the Republican package would provide Israel with the assistance needed to defend itself, free hostages held by Hamas and eradicate the militant Palestinian group, accomplishing "all of this while we also work to en-

sure responsible spending and reduce the size of the federal government."

Democrats said that approach would only delay help for Israel. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has warned that the "stunningly unserious" bill has no chances in the Senate.

The first substantial legislative effort in Congress to support Israel in the war falls far short of Biden's request for nearly \$106 billion that would also back Ukraine as it fights Russia, along with U.S. efforts to

counter China and address security at the border with Mexico.

It is also Johnson's first big test as House speaker as the Republican majority tries to get back to work after the month of turmoil since ousting Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., as speaker.

Johnson has said he will turn next to aid for Ukraine along with U.S. border security, preferring to address Biden's requests separately as GOP lawmakers increasingly oppose aiding Kyiv.

Russia steps up aerial barrage as Kyiv officials prep

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia unleashed a wave of nighttime drone and missile attacks across 10 of Ukraine's 24 regions, Ukrainian authorities said Friday as they prepare for another winter of infrastructure bombardment by the Kremlin's forces.

Ukraine's air force said it intercepted 24 of 38 Shahed drones and one Kh-59 cruise missile launched by Russia.

The attacks caused fires in homes and public buildings, especially in the southern Kherson region which Moscow has increasingly targeted in recent weeks, emergency services said. Authorities reported that two people were injured.

"We understand that as winter approaches, Russian terrorists will attempt to cause more harm," Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Telegram after the attacks, employing his usual choice of words for the enemy's forces.

Last winter, Russia took aim at Ukraine's power grid in an effort to deny civilians light and heating and chip away at the country's appetite for war. Ukrainian officials accused the Kremlin of weaponizing winter.

The Russian strikes are inflicting "unimaginable levels of suffering" on Ukrainian civilians, according to Ramesh Rajasingham, coordination director in the U.N. humanitarian office.

Andriy Yermak, the president's chief of staff, said Russia had expanded the number of drones it uses in its routine

nighttime attacks as winter approaches.

"The battle for the sky is what awaits us," he said on Telegram.

Laser-guided munitions designed to take out drones are expected to be part of a \$425 million package of new U.S. military aid to Ukraine, according to U.S. officials.

The coming wet, muddy and cold weather will likely frustrate both sides' efforts to advance on the battlefield, compelling a change in military tempo.

Russia and Ukraine will be building up ammunition stockpiles for offensives in 2024, analysts say. Ukraine is relying heavily on its Western allies and plans to ramp up its own weapons manufacturing while Russia buys from North Korea, Iran and Belarus.

Both armies are struggling to make major progress along the 930-mile front line in what is largely an artillery war. Ukraine's commander-in-chief, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, said in published remarks this week that artillery, missile and rocket fire account for up to 80% of all military tasks.

Ukraine's forces can now wear down Russian logistics and command centers behind the front line using U.S. long-range ballistic missiles, known as ATACMS, and U.K. long-range Storm Shadow cruise missiles.

The planned delivery of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine in the first part of next year will also improve Kyiv's military might.

US to send \$425M to Ukraine

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States is expected to deliver \$425 million in new military aid to Ukraine for its fight against Russia, including about \$300 million in long-term funding to buy laser-guided munitions designed to take out drones, U.S. officials said Thursday.

According to officials, the long-term money will be provided through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which funds contracts for larger weapons systems that need to be either built or modified by defense companies.

In addition, the Biden administration will send about \$125 million in weapons and equipment through presidential

drawdown authority, which pulls weapons from existing U.S. stockpiles. According to officials, the weapons will include munitions for High-Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS), as well as artillery rounds, anti-tank missiles, demolition equipment and cold-weather gear.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because the aid has not yet been publicly announced. An announcement is expected on Friday.

This would be the 50th package of aid pulled from Pentagon shelves and it resembles an aid package about a week ago that was for \$150 million.

DOD boosts Turkey base security ahead of rallies

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military is heightening protection at Incirlik Air Base in anticipation of protests this weekend at the installation near Adana, Turkey, that could see thousands of marchers.

Convoys of Turks were headed to the base Friday to prepare for demonstrations for "the freedom of Palestine," protest organizer Bulent Yildirim said.

Yildirim leads the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, an organization with ties to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Earlier this week, Yildirim called for "hundreds of thousands of people" to make their way to Incirlik.

Expected to run Friday through Sunday, the demonstrations will denounce U.S. support for Israel, which has launched a ground invasion into Gaza in response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack that killed 1,400 people in Israel.

U.S. European Command

said the 39th Air Base Wing at Incirlik was "devising appropriate safety protocols" to ensure the safety of its personnel.

"The safety and well-being of our airmen, families and community remain the forefront of our concerns," EUCOM spokeswoman 2nd Lt. Gaby Gocso said in a statement Thursday. "We urge all members to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities."

Gocso said military officials are expecting large demonstrations throughout Turkey for the next several weeks.

The U.S. military presence in Turkey long has been a political flashpoint when disputes emerge between the countries.

In the past, top Turkish officials have threatened to cut off American access at Incirlik over disagreements related to everything from Turkey's acquisition of a Russian missile defense system several years ago to Ankara's military operations in northern Syria.

Eric Trump testifies in dad's fraud trial

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Eric Trump, one of two sons entrusted to run Donald Trump's real estate empire, swore Thursday that he was never involved with financial statements that New York state lawyers say fraudulently puffed up the ex-president's wealth and the worth of the family business.

But when shown a decade-old email asking him for information for one of his dad's financial statements, the irritated son strove to clarify.

"We're a major organization, a massive real estate organization — yes, I'm fairly sure I understand that we have financial statements. Absolutely," Eric Trump testified at the family's and company's civil fraud trial. But the Trump Organization executive vice president insisted:

"I had no involvement and never worked on my father's statement of financial condition."

Though another Trump Organization executive has testified that Eric Trump was on a video call about his father's financial statement as recently as 2021, the son said he couldn't remember it.

"I'm on a thousand calls a day," he said.

Eric Trump followed brother and fellow Trump Organization Executive Vice President Donald Trump Jr. to the stand on a closely watched and sometimes fractious day in the trial.

The day ended with Judge Arthur Engoron suggesting he might expand a gag order, after defense lawyers again criticized his law clerk's role in the case.

Early in the trial, Engoron

barred participants in the case from smearing his staff after Donald Trump maligned the clerk on social media. The former president has been fined twice, a total of \$15,000, for what the judge said were violations.

Trump's lawyers have repeatedly complained about the clerk passing notes to the judge during testimony, a practice the attorneys suggest is inappropriate and unfair to them. Engoron says he has an "absolutely unfettered right" to the clerk's advice.

When the defense complained again Thursday, with Eric Trump watching quietly from the witness stand, a sometimes table-pounding Engoron said he might expand the gag order to include attorneys if anyone refers to a member of his staff again.

The former president, his adult sons and other defendants deny wrongdoing in the case, brought by New York Attorney General Letitia James. She accuses them of inflating the ex-president's net worth on his annual "statement of financial condition" documents, which were given to banks, insurers and others to secure loans and make deals.

"So sad to see my sons being PERSECUTED in a political Witch Hunt," the Republican 2024 presidential front-runner wrote on his Truth Social platform Thursday. James and Engoron are Democrats.

Donald Trump is slated to testify Monday, followed by his daughter Ivanka on Wednesday. An appeals court late Thursday denied her request to delay her testimony.

Employers pulled back on hiring in October

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The nation's employers slowed their hiring in October, adding a modest but still decent 150,000 jobs, a sign that the labor market may be cooling but remains resilient despite high interest rates that have made borrowing much costlier for companies and consumers.

Last month's job growth, though down sharply from a robust 297,000 gain in September, was solid enough to suggest that many companies still want to hire and that the economy remains sturdy.

And job growth would have been higher in October if not for the now-settled United Auto Workers' strikes against Detroit's automakers.

The unemployment rate rose from 3.8% to 3.9% in October. In another sign of a possible softening in the labor market, the

Labor Department revised down its estimate of job growth in August and September by a combined 101,000.

The UAW strikes resulted in an overall loss of 35,000 factory jobs in October. Among the sectors that posted solid job gains last month were healthcare, which added 58,000, government agencies (51,000) and construction companies (23,000).

By contrast, the vast leisure and hospitality sector, which includes bars, restaurants and hotels, reported only modest job growth. So did professional and business services, a category that includes such high-paying occupations as accounting, engineering and architecture.

Wage pressures, which have been gradually slowing, eased further in October. Average hourly pay rose 0.2% from September and 4.1% from 12 months earlier.

Report: High schoolers vaping less this year

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Fewer high school students are vaping this year, the government reported Thursday.

In a survey, 10% of high school students said they had used electronic cigarettes in the previous month, down from 14% last year.

Use of any tobacco product — including cigarettes and cigars — also fell among high schoolers, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report.

"A lot of good news, I'd say," said Kenneth Michael Cummings, a University of South Carolina researcher who was not involved in the CDC study.

Among middle school student, about 5% said they used e-cigarettes. That did not significantly change from last year's survey.

This year's survey involved

more than 22,000 students who filled out an online questionnaire last spring. The agency considers the annual survey to be its best measure of youth smoking trends.

Why the drop among high schoolers? Health officials believe a number of factors could be helping, including efforts to raise prices and limit sales to kids by raising the legal age to 21.

"It's encouraging to see this substantial decrease in e-cigarette use among high schoolers within the past year, which is a win for public health," said Brian King, the Food and Drug Administration's tobacco center director.

The FDA has authorized a few tobacco-flavored e-cigarettes intended to help adult smokers cut back but has struggled to stop sales of illegal products.

Storm Ciarán brings death, record rainfall across Italy

Associated Press

MILAN — Record-breaking rain produced floods in a vast swath of Italy's Tuscany region as Storm Ciarán pushed into the country overnight trapping residents in their homes, inundating hospitals and overturning cars. At least five people were killed, bringing the storm's death toll in western Europe to 12 on Friday.

Italian Civil Protection authorities said nearly 8 inches of rain fell in a three-hour period, from the coastal city of Livorno to the inland valley of Mugello, and caused riverbanks to overflow. Video shows at least a dozen cars getting pushed down a flooded road.

Tuscany Gov. Eugenio Giani said five people died in the storm, which dumped an amount of rainfall not recorded in the past 100 years. "There was a wave of water bombs without precedence," Giani told Italian news channel Sky TG24.

Climate scientists say human-induced climate change has led to heavier rainfall during storms like Ciarán, often resulting in more severe damage.

"If the conditions are differ-

ent than 20 years ago, it is obvious to everyone," Nello Musumeci, the government's minister for civil protection, told Sky TG24, noting that weather systems in Italy have become more tropical in nature.

The dead in Tuscany included an 85-year-old man found in the flooded ground floor of his home near the city of Prato, north of Florence, and an 84-year-old woman who died while trying to push water out of her home in the same area, according to Italian news agency ANSA.

The other victims were a couple who had been missing near the town of Vinci and a person in Livorno province.

At least one person was missing Friday in Tuscany, along with an off-duty firefighter reported missing in the mountains of Veneto, north of Venice. Other regions were on high alert and authorities warned that the storm was heading toward southern Italy.

Ciarán left at least seven people dead as it swept across Spain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany on Thursday. The storm devastated homes, caused travel may-

hem and cut power to a vast number of people.

As the storm pushed through, it flooded at least four hospitals, including in Pisa and Mugello. Throughout Tuscany, train lines and highways were disrupted and schools were closed. Hundreds of people were unable to get home, including about 150 stranded in Prato after a train line was suspended. Some 40,000 people were without electricity on Friday.

In Austria's southern Carinthia province, which borders Italy and Slovenia, wind and heavy rain on Thursday night led to landslides, blocked roads and power cuts. About 1,600 households were without electricity early Friday, the Austria Press Agency reported.

The storm receded in northern France and the Atlantic coast on Friday, but heavy rains continued in some regions as emergency workers cleared away debris from the day before. Meanwhile, Corsica in the Mediterranean faced unusually fierce winds Friday — up to 87 mph — and regions in the Pyrenees in the southwest were under flood warnings.

Japanese eat more local fish in spite of China ban

Associated Press

IWAKI, Japan — Fishing communities feared the worst when the wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant began discharging treated radioactive wastewater into the sea.

Instead of a business calamity, however, consumers from across the nation have supported the region by eating more fish. Besides boosting a fragile industry, the demand has helped mitigate the impact of China's ban on Japanese seafood, though there are worries about the future of the water release.

"So far, I haven't heard anyone raising safety concerns over the treated water release. I'd say zero," said Kazuto Harada, who works at Marufuto Fish Store near the Onahama Port in Fukushima. "I'm half surprised, and half relieved."

Customers nationwide are placing orders, with many asking for "Joban-mono," or fish from the waters off Fukushima and its southern neighbor Ibaraki. That includes regional favorites flounder and greeneye.

By late afternoon, almost all the fresh local catch sells out.

The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant started releasing treated and diluted radioactive wastewater into the sea on Aug. 24.

Officials said it was necessary because more than 1.3 million tons of radioactive wastewater has accumulated in about 1,000 tanks at the plant since its cooling system was destroyed by a massive earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

Even with the wastewater release, the tanks are estimated to reach capacity in the first half of 2024, and space at the plant will be needed for its decommissioning, which will take decades.

Fire on Oahu moves away from towns

Associated Press

HONOLULU — A wildfire that has burned forestlands in a remote mountainous area of Central Oahu has moved eastward and away from population centers, Hawaii authorities said, as firefighters continued to battle the blaze.

The flames haven't threatened homes or property, and no evacuations have been ordered, but they have scorched some native koa and ohia trees. The main part of the fire was about 4

miles from the Mililani Mauka housing area and was headed away from it, the Honolulu Fire Department said in a statement Thursday.

Nearly 2 square miles have been burned so far by the blaze, which firefighters have been battling since Monday.

Three Army helicopters were dropping water on the fire Thursday, and helicopters from the Honolulu Fire Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also doused flames

from the air.

A Hawaii Emergency Management Agency hazard mitigation plan released this week said the state has experienced longer droughts during the past 30 years, creating more dangerous conditions for wildfires.

The risk has increased further due to more frequent and intense El Niño events, which occur when parts of the Pacific Ocean warm and affect weather patterns worldwide, the report said.

Rangers set up for another series run

Associated Press

Corey Seager and Marcus Semien are really just getting started with the Texas Rangers, and already have a World Series championship together with a franchise that had never won one.

The Rangers, their half-billion dollar middle infield and their almost-certain Hall of Fame manager Bruce Bochy, who just won his fourth title after coming out of retirement, should be all set to contend again next season.

Their long-term plan may have resulted in a title quicker than anyone could have expected, but it was never about a one-and-done run for the franchise that waited 63 seasons — the last 52 in Texas — to hoist the World Series trophy.

“A lot of trust from them to me and me to them, and a lot of trust for Marcus to come, a lot of trust for Jon (Gray) — all these guys that came here and had the same vision,” Seager said. “It’s pretty cool to see it through.”

Seager is only two seasons into the \$325 million, 10-year deal

the now two-time World Series MVP signed in free agency two winters ago with Texas coming off a 102-loss season, at the same time Semien got \$175 million for seven years and right-hander Gray \$56 million for four years. Then last offseason, after another 94 losses, Bochy was hired and the rotation bolstered with two-time Cy Young Award winner Jacob deGrom, right-hander and Texas native Nathan Eovaldi and Andrew Heaney on multiyear deals.

Texas this offseason will look to re-sign left-hander Jordan Montgomery, the trade-deadline acquisition from the St. Louis Cardinals who is eligible for free agency. He was 4-2 with a 2.79 ERA in 11 regular-season starts before winning two AL Championship Series games, including the Game 7 clincher.

Three-time Cy Young winner Max Scherzer, the other deadline acquisition from the Mets, opted in for the 2024 season as part of that trade.

ALCS MVP Adolis García is eligible for salary arbitration for the first time, but the slugger

who set a postseason record with 22 RBIs before missing the last two World Series games with an oblique issue is still under team control for next season. The same goes for switch-hitting All-Star starting catcher Jonah Heim, center fielder Leody Taveras, starter-reliever Dane Dunning and reliever Josh Sborz after he got the last seven outs of the season.

First baseman Nathaniel Lowe is eligible for arbitration again, while All-Star third baseman Josh Jung is coming off his rookie season and 21-year-old outfielder Evan Carter made his big league debut in September. The Rangers have a \$6.25 million club option for closer Jose Leclerc.

Odds makers already expect Texas to be a World Series title contender again next fall. FanDuel Sportsbook on Thursday listed the Rangers and Houston, the AL West nemesis they beat in the ALCS, with the same odds to win it all. The only teams with better odds were Atlanta and the Los Angeles Dodgers — both 100-win teams that didn’t

make it out of the NL division round.

Bochy said general manager Chris Young, one of his former pitchers, and owner Ray Davis did everything they said they would when they got him back in a big league dugout after three seasons away. Bochy signed a three-year contract.

“They were determined to get winning baseball back to the Texas Rangers,” Bochy said. “They went out and got starting pitching, improved the club. We had young talent coming up. I knew this was a good ballclub.”

Eovaldi, who pitched six scoreless innings to win the World Series clincher and became the first starter with five wins in a single postseason, has a conditional player option that could extend through the 2025 season. After also winning a World Series with Boston in 2018, he said it was “an incredible moment and incredible feeling” to be part of the Rangers’ first title.

The Rangers went into the playoffs with the sixth-highest payroll at \$228 million.

Ohtani, Bellinger, Montgomery head free agent market

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Shohei Ohtani, Cody Bellinger, Jordan Montgomery, Blake Snell and Aaron Nola were among the 130 players who became free agents Thursday as baseball’s business season began the day following the Texas Rangers’ first World Series title.

Max Muncy, Joe Jiménez and Colin Rea gave up a chance to go

free and agreed to new contracts with their teams.

That free agent market also includes Sonny Gray, Josh Hader, Matt Chapman, Jorge Soler and J.D. Martinez.

Minnesota prevented outfielder Max Kepler and infielder Jorge Polanco from going free, exercising a \$10 million option on Kepler and \$10.5 million option on Polanco.

Each would have been owed a \$1 million buyout had the option been declined.

At the start of the day, 61 additional players had the potential to go free by Monday, depending on decisions on options and opt outs.

Players may start negotiating with any team at 5 p.m. EST Monday, which also serves as the deadline day for teams to

make qualifying offers.

Players may receive a qualifying offer if they spent the entire season with the team and have not previously received a qualifying offer.

The amount is the average of the top 125 contracts by average annual value.

This year’s offer price is \$20,625,000, up from \$19.65 million last year.

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Steelers slip past Levis, Titans 20-16

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Steelers know their margin for error is impossibly thin. They know no other way.

The tighter the finish, the more the team they believe they can be emerges — a team that rarely, if ever, shows itself for four quarters.

“You can’t get nervous,” running back Jaylen Warren said. “We’re not ones to fold. When the pressure builds, we love it. We love it.”

Sure looks like it.

Kenny Pickett threw a 3-yard touchdown pass to Diontae Johnson with 4:02 to go and Pittsburgh’s defense turned away Tennessee rookie quarterback Will Levis twice in the final minutes as the Steelers rallied for a 20-16 victory on Thursday night.

Pittsburgh (5-3) bounced back from a dismal loss to Jacksonville on Sunday by doing

what it has done so well for so long: hanging around long enough to pull it out in the end.

Four of Pittsburgh’s five wins this season have come in games they trailed entering the fourth quarter. All five of Pittsburgh’s victories have come by eight points or less.

“The fact that we continue to find ways to win, I think is a huge advantage to us,” said Pickett, who threw for 190 yards and the winning score while playing with aching ribs. “No one panics down the stretch. We all are confident in each other.”

Pickett struggled at times while completing 19 of 30 but found Johnson for 32 yards down the sideline on the go-ahead drive, then hit him again on a little out to Johnson just beyond the goal line for the receiver’s first touchdown reception since Jan. 3, 2022, a span of 23 games.

“It was a big deal to get him in

the end zone,” Pickett said. “It’s been too long for sure.”

Johnson finished with seven receptions for 90 yards. Warren added 112 total yards — including a burst over the right side for 22 yards on the winning drive. Najee Harris had 76 total yards and a touchdown as the Steelers continued a startling trend. Pittsburgh is the 29th team since 1970 to be outgained in each of its first eight games and the only one to have a winning record in spite of it.

“Obviously we’re not satisfied with where we are,” Steelers outside linebacker T.J. Watt said. “We just need to continue to improve and eliminate problems as quickly as possible.”

Levis played well in his second NFL start but couldn’t match the electricity of his first, a four-touchdown masterpiece against Atlanta. Levis threw for 262 yards but his 39th and final pass ended up being the first in-

terception of his career when Steelers linebacker Kwon Alexander picked it off at the goal line with 6 seconds remaining.

“It’s so hard to win games and you have an opportunity like that to win it at the end and it doesn’t happen, it makes you feel a whole lot worse,” Levis said. “Credit to them. They made the plays when they needed to, and we didn’t.”

Titans wide receiver Treyton Burks was carted off the field with just over 2 minutes to go when he landed hard on the Acrisure Stadium turf after unsuccessfully trying to haul in a fourth-down heave from Levis.

The second-year pro lay on the field for several minutes while being tended to by medical staff from both teams. Burks was alert and moving in the training room after the game.

“It’s probably better than how it looked,” Titans coach Mike Vrabel said.

Big Ten coaches push for discipline of Mich. sign-stealing

Associated Press

There is mounting pressure on Big Ten Conference Commissioner Tony Petitti from football coaches to discipline Michigan and coach Jim Harbaugh for an alleged sign-stealing scheme that has cast a cloud over the second-ranked Wolverines as the postseason approaches.

Coaches were angry and expressed frustration during a call with Petitti over a lack of action by the conference as mounting evidence supports allegations that a Michigan staffer sent people to games to do impermissible advanced scouting of opponents, according to two people with knowledge of Wednesday’s meeting, one who listened in on the call and another who participated.

The people spoke to The Associated Press on Thursday on

condition of anonymity because the conference was not making its internal discussions public.

This week’s initial College Football Playoff rankings, where Michigan was ranked third, stoked coaches’ outrage over the inaction.

“They said it was an NCAA issue and not a CFP issue. It’s a football issue,” said the person who was on the call.

During a regularly scheduled video call with Big Ten athletic directors last week, Petitti first heard complaints from within the conference and calls for the league to hand down some punishment. The call with coaches Wednesday was also regularly scheduled, but it was dominated by talk of the current allegations against Michigan.

Both people said Petitti suggested a possible follow-up call with the coaches on Sunday.

Petitti met again with the athletic directors Thursday, but nothing was decided.

One of the people who spoke to AP was also involved in that meeting, and said Petitti told the ADs he planned to meet with conference presidents and Michigan officials and gather as much information as possible.

Nebraska coach Matt Rhule, appearing on the podcast Andy Staples On3 on Thursday, said the meeting was the first chance for all the coaches and the commissioner to talk about the Michigan case.

“I think it was a chance for everybody just to kind of talk about how they felt, how they were impacted,” said Rhule, who called Petitti a “wonderful commissioner.”

“I think a lot of people’s lives, livelihoods, jobs, their seasons, players, players’ health, all

kinds of things, have been impacted by this,” Rhule said.

NCAA rules do not ban the stealing of signs, but bylaws do preclude in-person, in-season scouting and the use of electronic equipment to record opponents’ signals.

The allegations against Michigan are elaborate.

Michigan and the Big Ten have acknowledged the NCAA is investigating the Wolverines football program. Michigan has suspended low-level staffer Connor Stalions.

Multiple Big Ten schools have found tickets purchased in Stalions’ name to their games over the past three seasons. A person with knowledge of the situation told AP that tickets to the last two Southeastern Conference championship games were also purchased in Stalions’ name.

Wembanyama dazzles in 5th NBA game

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Victor Wembanyama strolled through the hallways at Footprint Center after the best game of his short NBA career when he passed 13-time All-Star Kevin Durant, stopping for a quick handshake and quick hug.

Some say the 7-foot-4 Frenchman is a taller version of Durant.

Durant's first impression is that the budding San Antonio Spurs star might be even better.

"His enthusiasm for the game — you can tell that through the TV and playing against him," Durant said. "He's his own player, own person. He's going to create his own lane and is much different than anyone else who has played."

In just his fifth NBA game, Wembanyama, 19, showed why he was one of the most-hyped prospects in years, scoring 38

points and grabbing 10 rebounds in a standout performance during a 132-121 victory over Durant and the Phoenix Suns on Thursday night.

Wembanyama produced several highlight-reel plays in the game, including a soaring dunk while running the floor during the second quarter. But it was his poise in the fourth quarter that was the real eye-opener.

The Spurs built a 27-point lead in the first half and still had a 14-point lead entering the fourth quarter before the Suns clawed back to tie it 116 with about four minutes left. That's when Wembanyama took over, making a 3-pointer, three free throws, a dunk and an 18-foot jumper to push the Spurs on a 12-0 run that sealed the win.

Wembanyama shot 15 of 26 from the field and added two assists, two blocks and a steal to help the Spurs complete a two-

game sweep in Phoenix. He said the game also taught him an important lesson.

"I'd say it's that a 20-point lead is nothing," Wembanyama said. "It works both ways. It's also something we've seen in FIBA when we play team U.S. or scout U.S. You could be up 15 and in a blink you'll be down one and you don't know what happened because they ran the fast-break like crazy and got some defensive stops.

"So yeah, in the NBA it's the same."

Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said Wembanyama's strength is that he's unselfish but can also take over a game when needed.

"He's a multi-faceted player — he'll pass to the open guy," Popovich said. "He's got confidence in himself. He made some plays that were unbelievable. That combination is pretty good."

He certainly has a few fans on the Suns. Both three-time All-Star Devin Booker and Durant praised the rookie.

"He's an unbelievable talent," Booker said. "Everyone knows that. We're just trying to figure out what he is because we've never seen him before. We got him early in the season. Hopefully, next time we play him we can make some adjustments to make it tougher. But he has an advantage being 7-4 and being able to shoot over everybody."

That advantage isn't going away anytime soon.

And if Thursday night was any indication, Wembanyama is every bit the rising NBA star that many expected.

"I don't see anyone else like him in this game," Durant said. "We're both skinny and I know he watched me growing up, but he's his own player."

Embiid's 28 points leads Philadelphia over Toronto

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Joel Embiid had 28 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists and Philadelphia won in its first game since trading James Harden, beating Toronto 114 to 99.

Kelly Oubre Jr. and Tobias Harris each scored 23 points for the 76ers. Oubre's ascension to the starting lineup in place of PJ Tucker, who was included in the Harden deal with the Los Angeles Clippers, left the Sixers with a thin bench.

Scottie Barnes led Toronto with 24 points. A night after snapping a three-game losing streak with a home victory over Milwaukee, the Raptors lost for the second time to former coach Nick Nurse and the 76ers this season.

Magic 115, Jazz 113: Paolo Banchero scored 30 points, making the deciding layup with

14 seconds left, in Orlando's victory over Utah.

Banchero added nine rebounds and five assists to help the Magic win for the third time in 15 games against Utah. Franz Wagner added 21 points, and Cole Anthony had 18 points, seven rebounds and seven assists.

Lauri Markkanen led the Jazz with 22 points and seven rebounds.

Pelicans 125, Pistons 116: CJ McCollum scored 33 points and short-handed New Orleans beat Detroit with both teams playing for the second straight night.

New Orleans played without starting power forward Zion Williamson (rest) and wing Brandon Ingram (right knee tendinitis).

Cade Cunningham had 22 points and 11 assists for Detroit.

Harden determined to fit in on Clippers' loaded roster

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Even more than his stints in Brooklyn and Philadelphia, James Harden believes he has much more to prove in joining the Los Angeles Clippers.

Not only is Harden back home, but he joins a loaded roster that already features fellow Southern California natives Kawhi Leonard, Paul George and Russell Westbrook.

While the "Big Three" of Harden, Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving didn't work in Brooklyn and teaming up with Joel Embiid in Philadelphia ended with some rancor, Harden says he is determined to do his part to see that this "Core Four" can win an NBA title.

"I'm very elite as an individual and then I can fit in with anybody and make a championship run work," Harden

said Thursday after practice at the team's facility. "I think all of us are on the same page in the sense of the individual stats and all those things are past us and we all got one goal and I think everybody knows what that is."

It was Harden's first comments since the trade happened late Monday night. Harden arrived in Los Angeles on Tuesday before the Clippers faced the Orlando Magic and watched from the bench Wednesday night when the Clippers lost to the Lakers in overtime.

Harden also realizes the narrative around him is polarizing based on the issues with his previous teams. The 34-year-old guard is a 10-time All-Star and the NBA's MVP in 2018, but is on his fourth team in three years.

Cuylle scores final goal in Rangers' win

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Will Cuylle scored the tiebreaking goal midway through the third period, Igor Shesterkin made 26 saves and the New York Rangers beat the Carolina Hurricanes 2-1 on Thursday night for their sixth straight win.

Chris Kreider also scored for the Rangers, who have eight wins in their first 10 games for the second time in franchise history. The 8-2-0 start is second only to a 9-1-0 mark to begin the 1983-84 season.

Seth Jarvis had the goal for Carolina, which had won three straight.

Frederik Andersen finished with 24 saves.

Cuylle converted a pass from defenseman Jacob Trouba to score his second career goal past Andersen at 10:21 of the third.

Bruins 3, Maple Leafs 2, SO: Jake DeBrusk and Charlie Coyle scored in the shootout and Boston beat Toronto.

DeBrusk and Paval Zacha scored in regulation for the Bruins, who lead the Eastern Conference with a 9-0-1 record. Jeremy Swayman made 33 saves.

Mitchell Marner and Auston Matthews scored for the Maple Leafs. Ilya Samsonov stopped 38 shots.

Kings 3, Senators 2: Anze Kopitar scored midway through the second period to help Los Angeles build a three-goal lead and hold on to beat Ottawa.

Carl Grundstrom and Philip Danault also scored and Adrian Kempe had two assists for the Kings, who have won the first two games on their four-game trip and improved to 6-2-2 on the season.

Cam Talbot, who spent last season in Ottawa, had 24 saves against his former team.

Dominik Kubalik and Josh Norris had goals for Ottawa, and Joonas Korpisalo finished with 36 saves.

Islanders 3, Capitals 0: Ryan

Pulock, Simon Holmstrom and Brock Nelson scored on three of the Islanders' first five shots and New York beat Washington.

Semyon Varlamov stopped 32 shots for his second shutout of the season and 22nd of his NHL career as the Islanders won for the third time in four games.

Darcy Kuemper had 18 saves for Washington, which snapped a three-game win streak.

Panthers 2, Red Wings 0: Sergei Bobrovsky made 22 saves for his 39th career shutout, and Steven Lorentz scored his first goal for Florida.

Anton Lundell provided insurance with an empty-net goal with 1:12 remaining, also his first of the season.

Bobrovsky now has a 25-6-1 career record against the Red Wings, including four shutouts.

Lorentz, who was acquired in an offseason trade with San Jose, scored with 52 seconds left in the second period with an assist from Niko Mikkola.

Aleksander Barkov set a franchise record by appearing in his 672th game with the Panthers.

Detroit was shut out for the first time this season. James Reimer made 25 saves.

Blue Jackets 4, Lightning 2: Boone Jenner and Eric Gudbranson scored 2:17 apart in the third period and Columbus snapped a four-game skid.

Kirill Marchenko scored in the first period, Johnny Gaudreau added a goal and Elvis Merzlikins stopped 27 shots for his first win since Oct. 21.

Steven Stamkos and Conor Sheary scored in the second period for the Lightning, who have lost two straight and all four of their road games.

Former Ohio State University goaltender Matt Tomkins returned to the Buckeye State and stopped 24 shots.

Devils 5, Wild 3: Jesper Bratt had a goal and three assists as New Jersey beat Minnesota.

Timo Meier, Alexander Holtz, Michael McLeod and Dougie Hamilton also scored

for New Jersey, while Jack Hughes added two assists to push his league-leading total to 15.

Vitek Vanecek stopped 22 shots for the Devils, who improved to 3-0 on the road this season and have won five of their past six games.

Kirill Kaprizov, Marco Rossi and Jake Middleton scored and Filip Gustavsson made 33 saves for the Wild, who are 0-3-1 in their past four.

Stars 4, Oilers 3: Roope Hintz had two goals and an assist, Scott Wedgewood made 46 saves and Dallas got its third straight win.

Joe Pavelski had a goal and two assists and Matt Duchene also scored for the Stars, who improved to 7-1-1 on the season.

Sam Gagner scored twice in his return to the lineup and Evander Kane also had a goal for the struggling Oilers, who have lost five of their past six and dropped to 2-6-1. Stuart Skinner had 23 saves.

Golden Knights 5, Jets 2: Jonathan Marchessault scored three goals for his sixth career hat trick, Logan Thompson made 28 saves and Vegas improved to 10-0-1 this season.

William Karlsson and Ivan Barbashev also scored as the Golden Knights became the 13th team in NHL history to record a season-opening point streak of at least 11 games.

Kyle Connor and Alex Iafallo scored for the Jets while Connor Hellebuyck made 21 saves.

Kraken 4, Predators 2: Vince Dunn scored his second goal of the season off a faceoff 8:38 into the third period to give Seattle a two-goal advantage, Philipp Grubauer made 32 saves and Seattle beat Nashville.

Coming off a career-high in points last season, Dunn's slap shot beat Nashville goalie Juuse Saros to the glove side to give Seattle a 4-2 lead.

The Kraken also got goals from Oliver Bjorkstrand and

Jared McCann in the first period and defenseman Brian Dumoulin's goal late in the second period snapped a 2-2 tie. Dumoulin scored in consecutive games for the first time in his career.

Tommy Novak and Roman Josi scored for Nashville, and Juuse Saros had 27 saves.

Coyotes 3, Canadiens 2: Nick Schmaltz scored two goals, including the go-ahead score in the third period, and Arizona beat Montreal.

The game-winner came with 13:53 remaining on a Coyotes power play with Arber Xhekaj in the penalty box for cross-checking.

Rookie Logan Cooley skated from the left side and hit Schmaltz with a pass to beat Jake Allen on the glove side.

Schmaltz, who has four goals and a team-high 10 points, scored his first goal on a penalty shot. Lawson Crouse also scored for Arizona and Connor Ingram stopped 28 shots.

Sean Monahan and Brendan Gallagher had the goals for the Canadiens and Allen stopped 33 shots.

Canucks 10, Sharks 1: Quinn Hughes had a goal and four assists, eight players scored and Vancouver got its fifth win in six games.

Brock Boeser had two goals and an assist, Anthony Beauvillier also scored twice, J.T. Miller had a goal and two assists, Andrei Kuzmenko and Sam Lafferty each had a goal and an assist, and Pius Suter and Ilya Mikheyev also scored for the Canucks.

Elias Pettersson had three assists, and Filip Hronek and Carson Soucy had two apiece. Thatcher Demko stopped 29 shots.

The Canucks beat the Sharks for the sixth straight time and sent San Jose to its 10th straight loss to start the season (0-9-1).

Fabian Zetterlund spoiled Demko's shutout bid with 3:48 remaining.