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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Military prepares for response to Irma

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Navy evacuated some 5,000 servicemembers from its Key West air station Wednesday as National Guard troops in Hurricane Irma's path prepared to respond to the massive storm threatening American territory in the Caribbean and the Florida mainland, according to defense officials.

Nearly 14,000 National Guardsmen in Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico had been alerted by Wednesday morning to prepare to respond as Irma bore down on the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, said Army Lt. Col. Jamie Davis, a Pentagon spokesman. Irma is one of the strongest storms ever recorded in the Atlantic Ocean and boasts sustained winds of 185 mph, according to the National Weather Service.

The National Hurricane Center described Irma as "life-threatening" and "potentially catastrophic" and urged people in its path to "rush" to prepare for impact. It had issued hurricane warnings for both Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands by Wednesday morning. The storm could reach Cuba, including the United States' Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, by Friday and could still be a Category 5

storm, according to the hurricane center.

The U.S. Navy has ordered military personnel at Guantanamo to shelter in place.

In Florida, where the storm could hit this weekend, Gov. Rick Scott activated 100 National Guardsmen to prepare the response and ordered at least 7,000 more to report for duty by Friday. In a statement, Scott said he had asked the National Guard Bureau to identify 30,000 additional troops to respond if they are needed.

Meanwhile, the Navy evacuated nonessential servicemembers and their families from Naval Air Station Key West, Navy officials said. They were ordered to evacuate to within 300 miles of Atlanta.

The Navy also diverted two Virginia-based warships headed toward the Texas coast to respond to Hurricane Harvey, to position themselves to respond if needed to Irma. The USS Kearsarge, a Wasp-class amphibious assault ship, and the USS Oak Hill, a Harpers Ferry-class dock landing ship, were positioned off the eastern coast of southern Florida where they could assist civilian authorities if they are asked, Davis said.

A Navy official said two other ships were being prepared to deploy toward south Florida to respond if necessary. The USS Iwo Jima, another Wasp-class amphibious assault ship, and the USS New York, a San

Antonio-class amphibious transport dock, were being loaded with supplies at Naval Station Mayport, near Jacksonville, Fla., as of Wednesday, the official said on the condition of anonymity.

The Air Force on Wednesday began evacuating F-16 fighter jets stationed at Homestead Air Reserve Base just south of Miami, said Air Force Lt. Col. Chad Gibson, a spokesman for Air Force Reserve Command. In total, 17 F-16s are being moved to Texas, he said.

Gibson said the Air Force was flying WC-130J "Hurricane Hunter" aircraft out of Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., into Irma to collect storm data. The service was also preparing search and rescue units to respond, if needed, he said.

President Donald Trump had declared pre-landfall emergencies for the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and Florida as of Wednesday. Irma preparations come as National Guardsmen continue to respond to Hurricane Harvey. That deadly storm made landfall on Texas' coast as a Category 4 hurricane on Aug. 25. More than 16,000 U.S. active-duty, National Guard and Reserve troops responded as Harvey dropped more than 50 inches of rain on areas around Houston and was blamed for more than 60 deaths.

Suicide bombers target Bagram in wake of pamphlet flap

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A suicide bomber attacked a gate Wednesday at the largest U.S. base in Afghanistan after the U.S. military distributed "highly offensive" propaganda flyers, Afghan and U.S. authorities said.

The blast at an entry-control point outside Bagram Air Field about 5:30 p.m. local time caused a "small number" of casualties, according to a statement from U.S. Forces-Afghanistan.

The statement did not say how many U.S. personnel were injured or describe their injuries. The injured were being treated at medical facilities on the base, about 60 miles north of the capital, Kabul.

Afghanistan's private Tolo News reported that a suicide bomber on a motorcycle targeted Bagram's southern gate. Tolo said three civilians were wounded in the blast, quoting a spokesman for Afghanistan's Interior Ministry. The governor for Bagram district, how-

ever, told Tolo that four people were wounded.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the bombing, saying it was in retaliation for an offensive leaflet that U.S. military forces dropped Tuesday on Parwan province, north of Kabul.

The leaflets included an image of a white dog with the Taliban's banner — which contains a Quran passage — running from a lion.

Dogs are considered impure in Islam. The United States issued an apology Wednesday for

the "highly offensive" leaflets. U.S. Army Maj. Gen. James Lindor acknowledged the graphic was offensive to Muslims and the religion of Islam and vowed in a statement that it would not happen again.

"I sincerely apologize. We have the deepest respect for Islam and our Muslim partners worldwide," Lindor said in the statement. "There is no excuse for this mistake. I am reviewing our procedures to determine the cause of this incident and to hold the responsible party accountable."

Most Fitzgerald crew leaving ship

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Most USS Fitzgerald crewmembers will leave the collision-damaged ship before it heads stateside for extensive repairs and a combat systems modernization, a 7th Fleet spokesman said Wednesday.

The Yokosuka-based guided-missile destroyer collided with a Philippine-flagged merchant vessel near Japan on June 17, killing seven sailors and injuring three, including the ship's commander.

Only about 50 sailors from the Fitzgerald's crew of about 300 will remain aboard the ship when it travels this fall to Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Miss., said 7th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Clay Doss.

"The majority of (Fitzgerald) sailors — but not all — will have opportunities to serve other commands in Japan based on available billets, individual crew desires and the needs of

the Navy," he said. "Some sailors do not desire reassignment in [Japan] and have asked for orders to other locations."

A team of manning specialists arrived at Yokosuka this week to meet sailors and discuss their reassignments, Doss said.

The Fitzgerald is scheduled to depart Yokosuka sometime between mid-September and the end of October, and will remain under 7th Fleet jurisdiction during the repairs, Navy officials said last month.

Huntington Ingalls Industries was chosen to repair the Fitzgerald because the company would be able to restore the ship in the shortest amount of time, Naval Sea Systems Command said in a statement.

"Given the complexity of the work and the significant unknowns of the restoration, the Navy determined that only an Arleigh Burke-class shipbuilder could perform the effort," the statement said.

The project's start date,

scope, cost and timeline are still to be determined, the statement added.

The Navy announced late last month that Houston-based Patriot Shipping would move the Fitzgerald back to the U.S. by using a heavy-lift ship.

The Navy decided to take the Fitzgerald back to the U.S. to free up space along Yokosuka's waterfront for other 7th Fleet ships needing maintenance, Doss said in a previous statement.

"The main reason why the ship was not repaired here is because it would've tied up those resources and tied up the dry docks," he said. "We could do it here; it's just more cost effective and safer to go through the heavy lift route."

Two months after the Fitzgerald accident, 10 sailors from the USS John S. McCain died in a similar collision east of Singapore. The 7th Fleet's commander was relieved soon after the second collision.

Secretary says Navy to address safety concerns

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Ahead of a congressional hearing on a rash of recent warship crashes, Navy Secretary Richard Spencer said Wednesday that the service will do their part to address rising concerns about safety.

Spencer said the Navy is consulting with several industrial partners to conduct their own probe. The effort aims to find causes for the crashes, who's responsible and boost safety for servicemembers, he said.

The crashes "are being investigated," said Spencer, who made the remarks during a defense conference at Pentagon City outside of Washington, D.C. "We are going to hold those responsible accountable, but more importantly, we are going to learn from these events."

Spencer said he called for an independent strategic readiness review last week.

The comments come in the wake of two deadly Navy crashes this summer involving the USS John S. McCain and USS Fitzgerald. The McCain crash left seven sailors dead in August, while the Fitzgerald crash, in June, left 10 dead.

Thursday afternoon, a House Armed Services subcommittee is scheduled to hold a hearing to address Navy readiness, assessing the McCain and USS Fitzgerald crashes. The subcommittee is expected to hear from several Navy officials.

The probes into the crashes will hopefully set the stage for an eventual reset, and for subsequent improvements, Spencer said.

But Spencer conceded many challenges lie ahead, from addressing budget issues to readiness concerns.

"Our capabilities come from people who are well trained to use the equipment that we have," he said. "Our capabilities currently exceed those of other nations, but that advantage ... is shrinking."

Osprey in Australia crash recovered

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — An MV-22 Osprey that crashed off Australia's eastern coast in early August has been recovered and will soon be analyzed as part of an investigation into the incident that killed three Marines, Marine Corps officials said this week.

The aircraft was recovered in about 165 feet of water approximately 18 miles off the coast of Queensland by the USNS Salvor and Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit One, with the assistance of the MMA Pinnacle Offshore Supply Ship, a Marines statement said. The Osprey is in Townsville, Queensland, where it is being prepared to be taken to Hawaii for analysis.

"The exact cause of the mishap will be determined after

the investigation is complete," the statement said. "The investigation is very thorough and is intended to find the cause of the incident in order to prevent similar occurrences in the future."

Marine officials on Okinawa were unclear Wednesday about exactly when the tilt-rotor aircraft was pulled from the sea. Australian media outlets reported it happened earlier this week.

The crash that took the lives of Capt. Benjamin Cross, Cpl. Nathaniel Ordway and Lance Cpl. Ruben Velasco happened just after 4 p.m. Aug. 5 when the helicopter-plane hybrid from Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 265 left the deck of the amphibious-assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard and attempted to land on the am-

phibious-transport dock USS Green Bay. The ships had been operating off the Australian coast as a part of the massive bilateral training exercise Talisman Saber 2017, which wrapped up at the end of July.

The Osprey reportedly crashed into the Green Bay's deck and slid into the sea, trapping the Marines inside. Twenty-three others were rescued.

The aircraft was found the day after the crash by the Australian navy ship HMAS Melville. The Marine Corps announced Aug. 25 that the Marines' bodies had been recovered.

Gen. Robert Neller, Marine Corps commandant, ordered a 24-hour stand-down for all Marine aviation units in the weeks following the crash to review safety procedures.

S. Korea monitoring for signs of radiation after North's latest test

BY KIM GAMEL AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea said Wednesday that it's monitoring closely for any signs of radiation after North Korea's sixth and most powerful nuclear test, which satellite images show apparently caused numerous landslides on the mountain that provided its cover.

The blast, which occurred Sunday at North Korea's testing facility, was followed by a second smaller tremor that raised fears of a possible tunnel collapse that could allow radiation to seep out.

Commercial satellite imagery obtained the day after the test "appears to show numerous landslides throughout the Punggye-ri nuclear test site and beyond," according to 38 North, a website run by the U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins University. The images show small landslides going from the peak of Mount Mantap into a stream below.

"These disturbances are more numerous and widespread than what we have seen from any of the five tests North Korea previously conducted," it said in a report posted Tuesday.

Researchers said there was no evidence of a cave-in but said the resolution of the photos, which were obtained by the imagery company Planet Labs, was insufficient

to show other damage.

South Korea's Unification Ministry said the government was on the lookout for signs of radiation. Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon told lawmakers Tuesday that North Koreans living near the site may have been exposed, his spokesman said.

"We are watching the situation closely due to the seriousness of harm caused by possible radiation leaks," the spokesman, Baik Tae-hyun, told reporters Wednesday.

The Korean Institute of Nuclear Safety told Stars and Stripes that it has not detected any signs of radiation in South Korea but was monitoring the situation.

Chinese researchers have said they believe the mountain may be in danger of collapsing and spreading radiation throughout the region, according to the South China Morning Post. The newspaper said researchers at the University of Science and Technology of China based their findings on data collected by more than 100 earthquake monitoring centers and the margin of error was no more than 330 feet.

Wang Naiyan, senior researcher on China's nuclear weapons program, told the newspaper that if the results were confirmed the mountain could be in danger of collapsing, which would allow radiation to leak. However, he stressed it was not easy to make precise predictions based on seismic data and researchers could be wrong.

Despite S. Koreans' protests, US will complete THAAD deployment

BY KIM GAMEL AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — The U.S. military will deploy additional launchers for an advanced missile-defense system Thursday in a remote area of South Korea despite local protests, villagers said.

South Korea's Defense Ministry said Monday that it was planning to install four more launchers soon to complete the deployment of the anti-missile battery known as THAAD aimed at countering the growing threat from the North.

Residents of Seongju, the southeastern area where the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system is stationed, said the ministry has given notice that the deployment would happen early Thursday.

"The (Defense Ministry) today told reporters that THAAD will be deployed tomorrow," Park Chulju, a local activist, told Stars and Stripes on Wednesday.

The Yonhap News Agency also quoted a local residents' group as saying it has

confirmed through various channels that the deployment will take place at 2 a.m. Thursday.

The Defense Ministry did not confirm the report, and U.S. Forces Korea's public affairs office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

USFK began deploying the anti-missile battery known as THAAD with two launchers and the radar in late April in an overnight operation that many saw as an effort to rush it into place before May 9 elections to replace ousted President Park Geun-hye. Her administration made the THAAD agreement with Washington over the objections of local protesters, who fear it will have adverse effects, and China, which fears the system's powerful radar could be used against it as well.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in suspended THAAD's deployment shortly after taking office but reversed that decision as the North conducted increasingly advanced missile tests and rebuffed his efforts to pursue dialogue.

Probe: Syria launched deadly April sarin attack

Associated Press

GENEVA — Syrian President Bashar Assad's air force conducted a sarin-gas attack that killed at least 83 civilians in April, one of 20 chemical weapons attacks perpetrated by the Syrian government in the past four years, U.N.-mandated investigators said Wednesday.

The investigators also appealed to the U.S.-led coalition to better protect civilians as it strikes at Islamic State militants in the east.

The latest report by the Commission of Inquiry on Syria offers among the strongest evidence yet of allegations that Assad's forces carried out the April 4 attack on Khan Sheikhoun in rebel-held Idlib province in which dozens of people were killed. The United States quickly blamed the Syrian government and launched a punitive strike on Shayrat air base, where the report says the Sukhoi-22 plane took off.

Syrian government officials have denied responsibility, and said last month that they would allow in U.N. teams to investigate. Russia says the U.S. and its Western allies rushed to judgment and blamed the Syrian government without ever visiting the site.

"We have analyzed all the other interpretations" of who might have conducted the attack, commission chairman Paulo Pinheiro said at a Geneva news conference. "It is our task to verify these allegations, and we concluded ... that this attack was perpetrated by the Syrian air force."

The commission said the Khan Sheikhoun chemical attack killed at least 83 people and wounded 293. It was among four chemical attacks the commission tallied over the span of its investigation — including the use of "weaponized chlorine" in three other locations.

However it documented 25 incidents of chemical weapons use in Syria between March 2013 and March 2017, of which 20 were perpetrated by government forces and used primarily against civilians.

Syrian activists on Wednesday said fierce fighting is underway between pro-government forces and ISIS around a garrison in Deir el-Zour, where a nearly three-year ISIS siege was breached this week.

Group: Egypt OK'd abuse 'assembly line'

Associated Press

CAIRO — An international rights group says Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi has given a “green light” to systematic torture inside detention facilities, allowing officers to act with “almost total impunity.”

In a 63-page report released Wednesday, Human Rights Watch says el-Sissi, a U.S. ally who was warmly received at the White House earlier this year, is pursuing stability “at any cost,” and has allowed the widespread torture of detainees despite it being outlawed by the Egyptian constitution.

El-Sissi “has effectively given police and National Security officers a green light to use torture whenever they please,” said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at the New York-based group. “Impunity for the systematic use of torture has left citizens with no hope for justice.”

The allegations, the group said, amount to crimes against humanity.

Egypt’s Foreign Ministry declined to comment on the report.

Most of the detainees are alleged supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood group, which rose to power after the 2011 uprising that toppled President Hosni Mubarak but has been the target of a sweeping crackdown since the military overthrew an elected Islamic president in 2013.

Human Rights Watch says Egypt ar-

rested or charged some 60,000 people in the two years after Mohammed Morsi, a Brotherhood leader who became Egypt’s first freely elected president, was overthrown following a divisive year in power. Hundreds have gone missing in what appear to be forced disappearances, and hundreds of others have received preliminary death sentences.

Widespread torture in a perceived climate of impunity was one of the main grievances behind the uprising that toppled Mubarak. Stork warned that “allowing the security services to commit this heinous crime across the country invites another cycle of unrest.”

President Donald Trump has hailed el-Sissi as an ally against terrorism, but last month the United States cut or delayed nearly \$300 million in military and economic aid, part of an estimated \$1.3 billion a year the U.S. has given Egypt since it made peace with Israel in 1979.

Based on interviews with 19 Egyptians detained as far back as 2013, the rights group documented abuses ranging from beatings to rape and sodomy. Human Rights Watch said local rights groups have documented dozens of deaths under torture in police custody.

It said torture sessions are aimed at extracting confessions, collecting information or simply as punishment. Prosecutors, who are tasked with probing violations, create an “environment of almost total impunity” by either ignor-

ing complaints of torture or threatening abuse themselves.

Human Rights Watch says it found identical methods of torture used in detention facilities across the country, an “assembly line of serious abuse.”

After a “welcoming party” of beatings, detainees are stripped naked, blindfolded and subjected to electrical shocks and various stress positions. In one position, known as the “grill,” detainees are hung from a spit-like wooden pole placed atop two chairs.

Officers often move detainees from one room to the other, where different methods of torture are used, such as pulling out nails or electrocuting a detainee while dousing him with water, often until he passes out. Some detainees said they were placed inside a room dubbed the “fridge” and kept in extremely cold temperatures while wearing nothing but underwear.

“All my nerves were shaking. I wasn’t in control of them,” Human Rights Watch quoted a detainee as saying after an intense torture session that included shocking his genitals with electrical wires.

The researchers found five cases in which officers used torture to force detainees to read pre-written confessions, which were filmed and then posted on social media or shown on state TV.

Trump OK with tying debt limit to Harvey aid

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democratic leaders say President Donald Trump has agreed to a plan to fund the government and increase the nation’s debt limit for three months as part of a deal to rush disaster aid to Hurricane Harvey victims.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer announced the agreement Wednesday after meeting with Trump at the White House.

The deal promises to speed a \$7.9 billion Harvey aid bill, which passed the House on

Wednesday, to Trump’s desk before disaster accounts run out later this week.

The move buys almost three months for Washington to try to solve myriad issues, including more funding for defense, immigration and health care, and a longer-term increase in the government’s borrowing authority.

Wednesday’s House vote comes as the government’s response to Harvey is draining existing disaster reserves, with Federal Emergency Management Agency disaster accounts hovering at \$1 billion or less. FEMA is warn-

ing lawmakers that disaster funds run out on Friday, even as a much more powerful hurricane, Irma, is bearing down on the eastern U.S.

This week’s measure is to handle the immediate emergency needs and replenish reserves in advance of Irma.

Far more money will be needed once more complete estimates are in this fall, and Harvey could end up exceeding the \$110 billion government cost of Hurricane Katrina.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards asked Congress to tweak federal law govern-

ing disaster loans as part of the Hurricane Harvey aid legislation.

The governor sent a letter Wednesday to U.S. House and Senate leaders seeking an adjustment to language governing Small Business Administration disaster loans.

Under federal rules, those who were approved for SBA loans, whether they used the loans or not, can’t receive additional federal aid such as through the state’s federally financed homeowner grant program if it is deemed a “duplication of benefits.”

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Translucent lobster hauled from ocean

ME CUMBERLAND — Maine lobsterman Alex Todd has hauled in blue lobsters and even some lobsters that were half-blue, or half-orange. But he says those don't compare on the scale of weirdness to the translucent crustacean that he recently pulled up in a trap.

The lobster that Todd caught on Aug. 24 is a ghostly, pale blue. It almost looks to be transparent.

Todd, from Chebeague Island, said he knew when he saw the translucent lobster in his trap alongside mottled green and brown lobsters that this was "definitely weird."

His photos have made the rounds on social media.

As for the lobster, he tossed it back into the ocean because its tail had been notched, flagging the lobster as an egg-bearing female. Those lobsters are off-limits for conservation reasons.

Errant goose delays minor league game

MD SALISBURY — A goose caused a game delay and a bit of a stir when it landed in the middle of a Maryland minor league baseball team's field.

The Daily Times of Salisbury reported Sunday that the wayward bird landed in center field during a Delmarva Shorebirds game the night before, prompting the team's first-ever "goose delay."

The Shorebirds' groundskeeper scooped up the bird, which appeared to be suffering from an injury, and carried it off the field.

The team's general manager said Sunday the goose was taken to an animal shelter in

Clayton, Del., to be treated.

State's oldest elementary school begins final year

NJ STOCKTON — New Jersey's oldest and smallest elementary school opened its doors for its final year of operation.

Classes started Tuesday at the Stockton Borough Elementary School, which opened in 1832. The current school building dates to 1872.

Officials cited declining enrollment for shuttering the school in the small Hunterdon County town. In most years it has housed fewer than 50 students.

District officials agreed late last year to keep the Stockton school open for one more year after community members started a grass-roots campaign to save the facility.

Electrical issue caused fire that killed 518 pigs

KS DWIGHT — Authorities in northeast Kansas said an electrical malfunction is the likely cause of a fire that killed more than 500 pigs inside a barn.

KSNT-TV reported that the fire broke out over the weekend in a barn owned by F&R Swine of rural Dwight. The \$200,000 barn was destroyed and 518 pigs, valued at \$30,000, died in the blaze.

Employees of the state of Kansas will help the farm dispose of the pigs.

Man with badge, gun tries pulling over drivers

FL NAPLES — A man is charged with impersonating a law enforcement officer after authorities said he tried pulling over drivers on

a section of Florida highway known as Alligator Alley.

The Florida Highway Patrol said it received a call from a motorist Sunday who said a man in a black Toyota with dark tinted windows pulled alongside the driver's car on Interstate 75, flashed a badge and motioned the driver to pull over.

Troopers were told the man also tried pulling over other cars. They stopped Lloyd Chang, 61, 24 miles down the road. He had a concealed weapons permit badge around his neck and a handgun in his backseat.

Chang is charged with a third-degree felony and was being held at the Collier County jail.

Car plows into laundry; 6 injured in accident

NY NEW YORK — Authorities said a car accidentally plowed into a New York City coin laundry, leaving six people injured as the vehicle veered through the business.

Security-camera video captured the dramatic scene around 8 a.m. Sunday at the Page Laundromat on Staten Island.

In video obtained by news outlets, the car begins slowly backing out of a parking space opposite the laundry. Then the vehicle speeds up, crashes through the glass storefront and continues to the back of the shop, knocking people, tables and carts out of the way.

Police said the 74-year-old driver apparently drove into the store by accident.

Sculpture that sparked protests will be buried

MN MINNEAPOLIS — Tribal elders have decided that wood from a sculpture that sparked protests

at a Minneapolis art museum will be buried, not burned.

"Scaffold" ignited a firestorm of criticism after it was built last spring at the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden outside the Walker Art Center. Artist Sam Durant intended it as a commentary on capital punishment. It depicted elements of gallows used in seven hangings, including the mass execution of 38 Dakota men in Mankato in 1862.

Dakota leaders denounced the work as disrespectful. The Walker ordered it removed and turned over to the Dakota. The initial plan was to burn it.

College gets eviction letter over rent dispute

WV SOUTH CHARLESTON — The head of a business park in South Charleston said a community college is being evicted from its campus in a rent dispute.

The Charleston Gazette-Mail reported West Virginia Regional Technology Park Executive Director and CEO Russell Kruzelock sent a letter to BridgeValley Community and Technical College last week that an agreement with the school is being terminated.

Kruzelock wrote that BridgeValley has 10 days to leave the two buildings it occupies because the school hasn't paid \$1.8 million in rent. The school previously received written warnings about the rent in May and June.

BridgeValley is asking a Kanawha County circuit judge to intervene. School attorney Marc Williams said 10 days isn't enough time to vacate the property.

The college's last lease agreement at the technology park ended in 2015.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

No favorite among NFC contenders

Associated Press

If the AFC has the look of a slam dunk for the Patriots, the NFC is as wide open as Odell Beckham Jr. can get on a deep pass.

Sure, there are favorites, led by the Falcons, whose late collapse in the Super Bowl should serve as motivation to get things right for a full 60 minutes. Seattle looks like the top dog in the West, and the Giants — if Beckham can stay healthy — appear dangerous back East.

No one wants to visit the tundra in winter, but the NFC North race looks like it will go through Green Bay.

Most intriguing is what might occur in Atlanta, where the Falcons have a sensational new home — complete with reasonable food prices, if you can imagine — and some sour memories to use as impetus in the South.

“I am demanding of them and of the staff and of myself, too,” coach Dan Quinn says. “I definitely share the disappointment when that happens or share in how much fun it is when we have a red-zone period ... where it’s competing and battling for it. Those are the moments I try to really stay in and not look too far down the line.”

Or too close back.

But handing the Falcons the

division title, let alone the conference crown, is something of a stretch.

NFC South

This might be the most competitive sector in the NFC. All four teams have high expectations, and major weak areas.

For Atlanta, aside from its psyche, the question is how much the defense has improved around sackmaster Vic Beasley Jr. Adding tackle Dontari Poe and rookie end Takkarist McKinley should help the pass rush, but the secondary, in particular, needs upgrading.

That said, 2016 MVP Matt Ryan and a strong corps of receivers and running backs are capable of 40 points any day.

Carolina’s post-Super Bowl malaise was apparent from the outset last year, and Ron Rivera is too good a coach to let anything approaching half-heartedness rear its head again. Look for Cam Newton, if his arm is OK, to have a strong turnaround campaign, and the running game to be spiced by rookie Christian McCaffrey. The defense has Luke Kuechly and Thomas Davis as its foundation.

Tampa Bay must find such a foundation on D to go with an offense that will scare every opponent. Watch TE O.J. Howard, an Offensive Rookie of the Year favorite.

New Orleans is in an ugly trend of 7-9 finishes. A fourth straight, especially with Drew Brees still a sensational passer, could doom coach Sean Payton, who needs the defense to show up.

NFC West

The only remote challenge to the Seahawks — except, perhaps, for turmoil

within — is Arizona. The Cardinals, though, come off an underachieving season in which they couldn’t close the deal too often.

If Carson Palmer rebounds, David Johnson continues as the most versatile RB around, and Larry Fitzgerald remains, well, Larry Fitz, Arizona could push Seattle. The Cardinals were badly damaged by injuries in 2016 and their depth still is questionable.

Seattle also had injury issues, yet got into the playoffs in something of a down year. Its running game has been juiced up with the return of Thomas Rawls and the signing of Eddie Lacy (if he is in shape), and that defense can be scary, especially down the stretch.

Forget any thoughts of the Rams or 49ers contending for anything but high draft choices.

NFC East

During a year when Jerry Jones went into the Hall of Fame, how about them Cowboys winning it all?

Whoa! Dallas might not be the top team in this division.

While the Cowboys could take a step back, perhaps several if sizzling RB Ezekiel Elliott has to sit out all six games of his suspension, New York is primed to leap forward. That changes if Beckham keeps taking hits like he did against Cleveland last Monday, but with Brandon Marshall and impressive rookie TE Evan Engram, Eli Manning has more targets. The big if is New York’s ground game, but no one — not even Dallas — figures to run well against Steve Spagnuolo’s defense.

Of course, if top offensive rookie Dak Prescott is as effective in his sophomore season, working behind an outstanding O-line, Dallas is dangerous. The biggest

issue is an undependable defense, though Sean Lee is an All-Pro linebacker.

Philadelphia’s 2018 could be a special year. For now, development and a .500 or better record should be the goal.

Washington is paying QB Kirk Cousins as if he was a combination of Tom Brady and Aaron Rodgers. The Redskins needs that kind of production from him to stay out of the cellar.

NFC North

Detroit and Minnesota have designs on challenging the Packers. We don’t see it.

Not if Rodgers is healthy and develops a symbiotic relationship with TE Martellus Bennett, among the best offseason signings by any team. Not if the secondary that was so damaged by injuries can stay healthier. Certainly not if the Packers find their form early after a 4-6 record last season forced them to get hot just to get into the postseason.

If Minnesota finds a balanced offense to go with a very strong defensive line, it could get it into the playoffs. The Vikings should be powerful on the ground with Latavius Murray and rookie Dalvin Cook, but the air game needs more consistency and downfield threats. Minnesota could lead the league in sacks.

The Lions were comeback kings in 2016 and will need to avoid falling in so many holes this time. Improvements up front could bolster the running game, and Matthew Stafford has proven he is worth franchise-QB money. It’s hard to get excited about the D in Motor City, though.

The Bears won’t resemble recent versions of the Cubs or Blackhawks.

Elliott’s suspension upheld, but he’ll play in opener

Associated Press

SHERMAN, Texas — An arbitrator denied Dallas running back Ezekiel Elliott’s appeal of a six-game suspension in a domestic violence case Tuesday, but the 2016 NFL rushing champion will play in the opener because of the timing of the decision.

Elliott attorney Jeffrey Kessler told the judge near the end of a nearly 2½-hour hearing in federal court that Elliott’s suspension was sustained by arbitrator Harold Henderson.

At the start of the hearing,

NFL attorney Daniel Nash told the judge it was “his understanding” that Elliott could play Sunday night against the New York Giants because the league didn’t want to rush the judge.

U.S. District Judge Amos Mazzant said he would rule on Elliott’s request for a temporary restraining order by Friday. If the request is denied and no further legal action taken, Elliott’s suspension would start in Week 2 at Denver. He would be eligible to return Nov. 5 against Kansas City.

“We are extremely disap-

pointed with Mr. Henderson’s inability to navigate through league politics, and follow the evidence, and, most importantly, his (sic) conscience,” attorneys Frank Salzano and Scott Rosenblum said in a statement released after the hearing.

Elliott was suspended by Commissioner Roger Goodell after the league concluded he had several physical confrontations last summer with Tiffany Thompson, a former girlfriend. Prosecutors in Ohio didn’t pursue the case, citing conflicting evidence.

The 22-year-old Elliott de-

nied the allegations in sworn testimony during an appeal hearing last week. He attended Tuesday’s hearing in Sherman, about 65 miles north of Dallas, sitting quietly in a suit and tie and facing away from the audience and mostly toward the judge.

The NFL Players’ Association sued in federal court on behalf of Elliott last week before Henderson ruled, saying the appeal hearing was “fundamentally unfair” because the running back was prevented from confronting his accuser in the Ohio case.

Venus in first US Open semi since 2010

Associated Press

NEW YORK — When her work was done, her first trip to the U.S. Open semifinals since 2010 secured, if just barely, Venus Williams sat in her sideline chair and beamed.

Williams reached her third major semifinal of the season — something she last did 15 years ago — by edging two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (2) on Tuesday night to a soundtrack of thunderous partisan support under a closed roof at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

“Definitely felt like a special match. No easy moments, not easy to hold serve or break serve,” Williams said. “This match meant a lot to me, obviously, playing at home and, of course, it being a major.”

The 37-year-old Williams, who won titles at Flushing Meadows back in 2000 and 2001, trailed 3-1 in the third set before digging out of the hole with a little help: Kvitova’s eighth double-fault handed over the break that made it 3-all.

And Kvitova’s ninth double-fault got Williams to match point in the tiebreaker.

“Sometimes you have opportunities, and sometimes you take them and you don’t, but it’s not like you get opportunity after opportunity after opportunity in these sorts of matches,” Williams said. “You have to take the ones you have.”

She will face unseeded Sloane Stephens on Thursday in the first all-American women’s semifinal in New York since 2002. Stephens advanced earlier Tuesday with a 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (4) victory over 16th-seeded Anastasija Sevastova of Latvia. It is Stephens’ deepest run at any major since 2013 and the apex of a recovery from foot surgery in January.

There could be another U.S. vs. U.S. semifinal on the other side of the draw: 15th-seeded Madison Keys and 20th-seeded CoCo Vandeweghe played their quarterfinals Wednesday.

“It’s been a great two weeks for American tennis. Seeing all the American players in the draw and all of them advancing so deep and competing so well,” Williams said. “It’s great to see this resurgence, and I hope it can continue.”

Kvitova, seeded 13th, was hoping to prolong her come-

back from a knife attack less than nine months ago by reaching the first U.S. Open semifinal of her career. She needed surgery on her racket-holding hand after she was cut by an intruder at her home in the Czech Republic in December. She returned to the tour at the French Open in May, losing in the second round there and at Wimbledon.

“I had my chances,” Kvitova said. “Kind of.”

Williams, who revealed in 2011 she had been diagnosed with an energy-sapping autoimmune disease, is the oldest women’s semifinalist in New York in the Open era, which dates to 1968.

Stephens, ranked 83rd, has won 13 of her past 15 matches, all on hard courts, reaching the semifinals at three consecutive tournaments for the only time in her career.

She had an operation in January, and while forced to stay away from her sport, she found a new appreciation for it. The time off also allowed her to enjoy other aspects of life.

“I couldn’t walk. I couldn’t do all the things that I wanted to do. But I did get to hang out

with my family and see my little cousin’s soccer games and go to weddings and baby showers and stuff. All the things that I thought before I was missing out on, (now) I really wasn’t,” said Stephens, whose late father, John Stephens, was the 1988 NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year for the New England Patriots, and whose mother, Sybil Smith, was Boston University’s first All-American in women’s swimming.

“It was just kind of, like, eye-opening,” Stephens added. “When I wasn’t playing, like, of course I loved my time off, but when I got back to playing tennis, it was, like, this is where I want to be. This is what I love doing.”

In the men’s quarterfinals, No. 12 Pablo Carreno Busta of Spain and No. 28 Kevin Anderson of South Africa each advanced to the final four at a Grand Slam tournament for the first time.

Anderson got past 17th-seeded Sam Querrey of the United States 7-6 (5), 6-7 (9), 6-3, 7-6 (7) in a match that ended shortly before 2 a.m. Wednesday.

Wood’s goal gives US draw with Honduras

Associated Press

SAN PEDRO SULA, Honduras — The legs were heavy and the tension high in the 85th minute at Estadio Olimpico Metropolitano, where exuberant fans had been cheering and blowing vuvuzelas nonstop.

The United States was losing to Honduras in a World Cup qualifier played in searing late-afternoon tropical heat, just a few minutes from falling into a deep hole that would jeopardize the Americans’ streak of seven straight World Cup appearances.

Bobby Wood then silenced the crowd, scoring from short range off a scramble following a free kick. The U.S. escaped from Honduras with a 1-1 tie on Tuesday.

“Huge point. Great point,” said U.S. captain Michael Bradley. “In a lot of moments it has nothing to do with football. It’s about finding a way to survive and dealing with everything that gets thrown at you, having a group that can hold up in the toughest

moments.”

Playing from behind after Romell Quioto put the Catrachos ahead in the 27th minute, the U.S. dropped to fourth in the North and Central American and Caribbean region with nine points, but more importantly remained ahead of Honduras on goal difference with two qualifiers left. Panama moved into third place when it beat last-place Trinidad and Tobago 3-0.

The top three nations in the six-team group qualify for next year’s tournament in Russia, and the fourth-place finisher meets Australia or Syria in a playoff for another berth.

“We knew what type of spot we were in. We knew we needed at least one point,” Wood said. “We knew we started bad. We weren’t mentally there. We let off an easy goal, but we knew we just needed one goal and that would change everything.”

Wins in the final two games would en-

sure a World Cup berth, but for the first time since 1989 the Americans will head into their finale uncertain of qualifying. Before Wood’s goal, they might have put themselves in position to fight for a playoff spot at best.

“I was thinking we might have an early vacation at the end of this year,” U.S. coach Bruce Arena said.

That changed when Christian Pulisic, the Americans’ emerging 18-year-old star midfielder, was fouled about 30 yards from the goal and Kellyn Acosta took the free kick. Goalkeeper Luis Lopez made a sprawling save to bat the ball with his left hand. It landed near the end line, and Matt Besler beat Johnny Palacios to the ball and while falling backward hooked it in the air to Jordan Morris at the edge of the 6-yard box. Morris outjumped Henry Figueroa and sent a backward header to Wood, who made a nifty chest trap and shot.

Diamondbacks stretch win streak to 12

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Over the past couple of weeks, the Arizona Diamondbacks are playing as well as the Los Angeles Dodgers did for so long this season.

Brandon Drury hit a ground-er to third base that scored the go-ahead runs when Justin Turner's throw home got away, and the Diamondbacks won 3-1 on Tuesday night to match a franchise record with their 12th consecutive victory.

Arizona has built a comfortable cushion in the NL wild-card race, but still trails Los Angeles by 11½ games in their division. The slumping NL West leaders have dropped five in a row and 10 of 11.

"It seems like it's timed up that we're playing good when they're going through a rough patch," Diamondbacks starter Zack Greinke said of his old team. "I wouldn't say it means

too much."

Dodgers reliever Pedro Baez (3-4) issued consecutive walks to open the 10th, drawing boos for the second night in a row after he gave up four straight hits that led to four runs in a 13-0 loss to Arizona on Monday.

Baez retired J.D. Martinez, who tied a major league record with four home runs Monday, on a broken-bat groundout that left runners at second and third. Martinez went 1-for-5 and scored a run.

Drury grounded to Turner just inside the third-base line, and he fired home to catcher Yasmani Grandal. The ball ricocheted off pinch-runner Chris Hermann's arm and then Grandal's forearm before bouncing away. Hermann and A.J. Pollock scored, Drury was safe at second and Grandal was charged with an error.

"I don't even know where the ball is after it hits him," Grandal said. "There's no time to

react. You've got a runner coming straight at you and a ball being thrown very hard."

Despite playing without ailing slugger Paul Goldschmidt the last few days, Arizona equaled its franchise record for most consecutive wins set in June 2003. The victory earned the Diamondbacks their first season series win over Los Angeles since 2013.

"We're enjoying it," manager Torey Lovullo said. "The guys come in energized every single day. They rally around one another. They sense that something very special is happening here."

The Diamondbacks haven't trailed for 98 straight innings, tying the 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers for the third-longest streak by a major league team since 1912.

"When you're playing good baseball, you don't really know once the streak's going on," Pollock said. "I'm sure there's

going to be a time where we're going to have to fight, but we can play on top. Pitchers are doing a good job of not giving up their lead."

The Dodgers tied their longest skid of the season, although they remain baseball's top team at 92-46.

"Might as well happen now and not in the playoffs," Grandal said.

David Hernandez (3-0) got the win in relief. Fernando Rodney earned his 35th save.

Chris Taylor singled for the Dodgers leading off the bottom of the ninth, but Curtis Granderson flied out and Taylor was thrown out at second for Arizona's second double play before Turner grounded out to send the game to the 10th.

The Dodgers tied it 1-all in the fifth on Grandal's lead-off homer.

"I didn't make a lot of mistakes, but I make one mistake a game," Greinke said.

MLB roundup

Red-hot Cleveland wins league-best 13th in a row

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Jose Ramirez hit two more homers, Austin Jackson also connected and the Cleveland Indians beat the Chicago White Sox 9-4 on Tuesday night for their 13th straight victory, the longest run by a major league team this season.

Danny Salazar got just two outs in his return from right elbow inflammation, but Cleveland's deep bullpen took over from there. Seven relievers combined for 8⅓ scoreless innings as the Indians moved within one of their franchise-record 14-game winning streak last year.

Jackson and Ramirez hit back-to-back homers during a three-run first against David Holmberg (2-4). Ramirez added another solo shot in the second, and the AL Central leaders went ahead to stay on Greg Allen's tiebreaking, two-

run double in the third. Yan Gomes tacked on a three-run shot in the ninth.

Ramirez has five homers in his last three games. He is batting .500 (17-for-34) with seven homers and nine RBIs on Cleveland's 11-game road trip.

Red Sox 3, Blue Jays 2 (19): The home team won its own version of a Boston marathon, beating Toronto in the 19th inning on an RBI single by Hanley Ramirez in a game that took six hours.

Astros 3, Mariners 1: Justin Verlander (11-8) pitched six strong innings and won his debut with his new team after Cameron Maybin hit a two-run homer with one out in the seventh for visiting Houston's first hit against Seattle.

Orioles 7, Yankees 6: Manny Machado hit a two-run homer off Dellin Betances (3-6) with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning, capping a

big comeback that lifted host Baltimore over New York.

Angels 8, Athletics 7 (10): Pinch-hitter Ben Revere lined a go-ahead single in the 10th inning that diving left fielder Matt Joyce just missed, and visiting Los Angeles took over the second AL wild-card spot by beating Oakland.

Cardinals, 8, Padres 4: Jose Martinez hit two home runs, rookie Harrison Bader had three RBIs and Michael Wacha (11-7) overcame a shaky start to last six innings as visiting St. Louis defeated San Diego.

Pirates 4, Cubs 3: Max Moroff and David Freese each hit an RBI single off Carl Edwards Jr. (3-4) in the eighth inning as host Pittsburgh rallied past Chicago.

Reds 9, Brewers 3: Robert Stephenson (4-4) escaped threats while pitching into the seventh, and Scooter Gennett hit a three-run homer during

host Cincinnati's five-run rally in the bottom of the inning against Milwaukee.

Nationals 2, Marlins 1: Stephen Strasburg (12-4) pitched six solid innings to help visiting Washington edge Miami.

Rays 2, Twins 1: Jake Odorizzi (8-7) took a no-hitter into the seventh inning in front of a tiny home crowd, and host Tampa Bay topped Minnesota.

Rockies 9, Giants 6: Trevor Story homered and Colorado beat San Francisco for its 10th straight win over the Giants in Denver.

Tigers 13, Royals 2: JaCoby Jones and John Hicks each hit two of host Detroit's six homers in a rout of Kansas City.

Phillies 9, Mets 1: Ben Lively (3-5) homered and drove in four runs off New York ace Jacob deGrom (14-9), and also pitched seven strong innings to lead visiting Philadelphia to the win.