

Israel blamed for deadly Gaza hospital blast

Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip — The health ministry run by Hamas said an Israeli airstrike on Tuesday hit a Gaza City hospital packed with wounded and other Palestinians seeking shelter, killing hundreds. If confirmed, the attack would be by far the deadliest Israeli airstrike in five wars fought since 2008.

The health ministry said at least 500 people had been killed. Photos purportedly from al-Ahli Hospital shared widely on social video showed fire engulfing the building, widespread damage and bodies scattered in the wreckage. The photos could not be independently verified.

Several hospitals in Gaza City have become refuges for hundreds of people, hoping they would be spared bombardment after Israel ordered all residents of the city and surrounding areas to evacuate to the southern Gaza Strip.

Hamas, which sparked the latest war with an attack last week that killed more than 1,400 Israelis, called Tuesday's hospital strike "a horrific massacre." It

said in a statement that most of the casualties were displaced families, patients, children and women.

Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said there were still no details on the hospital deaths: "We will get the details and update the public. I don't know to say whether it was an Israeli air strike."

In the south, Israeli airstrikes killed dozens of civilians and at least one senior Hamas figure Tuesday as U.S. officials worked to convince Israel to allow delivery of supplies to desperate civilians, aid groups and hospitals after days of failed hopes for an opening in the siege.

With Israel barring entry of water, fuel and food into Gaza since Hamas' brutal attack last week, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken secured an agreement with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to discuss creation of a mechanism for delivering aid to the territory's 2.3 million people. U.S. officials said the gain might appear modest, but stressed that it was a significant step forward.

Still, as of late Tuesday, there was no deal in place. A top Israeli official said Tuesday that his country was demanding guarantees Hamas militants would not seize any aid deliveries. Tzahi Hanegbi, head of Israel's National Security Council, suggested entry of aid also depended on the return of hostages held by Hamas.

"The return of the hostages, which is sacred in our eyes, is a key component in any humanitarian efforts," he told reporters, without elaborating whether Israel was demanding the release of all of the roughly 200 people Hamas abducted before allowing supplies in.

U.S. President Joe Biden prepared to head to the region as he and other world leaders tried to prevent the war from sparking a broader regional conflict. Violence flared Tuesday along Israel's border with Lebanon, where Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants operate.

With tens of thousands of troops massed along the border, Israel has been expected to launch a ground invasion into

Gaza — but plans remained uncertain.

"We are preparing for the next stages of war," military spokesman Lt. Col. Richard Hecht said. "We haven't said what they will be. Everybody's talking about a ground offensive. It might be something different."

In Gaza, dozens of injured were rushed to hospitals after heavy attacks outside the southern cities of Rafah and Khan Younis, residents reported. Bassem Naim, a senior Hamas official and former health minister, reported 27 people were killed in Rafah and 30 in Khan Younis.

An Associated Press reporter saw around 50 bodies brought to Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis. Family members came to claim the bodies, wrapped in white bedsheets, some soaked in blood.

An airstrike in Deir al Balah reduced a house to rubble, killing a man and 11 women and children inside and in a neighboring house, some of whom had evacuated from Gaza City. Witnesses said there was no warning before the strike.

Ex-Navy IT manager sentenced for stealing identities

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN

Stars and Stripes

A former Navy chief petty officer is going to prison for using his job at Yokosuka Naval Base in Japan to steal and sell \$160,000 worth of personal information belonging to thousands of people, the Justice Department said.

Marquis Hooper, 32, of Selma, Calif., was sentenced Monday in federal court in Fresno to five years and five months. He and his wife, Natasha Chalk, pleaded guilty in March to con-

spiracy to commit wire fraud.

Hooper also pleaded guilty to wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. Chalk is scheduled to be sentenced next month, the Justice Department said.

The maximum prison term for the conspiracy conviction alone is 20 years.

The two obtained information by accessing a private database and selling it in exchange for Bitcoin on the dark web, according to prosecutors.

The couple's criminal plot began in August 2018, about two

months before Hooper's 10-year military career ended, according to court documents.

At the time, he was stationed in Japan as an IT manager. Chalk was a naval reservist at Naval Air Station Lemoore in California.

Hooper opened an online account with a company that runs a database containing personal information for millions of people.

The company, which was not identified in court documents, restricts access to the database

to businesses and government agencies with a proven and lawful need for the information.

Hooper falsely told the company he was representing 7th Fleet and needed access to perform background checks on Navy personnel, according to court filings.

Hooper then added Chalk's name to the account, and they retrieved information of more than 9,000 people's information, which they sold to third parties for \$160,000, the Justice Department said.

Marines struggling with aviator diversity

The Washington Post

Zach Mullins was used to walking into rooms filled with white faces. But he was taken aback when, at an air show last year in San Diego, a man approached to ask: “Did you know that you’re the only Black fighter pilot in the Marine Corps?”

Mullins, who flies F/A-18 Hornets, is one of five, in fact. But in recalling the exchange, he said that, “I never really thought about the numbers just because it was the job that I wanted to do” — though it was “a little staggering,” the Marine captain conceded, to learn the number of African Americans in elite jobs like his was so small.

The Marine Corps, in step with the rest of the U.S. military, has spent decades making a concerted push to become more reflective of the diverse nation it defends. Officials point to sustained gains in recruiting women to join the force and in growing overall diversity among the service’s officer ranks.

But within its community of fighter pilots, these efforts have failed to keep pace. And while leaders acknowledge they have work to do, observers say the institution appears unwilling to take the aggressive and resource-intensive steps that experts deem necessary to put Black candidates for those jobs on more equal footing with their white peers.

Gary Graham Jr., a film producer whose father flew fighter jets in the Marine Corps, has researched the imbalance and concluded that the service’s leaders underestimate what’s required for African Americans to overcome certain obstacles that can stymie the prospects of otherwise qualified individuals. He points to previous flying experience, which is expensive. Graham also faults a recruiting system that he said has done a lackluster job engaging the

Black community specifically.

“So those opportunities,” he said, “aren’t known to folks who would even consider it, and who would be skillful or educated enough.”

Over the past quarter-century, the number of Black Marines who fly fighter jets has fallen from an all-time high of 15 in 2000 to just the five today — not even 1% of the approximately 580 fighter pilots serving across the Marine Corps. It’s the military’s worst such disparity — and one made more striking by the rise of Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., a fighter pilot and African American, who as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff holds the military’s highest post.

David Berger, who retired in July as the Marines’ top general, commissioned during his tenure as commandant an independent study that yielded a road map for the service to start closing the gap. But two years later, the study’s most transformative recommendations remain unimplemented as leaders opt instead to remain on a course that emphasizes a broad concept of diversity rather than targeting shortfalls in individual demographics or careers.

To lead the effort, Berger tapped Charles Bolden Jr., a former NASA administrator and the second Black Marine aviator ever promoted to general officer, and Bolden’s son Ché, who spent 26 years in the Marine Corps. In an interview, Charles Bolden said he accepted the assignment “somewhat leery,” having grown disillusioned with what he characterized as the Pentagon’s vague efforts to promote diversity.

“I came out depressed,” he said. “Because I personally had no idea we had gone as backwards as we have gone.” He and his son remain doubtful that Marine Corps leaders will ex-

pend the resources and effort required to achieve the change they prescribe.

The Boldens’ study, a copy of which was obtained by *The Washington Post*, has not been made public. It concludes that the Marine Corps cannot overcome generations of discrimination and mistrust merely by having removed barriers to participation in top-tier jobs such as fighter pilot. Rather, the Boldens assert, the service must establish new pathways to reach and recruit African Americans and entrust the role of “chief diversity officer” to the commandant himself rather than delegate that responsibility to a leader with less visibility and influence as it does now.

“We made a very clear statement upfront that, hey, the Black jet pilot community is an avatar for the Marine Corps,” Ché Bolden said.

In response to questions about the study, Maj. Joshua Larson, a Marine Corps spokesman, pointed to a mission statement indicating that the service is “committed” to diversity, equity and inclusion, “not to satisfy abstract notions of political correctness, but as a very real means to recruit, develop, and retain Marines of varied talents.”

Only the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps operate fighter jets, and while all have struggled to recruit and retain Black pilots, the Marines have performed most poorly.

There are 60 Black fighter pilots in the Air Force, or 2% of the community. Navy data show 15 Black pilots out of 1,124, about 1.3%. Those figures could be higher, however, as both services allow personnel to identify as multiple races or decline to respond.

In the Marine Corps, the fighter pilot community has an outsize impact: The service’s

top officers are almost always promoted from within the infantry and aviation fields. One takeaway from the Boldens’ study was that Black Marines often take themselves out of the running for these positions at the start of their military careers by pursuing fields that transfer more readily to future civilian employment.

The Marine Corps could diversify its pilot ranks by selecting more Black enlisted troops for officer training, the study found. But a restrictive process that requires enlisted Marines to serve at least four years before entering an officer program reduces the pool of candidates.

Statistics provided by the Marine Corps show that, in the past two years, about 35% of newly commissioned lieutenants came from what the service calls diverse backgrounds, defined as anyone other than a white male. The data show, too, that last year nearly 45% of those enrolled in enlisted-to-officer programs were categorized as diverse.

The Boldens’ study noted only a few reported incidents of racial hostility within the Marines’ aviation units, and none from recent years, but it described a culture of “silence” in which Black and white Marines are unwilling to engage in conversations about race and representation. Often, the study says, as the only minorities in their unit, non-white Marines deem it necessary to “adapt to the cultural circumstances in which they find themselves if they want to be accepted by peers.”

The Boldens have called for the creation of Socratic-style discussion groups, centered on topics of diversity and race, at Marine Corps training hubs. Officials said the service will consider such groups.

Quick-reaction force planned for Okinawa

By **MATTHEW M. BURKE**
AND **MARI HIGA**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marine Corps plans to launch a new seaborne quick-reaction force on Okinawa next month to counter Chinese maritime expansion and protect Japan's southern island chain.

The 12th Marine Regiment will be renamed the 12th Marine Littoral Regiment during a Nov. 15 ceremony at Camp Hansen, 3rd Marine Division spokesman Maj. Clayton Groover said by phone Tuesday. Littoral units — typically about 2,000 Marines — specialize in stand-in force operations, a key tenet of the Marine Corps' Force Design 2030 modernization effort.

A stand-in force is a small, mobile unit inserted within range of enemy missiles to seize and hold key islands and deny enemy vessels access to surrounding seas.

The 12th Marine Regiment is rehearsing stand-in force concepts during exercise Resolute Dragon, which began Saturday and runs through Oct. 31, Groover said. Training is taking place from the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido to Yonaguni, an island 70 miles east of Taiwan.

"The redesignation will mark the next historic chapter in the Marine Corps' commitment to designing a force that is prepared to effectively respond to the challenges of the contemporary global security environment," a division statement said Tuesday.

It will take a "couple of years" for the unit to become fully operational, Groover said. The unit will not add to the total number of Marines on Okinawa.

Plans to transition to a new Okinawa-based littoral regiment were first announced Jan. 11 by the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee, or 2+2. The

new regiment is the second of at least three planned for the Indo-Pacific. The 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment was launched in Hawaii in March 2022.

Guam is reportedly being considered for the third littoral regiment, the Yomiuri newspaper reported earlier this year.

Resolute Dragon kicked off Saturday with opening ceremonies at Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Camp Kengun in Kumamoto prefecture and at Marine base Camp Kinser on Okinawa, 1st Lt. Alejandro Arteaga, a spokesman for III Marine Expeditionary Force, said.

The exercise will see approximately 3,300 U.S. troops, mostly from III MEF, and 4,000 Self-Defense Force personnel train on island-defense concepts, including command and control, precision fires and maneuvering.

For the first time, Marine M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket

System, or HIMARS, crews will participate in live-fire maneuvers with Ground Self-Defense Force M270 rocket teams.

Marines with HIMARS will rapidly infiltrate the Yausubetsu Maneuver Area in Hokkaido; JGSDF V-22 Osprey aircraft will fly over Okinawa in simulated casualty evacuation drills; and about 80 U.S. soldiers and Marines will work from JGSDF Camp Ishigaki, a southwestern Japanese island 160 miles east of Taiwan.

The purpose of the exercise from the Japanese perspective is to "protect Japan's remote islands from any type of attack," Japan's Ground Joint Staff said in an email.

Once a training scenario is issued, members of the 12th Marine Regiment will work with their Japanese allies to come up with the best strategy to address potential threats, Groover said.

Drills in Philippines will include littoral regiment

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

Members of a new Marine rotational force and littoral regiment will be among the nearly 2,000 troops training to defend Philippine islands during next month's Kamandag exercise.

Kamandag will take place Nov. 9-17 on the main island of Luzon and on Palawan, to the west, Capt. Larry Boyd, a spokesman for Marine Rotational Force — Southeast Asia, recently told Stars and Stripes by email.

Chinese coast guard and maritime militia have, in recent weeks, tried unsuccessfully to block Philippine vessels resupplying a marine territorial outpost at Second Thomas Shoal, a disputed South China Sea reef.

A major clash in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims as its territory, could potentially involve U.S. forces. Washington

has vowed to defend Manila if it is attacked.

Next month's coastal defense exercise will include approximately 900 U.S. troops and 900 Filipinos, along with marines and commandos from Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom, Boyd said.

About 200 members of the rotational force, which stood up last year and has been training in the Philippines this month, will join Kamandag alongside members of the newly formed, Hawaii-based 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment and the Okinawa-based III Marine Expeditionary Force and 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, Boyd said.

The 3rd Marine Regiment was redesignated 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment in February 2022, a major step in the Marine Corps' Force Design 2030 modernization effort in Hawaii.

Ukraine uses long-range US missiles for first time

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States has quietly delivered the long-range ballistic missiles that Ukraine said it urgently needed and that President Joe Biden promised last month, U.S. officials said Tuesday, and Ukraine has already begun using them on the battlefield against Russia for the first time.

The missiles arrived in Ukraine within the last few days, one of the officials said. Their delivery to the warfront gives Ukraine a critical ability to strike Russian targets that are farther away, allowing Ukrainian forces to stay safely out of range. The officials were not authorized to publicly discuss the matter before an official announcement and spoke Tuesday on the condition of anonymity.

The delivery of the Army Tactical Missile System, known as

ATACMS, was shrouded in secrecy, with the expectation that the first public acknowledgment would come when the missiles were used on the battlefield. That intense secrecy is a marked change from previous U.S. weapons sent by the Biden administration. In nearly all other cases, the U.S. has publicly announced its decision prior to the weapons and equipment being shipped.

Because of lingering U.S. concerns about escalating tensions with Russia, the ATACMS version that went to Ukraine will have a shorter range than the maximum distance the missiles can have. While some versions of the missiles can go as far as about 180 miles, the ones sent to Ukraine have a shorter range and carry cluster munitions, which, when fired, open in the air, releasing hundreds of bomblets rather than a single warhead.

Trump ally Jordan loses vote for speaker

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans rejected Rep. Jim Jordan for House speaker on Tuesday on the first ballot, as an unexpectedly numerous 20 holdouts denied the hard-charging ally of Donald Trump the majority needed to seize the gavel.

More voting is expected as Jordan works to shore up support to replace the ousted Kevin McCarthy for the job and the leader of the GOP's hard-right flank moves to take a central seat of U.S. power.

But after two weeks of angry Republican infighting since McCarthy was removed by hardliners, the House vote quickly has become a showdown for the gavel. Some 20 reluctant Republicans are refusing to give Jordan their votes, viewing the Ohio congressman as too extreme for the powerful position of House speaker, second in line to the presidency.

In all, 212 Democrats voted unanimously for their House leader, Hakeem Jeffries of New York, while 200 Republicans vot-

ed for Jordan and 20 for someone else. Jeffries has no chance of winning, and Jordan must pick up most of his GOP foes to win a majority.

The holdouts are a mix of pragmatists, ranging from seasoned legislators and committee chairs worried about governing to newer lawmakers from districts where their voters back home prefer President Joe Biden to Trump.

But with public pressure bearing down on lawmakers from Trump's allies including Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity, it's unclear how long the holdouts can last. Jordan swiftly flipped dozens of detractors in a matter of days, shoring up Republicans who have few options left.

"Jim Jordan will be a great speaker," the former president said outside the courthouse in New York where he is facing business fraud charges. "I think he's going to have the votes soon, if not today, over the next day or two."

The political climb has been steep for Jordan, the combative

Judiciary Committee chairman and a founding member of the right-flank Freedom Caucus. He is known more as a chaos agent than a skilled legislator, raising questions about how he would lead.

Congress faces daunting challenges, risking a federal shutdown if it fails to fund the government and fielding Biden's requests for aid to help Ukraine and Israel in the wars abroad.

To seize the gavel, Jordan will need almost the full majority of his colleagues behind him in a House floor vote, as Democrats are certain to back their own nominee, Jeffries.

With the House Republican majority narrowly held at 221-212, Jordan can afford to lose only a few votes to reach the 217 majority threshold, if there are no further absences.

As the somber roll call was underway, each lawmaker verbally announcing their choice, the holdouts quickly surfaced.

One, Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., a leader of the centrists, voted McCarthy, the ousted former

speaker.

Murmurs rippled through the chamber. Others voted for Majority Leader Steve Scalise, who was the party's first nominee to replace McCarthy before he, too, was rejected by hardliners last week.

Making the official nominating speech was another top Trump ally, GOP conference chairwoman Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York, who drew from the lessons of the Old Testament before declaring Jordan will be "We the People's speaker."

On the other side of the aisle, Democratic caucus chairman Rep. Pete Aguilar of California nominated Jeffries and warned that handing the speaker's gavel to a "vocal election denier" would be "a terrible message" at home and abroad.

Upset that a small band of hardliners have upended the House by ousting McCarthy, Republicans have watched their majority control of the chamber descend into public infighting. All House business has ground to a halt.

With Trump back in court, accountant testifies

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Former President Donald Trump returned to a New York court Tuesday to watch and deplore the civil fraud trial that threatens to disrupt his real estate empire, but he got no face-to-face encounter — for now — with the star witness against him.

After attending the trial's first three days earlier this month, Trump initially planned a return to coincide with testimony by Michael Cohen, his onetime attorney turned outspoken foe. But Cohen's testimony was delayed until at least next week, with Cohen citing a health problem.

Instead, Trump sat in on a less splashy day in the trial, hearing testimony from one of

his company's accountants, Donna Kidder. Under point-by-point questioning about the intricacies of internal spreadsheets, she testified that she was told to make some assumptions favorable to the company.

For example, she said, longtime former Trump Organization finance chief Allen Weisselberg told her to act as if all space in a Trump-owned Wall Street office building would be leased by a certain date, even if some space was currently vacant. For a Park Avenue residential tower, she was told to project that unsold units "would all sell out" in a certain timeframe.

Kidder said she wasn't aware that those assumptions would be used to improve Trump's

bottom line on financial statements that helped his company make deals and get financing and insurance.

New York Attorney General Letitia James' lawsuit alleges that Trump and his company deceived banks, insurers and others by massively overvaluing his assets and inflating his net worth on those financial statements.

Trump, the front-runner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, denies any wrongdoing. He says his assets were actually undervalued and maintains that disclaimers on his financial statements essentially told banks and other recipients to check out the numbers for themselves.

"We built a great company —

a lot of cash, it's got a lot of great assets, some of the greatest real estate assets anywhere in the world," he said as he headed into court, dismissing the lawsuit as "a witch hunt by a radical lunatic attorney general" bent on dragging down his presidential run.

Although he's attending the trial by choice, Trump complained it was taking him off the campaign trail.

The attorney general, a Democrat, started investigating Trump in 2019 after Cohen testified to Congress that the billionaire politician had a history of misrepresenting the value of assets to gain favorable loan terms and tax benefits. She didn't comment as she arrived Tuesday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Boyfriend arrested after deputy found dead

CA CRESCENT CITY — A Northern California sheriff's deputy was found dead in her home and her boyfriend was later arrested in Oregon on suspicion of killing her, authorities said.

The body of Deputy Deanna Esmaeel was discovered at the residence in coastal Crescent City, Calif., the Del Norte County Sheriff's Office said in a statement.

An arrest warrant was issued for Daniel James Walter, 54, who was last seen near Esmaeel's house on the day of the killing. Authorities in Curry County, Ore., found Walter's black Mazda sedan and he was arrested a short time later, officials said.

Esmaeel was the mother of actor Marty York, best known for a role in the 1993 movie "The Sandlot." Esmaeel had worked as an animal trainer on film sets for decades before making the change to law enforcement in 2021, SF Gate reported.

Walter was charged in March with unauthorized entry into a dwelling, according to According to Del Norte County court records obtained by SF Gate. It's not clear whose dwelling he is accused of unlawfully entering.

School bus driver, 12 kids hurt after bus overturns

VA SUFFOLK — A bus driver and 12 children were hurt when a school bus headed to a southeastern Virginia elementary school overturned, officials said.

City of Suffolk spokesperson

Jennifer Moore said the crash happened around 9:30 a.m. on Cypress Chapel Road, WAVY-TV reported.

The school bus was headed to Southwestern Elementary School when the crash occurred. Images from the scene showed the bus on its side across much of the road.

The driver and children were taken to hospitals with minor injuries, Moore said. School personnel notified the parents of the students involved.

The cause of the crash is under investigation.

New refuges made to aid toads, bats, salamanders

TN MEMPHIS — Two newly created national wildlife refuges in Tennessee and Wyoming will help protect habitats for threatened and endangered species such as toads, bats, shrimp and salamanders, federal officials said.

The Wyoming Toad Conservation Area and the Paint Rock River National Wildlife Refuge in Tennessee are the result of "decades-long, locally led efforts to conserve habitat for species while maintaining recreational access," the U.S. Department of Interior said in a news release.

The Wyoming Toad Conservation Area is in the Laramie Plains of the Wyoming Basin and will provide public access to the Laramie River. Officials said it will help protect the Wyoming toad, an endangered amphibian, while also helping conserve other species including the white-tailed prairie dog and migratory birds.

The refuge in Franklin County features habitats for threatened and endangered species

including gray bats, Indiana bats, Tennessee cave salamanders and Alabama cave shrimp. Fifty kinds of freshwater mussels, including some that are found nowhere else in the world, live in the area's waters, officials said.

Independent's name still on ballots despite exit

MS JACKSON — An independent candidate running a low-budget campaign for Mississippi governor said she is dropping out and endorsing Democratic nominee Brandon Presley as he tries to unseat Republican incumbent Tate Reeves.

But Gwendolyn Gray's decision was announced more than two weeks after absentee voting had already begun, with ballots that list her along with Reeves and Presley.

Gray's name will appear on the remaining absentee ballots and on the ballots that people cast on Election Day, Nov. 7, meaning that people can still vote for her.

"Once ballots are printed, it is what it is," said Elizabeth Holbert Jonson, spokesperson for Secretary of State Michael Watson, the state's top elections official.

Massive landfill-to-park project hits milestone

NY NEW YORK — Efforts to turn what was once the largest landfill site in the world into a public park hit a milestone with the opening of the first section open to the public, New York City officials said.

The 21-acre North Park section of what has become Freshkills Park includes pedestrian

and cycling paths, an overlook deck, bird viewing tower and composting restroom that uses no water.

The 2,200-acre Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island was once the largest landfill site in the world. For five decades after its opening in 1948, it was the principal landfill for New York City's garbage. The last barge of regular trash was delivered in 2001 when then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani closed the site, partly in response to Staten Island residents who had complained about being the city's dumping ground.

Construction on Freshkills Park began in 2008 and is expected to be completed in 2036.

NASA shows off its first asteroid samples

FL CAPE CANAVERAL — NASA showed off its first asteroid samples delivered last month by a spacecraft — the most ever returned to Earth.

Scientists and space agency leaders took part in the reveal at Johnson Space Center in Houston.

The ancient black dust and chunks are from the carbon-rich asteroid named Bennu, almost 60 million miles away. NASA's Osiris-Rex spacecraft collected the samples three years ago and then dropped them off sealed in a capsule during a fly-by of Earth last month.

Scientists anticipated at least a cupful of rocks, far more than what Japan brought back from a pair of missions years ago. They're still not sure about the exact quantity. That's because the main sample chamber has yet to be opened, officials said.

— From wire reports



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Rangers jump ahead to 2-0 lead in ALCS

Associated Press

HOUSTON — No matter the place or the moment, the Texas Rangers are rolling right now.

Jonah Heim homered, Nathaniel Lowe pitched six effective innings and Texas beat Framber Valdez and the Houston Astros 5-4 on Monday for a 2-0 lead in the AL Championship Series.

The Rangers improved to 7-0 in the playoffs, including six wins on the road. They swept the Rays in the Wild Card Series and the Orioles in the Division Series, and then posted a 2-0 win at Houston in the ALCS opener.

"It's just baseball to us," Texas third baseman Josh Jung said. "We're jumping on teams early, and that helps us settle in. Our pitching has been outstanding. You can't ask for anything more than what they've given us."

Adolis García, Mitch Garver and Nathaniel Lowe each hit an RBI single during Texas' four-run first inning against Valdez, and José Leclerc closed it out for the Rangers after Yordan Alva-

rez powered an Astros rally.

Eovaldi struck out nine, including two in a row after Houston loaded the bases with none out in the fifth. He was charged with three runs and five hits in his third win this postseason.

"You're talking about one of the elite pitchers in the game," Texas manager Bruce Bochy said. "They have that ability to turn up a notch when they had to. We made an error, bases loaded, and it's about picking each other up, and he picked us up there and made great pitches."

Game 3 of the best-of-seven series is Wednesday night in Arlington, Texas.

The Rangers are the fifth team in MLB history and first since the Astros last season to win their first seven postseason games. Kansas City holds the record with an eight-game winning streak to start the 2014 postseason.

The six straight road playoff wins by the Rangers is tied for the second-longest such streak

in MLB history, behind an eight-game streak by the Yankees in 1996.

Alvarez hit two solo drives to become the sixth player in MLB history to have two multihomer games in one postseason. The second one was off Aroldis Chapman, trimming Houston's deficit to 5-4 with two out in the eighth.

Leclerc then came in and walked José Abreu and Michael Brantley, but Chas McCormick grounded out to end the threat.

Jeremy Peña flied out to deep right field for the first out in the Houston ninth. Yainer Diaz then grounded out and Jose Altuve flied to center, giving Leclerc his second save of the series.

The Astros, who went 39-42 at home in the regular season, continued to struggle at Minute Maid Park. The defending champions fell to 1-3 at home in the playoffs this year.

The Rangers jumped all over Valdez. Marcus Semien smacked the first pitch to center field for a single. Corey Seager

singled to left on the second pitch before Valdez made two errors on one play.

Valdez bobbled a chopper hit by Robbie Grossman for an error that allowed him to reach first and Semien to score. His second error occurred when he badly overthrew first to move Grossman to second and Seager to third.

Valdez put his hands on his knees and shook his head at the end of the play.

García then hit a liner to right field to score Seager. Garver singled home another run before Valdez finally got his first out when he struck out Heim.

The Rangers weren't done yet.

Lowe singled on a ground ball to left to make it 4-0. Valdez retired the next two batters to end the inning.

"I thought my pitches were good," he said through a translator. "Maybe they got a little bit lucky. There were a couple of balls that weren't hit that well for base hits."

Phillies hit 3 more homers, top D-backs to open NLCS

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Bryce Harper celebrated his 31st birthday with a bang — a 420-foot homer on the first pitch he saw in the NL Championship Series.

That merited a special tribute. As he rounded third base, the Philadelphia Phillies slugger concocted a celebration on the fly: Harper held up three fingers on his left hand and one on his right and pretended to blow them out like candles on a cake as he crossed the plate.

"Sometimes I just do stuff, and that felt right," Harper said. "So I thought I would step on home plate and do that."

Harper keeps rising to the moment in October, helping the Phillies take another step toward winning their first World Series title since 2008.

The two-time NL MVP hit his 10th playoff homer with Philadelphia, Kyle Schwarber hit his first of this postseason and Nick Castellanos also went deep again to power the Phillies past the Arizona Diamondbacks 5-3 in Game 1 of the NLCS on Monday night.

Harper also walked, scored twice and knocked in two runs to send the Phillies to their 10th straight home playoff win against NL teams.

"This guy, he is looking for the moment, and he wants it," Schwarber said. "He's doing such an unbelievable job for us. Talking about when he is going up to the plate, you're just thinking that he's going to do something special every single time. Can that be unfair to have an expectation on a player? Sure. But that's what everyone is thinking when you're in the dugout. Man, what's this guy going to do next?"

The same could be said about Zack Wheeler after another stellar postseason outing.

Wheeler struck out eight in six innings to help the defending National League champs win their seventh Game 1 of the past two seasons. Wheeler sawed two bats in half during the first two innings, leaving the Diamondbacks with more pieces of busted lumber than hits through five.

José Alvarado got four clutch outs on 15

pitches and Craig Kimbrel worked a scoreless ninth for the save.

Arizona was stuck with its first loss of the playoffs after ripping off five straight wins against the Brewers and Dodgers.

The Diamondbacks were simply the latest team to unravel under the red storm of 45,396 towel-waving fans at Citizens Bank Park. The Phillies never gave the crowd a reason to stop cheering — or Arizona a chance to catch its breath until it was too late.

Schwarber started the home run derby when he launched Zac Gallen's first pitch 420 feet into the right-field seats. Gallen, a South Jersey native, had his name derisively drawn out to "Galll-ennnn" by Phillies fans each time the 17-game winner got into a jam. Too many times, for Arizona.

"That's an aggressive lineup," Gallen said. "It's no secret, they try to get the crowd into it as early as possible and that plays into the aggression. Schwarber and Bryce were just looking for fastballs. They got 'em in locations they could handle."

Prescott, Cowboys rally in 4th to beat Chargers

Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — Fans and some players might roll their eyes when a Week 6 game is described as a “must win.”

That doesn't matter to Dak Prescott.

After playing one of the worst games of his eight-year career last week and with a bye week on the horizon, Prescott went into Monday night's game against the Los Angeles Chargers knowing anything other than victory would be detrimental to the Cowboys' hopes of contending for an NFC title.

Prescott responded by throwing for 272 yards and a touchdown as Dallas rallied in the fourth quarter for a 20-17 victory.

“It was a must win. There's a big difference between 4-2 and 3-3,” said Prescott, who completed 21 of 30 passes and also had a rushing TD. “We talked after last week about not allowing this thing to landslide. When you

get this win like we did, we can definitely move on.”

The Cowboys — coming off a 42-10 loss at San Francisco on Oct. 8 — continue to prove they don't let losses fester. They improved to 10-1 in weeks following a loss since the start of the 2021 season.

“There's plays that needed to be made, especially down the stretch,” Cowboys coach Mike McCarthy said. “A lot of back and forth, a lot of resetting your jaw and just keep fighting, and I thought our men did a really good job there.”

Prescott became the 30th quarterback in NFL history to throw at least one touchdown pass against 31 or more opponents when he connected with Brandin Cooks for a 2-yard score with 11:19 remaining in the game to give the Cowboys a 17-10 lead.

“Dak did a lot of great things,” said Cowboys receiver CeeDee Lamb, who had seven receptions for 117 yards. “He improvised a

lot, gave us the ability to do our work down the field.”

Prescott showed off his running ability midway through the first quarter when he faked a handoff to Tony Pollard on fourth-and-1 and went up the middle for an 18-yard touchdown to tie the game at 7. It was the longest rushing TD of Prescott's eight-year career.

“We had CeeDee in motion as an option. The defensive end took out Tony and two other guys ran toward CeeDee just allowing me to cut upfield,” said Prescott, who also had 40 rushing yards on seven carries. “I have not been showing my legs early in the year, so that might have played a part in it.”

Los Angeles tied it at 17 with 7:11 remaining when Gerald Everett caught a 1-yard touchdown pass from Justin Herbert.

Brandon Aubrey made two field goals, including a 39-yarder with 2:19 remaining, to give the Cowboys the lead.

The Chargers (2-3) had one last chance to send it into overtime or win, but Stephon Gilmore picked off Herbert at the LA 33-yard line with 1:22 remaining to seal the victory. On the play before the pick, Herbert was sacked by Micah Parsons for an 8-yard loss.

“We fell short, and I've got to make more plays as a quarterback,” said Herbert, who was 22-for-37 for 227 yards with two touchdowns and an interception.

Cooks' touchdown was set up by a 60-yard reception by Pollard on the first play of the fourth quarter.

Prescott scrambled out of pressure on third-and-11 at the Dallas 24 and completed a short pass to Pollard at the 32. Pollard then spun out of a tackle by Chargers cornerback Michael Davis at the 40 and appeared as if he would score a touchdown until he was brought down by Asante Samuel at the Chargers 16.

Ng leaves Marlins after 3 seasons as 1st ever female GM

Associated Press

MIAMI — Kim Ng is leaving the Miami Marlins after three seasons as general manager, Marlins chairman and principal owner Bruce Sherman announced Monday.

Ng, 54, became the majors' highest-ranking woman in baseball operations and the first female GM in the four major North American professional sports leagues in a groundbreaking hire in November 2020.

The Marlins exercised their team option for her to return for the 2024 season, Sherman said in a statement, but Ng declined her mutual option.

“Last week, Bruce and I discussed his plan to reshape the Baseball Operations department. In our discussions, it became apparent that we were not completely aligned on what that should look like,” Ng told the Athletic on Monday. “I felt it best to step away. I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Marlins family and its fans for my time in South Florida. This year was a great step forward for the organization.”

When the Marlins first hired her, Ng said

at the time that it was the product of years of determination and an honor.

“When I got into this business, it seemed unlikely a woman would lead a major league team,” she said then, “but I am dogged in the pursuit of my goals. My goal is now to bring championship baseball to Miami.”

The Marlins were a dormant franchise before they made the postseason during the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, which was Year 3 in the rebuilding effort of former CEO Derek Jeter, who brought in Ng.

Miami reached the playoffs that year for the first time since 2003 and swept the Chicago Cubs in their Wild Card Series. Atlanta then swept the Marlins in the National League Division Series, but Miami showed flashes of promise and brought in Ng at the end of that season to help surge the club forward.

Ng won three World Series rings while spending 21 years in the front offices of the Chicago White Sox (1990-96), New York Yankees (1998-2001) and Los Angeles Dodgers (2002-11). Before joining the Marlins, she was an MLB senior vice president for

nine years.

“Kim's appointment makes history in all of professional sports and sets a significant example for the millions of women and girls who love baseball and softball,” baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said at the time of Ng's hiring. “The hard work, leadership, and record of achievement throughout her long career in the national pastime led to this outcome.”

Miami went 220-266 during Ng's tenure, including an 84-78 record this past season.

She oversaw the rebuilding of the Marlins' roster into one that wants to contend in the future. Last October, she hired former Cardinals bench coach Skip Schumaker, and he helped lead the Marlins to a postseason berth in his first year as manager.

Miami lost to the Philadelphia Phillies in the Wild Card Series earlier this month.

Ng was the fifth GM in the Marlins' history. Sherman said the club will immediately begin its search for new leadership.

“We thank Kim for her contributions during her time with our organization and wish her and her family well,” Sherman said.

Kansas ranked No. 1 in preseason poll

Associated Press

Bill Self likes to remind his team that the faces may change at Kansas but the expectations within his program never do.

Expectations outside the program? Turns out they are as high as possible this year.

The Jayhawks were the clear No. 1 pick in the AP Top 25 preseason men's basketball poll released Monday, earning 46 of 63 first-place votes to easily outdistance No. 2 Duke and No. 3 Purdue. It's the fourth time since Self's arrival in Lawrence that his team will start the season on top but the first time since the 2018-19 season.

"You know you'll have a target on your back playing at Kansas," said Kevin McCullar Jr., who decided to return for a second season with the Jayhawks

and fifth in college hoops. "We'll have that chip on our shoulder, you know, prove everybody wrong, and state why you should be the No. 1 team in the nation. You go out there and use that. You use that as fuel every day."

The Jayhawks had a disappointing follow-up to their 2022 national title last season, losing to Texas in the Big 12 championship and falling to Arkansas in the opening weekend of the NCAA Tournament.

Self missed both of those events after having a valve in his heart replaced, but the 60-year-old coach is back on the sideline and chasing a third national title in the 75th anniversary season of the AP poll.

He has three returning starters in McCullar, DaJuan Harris

Jr. and KJ Adams, along with top-50 recruit Elmarko Jackson and Michigan transfer Hunter Dickinson, perhaps the biggest prize of this past summer's portal moves.

Duke picked up 11 first-place votes to land at No. 2 in Jon Scheyer's second season, and Purdue got three first-place nods as it tries to avenge a stunning end to last season. AP player of the year Zach Edey and the Boilermakers became the second men's No. 1 seed to lose to a No. 16 seed when they lost to Fairleigh Dickinson in the NCAA Tournament.

Edey's deadline-day decision to return to the Boilermakers, rather than turn pro, kept them a national title contender.

Michigan State was fourth with one first-place vote, its

highest ranking since December 2020, and Marquette rounded out the top five with AP coach of the year Shaka Smart returning a loaded squad led by third-team All-American Tyler Kolek.

That's the highest ranking for the Golden Eagles since they were No. 3 in March 1978, when they were known as the Warriors.

Defending national champion UConn was sixth with two first-place votes after losing standouts Adam Sanogo and Jordan Hawkins. The Huskies were followed by Big 12 newcomer Houston, Creighton, Tennessee and Florida Atlantic, which returns just about everyone from the team that went 35-4 and made a surprising Final Four run last season.

Blackhawks have little trouble getting past Leafs

Associated Press

TORONTO — Corey Perry, Tyler Johnson and MacKenzie Entwistle scored in the second period, and the Chicago Blackhawks beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-1 on Monday night.

Taylor Raddysh added an empty-netter for Chicago (2-2-0), and Arvid Soderblom made 34 stops. Andreas Athanasiou had two assists.

Blackhawks rookie Connor Bedard — the NHL's most-hyped youngster since Connor McDavid — continued a season-opening tour of hockey-mad markets after starting his professional career against childhood idol Sidney Crosby and the Pittsburgh Penguins before visiting the Boston Bruins and Montreal Canadiens.

The 18-year-old Bedard, the No. 1 overall pick in the NHL Draft, recorded a point in each of his first three games, but was held off the scoresheet Monday.

John Tavares scored for Toronto (2-1-0), and Joseph Woll made 27 saves in his first start of the season.

Panthers 4, Devils 3: Sam Reinhart scored two goals with the top line and defending Eastern Conference champion Florida held off a late rally by host New Jersey.

Carter Verhaeghe and Niko Mikkola also scored and Matthew Tkachuk had two assists for the Panthers, who had opened the season with losses at Minnesota and Winnipeg.

Sergei Bobrovsky carried a shutout into the third period before Erik Haula, Michael McLeod and Jesper Bratt scored to get New Jersey within a goal with 2:23 to play. The 35-year-old Bobrovsky, who has started all three games this season, finished with 33 saves.

Rangers 2, Coyotes 1: Vincent Trocheck scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period and Igor Shesterkin stopped a penalty shot with under five minutes remaining as New York won its home opener.

Chris Kreider also scored for the Rangers, who won for the second time in three games this season.

Trocheck's deflection at 8:26 on the power play snapped a 1-all tie and came after Coyotes goalie Connor Ingram made a sensational pad save on Mika Zibanejad's shot. Adam Fox and Artemi Panarin assisted on Trocheck's first goal of the season.

Capitals 3, Flames 2 (SO): Matthew Phillips scored against his old team, Darcy Kuemper made 38 saves in regulation and

overtime and three more in the shootout as host Washington beat Calgary and gave new coach Spencer Carbery his first win of the season.

Evgeny Kuznetsov scored the only goal in the shootout to cap the rally from down 2-0, which started in the second period when Phillips scored his first NHL goal. The 5-foot-7, 140-pound winger also assisted on Connor McMichael's goal that tied it three minutes later.

The Capitals were outshot 40-23, but Kuemper was sharp throughout, including a stop on a penalty shot by Blake Coleman with 14 minutes remaining in the third.

Red Wings 4, Blue Jackets 0: James Reimer stopped 23 shots in his first start with his new team, and visiting Detroit scored three times in the second period in a win over Columbus.

Shayne Gostisbehere, Michael Rasmussen, Dylan Larkin and Andrew Copp scored as Detroit won its second straight game and first road contest.

Reimer, signed as a free agent, picked up his 29th career shutout in Detroit's only appearance in Columbus this season. He joined Ville Husso and Dave Gatherum as the only goaltenders to record a shutout in their debut with the Red Wings.