

Groton Daily Independent

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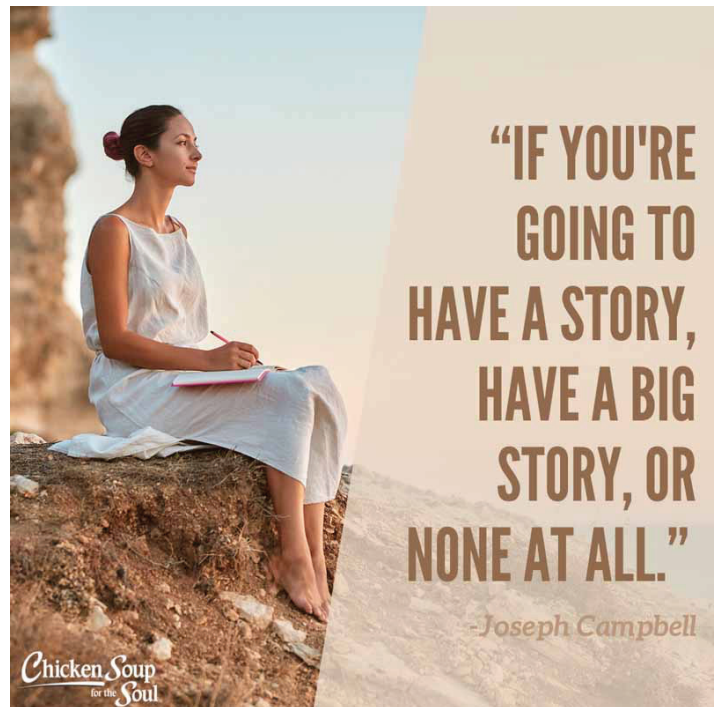
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Monday, March 14

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, March 15

Pep Rally for BB Team, 2:55 p.m., in the Arena

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Thursday, March 17

State A Tournament in Rapid City: Groton Area vs. Flandreau at 1:45 p.m. MT (2:45 CT).

Spring Break - No School

Friday, March 18

State A Tournament in Rapid City

Spring Break - No School

Saturday, March 19

State A Tournament in Rapid City

Mitchell Show Choir Competition

Sunday, March 20

5 p.m.: Welcome Home Celebration in the Arena

Vender Fair

A vendor fair has been organized in Groton for March 26, 2022, at the Groton Community Center, from 10 am. – 3 p.m. A variety of crafters and vendors will be available. Proceeds from an auction table will be donated to Make-a-Wish Foundation.

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

OPEN: **Recycling Trailer in Groton**
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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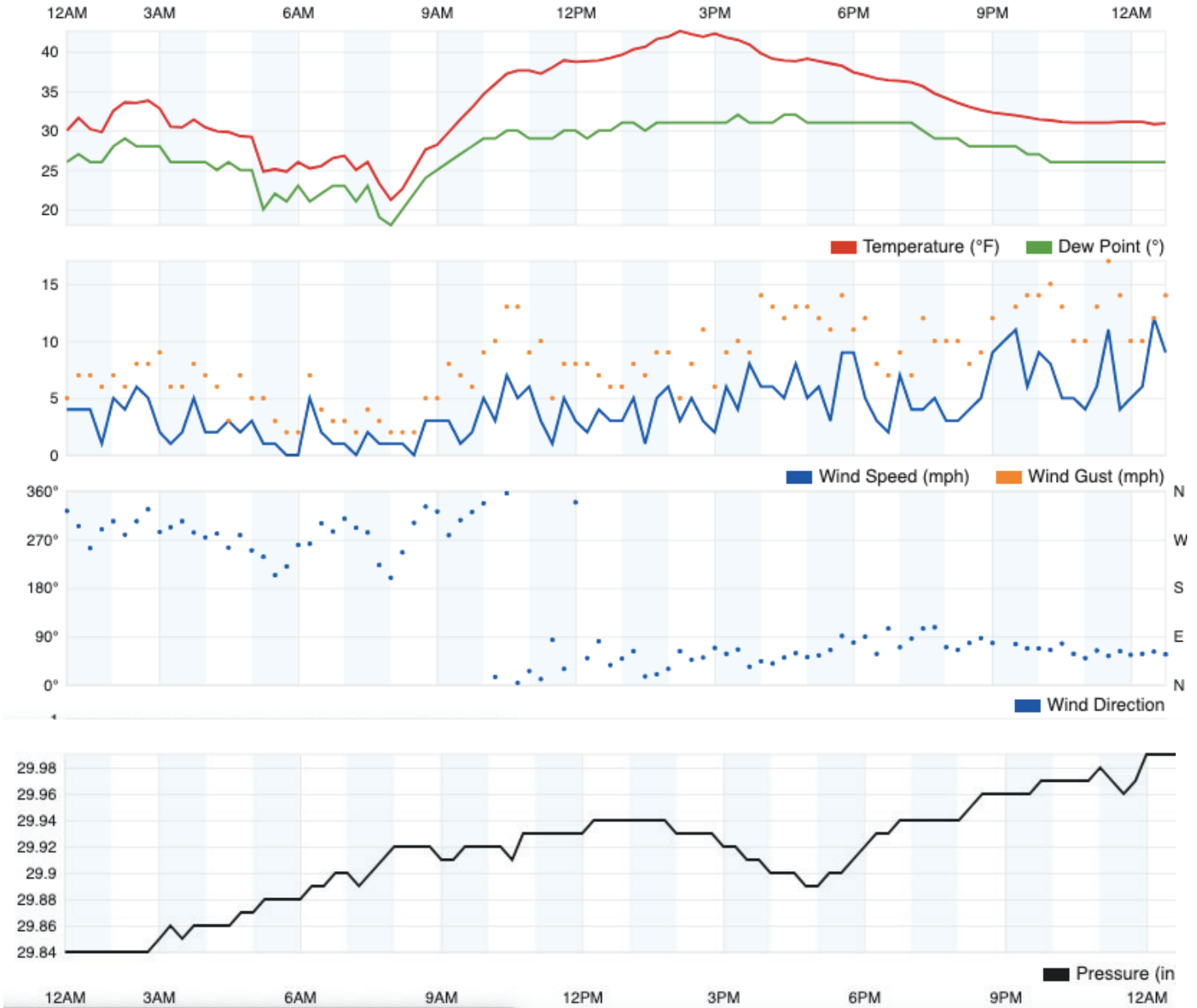
Major damage was done to three vehicles on Third Street early Sunday morning. Residents reported they were awakened by a loud noise around 3 a.m. They discovered three vehicles, a mailbox and a street sign were damaged.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs










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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
				
Chance Wintry Mix then Mostly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy then Mostly Sunny and Breezy
High: 38 °F	Low: 29 °F	High: 57 °F	Low: 33 °F	High: 57 °F

Today	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
						
		Breezy	Breezy	Breezy	Breezy	
40° 23° 65% 70%	61° 28° 0% 0%	59° 33° 2% 5%	48° 31° 3% 2%	53° 25° 2% 2%	58° 31° 3% 3%	62° 30° 1% 3%
NE 8 - 12 G25	S 10 - 15 G25	S 15 - 20 G25	NW 15 - 20 G30	N 20 - 25 G25	S 10 - 15 G20	NW 10 - 15 G25

7 Day Forecast - Aberdeen, SD

Today	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
						
			Gusty	Breezy		
50° 26° 20% 20%	66° 29° 0% 0%	62° 36° 1% 4%	54° 31° 2% 1%	59° 26° 1% 2%	63° 31° 4% 3%	69° 34° 0% 4%
N 10 - 15 G25	SE 6 - 10	S 8 - 12 G20	NW 15 - 20 G30	NW 15 - 20 G25	SW 9 - 13	SE 9 - 13

7 Day Forecast - Pierre, SD



National Weather Service Aberdeen, South Dakota

Updated: 3/14/2022 4:00 AM Central

With wintry precipitation departing the region this morning, look for some partial sunshine over the region by late this afternoon. The rest of the forecast is supposed to be dry and increasingly warm, even with a cold frontal passage expected by mid week. Temperatures will remain above normal.

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Today in Weather History

March 13, 1971: During an evening thunderstorm in Moody County, South Dakota, lightning destroyed a transformer plant in Coleman. Damages were estimated at \$250,000.

March 13, 1997: A winter storm began with widespread freezing drizzle, creating icy roadways and walkways, before changing over to snow. Before the snow was over, 2 to 8 inches had fallen on an already expansive and deep snowpack. The winds accelerated to 20 to 40 mph, resulting in widespread blowing and drifting snow. Visibilities were reduced to near zero at times, making travel treacherous. Many roads again became blocked by snowdrifts, and several were closed. Many area schools were still closed, adding to an already substantial total of days missed for the winter season. Some people were stranded and had to wait out the storm. Some airport flights were canceled. The icy roads and low visibilities resulted in several vehicle mishaps as well. There was a rollover accident west of Mobridge and an overturned van 7 miles west of Webster. On Interstate-29, there were several rollover accidents, including vehicles sliding off of the road. Some snowfall amounts included, 4 inches at Timber Lake, Mobridge, Eureka, Leola, Britton, and Clark, 5 inches at Leola, 6 inches at Waubay and Summit, and 8 inches at Pollock.

1907 - A storm produced a record 5.22 inches of rain in 24 hours at Cincinnati, OH. (12th-13th) (The Weather Channel)

1951 - The state of Iowa experienced a record snowstorm. The storm buried Iowa City under 27 inches of snow. (David Ludlum)

1953: An F4 tornado cut an 18-mile path through Haskell and Knox counties in Texas. 17 people were killed, and an eight-block area of Knox City was leveled.

1977 - Baltimore, MD, received an inch of rain in eight minutes. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada Range of California, and the Lake Tahoe area of Nevada. Mount Rose NV received 18 inches of new snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Unseasonably cold weather prevailed from the Plateau Region to the Appalachians. Chadron NE, recently buried 33 inches of snow, was the cold spot in the nation with a low of 19 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Residents of the southern U.S. viewed a once in a life-time display of the Northern Lights. Unseasonably warm weather continued in the southwestern U.S. The record high of 88 degrees at Tucson AZ was their seventh in a row. In southwest Texas, the temperature at Sanderson soared from 46 degrees at 8 AM to 90 degrees at 11 AM. (The National Weather Summary)

1990: Thunderstorms produced severe weather from northwest Texas to Wisconsin, Iowa, and Nebraska during the day and into the night. Severe thunderstorms spawned 59 tornadoes, including twenty-six strong or violent tornadoes, and there were about two hundred reports of large hail or damaging winds. There were forty-eight tornadoes in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, and some of the tornadoes in those three states were the strongest of record for so early in the season, and for so far northwest in the United States. The most powerful tornado of the day was one that tore through the central Kansas community of Hesston. The F5 tornado killed two persons, injured sixty others, and caused 22 million dollars damage along its 67-mile path. The tornado had a lifespan of two hours. Another tornado tracked 124 miles across southeastern Nebraska, injuring eight persons and causing more than five million dollars damage during its three-hour lifespan.

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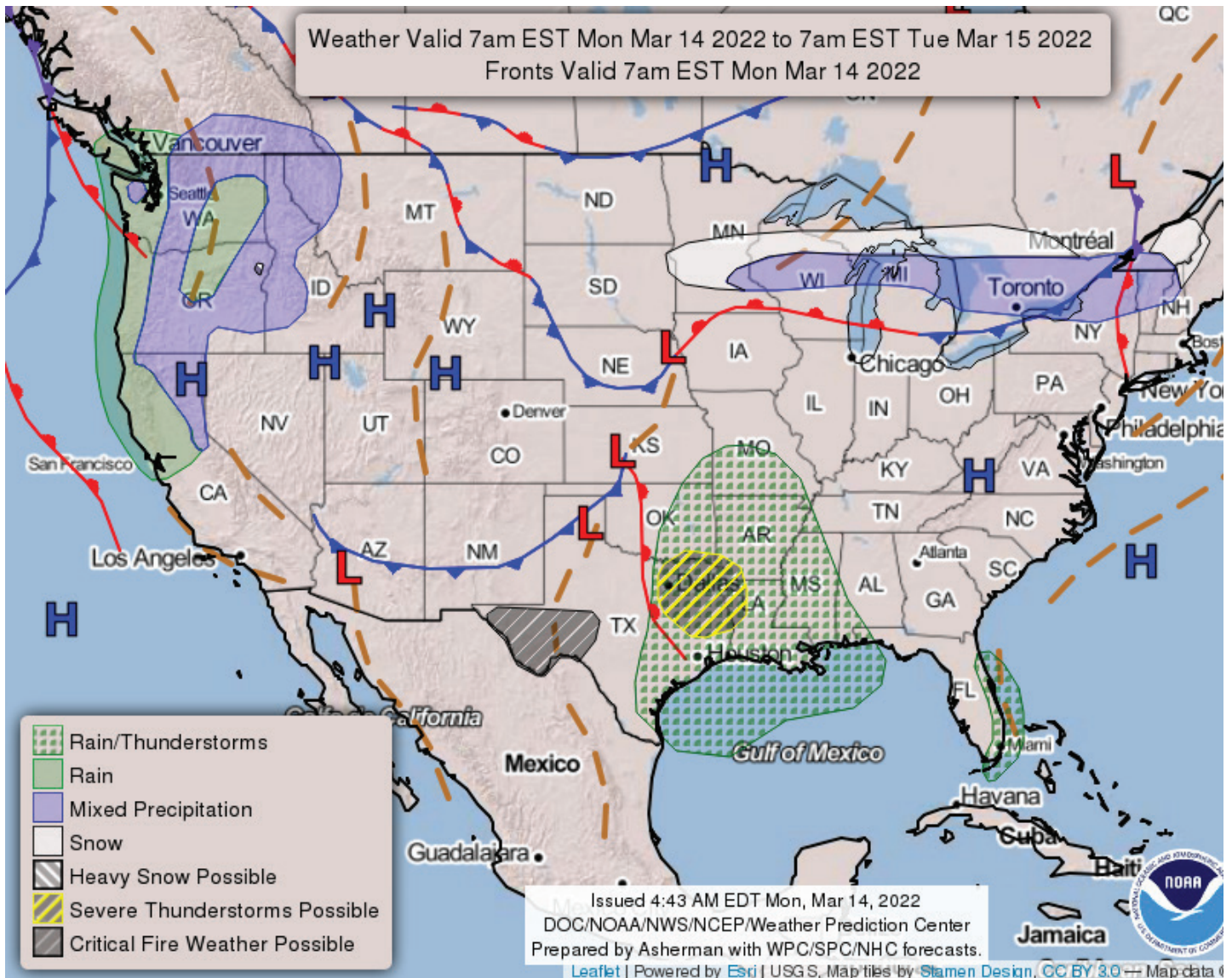
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 43 °F at 2:12 PM
Low Temp: 21 °F at 8:01 AM
Wind: 18 mph at 11:31 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 53 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 71 in 1981
Record Low: -31 in 1897
Average High: 41°F
Average Low: 19°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.35
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.52
Precip Year to Date: 0.97
Sunset Tonight: 7:38:22 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:42:45 AM



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SILENT OR SILENCED?

"It is time for You to act, Lord. Your law is being broken." That sounds like something we would hear while walking out of church or part of a conversation we were having with a friend about the "signs of the times."

"It is time for You to act, Lord." Not me, Lord! YOU!

This is amusing. Here we find this Psalmist who has been writing to us about the Lord's faithfulness, the Lord's grace, the Lord's mercy, the Lord's goodness, the Lord's protection, the Lord's righteousness, the Lord's justice. And the list goes on and on.

Suddenly, he becomes aware of things that are going on around him that are wrong. Suddenly, he realizes that things are not in agreement with God's laws, and he is bothered. Suddenly, he wants God to do something to make things right.

Why God and not him? Does he want to sit in a big, comfortable, easy chair and cheer the Lord on? "Go get 'em, God! Make them pay for the wrongs they've done! I'm all for You straightening this mess out. In fact, why did You let things get like this in the first place? I'd like to help You, Lord, but don't count on me. It's Your world, Lord. Clean it up. I'm over here thanking You for all my many blessings! Go, God. Go!"

Unfortunately, the words of the Psalmist sound like words that come from the mouths of many Christians. We expect God to do the work that He has entrusted us to do. "Go," Jesus said to His disciples, "and make disciples." We are to do what He told us to do! We are the ones to act.

Prayer: Forgive us, Lord, for refusing to do our part in doing what You have called us to do. Lead us to action now! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: It is time for You to act, Lord. Your law is being broken. Psalm 119:126

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2022 Community Events

- 01/30/2022 84th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
01/30/2022 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am – 1pm, Groton Community Center, 109 N 3rd St, Groton,
04/07/2022 Groton CDE
04/09/2022 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/09/2022 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/23/2022 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/24/2022 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/07/2022 Lions Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
St John's Lutheran Church VBS 9-11am
05/30/2022 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
Transit Fundraiser at the Community Center 4-7pm (Thursday Mid-June)
06/17/2022 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Start
06/18/2022 Groton Triathlon
Ladies Invitational at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration 10am Start
07/04/2022 Firecracker Couples Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start
(4th of July)
07/10/2022 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar 11am-1pm at the Groton Legion
Baseball Tourney
07/21/2022 Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
How can we... "Love Groton"? United Methodist Church 9:30am
Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20
Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm
08/05/2022 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
08/12/2022 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
United Methodist Church VBS 5-8pm
Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot
09/10/2022 Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3:30-5pm
09/11/2022 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm
Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/14/2022 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am (2nd Friday in October)
10/01/2022 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
10/31/2022 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2022 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/12/2022 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course
Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm
01/29/2023 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

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News from the Associated Press

Personal experiences guide men in medical cannabis business

By SIANDHARA BONNET Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Nevada Ellison wants to fulfill a promise to his mother who died from cancer in 2015.

Ellison worked in the cannabis industry in Colorado from 2008 to 2012 before returning to Rapid City. When his mother, Susie, was in what turned out to be the last three months of her life, she called and asked her son for cannabis edibles.

"She was always anti-cannabis," Ellison said. "She never broke the law her entire life and she called me. She was taking hundreds of milligrams of oxycodone every day. She's like, 'I can't do this anymore.' ... It broke her heart to break the law."

A week later, she called again and asked for more edibles, noting that she now was better able to take care of herself. Ellison took care of his mother for 16 months in Lemmon until she died. Before she did, Susie made her son promise he'd get back in the marijuana business, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"She made me promise if I had a chance to get back into it, especially in the medical side of it, that I would, and that's the reason that I'm getting back into it," he said.

Ellison is now chief operating officer of Black Hills Cannabis Care, which is Rapid City's first cultivating company approved for a conditional use permit by the city's Planning Commission.

Ellison runs the business with Jake Johnson, who is the company's CEO.

Johnson got into the business because he has an uncle who was recently diagnosed with colon cancer and relies on medical marijuana to help manage his pain.

"He knows that his time is running short," Johnson said.

He said he has friends in the industry and has heard of the medicinal benefits of cannabis and he's a believer in those benefits.

"Knowing that and (Ellison's) story, we thought it was the right thing to do, to try and bring the highest quality of medicine to the people in the city," he said.

The cultivation facility will have four to eight employees, but it won't be open to the public. It will be located at 1820 Rand Road on the northwest side of Rapid City off of Deadwood Avenue. Ellison said the business will open as soon as the state grants a license.

"We're trying to get a cultivation going as quickly as possible to help meet the demand of our regional medical cannabis patients and to give them safe access to their medicine," he said. "Until we get some cultivations going, the dispensaries will have nothing to sell so we are working hard to get that done."

Cultivation facilities for medical cannabis in Rapid City require a conditional use permit to operate. In order to qualify, applicants must show their facility is at least 1,000 feet from any school and 500 feet from any church, childcare center, public park or residential area. Facilities must be located in heavy industrial or light industrial zoning districts. The city did not set a limit to the number of cultivation facilities within city limits.

Johnson said he and Ellison have been preparing for the business since November 2020 when voters overwhelmingly approved medical marijuana and have since spent nearly every day on the phone getting everything ready to apply to the state and municipalities for their licenses.

Ellison said each city and each county has different rules. Rapid City's application included submitting plans for management, operations, security, engineering and seed to sale tracking.

Black Hills Cannabis Care also expects to have dispensaries in Fort Pierre and Belle Fourche, although the Belle Fourche location is listed under Redwater Cannabis Care. The company also has a provisional license for a dispensary in Rapid City. Ellison said they also plan to have a manufacturing facility, as well.

"The patients need to have a large enough variety of products to choose from," Ellison said. "We're teaming up with some other locals or South Dakota folks and trying to create a network of people who

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are going to be in manufacturing so we can get these products moved across the state and have a high quality and a large variety.”

Johnson said those in the industry have a common goal of moving the industry forward, so even though they have competitors, they share information. They’ll be working with Black Hills Cultivation and Supplies to get their equipment.

How Noem’s struggles at home may enhance White House chances

By STEPHEN GROVES and THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem’s election-year fight with fellow Republicans in the Legislature has spurred criticism she is neglecting her job to angle for the White House, but the resistance could actually be helping her national brand rather than tarnishing it.

The first-term governor in recent weeks jetted to Florida to speak at a major gathering of conservative activists, announced on Fox News the release of an autobiography and blasted President Joe Biden’s energy policy as Russia invaded Ukraine.

Back home, the politician trying to corner the label as the nation’s most conservative governor has faced considerable defiance from members of her own party. They have derailed key parts of her agenda on issues including abortion, school prayer, COVID-19 vaccine exemptions and how racism is taught in schools.

Republican pollster Brent Buchanan says that in Donald Trump’s GOP, such intraparty squabbles aren’t a liability and may even be an asset for a politician trying to curry favor with the former president and the voters who support him.

“It helps her if they don’t pass (her agenda) more so than if they did,” Buchanan said. “Trump has primed Republican leaders to think about the unfaithful within their own ranks.”

In a recent Statehouse setback for Noem, Republicans rejected her plan to keep K-12 classrooms free of “critical race theory” — an academic concept that has morphed into a political rallying cry on the right. They later passed a bill applying to universities, but not before reining in its scope.

Noem began this session by laying out an agenda that amounted to a wish list for social conservatives. But she has had to navigate a Legislature divided between conservatives pushing the state to take hard-line stands on social issues and a GOP establishment more likely to focus on bread and butter issues. Lawmakers rejected roughly half the proposals the governor highlighted in her State of the State speech at the start of the session.

Noem has long displayed a willingness to spar with the Legislature, but acrimony boiled over this winter. Republican House Speaker Spencer Gosch accused the governor of chasing headlines and TV appearances rather than doing the foundational work to build legislative support for her proposals at home.

Noem has shown a knack for the political theatrics invaluable in Trump’s Republican Party and last month won the former president’s endorsement for her reelection campaign. Her social media feeds are filled with images of her riding a motorcycle at the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, on horseback carrying an American flag, showing off a flamethrower and hunting pheasants.

But her move onto the list of Republican White House aspirants suffered a major stumble last year when she backed away from a pledge to sign a bill that would have banned transgender girls and college-age women from competing in school sports that match their gender identity.

In an effort to placate angry conservatives, Noem pushed a transgender athlete ban through the Legislature this year, promoting her proposal with a barrage of TV ads on Fox News that claimed she “never backed down” on the issue.

With that element of the national party, at least, it appears to have worked.

“I do think this has really repaired her image,” said Terry Schilling, president of the conservative American Principles Project. “It’s definitely made me much more supportive of her to see her sign this.”

But some people in both parties see that bill, and others, as aimed largely at Noem’s national ambitions. “You have a governor who is trying to get her name out and sadly that’s what a lot of these bills are — it’s to be used for election material, not to affect any real policy change,” said Democratic state Sen. Troy

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Heinert. "It looks to me like we're trying to out-crazy Texas and Florida."

Noem has adopted some of Trump's bombast, name-calling fellow Republicans on Twitter when they do something she doesn't like. But it's an approach that has backfired at times in the small government town of Pierre, where lawmakers pride themselves on decorum and often refer to one another as "friend" or "good representative" during debates.

She griped that two Republican lawmakers were acting like "wolves in sheep's clothing" when they floated a ban on vaccine mandates last year. As talks with fellow Republicans over the state budget broke down this week, she took to YouTube to accuse them of "corruption" for holding a closed-door budget briefing with the state's attorney general.

"I'm screwed either way, no matter what I say," Noem said of her particularly tense relationship with Gosch, who has accused her of meddling in an impeachment investigation of the attorney general in a fatal traffic crash. "It's probably been one of the biggest struggles I've had just because I know he's looking for a reason to blame me for everything."

"A lot of bridges have been burned," said Jon Schaff, a political science professor at Northern State University. "There is a rump portion of the Republican Party that is just not on board with Kristi Noem."

Even lawmakers who were once allies of the governor said they have often been left on the outside after daring to defy her.

The "breakdown is just not staying in touch with people, it's not communicating," said Republican Rep. Rhonda Milstead, who was appointed to the Legislature by Noem but became an outspoken critic after Noem effectively killed the trans athlete bill.

The drama at home may not matter if Noem pursues higher office. A decade ago, Minnesota U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann — known more for championing far-right social issues than for lawmaking — rode her polarizing image to an early splash in the GOP race for president in 2012 before fizzling out.

For now, Noem says she's focused on winning reelection later this year. She won her first term in 2018 by just 3 points over a Democratic state lawmaker, Billie Sutton, who had a compelling personal story as a former professional rodeo cowboy who had overcome paralysis to forge a second career in politics.

The race is likely to be far different this year. Noem has raised a record \$11.8 million and is known in the red state as the governor who kept businesses open during the pandemic.

Some of her backers are already looking beyond November — and beyond South Dakota.

"There will be plenty of people raising her flag, whether it is to be President Trump's running mate, should he decide to engage, or as a bona fide contender for the Republican nomination herself," said Ken Blackwell, co-chairman of the pro-Trump America First Policy Institute.

China battles multiple outbreaks, driven by stealth omicron

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — China banned most people from leaving a coronavirus-hit northeastern province and mobilized military reservists Monday as the fast-spreading "stealth omicron" variant fuels the country's biggest outbreak since the start of the pandemic two years ago.

The National Health Commission reported 1,337 locally transmitted cases in the latest 24-hour period, including 895 in the industrial province of Jilin. A government notice said that police permission would be required for people to leave the area or travel from one city to another.

The hard-hit province sent 7,000 reservists to help with the response, from keeping order and registering people at testing centers to using drones to carry out aerial spraying and disinfection, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

Hundreds of cases were reported in other provinces and cities along China's east coast and inland as well. Beijing, which had six news cases, and Shanghai, with 41, locked down residential and office buildings where infected people had been found.

"Every day when I go to work, I worry that if our office building will suddenly be locked down then I won't be able to get home, so I have bought a sleeping bag and stored some fast food in the office in

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advance, just in case," said Yimeng Li, a Shanghai resident.

While mainland China's numbers are small compared to many other countries, and even the semi-autonomous city of Hong Kong, they are the highest since COVID-19 killed thousands in the central city of Wuhan in early 2020. No deaths have been reported in the latest outbreaks.

Hong Kong on Monday reported 26,908 new cases and 249 deaths in its latest 24-hour period. The city counts its cases differently than the mainland, combining both rapid antigen tests and PCR test results.

The city's leader, Carrie Lam, said authorities would not tighten pandemic restrictions for now. "I have to consider whether the public, whether the people would accept further measures," she said at a press briefing.

Mainland China has seen relatively few infections since the initial Wuhan outbreak as the government has held fast to its zero-tolerance strategy, which is focused on stopping transmission of the coronavirus by relying on strict lockdowns and mandatory quarantines for anyone who has come into contact with a positive case.

The government has indicated it will continue to stick to its strategy of stopping transmission for the time being.

Officials on Sunday locked down the southern city of Shenzhen, which has 17.5 million people and is a major tech and finance hub that borders Hong Kong. That followed the lockdown of Changchun, home to 9 million people in Jilin province, starting last Friday.

On Monday, Zhang Wenhong, a prominent infectious disease expert at a hospital affiliated with Shanghai's Fudan University noted in an essay for China's business outlet Caixin, that the numbers for the mainland were still in the beginning stages of an "exponential rise."

China's vast passenger rail network said it would cut service significantly, and both China Railway and airlines said they would offer free refunds to people who had already bought tickets. Shanghai suspended bus service to other cities and provinces.

Shanghai has recorded 713 cases in March, of which 632 are asymptomatic cases. China counts positive and asymptomatic cases separately in its national numbers. Schools in China's largest city have switched to remote learning.

In Beijing, several buildings were sealed off over the weekend. Residents said they were willing to follow the zero-tolerance policies despite any personal impact.

"I think only when the epidemic is totally wiped out can we ease up," said Tong Xin, 38, a shop owner in the Silk Market, a tourist-oriented mall in the Chinese capital.

Much of the current outbreak across Chinese cities is being driven by the variant commonly known as "stealth omicron," or the B.A.2 lineage of the omicron variant, Zhang noted. Early research suggests it spreads faster than the original omicron, which itself spread faster than the original virus and other variants.

"But if our country opens up quickly now, it will cause a large number of infections in people in a short period of time," Zhang wrote Monday. "No matter how low the death rate is, it will still cause a run on medical resources and a short term shock to social life, causing irreparable harm to families and society."

Talks to resume as Russia pressures Ukrainian capital Kyiv

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia's military forces kept up their punishing campaign to capture Ukraine's capital with fighting and artillery fire in Kyiv's suburbs Monday after an airstrike on a military base near the Polish border brought the war dangerously close to NATO's doorstep.

A new round of talks between Russian and Ukrainian officials raised hopes that progress would be made in evacuating civilians from besieged Ukrainian cities and getting emergency supplies to areas without enough food, water and medicine.

Air raid alerts sounded in cities and towns all around the country overnight, from near the Russian border in the east to the Carpathian Mountains in the west, as fighting continued on the outskirts of Kyiv. Ukrainian officials said Russian forces shelled several suburbs of the capital, a major political and strategic

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target for an invasion in its 19th day.

Ukrainian authorities said two people died and seven were injured after Russian forces struck an airplane factory in Kyiv, sparking a large fire. The Antonov factory is Ukraine's largest aircraft manufacturing plant and is best known for producing many of the world's biggest cargo planes.

Russian artillery fire also hit a nine-story apartment building in a northern district of the city, killing two more people, authorities said. Firefighters worked to rescue survivors, painstakingly carrying an injured woman on a stretcher away from the blackened and still smoking building.

A town councilor for Brovary, east of Kyiv, was killed in fighting there, officials said. Shells also fell on the Kyiv suburbs of Irpin, Bucha and Hostomel, which have seen some of the worst fighting in Russia's stalled attempt to take the capital, regional administration chief Oleksiy Kuleba said on Ukrainian television.

The surrounded southern city of Mariupol, where the war has produced some of the greatest human suffering, remained cut off despite earlier talks on creating aid or evacuation convoys.

A pregnant woman who became a symbol of Ukraine's suffering when she was photographed being carried from a bombed maternity hospital in Mariupol has died along with her baby, the Associated Press has learned. Images of the woman being rushed to an ambulance on a stretcher had circled the world, epitomizing the horror of an attack on humanity's most innocent.

Ukraine announced plans for new humanitarian aid and evacuation corridors on Monday, although ongoing shelling caused similar efforts to fail in the last week.

A fourth round of high-level discussions between Ukrainian and Russian officials was set for Monday, the first negotiations in a week, Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhailo Podolyak said. The talks were to take place by video conference. The previous rounds were held face-to-face in Belarus.

Monday's meeting will be a "hard discussion," Podolyak wrote on Twitter. "Although Russia realizes the nonsense of its aggressive actions, it still has a delusion that 19 days of violence against (Ukrainian) peaceful cities is the right strategy."

The hope for a breakthrough came the day after Russian missiles pounded a military training base in western Ukraine that previously served as a crucial hub for cooperation between Ukraine and NATO.

The attack killed 35 people, Ukrainian officials said, and the base's proximity to the borders of Poland and other NATO members raised concerns that the Western military alliance could be drawn into the the largest land conflict in Europe since World War II.

Speaking Sunday night, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called it a "black day" and again urged NATO leaders to establish a no-fly zone over his country, a move the West has rejected for fear of starting a direct confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia.

"If you do not close our sky, it is only a matter of time before Russian missiles fall on your territory. NATO territory. On the homes of citizens of NATO countries," Zelenskyy said, urging Russian President Vladimir Putin to meet with him directly, a request that has gone unanswered by the Kremlin.

The president's office reported Monday that airstrikes hit residential buildings near the important southern city of Mykolaiv, as well as in the eastern city of Kharkiv, and knocked out a television tower in the Rivne region in the northwest. Explosions rang out overnight around the Russian-occupied Black Sea port of Kherson.

Three airstrikes hit the northern city of Chernihiv overnight, and most of the town is without heat. Several areas haven't had electricity in days. Utility workers are trying to restore power but frequently come under shelling.

While Russia's military is bigger and better equipped than Ukraine's, Russian troops have faced stiffer than expected resistance, bolstered by Western weapons support that has frustrated Russian President Vladimir Putin.

With their advance slowed in several areas, they have bombarded several cities with unrelenting shelling, hitting two dozen medical facilities and creating a series of humanitarian crises.

Ukraine said Moscow's troops failed to make major advances over the past 24 hours. The Russian Defense Ministry gave a different assessment, saying its forces had advanced 11 kilometers (7 miles) and

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reached five towns north of Mariupol.

U.S. President Joe Biden is sending his national security adviser to Rome to meet with a Chinese official over worries that Beijing is amplifying Russian disinformation and may help Moscow evade Western economic sanctions.

The U.N. has recorded at least 596 civilian deaths since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, though it believes the true toll is much higher. The Ukrainian prosecutor general's office said the death toll includes at least 85 children among them. Millions more people have fled their homes, with more than 2.7 million crossing into Poland and other neighboring countries.

Since launching its invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, Moscow has waged a multi-pronged attack and encircled several cities. The fight for the southern city of Mariupol is crucial because its capture could help Russia establish a land corridor to Crimea, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said suffering in Mariupol, where missiles struck a maternity hospital Wednesday, was "simply immense" and that hundreds of thousands of people faced extreme shortages of food, water and medicine.

"Dead bodies, of civilians and combatants, remain trapped under the rubble or lying in the open where they fell," the Red Cross said in a statement. "Life-changing injuries and chronic, debilitating conditions cannot be treated."

Russia also expanded its assault on Sunday to western Ukraine, striking the International Center for Peacekeeping and Security near Yavoriv, a military base which has long been used to train Ukrainian soldiers, often with instructors from the United States and other NATO members. More than 30 Russian cruise missiles targeted the site. In addition to the 35 deaths, 134 people were wounded in the attack, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry said.

The base is less than 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the Polish border and has hosted NATO training drills, making it a potent symbol of Russia's longstanding fears that the expansion of the 30-member Western military alliance to include former Soviet states threatens its security — something NATO denies.

NATO said Sunday that it currently does not have any personnel in Ukraine, though the United States has increased the number of U.S. troops deployed to NATO member Poland. White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said the West would respond if Russia's strikes travel outside Ukraine and hit any NATO members, even accidentally.

Ina Padi, a 40-year-old Ukrainian who crossed the border with her family, was taking shelter at a fire station in Wielkie Oczy, Poland, when she was awakened by blasts Sunday morning from across the border that shook her windows.

"I understood in that moment, even if we are free of it, (the war) is still coming after us," she said.

Live updates: 2 killed in attack on Ukraine aircraft factory

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest developments on the Russia-Ukraine war:

LVIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian authorities say two people have died and seven were injured after Russian forces struck an aircraft factory, and another person was killed when a residential building was fired upon.

The Antonov aircraft factory is Ukraine's largest and is best known for producing many of the world's largest ever cargo planes.

The Kyiv city government says a large fire broke out after the strike on the factory. One person died and three were injured when the residential building was hit, authorities said.

LONDON — British hospitals have begun treating 21 young Ukrainian cancer patients after Polish authorities asked for help in caring for the growing number of child refugees who need urgent medical care, U.K. authorities said.

The Ukrainian children arrived in Britain late Sunday and will be treated at six hospitals around the country, Health Secretary Sajid Javid said.

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"The vital and in many cases lifesaving cancer treatment will be provided free of charge by the health service across hospitals in England," the Department of Health and Social Care said in a statement.

The children were accompanied by 28 care-givers and family members, all of whom will be able to remain in the U.K. for at least three years while the children are treated, Javid said

NEW YORK -- Japanese tire giant Bridgestone says it is shutting down its factory in Russia temporarily and will suspend exports to Russia.

Bridgestone says it has returned 10 foreign staff and their families to Japan and that the factory in Ulyanovsk in central Russia will cease operations from Friday.

The company says it is "deeply saddened and concerned by the situation in Ukraine, and hopes for the restoration of peace and safety as soon as possible" and will donate approximately 500 million yen (\$4.24 million) to causes including the Red Cross and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

TOKYO — Technology company Fujitsu is the latest among Japanese companies exiting Russia after its invasion of Ukraine.

Tokyo-based Fujitsu said Monday all orders and deliveries will stop to Russia. Fujitsu had been offering computer servers and services related to such products in Russia.

Sales numbers for such operations were not disclosed.

Other Japanese companies, such as Toyota Motor Corp., Hitachi and Panasonic Group have suspended businesses in Russia, halting production and exports. Sony Corp. has halted shipments of its PlayStation video game machines to Russia and stopped theatrical releases of its movies.

LVIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak says the latest round of talks with Russia is due to start imminently.

Podolyak said in a video message from Kyiv posted on Twitter that talks would begin within minutes.

Unlike earlier negotiations held on the Belarus border, Monday's talks will be via video link.

It will be a "hard discussion," Podolyak wrote on Twitter. "Although Russia realizes the nonsense of its aggressive actions, it still has a delusion that 19 days of violence against (Ukrainian) peaceful cities is the right strategy."

LVIV, Ukraine — Fighting continued Monday on the outskirts of Kyiv, to the west, northwest, east and northeast, the Ukrainian president's office said Monday. Regional officials are preparing more evacuations from the targeted areas.

Air raid alerts sounded in cities and towns all around the country overnight, from near the Russian border in the east to the Carpathian Mountains in the west.

Airstrikes hit residential buildings near the important southern city of Mykolaiv, as well as in the eastern city of Kharkiv, and knocked out a television tower in the Rivne region in the northwest, the president's office said. Explosions rang out overnight around the Russian-occupied Black Sea port of Kherson.

Three airstrikes hit the northern city of Chernihiv overnight, and most of the town is without heat. Several areas haven't had electricity in days. Utility workers are trying to restore power but frequently come under shelling.

The government announced plans for new humanitarian aid and evacuation corridors, although ongoing shelling caused similar efforts to fail in the last week.

NEW YORK — The Russian Defense Ministry said Monday its forces had advanced 11 kilometers (7 miles) over the past 24 hours, and reached five towns north of Mariupol.

In a video statement, Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov did not elaborate on the advances, or comment on the humanitarian corridors or the crisis in Mariupol.

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LVIV, Ukraine — Russian forces fired artillery strikes on suburbs northwest of Kyiv overnight and targeted points east of the capital, the head of the Kyiv region said Monday.

A town councilor for Brovary east of Kyiv was killed in fighting there, regional administration chief Oleksiy Kuleba said on Ukrainian television. He also reported strikes overnight on the northwest towns of Irpin, Bucha and Hostomel, which have seen some of the worst fighting in Russia's stalled attempt to take the capital.

The general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said Monday morning that Russian troops have not made major advances over the past 24 hours despite expanding strikes to the west.

Ukrainian forces are targeting Russian bases, targeting their logistical abilities, the general staff said in a statement on Facebook marking the 19th day of the war.

The general staff accused Russian forces of setting up firing positions and military equipment in churches and other civilian infrastructure so that Ukrainian forces can't fire back. The accusation could not be immediately verified, though Associated Press reporters have seen Russian armored vehicles in residential areas.

An artillery strike hit a nine-story apartment building in the Obolonsky district of northern Kyiv on Monday morning, destroying apartments on several floors and igniting a fire. Internal Affairs Ministry adviser Anton Gerashchenko says two people were killed, three hospitalized and nine treated at the scene.

LVIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said he will continue negotiating with Russia and is waiting for a meeting with Vladimir Putin.

Zelenskyy has repeatedly called for a meeting with Putin. But so far, his requests have gone unanswered by the Kremlin. Zelenskyy said Sunday during his nightly address to the nation that his delegation has a "clear task" to do everything to ensure a meeting between the two presidents.

Zelenskyy said talks are held daily between the two countries via video conference. He said the talks are necessary to establish a cease-fire and more humanitarian corridors. Those corridors have saved more than 130,000 people in six days, he said.

The humanitarian convoy to the besieged city of Mariupol was blocked Sunday by Russian forces. Zelenskyy said they would try again Monday.

LVIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said it is a "black day" after Russia shelled a military base in the western part of his country.

Zelenskyy said in his nightly address on Sunday that Russia fired 30 rockets at the Yavoriv military base. He said the attack killed 35 people and injured 134 others.

The base is less than 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the Polish border. Zelenskyy said he had given Western leaders "clear warning" of the danger to the base. He asked NATO leaders again to establish a no-fly zone over Ukraine, warning "it is only a matter of time" before Russian missiles fall on NATO territory.

Military analysts say the U.S., Britain and their European allies are unlikely to impose a no-fly zone because they believe it could escalate the war in Ukraine into a nuclear confrontation between NATO and Russia.

GENEVA — The Red Cross is warning of a "worst-case scenario" for hundreds of thousands of civilians in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol unless the parties agree to ensure their safety and access to humanitarian aid.

The head of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, said in a statement Sunday that residents of Mariupol "have endured a weeks-long life-and-death nightmare."

The Geneva-based humanitarian agency said hundreds of thousands of people in the city are "facing extreme or total shortages of basic necessities like food, water and medicine."

"Dead bodies, of civilians and combatants, remain trapped under the rubble or lying in the open where they fell," the ICRC added. "Life-changing injuries and chronic, debilitating conditions cannot be treated. The human suffering is simply immense."

The Red Cross called on the parties to agree on the terms of a cease-fire, routes for safe passage, and

to ensure the deal is respected. It offered to act as a neutral intermediary in negotiations.

GENEVA — The U.N. human rights office says at least 596 civilians have been killed in Ukraine since the start of the war, and at least 1,067 have been injured.

The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights said Sunday that 43 of those killed were children, while 57 were injured.

The Geneva-based office had documented 579 civilian deaths and 1,002 injured a day earlier.

It said most recorded civilian casualties were caused “by the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area,” such as shelling from heavy artillery and missile strikes.

U.N. officials said they believe the actual number of casualties is “considerably higher” than so far recorded because the receipt of information has been delayed and many reports still need to be corroborated.

US view of Putin: Angry, frustrated, likely to escalate war

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than two weeks into a war he expected to dominate in two days, Vladimir Putin is projecting anger, frustration at his military’s failures and a willingness to cause even more violence and destruction in Ukraine, in the assessment of U.S. intelligence officials.

Officials in recent days have publicly said they’re worried the Russian president will escalate the conflict to try to break Ukraine’s resistance. Russia still holds overwhelming military advantages and can bombard the country for weeks more. And while the rest of the world reacts to horrific images of the war he started, Putin remains insulated from domestic pressure by what CIA Director William Burns called a “propaganda bubble.”

Putin’s mindset — as tough as it is to determine from afar — is critical for the West to understand as it provides more military aid to Ukraine and also prevent Putin from directly taking on NATO countries or possibly reaching for the nuclear button. Intelligence officials over two days of testimony before Congress last week openly voiced concerns about what Putin might do. And those concerns increasingly shape discussions about what U.S. policymakers are willing to do for Ukraine.

Over two decades, Putin has achieved total dominance of Russia’s government and security services, ruling with a tiny inner circle, marginalizing dissent, and jailing or killing his opposition. He has long criticized the breakup of the Soviet Union, dismissed Ukraine’s claims to sovereignty, and mused about nuclear war ending with Russians as “martyrs.” Burns told lawmakers that he believed Putin was “stewing in a combustible combination of grievance and ambition for many years.”

Putin had expected to seize Kyiv in two days, Burns said. Instead, his military has failed to take control of major cities and lost several thousand soldiers already. The West has imposed sanctions and other measures that have crippled the Russian economy and diminished living standards for oligarchs and ordinary citizens alike. Much of the foreign currency Russia had accumulated as a bulwark against sanctions is now frozen in banks abroad.

Burns is a former U.S. ambassador to Moscow who has met with Putin many times. He told lawmakers in response to a question about the Russian president’s mental state that he did not believe Putin was crazy.

“I think Putin is angry and frustrated right now,” he said. “He’s likely to double down and try to grind down the Ukrainian military with no regard for civilian casualties.”

Russia’s recent unsupported claims that the U.S. is helping Ukraine develop chemical or biological weapons suggest that Putin may himself be prepared to deploy those weapons in a “false flag” operation, Burns said.

There’s no apparent path to ending the war. It is nearly inconceivable that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who has won admiration around the world for leading his country’s resistance, would suddenly recognize Russia’s annexation of Crimea or support granting new autonomy to Russian-friendly parts of eastern Ukraine. And even if he captures Kyiv and deposes Zelenskyy, Putin would have to account for an insurgency supported by the West in a country of more than 40 million.

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"He has no sustainable political end-game in the face of what is going to continue to be fierce resistance from Ukrainians," Burns said.

Avril Haines, President Joe Biden's director of national intelligence, said Putin "perceives this as a war he cannot afford to lose. But what he might be willing to accept as a victory may change over time given the significant costs he is incurring."

Intelligence analysts think Putin's recent raising of Russia's nuclear alert level was "probably intended to deter the West from providing additional support to Ukraine," she said.

The White House's concern about escalation has at times frustrated both Democrats and Republicans. After initially signaling support, the Biden administration declined in recent days to support a Polish plan to donate Soviet-era warplanes to Ukraine that would have required the U.S. to participate in the transfer. The administration previously delayed sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and would not send Stinger air-defense missiles to Ukraine before changing course.

Questioned on Thursday, Haines said Putin might see the plane transfer as a bigger deal than the anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons already going to Ukraine. Haines did not disclose whether the U.S. had intelligence to support that finding.

U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley, an Illinois Democrat who sits on the House Intelligence Committee, said the Biden administration had been "always a step or two late" out of fear of triggering Putin. He urged the White House to agree quickly to the transfer of planes.

"I think it comes off as quibbling," Quigley said. "If anyone thinks that Putin is going to distinguish and differentiate — 'Oh, well, they're taking off from Poland' — he sees all of this as escalatory."

Meanwhile, as the violence worsens and more Russians die, the West is also watching for any sign of holes forming in Putin's "propaganda bubble." One independent Russian political analyst, Kirill Rogov, posted on his Telegram account that the war is "lost" and an "epic failure."

"The mistake was the notion that the West was unwilling to resist aggression, that it was lethargic, greedy and divided," Rogov wrote. "The idea that the Russian economy is self-sufficient and secure was a mistake. The mistake was the idea of the quality of the Russian army. And the main mistake was the idea that Ukraine is a failed state, and Ukrainians are not a nation.

"Four mistakes in making one decision is a lot," he said.

Before the invasion, polling conducted by the Levada Center, Russia's top independent opinion research firm, found that 60% of respondents consider the U.S. and NATO the "initiators" of conflict in eastern Ukraine. Just 3% answered Russia. The polling was in January and February, and the Levada Center has not published new polling since the war began.

Outsiders hope ordinary Russians will respond to the sharp decline in their living standards and find honest portrayals of the war through relatives and online, including by using VPN software to bypass Kremlin blocks on social media. Russian state television continues to air false or unsupported allegations about the U.S. and Ukrainian governments and push a narrative that Russia can't afford to lose the war.

"Otherwise, it will lead to the death of Russia itself," said Vladimir Solovyov, host of a prime-time talk show on state TV channel Russia 1, on his daily radio show last week.

US official: Russia seeking military aid from China

By AAMER MADHANI and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A U.S. official said Russia asked China for military equipment to use in its invasion of Ukraine, a request that heightened tensions about the ongoing war ahead of a Monday meeting in Rome between top aides for the U.S. and Chinese governments.

In advance of the talks, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan bluntly warned China to avoid helping Russia evade punishment from global sanctions that have hammered the Russian economy. "We will not allow that to go forward," he said. China in turn accused on Monday the U.S. of spreading "disinformation."

The prospect of China offering Russia financial help is one of several concerns for President Joe Biden.

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A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters, said that in recent days, Russia had requested support from China, including military equipment, to press forward in its ongoing war with Ukraine. The official did not provide details on the scope of the request. The request was first reported by the Financial Times and The Washington Post.

The Biden administration is also accusing China of spreading Russian disinformation that could be a pretext for Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces to attack Ukraine with chemical or biological weapons.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has put China in a delicate spot with two of its biggest trading partners: the U.S. and European Union. China needs access to those markets, yet it also has shown support for Moscow, joining with Russia in declaring a friendship with "no limits."

In his talks with senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi, Sullivan will indeed be looking for limits in what Beijing will do for Moscow.

"I'm not going to sit here publicly and brandish threats," he told CNN in a round of Sunday news show interviews. "But what I will tell you is we are communicating directly and privately to Beijing that there absolutely will be consequences" if China helps Russia "backfill" its losses from the sanctions.

"We will not allow that to go forward and allow there to be a lifeline to Russia from these economic sanctions from any country anywhere in the world," he said.

Without giving details, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Monday that the "Ukraine situation will definitely be a hot topic" at the meeting, which had been scheduled before Russia invaded its neighbor.

Asked at a daily briefing about the reported Russian request for assistance, Zhao responded: "The U.S. has been spreading disinformation targeting China recently over the Ukraine issue. It is malicious."

"What is pressing now is that all parties should exercise restraint and strive to cool down the situation, rather than fueling the tension," Zhao told reporters. "We should promote diplomatic settlements instead of further escalating the situation."

In a statement posted on the ministry's website late Sunday, Zhao did not mention Ukraine, but said the sides would "exchange views on China-U.S. relations and international and regional issues of common concern."

The White House said the talks will focus on the direct impact of Russia's war against Ukraine on regional and global security.

Biden administration officials say Beijing is spreading false Russian claims that Ukraine was running chemical and biological weapons labs with U.S. support. They say China is effectively providing cover if Russia moves ahead with a biological or chemical weapons attack on Ukrainians.

When Russia starts accusing other countries of preparing to launch biological or chemical attacks, Sullivan told NBC's "Meet the Press," "it's a good tell that they may be on the cusp of doing it themselves."

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby, on ABC's "This Week," said "we haven't seen anything that indicates some sort of imminent chemical or biological attack right now, but we're watching this very, very closely."

The striking U.S. accusations about Russian disinformation and Chinese complicity came after Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova alleged with no evidence that the U.S. was financing Ukrainian chemical and biological weapons labs.

The Russian claim was echoed by Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao, who claimed there were 26 bio-labs and related facilities in "which the U.S. Department of Defense has absolute control." The United Nations has said it has received no information backing up such accusations.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki called the claims "preposterous."

There is growing concern inside the White House that China is aligning itself with Russia on the Ukraine war in hopes it will advance Beijing's "vision of the world order" in the long term, according to a person familiar with administration thinking. The person was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Sullivan told "Face the Nation" on CBS that the Russian rhetoric on chemical and biological warfare is "an indicator that, in fact, the Russians are getting ready to do it and try and pin the blame elsewhere

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and nobody should fall for that.”

The international community has assessed that Russia used chemical weapons in attempts to assassinate Putin detractors such as Alexei Navalny and former spy Sergei Skripal. Russia also supports the Assad government in Syria, which has used chemical weapons against its people in a decade-long civil war.

China has been one of few countries to avoid criticizing the Russians for its invasion of Ukraine. China's leader Xi Jinping hosted Putin for the opening of the Winter Olympics in Beijing, just three weeks before Russia invaded on Feb. 24.

During Putin's visit, the two leaders issued a 5,000-word statement declaring limitless "friendship".

The Chinese abstained on U.N. votes censuring Russia and has criticized economic sanctions against Moscow. It has expressed its support for peace talks and offered its services as a mediator, despite questions about its neutrality and scant experience mediating international conflict.

But questions remain over how far Beijing will go to alienate the West and put its own economy at risk. Sullivan said China and all countries are on notice that they cannot "basically bail Russia out ... give Russia a workaround to the sanctions," with impunity.

Chinese officials have said Washington shouldn't be able to complain about Russia's actions because the U.S. invaded Iraq under false pretenses. The U.S. claimed to have evidence Saddam Hussein was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction though none was ever found.

On CNN, Sullivan said the administration believes China knew that Putin "was planning something" before the invasion of Ukraine. But he said the Chinese government "may not have understood the full extent of it because it's very possible that Putin lied to them the same way that he lied to Europeans and others."

Sullivan and Yang last met for face-to-face talks in Switzerland, where Sullivan raised the Biden administration's concerns about China's military provocations against Taiwan, human rights abuses against ethnic minorities and efforts to squelch pro-democracy advocates in Hong Kong.

That meeting set the stage for a three-hour long virtual meeting in November between Biden and Xi.

Sullivan is also to meet Luigi Mattiolo, diplomatic adviser to Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, while in Rome.

Anti-Trump Republicans lining up for 2024 shadow primary

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan is planning trips to Iowa and New Hampshire. Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., is considering a rough timeline for a potential presidential announcement. And allies of Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., are openly talking up her White House prospects.

More than two years before the next presidential election, a shadow primary is already beginning to take shape among at least three fierce Republican critics of former President Donald Trump to determine who is best positioned to occupy the anti-Trump lane in 2024.

Their apparent willingness to run — even if Trump does, as is widely expected — represents a shift from previous years when "Never Trump" operatives failed to recruit any GOP officeholders to challenge the incumbent president. But with the 2024 contest almost in view, the question is no longer whether one of Trump's prominent Republican critics will run, but how many will mount a campaign and how soon they will announce.

Those close to Cheney, Hogan and Kinzinger expect one of them, if not more, to launch a presidential bid after the 2022 midterms. While all three are nationally known to some degree, their goal would not necessarily be to win the presidency. Above all, they want to hinder Trump's return to the White House, at least compared with 2020, when his allies cleared the field of any Republican opponents and persuaded some states to cancel primary contests altogether.

"It's there as an option, but it's not necessarily because this is all some big plan so I can be in the White House," Kinzinger told The Associated Press when asked about his timeline for deciding on a presidential run. "It's looking and saying, 'Is there going to be a voice out there that can represent from that megaphone the importance of defending this country and democracy and what America is about?' There certainly, I'm

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sure within the next year or so, will be a point at which you have to make a decision.

"If it's not me doing anything, certainly we'll be all in for whoever can represent us," Kinzinger said.

Republican primary voters are expected to have other options.

Several former Trump loyalists who have emerged as on-again, off-again Trump critics are also eyeing the GOP's next presidential nomination. Among them: former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, former Vice President Mike Pence, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley. But most in this group have offered Trump far more praise than criticism, leaving the likes of Cheney, Hogan and Kinzinger as the only consistent Trump antagonists in the 2024 conversation.

The range of prospects suggests an openness within the GOP to move past Trump and his divisive politics, even as many Republican voters suggest they would like to see him run a third time.

About 7 in 10 Republicans said the former president should run for president again in 2024, according to a CBS poll last month. Among the most common reasons they cited: He's the best Republican candidate and has the best chance of winning.

Lest anyone question his intentions, Trump told thousands of supporters Saturday night in South Carolina, "We may have to run again." He remains the most popular figure among Republican voters and plans to use the upcoming midterms to keep bending the party in his direction. He was in South Carolina, for instance, to support GOP rivals to two incumbent members of Congress who have crossed him.

But those close to Cheney, Hogan and Kinzinger insist a significant number of less vocal Republican voters are eager to move past Trump, especially after he inspired the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. After all, 10 Republican representatives voted to impeach Trump and seven Republican senators subsequently voted to convict him.

"There is a large and growing lane of Republicans and Americans across the political spectrum who are fed up with toxic politics and want to move in a new direction," Hogan told the AP. "While I'm focused on finishing my term as governor strong, I'm going to continue to stand up and be a voice for getting our party and our country back on the right track."

For now, Cheney, Hogan and Kinzinger remain friendly and in semi-regular contact.

The 65-year-old, term-limited Hogan will leave office at the end of the year. He already decided against a 2022 Senate campaign, rebuffing an aggressive lobbying effort from Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell. He said he saw himself as an executive more than a legislator.

Kinzinger, among 10 Republican House members who voted to impeach Trump, chose not to seek reelection after his district was redrawn in the Democrats' favor. Only Cheney, who also voted to impeach, is running to retain her seat in this fall's midterms, although she is no lock to win her primary election in August.

Trump is pushing hard for Cheney's defeat. And while her allies indicate she is focused on her reelection, it's an open secret that she is seriously considering a presidential run once the 2022 race is decided.

By some measures, the 55-year-old daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney has the strongest national profile. Cheney is building a national fundraising network, as demonstrated by a \$7.1 million fundraising haul in 2021, among the most in the nation for any House member.

Wyoming state Rep. Landon Brown, a Cheney ally, said this network will allow her to compete on a national scale. Of a Cheney presidential run, he said, "I don't see any reason it wouldn't" happen.

"She's opened up the door across the country by standing up on a national platform that bridges that middle gap of the people that were frustrated on both the left and the right," Brown said. "I don't think it would be easy, but she would be a formidable candidate, for sure."

Cheney has encouraged 2024 speculation by delivering prominent speeches about the future of the Republican Party in recent months, including a November address in New Hampshire, which typically hosts the first presidential primary election.

Meanwhile, both Hogan and Kinzinger are building political organizations that could serve as vehicles to promote their presidential ambitions after they leave office early next year.

Hogan's advocacy group, America United, has millions in the bank, according to an adviser. To strengthen

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his network, Hogan is planning to travel to Iowa and New Hampshire — the first and second states on the traditional presidential primary calendar — to stump for local candidates in coming months.

Hogan is working to help Trump's loudest Republican critics in other states as well.

Hogan had lunch last week with Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey, who has refused to embrace Trump's lies about the 2020 election. Hogan also plans to host events for Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, and Rep. David Valadao, R-Calif. He voted to impeach Trump for inspiring the Jan. 6 insurrection while Murkowski voted for Trump's conviction.

Kinzinger's outside group, Country First, now claims chapters in 38 states and a growing fundraising base.

The 44-year-old Illinois congressman, a lieutenant colonel in the Air National Guard, plans to spend much of the year working to defeat Republicans in the midterms who promote Trump's false claims of voter fraud. Last month, he announced a plan to encourage Democrats and independents to cast ballots in Republican primaries when possible to oust pro-Trump candidates.

Kinzinger said he would even consider a 2024 run as an independent if that's the best way to stop Trump, although he prefers to stay a Republican.

"This country is built really for two parties, like it or love it or hate it," he told the AP. "Never rule anything out. But my hope would be to be able to find the salvation of the GOP."

For kids with COVID-19, everyday life can be a struggle

By COLLEEN LONG and CAROLYN KASTER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Eight-year-old Brooklynn Chiles fidgets on the hospital bed as she waits for the nurse at Children's National Hospital. The white paper beneath her crinkles as she shifts to look at the medical objects in the room. She's had the coronavirus three times, and no one can figure out why.

Brooklynn's lucky, sort of. Each time she has tested positive, she has suffered no obvious symptoms. But her dad, Rodney, caught the virus — possibly from her — when she was positive back in September, and he died from it.

Her mom, Danielle, is dreading a next bout, fearing her daughter could become gravely ill even though she's been vaccinated.

"Every time, I think: Am I going to go through this with her, too?" she said, sitting on a plastic chair wedged in the corner. "Is this the moment where I lose everyone?"

Among the puzzling outcomes of the coronavirus, which has killed more than 6 million people worldwide since it first emerged in 2019, are the symptoms suffered by children.

More than 12.7 million children in the U.S. alone have tested positive for COVID-19 since the pandemic began, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. Generally, the virus doesn't hit kids as severely as adults.

But, as with some adults, there are still bizarre outcomes. Some youngsters suffer unexplained symptoms long after the virus is gone, what's often called long COVID. Others get reinfected. Some seem to recover fine, only to be struck later by a mysterious condition that causes severe organ inflammation.

And all that can come on top of grieving for loved ones killed by the virus and other interruptions to a normal childhood.

Doctors at Children's National and multiple other hospitals getting money from the National Institutes of Health are studying the long-term effects of COVID-19 on children.

The ultimate goal is to evaluate the impact on children's overall health and development, both physically and mentally — and tease out how their still-developing immune systems respond to the virus to learn why some fare well and others don't.

Children's has about 200 kids up to age 21 enrolled in the study for three years, and it takes on about two new patients each week. The study involves children who have tested positive and those who have not, such as siblings of sick kids. The subjects range from having no symptoms to requiring life support in intensive care. On their first visit, participants get a full day of testing, including an ultrasound of their heart, blood work and lung function testing.

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Dr. Roberta DeBiasi, who runs the study, said its main purpose is to define the myriad complications that children might get after COVID-19 and how common those complications are.

Brooklynn is one study subject. So is 3-year-old Alyssa Carpenter, who has had COVID-19 twice and gets strange fevers that break out unexpectedly, and other unusual symptoms. Her feet sometimes turn bright red and sting with pain. Or she'll lie down and point her little fingers to her chest and say, "It hurts."

Her parents, Tara and Tyson Carpenter, have two other daughters, 5-year-old Audrey and 9-year-old Hailey, who is on the autism spectrum. As for many parents, the pandemic has been a nightmare of missed school, unproductive work, restrictions and confusion. But on top of all the anxiety so many parents feel lies the concern for their toddler. They don't know how to help her.

"It was just super frustrating," says Tara Carpenter, who is quick to add that no one's to blame. "We're trying to find out answers for our kid and nobody could give us any. And it just was really frustrating."

Alyssa would wail in pain from her red burning feet or whimper quietly. She'd come down with a fever, but suffer no other symptoms and be sent home from school for days, ruining Carpenter's work week. But then in ballet class, with her pink tights and tutu, she'd seem totally normal.

In the past few months, symptoms have started to subside and it's giving the family some relief.

"After the fact, what do we do about this?" asks Tara Carpenter. "We don't know. We literally don't know."

For some families in the study, the child suffering from long COVID is the easy one during the hospital visits.

One recent day, another family finds that it's the older sister Charlie who dissolves into tears because she doesn't want blood drawn while younger sister Lexie, used to being prodded by nurses and doctors, hops up on the table. The family dynamics of COVID-19 are tough: The sibling with the illness may get more attention, which can create problems for the others. Exhausted parents struggle with how to help all their children.

In their work-ups, the children receive full medical check-ins. They also receive a full psychological assessment, run by Dr. Linda Herbert.

Herbert asks the kids about fatigue, sleep, pain, anxiety, depression and peer relationships. Do they have memory concerns? Are they having a hard time keeping things in their brains?

"There's this constellation of symptoms," she said. "Some kids are incredibly anxious about getting COVID again."

She said psychological symptoms are among the most common, and it's not just the kids with COVID-19, it's their siblings and parents, too.

Danielle Chiles feels the stress. She's a single mother working full time, grieving the loss of her partner and trying not to seem too depressed in front of her daughter. The decision to enroll her daughter Brooklynn in the study was motivated by wanting to draw attention to the need for vaccines, particularly in the Black community.

"My baby keeps getting it," she said. "Can't the people around us try to protect her?"

Brooklynn whimpers when she hears she has to get blood drawn: "Do you have to?"

"Yes, baby," the nurse says. "It's so we can figure all this out."

"If her daddy was here, he'd take her to Dave & Busters after this," Chiles says, before lowering her voice so her daughter can't hear what she's going to say. Her husband, Rodney Chiles, wasn't vaccinated.

He had qualms, like many do, about the vaccine and was waiting to get it. Shortly after Brooklynn tested positive during the run of the delta variant, he started feeling sick and went downhill fast. Chiles had pre-existing conditions, too, which accelerated his death. He was 42.

"And then he called us on a Sunday. He was like, 'They are about to intubate me because I can't keep my oxygen up. And I love y'all and Brooklynn, forgive me,'" she said. It was the last time he talked to them before he died.

"I'll tell you what," Danielle Chiles says. "The only reason I'm still here is because I have a child."

On school days, Chiles picks up Brooklynn from Rocketship Rise Academy Public Charter School in Southeast Washington. They walk hand-in-hand to the car for a short ride before she resumes working

for a nonprofit organization.

One recent day after school, as Chiles had a Zoom meeting in her bedroom office, Brooklynn munched popcorn and talked about how she and her dad bought a pair of tennis shoes and balloons for her mom last year on Mother's Day. They forgot her mom's shoe size and they had to come back home and check the size. She giggles as she tells it.

In her room, there's a big photo of her dad and her, though she usually sleeps in bed with her mom now. "Even though kids aren't as sick, they are losing," said Chiles. "They're losing parents, social lives, entire years. Yes, kids are resilient, but they can't go on like this. No one is this resilient."

Russia-Ukraine war: Key things to know about the conflict

Russian troops kept up pressure on Ukraine's capital city on Monday and air raid sirens were heard across the besieged country overnight, even as both nations were expected to resume diplomatic talks.

The attacks around Kyiv came a day after Russia escalated its offensive by shelling areas close to the Polish border. The Ukrainian military said Monday that Russian troops had not made great strides over the past day. Russia's Defense Ministry says its forces have advanced.

The fighting, now in its third week, continued to exact a human toll. A pregnant woman and her baby died after Russia bombed the maternity hospital where she was meant to give birth. Associated Press images of the woman being rushed to an ambulance on a stretcher were circulated around the world and encapsulated the horror of attacks on humanity's most innocent.

The war has forced nearly 2.7 million people to flee Ukraine. Thousands of civilians and soldiers have been killed.

Here are some key things to know about the conflict:

WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE FIGHTING?

Russian troops refocused their efforts to seize Kyiv, on Monday, firing artillery on suburbs, a local official said on Ukrainian television.

The official also said a town councilor for Brovary, east of Kyiv, had been killed in fighting there and shells fell on the towns of Irpin, Bucha and Hostomel, which have seen some of the worst conflict during Russia's stalled attempt to take the capital.

Two people were killed when artillery hit a nine-story residential building in a northern district of the city early Monday morning, destroying apartments on several floors and igniting a fire.

Air raid alerts sounded in cities and towns all around the country overnight, from near the Russian border in the east to the Carpathian Mountains in the west.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Monday its forces had advanced 11 kilometers (7 miles) over the past 24 hours. A ministry spokesman did not comment in a video statement on humanitarian corridors or the crisis in the desperate, strategically important city of Mariupol.

On Sunday, Russia expanded its strikes close to the Polish border, where its missiles pounded a military base in western Ukraine, killing 35 people. The facility served as a critical hub for cooperation between Ukraine and the NATO countries supporting its defense. The attack raised the possibility that the alliance could be drawn into the fight.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO CIVILIANS?

Civilians continue to pay a price for the war in Ukraine. The Associated Press has learned that a pregnant woman and her baby died after Russian forces bombed a maternity hospital in Mariupol.

In video and photos shot Wednesday by AP journalists after the attack on the hospital, the woman was seen stroking her bloodied lower abdomen as rescuers rushed her through the rubble in the besieged city of Mariupol, her blanched face mirroring her shock at what had just happened. It was among the most brutal moments so far in Russia's war in Ukraine.

The AP team tracked down the victims in the hospital where they had been transferred, on the outskirts of Mariupol.

Surgeon Timur Marin said the baby showed no signs of life after a caesarean section and attempts to

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resuscitate the mother were unsuccessful.

On Sunday, an American journalist was killed and another injured when their vehicle came under fire from Russian forces outside Kyiv.

The U.N. has recorded at least 596 civilian deaths, though it believes the true toll is much higher, and Ukraine's Prosecutor General's office said that at least 85 children are among them. More than 2.6 million people have fled Ukraine since the start of the conflict.

The Ukrainian government meanwhile announced plans for new humanitarian aid and evacuation corridors Monday.

HOW ARE TALKS PROCEEDING?

A fourth round of talks is expected Monday between Ukrainian and Russian officials via video conference to discuss getting aid to cities and towns under fire, among other issues, Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhailo Podolyak said.

The talks will involve the same higher-level officials who met earlier in Belarus. Previous talks have not led to major breakthroughs or a solution for getting aid or evacuation convoys to Mariupol.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to meet with him directly, a request that has gone unanswered by the Kremlin.

As Ukraine war rages, Israel grapples with fate of oligarchs

By JOSEF FEDERMAN and ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel is grappling with how to deal with dozens of Jewish Russian oligarchs as Western nations step up sanctions on businesspeople with ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

A worried Israeli government has formed a high-level committee to see how the country can maintain its status as a haven for any Jew without running afoul of the biting sanctions targeting Putin's inner circle.

Several dozen Jewish tycoons from Russia are believed to have taken on Israeli citizenship or residency in recent years. Many have good working relations with the Kremlin, and at least four -- Chelsea FC owner Roman Abramovich, Mikhail Fridman, Petr Aven and Viktor Vekselberg -- have been sanctioned internationally because of their purported connections to Putin.

Israel, which has emerged as an unlikely mediator between Ukraine and Russia, has not joined the sanctions imposed by the U.S., Britain, European Union and others. But as the war in Ukraine drags on, and other names are added to the list, the pressure is increasing.

In an interview with Israel's Channel 12 TV station over the weekend, the U.S. undersecretary of state for political affairs, Victoria Nuland, called on Israel to join the group of countries that have sanctioned Russia.

"What we are asking among other things is for every democracy around the world to join us in the financial and export control sanctions that we have put on Putin," she said. "You don't want to become the last haven for dirty money that's fueling Putin's wars."

Aaron David Miller, a now-retired veteran U.S. diplomat, said on Twitter that Nuland's comments were the 'toughest battering of Israeli policy since crisis began or of any policy in very long while."

Israel, founded as a haven for Jews in the wake of the Holocaust, grants automatic citizenship to anyone of Jewish descent. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union 30 years ago, an estimated 1 million Jews from Russia and other former Soviet republics have moved to Israel. In recent years, a growing number of tycoons from the former Soviet Union have joined them.

Some, such as former energy magnate Leonid Nevzlin, came after falling out with Putin. Others appeared to have done so as hedges against trouble abroad.

Abramovich, for instance, took Israeli citizenship in 2018 after his British visa was not renewed, apparently as part of British authorities' efforts to crack down on Putin associates after a former Russian spy was poisoned in England. Although he appears to spend little time in the country, he has bought some choice real estate, including a home in a trendy Tel Aviv neighborhood reportedly purchased from the husband of Wonder Woman actress Gal Gadot.

Some have kept low public profiles, while others have embraced their Jewish roots, emerging as major

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philanthropists to Jewish causes or investing in Israel's high-flying technology sector.

Israeli media have reported private jets belonging to oligarchs coming in and out of the country in recent days. Channel 12 said late Sunday that one of Abramovich's planes had arrived, though it was unclear if he was onboard.

While Israel weighs its moves, Jewish organizations already are taking a closer look at their relations with Russian oligarchs.

Last week, Yad Vashem, Israel's national Holocaust memorial, said it was suspending a reported donation of tens millions of dollars from Abramovich "in light of recent developments." In Ukraine, the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, built at the ravine where over 30,000 Jews were massacred in just two days in 1941, said that Fridman, who was born in Ukraine, had resigned from its advisory board due to the sanctions.

Lior Haiat, spokesman for Israel's Foreign Ministry, said the government has formed a special inter-ministerial committee to study the sanctions issue. The fate of affected oligarchs is a central part of that mission.

In the meantime, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid has already advised his colleagues to keep their distance from the oligarchs.

"You have to be very careful because those guys have connections and they can call you on the phone and ask you for things," Lapid recently told the Cabinet. "Don't commit to anything because it could cause diplomatic damage. Say you can't help them and give them the number of the Foreign Ministry."

His comments, first reported in Israeli media, were confirmed by officials who attended the meeting. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were discussing closed Cabinet proceedings.

Israel, one of the few countries that has good relations with both Russia and Ukraine, may be able to insulate itself from the international pressure as long as it continues to mediate between the warring sides. Joining the sanctions would risk drawing Russian ire and jeopardize Israel's unique role.

Ksenia Svetlova, an international-affairs expert and former Israeli lawmaker born in Russia, said Israel would hold out from taking a stance as long as possible.

"It depends on what kind of pressure they will exercise against Israel," she said. "Not voluntarily, certainly."

Pregnant woman, baby die after Russia bombed maternity ward

By MSTYSLAV CHERNOV Associated Press

MARIUPOL, Ukraine (AP) — A pregnant woman and her baby have died after Russia bombed the maternity hospital where she was meant to give birth, The Associated Press has learned. Images of the woman being rushed to an ambulance on a stretcher had circled the world, epitomizing the horror of an attack on humanity's most innocent.

In video and photos shot Wednesday by AP journalists after the attack on the hospital, the woman was seen stroking her bloodied lower abdomen as rescuers rushed her through the rubble in the besieged city of Mariupol, her blanched face mirroring her shock at what had just happened. It was among the most brutal moments so far in Russia's now 19-day-old war on Ukraine.

The woman was rushed to another hospital, yet closer to the frontline, where doctors labored to keep her alive. Realizing she was losing her baby, medics said, she cried out to them, "Kill me now!"

Surgeon Timur Marin found the woman's pelvis crushed and hip detached. Medics delivered the baby via cesarean section, but it showed "no signs of life," the surgeon said.

Then, they focused on the mother.

"More than 30 minutes of resuscitation of the mother didn't produce results," Marin said Saturday.

"Both died."

In the chaos after Wednesday's airstrike, medics didn't have time to get the woman's name before her husband and father came to take away her body. At least someone came to retrieve her, they said — so she didn't end up in the mass graves being dug for many of Mariupol's growing number of dead.

Accused of war crimes, Russian officials claimed the maternity hospital had been taken over by Ukrainian

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extremists to use as a base, and that no patients or medics were left inside. Russia's ambassador to the U.N. and the Russian Embassy in London called the images "fake news."

Associated Press journalists, who have been reporting from inside blockaded Mariupol since early in the war, documented the attack and saw the victims and damage firsthand. They shot video and photos of several bloodstained, pregnant mothers fleeing the blown-out maternity ward, medics shouting, children crying.

The AP team then tracked down the victims on Friday and Saturday in the hospital where they had been transferred, on the outskirts of Mariupol.

In a city that's been without food supplies, water, power or heat for more than a week, electricity from emergency generators is reserved for operating rooms.

As survivors described their ordeal, explosions outside shook the walls. The shelling and shooting in the area is sporadic but relentless. Emotions are running high, even as doctors and nurses concentrate on their work.

Blogger Mariana Vishegirskaya gave birth to a girl the day after the airstrike, and wrapped her arm around newborn Veronika as she recounted Wednesday's bombing. After photos and video showed her navigating down debris-strewn stairs and clutching a blanket around her pregnant frame, Russian officials claimed she was an actor in a staged attack.

"It happened on March 9 in Hospital No. 3 in Mariupol. We were laying in wards when glasses, frames, windows and walls flew apart," Vishegirskaya, still wearing the same polka dot pajamas as when she fled, told The AP.

"We don't know how it happened. We were in our wards and some had time to cover themselves, some didn't."

Her ordeal was one among many in Mariupol, which has become a symbol of resistance to Russian President Vladimir Putin's drive to crush democratic Ukraine and redraw the world map in his favor. The failure to subordinate Mariupol has pushed Russian forces to broaden their offensive elsewhere in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the Azov Sea port city of 430,000, key to creating a land bridge from Russia to Russian-annexed Crimea, is slowly starving.

In the makeshift new maternity ward, each approaching childbirth brings new tension.

"All birthing mothers have lived through so much," said nurse Olga Vereshagina.

One of the distraught mothers lost some of her toes in the bombing. Medics performed a C-section on her Friday, carefully pulling out her daughter and rubbing the newborn vigorously to stimulate signs of life.

After a few breathless seconds, the baby cries.

Cheers of joy resonate through the room. Newborn Alana cries, her mother cries, and medical workers wipe the tears from their eyes.

War censorship exposes Putin's leaky internet controls

By FRANK BAJAK and BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writers

BOSTON (AP) — Long before waging war on Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin was working to make Russia's internet a powerful tool of surveillance and social control akin to China's so-called Great Firewall.

So when Western tech companies began cutting ties with Russia following its invasion, Russian investigative journalist Andrei Soldatov was alarmed. He'd spent years exposing Russian censorship and feared that well-intentioned efforts to aid Ukraine would instead help Putin isolate Russians from the free flow of information, aiding the Kremlin's propaganda war.

"Look, guys the only space the Russians have to talk about Ukraine. and what is going on in Russia. is Facebook," Soldatov, now exiled in London. wrote on Facebook in the war's first week. "You cannot just, like, kill our access."

Facebook didn't, although the Kremlin soon picked up that baton, throttling both Facebook and Twitter so badly they are effectively unreachable on the Russian internet. Putin has also blocked access to both Western media and independent news sites in the country, and a new law criminalizes spreading informa-

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tion that contradicts the government's line. On Friday, the Kremlin said it would also restrict access to Instagram. By early Monday, the network monitor NetBlocks reported the social network throttled across multiple Russian internet providers.

Yet the Kremlin's latest censorship efforts have revealed serious shortcomings in the government's bigger plans to straightjacket the internet. Any Russian with a modicum of tech smarts can circumvent government efforts to starve Russians of fact.

For instance, the government has so far had only limited success blocking the use of software known as virtual private networks, or VPNs, that allows users to evade content restrictions. The same goes for Putin's attempts to restrict the use of other censorship-evading software.

That puts providers of internet bandwidth and associated services sympathetic to Ukraine's plight in a tough spot. On one side, they face public pressure to punish the Russian state and economic reasons to limit services at a time when bills might well go unpaid. On the other, they're wary of helping stifle a free flow of information that can counter Kremlin disinformation — for instance, the state's claim that Russia's military is heroically "liberating" Ukraine from fascists.

Amazon Web Services, a major provider of cloud computing services, continues to operate in Russia, although it says it's not taking on any new customers. Both Cloudflare, which helps shield websites from denial-of-service attacks and malware, and Akamai, which boosts site performance by putting internet content closer to its audience, also continue to serve their Russian customers, with exceptions including cutting off state-owned companies and firms under sanctions.

Microsoft, by contrast, hasn't said whether it will halt its cloud services in the country, although it has suspended all new sales of products and services.

U.S.-based Cogent, which provides a major "backbone" for internet traffic, has cut direct connections inside Russia but left open the pipes through subsidiaries of Russian network providers at exchanges physically outside the country. Another major U.S. backbone provider, Lumen, has done the same.

"We have no desire to cut off Russian individuals and think that an open internet is critical to the world," Cogent CEO Dave Schaeffer said in an interview. Direct connections to servers inside Russia, he said, could potentially "be used for offensive cyber efforts by the Russian government."

Schaeffer said the decision didn't reflect "financial considerations," although he acknowledged that the ruble's sharp drop, which makes imported goods and services more expensive in Russia, could make it difficult to collect customer payments. Meanwhile, he said, Cogent is providing Ukrainian customers free service during the conflict.

Schaeffer said these moves might impair internet video in Russia but will leave plenty of bandwidth for smaller files.

Other major backbone providers in Europe and Asia also continue to serve Russia, a net importer of bandwidth, said Doug Madory, director of internet analysis for the network management firm Kentik. He has noted no appreciable drop in connectivity from outside providers.

Cloudflare continues to operate four data centers in Russia even though Russian authorities ordered government websites to drop foreign-owned hosting providers as of Friday. In a March 7 blog post the company said it had determined "Russia needs more Internet access, not less."

Under a 2019 "sovereign internet" law, Russia is supposed to be able to operate its internet independent of the rest of the world. In practice, that has brought Russia closer to the kind of intensive internet monitoring and control practiced by China and Iran.

Its telecommunications oversight agency, Rozkomnadzor, successfully tested the system at scale a year ago when it throttled access to Twitter. It uses hundreds of so-called middleboxes — router-like devices run and remotely controlled by bureaucrats that can block individual websites and services — installed by law at all internet providers inside Russia.

But the system, which also lets the FSB security service spy on Russian citizens, is a relative sieve compared to China's Great Firewall. Andrew Sullivan, president of the nonprofit Internet Society, said there's no evidence it has the ability to successfully disconnect Russia from the wider internet.

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"Walling off a country's internet is complicated, culturally, economically and technologically. And it becomes far more complicated with a country like Russia, whose internet, unlike China's, was not originally built out with government control in mind," he said.

"When it comes to censorship, the only ones who can really do it are the Chinese," said Serge Droz, a senior security engineer at Swiss-based Proton Technologies, which offers software for creating VPNs, a principal tool for circumventing state censorship.

ProtonVPN, which Droz says has been inventive in finding ways to circumvent Russian blocking, reports clocking ten times as many daily signups than before the war. VPN services tracked by researchers at Top10VPN.com found Facebook and Twitter downloads surging eight times higher than average. Its research found the Kremlin to have blocked more than 270 news and financial sites since the invasion, including BBC News and Voice of America's Russian-language services.

Russia's elites are believed to be big VPN users. No one expects them to disconnect.

Russian authorities are also having some success blocking the privacy-protecting Tor browser, which like VPNs lets users visit content at special ".onion" sites on the so-called dark web, researchers say. Twitter just created a Tor site; other outlets such as The New York Times also have them.

The Kremlin has not, however, blocked the popular Telegram messaging app. It's an important conduit for Ukrainian government ministries and also for Meduza, the Latvia-based independent Russian-language news organization whose website is blocked in Russia. Meduza has 1 million followers on Telegram.

One reason may be that Telegram is also a vital conduit for Kremlin propagandists, analysts say.

Additionally, Telegram does not feature default end-to-end encryption, which renders messages unreadable by the company and outsiders, as the popular U.S.-based messaging apps Signal and WhatsApp do. WhatsApp is owned by Facebook's parent, Meta. Telegram does offer users fully encrypted "private chats," although users have to make sure to activate them.

After the invasion, Signal founder Moxie Marlinspike tweeted a reminder that sensitive communication on insecure apps can literally be a matter of life and death in war. A Signal spokesman would not share user numbers, but WhatsApp has an estimated 63 million users in Russia.

Being able to access outside websites and apps vital to staying informed depend, however, on foreign-based VPN services that Russians say they are having trouble paying for since Visa and Mastercard cut off their country.

India unsure of Russian arms to meet China, Pakistan threats

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India is exploring ways to avoid a major disruption in its supply of Russian-made weaponry amid U.S. sanctions following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tightrope walk could become more difficult due to a continuing border standoff with China.

Experts say up to 60% of Indian defense equipment comes from Russia, and New Delhi finds itself in a bind at a time when it is facing a two-year-old standoff with China in eastern Ladakh over a territorial dispute, with tens of thousands of soldiers within shooting distance. Twenty Indian soldiers and four Chinese soldiers died in a clash in 2020.

"The nightmare scenario for India would be if the U.S. comes to the conclusion that it confronts a greater threat from Russia and that this justifies a strategic accommodation with China. In blunt terms, concede Chinese dominance in Asia while safeguarding its European flank," Shyam Saran, India's former foreign secretary, wrote in a recent blog post.

Would China, drawing lessons from Ukraine, be an aggressor in disputed eastern Ladakh or in Taiwan?

"It is very possible they might do it," said Jitendra Nath Misra, a retired diplomat and distinguished fellow in the Jindal School of International Affairs.

President Joe Biden has spoken about unresolved differences with India after the country abstained from voting on United Nations resolutions against Russian aggression in Ukraine. Modi has so far avoided voting against Russia or criticizing Putin for invading Ukraine.

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In the early 1990s, about 70% of Indian army weapons, 80% of its air force systems and 85% of its navy platforms were of Soviet origin. India is now reducing its dependency on Russian arms and diversifying its defense procurements, buying more from countries like the United States, Israel, France and Italy.

From 2016-20, Russia accounted for nearly 49% of India's defense imports while French and Israeli shares were 18% and 13%, respectively, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

India not only depends on Russian weaponry, but it also relies hugely on Moscow for military upgrades and modernization as it moves toward self-reliance in its defense sector, said Lt. Gen. D.S. Hooda, a former Indian military commander.

"Russia is the only country that leased a nuclear submarine to India. Will any other country lease India a nuclear submarine?" Hooda asked.

Sushant Singh, a senior fellow at the Center for Policy Research, said: "India's navy has one aircraft carrier. It's Russian. India's bulk of fighter jets and about 90% of its battle tanks are Russian."

In 1987, the Indian navy leased a Chakra-1, a Charlie-class nuclear cruise missile submarine, from the former Soviet Union for training. It later got another Soviet submarine, Chakra-2, in its place. In 2019, India signed a \$3 billion contract to lease an Akula-1-class nuclear-powered attack submarine from Russia for 10 years. It is expected to be delivered by 2025.

India bought its only aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya, from the Russia in 2004. The carrier had served during the former Soviet Union and later for the Russian navy. India's first indigenous 40,000-tonne aircraft carrier is undergoing sea trials ahead of its planned induction by next year.

India also has four nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines on the way.

India's air force presently operates more than 410 Soviet and Russian fighters, comprising a mix of imported and license-built platforms. India's inventory of Russian-made military equipment also includes submarines, tanks, helicopters, submarines, frigates and missiles.

Misra said the U.S. hasn't shown any willingness to provide technology transfers to India.

"I would like to ask our American friends: What kinds of defense technology have you given us? What the U.S. is offering is the F-16 fighter aircraft rebranded as the F-21. The F-16 is obsolete from the Indian point of view. We went for the Mig-21 in the 1960s because the F-104 was denied to India. We are seeing the same kind of thing," he said.

"Under the AUKUS agreement, the U.S. is willing to share the nuclear propulsion technology for submarines with Australia but is not willing to share it with India," he added, referring to the trilateral security pact between the U.S., U.K. and Australia.

Australia in September decided to cancel a multibillion-dollar contract to buy diesel-electric French submarines and said it would instead acquire U.S. nuclear-powered vessels in a new Indo-Pacific defense deal under AUKUS.

During the Donald Trump presidency, the U.S. and India concluded defense deals worth over \$3 billion. Bilateral defense trade increased from near zero in 2008 to \$15 billion in 2019. Major Indian purchases from the United States included long-range maritime patrol aircraft, C-130 transport aircraft, missiles and drones.

As the Ukraine crisis deepens, the challenge for India is how to navigate international sanctions against Russia.

The Russian S-400 missile system deal with Moscow has put India at risk of U.S. sanctions after Washington asked its partners to avoid purchasing Russian military equipment. The S-400 is a sophisticated surface-to-air defense system and is expected to give India strategic deterrence against rivals China and Pakistan.

New Delhi has sought support from Washington and its allies in confronting China, a common ground for the Indo-Pacific security alliance known as "the Quad" that also includes Australia and Japan.

Tracing the history of India's acquisition of Soviet arms, S.C.S. Bangara, a retired navy admiral, said India began looking for arms and ammunition after its war with China in 1962.

The Cold War resulted in the United States cozying up with China. Pakistan as a facilitator held a trump card that could be used to enlist the complete support of the U.S. government in the event of an India-Pakistan conflict, he said.

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During India's war with Pakistan in December 1971 that led to the creation of Bangladesh, the U.S. deployed a task force led by the USS Enterprise in the Bay of Bengal in support of Pakistan.

In the mid-1960s, India negotiated a series of acquisition agreements with the Soviet Union that continued for the next 40 years, Bangara said.

"It was not seamless, particularly when the Soviet Union collapsed. The long chain of training facilities along with the supply chain of logistics collapsed when the Union broke into smaller states," he said.

Even as India diversifies its defense acquisitions from the U.S., Israel, France and other countries, it may take 20 years to get over its dependence on Russian supplies and spares, Bangara said.

Tom Brady is returning to Tampa to play 23rd season in NFL

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Tom Brady's retirement lasted 40 days.

Brady said Sunday he's returning to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers for his 23rd NFL season.

The seven-time Super Bowl champion announced his decision on Twitter and Instagram, saying he has "unfinished business." The news stole the spotlight from the NCAA's Selection Sunday.

"These past two months I've realized my place is still on the field and not in the stands," Brady wrote. "That time will come. But it's not now. I love my teammates, and I love my supportive family. They make it all possible. I'm coming back for my 23rd season in Tampa."

Brady led the Buccaneers to a Super Bowl title following the 2020 season and NFC South championship last season. He teamed with coach Bill Belichick to win six Super Bowls during 20 seasons with the New England Patriots.

The 44-year-old Brady led the NFL in yards passing (5,316), touchdowns (43), completions (485) and attempts (719) in 2021, but the Buccaneers lost at home to the Los Angeles Rams in the divisional round.

"Tom Brady loves to play football as much as anyone I have ever been around," Buccaneers coach Bruce Arians said. "As Tom said, his place right now is on the football field. He is still playing at a championship level and was as productive as anyone in the league last season. We are ecstatic that he decided to continue playing and working toward winning another championship."

Brady cited his desire to spend more time with his wife, supermodel Gisele Bundchen, and three children when he decided to walk away from the game on Feb. 1. But he changed his mind about staying home, a day after attending the Manchester United match against Tottenham Hotspur. Brady sat with the Glazer Family, who own Manchester United and the Buccaneers.

His reversal sent shock waves throughout the sports world, and his teammates and Buccaneers fans reacted with jubilation.

All-Pro right tackle Tristan Wirfs called it "unreal." Receivers Mike Evans and Chris Godwin shared their joy in emojis.

Giants safety Logan Ryan said Brady's return is "good for football." Rams star cornerback Jalen Ramsey tweeted: "THANK YOU! throw that last touchdown on somebody else."

Many Hall of Fame players across several sports returned to playing after retiring, including Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson and Bob Cousy in the NBA, Brett Favre and Reggie White in the NFL, Guy Lafleur and Mario Lemieux in the NHL.

The Buccaneers are hopeful star tight end Rob Gronkowski also returns. Brady convinced his buddy to unretire to join him in Tampa in 2020. The team lost Pro Bowl guard Ali Marpet, who retired at age 28. But Godwin is staying after getting the franchise tag.

Brady's decision comes right before the NFL free agency period begins. The Bucs have several key players set to hit the open market: running back Leonard Fournette, cornerback Carlton Davis, safety Jordan Whitehead, linebacker Jason Pierre-Paul, defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh, Gronkowski and others.

They kept one of those key players when Pro Bowl center Ryan Jensen agreed to a three-year contract late Sunday night, his agent Mike McCartney said on Twitter.

Brady's return should impact their decisions and the team's plans. Tampa's odds for winning the Super

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Bowl went from 25:1 to 7 1/2:1, tied with Green Bay for second-best behind Buffalo at 7:1, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

"We are thrilled that Tom has decided to come back this season," Bucs general manager Jason Licht said. "We said we would leave all options open for him should he reconsider his retirement and today's announcement is something we have been preparing for in recent days.

"Bruce and I have had plenty of conversations with Tom recently that led us to believe there was a realistic chance he would want to come back. Tom is the greatest quarterback of all time who is still playing at an elite level. With this decision now made, we will continue to move forward with our offseason plans to reload this roster for another championship run."

Brady is the NFL's career leader in yards passing (84,520) and TDs (624). He's the only player to win more than five Super Bowls and has been MVP of the game five times.

Brady has won three NFL MVP awards, been a first-team All-Pro three times and selected to the Pro Bowl 15 times. He is 243-73 in his career in the regular season and 35-12 in the playoffs.

He's back to build on all those numbers.

War censorship exposes Putin's leaky internet controls

By FRANK BAJAK and BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writers

BOSTON (AP) — Long before waging war on Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin was working to make Russia's internet a powerful tool of surveillance and social control akin to China's so-called Great Firewall.

So when Western tech companies began cutting ties with Russia following its invasion, Russian investigative journalist Andrei Soldatov was alarmed. He'd spent years exposing Russian censorship and feared that well-intentioned efforts to aid Ukraine would instead help Putin isolate Russians from the free flow of information, aiding the Kremlin's propaganda war.

"Look, guys the only space the Russians have to talk about Ukraine. and what is going on in Russia. is Facebook," Soldatov, now exiled in London. wrote on Facebook in the war's first week. "You cannot just, like, kill our access."

Facebook didn't, although the Kremlin soon picked up that baton, throttling both Facebook and Twitter so badly they are effectively unreachable on the Russian internet. Putin has also blocked access to both Western media and independent news sites in the country, and a new law criminalizes spreading information that contradicts the government's line. On Friday, the Kremlin said it would also restrict access to Instagram. By early Monday, the network monitor NetBlocks found network data showing the social network restricted in Russia across multiple users.

Yet the Kremlin's latest censorship efforts have revealed serious shortcomings in the government's bigger plans to straightjacket the internet. Any Russian with a modicum of tech smarts can circumvent Kremlin efforts to starve Russians of fact.

For instance, the government has so far had only limited success blocking the use of software known as virtual private networks, or VPNs, that allows users to evade content restrictions. The same goes for Putin's attempts to restrict the use of other censorship-evading software.

That puts providers of internet bandwidth and associated services sympathetic to Ukraine's plight in a tough spot. On one side, they face public pressure to punish the Russian state and economic reasons to limit services at a time when bills might well go unpaid. On the other, they're wary of helping stifle a free flow of information that can counter Kremlin disinformation — for instance, the state's claim that Russia's military is heroically "liberating" Ukraine from fascists.

Amazon Web Services, a major provider of cloud computing services, continues to operate in Russia, although it says it's not taking on any new customers. Both Cloudflare, which helps shield websites from denial-of-service attacks and malware, and Akamai, which boosts site performance by putting internet content closer to its audience, also continue to serve their Russian customers, with exceptions including cutting off state-owned companies and firms under sanctions.

Microsoft, by contrast, hasn't said whether it will halt its cloud services in the country, although it has suspended all new sales of products and services.

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U.S.-based Cogent, which provides a major "backbone" for internet traffic, has cut direct connections inside Russia but left open the pipes through subsidiaries of Russian network providers at exchanges physically outside the country. Another major U.S. backbone provider, Lumen, has done the same.

"We have no desire to cut off Russian individuals and think that an open internet is critical to the world," Cogent CEO Dave Schaeffer said in an interview. Direct connections to servers inside Russia, he said, could potentially "be used for offensive cyber efforts by the Russian government."

Schaeffer said the decision didn't reflect "financial considerations," although he acknowledged that the ruble's sharp drop, which makes imported goods and services more expensive in Russia, could make it difficult to collect customer payments. Meanwhile, he said, Cogent is providing Ukrainian customers free service during the conflict.

Schaeffer said these moves might impair internet video in Russia but will leave plenty of bandwidth for smaller files.

Other major backbone providers in Europe and Asia also continue to serve Russia, a net importer of bandwidth, said Doug Madory, director of internet analysis for the network management firm Kentik. He has noted no appreciable drop in connectivity from outside providers.

Cloudflare continues to operate four data centers in Russia even though Russian authorities ordered government websites to drop foreign-owned hosting providers as of Friday. In a March 7 blog post the company said it had determined "Russia needs more Internet access, not less."

Under a 2019 "sovereign internet" law, Russia is supposed to be able to operate its internet independent of the rest of the world. In practice, that has brought Russia closer to the kind of intensive internet monitoring and control practiced by China and Iran.

Its telecommunications oversight agency, Rozkomnadzor, successfully tested the system at scale a year ago when it throttled access to Twitter. It uses hundreds of so-called middleboxes — router-like devices run and remotely controlled by bureaucrats that can block individual websites and services — installed by law at all internet providers inside Russia.

But the system, which also lets the FSB security service spy on Russian citizens, is a relative sieve compared to China's Great Firewall. Andrew Sullivan, president of the nonprofit Internet Society, said there's no evidence it has the ability to successfully disconnect Russia from the wider internet.

"Walling off a country's internet is complicated, culturally, economically and technologically. And it becomes far more complicated with a country like Russia, whose internet, unlike China's, was not originally built out with government control in mind," he said.

"When it comes to censorship, the only ones who can really do it are the Chinese," said Serge Droz, a senior security engineer at Swiss-based Proton Technologies, which offers software for creating VPNs, a principal tool for circumventing state censorship.

ProtonVPN, which Droz says has been inventive in finding ways to circumvent Russian blocking, reports clocking ten times as many daily signups than before the war. VPN services tracked by researchers at Top10VPN.com found Facebook and Twitter downloads surging eight times higher than average. Its research found the Kremlin to have blocked more than 270 news and financial sites since the invasion, including BBC News and Voice of America's Russian-language services.

Russia's elites are believed to be big VPN users. No one expects them to disconnect.

Russian authorities are also having some success blocking the privacy-protecting Tor browser, which like VPNs lets users visit content at special ".onion" sites on the so-called dark web, researchers say. Twitter just created a Tor site; other outlets such as The New York Times also have them.

The Kremlin has not, however, blocked the popular Telegram messaging app. It's an important conduit for Ukrainian government ministries and also for Meduza, the Latvia-based independent Russian-language news organization whose website is blocked in Russia. Meduza has 1 million followers on Telegram.

One reason may be that Telegram is also a vital conduit for Kremlin propagandists, analysts say.

Additionally, Telegram does not feature default end-to-end encryption, which renders messages unreadable by the company and outsiders, as the popular U.S.-based messaging apps Signal and WhatsApp do. WhatsApp is owned by Facebook's parent, Meta. Telegram does offer users fully encrypted "private chats,"

although users have to make sure to activate them.

After the invasion, Signal founder Moxie Marlinspike tweeted a reminder that sensitive communication on insecure apps can literally be a matter of life and death in war. A Signal spokesman would not share user numbers, but WhatsApp has an estimated 63 million users in Russia.

Being able to access outside websites and apps vital to staying informed depend, however, on foreign-based VPN services that Russians say they are having trouble paying for since Visa and Mastercard cut off their country.

COVID-19 delays trial in plot to abduct Mich. Gov. Whitmer

By MICHAEL TARM and ED WHITE Associated Press

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — The trial for four men accused of plotting to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer that was scheduled to resume Monday has been postponed at least until Thursday because an essential participant tested positive for COVID-19.

U.S. District Judge Robert Jonker ordered the delay Sunday. Undercover FBI agents and informants were expected to testify in the coming weeks, as were two co-conspirators who pleaded guilty prior to trial as prosecutors build their case against four defendants accused of plotting to kidnap Whitmer.

The trial could last more than a month.

In testimony last week, prosecutors sought to counter defense claims that the four were entrapped, tricked by the FBI into joining a kidnapping conspiracy that wouldn't have occurred to them otherwise. Prosecutors laid the groundwork of their case by calling FBI investigators to explain how they obtained covert recordings and social media posts. They entered some of that key evidence.

On Thursday, jurors heard for the first time a recording of one of the defendants specifically talk about kidnapping the Democratic governor. Barry Croft Jr. could be heard saying there should be "a quick, precise grab" of Whitmer.

Jurors heard him and defendant Adam Fox in social media postings and recordings ranting about purported government abuses and saying violence was a valid response. Prosecutors say Croft and Fox were plot ringleaders.

Prosecutors said authorities arrested Fox, Croft, Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta in October 2020 to thwart the kidnapping and to ensure the men couldn't follow through on bids to buy powerful explosives.

In 2020, Whitmer was trading taunts with then-President Donald Trump over his administration's response to COVID-19. Her critics regularly protested at the Michigan Capitol, clogging streets around the statehouse and legally carrying semi-automatic rifles into the building.

Whitmer, who is seeking reelection this year, rarely talks publicly about the case and isn't expected to attend the trial. She has blamed Trump for stoking mistrust and fomenting anger over coronavirus restrictions and refusing to condemn hate groups and right-wing extremists like those charged in the plot. She has said he was also complicit in the deadly Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection.

Russian airstrike escalates offensive in western Ukraine

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian missiles pounded a military base in western Ukraine on Sunday, killing 35 people in an attack on a facility that served as a crucial hub for cooperation between Ukraine and the NATO countries supporting its defense. The barrage marked an escalation of Moscow's offensive and moved the fighting perilously close to the Polish border.

The attack so near a NATO member-country raised the possibility that the alliance could be drawn into the fight, and was heavy with symbolism in a conflict that has revived old Cold War rivalries and threatened to rewrite the current global security order.

More than 30 Russian cruise missiles targeted the sprawling facility at Yavoriv, which has long been used to train Ukrainian soldiers, often with instructors from the United States and other countries in the

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Western alliance. Poland is also a transit route for Western military aid to Ukraine, and the strikes followed Moscow's threats to target those shipments.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called it a "black day," and again urged NATO leaders to establish a no-fly zone over the country, a plea that the West has said could escalate the war to a nuclear confrontation.

"If you do not close our sky, it is only a matter of time before Russian missiles fall on your territory. NATO territory. On the homes of citizens of NATO countries," Zelenskyy said.

In addition to the fatalities, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry said that 134 people were wounded in the attack.

Ina Padi, a 40-year-old Ukrainian who crossed the border with her family, was taking shelter at a fire station in Wielkie Oczy, Poland, when she was awakened by blasts Sunday morning that made the glass in the windows shake.

"I understood in that moment, even if we are free of it, (the war) is still coming after us," she said.

Since their invasion more than two weeks ago, Russian forces have struggled in their advance across Ukraine, in the face of stiffer than expected resistance, bolstered by Western weapons support. Instead, Russian forces have besieged several cities and pummeled them with strikes, hitting two dozen medical facilities and leading to a series of humanitarian crises.

The U.N. has recorded at least 596 civilian deaths, though it believes the true toll is much higher, and Ukraine's Prosecutor General's office said that at least 85 children are among them. An American filmmaker and journalist was also killed Sunday. Millions more people have fled their homes amid the largest land conflict in Europe since World War II.

Talks for a broad cease-fire have so far failed, but the Kremlin's spokesman said another round would take place on Monday by videolink, according to Russian state news agency Tass. Meanwhile, U.S. President Joe Biden is sending his national security adviser to Rome to meet with a Chinese official. There are worries in Washington that Beijing is amplifying Russian disinformation and may help Moscow evade punishing Western economic sanctions.

Zelenskyy said he will continue negotiating with Russia and making requests for a meeting with Putin, which, so far, have gone unanswered by the Kremlin. Daily talks, Zelenskyy said, were necessary to establish a cease-fire and add more humanitarian corridors, which saved more than 130,000 people in six days.

The attacked training base near Yavoriv is less than 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the Polish border and appears to be the westernmost target struck during Russia's 18-day invasion.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken condemned the attack, tweeting: "The brutality must stop."

The base has hosted NATO drills, and a senior official, Admiral Rob Bauer, previously hailed it as embodying "the spirit of military cooperation" between Ukraine and international forces.

As such, the site is a potent symbol of Russia's longstanding concerns that the expansion in recent years of the 30-member Western military alliance to include former Soviet states threatens its security — something NATO denies. Still, the perceived threat from NATO is central to Moscow's justifications for the war, and it has demanded Ukraine drop its ambitions to join the alliance.

Russian fighters also fired at the airport in the western city of Ivano-Frankivsk, which is less than 150 kilometers (94 miles) north of Romania and 250 kilometers (155 miles) from Hungary, two other NATO allies.

NATO said Sunday that it currently does not have any personnel in Ukraine, though the United States has increased the number of U.S. troops deployed to Poland. White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said the West would respond if Russia's strikes travel outside Ukraine and hit any NATO members, even accidentally.

The city of Lviv, in western Ukraine itself, so far has been spared the scale of destruction happening to its east and south. Its population of 721,000 has swelled during the war, with residents escaping bombarded cities and as a waystation for the nearly 2.6 million people who have fled the country.

Ukrainian and European leaders have pushed with limited success for Russia to grant safe passage to civilians trapped by fighting. Ukrainian authorities said more than 10 humanitarian corridors would open

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Sunday, with agreement from Russia, including from the besieged port city of Mariupol, where the city council said 2,187 people have been killed.

But such promises have repeatedly crumbled, and there was no word late Sunday on whether people were able to use the evacuation routes. Officials did say that a convoy carrying 100 tons of aid was expected to arrive in Mariupol on Monday.

The suffering in the port city is "simply immense," the International Committee of the Red Cross said Sunday, noting that hundreds of thousands of its residents are "facing extreme or total shortages of basic necessities like food, water and medicine."

"Dead bodies, of civilians and combatants, remain trapped under the rubble or lying in the open where they fell," the Geneva-based organization said in a statement. "Life-changing injuries and chronic, debilitating conditions cannot be treated."

The fight for Mariupol is crucial because its capture could help Russia establish a land corridor to Crimea, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014.

Meanwhile, continued fighting on multiple fronts caused more misery in Ukraine on Sunday and provoked renewed international outrage.

In the southern Ukrainian city of Mykolaiv, near the Black Sea, authorities reported nine people killed in bombings. They said Russian airstrikes on a monastery and a children's resort in the eastern Donetsk region hit spots where monks and others were sheltering, wounding 32 people.

Around the capital, Kyiv, a major political and strategic target for the invasion, fighting also intensified, with overnight shelling in the northwestern suburbs and a missile strike Sunday that destroyed a warehouse to the east.

Kyiv Region police said on its official website that Russian troops opened fire on a car carrying two American journalists. The U.S. State Department said Brent Renaud died. Juan Arredondo was wounded.

In the Kyiv suburb of Irpin, Ukrainian soldier Alexei Lipirdi, 46, said that the Russians "want to intimidate us so that we will not be calm," but he and his unit remain defiant. As he spoke, smoke billowed from distant buildings and cars stood damaged or abandoned.

The city's mayor said only about 10,000 of its 60,000 residents remain. Many who stayed behind are the old or sick and those who are caring for them.

At a suburban hospital, doctors said 80% of their patients are civilians wounded by shelling. Patient Volodymyr Adamkovych, his abdomen bandaged, said he was wounded when his home was hit. He spent the night in his basement before he could reach doctors.

US official: Russia seeking military aid from China

By AAMER MADHANI and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A U.S. official said Russia asked China for military equipment to use in its invasion of Ukraine, a request that heightened tensions about the ongoing war ahead of a Monday meeting in Rome between top aides for the U.S. and Chinese governments.

In advance of the talks, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan bluntly warned China to avoid helping Russia evade punishment from global sanctions that have hammered the Russian economy. "We will not allow that to go forward," he said.

The prospect of China offering Russia financial help is one of several concerns for President Joe Biden. A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters, said that in recent days, Russia had requested support from China, including military equipment, to press forward in its ongoing war with Ukraine. The official did not provide details on the scope of the request. The request was first reported by the Financial Times and The Washington Post.

The Biden administration is also accusing China of spreading Russian disinformation that could be a pretext for Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces to attack Ukraine with chemical or biological weapons.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has put China in a delicate spot with two of its biggest trading partners: the U.S. and European Union. China needs access to those markets, yet it also has shown support for

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Moscow, joining with Russia in declaring a friendship with "no limits."

In his talks with senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi, Sullivan will indeed be looking for limits in what Beijing will do for Moscow.

"I'm not going to sit here publicly and brandish threats," he told CNN in a round of Sunday news show interviews. "But what I will tell you is we are communicating directly and privately to Beijing that there absolutely will be consequences" if China helps Russia "backfill" its losses from the sanctions.

"We will not allow that to go forward and allow there to be a lifeline to Russia from these economic sanctions from any country anywhere in the world," he said.

In brief comments on the talks, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian did not mention Ukraine, saying that the "key issue of this meeting is to implement the important consensus reached by the Chinese and U.S. heads of state in their virtual summit in November last year."

"They will exchange views on China-U.S. relations and international and regional issues of common concern," Zhao said in comments posted on the ministry's website late Sunday.

The White House said the talks will focus on the direct impact of Russia's war against Ukraine on regional and global security.

Biden administration officials say Beijing is spreading false Russian claims that Ukraine was running chemical and biological weapons labs with U.S. support. They say China is effectively providing cover if Russia moves ahead with a biological or chemical weapons attack on Ukrainians.

When Russia starts accusing other countries of preparing to launch biological or chemical attacks, Sullivan told NBC's "Meet the Press," "it's a good tell that they may be on the cusp of doing it themselves."

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby, on ABC's "This Week," said "we haven't seen anything that indicates some sort of imminent chemical or biological attack right now, but we're watching this very, very closely."

The striking U.S. accusations about Russian disinformation and Chinese complicity came after Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova alleged with no evidence that the U.S. was financing Ukrainian chemical and biological weapons labs.

The Russian claim was echoed by Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, who claimed there were 26 bio-labs and related facilities in "which the U.S. Department of Defense has absolute control." The United Nations has said it has received no information backing up such accusations.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki called the claims "preposterous."

There is growing concern inside the White House that China is aligning itself with Russia on the Ukraine war in hopes it will advance Beijing's "vision of the world order" in the long term, according to a person familiar with administration thinking. The person was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Sullivan told "Face the Nation" on CBS that the Russian rhetoric on chemical and biological warfare is "an indicator that, in fact, the Russians are getting ready to do it and try and pin the blame elsewhere and nobody should fall for that."

The international community has assessed that Russia used chemical weapons in attempts to assassinate Putin detractors such as Alexei Navalny and former spy Sergei Skripal. Russia also supports the Assad government in Syria, which has used chemical weapons against its people in a decadelong civil war.

China has been one of few countries to avoid criticizing the Russians for its invasion of Ukraine. China's leader Xi Jinping hosted Putin for the opening of the Winter Olympics in Beijing, just three weeks before Russia invaded on Feb. 24.

During Putin's visit, the two leaders issued a 5,000-word statement declaring limitless friendship.

The Chinese abstained on U.N. votes censuring Russia and has criticized economic sanctions against Moscow. It has expressed its support for peace talks and offered its services as a mediator, despite questions about its neutrality and scant experience mediating international conflict.

But questions remain over how far Beijing will go to alienate the West and put its own economy at risk. Sullivan said China and all countries are on notice that they cannot "basically bail Russia out ... give Russia a workaround to the sanctions," with impunity.

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Chinese officials have said Washington shouldn't be able to complain about Russia's actions because the U.S. invaded Iraq under false pretenses. The U.S. claimed to have evidence Saddam Hussein was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction though none was ever found.

On CNN, Sullivan said the administration believes China knew that Putin "was planning something" before the invasion of Ukraine. But he said the Chinese government "may not have understood the full extent of it because it's very possible that Putin lied to them the same way that he lied to Europeans and others."

Sullivan and Yang last met for face-to-face talks in Switzerland, where Sullivan raised the Biden administration's concerns about China's military provocations against Taiwan, human rights abuses against ethnic minorities and efforts to squelch pro-democracy advocates in Hong Kong.

That meeting set the stage for a three-hour long virtual meeting in November between Biden and Xi.

Sullivan is also to meet Luigi Mattiolo, diplomatic adviser to Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, while in Rome.

Iran claims missile barrage near US consulate in Iraq

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iran claimed responsibility Sunday for a missile barrage that struck near a sprawling U.S. consulate complex in northern Iraq, saying it was retaliation for an Israeli strike in Syria that killed two members of its Revolutionary Guard earlier this week.

Iraq's Foreign Ministry on Sunday summoned Iran's ambassador to protest the attack, calling it a flagrant violation of the country's sovereignty.

No injuries were reported in Sunday's attack on the city of Irbil, which marked a significant escalation between the U.S. and Iran. Hostility between the longtime foes has often played out in Iraq, whose government is allied with both countries.

The attack drew harsh condemnation from the Iraqi government, which called it a "violation of international law and norms" and demanded an explanation from the Iranian leadership. Iraq's Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmad al-Sahhaf told The Associated Press that the ministry summoned the Iranian ambassador, Iraj Masjedi, to deliver the diplomatic protest.

The United States strongly condemned the strike and said it was an unjustified attack on a civilian residence.

"We will support the Government of Iraq in holding Iran accountable, and we will support our partners throughout the Middle East in confronting similar threats from Iran," the White House national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said in a statement. "The United States of America stands behind the full sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Iraq."

No U.S. facilities were damaged or personnel injured, State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters in Washington. The U.S. had no indication the attack was directed at the United States, he said.

Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard said on its website that it attacked what it described as an Israeli spy center in Irbil. It did not elaborate, but in a statement said Israel had been on the offensive, citing the recent strike that killed two members of the Revolutionary Guard. The semi-official Tasnim news agency quoted an unnamed source as saying Iran fired 10 Fateh missiles, including several Fateh-110 missiles, which have a range of about 300 kilometers (186 miles).

The source claimed the attack resulted in multiple casualties. There was no immediate comment from Israel on the allegations or the Iranian missile barrage.

An Iraqi official in Baghdad initially said several missiles had hit the U.S. consulate in Irbil, which is new and unoccupied, adding that it had been the intended target of the attack. Later, Lawk Ghafari, the head of Kurdistan's foreign media office, said none of the missiles had struck the U.S. facility but that residential areas around the compound had been hit.

Following a Cabinet meeting, the Iraqi government in Baghdad reiterated its refusal to allow Iraq to be used to settle scores between other countries and said it has requested an explanation from the Iranian leadership.

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Satellite broadcast channel Kurdistan24, which is located near the U.S. consulate, went on air from their studio shortly after the attack, showing shattered glass and debris on their studio floor.

The attack came several days after Iran said it would retaliate for an Israeli strike near Damascus, Syria, that killed two members of its Revolutionary Guard. On Sunday, Iran's state-run IRNA news agency quoted Iraqi media acknowledging the attacks in Irbil, without saying where they originated.

The missile barrage coincided with regional tensions. Negotiations in Vienna over Tehran's tattered nuclear deal hit a "pause" over Russian demands about sanctions targeting Moscow for its war on Ukraine. Meanwhile, Iran suspended its secret Baghdad-brokered talks aimed at defusing yearslong tensions with regional rival Saudi Arabia, after Saudi Arabia carried out its largest known mass execution in its modern history with over three dozens Shiites killed.

Iraqi security officials said there were no casualties from the Irbil attack, which they said occurred after midnight and caused material damage in the area. They spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

One of the Iraqi officials said the ballistic missiles were fired from Iran, without elaborating. He said the Iranian-made Fateh-110 missiles likely were fired in retaliation for the two Revolutionary Guards killed in Syria.

U.S. forces stationed at Irbil's airport compound have come under fire from rocket and drone attacks in the past, with U.S. officials blaming Iran-backed groups.

The top U.S. commander for the Middle East has repeatedly warned about the increasing threats of attacks from Iran and Iranian-backed militias on troops and allies in Iraq and Syria.

In an interview with The Associated Press in December, Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie said that while U.S. forces in Iraq have shifted to a non-combat role, Iran and its proxies still want all American troops to leave the country. As a result, he said, that may trigger more attacks.'

The Biden administration decided last July to end the U.S. combat mission in Iraq by Dec. 31, and U.S. forces gradually moved to an advisory role last year. The troops will still provide air support and other military aid for Iraq's fight against the Islamic State.

The U.S. presence in Iraq has long been a flash point for Tehran, but tensions spiked after a January 2020 U.S. drone strike near the Baghdad airport killed a top Iranian general. In retaliation, Iran launched a barrage of missiles at al-Asad airbase, where U.S. troops were stationed. More than 100 service members suffered traumatic brain injuries in the blasts.

More recently, Iranian proxies are believed responsible for an assassination attempt late last year on Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

And officials have said they believe Iran was behind the October drone attack at the military outpost in southern Syria where American troops are based. No U.S. personnel were killed or injured in the attack.

Al-Kadhimi tweeted: "The aggression which targeted the dear city of Irbil and spread fear amongst its inhabitants is an attack on the security of our people."

Masrour Barzani, prime minister of the semi-autonomous Kurdish-controlled region, condemned the attack. In a Facebook post, he said Irbil "will not bow to the cowards who carried out the terrorist attack."

Now that NCAA brackets are out, here's what you should know

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

After the pandemic shut things down in 2020 and severely restricted the number of spectators last year, we finally have a March featuring NCAA Tournament games with no crowd restrictions at sites across the country.

The notable upsets and buzzer-beating shots that highlighted conference tournaments last week offered just an appetizer of what to expect. Now that the 68-team field been announced, here's a rundown of things to know before filling out your bracket.

GONZAGA ON TOP AGAIN

Gonzaga (26-3) is the No. 1 overall seed and will face Sun Belt champion Georgia State (18-10) on

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Thursday in Portland, Oregon.

This marks the third straight tournament in which Gonzaga has been a No. 1 seed. Gonzaga lost to Texas Tech in a regional final as a No. 1 seed in 2019 and fell to Baylor in last season's national championship game.

Gonzaga was ranked second when the 2020 season was halted and very well could have earned a No. 1 seed that year as well if the tournament had gone on as planned.

WHO'S NO. 1?

Defending national champion Baylor, Kansas and Arizona joined Gonzaga as No. 1 seeds.

This marks the first time the Big 12 has two No. 1 seeds since Oklahoma and Texas were both seeded first in 2003. Texas made its last Final Four appearance that year and Oklahoma reached a regional final before both teams lost to eventual national champion Syracuse.

RAISING ARIZONA

This marks the second straight year that a team has earned a No. 1 seed after going multiple years without a bid.

Illinois earned a No. 1 seed last year in its first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2013. Now Arizona is a No. 1 seed in its first NCAA Tournament since 2018 under new coach Tommy Lloyd.

The Wildcats went 17-15 and didn't earn a bid in 2019. After the pandemic forced the cancellation of the 2020 tournament, Arizona was ineligible last year because it self-imposed a postseason ban during an NCAA investigation.

WHO'S GOING FIRST?

Indiana faces Wyoming on Tuesday and Notre Dame meets Rutgers on Wednesday in Dayton, Ohio. Those were the last four teams to earn at-large bids.

The other matchups in Dayton have Texas A&M-Corpus Christi facing Texas Southern on Tuesday and Division I scoring leader Peter Kiss leading Bryant against Wright State on Wednesday.

They will try to follow the lead of UCLA, which went from the First Four to the Final Four last season.

JUST MISSING OUT

Dayton nearly ended up in Dayton. The Flyers were one of the last four teams left out of the 68-team bracket along with Oklahoma, SMU and Texas A&M.

KRZYZEWSKI'S LAST DANCE

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski, who announced last year this would be his final season, will attempt to walk away with a sixth national title and 13th Final Four appearance. He enters this NCAA Tournament two wins away from reaching 1,200 career victories.

Duke is a No. 2 seed in the West Region and faces Cal State Fullerton on Friday in Greenville, South Carolina. Krzyzewski's Blue Devils could end up facing Tom Izzo and Michigan State in an intriguing second-round matchup.

Duke's national championships, all under Krzyzewski, came in 1991, 1992, 2001, 2010 and 2015. The Blue Devils haven't reached the Final Four since that 2015 title.

BIG TEN'S TITLE CHASE

The Big Ten leads all conferences with nine bids, but none of its teams got seeded first or second in a region. That could make it difficult for the Big Ten to win its first title since Michigan State's 2000 championship.

The highest-seeded Big Ten teams are Purdue and Wisconsin, which are seeded third in their respective regions.

The Big Ten is attempting to bounce back from a disappointing 2021 tournament performance. The Big Ten also earned nine bids last year but didn't send anyone to the Final Four and went 8-9.

J-STATE'S UNUSUAL ROUTE

Jacksonville State is the rare team from a one-bid league to earn an NCAA invitation without winning its conference tournament. Bellarmine won the Atlantic Sun Tournament but was ineligible for the NCAA Tournament because it's only in the second year of a four-year transition from Division II to Division I.

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The Atlantic Sun's automatic bid instead went to Jacksonville State because it won the league's regular-season title. The Gamecocks, who lost in the conference semifinals are making their first NCAA appearance since 2017.

WHO'S SURGING?

Summit League champion South Dakota State owns the longest active winning streak of any Division I team with 21 consecutive victories. Murray State of the Ohio Valley Conference has won 20 straight. Colgate has won 15 in a row.

In the power conferences, Arizona has won 15 of 16, Tennessee has won 12 of 13 and Iowa has won nine of 10.

PLAYING THEIR WAY IN

Virginia Tech wasn't included in most brackets heading into the ACC Tournament and needed Darius Maddox's buzzer-beating 3-pointer in overtime to win its opening-round game with Clemson. But the seventh-seeded Hokies turned it on from there and beat Notre Dame, North Carolina and Duke to win the ACC's automatic bid.

Richmond played its way into the field by upsetting Davidson in Sunday's Atlantic 10 tourney final.

Texas A&M (23-12) nearly played its way in by reaching the SEC Tournament final as a No. 9 seed but lost its chance at an automatic bid when it fell to Tennessee in the championship game.

Breonna Taylor's family, supporters sustain push for justice

By PIPER HUDSPETH BLACKBURN Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — A square in downtown Louisville was engulfed with blue and silver balloons Sunday afternoon, as Breonna Taylor's family, joined by demonstrators and organizers, gathered to honor the two-year anniversary of the Black woman's passing in a botched police raid.

Taylor's mother, Tamika Palmer, stood at the center of a memorial made up of paintings, posters and flowers. Staring up at the sky, she let go of the last balloon as a crowd cried out Taylor's name.

The memorial took place a couple weeks after one of the Kentucky police officers involved in the raid, Brett Hankison, was found not guilty on charges he endangered neighbors the night he fired into Taylor's apartment.

His acquittal likely closed the door on the possibility of state criminal charges against any of the officers involved in the raid. None of the officers involved were charged with Taylor's death.

Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman who worked as an emergency medical technician, was shot multiple times during the raid. No drugs were found in her apartment, and the warrant was later found to be flawed.

Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron determined that the officers fired into her apartment in self-defense after Taylor's boyfriend shot at them first as they broke into her apartment. Cameron, a Republican, acknowledged that Taylor's death was heartbreaking but did not give a grand jury the option of charging anyone with killing her.

Taylor's death helped spur massive racial injustice protests in the summer of 2020, along with the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd. In her hometown of Louisville, protests carried on for weeks, with many meetings in the city's downtown Jefferson Square Park to voice their frustration and disappointment that no officers were charged.

Clutching a microphone onstage Sunday, Taylor's aunt, Bianca Austin, sharply condemned the Hankison verdict, insisting that the Louisville Metro Police Department has not been transparent with Taylor's family or the city's Black residents.

"Kentucky has failed Breonna Taylor. Kentucky has failed our community," Austin said to protestors gathered in the square. Wearing a white t-shirt decorated with a portrait of her niece, she pointed in the direction of the Louisville Metro Police Department buildings.

"We demand the truth, we demand transparency," she added. "We are going to continue to demand answers and we're gonna continue to keep pressure on the Louisville Metro Police Department, who continues to fail us and our community."

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Democratic state Rep. Keturah Herron urged the demonstrators to vote out Jefferson Circuit Judge Mary Shaw, who signed the warrant for the raid. Shaw is up for reelection in 2022.

"We have an opportunity to get justice in a different type of way by going to the ballot box this election season," Herron explained.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, a Democrat, tweeted a statement in support of Taylor's family, including her mother.

"Thinking about Tamika Palmer today and holding her and all of those mourning the tragic loss of Breonna Taylor close in prayer," he said. "Let us continue to work to build a safer, more just and equitable world full of love and compassion."

An ongoing federal investigation could be wide ranging and is regarded by many as the last chance for justice for Taylor's death.

Snapshots of 4 men charged in Whitmer kidnapping plot

By ED WHITE, SARA BURNETT and MICHAEL TARM Associated Press

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — After more than two days of testimony, jurors have unflattering snapshots of four men who are charged with planning to strike back against government by kidnapping Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer from her weekend home.

Prosecutors introduced videos, messages and secretly recorded conversations full of antigovernment screeds, mostly expressed by Barry Croft Jr. and Adam Fox, who are described as the leaders. Evidence presented early in what's likely to be a weekslong trial has bounced from Michigan to gatherings in Ohio and Wisconsin and an arrest in New Jersey — and not always in order.

"The pattern doesn't always become clear until the end. ... Don't feel pressure to try to pull it all together just yet," U.S. District Judge Robert Jonker told jurors Thursday.

Croft, Fox, Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta are charged with conspiracy; three of them also face weapons-related charges. Lawyers have signaled an entrapment defense, claiming the men were cajoled by undercover FBI agents and zealous, greedy informants.

Trial was scheduled to resume Monday in federal court in Grand Rapids, Michigan, but Jonker ordered Sunday that it would be delayed until at least Thursday because an essential participant tested positive for COVID-19.

Here is some of what the jury has heard so far:

CROFT

The 46-year-old trucker from Bear, Delaware, is an adherent of the "boogaloo" movement, which believes the country is broken and that politicians "should be targeted and attacked," Assistant U.S. Attorney Jonathan Roth said.

Croft and Fox attended a meeting of allies in Dublin, Ohio, in July 2020. So did an informant who recorded Croft saying he was so devoted to an antigovernment cause, "I might murder a cop."

Croft said he was even willing to slash his cheek in an effort to fool face-detection technology used by law enforcement.

"One criminal governor in our possession, we've captured the flag in that state. We can then start to issue terms," Croft said in a video in May 2020.

Defense attorney Joshua Blanchard said Croft was targeted by thin-skinned FBI agents who simply didn't like his disgust of government.

"There was no plan, there was no agreement and no kidnapping," he said.

FOX

Fox, 38, of Wyoming, Michigan, was living in the basement of a vacuum shop and brushing his teeth next door at a restaurant. He was tapped by Croft to lead the plot, Roth said.

Prosecutors portrayed Fox as a man committed to violence. He said in a video that he was in favor of a "revolutionary war" to get rid of "corrupt, tyrannical government."

Fox said he wanted to offer "constitutional comfort" to angry Michigan gym owners whose businesses

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were shut down for months to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Fitness centers, he said, were “essential for a lot of people’s mental health.”

In August 2020, according to the government, Fox scouted Whitmer’s cottage for the first time and said an attack would be a “nightmare” and a “shootout.” Prosecutors said he wanted to blow up a nearby bridge to stymie police during an abduction.

But defense attorney Christopher Gibbons said Fox was heavily influenced by an FBI informant known as “Big Dan,” who was a member of a militia known as the Wolverine Watchmen.

Dan “said things like, ‘You can train for everything but what’s your goal?’ The goal is what the government wants,” Gibbons told jurors, referring to entrapment.

HARRIS and CASERTA

They didn’t come up as much as Croft and Fox in the first two days of trial. But Roth said they were considered soldiers in Fox’s “kill squad.”

Harris, a former Marine infantryman, suggested killing Whitmer would be better than kidnapping her, perhaps “posing as a pizza delivery person and shooting her at home,” the prosecutor said.

Caserta’s home in Canton Township, Michigan, was full of antigovernment items, and he talked about crushing the governor’s skull, Roth said.

“You will hear him say, ‘Whatever we do in the future, this is my personal choice to be involved here,’” Roth said.

Defense lawyers pointed out that Harris, 24, and Caserta, 33, didn’t join the others on the road trip to northern Michigan to look at Whitmer’s home, a key part of the government’s case. But they participated in firearms training sessions, including a “shoot house,” a mock-up of Whitmer’s house.

Attorney Julia Kelly said Harris of Lake Orion, Michigan, “was not perfect in the summer of 2020” but didn’t agree to kidnap the governor. Lawyer Michael Hills said Caserta participated in training but didn’t organize the “fed-sponsored events.”

Harris’ parents were in court, taking notes and frequently leaning over to whisper to Kelly.

Croft, Fox, Harris and Caserta were arrested in October 2020 along with two others, Ty Garbin and Kaleb Franks, who pleaded guilty to the conspiracy and said no one was entrapped by agents or informants.

“They will tell you they made their own decisions,” Roth told the jury. “They will tell you the defendants did the same.”

Whitmer, who is seeking reelection this year, has blamed then-President Donald Trump for fomenting anger over coronavirus restrictions and refusing to condemn right-wing extremists like those charged in the plot. She said he was complicit in the deadly Jan. 6 Capitol riot.

Sportswashing derby: Chelsea-Newcastle bound by murky owners

By ROB HARRIS AP Global Soccer Writer

LONDON (AP) — The chants grew louder as the Newcastle fans closed in on Stamford Bridge through the throngs of the subdued Chelsea support.

“Chelsea get bankrupt everywhere they go,” they gloated.

The chance to seize on the misfortune of a rival was an open goal the supporters from northeast England were not going to miss.

But beyond the taunting songs, there were few obvious signs around Chelsea’s stadium to signal the unprecedented situation the Premier League club now finds itself in — only permitted to operate under a special British government license after owner Roman Abramovich was sanctioned over his ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Freezing the assets of Abramovich restricts Chelsea’s ability to generate income. So the club shops remained closed as they have been since Thursday when the sanctions against Abramovich were announced. No matchday magazines were allowed to be sold. The only fans allowed into Sunday’s 1-0 victory for third-place Chelsea over Newcastle had to have bought tickets before Thursday.

The reigning European and world champions are sending out the message they are running out of cash

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— becoming “skint” in a British colloquialism — to pressure the government to ease restrictions before the fast-tracked sale can be completed to end Abramovich’s 19 years of trophy-filled ownership.

“Chelsea’s skint,” came another song from the Magpies fans, “and the Mags are rich.”

Newcastle certainly has the richest owners in football. But it is an ownership that denies Newcastle fans the ability to assume a moral high ground. And yet during a match where the chants were most memorable, they still bellowed: “Abramovich is a war offender”.

Abramovich has not commented since being targeted in a crackdown on the assets of Russian oligarchs in Britain since Moscow launched the invasion of Ukraine that the Premier League has condemned.

And yet, the same league officials in October approved the sale of Newcastle to the Saudi sovereign wealth fund led by crown prince Mohammed bin Salman despite protests by human rights activists and insisting the kingdom didn’t control the club.

“I don’t want to point the finger because comparing yourself or blaming the others,” Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel said, “doesn’t make the situation for us a different situation.

“We condemn war and the action from Russia towards Ukraine. There is no doubt that we are facing the consequences actually at the moment.”

On the eve of this game against Chelsea — dubbed a “sportswashing derby” — Bin Salman’s regime carried out the largest known mass execution in the autocratic kingdom’s modern history by killing 81 people convicted of crimes ranging from murder to membership in a militant group.

“In an era of global sportswashing and with the horror of what is currently unfolding in Ukraine,” said Amnesty International UK CEO Sacha Deshmukh, “the Premier League has a clear moral responsibility to change its ownership rules to put a stop to topflight English football being used as a PR vehicle for those complicit in serious human rights violations.”

The Newcastle fans were unmoved and still waving Saudi flags in the Shed End in west London.

“I’ll stick to football,” Newcastle manager Eddie Howe said when asked about the country bankrolling his club launching the mass executions.

It’s a stance that overlooks how clubs in world football can be used as political tools.

“I’ve made my position clear,” Howe responded curtly.

It’s an uneasy situation even some Newcastle fans admit being conflicted by, despite the more than \$100 million of spending in the first transfer window under Saudi ownership helping the team to move clear of the relegation zone. While Newcastle shows solidarity toward the Ukrainian victims of Russia’s aggression, the Saudis are involved in a war against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen that has spawned the world’s worst humanitarian disaster.

For now, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has cordial relations with Saudi Arabia and the country’s ambassador to Riyadh celebrated the Newcastle purchase. But the moves against Abramovich’s British businesses serve as a cautionary warning for Newcastle fans celebrating their newfound investment and how geopolitical tensions can impact a Premier League team.

“Boris Johnson, he’s coming for you,” were the heckles from Chelsea to the visitors from Newcastle.

Outside, Newcastle fans listened in as Angie Conlon, a Chelsea fan who traveled down from the north-east city, reflected on how authorities have a wider responsibility to assess the source of owner funding in light of Abramovich’s downfall.

“This could easily happen because the Saudis are doing horrible things to people in Yemen,” said Conlon, who has been coming to Chelsea games since the 1970s. “It just goes to show if we’ve got a (new) owner — we’re bound to have billionaire owners, otherwise you can’t afford this club these days — anything can happen that could change that in a week. Really, we won’t get to the end of the season if we don’t get this club sold.”

Perhaps it was the realization of the severity of the situation now facing Chelsea that ensured there was no repeat on Sunday of the Abramovich chants that disrupted the previous weekend’s backing for Ukraine during a game at Burnley.

Still hanging at Stamford Bridge, though, was “The Roman Empire” banner on a Russian flag dedicated to the owner who has funded 21 trophies since 2003 for a club that had won only 11 in its previous 98 years.

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"You're never going to change any Chelsea fan's opinions on him," 64-year-old fan Kim Clark said. "Never for what he's done for this club."

Just as he has been for three decades, Clark was manning an unofficial stall close to the Chelsea stadium. There were a couple of books about Abramovich on sale and old matchday magazines.

Fans were unable to buy them for Sunday's game on government orders. The only editions of a limited print run were provided to those who had pre-paid, club guests or media and they found the only reference to Abramovich was a statement announcing the sanctions and the government license the club was operating under.

"We know there's going to be sanctions, we understand that something has to be done," Clark said. "It's getting petty... but it's all the knock-on effects that are happening now. It's affecting the fans."

Obama tests positive for COVID-19, says he's 'feeling fine'

The Associated Press undefined

Former President Barack Obama said on Sunday that he had tested positive for the coronavirus, though he's feeling relatively healthy and his wife, Michelle, tested negative.

"I've had a scratchy throat for a couple days, but am feeling fine otherwise," Obama said on Twitter. "Michelle and I are grateful to be vaccinated and boosted."

Obama encouraged more Americans to get vaccinated against the coronavirus, despite the declining infection rate in the U.S. There were roughly 35,000 infections on average over the past week, down sharply from mid-January when that average was closer to 800,000.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that 75.2% of U.S. adults are fully vaccinated and 47.7% of the fully vaccinated have received a booster shot. The CDC relaxed its guidelines for indoor masking in late February, taking a more holistic approach that meant the vast majority of Americans live in areas without the recommendation for indoor masking in public.

Average US gas price rises 22% in two weeks to record \$4.43

CAMARILLO, Calif. (AP) — The average U.S. price of regular-grade gasoline shot up a whopping 79 cents over the past two weeks to a record-setting \$4.43 per gallon (3.8 liters) as Russia's invasion of Ukraine is contributing to already-high prices at the pump.

Industry analyst Trilby Lundberg of the Lundberg Survey said Sunday the new price exceeds by 32 cents the prior all-time high of \$4.11 set in July 2008. But that's still quite a ways from the inflation-adjusted record high of about \$5.24 per gallon.

The price at the pump is \$1.54 higher than it was a year ago.

Lundberg said gas prices are likely to remain high in the short term as crude oil costs soar amid global supply concerns following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Prices at the pump were rising long before Russia invaded Ukraine as post-lockdown demand has pushed prices higher. Crude prices plummeted in early 2020 as economies around the world shut down because of COVID-19 — the price of futures even turned negative, meaning some sellers were paying buyers to take oil. Prices rebounded, however, as demand recovered faster than producers pulled oil out of the ground and inventories dried up.

Then, the price increase accelerated after war began.

Energy prices are also contributing to the worst inflation that Americans have seen in 40 years, far outpacing higher wages.

Nationwide, the highest average price for regular-grade gas is in the San Francisco Bay Area, at \$5.79 per gallon. The lowest average is in Tulsa, Oklahoma, at \$3.80 per gallon.

According to the survey, the average price of diesel also spiked, up \$1.18 over two weeks, to \$5.20 a gallon. Diesel costs \$2.11 more than it did one year ago.

Census: Black population grows in suburbs, shrinks in cities

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By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — A longtime area staple with its wagon wheel décor and “Roy Rogers ribeye,” The Ranch Steak House is fighting to reopen as one of the last sit-down restaurants in the once-flourishing Black Chicago neighborhood of Roseland.

About 13 miles (21 kilometers) away near Indiana, Christopher Cain and wife Deja Cousins-Cain sought a new market for their wine bar that promises “Good Vibes Only,” settling on the suburb of Lansing, where growth has included a steady increase in Black residents.

The two enclaves of roughly 30,000 people reflect how Black migration patterns in the 21st century are changing the makeup of metropolitan areas nationwide. For decades, Black residents have been leaving some of the nation’s largest cities while suburbs have seen an increase in their Black populations. Those two trends have now spread to even more areas of the country, according to the 2020 U.S. census.

The patterns echo the “white flight” that upended urban landscapes in the 20th century. Like those who left cities before them, Black residents often move because of worries about crime and a desire for reputable schools, affordable housing and amenities. But there are key differences: Leaving Black city neighborhoods that are starved for investment is often more of a necessity than a choice, and those who do settle into new suburban lives often find racial inequities there, too.

From 1990 to 2000, 13 of the United States’ biggest cities lost Black residents. By 2020, it was 23. According to the census, roughly 54% of Black residents within the 100 biggest American metro areas were suburbanites in 2020, up from 43% two decades ago, according to Bill Frey of the Brookings Institution.

While New York, Los Angeles and Philadelphia all lost Black residents from 2010 to 2020, the change was especially notable in Chicago, which gained population but lost 85,000 Black people, the highest number after Detroit, according to the 2020 census. Those numbers could vary slightly, as the Census Bureau reported last week that 3.3% of the Black population was undercounted in the 2020 census, a rate higher than in 2010.

The official count found that a section of Roseland measuring less than 1 square mile lost 1,600 Black residents. Now, the area near where former President Barack Obama was a community organizer — located about 20 minutes south of downtown — doesn’t even have a grocery store. That makes Judy Ware, who bought the Ranch restaurant in 2018, more determined to hang on.

“We take pride in trying to keep this institution in the neighborhood,” she said. “It’s needed.”

For others, though, the suburbs offer a fresh choice.

Cousins-Cain and her husband surprised themselves in choosing Lansing, which wasn’t always friendly to Black people.

Settled by Dutch and German immigrants, the city has seen a roughly 50% increase in its Black residents, who now represent almost half the population. Lansing recently elected its first Black trustee.

“It just feels like we are finally getting an opportunity to bring something to the table and bring something to the conversation,” Cousins-Cain said.

The trends are nuanced. Part of the explanation is that Black residents are continuing to move to Southern cities in a reversal of the Great Migration, a movement that began in the 1910s and resulted in millions leaving the South for northern cities to escape discrimination. But more recently, some of the starkest changes are happening within metro areas as suburbs of major cities see Black population growth.

Black residents, who represented roughly 40% of Chicago’s population in 1980, now make up less than 30%. Their presence increased, meanwhile, in dozens of Chicago suburbs from 2010 to 2020.

Chicago residents and demographers offer no shortage of reasons for the urban exodus:

— The decline of the steel industry and blue-collar jobs starting in the 1970s. — The war on drugs. — The dismantling of public housing in the 2000s that displaced thousands of Black residents. — School closures in 2014 that disproportionately affected Black and Latino children.

“It’s really hard to point to one specific thing,” said Dan Cooper, director of research with Chicago’s Metropolitan Planning Council. “And when you look at the confluence of factors, Black folks haven’t been

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centered in policy or they are centered in wrong ways.”

Chicago, long a segregated city, continues to report disparate outcomes by race when it comes to home ownership, income, transportation access and more. In Roseland, residents note persistent crime, delayed city services and a train line that ends at Roseland’s northern edge. Worries persist about population loss diluting Black political power as drafts of a political remapping show fewer majority-Black wards.

Many said those issues forced them to leave.

Truck driver Chris Calhoun, 32, sought more peace in suburban South Holland in 2014.

The deciding factor for him, he said, was, “Where can I live where my kids can go outside and ride their bikes, or we can take a walk around the block as a family without looking over my shoulder?”

Crystal Fenn left in 2015 for law school in suburban Atlanta, where she’s now an attorney.

“If you could do anything better for yourself, why would you want to be there?” she said. “The lack of economic dollars, it’s almost like the city doesn’t care about Roseland anymore.”

Once a Dutch enclave, Roseland was annexed into Chicago in 1892. Within decades, there was an influx of Black families.

Marc Pullins, 56, recalls four nearby grocery stores and has fond memories of Kohn Elementary School.

“Half the neighborhood went to that school,” said Pullins, a current resident and activist. “They’re all gone.”

Kohn is located within the section of Roseland that lost more than 1,600 Black residents. The school sits vacant, a green “For Sale” sign out front. It is among the roughly 55 schools targeted by former Mayor Rahm Emanuel in the nation’s largest mass school closure.

Nearby homes and businesses, including a candy shop, are shuttered. The vacancies extend down a once-thriving business corridor that Preservation Chicago has deemed among Chicago’s “most endangered places.”

Kisha Pleasant, 41, bought her first home in Roseland, but violence and dwindling amenities pushed her out.

“I can’t retire in this area,” she said. “I want to come outside, and I don’t want to be scared that somebody will be shooting at me.”

Last year, she moved to Lansing.

Sameerah and Jerrell Miller moved with their daughter to a leafy Lansing street six years ago after living in Chicago and neighboring Oak Park.

They bought a home near a top school for less than what they would have paid in Chicago. Lansing’s median home price is about \$195,000, less than half the city’s median.

“Lansing, to this day, still has kids outside in the summertime playing,” said Jerrell Miller. “You don’t really get that in the city without worry.”

The growing Black population prompted Micaela Smith, who moved to Lansing in 2002, to seek office. She became the suburb’s first Black trustee last year, after a challenging campaign in the predominantly white suburb.

“I had to do more persuasion to convince the voters,” Smith said.

Activists say Lansing has had its fair share of issues involving race. In 2017, a Black teenager was held down and threatened by a white off-duty police officer, a confrontation that led the city to enter a memorandum of understanding with activists and the U.S. Department of Justice.

Pastor David Bigsby of In The Upper Room Ministries recently held a community call about disproportionate traffic stops, noting a major thoroughfare largely divides Black and white residents.

“It’s still segregated in town,” he said.

Still, the 76-year-old, who moved into the parsonage six years ago, has about 250 congregants now, an increase of about 20%.

Lansing is also seeing a boost in Black-owned businesses. Cain and Cousins-Cain opened their chic S.L. Wine Bar last year, with R&B and jazz setting the mood. Support, particularly from Black customers, has been strong.

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"We want our own version of 'Cheers,'" Cousins said.

Roseland residents who remain take pride in Obama's work there, and say they've seen signs of a turn-around.

Chicago officials recently launched a \$750 million program to improve neglected neighborhoods, including Roseland, and have detailed plans for a train line extension. The Greater Roseland Chamber of Commerce hopes a community hospital will grow into a medical district.

Judy Ware is preparing to resume table service at the Ranch after struggling through the coronavirus pandemic. A fire set during unrest following George Floyd's killing in Minneapolis destroyed the restaurant's interior, and takeout-only couldn't sustain the business, which has been operating for more than 50 years.

After renaming it Ware Ranch Steak House and installing new flooring and orange booths, Ware is feeling optimistic as she prepares to reopen this month.

"If we can weather the storm, I think we'll come out good on the other side," she said. "There is a lot of stuff waiting to happen in Roseland."

Ukraine refugees tell harrowing tales even as numbers ease

By STEPHEN McGRATH Associated Press

SUCEAVA, Romania (AP) — Elena Yurchuk saw families with children blown up and the hospital she worked in reduced to rubble during Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"I don't know if I have a home or not," said the 44-year-old nurse from the northern Ukrainian town of Chernihiv. "Our city is under siege and we barely escaped."

Yurchuk has arrived to safety in the Romanian border town of Suceava, which has welcomed thousands of refugees fleeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the past days. Chernihiv, she said, now resembles a "ghost town."

"People in cars are blown up by mines, a car with children and a young family was blown up ... literally behind us," Yurchuk said.

While the number of people arriving in neighboring countries from Ukraine appears to have eased in the past week, the refugees' harrowing accounts of destruction and death are evidence of the continued suffering of civilians in Ukrainian cities besieged by Russian forces.

At the train station in Przemysl, Poland, refugees described traveling in packed trains and "people sleeping on each other" during their journeys to safety. Some heard explosions as they passed through a western region of Ukraine near Lviv in the area where Russian missiles pounded a military training base, killing at least 35 people.

"When I went through Lviv there was an explosion. They bombed two military bases," said Elizaveta Zmievskaya, 25, from Dnipro. "The sky became red."

More than 1.5 million refugees have arrived in Poland since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 — out of a total of around 2.7 million people that the United Nations say have fled so far.

But Polish border guard spokeswoman Anna Michalska said that the numbers of refugees arriving have eased in the past week with about 79,800 arriving on Saturday, compared to 142,000 a week earlier. In Romania, 29,636 refugees arrived on March 7, with the number dropping to 16,676 on Saturday.

Still, the refugees said their escape to safety was as hard as ever.

Roman Titov Chuguyev, 16, traveled with his brother for more than 10 hours in a crowded train before meeting their mother who was already in Poland.

"We had to travel by ourselves," he said. "It was very crowded, lots of people sleeping on each other. In the cabin for six people there were eight to 10 people inside. It was just very hard."

His mother Svetlana Titova said she was relieved that her two sons have finally arrived.

"I had no connection with them," she said. "I was worried, but I was here with others who were waiting."

For Natalia, a 55-year-old Ukrainian refugee from Zaporizhzhia, this was her second time fleeing, after leaving the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, when Russia annexed it.

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"It was scary," she said. "We did not wait for them (Russians) and this is not our first experience. But it was scary."

Most of the refugees fleeing Ukraine have been women and children, because men from 18-60 have stayed behind to fight and are forbidden from leaving the country. Many already have moved to other countries in Europe, mostly to stay with friends and family there.

At dawn on Sunday, a bus carrying about 50 Ukrainian refugees overturned on a major highway in northern Italy, killing one person, Italian firefighters said.

In Britain, the government announced it will pay a monetary reward to people who offer their homes as a refuge to Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion. Officials said Sunday the "Homes for Ukraine" program, to be introduced this week, will see sponsors receive a government payment of 350 pounds (\$456) per month.

But refugees like Svitlana Prihodnia, a 55-year-old from Dnipro, just wish they never had to leave at all. "Everybody dreams that they will go back home soon," she said.

What happens when all the student volunteers disappear?

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When the pandemic shut schools two years ago, Scott Losavio faced a problem afflicting students, administrators and communities everywhere: What happens when all the student volunteers disappear?

As service coordinator at Catholic High School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Losavio helps students fulfill the school's requirement to perform community service hours. Juniors must do 40 "Type A" volunteer hours, where they have direct contact with the people being served, and seniors must do 20.

Packing boxes in a food bank warehouse doesn't qualify, but serving meals in a soup kitchen does. "We want them to have a real human interaction and develop a sense of passion and empathy for people that are suffering," Losavio said.

All of that, of course, became nearly impossible when the coronavirus pandemic sent students home in the midst of the 2019-2020 school year and kept them home for the following year as communities shut down and people were told to avoid direct contact.

Now with the pandemic potentially fading, school administrators are anticipating returning to the pre-COVID-19 days of unhindered volunteerism. Not a moment too soon at Catholic High School. "I work with teenagers all day, and I know what kind of knuckleheads they are," Losavio said. "But I also know that when they're out there helping other people, that's when they're at their best."

Across the U.S., the pandemic forced school administrators like Losavio to slash or eliminate student volunteer requirements. Students either abandoned volunteering or strained to find safe ways to serve their communities in a time of isolation and crisis.

Catholic High cut the volunteer hours requirement by half across the board and waived the Type A stipulation. And the definitions for what qualifies as volunteering have been creatively stretched.

"I basically for the last two years have told kids that as long as they are serving someone who is not family and you're not getting paid for it, it counts toward your hours," Losavio said. "It's been a real loss. I'm trying to get them to learn how to care about other people."

The pullback hurt broadly. For communities, thousands of dependable volunteer hours vanished at a moment of spiraling need. And the students lost out on the kind of empathy-building experiences that such requirements were designed to create.

"There's thousands of hours of work that's not getting done and the community is not being served," said Adam Weiss, community service coordinator for Oceana High School in Pacifica, California. For students, volunteering "gives them work experience and gives back to the community and helps them get out of their teenage bubble."

Weiss' school dropped its community service requirement from 100 hours to 32. Even that, he said, runs on "much more of an honor system these days."

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Even at schools without service requirements, volunteer-oriented groups like the Key Club faced the same problem.

"Everything just went kerplunk," said Kimberlyn Denson, a 9th grade teacher and Key Club adviser for Baton Rouge Magnet High School. "Suddenly there was nothing out there for them to safely do."

Her school doesn't have a volunteer requirement, but its Key Club members still worked to find safe ways to contribute — organizing donation drives to gather canned goods, socks and toiletries for homeless shelters.

Outdoor volunteer activities also became a huge draw. In December 2020, when Denson helped organize a clean-up at Louisiana's oldest Black cemetery, it drew so many student volunteers that she had to cut it off at 60 people.

"There were some small advantages to it," she said of those isolating times. "The students came up with some service projects that we really would not have done before."

The community service requirement is rare at the state level, with only Maryland (and the District of Columbia) mandating it. But individual schools, both public and private, frequently institute them.

With no real coordination when the pandemic struck, these schools and school districts had to make their own decisions on how to handle things. That applies, too, to reinstating community service requirements.

In Prince George's County, Maryland, the school district waived the state-mandated 75-hour requirement to graduate for the 2020 and 2021 graduating classes. For the 2022 graduating class, a 24-hour volunteer requirement was brought back, along with relaxed guidelines on what would qualify.

In some cases, shifting policies have caused confusion. In Washington, the 100-hour requirement to graduate high school was waived for the 2020 and 2021 graduating classes. But this year the city's school system brought it back in full — which means that many current seniors are scrambling to find ways to accumulate volunteer hours after having done nothing for 18 months.

Enrique Gutierrez, a spokesman for D.C. Public Schools, said in an email that the school district has worked to create socially distanced opportunities so students can "still have an impact even in a world with COVID."

Now, with students back in school buildings, safe volunteer opportunities remain limited. Common volunteer options like homeless shelters and senior homes remain largely closed to outsiders, and organizations like food banks have had to institute social distancing rules for indoor and warehouse work.

"A room that once held 80 people now safely holds 20," said Cody Jang, associate director of community engagement for the San Francisco-Marin Food Bank. "A teacher just contacted me wanting to bring 60 students, and we just didn't have the space for them with social distancing."

Not every school chose to reduce its community service requirements in the pandemic. At Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco, administrators retained the school's 40-hour requirement for 10th graders.

"That was a decision we had to make early on — do we just scrap the whole requirement?" said Alan Wesson Suarez, the school's public purpose program director. "I'm glad we decided to keep it." Otherwise, "it would be sending the wrong message to our students about the way we want them to be engaged."

But keeping the requirement in place in a mostly shuttered country meant getting creative.

"Suddenly we had to accommodate and adapt to students who couldn't leave their homes," Suarez said.

In some cases, the students themselves came up with new forms of public service. One started transcribing old historical documents for the Smithsonian Institution and soon several other students had joined in.

"I had never seen a student do that before," Suarez said.

Peru's 'worst ecological disaster' slams small-scale fishing

By FRANKLIN BRICEÑO Associated Press

CIUDAD PACHACUTEC, Perú (AP) — Walter de la Cruz scrambled down a large sand dune in the fog to reach a rock overlooking the Pacific Ocean, where he has fished for three decades. He cast a hook into the waters off Peru's coast several times, with no luck. One attempt yielded a piece of plastic stained with oil.

De la Cruz, 60, is one of more than 2,500 fishermen whose livelihoods have been cast into doubt as a result of a large crude-oil spill at the Spanish-owned Repsol oil refinery on Jan. 15.

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"We are desperate," he said, counting on his fingers the debts that overwhelm him, including a bank loan, bills for water, electricity, gas, and school supplies for his two grandchildren.

Peru has characterized the spill of 11,900 barrels in front of a Repsol refinery as its "worst ecological disaster." A report by United Nations experts estimates it involved about 2,100 tons of crude, well above the 700 tons the International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation Limited considers the threshold for a large spill — and an unprecedented amount for the type of crude that leaked. The oil was extracted from Buzios, the world's largest deep water oil field and the most productive in Brazil.

The spill happened when the Mare Doricum, an Italian-flagged tanker, was unloading oil at the La Pampilla refinery, just off Peru's coast north of the capital. The ship's captain told the South American country's Congress that oil spilled into the ocean for at least eight minutes.

Peru — which has a vast informal economy — does not have exact data on the number of fishermen affected, or of the people on the docks and ports who depend on the fishing industry, including restaurants, food vendors, and those who rent sun umbrellas or boats.

One thing is for sure: The affected artisanal fishermen are among the most economically vulnerable in Peru, harvesting small amounts of fish very close to the coast, sometimes from small boats and sometimes from the shore, said Juan Carlos Sueiro, an expert on the economics of fishing with the international conservation group Oceana.

"They are on the poverty line. Their income varies from day to day," he said.

De la Cruz said he knew immediately that the oil spreading over more than 106 square kilometers (41 square miles) — an area larger than the city of Paris — would halt for the first time the activity carried out for centuries on Peru's Pacific coast.

"I saw the fruits of my livelihood destroyed," he said. "It's like if you have a store and someone comes and sets it on fire."

Shortly after the spill, the government announced that it was looking into giving financial aid to those affected. Authorities took three weeks to come up with a list of 2,500 fishermen whom they would help. Two weeks after that, the government said it would now be Repsol who would give as much as \$799 to each of the 5,600 people affected to compensate them for the income they've lost because of the spill. The Presidency of the Council of Ministers did not respond to a question from The Associated Press about whether the aid promise was still valid.

Many fishermen here don't have a certificate or papers to prove it is their livelihood. De la Cruz doesn't. But he knows that he has been coming here with a basket to be filled on his back for 30 years. He normally sells or trades the fish with the owners of restaurants or local homemakers, and take some home to his wife to prepare in dishes that can be sold to neighbors.

De la Cruz said he felt "broken" when he saw his work space swarmed by journalists reporting on the oil spill. He wanted to tell them and the authorities what he felt, so he took a blue ink marker and wrote on a piece of cardboard, "Fishermen we need help please."

Peruvian President Pedro Castillo visited the area, passed by De la Cruz, and promised to help. After looking at the puddles of oil, he'd shaken his head and said: "This can't be."

On another beach, Castillo had picked up oil-soaked sand and acknowledged the impact of the spill. "What is the use of giving nets if they no longer have a place to fish?" he said.

But those presidential words, which ignited De la Cruz's hopes, have not borne fruit. More than a month after that visit, state aid does not exist.

"The days pass and we don't receive anything," he said.

The fishermen have protested with their empty nets in front of the Repsol refinery and blocked roads, but they still have no answers to key questions such as: Who caused the oil spill? And how long before they can return to fishing?

Repsol, a Spanish company, has said huge waves created by a volcanic eruption in Tonga caused the spill and that the fault lies with the Mare Doricum oil tanker. In response, the company that owns the tanker has asked that Repsol not disseminate "incorrect or misleading" information as the investigation continues.

Edward Málaga, a microbiologist and legislator from the centrist Morado party who has toured the

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polluted area and spoken with Peru's government and Repsol officials, said political instability is causing paralysis and disorder in Castillo's government and hindering a response.

Since the ecological disaster in mid-January, there have been three Cabinet shuffles and three different environment ministers. One of them was an inexperienced schoolteacher from the ruling party who barely lasted a week.

"You talk to an official and the following week there is another one who starts everything from scratch," Málaga said. He said the four ministries and more than 30 associated bodies involved do not work in a coordinated manner.

"There is no webpage where you can go to see the work of each sector, day after day, how many fauna have been rescued, how many animals have been reported dead, how much has been cleaned," he said.

So far Repsol has given out one or two cards — worth \$135 each — to those affected to exchange for food at a supermarket. This is not enough to feed them, so the fishermen have organized community lunches with food donated by the Catholic Church and other organizations. In these meetings, the lack of financial aid is the recurring theme.

Ady Chinchay, a lawyer and researcher in environmental law, said fishermen can request compensation for loss of earnings in a civil court but there would be challenges.

"The judge is going to grant compensation based on the evidence" the fishermen present about their income, said Chinchay. For many of those affected by the spill, this will be almost impossible to do because they do not issue receipts when they sell their seafood.

This is the case with De la Cruz, who has never issued a bill of sale in 30 years.

"Imagine the desperation in my home," he said. His wife sells empanadas to try to pay off debts but she no longer buys anti-inflammatories for the arthritis in her hands.

"Yesterday, we were just barely able to pay for natural gas," he said.

Video shows man stabbing 2 workers at New York's MOMA

By MARINA VILLENUEVE and BRYAN GALLION Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Video from the Museum of Modern Art shows the moment a man leaped over a reception desk and stabbed two employees as they tried to flee Saturday.

The video released by New York City police shows a man police identified as 60-year-old Gary Cabana entering the museum lobby through a revolving door then climbing onto the desk and jumping over it as a man carrying what appears to be a walkie-talkie tries in vain to stop him.

Police were still searching for Cabana as of Sunday morning.

The man, wearing a black wool hat and a surgical mask, approaches three employees who are trapped in the small space and stabs one of them — a young woman who is able to run away seconds later — though not before she is stabbed again in the back.

The attacker then stabs the second employee as the man with the walkie-talkie hurls a notebook at him. That appears to distract the attacker long enough for the second victim to flee. The third employee can be seen getting up from the ground after the attacker runs away.

Authorities said Saturday that the two museum employees, a 24-year-old man and 24-year-old woman, were both stable with non-life-threatening injuries. Their names weren't released.

According to police, Cabana was denied entrance Saturday for previous incidents of disorderly conduct. John Miller, NYPD deputy commissioner of intelligence and counterterrorism, said his membership had been revoked for two separate incidents of disorderly behavior at the museum in recent days.

A letter informing Cabana of his expired membership had been sent out Friday, but he came to the museum Saturday saying he intended to see a film there, according to police.

He then became upset and stabbed the museum employees in the back, collarbone and the back of neck, Miller said. They were rushed within minutes to the hospital.

Miller said Saturday that the video showed which way the suspect went after leaving the museum. Police shared photos of Cabana late Saturday night, asking for the public's help finding him.

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The department has no record of a previous arrest for the man.

The museum didn't immediately respond to an emailed request for comment on the incident, but said on social media that it would be closed to the public Sunday.

The midtown Manhattan museum evacuated its patrons Saturday afternoon. Yuichi Shimada, a museum-goer present at the time of the attack, tweeted he was on the second floor when a couple suddenly came running toward him, and he heard security guards' radios throughout the museum loudly announcing something at the same time.

"It was chaotic, partly because it was snowing, with a group of young women in a panic and crying," Shimada said. "Not being good with claustrophobia myself, I headed for the exit early."

Shimada was diverted to the side on his way out as a stretcher was hurriedly brought in. Police vehicles and ambulances, emergency lights flashing, thronged outside the museum as dozens of patrons hurried away.

Mayor Eric Adams tweeted Saturday evening he'd been briefed on the attack and said the victims' injuries were not life-threatening.

"We're grateful for the quick work of our first responders," Adams, a former NYPD captain, said.

MoMA, founded in 1929, is one of New York City's top tourist attractions, and drew more than 700,000 visitors in 2020. Its collection of modern art includes "The Starry Night" by Vincent Van Gogh and works by Henri Matisse and Paul Gauguin.

Leaders of Turkey, Greece hold talks in rare meeting

ISTANBUL (AP) — The leaders of Greece and Turkey held talks over lunch in Istanbul on Sunday in a rare meeting between the neighboring countries, which have been at odds over maritime and energy issues, the status of Aegean islands and migration.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed bilateral and international relations as well as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a statement from the Turkish presidency's communications directorate said.

"Turkey and Greece have a special responsibility in the European security architecture which has changed with Russia's attack on Ukraine," the statement said, adding that both countries should increase cooperation and "focus on positive agendas" for regional benefits.

Greece and Turkey are nominal NATO allies but have strained relations over competing maritime boundary claims that affect energy exploration rights in the eastern Mediterranean. Tensions flared in the summer of 2020 over exploratory drilling rights in areas in the Mediterranean Sea where Greece and Cyprus claim their own exclusive economic zone, leading to a naval standoff. Turkey also claims Greece is violating international agreements by militarizing islands in the Aegean Sea.

Since then, Greece has embarked on a major military modernization program. Officials from both countries resumed exploratory talks in 2021 after a five-year pause to lay the groundwork for formal negotiations to begin, but haven't made much progress. At Sunday's meeting, the two leaders agreed to keep communication channels open "despite disagreements" and improve bilateral relations, the Turkish statement said.

Greece has also accused Turkey of allowing migrants to cross its land and sea borders despite a deal with the European Union to prevent illegal crossings, while Turkey and rights groups have documented Greek authorities' practice of migrant "pushbacks" to Turkey.

"With the goal of starting a new page in bilateral relations," Erdogan told Mitsotakis he believes the two countries can make headway on issues like the Aegean, minorities, combating terrorism and migration. He added the neighbors should speak regularly, rather than only at times of crisis.

But Greece and Turkey also cooperate on energy projects, including a newly-built pipeline that spans their countries transporting natural gas from Azerbaijan to Western Europe — a project that is part of Europe's effort to reduce dependence on Russian energy exports.

Mitsotakis kicked off his visit by attending a service for Orthodox Christians at the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

China shuts business center of Shenzhen to fight virus surge

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's government responded Sunday to a spike in coronavirus infections by shutting down its southern business center of Shenzhen, a city of 17.5 million people, and restricted access to Shanghai by suspending bus service.

Everyone in Shenzhen, a finance and technology center that abuts Hong Kong, will undergo three rounds of testing after 60 new cases were reported Sunday. All businesses except those that supply food, fuel and other necessities were ordered to close or work from home.

Case numbers in China's latest infection surge are low compared with other countries and with Hong Kong, which reported more than 32,000 on Sunday. But mainland authorities are enforcing a "zero tolerance" strategy and have locked down entire cities to find and isolate every infected person.

Shenzhen is home to some of China's most prominent companies, including telecom equipment maker Huawei Technologies Ltd., electric car brand BYD Auto, Ping An Insurance Co. and Tencent Holding, operator of the popular WeChat message service.

On the mainland, the government reported 1,938 new cases, more than triple Saturday's total.

About three-quarters, or 1,412 cases, were in Jilin province in the northeast, where the industrial metropolis of Changchun was placed under lockdown on Friday and families were told to stay home after a spate of infections.

China, where the first coronavirus cases were detected in late 2019 in the central city of Wuhan, has reported a total of 4,636 deaths on the mainland out of 115,466 confirmed cases since the pandemic started.

In Shanghai, China's most populous city with 24 million people, the number of cases in the latest surge rose by 15 to 432.

The city government called on the public not to leave unless necessary. It said intercity bus service would be suspended starting on Sunday.

"Those who come or return to Shanghai must have a negative nucleic acid test report within 48 hours before arrival," said a city health agency statement.

In Hong Kong, a health official warned the public not to assume the territory's deadly coronavirus surge was under control as the government reported 190 new fatalities, most of them elderly people, and 32,430 new cases. That's down from above 50,000 after stringent travel and business curbs were imposed.

Hong Kong, a crowded financial hub of 7.4 million, is trying to contain an outbreak that has killed 3,993 people, most of them in the latest surge driven by the omicron variant, and swamped hospitals.

"People should not get the wrong impression that the virus situation is now under control," said Dr. Albert Au, an expert with the government's Center for Health Protection. "Once we let our guard down, it's possible that (infections) will bounce back and rise again."

Construction crews sent from the mainland have built temporary isolation centers in Hong Kong for thousands of patients.

On the mainland, 831 new cases were reported Sunday in Changchun, 571 in the nearby provincial capital city of Jilin and 150 in the eastern port city of Qingdao.

Authorities in Jilin are stepping up anti-disease measures after concluding their earlier response was inadequate, according to Zhang Yan, deputy director of the provincial Health Commission.

"The emergency response mechanism in some areas is not sound enough," Zhang said at a news conference, according to a transcript released by the government.

Also Sunday, some residents of Cangzhou, south of Beijing, were told to stay home after nine cases were reported there, according to a government notice. It wasn't clear how many of its 7.3 million people were affected.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined
Today in History

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Today is Monday, March 14, the 73rd day of 2022. There are 292 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 14, 1794, Eli Whitney received a patent for his cotton gin, an invention that revolutionized America's cotton industry.

On this date:

In 1879, physicist Albert Einstein was born in Ulm, Germany.

In 1939, the republic of Czechoslovakia was dissolved, opening the way for Nazi occupation of Czech areas and the separation of Slovakia.

In 1951, during the Korean War, United Nations forces recaptured Seoul.

In 1962, Democrat Edward M. Kennedy officially launched in Boston his successful candidacy for the U.S. Senate seat from Massachusetts once held by his brother, President John F. Kennedy. (Edward Kennedy served in the Senate for nearly 47 years.)

In 1964, a jury in Dallas found Jack Ruby guilty of murdering Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President John F. Kennedy, and sentenced him to death. (Both the conviction and death sentence were overturned, but Ruby died before he could be retried.)

In 1967, the body of President John F. Kennedy was moved from a temporary grave to a permanent memorial site at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

In 1980, a LOT (laht) Polish Airlines jet crashed while attempting to land in Warsaw, killing all 87 people aboard, including 22 members of a U.S. amateur boxing team.

In 1990, the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies held a secret ballot that elected Mikhail S. Gorbachev to a new, powerful presidency.

In 1995, American astronaut Norman Thagard became the first American to enter space aboard a Russian rocket as he and two cosmonauts blasted off aboard a Soyuz spacecraft, headed for the Mir space station.

In 2011, Neil Diamond, Alice Cooper, Tom Waits, Darlene Love, Dr. John and Leon Russell were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

In 2015, Robert Durst, a wealthy eccentric linked to two killings and his wife's disappearance, was arrested by the FBI in New Orleans on a murder warrant a day before HBO aired the final episode of a serial documentary about his life. (Durst would be convicted in the shooting death of his friend, Susan Berman; he died in January 2022 while serving a life sentence in California.)

In 2018, Stephen Hawking, the best-known theoretical physicist of his time, died at his home in Cambridge, England, at the age of 76; he had stunned doctors by living with the normally fatal illness ALS for more than 50 years.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, hosted a White House state dinner for British Prime Minister David Cameron and his wife, Samantha. Earlier, the two leaders announced that NATO forces would hand over the lead combat role in Afghanistan to Afghan forces in 2013 as the U.S. and its allies aimed to get out by the end of 2014.

Five years ago: A blustery late-season storm plastered the Northeast with sleet and snow, paralyzing much of the Washington-to-Boston corridor but falling well short of predicted snow totals in New York, Boston and Philadelphia. Declaring "enough is enough," Gen. Robert Neller, the Marine Corps commandant, told senators that he intended to fix the problem that led to current and former Corps members sharing nude photos of female Marines online and making lewd or threatening comments about them. Mitch Seavey won his third Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, becoming the fastest and oldest champion at age 57.

One year ago: U.S. authorities arrested and charged two men with assaulting U.S. Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick with bear spray during the Jan. 6 riot. (Sicknick collapsed and died at a hospital the next day; a medical examiner determined that he suffered a stroke and died from natural causes.) Myanmar's ruling junta declared martial law in parts of the country's largest city as security forces killed dozens of protesters in an increasingly lethal crackdown on resistance to the previous month's military coup. Female performers including Beyoncé and Taylor Swift swept the top honors at the Grammy Awards; Beyoncé's 28th win made her the most decorated woman in Grammy history. Record-setting New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees announced his retirement after 20 NFL seasons.

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Today's Birthdays: Former astronaut Frank Borman is 94. Actor Michael Caine is 89. Composer-conductor Quincy Jones is 89. Actor Raymond J. Barry is 83. Movie director Wolfgang Petersen is 81. Country singer Michael Martin Murphey is 77. Rock musician Walt Parazaider (payr-ah-ZAY'-dur) (formerly with Chicago) is 77. Actor Steve Kanaly is 76. Comedian Billy Crystal is 74. Actor-writer-comedian-radio personality Rick Dees is 71. Country singer Jann Browne is 68. Actor Adrian Zmed is 68. Prince Albert II, the ruler of Monaco, is 64. Actor Laila Robins is 63. Actor Tamara Tunie (tuh-MAH'-ruh TOO'-nee) is 63. Actor Penny Johnson Jerald is 62. Producer-director-writer Kevin Williamson is 57. Actor Elise Neal is 56. Actor Gary Anthony Williams is 56. Actor Megan Follows is 54. Rock musician Michael Bland is 53. Country singer Kristian Bush is 52. Actor Betsy Brandt is 49. Actor Grace Park is 48. Actor Daniel Gillies is 46. Actor Corey Stoll is 46. Actor Jake Fogelnest is 43. Actor Chris Klein is 43. Actor Ryan Cartwright (TV: "Kevin Can Wait") is 41. Actor Kate Maberly is 40. Singer-musician Taylor Hanson (Hanson) is 39. Rep. Dan Crenshaw, R-Texas, is 38. Actor Jamie Bell is 36. Rock musician Este Haim (HY'-uhm) (Haim) is 36. NBA star Stephen Curry is 34. Actor Ansel Elgort is 28. Olympic gold medal gymnast Simone Biles is 25. Actor James Freedson-Jackson (Film: "The Strange Ones") is 20.