North Korea confirms test missile could reach Guam

By David Choi
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea’s state-run news outlet on Monday confirmed it successfully test-fired an intermediate-range ballistic missile capable of reaching the United States territory of Guam.

The Korean Central News Agency announced the country had fired a Hwasong-12 missile on Sunday from the northwestern area of North Korea toward the eastern coast “in consideration of the security of neighboring countries.”

The Hwasong-12 is an intermediate-range ballistic missile with an estimated maximum range of 2,796 miles, more than enough distance to reach Guam, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. It was first unveiled — and last tested — by North Korea in 2017, the same year the communist regime tested its first intercontinental ballistic missile.

KCNA added that a camera installed on the missile took a photo.

Detainees in Syria moved to more secure facility after thwarted prison break

By Chad Garland
Stars and Stripes

Thousands of Islamic State fighters jailed in Syria had to be hustled to a more secure facility in the midst of a 10-day prison siege by the militants aimed at freeing them, according to U.S. officials.

On Sunday, the U.S.-allied Syrian Democratic Forces announced they had retaken the al-Sinaa prison in the northeastern city of Hassakeh after “eliminating the last enclaves” of ISIS fighters barricaded in dormitories.

The attempted prison break, which began Jan. 20, “ultimately sped up the clock to ensuring the detainees are in a hardened facility from which they will never escape,” Army Brig. Gen. Isaac Peltier, commander of the Special Operations Joint Task Force- Levant, said Sunday in a separate statement.

Peltier called the attack a “huge ISIS failure.”

Had they succeeded, the militants likely would have carried out further attacks in Hassakeh and elsewhere, the SDF said in a statement Monday, adding that the assault was part of a long-planned operation that drew militants from neighboring Iraq.

Detainees were still being accounted for late Monday, said Maj. Chuck An, a spokesman for the U.S.-led special operations task force, in an email to Stars and Stripes.

“Thanks to the bravery and determination of the SDF, many of whom paid the ultimate sacrifice, ISIS failed in its efforts to conduct a large-scale prison break to reconstitute its ranks.”

Jake Sullivan
U.S. national security adviser

SEE TEST ON PAGE 3

Above: U.S. soldiers stand guard in Hassakeh, northeast Syria, on Thursday. Syrian Democratic Forces announced Sunday that they had retaken the al-Sinaa prison, which was targeted by Islamic State fighters in an attempted prison break that began Jan. 20.

SEE FAILURE ON PAGE 4

This series of photos released by the Korean Central News Agency on Monday purports to show the launch of an intermediate-range ballistic missile the previous day.

‘Huge ISIS failure’
Growth slowed down in 19 European countries

Associated Press
FRANKFURT, Germany —
The European economy slowed noticeably at the end of last year as surging COVID-19 cases driven by the omicron variant piled on top of supply shortages and rising energy prices that dented consumer purchasing power. The result: An economic winter of discontent that may not lift until later this year.

Much of the slowdown came in Germany, Europe’s largest economy, where difficulty getting parts held back its export-heavy manufacturing economy. France, Spain and Italy showed stronger growth.

In the 19 countries that use the euro, growth in the last three months of 2021 came in at 0.3%, the European Union’s statistics agency said Monday. That compared with growth of 2.2% in the July-September quarter.

For the year, it was 5.2%, underlining how Europe’s economic recovery from the pandemic has moved slower than the rebound in the United States, where 2021 growth was 5.7%. U.S. growth was boosted by what economists say was a comparatively larger share of federal stimulus spending than in Europe.

Europe’s economy is “almost exactly back to its pre-virus size,” but that leaves it “way behind” the U.S., which reached that milestone last year and where output is now more than 3% above what it was in late 2019, said Jessica Hinds, senior Europe economist at Capital Economics.

Growth slowed down in 19 European countries

Much of the slowdown came in Germany, Europe’s largest economy, where difficulty getting parts held back its export-heavy manufacturing economy. France, Spain and Italy showed stronger growth.

In the 19 countries that use the euro, growth in the last three months of 2021 came in at 0.3%, the European Union’s statistics agency said Monday. That compared with growth of 2.2% in the July-September quarter.

For the year, it was 5.2%, underlining how Europe’s economic recovery from the pandemic has moved slower than the rebound in the United States, where 2021 growth was 5.7%. U.S. growth was boosted by what economists say was a comparatively larger share of federal stimulus spending than in Europe.

Europe’s economy is “almost exactly back to its pre-virus size,” but that leaves it “way behind” the U.S., which reached that milestone last year and where output is now more than 3% above what it was in late 2019, said Jessica Hinds, senior Europe economist at Capital Economics.

The European economy slowed noticeably at the end of last year as surging COVID-19 cases driven by the omicron variant piled on top of supply shortages and rising energy prices that dented consumer purchasing power. The result: An economic winter of discontent that may not lift until later this year.

Much of the slowdown came in Germany, Europe’s largest economy, where difficulty getting parts held back its export-heavy manufacturing economy. France, Spain and Italy showed stronger growth.

In the 19 countries that use the euro, growth in the last three months of 2021 came in at 0.3%, the European Union’s statistics agency said Monday. That compared with growth of 2.2% in the July-September quarter.

For the year, it was 5.2%, underlining how Europe’s economic recovery from the pandemic has moved slower than the rebound in the United States, where 2021 growth was 5.7%. U.S. growth was boosted by what economists say was a comparatively larger share of federal stimulus spending than in Europe.

Europe’s economy is “almost exactly back to its pre-virus size,” but that leaves it “way behind” the U.S., which reached that milestone last year and where output is now more than 3% above what it was in late 2019, said Jessica Hinds, senior Europe economist at Capital Economics.

TODAY
IN STRIPES
American Roundup ……… 14
Classified …………………… 7
Comics ……………………… 17
Crossword …………………… 17
Faces …………………………… 15
Opinion …………………… 16
Sports …………………… 18-24

Round-the-world news for America’s military.

Stripes.com supplies constant updates, on news of interest — including reports from our overseas military bases in Europe, Pacific, Southwest Asia and the Mideast, and coverage of the Pentagon and Capitol Hill.

Also available on mobile apps for Android and iOS.
2 German police fatally shot near Baumholder  

Officials announce arrests of 2 suspects after hourslong search

Stars and Stripes
KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Two men suspected in the shooting and killing of two police officers Monday during a routine patrol about 12 miles from the U.S. Army base in Baumholder have been arrested, according to police.

The shooting happened during a traffic check on the K22 between Ulmert and Mayweilerhof, near Kusel, at about 4:20 a.m., police from West Palatinate headquarters in Kaiserslautern said.

The officers who died were a 24-year-old woman who was still completing her academy training, and a 29-year-old colleague, police said Monday.

At 5 p.m., police arrested Andreas Johannes Schmitt, 38, of Spiesen-Ebersberg, in Sulzbach, about 40 miles from the scene of the shootings in southwestern Germany.

A photo released by police showed Schmitt with brown hair and a beard.

Schmitt has a gun license and was previously suspected of leaning against a fence when police from Mainz were answering a home invasion.

A police officer has since asked for an investigation into whether more people were connected to the shooting, Stynes told Stars and Stripes.

Helicopters, tracking dogs and special police forces were part of a search Monday that spanned from Rheinland-Pfalz to the state of Saarland.

The two officers reported over police radio that shots were being fired, police spokesman Bernhard Christian Erford told n-tv television.

Police responding to the scene were unable to help the fallen officers, Erford said.

Erford said he didn’t know whether the officers had seen someone or something that led them to check the assailants’ vehicles.

Earlier Monday, police called on drivers in the Kusel area not to pick up hitchhikers.

Kusel is a town of about 5,500 people 25 miles northwest of Kaiserslautern.

The larger Kusel district is also home to Americans who work at U.S. military bases in the area, which include several Army installations and Ramstein Air Base.

It’s unclear how many shots were fired, and residents gave mixed accounts of what they heard, police said.

Gunfire is relatively common because of the nearby military training area, Kusel district hunting manager Bernd Klinck said, as quoted by the Rheinpfalz.

West Palatinate police are asking anyone with information to call 0631-389-2528.

Test: Japan and S. Korea condemn North’s actions

FROM PAGE 1

tograpgh of Earth from space.

Sunday’s launch marks the seventh round of missile tests in Japan in nearly five years, when U.S. relations with the communist country were at an all-time low.

The U.S. and North Korea exchanged heated remarks in 2017, when then-President Donald Trump threatened “fire and fury” against North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, while Pyongyang signaled it was developing plans to “sit at the areas around Guam” using its Hwasong-12 missiles.

Neighboring countries confirmed North Korea had tested an intermediate-range missile on Sunday morning. South Korea’s military said it detected the launch at around 7:52 a.m. and estimated the missile flew about 500 miles at an altitude of 1,240 miles.

“In preparation for additional launches, the military maintains a readiness posture by tracking and monitoring related trends,” South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

Following the launch, Japan’s chief cabinet secretary, Hirokazu Matsuno, told reporters the missile was airborne for about 30 minutes before splashing down outside Japan’s exclusive economic zone.

“A such violent ballistic missile launch violates the relevant U.N. Security Council resolution, and Japan has made a strict protest against North Korea,” Matsuno said on Sunday. “We will continue to collect information to protect the lives and property of the people.

South Korea’s Ministry of Unification condemned the North’s latest launch and described it as “undermining the efforts” of South Korea and other countries to bring about peace on the Korean Peninsula.

“We repeatedly urge North Korea to immediately stop such actions … and come out on the path of dialogue and cooperation,” the ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

North Korea previously pledged to “keep developing powerful warheads” as a deterrent against the U.S. and its allies’ “hostile moves.”

“The practical combat performance of the long-range cruise missile system would hold a reliable share in boosting the war deterrence of the country,” KCNA said in an article Friday.

That statement came days after the U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions against six North Koreans, a Russian and a Russian firm suspected of aiding the regime’s weapons program.

U.S. military assets, including aircraft from the U.S., Albania, Brazil, France, Ireland, Japan, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom also condemned the January weapon tests.

Test: Japan and S. Korea condemn North’s actions

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Military exercises between the United States and its allies in the Western Pacific, both ongoing and upcoming, send a message to China not to pull a “stunt” to distract people at home, according to a New Zealand-based security expert.

The U.S. Air Force is about to launch Cope North, a large-scale aerial combat, force employment and disaster relief exercise with Japan and Australia, that will involve more than 2,000 sorties on and around Guam, Pacific Air Forces announced in a statement Saturday.

Fighter aircraft from all three nations will take part in counter-air and close-air support missions, according to the statement.

They’ll also practice aerial refueling. Counter air means attacking enemy air bases while close air support involves aircraft attacking enemy targets near friendly ground forces.

“These training missions will conclude with a large force employment designed to enhance readiness and interoperability among the three countries,” the statement said.

Interoperability describes the ability of one country’s armed forces to use another country’s training methods and military equipment.

The training will follow last week’s Keen Edge command post exercise involving U.S. and Japanese forces in Japan and the ongoing Marine Exercise 2022 amphibious-assault training involving U.S. sailors and Marines and local forces in the Philippines.

The exercises send a message to China, New Zealand-based security expert Paul Buchanan said Monday.

Internal troubles such as economic and supply disruptions and coronavirus outbreaks could turn powerful Chinese factions against President Xi Jinping, Buchanan predicted.

The Chinese leader hasn’t left Beijing for 700 days, Foreign Policy reported Friday.

“What do authoritarian leaders do when they are concerned about internal challenges?” Buchanan asked. “They do something outside to distract attention.”

The U.S. and its allies are eager to deter China from “pulling a stunt” in the South China Sea or beyond, he said.

“The possibility of Xi intentionally … using conflict to divert attention from his internal woes have increased dramatically,” he said. “These exercises increase deterrence.”

The Cope North exercise, which runs from Wednesday to Feb. 18, begins with humanitarian-assistance and disaster-relief training, according to a Pacific Air Forces statement.

Training will take place at Andersen Air Force Base and North-west Field on Guam; the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, including Rota, Saipan and Tinian; Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia, the statement said.

Over 2,600 sorties are planned across seven islands and 10 airfields. More than 2,500 U.S. airmen, Marines, and sailors will train alongside about 1,600 from Japan and Australia. Approximately 130 aircraft from over 30 units will fly in the exercise, the statement said.

The training begins as drills in Japan and the Philippines end. U.S. sailors and Marines and Philippine troops will wrap up Marine Exercise 2022 in the Philippines on Wednesday.

The forces, which began training Thursday, have involved warships at sea, the U.S. Embassy in the Philippines said on its website Friday.

The training includes beach landings, search and seizure of enemy craft and moving troops and equipment, the statement said.

U.S. warships participating include the USS Essex, USS Portland and USS Pearl Harbor carrying troops from the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Keen Edge, which began Jan. 23 and wraps up Thursday, involves 500 U.S. personnel and 1,300 Japanese troops at Yokota Air Base and other locations in Japan, along with Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. It aims to increase combat readiness and the ability of U.S. and Japanese Forces to work together, USFJ said in a Jan. 23 statement.

FROM PAGE 1

Tuesday, February 1, 2022
US, Russia clash sharply on Ukraine during UN meeting

The Washington Post

Russia and the United States faced off Monday for “whipping up hysteria” over Ukraine, saying it had brought “pure Nazis” to power on Russia’s border and wanted to make “heroes out of those peoples who fought on the side of Hitler.”

In a blistering attack at a meeting of the United Nations Security Council, Russian Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya said the U.S. itself was “provoking escalation” of the situation by falsely charging Moscow with preparing to invade Ukraine.

“You’re waiting for it to happen, as if you want your words to become a reality,” Nebenzya said in remarks directed toward U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

The confrontation was one of the sharpest in years in the international forum. Nebenzya’s comments followed a charge by Thomas-Greenfield that Russia was “attempting, without any factual basis, to paint Ukraine and Western countries as the aggressors to fabricate a pretext for attack” by more than 100,000 heavily armed troops it has amassed on Ukraine’s border.

It has demanded a Western commitment to exclude Ukraine from its security umbrella, “has threatened to take military action should its demands not be met,” Thomas-Greenfield said. “If Russia further invades Ukraine, none of us will be able to say we didn’t see it coming. And the consequences will be horrific, which is why this meeting is so important today.”

With the support of only China, the Russians forced a vote at the beginning of the U.S.-called meeting on whether to hold the session behind closed doors. Calling for the continuation of diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis, Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jun said that “we urgently need now is quiet diplomacy, but not microphone diplomacy.”

But the majority of the 15-member council voted to proceed with the public session, which President Joe Biden, in a statement issued by the White House, called “a critical step in rallying the world to speak out in one voice.”

Beyond the Security Council, world leaders continued applying diplomatic pressure on Russia across several fronts in an effort to head off what has been a tense confrontation that is possibly only days or weeks away.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to speak with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday, a senior official of the State Department said. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will speak again this week, a senior State Department official said, after earlier efforts by the top diplomats to reach a resolution were unsuccessful.

In London, speaking to reporters Monday before his call with Putin, Johnson said: “What I will say to President Putin, as I have said before, is that I think we really all need to step back from the brink ... I think Russia needs to step back from the brink. I think that an invasion of Ukraine, any incursion into Ukraine beyond the territory that Russia has already taken in 2014, would be an absolute disaster for the world and, above all, it would be a disaster for Russia.”

In Moscow, Russia’s military announced that thousands of troops from southern and western military bases were returning to barracks after military exercises, as the Kremlin again accused the U.S. of fanning hysteria over Ukraine.

It was too early to determine whether Russia’s move to send 6,000 troops of the Southern Military District and 3,000 others from the Western Military District back to barracks presaged a deescalation of military tensions near Ukraine’s border. Military commanders in Belarus announced last week that Russian forces would leave that country after a massive joint military exercise with Russian and Belarusian forces due to begin next week.

The coalition backed the SDF with real-time surveillance, air strikes and limited ground forces to suppress the prison break. The U.S. Army’s Bradley Fighting Vehicles helped establish a perimeter to contain the fighting.

The death toll is expected to continue rising as clearing operations continue and more remainders are found.

The continued presence of tens of thousands of ISIS families in Syrian detention camps is “a time bomb with a pulled safety pin,” journalist Chris Stein said Monday. They urged the creation of an international tribunal to prosecute them.
US troop isolation ends; virus still strong in Japan

By Joseph Ditzler

TOKYO — The U.S. military population in Japan awoke Monday to something closer to normal life after three weeks confined to their homes and military bases to stem the tide of COVID-19.

A stay-at-home order imposed by U.S. Forces Japan at the behest of Japan’s government expired at 6 a.m., but some restrictions still apply as tens of thousands of people continue to contract COVID-19 on a daily basis across the country. Ski trips, shopping excursions, restaurant dining — those activities and some are back on the free-time agenda for the more than 55,000 U.S. service members, their families and civilian employees in Japan. Masks are still required on and off U.S. bases.

Restrictions on travel in Japan vary from one U.S. base to another, however, specifically according to vaccination status. Vaccination rates among uniformed personnel are above 95%, based on state byments by individual commands.

Camp Zama, headquarters of U.S. Army Japan, has a 93-rule liberty limit. The Marine Corps sets quarantine requirements for zones and travelers based on vaccination status.

Meanwhile, Japan continues to wrestle with high numbers of new COVID-19 cases each day. Tokyo reported that another 11,751 individuals tested positive Monday, 15,895 on Sunday and 17,433 on Saturday, according to Air Mobility Command. A 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew is also in place.

For 10 years, military passengers terminals on U.S. military bases are moving their flight schedule information off Facebook and onto official Air Force public websites in February, according to Air Mobility Command.

Air Mobility Command passenger terminals have posted 72-hour and 30-day flight information on individual Facebook pages managed by staff at each terminal. Air Mobility Command spokesman Tech. Sgt. Zachary Boyer told Stars and Stripes by email Wednesday.

Soon, that same information will be available on Air Force websites, with a directory on the AMC website with links to the individual base websites, according to Boyer’s email. Once passenger terminals have transitioned to the official Air Force websites, they will indicate the date they will no longer utilize Facebook and include a link to the website.

“Many terminals advised AMC Passenger Policy Branch of challenges they encountered while using Facebook,” Boyer wrote, “such as account lockouts, revalidation problems when pages reach a certain number of likes and passengers being given inaccurate travel advice in the comments section.”

Flight schedules and other passenger information will migrate from Facebook to the American Forces Public Information Management System, or AFPIIMS, which will provide travelers easy and organized access to that information.

AFPIIMS is a website content management system for all Air Force public websites, according to Defense Media Activity.

“AMC Passenger Terminals will fully transition to the command’s official website by February 28, and all terminals are engaged in website creation and training to meet this deadline,” Boyer said.

The passenger terminal at Misawa Air Base, Japan, has already begun posting passenger flight information on the base website. “We implemented this about a month ago when our AMC terminal personnel reached out to us, and we said, ‘Happy to help.’ So, we have been updating ever since then,” base spokesman 1st Lt. Josephine Rios told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday.

“The upside to keeping it on Facebook is that when the Air Force network is down, we are still able to plan trips,” she said by phone on Wednesday. “I’ve used Space-A so many times, and I’m always open to improving the process. All in all, if the information is easily accessible, that’s less indistinct in how I receive it.”

The directory of AMC Passenger Terminal webpages can be found at www.amc.af.mil/AMC-Travel-Site.
By Edith M. Lederer
Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations has received “credible allegations” that more than 100 former members of the Afghan government, its security forces and those who worked with international troops have been killed since the Taliban took over the country Aug. 15, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

In a report obtained Sunday by The Associated Press, Guterres said that “more than two-thirds” of the victims were alleged to result from extrajudicial killings by the Taliban or its affiliates, despite the Taliban’s announcement of “general amnesties” for those affiliated with the former government and U.S.-led coalition forces.

The U.N. political mission in Afghanistan also received “credible allegations of extrajudicial killings of at least 50 individuals suspected of affiliation with ISIL-KP,” the Islamic State extremist group operating in Afghanistan, Guterres said in the report to the U.N. Security Council.

He added that despite Taliban assurances, the U.N. political mission has also received credible allegations “of enforced disappearances and other violations impacting the right to life and physical integrity” of former government and coalition members.

Guterres said human rights defenders and media workers also continue “to come under attack, intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment and killings.”

Eight civil society activists were killed, including three by the Taliban, the report said.

The Taliban initially promised a general amnesty for those linked to the former government and international forces, and tolerance and inclusiveness toward women and ethnic minorities.

They ultimately renewed restrictions on women and appointed an all-male government, however, which have met with dismay by the international community.

Afghanistan’s aid-dependent economy was already slowing when the Taliban seized power, and the international community froze Afghanistan’s assets abroad and halted economic support, recalling the Taliban’s reputation for brutality during its 1996-2001 rule and refusal to educate girls and allow women to work.

Guterres said: “The situation in Afghanistan remains precarious and uncertain six months after the Taliban takeover as the multiple political, socioeconomic and humanitarian shocks reverberate across the country.”

He said Afghanistan today faces multiple crises: a growing humanitarian emergency, a massive economic contraction, the crippling of its banking and financial systems, the worst drought in 27 years, and the Taliban’s failure to form an inclusive government and restore the rights of girls to education and women to work.

“An estimated 22.8 million people are projected to be in crisis and ‘emergency’ levels of food insecurity until March 2023,” the U.N. chief said.

Almost 9 million of these will be at ‘emergency’ levels of food insecurity following the U.S. withdrawal in August.

The Taliban quickly seized control of much of the country and the foreign aid that had been flowing into the country was largely halted, putting at risk the lives of millions of Afghans who could starve or freeze to death.

From Kabul, pregnant reporter fights NZ government to come home

Biden calls for release of Navy vet taken hostage in 2020

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Sunday called for the release of U.S. Navy veteran Mark Frerichs, who was taken hostage in Afghanistan nearly two years ago.

Frerichs, a civil engineer and contractor from Lombard, Ill., was kidnapped in January 2020 from the capital of Kabul. He is believed to be in the custody of the Taliban-linked Haqqani network.

“Threatening the safety of Americans or any innocent civilians is always unacceptable, and hostage-taking is an act of particular cruelty and cowardice,” President Joe Biden said in a statement to mark the second anniversary of the kidnaping on Monday.

“The Taliban must immediately release Mark before it can expect any consideration of its aspirations for legitimacy. This is not negotiable.”

The statement came as Afghanistan faces a thorny humanitarian crisis following the U.S. withdrawal in August.

The Taliban quickly seized control of much of the country and the foreign aid that had been flowing into the country was largely halted, putting at risk the lives of millions of Afghans who could starve or freeze to death.

Charlene Cakora, Frerichs’ sister, issued a statement saying that her family is “grateful” for Biden’s words.

“But what we really want is to have Mark home,” she said. “We know the president has options in front of him to make that happen and hope Mark’s safe return will become a priority for him personally.”

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — She reported on Afghanistan’s conflict but fell victim to it.

Charlotte Bellis, 35, is expecting her first child with her partner, freelance photographer Jim Holybrooke, a Belgium native who has lived in Afghanistan for two years. Bellis, who is 25 weeks pregnant with a daughter, told The Associated Press on Sunday that each day is “crucial.

“Threatening the safety of Americans or any innocent civilians is always unacceptable, and hostage-taking is an act of particular cruelty and cowardice,” President Joe Biden said in a statement to mark the second anniversary of the kidnaping on Monday.

“The Taliban must immediately release Mark before it can expect any consideration of its aspirations for legitimacy. This is not negotiable.”

The statement came as Afghanistan faces a thorny humanitarian crisis following the U.S. withdrawal in August.

The Taliban quickly seized control of much of the country and the foreign aid that had been flowing into the country was largely halted, putting at risk the lives of millions of Afghans who could starve or freeze to death.

Charlene Cakora, Frerichs’ sister, issued a statement saying that her family is “grateful” for Biden’s words.

“But what we really want is to have Mark home,” she said. “We know the president has options in front of him to make that happen and hope Mark’s safe return will become a priority for him personally.”
BEIJING — People across Asia prepared Monday for muted Lunar New Year celebrations amid concerns over the coronavirus and virulent omicron variant, even as increasing vaccination rates raised hopes that the Year of the Tiger might bring life back closer to normal.

The Lunar New Year is the most important annual holiday in China and falls on Tuesday, Feb. 1. Each year is named after one of twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac in a repeating cycle. The Year of the Tiger follows the Year of the Ox.

This will be the third new year in a row celebrated in the shadow of the pandemic. It was two days before the holiday in 2020 that China locked down Wuhan — a city of 11 million people — following the detection of the coronavirus there.

Some 85% of Chinese are now fully vaccinated, according to Our World in Data, and more Chinese have been traveling domestically this year, despite government warnings. Many people prepare to celebrate by buying red lanterns and other decorations for their homes, and food to mark the beginning of a new year.

“I wish for the epidemic to pass as early as possible and for the economy to recover as well,” he said. In Hong Kong, which saw a surge in cases in January, people wore surgical masks as they shopped for red and tiger-themed holiday items. The city has closed schools because of the outbreaks and required restaurants to close at 6 p.m., forcing many to dine at home for traditional New Year’s Eve family dinners.

With the Year of the Tiger, many are hoping the traditional powers attributed to the animal will help put the country on a path out of the pandemic, said Chen Lianshan, a Beijing university expert on Chinese folklore.

“The tiger is a protection against evil spirits and it can defeat demons and ghosts of all kinds, and the Chinese believe that the plague is one kind of an evil spirit,” he said.

In the old quarter of Hanoi, people flocked on the weekend to the traditional market to get decorations and flowers for the festival, known as Tet in Vietnam. More than 70% of Vietnamese are fully vaccinated, and 80% have had at least one shot, according to Our World in Data.

In Singapore, Lunar New Year celebrations are more subdued due to coronavirus restrictions that allow residents to receive only five unique visitors a day, and preferably only one visit daily. The rules are likely to get in the way of the tradition of visiting relatives during the holiday.

In Thailand, where 69% of people are fully vaccinated, Bangkok decided this year not to hold traditional Lunar New Year celebrations in Chinatown for the second year in a row, but was going ahead with lighting seasonal lanterns on the district’s main street.
Omicron amps up concerns regarding long COVID, causes symptoms, usually diagnosed months after the initial illness. But some experts think a wave of long COVID patients will push doctors need to be prepared for it.

With $1 billion from Congress, the National Institutes of Health is funding a vast array of research on the condition. Clinics devoted to studying and treating it are popping up around the world, affiliated with places such as Stanford University in California and University College London.

Momentum is building around a few key theories. One is that the infection or remnants of the virus persist past the initial illness, triggering inflammation that leads to long COVID.

Another is that latent viruses in the body, such as the Epstein-Barr virus that causes mononucleosis, are reactivated. A recent study in the journal Cell pointed to Epstein-Barr in the blood as one of four possible risk factors, which also include pre-existing Type 2 diabetes and the levels of coronavirus RNA and certain antibodies in the blood. Those findings must be confirmed with more research.

A third theory is that autoimmune responses develop after acute COVID-19. In a normal immune response, viral infections activate antibodies that fight invading virus proteins. But sometimes in the aftermath, antibodies remain revved up and mistakenly attack normal cells. That phenomenon is thought to play a role in autoimmune diseases such as lupus and multiple sclerosis.

The evidence for these theories and others is tested, there is fresh evidence that vaccination may reduce the chances of developing long COVID.

If omicron sweeps across the globe, scientists are racing to pinpoint the cause of the developing condition and find treatments before a potential explosion in long COVID cases.

Clinics in Moscow are now providing Sputnik M shots to 12- to 17-year-olds.

A teenager receives a dose of Russia's Sputnik M (Gam-COVID-Vac-M) COVID-19 vaccine in Krasnodar, Russia, on Friday.

Associated Press

Far-right groups escalate anti-vaccine protests in eastern Germany

The Washington Post

BAUTZEN, Germany — Among the crowd who gathered to protest the German government’s pandemic policies at a medieval square in the old town of Bautzen on a recent icy Monday evening were a gaggle of first-time demonstrators.

A 16-year-old nursing student said new German mandates on vaccinations for health care workers, due to come into force in the spring, had gotten her off the streets. Others said they just wanted to be able to meet at a cafe to drink coffee with friends — now not possible in Germany for the unvaccinated, whom they recently had the coronavirus.

“We feel left out of society,” said Stephanie Hendrick, 37, who was demonstrating for the first time with her mother, Karin, 62.

Protests in Germany — the majority in the form of Monday evening “walks” — are growing. According to official estimates, there were 1.4 million demonstrations across the country in the third week of January alone, drawing around 400,000 people, said a security official.

But Germany’s leaders have moved toward more communal protests, aiming to strengthen movements locally and overwhelm the police by stretching security forces thin. The eastern German state of Saxony has emerged as a particular epicenter, with as many as 200 demonstrations each week drawing some 50,000 people, according to police estimates.

In Saxony, which has the lowest vaccination rate in Germany, far-right extremists also have tried to gain ground in the growing movement against vaccine mandates and other health measures. Demonstrators come from a mix of backgrounds, said Saxony’s Interior Minister Roland Wöller, but he said extremist groups are attempting to use them to “move in to the middle of society.”

“Week by week, we have more and more participants, and nothing speaks to a situation that this will come to an end,” Wöller said.

“It’s a minority,” he added, but it’s a “loud minority.”

The dangers were thrown into sharp relief in December when a group of more than two dozen demonstrators, some carrying flaming torches, descended on the house of Petra Köpping, the state’s minister for social affairs. Just days later came the disruption of an alleged plot, by people opposed to coronavirus restrictions and vaccinations, to assassinate the state’s prime minister, Michael Kretschmer.

Saxony’s domestic intelligence agency deems a group called Free Saxons, which it classified last year as a right-wing extremist movement, to be the “mobilization machine” of protests against coronavirus measures in the state and beyond, promoting the demonstrations on its Telegram channel.

“It is frightening how many people follow these mobilization calls,” said Dirk-Martin Christian, the head of the state’s domestic intelligence agency. “The almost conspicuous lack of distance shown by non-extremist protestors toward the extremists strengthens the backs of enemies of the constitution and makes their slogans and verbal threats increasingly acceptable in mainstream society.”
Pandemic-weary school systems

Cyberattacks increasingly hobble pandemic-weary school systems

By Janie Har
Associated Press
SAN FRANCISCO — On their first night together, father and daughter watched the news and traded goodnight kisses on the cheek. The next morning, Vicha Ratanapakdee was assaulted while on a walk in San Francisco and died, becoming yet another Asian victim of violence in America.

On Sunday, Monthanuus Ratanapakdee marked the one-year anniversary of her father’s death with a rally in the San Francisco neighborhood where the 84-year-old was killed. She was joined by San Francisco Mayor London Breed, local leaders and several hundred people who came out to say they would stay silent no more.

“It’s been traumatizing to see this again and again happen to people who look like you,” said Natasha Kwan, an attorney and rally organizer. “Today, we’re going to say it’s not okay for our elders and women to be pushed into subway tracks, to be killed, to be beaten. We deserve better.”

Asians in America have long been subject to prejudice and discrimination, but the attacks escalated sharply after the coronavirus first appeared in late 2019 in Wuhan, China. More than 10,000 hate incidents against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders were reported to the Stop AAPI Hate coalition from March 2020 to September 2021. The incidents involved shunning, racist taunting and physical assaults.

In San Francisco and elsewhere, news reports showed video and photos of older Asian people robbed and knocked down on public streets. Preliminary data shows that reported hate crimes against Asian Americans in San Francisco surged from 9 victims in 2020 to 60 in 2021. Crime stats don’t tell the whole story, however, as many victims are reluctant to report and not all charges result in hate crime enhancements.

In San Francisco on Sunday, Ratanapakdee and Breed led a short chant-filled march to the house where her father fell, and where flowers marked the pavement.

He loved the United States, she said, and would want people to “raise their voice.”

“I know people are scared about anti-Asian hate in the community, and we must demand action for justice and all human rights,” she said Sunday. “Please be strong in memory of my father.”

By Cedar Attanasio
Associated Press
ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — For teachers at a middle school in New Mexico’s largest city, the first inkling of a widespread tech problem came during an early morning staff call.

On the video, there were shoutouts for a new custodian for his hard work and the typical announcements from administrators and the union reps. But in the chat, there were hints of a looming crisis. Nobody could open attendance records, and everyone was locked out of class rosters and grades.

Albuquerque administrators later confirmed the outage that blocked access to the district’s student database—which also includes emergency contacts and lists of which adults are authorized to pick up which children—was due to a ransomware attack.

“I didn’t realize how important it was until I couldn’t use it,” said Sarah Hager, a Cleveland Middle School art teacher.

Ramanpatdeek, who was raised in Thailand, feels compelled to speak out so people don’t forget the gentle, bespectacled man who died on his young grandsons and encouraged her to pursue her education in America.

“I really want my father’s death not to be in vain,” said Ratanapakdee, 49, a food safety inspector with the San Francisco Unified School District. “I wouldn’t want anyone to feel this pain.”

Asians in America have long been subjected to prejudice and discrimination, but the attacks escalated sharply after the coronavirus first appeared in late 2019 in Wuhan, China. More than 10,000 hate incidents against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders were reported to the Stop AAPI Hate coalition from March 2020 to September 2021. The incidents involved shunning, racist taunting and physical assaults.

In San Francisco and elsewhere, news reports showed video and photos of older Asian people robbed and knocked down on public streets. Preliminary data shows that reported hate crimes against Asian Americans in San Francisco surged from 9 victims in 2020 to 60 in 2021. Crime stats don’t tell the whole story, however, as many victims are reluctant to report and not all charges result in hate crime enhancements.

There were cheers and emotional moments at a rally organized by Stop Asian Hate in midtown San Francisco to remember Ratanapakdee. Rallies also were held in five other U.S. cities.

Organizers say Sunday’s events in San Francisco, New York, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Chicago and Los Angeles are to honor victims, stand in solidarity and demand more attention to anti-Asian discrimination. But organizers say they also want to spark conversation in a community where both longtime Americans and newer immigrants feel every day, that kind of pervasive disrespect and casual contempt at our parents, our languages, our families,” said Charles Jung, a Los Angeles employment attorney and executive director of the California Asian Pacific American Bar Association.

“What we really want is to encourage Asian Americans to tell their stories,” he said, “and finally break the silence.”

In San Francisco on Sunday, Ratanapakdee and Breed led a short chant-filled march to the house where her father fell, and where flowers marked the pavement.

He loved the United States, she said, and would want people to “raise their voice.”

“I know people are scared about anti-Asian hate in the community, and we must demand action for justice and all human rights,” she said Sunday. “Please be strong in memory of my father.”

By Cedar Attanasio
Associated Press

Art teacher Sarah Hager works at a computer in her classroom at Cleveland Middle School on Jan. 23, in Albuquerque, N.M.

Cyberattacks like the one that canceled classes for two days in Albuquerque’s biggest school district have become a growing threat to U.S. schools, with several high-profile incidents reported since last year. And the coronavirus pandemic has compounded their effects: More money has been demanded, and more schools have had to shut down as they scramble to recover data or even manually wipe all laptops.

“Pretty much any way that you cut it, incidents have both been growing more frequent and more significant,” said Doug Levin, director of the K12 Security Information Exchange, a Virginia-based nonprofit that helps schools defend against cyber security risk.

Precise data is hard to come by since most schools are not required to publicly report cyberattacks. But experts say public school systems — which often have limited budgets for cybersecurity expertise — have become an inviting target for ransomware gangs.

The pandemic also has forced schools to turn increasingly toward virtual learning, making them more dependent on technology and more vulnerable to cyberextortion. School systems that have had instruction disrupted include those in Baltimore County in Maryland, and Miami-Dade County in Florida, along with districts in New Jersey, Wisconsin and elsewhere.

Levin’s group has tracked well over 1,200 cyber security incidents since 2016 at public school districts across the country. They included 209 ransomware attacks, when hackers lock data up and charge to unlock it; 53 “denial of service” attacks, where attackers sabotage or slow a network by flooding server requests; 156 “zoombombing” incidents, where an unauthorized person intrudes on a video call; and more than 110 phishing attacks, where a deceptive message tricks a user to let a hacker into their network.

Albuquerque Superintendent Scott Elder said getting all students and staff online during the pandemic created additional avenues for hackers to access the district’s system. He cited that as a factor in the Jan. 12 ransomware attack that canceled classes for some 75,000 students.

Edupoint, the vendor for Albuquerque’s student information database, called Synergy, declined to comment.

A few days after Christmas, the 1,285-student district of Truth or Consequences, south of Albuquerque, also had its Synergy student information system shut down by a ransomware attack. Officials there compared it to having their house robbed.

“It’s just that feeling of helplessness, of confusion as to why somebody would do something like this because at the end of the day, it’s taking away from our kids. And to me that’s just a disgusting way to try to, to get money,” Superintendent Channell Segura said.

Cyberattacks like the one that canceled classes for two days in Albuquerque’s biggest school district have become a growing threat to U.S. schools, with several high-profile incidents reported since last year. And the coronavirus pandemic has compounded their effects: More money has been demanded, and more schools have had to shut down as they scramble to recover data or even manually wipe all laptops.

“Pretty much any way that you cut it, incidents have both been growing more frequent and more significant,” said Doug Levin, director of the K12 Security Information Exchange, a Virginia-based nonprofit that helps schools defend against cyber security risk.

Precise data is hard to come by since most schools are not required to publicly report cyberattacks. But experts say public school systems — which often have limited budgets for cybersecurity expertise — have become an inviting target for ransomware gangs.

The pandemic also has forced schools to turn increasingly toward virtual learning, making them more dependent on technology and more vulnerable to cyberextortion. School systems that have had instruction disrupted include those in Baltimore County in Maryland, and Miami-Dade County in Florida, along with districts in New Jersey, Wisconsin and elsewhere.

Levin’s group has tracked well over 1,200 cyber security incidents since 2016 at public school districts across the country. They included 209 ransomware attacks, when hackers lock data up and charge to unlock it; 53 “denial of service” attacks, where attackers sabotage or slow a network by flooding server requests; 156 “zoombombing” incidents, where an unauthorized person intrudes on a video call; and more than 110 phishing attacks, where a deceptive message tricks a user to let a hacker into their network.

Albuquerque Superintendent Scott Elder said getting all students and staff online during the pandemic created additional avenues for hackers to access the district’s system. He cited that as a factor in the Jan. 12 ransomware attack that canceled classes for some 75,000 students.

Edupoint, the vendor for Albuquerque’s student information database, called Synergy, declined to comment.

A few days after Christmas, the 1,285-student district of Truth or Consequences, south of Albuquerque, also had its Synergy student information system shut down by a ransomware attack. Officials there compared it to having their house robbed.

“It’s just that feeling of helplessness, of confusion as to why somebody would do something like this because at the end of the day, it’s taking away from our kids. And to me that’s just a disgusting way to try to, to get money,” Superintendent Channell Segura said.
By Kate Brumback

ATLANTA — The prosecutor who’s investigating whether Donald Trump and others broke the law by trying to pressure Georgia officials to overturn Joe Biden’s presidential election victory is asking the FBI for security help after the former president raided against prosecutors investigating him.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis on Sunday wrote a letter to the FBI office in Atlanta asking for a risk assessment of the county courthouse and government center. She also asked the FBI to provide protective resources, “to include intelligence and federal agents.”

Willis last year opened an investigation into any potential attempts to improperly influence the 2020 general election in Georgia by Trump and his associates. A special grand jury is set to be seated May 2 to aid in that investigation, and Willis asked the FBI to take the steps she requested well in advance of that date.

“My staff and I will not be influenced or intimidated by anyone as this investigation moves forward,” Willis wrote.

She added that her office has already taken steps to address security concerns “considering the communications we have received from persons unhappy with our commitment to fulfill our duties.” She said she’s also working with county officials on the need for extra security measures as the investigation progresses.

But she said security concerns were “escalated” over the weekend as Trump lashed out at prosecutors looking into his actions, calling them “vicious, horrible people.”

“If these radical, vicious, racist prosecutors do anything wrong or illegal, I hope we are going to have in this country the biggest protest we have ever had in Washington, D.C., in New York, in Atlanta and elsewhere,” Trump said during the Saturday night rally in Texas.

The rhetoric is especially alarming, Willis wrote, in light of statements Trump made at the same event saying that if he returns to the White House, he could give pardons to people who stormed the U.S. Capitol last year in an effort to block the certification of Biden’s win.

“We must work together to keep the public safe and ensure that we do not have a tragedy in Atlanta similar to what happened at the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021,” Willis wrote in the letter to the FBI.

Willis has declined to speak about the specifics of her investigation, but in a recent interview with The Associated Press, she confirmed that its scope includes — but is not limited to — a Jan. 2, 2021, phone call between Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a November 2020 phone call between U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham and Raffensperger the previous day, and the Georgia Secretary of State’s Office in Atlanta in Jan. 4, 2021, and comments made during December 2020 Georgia legislative committee hearings on the election.

In a statement earlier this month, Trump said his call to Raffensperger was “perfect” and said he did not say anything wrong. Graham has also denied any wrongdoing.

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Evidence about Minneapolis Police Department policies and training is expected to be the focus as testimony resumes for a second week in the federal trial of three former Minneapolis police officers charged with violating George Floyd’s civil rights.

Federal prosecutors said former officers J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao didn’t follow their training when they failed to act to save Floyd’s life on May 25, 2020, as fellow officer Derek Chauvin knelt on the Black man’s neck for 9½ minutes while Floyd was handcuffed, face-down and gasping for air. Kueng knelt on Floyd’s back, Lane held his legs and Thao kept bystanders back.

Instead, Kueng and Blackwell, the police department’s former head of training, is expected to be back on the witness stand Monday.

Blackwell began her testimony last week, saying that officers are instructed that they have a duty to intervene if a fellow officer is using unreasonable force. She said officers are taught to use the least amount of force necessary and to stop once the person is no longer resisting. They also must render any necessary medical aid until medical personnel arrive “to make sure that we do everything we can to save a person’s life.”

She said Kueng, Lane and Thao acted in a way that was “inconsistency” with department policies. But Kueng’s attorney, Thomas Plunkett, suggested the department failed the officers. Plunkett said when officers are trained in use-of-force scenarios, intervention is not taught.

“There’s no intervention scenario, isn’t that correct?” Plunkett said.

“Not one exactly for intervention,” Blackwell said.

Blackwell also agreed that recruits are told that they should never argue with an instructor. Lane and Kueng were rookies, while Chauvin was the most senior of the four officers at the scene that day.

Blackwell spent hours talking about policy and training. She said Thao took repeated refresher courses on use-of-force policies, including as recently as 2018 and 2019, and that Lane and Kueng had repeated lessons on the same subjects while attending the academy in 2019.

Arbery’s mom says hate crimes plea agreement is a betrayal

By Russ Bynum

BRUNSWICK, Ga. — The son and father convicted of murdering Ahmaud Arbery have reached a plea agreement that could avoid their trial on federal hate crime charges.

Arbery’s parents denounced the deal as a betrayal, and called on the judge to reject it.

The proposed plea agreements, according to one federal prosecutor who filed the deal last week, say that Travis McMichael and Greg McMichael will plead guilty to a single count of murder.

The federal hate crime charges came too late for state hate crime prosecutors quick approval of one, but it came too late for state hate crime charges.

During the state trial in Glynn County Superior Court, the defense argued that the white men who had authority to charge Arbery because they reasonably suspected he had been committing crimes in their neighborhood. Travis McMichael testified he opened fire only after Arbery attacked him with a shotgun.

A national outcry erupted when the graphic video leaked online two months later. Georgia was one of just four U.S. states without a hate crimes law at the time. Legislators quickly approved one, but it came too late for state hate crime charges.

The DOJ has also declined to file federal hate crime charges.

The federal hate crime charges came too late for state hate crime charges.

The DOJ has also declined to file federal hate crime charges.


As Floyd officers’ trial resumes, focus is on policies, training
UAE stops missile amid Israeli leader visit

BY JON GAMBERELL AND ISABEL DEBRE
Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The United Arab Emirates intercepted a ballistic missile fired by Yemen’s Houthi rebels early Monday as the Israeli president, Isaac Herzog, was visiting the country, authorities said, the third such attack in as many weeks.

The attack only fuels ongoing tensions in the wider Persian Gulf, which has seen a series of attacks as Iran’s nuclear deal with world powers unravels and Yemen’s yearslong war rages on.

As negotiators in Vienna now attempt to revive the accord and Emirati-backed forces press on the Iran-backed Houthis, the rebels are launching their longest-range attacks yet — a major challenge for the Emirates, which advertises itself to international businesses as a safe corner of an otherwise-dangerous neighborhood.

The UAE’s state-run WAM news agency reported Monday’s interception, saying “the attack did not result in any losses, as the remnants of the ballistic missile fell outside the populated areas.”

It wasn’t immediately clear where the remnants fell. The country’s civilian air traffic control agency said there was no effect on air travel in the UAE, home to the long-haul carriers Emirates and Etihad.

Houthi military spokesman Ye-hia Sarei gave a press conference later Monday, claiming that the rebels had targeted “sensitive sites” in Abu Dhabi and Dubai with both Zulfiqar ballistic missiles and drones, without offering evidence for his assertions.

He repeated the group’s warnings that the headquarters of international companies will be targeted in further attacks.

“The Emirates will remain an adversary as long as the actions of the Israeli enemy continue in Abu Dhabi and Dubai,” Sarei shouted from the podium.

Herzog, Israel’s largely ceremonial president, was in the UAE on Monday for the first official visit by an Israeli head of state to the Gulf Arab nation. The day before, he held extensive talks with Abu Dhabi’s powerful Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in the capital, where he stressed Israel’s support for the UAE’s “security requirements” and condemned the recent attacks.

Herzog on Monday visited Dubai’s Expo 2020 world’s fair, which the Houthis earlier had previously threatened to target. From the site’s centerpiece dome, he delivered a carefully worded speech extolling Israel’s presence at the fair and growing economic cooperation with the UAE.

He arrived at the Israeli flag-raising ceremony surrounded by some dozen close protection officers in dark suits.

“Israel and Emiratis are standing together, learning each other’s cultures and languages,” Herzog said, rattling off figures about the countries’ cooperation: $1 billion in trade, the establishment of a $100 million research and development fund, 250,000 Israelis who so far have visited the UAE’s coastal cities.

U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price condemned the Houthis’ attack. “While Israel’s president is visiting the UAE to build bridges and promote stability across the region, the Houthis continue to launch attacks that threaten civilians,” Price wrote on Twitter.

British PM apologizes after release of papers on ‘partygate’ scandal

BY JILL LAWLESS
Associated Press

LONDON — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson apologized Monday for lockdown-flouting parties in Downing Street — but insisted that he and his government can be trusted.

Johnson told lawmakers in the House of Commons that he would make changes to the way the government is run in the wake of the “partygate” scandal.

He said: “I get it and I will fix it.”

He spoke after senior civil servant Sue Gray found that gatherings in 2020 and 2021 have been with-mailed on 12 other events she investigated. Her findings on 16 events she investigated said. Her findings on 12 other events in 2020 and 2021 have been withheld at the request of the police, who have launched a criminal investigation into the most serious alleged breaches of coronavirus rules. The cuts have led opponents to accuse Johnson of a whitewash.

Allegations that the prime minister and his staff flouted restrictions imposed on the country to curb the spread of the coronavirus have caused public anger, led some Conservative lawmakers to call for Johnson’s resignation and triggered intense infighting inside the governing party.

Johnson has denied personal wrongdoing and said he has “absolutely no intention” of resigning.

Gray did not criticize the prime minister directly, but said “there is significant learning to be drawn from these events which must be addressed immediately across government.”

The circumscribed and partial report may give Johnson at least a temporary reprieve from calls for his ouster.

It’s unclear whether Gray’s full findings will be published once the police investigation is finished. Johnson’s spokesman, Max Blain, said the prime minister’s office would discuss with police and Gray’s team “what is suitable” to publish.

Storm causes ships to collide off Dutch coast

BY MIKE CORDER
Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Rescue helicopters evacuated all 18 crew members from a ship that was left drifting rudderless in a wind turbine park off the Dutch North Sea coast Monday after it collided with another ship and began taking on water during a powerful storm, emergency services said.

The collision happened as Storm Corrie lashed parts of northern Europe. It came after Storm Malik killed at least four people over the weekend, destroying houses, unleashing flooding and leaving thousands of households without electricity.

A freighter called the Julietta D collided with another boat about 20 miles west of the port of Ijmuiden, said Edward Zwitzer, a spokesman for the Royal Dutch Lifeboat Company. The other boat, the Pechora Star, also was damaged, but was able to continue its voyage.

The Dutch coast guard said all crew members were rescued.

The Julietta D suffered damage “that poses direct danger for the 18 crew on board,” spokesman Edward Zwitzer told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

Both ships had been anchored off the coast, but the Julietta D’s anchor “did not hold,” the coast guard said.

Thousands of homes in the Nordic region remained without pow-er Monday and there were reports of flooding in North Sea and Baltic Sea harbors in the region.

The western Netherlands were hard hit Monday morning with powerful gusts uprooting trees and causing traffic problems.

Storm Corrie also hit Scotland late Sunday, hot on the heels of Storm Malik, which left thousands in Scotland and northern England without power as it blew down trees, damaged power lines and ripped roofs off homes.

A 9-year-old boy in the English county of Staffordshire and a 60-year-old woman in the Scottish city of Aberdeen died after trees were torn down on Saturday. Also over the weekend, Danish media reported that a 78-year-old woman died from severe injuries after falling in strong winds. In neighboring Germany, local media reported that a man was killed on Saturday after being hit by a billboard that was loosened by the storm.
Escaped lioness kills keeper, prowls Iran zoo for hours

Associated Press
TEHRAN, Iran — A lioness killed her keeper in Iran on Sunday as he was feeding her lunch, then escaped with her male partner and prowled around a zoo before being captured, media reported.

The official IRNA news agency said the 40-year-old victim, identified only by his family name, Esfandani, was putting meat through a feeding window when the two lions managed to open their cage.

Police and guards captured the couple a few hours later at the zoo in the central city of Arak, some 144 miles southwest of the capital, Tehran.

Authorities are investigating the case. Such incidents are rare in Iran, and often blamed on poor safety measures and inadequate emergency service.

Top Hong Kong official resigns over party fiasco

Associated Press
HONG KONG — A top Hong Kong official resigned Monday for attending a birthday party with about 200 guests in early January as the city was battling a coronavirus surge.

At least one guest later tested positive. Secretary of Home Affairs Caspar Tsui was among several officials and lawmakers ordered to quarantine after the party, which was held for Witman Hung, a delegate to China’s legislature.

Tsui said in a statement issued Monday afternoon that he had not “set the best example during the recent outbreak.” His resignation came as Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam reproached officials who attended the party, saying they should “know better.”

At the time of the gathering, health officials had urged the public to avoid large gatherings.

“I made the wrong decision to attend a banquet on January 3 and behaved in an inappropriate manner when all efforts should have been devoted to controlling the spread of the virus,” Tsui said.

“I will take responsibility for my actions, and I have therefore decided to resign from the position of Secretary for Home Affairs.”

Tsui’s announcement came hours ahead of a news conference by Lam, who announced the results of a disciplinary probe into officials who had attended the party.

“His conduct has brought the Hong Kong government into disrepute and he and his actions have caused a negative perception by the general public in relation to the conduct of principal officials,” Lam said.

She said that she had accepted Tsui’s resignation as “the right thing to do” as Tsui had taken responsibility for his actions.

Caspar Tsui announced Monday he would step down from his post as Hong Kong’s secretary for home affairs.
The official on-demand news program of Stars and Stripes. Get the day's top stories impacting the U.S. military in 7 minutes.

New episodes every Monday through Friday. Only on Stripes.com
Police: Woman stole lottery tickets after clerk shot

GA

WARNER ROBINS — Sheriff’s deputies in middle Georgia have arrested a woman they said stole lottery tickets after others shot and mortally wounded a clerk. Houston County Sheriff’s Capt. Jon Holland said Friday that deputies arrested 43-year-old LaKeisha Deshawn McGhee, of Bainbridge, on Monday after finding evidence that McGhee stole lottery tickets from the same office at the Warner Robins business where clerk Sabrina Renee Dollar lay dying. Holland said deputies also believe McGhee briefly disconnected power from the building’s security system before emergency workers arrived.

McGhee is charged with theft by taking and tampering with evidence and remains jailed in Houston County without bail set.

Holland did not accuse McGhee of being involved in the shooting of Dollar, saying McGhee called 911 after three unknown men entered the business, which offers video poker and sells lottery tickets, just after midnight on Jan. 18.

Mars Wrigley set to close Chicago chocolate factory

CHICAGO — Mars Wrigley is closing a chocolate factory on Chicago’s West Side and plans to donate the building and its Spanish-style architecture to the community.

The company said the plant built in 1928 will be phased out during the next two years and the 290 workers there will be encouraged to explore the opportunities to apply for open roles across the area, specifically in the Chicago area.

The Chicago Tribune reported that the factory was built on 16 acres in a residential area bordering Oak Park District 94, which was part of a golf club. The company statement said it plans to donate the property “for the use of the community.”

Mars acquired Chicago-based Wrigley in 2008 and moved its global headquarters to New Jersey in 2017. Mars Wrigley still operates a Burr Ridge ice cream factory, a Yorkville candy factory in Yorkville and a Mattown pet nutrition manufacturing site in Illinois.

Undercover operation yields 30-plus arrests

More than 30 people were arrested on over 200 cumulative counts related to an investigation into illegal drug, alcohol and firearm sales in a southeastern North Carolina county, the state Division of Alcohol Law Enforcement announced Saturday.

The monthlong undercover operation in Columbus County reached a climax Friday when local, state and federal law enforcement officials attempted to serve arrest warrants and a residential search warrant, according to an ALN news release. Agents seized drugs such as fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine, as well as guns and alcoholic beverages. Nearly a dozen of those who were the subject of arrest warrants are still at large, the release said.

The operation focused on businesses licensed through Alcoholic Beverage Control rules and on residences. Alleged illegal activity at businesses with ABC licenses could subject them to fines or the suspension or revocation of permits.

Carbon monoxide at hotel puts 9 people in hospital

MARYSVILLE — Seven people were hospitalized in critical condition Saturday after suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning at a Hampton Inn in Ohio, local officials said.

A total of nine people were taken to local hospitals, according to The Columbus Dispatch. Marysville Fire Chief Jay Riley told the newspaper that the source of the carbon monoxide was unclear, but everyone who was hospitalized had been in the hotel’s pool area.

Riley said the victims included both children and adults. He did not provide exact ages.

Authorities said they received a 911 call Saturday evening about a 2-year-old girl who had either fallen into the pool or was found in the pool unconscious at the Hampton Inn in Marysville. More than a dozen people called police, according to The Associated Press.

The number of dogs authorities discovered at a rural property near Traverse City, Mich., after arriving to enforce blight violations. “It was sad,” said Jamie Croel, county animal control supervisor. “It was incredibly sad to see that someone would keep animals in that condition and that care. I know that they’ve had loose dogs out there before but who would anticipate 165 canines?”

The dogs were found Friday in kennels in vehicles, campers and trailers. Animal control officers from area counties assisted, along with Cherryland Humane Center, said Beth Friend, township supervisor.

“The sheriff’s office is investigating,” Friend said. "When my dad passed, my mom would follow soon.”

Don’t give a hoot

A barred owl with a broken beak takes flight from a branch along Line Road in Greene, Maine, on Friday. According to Charity Bates, who lives across the road, the owl has been in the area for several weeks and is abnormally active during the day. “We are not sure if it’s a he or she, but we’ve named it Esther,” said Bates. “She’s quite a local celebrity as people stop every day to take photos and the school bus even slows down so the kids can take a look at her when they drive past.”

THE CENSUS

The number of dogs authorities discovered at a rural property near Traverse City, Mich., after arriving to enforce blight violations. “It was sad,” said Jamie Croel, county animal control supervisor. “It was incredibly sad to see that someone would keep animals in that condition and that care. I know that they’ve had loose dogs out there before but who would anticipate 165 canines?”

The dogs were found Friday in kennels in vehicles, campers and trailers. Animal control officers from area counties assisted, along with Cherryland Humane Center, said Beth Friend, township supervisor.

“The sheriff’s office is investigating,” Friend said.

Judge won’t rein in federal wild horse roundup effort

A federal judge decided Friday not to rein in the roundup and capture of wild horses in eastern Nevada, rejecting advocates’ claims the federal government was “needlessly and recklessly” killing free-roaming mustangs in violation of U.S. law.

With a little more than four weeks to go for federal land managers to complete what they call a drought-prompted “gathering” near the Utah state line, U.S. District Judge Miranda Du said she wasn’t convinced groups trying to stop the process would win their underlying lawsuit.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management insists it must round up the mustangs before the end of February — one of several operations scheduled on an expedited basis due to historically dry conditions on the Western range.

Horse advocates led by Laura Leigh, Wild Horse Education, Animal Wellness Action and the nonprofit CANA Foundation have said the agency is squeezing the horses into a month under an illegal environmental assessment of a series of gathers over 10 years.
As a growing number of musicians yanked their work from the streaming service Spotify over misinformation about coronavirus vaccines, podcaster Joe Rogan posted a video this weekend admitting he could do more to better inform his millions of listeners, particularly when it comes to COVID-19.

Rogan, in a nearly 10-minute video Sunday night on Instagram, said he would make two changes to his show, “The Joe Rogan Experience,” to accomplish that. The first: have mainstream experts give their viewpoints after guests espousing more fringe opinions.

The second: “do my best to make sure that I’ve researched these topics — the controversial ones in particular — and have all the pertinent facts at hand before I discuss them.”

“I don’t always get it right,” he said.

Rogan’s comments came amid a firestorm after hundreds of medical professionals called out Spotify last month for letting the podcaster spread “false and societally harmful assertions” about vaccines in the virus and vaccines, the Washington Post reported. Then, starting with folk rocker Neil Young a week ago, a growing number of artists and podcasters told the streaming service they would take their work off Spotify if the company did not stop Rogan from spreading COVID-19 misinformation.

“I am doing this because Spotify is spreading fake information about vaccines — potentially causing death to those who believe the disinformation being spread by them,” Young wrote in a letter explaining his decision. “I want you to let Spotify know immediately TODAY that I want all my music off their platform. They can have Rogan or Young. Not both.”

Spotify chose Rogan, which gave the company exclusive rights to his podcast in 2020 for a reported $100 million. On Jan. 26, Spotify started taking down Young’s music, including the hits “Heart of Gold,” “Old Man” and “Rockin’ in the Free World.”

Ultimatums from other artists followed. Singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell announced Jan. 28 she was pulling her music from Spotify to “stand in solidarity” with Young over what she called “lies that are costing people their lives.”

Bruce Springsteen’s E Street Band, writing in a statement on Young’s website that he was also cutting ties with the streaming service. Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, who have deals to host podcasts for Spotify, on Sunday released a statement expressing “concerns” about COVID-19 misinformation on the platform.

On Sunday, Spotify broke its silence over the growing rebellion. The company announced it was publishing its internal rules that govern what’s allowed on the platform and tweaking its policies about coronavirus content by adding a disclaimer to any podcast dealing with COVID-19.

“We know we have a critical role to play in supporting creator expression while balancing it with the safety of our users,” CEO Daniel Ek wrote in a news release. “In that role, it is important to me that we don’t take on the position of being content censor while also making sure that there are rules in place and consequences for those who violate them.”

Hours after Spotify’s announcement, Rogan said in his Instagram video that he supports the addition of disclaimers to episodes of his show that mention COVID-19.

Rogan hinted at “other things going on behind the scenes” that are driving the current controversy without specifying what those were. He apologized to Young, Mitchell and others who are upset. “I’m very sorry that they feel that way. I most certainly don’t want that,” Rogan said, adding that he’s “a huge Neil Young fan.”

Joe Rogan, shown at an Ultimate Fighting Championship event on Dec. 10 in Las Vegas, says he supports the addition of disclaimers to episodes of his Spotify podcast that mention COVID-19.

On his podcast, Rogan has suggested that young, healthy people shouldn’t get vaccinated, contrary to recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. When he caught the coronavirus in September, Rogan told listeners he’d treated the infection with the antiparasitic drug vermoxin, which the Food and Drug Administration has strongly recommended against in fighting COVID-19.

In his video, Rogan thanked Spotify for sticking with him and apologized to the company for “taking so much heat” over his podcast. Rogan said he’s not trying to spread misinformation but is controversial. He started his podcast to have “interesting conversations,” Rogan said, never dreaming it would become as successful as it has since launching in 2009. It has become one of the most-listened-to programs as podcasting has exploded in popularity.

Yet Rogan described how he’s struggled to manage his show’s ascent. “It’s ... like some out-of-control juggernaut that I barely have control of.”

‘Nanny,’ ‘Exiles,’ ‘Navalny’ among top Sundance winners

From wire reports

A drama about an undocumented nanny in New York City, a documentary about three exiled students from Tiananmen Square and another doc about Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny won top prizes at the Sundance Film Festival. Winners were announced Jan. 28 in a virtual ceremony.

“Nanny,” from writer-director Niyatu Jusu and starring Anna Diop and Michelle Monaghan, won the Grand Jury Prize in the drama category for its depiction of a Senegalese immigrant working for a wealthy family in New York City. The top jury prize for documentary went to Ben Klein and Violet Columbus for “The Exiles,” in which a documentary filmmaker attempts to finish a film she started in 1989 after the Tiananmen Square massacre.

“Navalny,” a late, secret addition to the competition, won the documentary audience award and the festival favorite award. Daniel Roher’s thrilling film tracks the Russian opposition leader as he recovers in Berlin after being poisoned.

The audience award for U.S. dramatic features went to Cooper Raiff’s “Cha Cha Real Smooth,” starring Dakota Johnson as the young mother of a teenage daughter who, on the bar mitzvah circuit, forms a unique relationship with a recent college graduate.

Grand jury prize winners in the world cinema category include “Utopia,” about an elderly couple in Bolivia, and “All That Breathes,” a documentary about brothers in Delhi fighting to protect the bird known as the Black Kite. World cinema audience awards went to “Girl Picture,” a Finnish coming-of-age movie about three girls, and “The Territory,” a documentary about the seizure of an area of the Amazon rainforest and those fighting for the land.

“Today’s awards represent the determination of visionary individuals, whose dynamic work will continue to change the culture and create discourse throughout the year,” said Joana Vicente, Sundance Institute CEO. “This year’s entire program has proven that no matter the context, independent storytelling remains a pivotal tool in expanding critical dialogues, and these stories will and must be shared.”

Several of last year’s Sundance award winners remain in the Oscars conversation, including “CODA,” “Flee,” “Hive” and “Summer of Soul.”

Shawn Mendes has announced that he’ll be postponing the European leg of his “Wonder” world tour until next spring and summer “due to the pandemic,” according to a Jan. 28 tweet. Mendes confirmed that the tour will continue as planned with the previously scheduled North American dates, kicking off with Portland, Oregon, on June 27.

“Spider-Man: No Way Home” grossed $11 million over the weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday, bringing its domestic total to $735.9 million. “No Way Home” is approaching the third-highest grossing film in North America, “Avatar” ($760 million). It also added $21.1 million overseas to pass $1 billion internationally.

Howard Hesseman, who played the radio disc jockey Dr. Johnny Fever on the sitcom “WKRP in Cincinnati” and the actor-turned-history teacher Charlie Moore on “Head of the Class,” died Jan. 29 in Los Angeles due to complications from colon surgery, his manager Robbie Kasz said. He was 81.

Hesseman, who had himself been a radio DJ in the ’60s, earned two Emmy nominations for playing Johnny Fever on CBS’ “WKRP in Cincinnati,” which ran for four seasons from 1978-1982.
Opinion

Coerced vaccination threatens everyone’s rights

By Katherine Drabik

A recent Rasmussen Reports poll revealed a significant percentage of Americans say they would not get a COVID-19 vaccine. Defending the right of people to choose their own health care decisions over whom they believe should receive vaccines is a cornerstone of our country’s values.

The Department of Defense enforces its own mandates, not federal or state rules. Although the department says it will consider requests for medical or religious exceptions, the final authority on exceptions lies with military commanders. Still, military personnel must decide whether to put their personal health and safety at risk, or their personal freedoms. Those who make a conscientious decision to decline the vaccine are constrained by the rules, which are enforced by the military and not by public health officials.

The military, with the unique challenges it faces, may have a moral obligation to protect public health. However, the military is not a public health authority with the authority to mandate vaccinations for civilians. The military should enforce its own requirements without infringing on civilian rights.

Therefore, the military’s enforcement of COVID mandates is a clear violation of our Constitution’s separation of powers and federalism. The military should respect the rights of the States to control the health, safety, and welfare of their citizens.

The military should also avoid using coercive measures to force people to accept the vaccine. Instead, the military should focus on education and outreach to inform people about the benefits and risks of vaccines, and encourage them to make an informed decision.

The military should also consider respecting exemptions for religious, medical, and ethical reasons. These people should be treated with respect and allowed to make their own choices without fear of coercion.

Katherine Drabik is a professor of public health law, health law and medical ethics at the University of South Florida.

Return-to-office decrees should wait a few more weeks

By Sarah Green Carmichael

Last summer’s back-to-the-office push left many workers with a big bump. Then omicron threw up a concrete wall. With daily COVID-19 infection rates again falling, some companies are reimposing RTO deadlines. As employers of Citigroup, Credit Suisse, BNP Paribas, Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase are among those who’ve been asked to return in early February, at least in New York City.

There’s a case to be made that these sweeping decrees are premature. As the world shifts, if it can, from pandemic to endemic COVID-19 — from emergency footing to mere contiguity — many offices are becoming less virus-ridden. As vaccines roll out, the need for facilities to manage an outbreak may fade. Just as with SARS, Ebola, or tuberculosis, it applies only to people with a known exposure, such as all people in one school or one ship, not an entire state or class of people.

Quarantine lasts only for the period of disease transmission, which for COVID is about 14 days. Quarantine is not designed as a punitive measure, but rather a method for monitoring and facilitating agreed-upon medical care. This policy is not designed to put a penalty designed to coerce people to submit to medical intervention.

Broadly closing businesses, schools and places of worship, and restricting travel did not prevent the spread of SARS; Ebola; or tuberculosis. It applies only to those who’ve been asked to return in early February, if it can, from pandemic to endemic COVID-19 — from emergency footing to mere contiguity.

Workers won’t avoid the office forever. People are still getting used to the luxury of remote work. For many, the idea of working five to eight hours a day, standing, without breaks, is exhausting.

Over the next month, cases will drop further and, with them, certain rules and restrictions. A positive COVID test may no longer mean foregoing child care or a medical appointment. While hospitalizations stay elevated, going to the office — or to a restaurant or gym — is still a potential way to go.

Employers who insist on vetting individual employees’ requests for forbearance will find themselves weighing one staffer’s knee surgery against another’s immunocompromised mother. Offering employees some autonomy over when they come into the office, as Colum­bia University professor Adam Galinsky has observed, would be “a surprisingly straightforward way to calm (at least partially) the frazled nerves wrought by COVID and its mandates.”

For at least a few more weeks, employers should give workers more choice about whether to return to their desks.
Eugene Sheffer Crossword

ACROSS
1 Spill the beans 5 Blend 9 '60s war zone 12 Alpha follower 13 Toledo’s lake 14 Mineral suffix 15 Frigid spells 17 Classic Pontiac 18 Toe malady 19 “Hogwash!” 21 Wishes (for) 24 Milk, in Montmartre 25 Love god 26 Tropical flower 30 Unprocessed 31 Uproar 32 Ginger — 33 Showy flowers 35 Detail, briefly 36 Poolroom prop 37 Basilica areas 38 African language group 40 Architect Saarinen 42 Eggs 43 Golf hazards 48 Agent 49 Actress Lena 50 “— chic!” 51 Hosp. sections 52 Zlich 53 Epidermis

DOWN
1 Telly network 2 Author Tolstoy 3 Pac. counterpart 4 Police identifiers 5 Diner handout 6 Part of Q.E.D. 7 Back talk 8 Woe 9 Bedtime drinks 10 “— boy!” 11 Cat call 16 “Mayday!” 20 Bro’s kin 21 Olympian queen 22 Algerian port 23 Afternoon energetizers 24 Wall St. deals 26 Big slice 27 Anger 28 Peter Fonda role 29 Brief moments 31 Deal primarily with 34 Wrestling surface 35 The “S” of ESPN 37 Museum display 38 Drill 39 Say it’s so 40 Wife of Geraint 41 Author Ferber 44 In the style of 45 Biblical boat 46 Architect I. M. 47 Nine-digit ID

CRYPTOQUIP

MNBM EXBOK IXVATK EKBVM XKBWWH WGOKV MG LG XAVPH VMITMV XKYPWKVWVWH AM'V VIYN B EKBX-LKOAW.

Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: POLICE WORK CONSISTING OF MAKING SURE GRASSY YARDS ARE KEPT WELL MANICURED: LAWN ENFORCEMENT.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: E equals B
Ivey's late 3 lifts No. 6 Purdue over No. 16 Ohio State

Ronan O'Gara — Associated Press

Ivey had 21 points, including a game-winning three-pointer with 6.6 seconds left, on Sunday in West Lafayette, Ind.

Associated Press
NHL/RUGBY

Avalanche center Nazem Kadri, center, maneuvers between Buffalo Sabres right wing Alex Tuch, left, and defenseman Casey Fitzgerald in the first period on Sunday in Buffalo. Colorado won 4-1.

By Ian Harrison

Associated Press

HAMILTON, Ontario — Canada established itself as the dominant nation in soccer's North and Central American and Caribbean region, taking a big step toward reaching the World Cup for the first time since 1986 with a 2-0 victory on Sunday over the United States.

Cyle Larin scored in the seventh minute and Sam Adekugbe added a goal in the fifth minute of second-half stoppage time. Canada beat the U.S. for just the second time in 37 years, remaining unbeaten in qualifying through 10 of 14 games.

Included are a win and a draw against both the U.S. and Mexico, traditionally the region's dominant nations.

"I genuinely believe that these men have an opportunity to really leave a proper football legacy on this country moving forward," Canada coach John Herdman said.

The U.S. has one win and two draws in five road qualifiers but remains on track to return to the World Cup for the first time since 2014 with wins in its remaining two home games, the first a chily encounter with Honduras on Wednesday night in what is forecast to be a single-digit or sub-zero temperature at St. Paul, Minn.

"Our focus right now is finishing off the window with a win," U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter said. "If we can do that, we'll be in good position."

Canada defeated the U.S. in qualifying for the first time since 1980 and leads North and Central America and the Caribbean with 22 points. The U.S. remained second with 18 points, ahead of Mexico on goal difference, followed by Panama (17), Costa Rica (13), and El Salvador (nine).

The top three nations qualify for this year’s tournament in Qatar, and fourth place advances to a playoff against the Oceania champion, likely New Zealand.

On sunny but breezy 22-degree day, central defenders Miles Robinson and Chris Richards were the only Americans starters in short sleeves and just two of Canada's players wore long sleeves. Jonathan David and Steven Vitória. Canada keeper Milan Borjan wore long pants, while American goalkeeper Matt Turner wore shorts.

Berhalter inserted Gyasi Zardes at forward in place of Jesús Ferreir-
a.

Canada went ahead after Turn-
er's goal kick failed to reach mid-
field. Kamal Miller headed the ball back toward goal, and Jonathan Osorio touched ahead to Larin.

Larin exchanged passes with David, then beat Turner to the far post with a right-footed shot from 14 yards for his Canadian record 23rd international goal, one more than Dwayne De Rosario.

"The wind killed the ball flight... On a smaller field, smaller mistakes make bigger differences," Turner said through the U.S. Soc-
cer Federation.

"It's frustrating because it was so early in the game. It set the tone and they knew from there they could just pack it in and absorb pressure."

Christian Pulisic, in his second straight quiet game, had a free kick saved about 25 yards in the 36th minute but sent the ball over the crossbar.

Weston McKennie nearly scored in the 43rd minute with a 6-yard header from Pulisic's corner kick, but Borjan leaped and with his outstretched right hand, slapped the ball off the underside of the crossbar. Paul Arriola's 87th-minute bicycle kick was just wide.

Canada's Kamal Miller, bottom left, tackles the United States' Sergino Dest as Canada's Tajon Buchanan looks on during the first half of a World Cup soccer qualifier in Hamilton, Ontario, on Sunday.

NHL/RUGBY

Avalanche center Nazem Kadri, center, maneuvers between Buffalo Sabres right wing Alex Tuch, left, and defenseman Casey Fitzgerald in the first period on Sunday in Buffalo. Colorado won 4-1.

Avalanche center Nazem Kadri, center, maneuvers between Buffalo Sabres right wing Alex Tuch, left, and defenseman Casey Fitzgerald in the first period on Sunday in Buffalo. Colorado won 4-1.
Suns nip Spurs for 10th straight win

Booker’s 28 lead way as Phoenix rallies from 12 points down in fourth

By David Brandt
Associated Press
PHOENIX — Chris Paul has been to the All-Star Game 11 times in his NBA career and — barring a mammoth snub — is headed there for No. 12 next month.

Now coach Monty Williams will get to join him for the first time.

Devin Booker scored 28 points, Mikal Bridges added a season-high 26 and the Phoenix Suns overcame a 12-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat the San Antonio Spurs 115-110 on Sunday night.

The NBA-leading Suns became the first team in the league with 40 wins — against only nine losses. The victory ensured that Phoenix will have the best record in the Western Conference this season.

“Good win,” head coach Monty Williams said. “We’re not in the position we want to be right now but that’s OK,” said Russell Westbrook, who had 20 points and 12 assists. “We know what we need to do as a team. Just find a way to win, and the best way to do it is to outscore your opponent.”

The game stayed tight from that point forward until Booker’s two big shots pushed Phoenix ahead for good.

Booker didn’t have a particular great shooting game until the second half, when he helped hold Anthony Davis to five of his 27 points.

“A lot of it was defensive because we know he makes our team a lot worse when he’s scoring,” Phoenix Suns center Bismack Biyombo (18) blocks the shot of San Antonio Spurs guard Lonnie Walker IV during the Suns’ 115-110 win Sunday in Phoenix.

Mikal Bridges added a season-high 26 points, 12 rebounds and five of his 27 points.

“Last year we played a lot of close games,” Bridges said. “We know that’s how we win. We handle those situations better when we’re down, when we’ve come back. We know we can do it.”

Booker hit back-to-back three-pointers late in the fourth to turn a two-point deficit into a 112-108 lead with 1:18 left. He finished 12-for-24 from the field, going 4-for-9 from three-point range.

“Just know he’s not afraid to take the shot,” Williams said.

The reigning NBA MVP just missed his 13th triple-double of the season.

“On the positive side, we didn’t lose,” Davis said. “We’re not in the position we want to be right now but that’s OK.”

“We’re not in the position we want to be right now but that’s OK,” said Russell Westbrook, who had 20 points and 12 assists. “We know what we need to do as a team. Just find a way to win, and the best way to do it is to outscore your opponent.”

The game stayed tight from that point forward until Booker’s two big shots pushed Phoenix ahead for good.

Booker didn’t have a particular great shooting game until the second half, when he helped hold Anthony Davis to five of his 27 points.

“Last year we played a lot of close games,” Bridges said. “We know that’s how we win. We handle those situations better when we’re down, when we’ve come back. We know we can do it.”

Booker hit back-to-back three-pointers late in the fourth to turn a two-point deficit into a 112-108 lead with 1:18 left. He finished 12-for-24 from the field, going 4-for-9 from three-point range.

“The Suns took a 91-79 lead into the final quarter, but the Suns erased that advantage in less than 3 1/2 minutes. They used a 14-point run — highlighted by Cam Johnson’s powerful one-handed jam — to take a 96-93 lead.

“When our mindset is right we get stops on the defensive end ... I think we have a good chance of winning any night,” Young said.

Onyeka Okongwu scored 12 of his 16 points in 1/2 minutes. They used a 14-point run — highlighted by Cam Johnson’s powerful one-handed jam — to take a 96-93 lead.

“We’re not in the position we want to be right now but that’s OK,” said Russell Westbrook, who had 20 points and 12 assists. “We know what we need to do as a team. Just find a way to win, and the best way to do it is to outscore your opponent.”

The game stayed tight from that point forward until Booker’s two big shots pushed Phoenix ahead for good.

Booker didn’t have a particular great shooting game until the second half, when he helped hold Anthony Davis to five of his 27 points.

“Last year we played a lot of close games,” Bridges said. “We know that’s how we win. We handle those situations better when we’re down, when we’ve come back. We know we can do it.”

Booker hit back-to-back three-pointers late in the fourth to turn a two-point deficit into a 112-108 lead with 1:18 left. He finished 12-for-24 from the field, going 4-for-9 from three-point range.

“The Suns took a 91-79 lead into the final quarter, but the Suns erased that advantage in less than 3 1/2 minutes. They used a 14-point run — highlighted by Cam Johnson’s powerful one-handed jam — to take a 96-93 lead.

“When our mindset is right we get stops on the defensive end ... I think we have a good chance of winning any night,” Young said.

Onyeka Okongwu scored 12 of his 16 points in 1/2 minutes. They used a 14-point run — highlighted by Cam Johnson’s powerful one-handed jam — to take a 96-93 lead.

“We’re not in the position we want to be right now but that’s OK,” said Russell Westbrook, who had 20 points and 12 assists. “We know what we need to do as a team. Just find a way to win, and the best way to do it is to outscore your opponent.”

The game stayed tight from that point forward until Booker’s two big shots pushed Phoenix ahead for good.

Booker didn’t have a particular great shooting game until the second half, when he helped hold Anthony Davis to five of his 27 points.

“Last year we played a lot of close games,” Bridges said. “We know that’s how we win. We handle those situations better when we’re down, when we’ve come back. We know we can do it.”

Booker hit back-to-back three-pointers late in the fourth to turn a two-point deficit into a 112-108 lead with 1:18 left. He finished 12-for-24 from the field, going 4-for-9 from three-point range.

“The Suns took a 91-79 lead into the final quarter, but the Suns erased that advantage in less than 3 1/2 minutes. They used a 14-point run — highlighted by Cam Johnson’s powerful one-handed jam — to take a 96-93 lead.

“When our mindset is right we get stops on the defensive end ... I think we have a good chance of winning any night,” Young said.

Onyeka Okongwu scored 12 of his 16 points in 1/2 minutes. They used a 14-point run — highlighted by Cam Johnson’s powerful one-handed jam — to take a 96-93 lead.
American Keely Cashman competes during a World Cup giant slalom in Courchevel, France, Dec. 21, 2021. Winter Olympians in outdoor sports say the weather can be a key factor in success or failure.

**Gold means less pressure for US curler Shuster**

By Jimmy Golen

John Shuster won’t be catching anyone by surprise at these Olympics.

The five-time Olympian is back to defend his curling gold medal in Beijing, and the target on his back will be almost as big as the one on the ice. Four years after surviving five straight elimination matches to win it all in Pyeongchang, the Americans are among the favorites to medal again.

“I definitely feel less pressure,” Shuster said after his victory in the U.S. curling trials. “The success last time for me, winning an Olympic gold, is the top of the mountain. And no matter how you finish in the other Olympics, it doesn’t matter. “I think I feel less pressure,” he said, “but I think I have supreme confidence.”

Shuster won bronze in 2006 as the lead for Pete Fenson’s team — the first-ever U.S. Olympic curling medal. Then he left to form his own rink, earning a trip to Vancouver but performing so badly that he benched himself.

After finishing 10th in 2010 — dead last — Shuster won the U.S. trials again four years later but managed just a ninth place in Sochi. When USA Curling put together a high performance camp of the country’s top 10 players, Shuster didn’t make the cut.

So the most decorated Olympian in American curling history scrapped together a foursome — calling themselves “Team Rejects” — and not only beat the federation-backed squads in the U.S. trials but won gold in Korea.

With 2018 teammates John Landsteiner and Matt Hamilton, and Olympic rookie Chris Plys, Shuster is hoping to avoid the slow starts of previous Winter Games. Longtime curling powers Britain and Canada will be there if they stumble.

**Baby bump**

Tabitha Peterson is heading to her second straight Olympics — her first as the skip of the U.S. women’s team.

A Twin Cities native, Peterson threw third for Nina Roth’s team in Pyeongchang. When Roth took maternity leave the following season, Peterson moved up to skip, the team captain who not only throws the last and most important stones but is also the final word on strategy throughout the match.

“It definitely is different, just in terms of my role on the team,” Peterson said. “I’ve had to kind of rethink the way I think the game, my role, my approach, my preparation. (And) what I do off the ice — there’s more strategic learning.”

Roth is back at vice-skip, throwing third, with 2018 fellow Olympian Becca Hamilton second. Olympic rookie Tara Peterson, Tabitha’s sister, is the lead, throwing first.

“It’s been amazing, this group of girls,” Tabitha Peterson said. “We’re so happy to be going together, no matter what our roles are.”

The U.S. women have never won an Olympic curling medal. They went 4-5 in 2018 and failed to qualify for the playoffs.

**Double duty**

A handful of curlers will be among the busiest athletes at the Olympics.

Plys will compete in the mixed doubles event with partner Vicky Persinger before turning his attention to the men’s tournament — meaning he could be on the ice for 18 days in a row, sometimes two sessions per day.

Others doing double duty are Britain’s Jennifer Dodds and Bruce Mouat, Italy’s Amos Mosaner and Sweden’s Oskar Eriksson.

**Many athletes know they’re at the mercy of the weather**

**By Howard Fendrich and Pat Graham**

Associated Press

 Mikaela Shiffrin describes herself as “super controlling over everything that’s happening in my life,” so the two-time Olympic gold medalist is not all that fond of one particular can’t-do-athing-about-it aspect of her chosen sport, Alpine skiing.

“The weather,” she said, “can literally change everything.”

The 26-year-old from Colorado is scheduled to open her Beijing Olympics on Feb. 7 as the defending champion in the giant slalom. A key word there is “scheduled,” because, as Shiffrin experienced at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games, nothing is certain when it comes to the vagaries of various elements such as temperature, wind, sunlight or precipitation.

In outdoor events, all of these factors can, and often do, alter the competition.

“On a more macro level, it takes a lot of mental effort to be ready to go out and compete in an Olympic event and when… it doesn’t happen…” said Mike Day, Shiffrin’s main coach with the U.S. ski team.

Olympians say the weather might change their preparation and mindset before a contest. Once the context begins, it might harm — or, it’s also true, help — their result.

All of which turns this into just another source of stress at a one-day, every-four-years spectacle already filled with them.

“That’s like, probably, 90% of what we’re thinking about,” said Keely Cashman, a 22-year-old Alpine skier from California heading to her first Olympics.

Snowfall is not in the forecast for the Yangming mountain area during these Olympics. Strong wind is expected.

Something else to contend with: the way light, and therefore visibility, switches as the sun moves over the course of a day, creating shadows that appear and recede. In an event like the downhill, where speeds can top 80 mph (130 kph), it’s vital to be able to pick up on nuances along the course.

“You need to see everything on the slope,” Austrian Vincent Kruechner said. “When we have bad light, you have to react: ‘What’s coming (toward) my skis?… When we see the slope, we can push.’

It generally is considered better to go earlier to avoid ruts and bumps that develop. But if a headwind gives way to a tailwind, say, or a cloudy day turns clear and the wind gives way to a tailwind, say, or a cloudy day turns clear and the skis, you have to (accept) the situation and just focus on yourself, focus on the skiing that you can do, focus on the technique and on the energy,” said Alexis Pinturault, a three-time Olympic medalist for France. “Of course it makes a difference — and we know it.”

What sort of difference can the weather make on the clock in Alpine skiing?

As much as a second, Pinturault estimates.

That’s significant. The margin between gold and silver was no more than 13 hundredths of a second in half of the 10 women’s or men’s races at the 2018 Games.

Four years ago, Shiffrin wanted to enter five individual events in South Korea. Fierce winds led to postponements, prompting her to drop two races.

“You only have so many weather days built into the schedule,” said Shiffrin, who once again plans to participate in slalom, giant slalom, downhill, super-G and Alpine combined.

“At the end of the day, you can make every move right. You can be rested and ready to go strong. And it still can be totally messed up for, essentially, reasons that are completely out of your control. I don’t really love that idea.”

John Shuster slides the stone while competing at the U.S. Olympic Curling team trials in Omaha, Neb., on Nov. 17, 2021.

Curling team trials in Omaha, Neb., on Nov. 17, 2021.
Offensive mistakes end Chiefs’ repeat bid

BY DAVE SKRETTA  
Associated Press
KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Kansas City Chiefs followed perhaps the greatest 13 seconds in franchise history in the divisional round against the Bills with 13 seconds late in the first half of the AFC title game against Cincinnati that they’d rather just forget.

“Not trying to dwell on the next 30 minutes and overtime,” said Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, who threw for 275 yards and three touchdowns but also had two second-half interceptions, including one in overtime that gave Cincinnati the chance to drive for the win.

“You know, deflated would be a good way to describe it,” Chiefs safety Tyrann Mathieu said. “But I’m proud of the way we continued to fight throughout the season. I’m proud of the way we stuck together, proud of our coaches, proud of the way we continue to take bullets for us. It’s a lot of good to think about. I’m grateful for the opportunity. But I think any time you come up short, you know you could be better, it’s obviously deflating.”

While the game now sudden death, the Bengals breezed downfield and into the range of McPherson who turned around and said, “I didn’t think even before his winning kick had passed through the uprights inside stunned Arrowhead Stadium.

“With this group of guys we have,” Mahomes said, “we expect to win that game and anything less is not success.”

Mahomes was 18 of 21 for 220 yards and three scores in the first half, finding Tyreek Hill and Travis Kelce for big gains almost at will. His quarterback rating was nearly perfect, as was the Kansas City offense, and coach Andy Reid’s team built a 21-10 lead and was 30 minutes away from a third straight trip to the Super Bowl.

The Chiefs punted on each of their first two second-half possessions. The third ended when Mahomes had a pass batted in the air and caught by 311-pound defensive tackle B.J. Hill, setting up Joe Burrow’s touchdown pass to Ja’Marr Chase and the ensuing 2-point conversion that tied the game 21-all heading to the fourth quarter.

In overtime, Mahomes threw an incomplete pass, then nearly had a pass picked by Bengals cornerback Eli Apple, before launching a throw toward Hill down the sideline. The ball was batted in the air by Jessie Bates III, who was perfectly positioned to make the play, and into the waiting hands of Bengals safety Vonn Bell.

Burrow and Cincinnati didn’t give Kansas City another chance.

The Bengals safety Tyrann Mathieu said. “But I’m proud of the way we continued to fight throughout the season. I’m proud of the way we stuck together, proud of our coaches, proud of the way we continue to take bullets for us. It’s a lot of good to think about. I’m grateful for the opportunity. But I think any time you come up short, you know you could be better, it’s obviously deflating.”

The Bengals (13-7) will play the Los Angeles Rams (15-5) in the Super Bowl at the Rams’ home stadium on Feb. 13. Cincinnati lost to the 49ers in both of its previous trips to the Super Bowl.

Mahomes and the Chiefs (14-6) will be left to lament blowing a chance at a third straight Super Bowl appearance.

“When you’re up 21-3 at any point in the game, you can’t lose it,” Mahomes said. “I put that on myself.”

Kansas City had a chance at a winning touchdown in the closing seconds of regulation, but sacks by Sam Hubbard on consecutive plays forced the Chiefs to settle for the tying field goal.

“We’re going to the Super Bowl,” Hubbard said. “It sounds crazy to say that.”

Cincinnati has won six of its last seven games against Kansas City, including two this season. But it didn’t look good for the Bengals early in this one.

The Chiefs got a touchdowns on their first three possessions, with Mahomes finding Mecole Hardman for a 3-yard score that made it 21-3 — and had this one looking very much like a rout. Mahomes joined Tom Brady (2014), Joe Flacco (2012) and Aaron Rodgers (2010) as the only players with three games with three or more TD passes in a single postseason.

But Burrow kept Cincinnati in it.

He tossed a short pass to Samaje Perine, who avoided a tackle attempt by Charvarius Ward and raced into the end zone for a 41-yard touchdown with 1:05 left in the opening half.

Kansas City appeared headed for its fourth straight touchdown drive to open the game, especially after Byron Pringle’s 10-yard catch put the team at the 15 with 13 seconds left — setting off chants from the fired-up Arrowhead Stadium crowd of “13 seconds!” who were still reveling in the Chiefs’ stunning comeback last week against Buffalo.

A pass interference call on Eli Apple in the backfield put the ball on the 1, but Kansas City couldn’t get into the end zone on two trips, with Mahomes’ pass to Tyreek Hill losing a yard and ending the Chiefs’ latest ended up costing the Chiefs.

“I was hoping we could get the ball in the end zone,” coach Andy Reid said. “I probably gave them the wrong play, first of all. I could have given them something better than that. I’ll take responsibility for that one.”

The Chiefs got a touchdowns on their first three possessions, with Mahomes finding Mecole Hardman for a 3-yard score that made it 21-3 — and had this one looking very much like a rout. Mahomes joined Tom Brady (2014), Joe Flacco (2012) and Aaron Rodgers (2010) as the only players with three games with three or more TD passes in a

Cincinnati Bengals safety Vonn Bell, left, intercepts a pass intended for Chiefs wide receiver Tyreek Hill, center, as Bengals free safety Jessie Bates defends during overtime in the AFC championship game, Sunday, in Kansas City, Mo. The Bengals won 27-24.

Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes dives after running the ball ahead of Cincinnati Bengals defensive end Trey Hendrickson, right.
Los Angeles outscores San Francisco 13-0 in fourth quarter for a 20-17 win

By Greg Beacham
Associated Press
INGLEWOOD, Calif. — After Matthew Stafford’s wife leaped into his arms, he took a moment to soak it all in — this victory, this confetti-strewn field, this remarkable year of his life.

One year to the day after the quarterback agreed to join the Rams for $165 million over four years under coach Sean McVay and moved into the home stadium next month with a thrilling 20-17 victory in the NFC championship game, they are in the Super Bowl.

“Can’t believe it,” Stafford said. “In practice all week I caught every single ball that was thrown to me and I didn’t step up,” Tartt said.

The Rams will welcome the Cincinnati Bengals in two weeks for Super Bowl 56 in owner Stan Kroenke’s multi-billion-dollar SoFi Stadium. Let’s get it done.”

“I’m at a loss for words. I’m just having a blast playing in this stadium,” said the Rams’ defensive end, who is in his second Super Bowl trip in three years.

The moment of truth showed up and I didn’t step up,” Tartt said. “In practice all week I caught everything that came my way. You practice for a moment like that and the only moment when you get it, it doesn’t happen.”

The Rams won their second conference title in the Super Bowl era.

The Rams won their second conference title in the Super Bowl era.

“The moment of truth showed up and I didn’t step up,” Tartt said. “In practice all week I caught everything that came my way. You practice for a moment like that and the only moment when you get it, it doesn’t happen.”

The Rams’ defensive end, who is in his second Super Bowl trip in three years, said he wished he had back on that pass in front of San Francisco 49ers’ JaMycal Hasty, but with three gritty scoring drives followed by a cathartic defensive stand, the Rams secured the right to punch his ticket to his first Super Bowl with another spectacular game, while Odell Beckham Jr.

While the민한 didn’t even consider going on fourth down. The play he said he wished he had back on that drive was second-and-1 at the Los Angeles 44 when Elijah Mitchell was stopped by Rams safety Eric Weddle for a 1-yard loss.

“On those three plays we had our opportunities and we didn’t come through. After that, it changed into a game we ended up not liking too much,” Shanahan said.

As bad as Shanahan’s decision was, Tartt’s dropped interception on the ensuing play was worse. From the Los Angeles 15, Matthew Stafford’s long throw came direct-ly to the seventh-year safety who had no one around him on a 50-yard pass. Tartt dropped it.

“I was thinking when he threw it ‘Oh yeah, he (screwed) up’ and we were going to win this game. And it hit my hands. I thought I had it again, but I dropped it,” Tartt said.

On the next play, Stafford found Odell Beckham Jr. for a 29-yard completion up the left sideline, along with 15 additional yards when Jimmie Ward was called for unnecessary roughness. Matt Gay hit a 40-yard field goal seven plays later to tie it at 17.

After Gay’s second field goal gave the Rams the lead, the Niners had a final chance to win or tie. Ga-roppolo was pressured by Aaron Donald on third-and-13 from the Niners 22 before being picked off by Travin Howard.

Los Angeles Rams’ Travin Howard (32) intercepts a pass in front of San Francisco 49ers’ JaMycal Hasty to seal the Rams’ victory with 1:09 to play.

Marcio Jose Sanchez/AP

Los Angeles Rams’ Cooper Kupp runs past the San Francisco 49ers’ Jaquiski Tartt, left, and Kwam Williams. Kupp had two touchdown catches in a 20-17 NFC Championship win Sunday in Inglewood, Calif.

Marcio Jose Sanchez/AP

San Francisco 49ers’ Deebo Samuel walks off the field after the NFC Championship Sunday in Inglewood, Calif.

Marcio Jose Sanchez/AP
Who Dey!?

Bengals top Chiefs in OT, clinch spot in Super Bowl

BY DENNIS WASZAK JR.
Associated Press

These aren’t the same ol’ Bungles. Not even close.

Joe Burrow and these young, hungry Cincinnati Bengals are Super Bowl-bound as unexpected and tenacious AFC champions.

Evan McPherson kicked a 31-yard field goal with 9:22 left in overtime after Burrow kept his cool leading a furious second-half comeback. They got the Bengals to the NFL’s big game for the first time in 33 years with a 27-24 victory over the Kansas City Chiefs for the AFC championship Sunday.

“We’re going to the Super Bowl. It sounds crazy to say that.”

Sam Hubbard
Cincinnati Bengals defensive end

“We believed. So we’re not surprised.”
And who could blame them?
The team erased an 18-point deficit on the road — tying an AFC title game record for largest comeback — to take a late 24-21 lead.

SEE CLINCH ON PAGE 22

Cincinnati Bengals kicker Evan McPherson is held aloft by teammates after he kicked a 31-yard field goal during overtime in the AFC championship game against the Chiefs on Sunday in Kansas City, Mo. The Bengals won 27-24.

Eric Gay/AP

INSIDE
Rams rally to stun 49ers, advance to Super Bowl

Page 23

US remains on track for Cup despite loss

Suns still sizzling
Booker scores 28, Phoenix wins 10th straight

NBA, Page 20

SPORTS

PAGE 24