

# Groton Daily Independent

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“Humans, not places, make memories.”

-Ama Ata Aidoo

## **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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## Two music teachers leaving Groton Area

Groton Area will be losing two music teachers at the end of the school year.

Kayla Duncan turned in her resignation on Monday as her family plans to move to Cresbard where her husband, Seth, will be a pastor at a church there. Earlier, Austin Fordham turned in his resignation as he will be the new music director at the Watertown School. In addition, Kristen Gonsoir turned in her resignation as oral interp/debate teacher as she needs the time for her family. Heather Rowen was hired as the new third third teacher.

Board President Deb Gengerke congratulated Joe Schwan as the Region 5 Superintendent of the Year. Region 5 schools include Aberdeen, Aberdeen Roncalli, Bowdle, Doland, Edmunds Central, Eureka, Frederick Area, Groton, Herried, Hoven, Ipswich, Leola, McIntosh, McLaughlin, Mobridge-Pollock, Northwestern Area, Redfield, Selby Area, Smee, Timber Lake and Warner. Mr. Schwan will now represent Region 5 as a candidate for South Dakota Superintendent of the Year. Gengerke said, "This is an award very well deserved."

The School board accepted the low bid from Harlow's for a new 59 passenger seating 53 International bus for \$92,560.25. The board also accepted the low bid from Hub City Roofing to do the Section C of the elementary school for \$82,000. This is the area that needs the most repair in the middle of the pods.

The Driver's Ed program has been charging \$250 since 2011 and the board decided to up its price to \$260 this year. Business Manager Mike Weber pointed out that the the Driver's Ed fund balance was at \$17,000. Superintendent Joe Schwan said he would like to see that money to be used to buy a driver's ed vehicle.

Weber also pointed out that in December of 2023, the final payment of the new MS/HS addition of \$220,000 will be made.

The elementary track and field day has been set for May 13 starting at 12:30 p.m. Parents and family members are welcome to eat at the elementary school with their child.

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## Superintendent's Report to the Groton Area School District 06-6 Board of Education

March 14, 2022

**ASBSD Protective Trust.** Our annual renewal meeting with Associated School Boards Protective Trust (Health and Worker's Compensation Insurance) is scheduled for next Wednesday (March 23) in Chamberlain where we will learn rate and plan information for 2022-2023.

**Fiscal Year 2023 Laptop Purchases.** The approved state bids have been released for computers. Our technology plan calls for replacement of 60 staff computers and 60 elementary I-pads, and the new purchase of 60 student computers (grade 10). I'd like to move forward with ordering this equipment to give us the best chance to receive the new equipment prior to the start of the 2023 school year.

**Next Meeting Reminder.** The next scheduled board meeting is set for Monday, March 28, 2022 at 7:00 PM with program overviews scheduled from K-12 Music, Art, and Health/PE/Athletics.

### Legislative Session.

**SB46.** Protect fairness in women's sports.

Requires designation of sports and activities as being (1) Females, women, or girls; (2) Males, men, or boys; or (3) Coeducational or mixed. Only biological females are permitted to participate in any "team, sport, or athletic event designated as being for females, women, or girls."

**SB59.** Revise property tax levies for school districts and to revise the state aid to general and special education formulas.

Maximum Levy (Commercial): \$6.308

Ag Levy: \$1.362

Owner Occupied Levy: \$3.048

Target Teacher Salary: \$55,756.31 (Up from \$52,600.29)

Overhead Rate: 38.78% (Up from 37.30%)

Max Special Ed Levy: \$1.599 [Groton Area Levy for 2022 Taxes: \$0.726]

**SB71.** Revise the tax credit limit for the partners in education tax credit program.

This bill increases the tax credit maximum from \$2.0M annually, to \$3.5M annually. These funds are used to provide scholarships to low-income students to attend non-public schools.

**SB95.** Revise provisions regarding the Teacher Compensation Review Board.

This requires the board to meet every two years rather than every three years.

**HB1080.** Prolong requirements for increasing teacher compensation.

Extends the salary increase requirements (*average compensation must meet or exceed average compensation of FY2017*) established in 2016 in the Blue Ribbon package through FY2024, including the penalty for not meeting the requirements (*\$500 per teacher reduction in state aid*).

**HB1119.** Revise the general state aid formula to provide adjustment for alternative education students participating in interscholastic activities.

**HB1185.** Permit the wearing of a beaded graduation cap at a school honoring or graduation ceremony.

**HB1308.** Provide for the payment of signing bonuses to school district staff members.

Allows a district to pay a signing bonus, moving expenses, or tuition reimbursement for staff members employed in the school district.

**HB1337.** To protect elementary and secondary students from political indoctrination. **This bill failed.**

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Principal's Report

MS/HS Building

Mrs. Sombke

March 14, 2022

- 1) Practice ACT/ACT
  - Students in grades 11 and 12 began taking the Practice ACT during hours 1-4 today, and will continue tomorrow morning hours 1-4
  - April 2<sup>nd</sup>: ACT Test date for students signed up to test at Groton Area, please see Mrs. Schwan with questions regarding this testing date
- 2) Spring Smarter Balance Assessments
  - Grades 6-8 and 11 will test in early April with testing dates coming soon
  - Grades 6-8 and 11 will do the ELA/Math assessments during one of those weeks, and grades 8 and 11 will do science tests during the other week
- 3) NWEA MAPS Spring Assessment
  - Grades 6-11 will complete the 3<sup>rd</sup> portion of the MAPS assessment during the last week in April
  - Any students who were absent or need to make up testing will do so during the first week in May
  - MAPS Assessments help to identify areas in need of improvement and to support teachers by providing the information to inform instruction
- 4) Dual Credit Registration
  - March 30<sup>th</sup> – 2 Year Dual Credit Registration: Students will register during Dual Credit Courses and during Study Hall
  - April 1<sup>st</sup> – 4 year Dual Credit registration: Students will register during Dual Credit Courses and during Study Hall
- 5) Dual Credit Informational Meeting with Mrs. Schwan

Groton Area High School

## ➤➤ Dual Credit Meeting

March 21 @6:00pm

MS/HS Library Conference room

Attend to learn more about the

Dual Credit program!

Mrs. Jodi Schwan will present information regarding the

Dual Credit program along with answer any questions you might have.

### What is Dual Credit:

Dual credit is an opportunity for High School Juniors and Seniors who meet admissions standards to enroll in public postsecondary institutions in South Dakota and simultaneously earn credits for both their high school diploma and postsecondary degree or certificate.

**D2L**  
DESIRE2LEARN

Questions?  
Contact Jodi Schwan  
Jodi.schwan@k12.sd.us  
Phone: 605-397-8381

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Brett Schwan

Principal Report

3/14/22

## **Enrollment:**

JK: 16

KG: 43

1<sup>st</sup>: 36 (+1)

2<sup>nd</sup>: 46

3<sup>rd</sup>: 47 (+1)

4<sup>th</sup>: 40

5<sup>th</sup>: 41 (-1, +1)

**Elementary PAC Update:** PAC will be purchasing STEM equipment which will be placed in the upper pod multiple purpose room. All teachers will be encouraged to use this space (makerspace). My hope is to incorporate this more with our computer/typing time. On April 29, Bramble Zoo will be coming to do presentations with each of the grades.

**Science Curriculum:** I was able to finally get into contact with our sales representative for Science Fusion to obtain 2 years of additional consumable textbooks/digital access and teacher online resources. This will get us to our next curriculum review cycle. Our current 6 year subscription will be done in July.

**Math Curriculum:** I have not received official word, but the elementary math review team is leaning towards enVisions 2020. This is the updated version of our current series envision 2.0.

**OST Reminder:** OST will be closed this Thursday and Friday for spring break.

**State Assessment (SBAC):** The elementary grades (3-5) will be doing their state assessments during the last week of April - the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> - and fifth grade will take the science portion on April 19. We have until May 6<sup>th</sup> to get them all completely done, so if for some reason we can't take care of it all in one week, we'll have time to make them up.

**Track and Field Day:** Track and field day is scheduled for May 13 starting at 12:30. Parents/families are welcome to eat at the elementary with their child.

**Requisitions (2022-2023):** Elementary Staff have submitted their requisitions for approval.



## Caring for Expectant Moms

Lately my teenager has been fascinated by medical dramas. Although my “doctor self” is usually rolling my eyes throughout the program, it’s often a good conversation starter.

One recent show featured a pregnant woman who experienced one medical crisis after another. Her kidneys, liver, and lungs failed in succession as the team raced to identify the underlying obstetrical problem and find a treatment. At the climax of the episode, her heart stopped. Of course, being television, the correct diagnosis was made, the experimental treatment worked, and the episode ended with a perfectly healthy mother at home, holding her perfectly healthy baby.



**Debra Johnston, MD**

For all the erroneous and outrageous details that transform bad fictional medicine into good TV, they did get something right. Pregnancy is a dangerous condition. In fact, in America, pregnancy complications account for approximately two percent of all deaths among women between the ages of 20 and 44.

To put the two percent into perspective, consider that pregnancy complications can only happen in the months during and immediately following pregnancy. On average a woman in the United States will birth between one and two children. This means that between the ages of 20 and 44, the risk of pregnancy-related death isn’t spread across those 25 years as are the risks of cancer or car accidents. It is concentrated into the relatively few months during which she is pregnant. And for women younger than 20 and older than 44 the risk of pregnancy complications is even greater but, statistically speaking, women in those age groups simply don’t have enough babies to categorize pregnancy complications as a major cause of death.

Consider also that death by violence is not counted as a pregnancy complication, even though pregnancy is a significant trigger for violence.

What’s more, consider that these risks are not distributed equally between women. Socioeconomic status, education, physical location, and race all impact the likelihood of pregnancy complications, and death from those complications.

Issues that affect pregnant people affect their whole family. In medical school, I was taught “nothing is worse for a fetus than a dead mother.” It’s hard to disagree.

So, what can we do to make pregnancy safer? The answer to that question is multi-faceted. Access to quality obstetric care is one factor. However, we must also ensure women are as healthy as possible before they conceive. They need good nutrition and safe places to live and work. They need education to know what is normal, and what is not. They and their families need access to psychiatric care to address mental illness and addiction.

It may not make for good TV, but in the real world, the starting place is as basic, and as difficult, as that.

Debra Johnston, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org) and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

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## Big Trades and Re-signings

By Duane & Jack Kolsrud

It was all quiet on the Viking's front this past week, but there was a lot of action in the NFL that will directly impact the Vikings in the coming years.

First and foremost, Aaron Rodgers, the 4-time MVP, extended his deal with the Packers for a mind-blowing and record \$50 million per year for the next four years. That means the Vikings will meet Arodg at least eight more times in the regular season before he possibly hangs them up. The wildcard is will the Packers be able to retain the best wide receiver in the league in Davante Adams.

That alone could make this new deal be a bust in the long run.

Staying in the NFC North, the Bears traded away a defensive nemesis in Khalil Mack in what appears to be a salary cap move and pairs him up opposite another great defender in Joey Bosa of the Chargers. Granted, he had some injuries the past two seasons, but if Mack is healthy, the Chargers just got a piece to help shore up a defense for a team poised to make a run in the coming years.

Another move that may rival the infamous trade all Viking fans remember between the Vikings and Cowboys in the early '90s, the Seattle Seahawks trade Russell Wilson to the Denver Broncos for three players, two first-round and two second-round picks. The three Broncos players in the deal included quarterback Drew Lock, tight end Noah Fant, and defensive lineman Shelby Harris, all to get what they consider to be their next franchise quarterback. Amazingly, a day later, the Seahawks cut the final player from their Super Bowl championship team in future hall of fame player Bobby Wagner. The Seahawks were touted as a potential dynasty and are now officially in rebuild mode.

The final big move of the week was Carson Wentz getting traded to the Washington Commanders. Why is this trade significant to the Vikings? The first is that Indianapolis is now a potential suitor for Kirk Cousins. The second is it shows courage in a team that after just one year after getting what they thought might be their franchise quarterback, they admit it is not working out and it's time to move on to another day. This is something the Vikings should have considered after the first rough season with Cousins.

What's ahead for the Vikings this coming week? Free agency begins on Monday but will the Vikings be playing in the game? For that to happen, they will need to either restructure some current contracts or move on from some top players. There is a lot of talk around teams inquiring about the availability of Danielle Hunter and what it would take to get him in a trade. Kirk Cousins is unwilling to restructure his deal and the Vikings may need to part ways with him if any teams are willing to take on his salary cap busting deal. Can the Vikings go after free agents like Brandon Scherff to help solidify their offensive line and hope the price tag is within reach?

The bottom line is the Viking's new regime have a lot of big decisions in front of them before the NFL draft in April . The chatter on the social networks is be prepared for a crazy week around the Viking headquarters in Eagan as change is in the air.

## That's Life by Tony Bender I'm officially old

The first sign came years ago when the pretty checkout girls started calling me "sir." Most recently, I was taken to task in a Facebook skirmish for being an old, out-of-touch white guy. Well, it's official. I'm recovering from a broken hip, so I guess I'm old.

I always suspected a hip replacement was in my future. It's a genetic issue with Benders. We're devastatingly handsome and have bad hips. My 59-year-old brother Scott had his replaced last summer.

I wish it were something spectacular, like I crashed a snowmobile, or even a drunken tumble down the stairs, but no, I snapped a badly-degraded hip getting off the couch.

I will say this, I was never so happy to see flashing red lights in the yard, and even happier when Eric Heupel of the Ashley Ambulance Department poked his head into the living room where I was stuck on the couch like a rag doll in the early hours of a Monday morning. I don't remember what my blood pressure was but it was in the millions and I think they had to use a mainframe computer to calculate it.

Now, anyone who's done the least bit of doctoring knows the common question you're asked at a time like that is what your level of pain is. "On a scale of 1-10, it's eff-you!" I was thinking, but numerically, I pegged it at about a 19.

I got a shot for the pain before they tried to move me by sling down the stairs and to the gurney outside, but I'm not sure it made much of dent. Poor Gus the Wonder Pug was beside himself to see me in such pain and being dragged away by strangers so he was snarling protectively as Dylan held him back from creating more casualties. Then it was off to Ashley Medical Center for X-rays. It was a pretty complicated break, it turned out.

My transfer to Bismarck was held up though, because they had a heck of a time finding an open bed. Now, for those of you who haven't been vaccinated and unnecessarily end up in the hospital, please note that there's a domino effect. As it was, I had to wait until Tuesday evening to get into surgery, and believe me, the staff at St. A's had their hands full trying to keep my pain down to a dull scream. Kidding. Mostly.

They tried to keep me comfortable on the ambulance ride up with ketamine. You might have heard about that stuff. It can be abused as a party drug or used for mental health issues. All I'll say is Timothy Leary would have approved. I had this very weird animation movie going on in my head, a welcome distraction from the pain, but Eric kept interrupting me. "Tony, are you still with us?" And I kept thinking, "Shut up, Eric, it's just getting good!"

The good news is, by chance, I think, or maybe because it was a complicated surgery, I got the guy everyone agrees is The Man when it comes to hip surgery, Dr. Brian Dahl. He was pleased as punch with the outcome which involved some creativity, metal, cement, wire, and a long stretch on the operating table. He told me later that there had been little to no damage to the muscles in the area, a testament to the expertise of the ambulance crew. What would we do without them in these rural communities? God bless, 'em, every one.

At first, the physical therapists treated me like I was fragile glass but after follow-ups with Dr. Dahl's team, they deemed me ready to start motoring, albeit with a walker or crutches with the expectation that I'll graduate to a cane in the near future. It's remarkable, really.

So, if you're wondering why there were some column re-runs recently, oldies but goodies, that's why.

It's been an eventful 12 months, starting with esophageal surgery at Mayo and now, this hip thing, and my respect and appreciation for our medical professionals from the ambulance crews to some of the best surgeons in the world, from Ashley to Bismarck to Fargo to Rochester, has only grown.

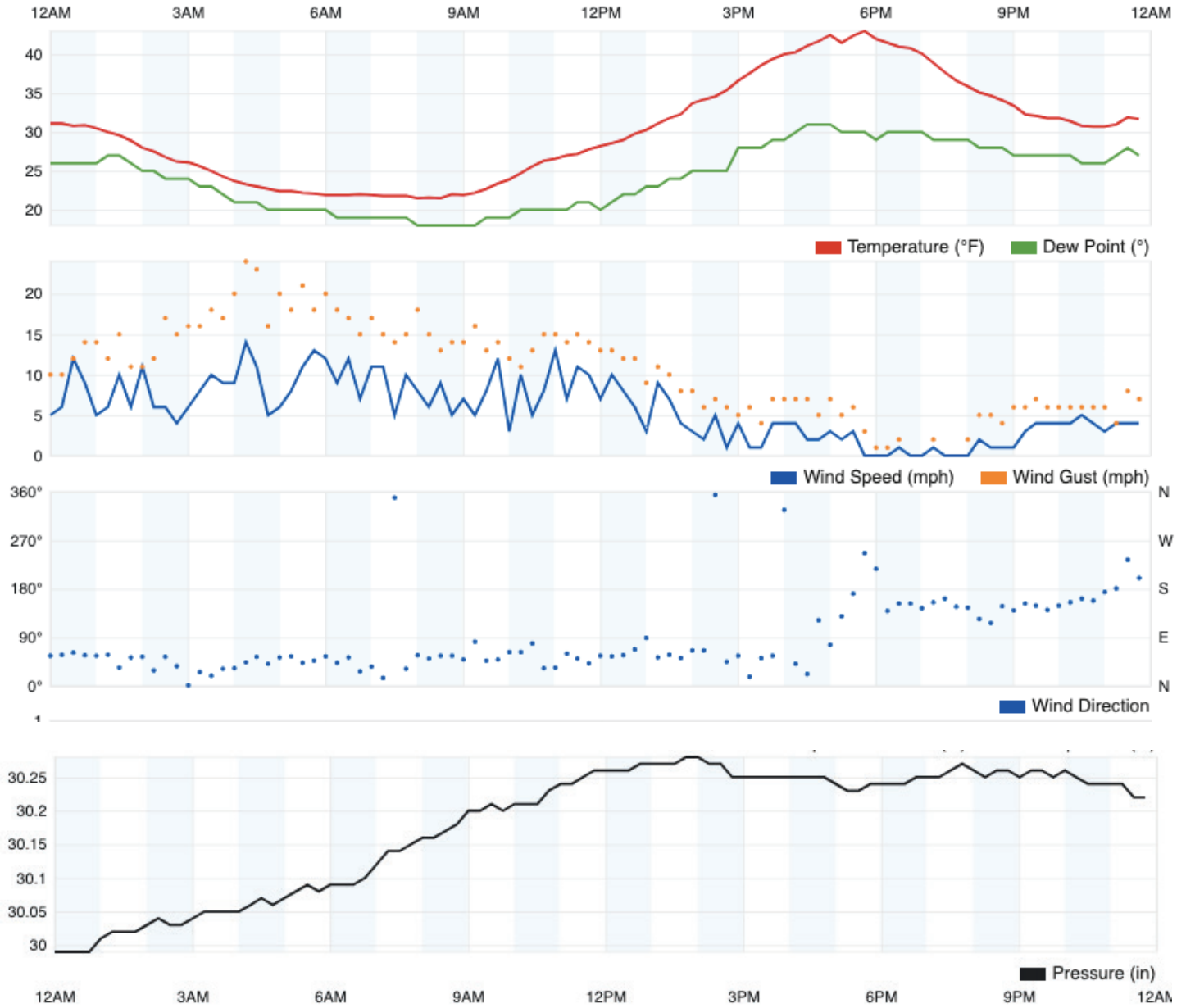
I'm still standing. Really. Just limpy when I walk. All things considered, I'll take it. It's good to be back at my computer again. Hold the ketamine.



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy then Partly Sunny and Breezy	Partly Cloudy	Sunny
High: 59 °F	Low: 33 °F	High: 56 °F	Low: 29 °F	High: 50 °F

## Much Warmer, A Bit Breezy Today

### This Morning

- Strong winds mainly across the eastern side of the Prairie Coteau
- Temperatures warming from the 30s into the 40s

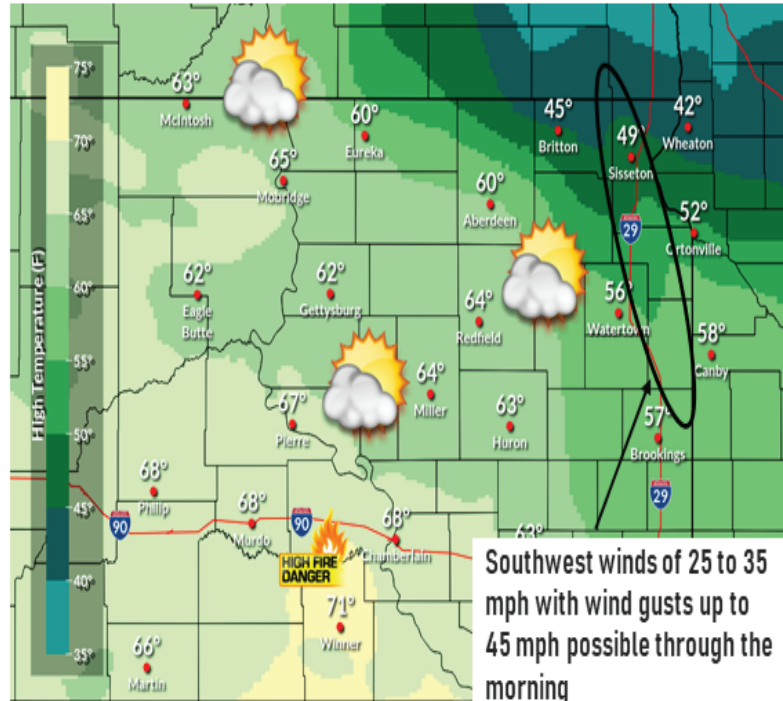
### This Afternoon

- Mild with highs in the 40s in ne SD/wc MN to the 50s and 60s elsewhere
- Breezy southwest winds, especially across the eastern side of the Prairie Coteau and I-90 corridor
- Very High Fire Danger across Jones and Lyman Counties

### Rest of the Week

- Above normal temperatures and dry conditions persist
- Slightly cooler Wednesday into Thursday before turning very mild this weekend

### High Temperatures Tuesday, Mar 15<sup>th</sup> 2022



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD Updated: 3/15/2022 5:05 AM Central

A warmer air mass will begin to overspread the area today on a southwesterly breeze. Strongest gusts will be felt across the Prairie Coteau and portions of the I-90 corridor. The stronger breezes combined with warm and dry conditions will create very high fire danger across Jones and Lyman Counties this afternoon. Above normal temps and dry conditions will persist through the remainder of the week.

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## Today in Weather History

March 14, 1989: A fast-moving winter storm produced freezing rain and heavy snow across most of South Dakota. The visibility was reduced to 100 ft within areas of blowing snow. Driving conditions were treacherous, resulting in abandoned vehicles, several accidents, and the temporary closing of I-29 from Sioux Falls to the North Dakota border.

March 14, 1990: Heavy Snow fell across parts of the southwest, central, and north-central South Dakota from the late afternoon on the 13th into the morning hours of the 14th. The highest accumulations were recorded in the north-central part of the state, including 9 inches at Gettysburg, 8 inches at Pollock, and 5 inches at Pine Ridge.

March 14, 2002: Heavy snow of 6 to 16 inches fell across parts of central and northeast South Dakota from the early morning to the evening hours. Some freezing rain fell across parts of the area before changing over to snow. Also, the winds increased from the north resulting in blowing snow and reduced visibilities. The combination of ice, heavy snow, and blowing snow resulted in challenging travel conditions. There were several accidents across the area, along with many vehicles sliding off the road. Schools either started late or were closed. Some snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Blunt, 7 inches at Murdo, 8 inches at Stephan and Clark, 9 inches at Gann Valley and Miller, and 11 inches at Highmore and Watertown. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included, 12 inches at Hayti and Milbank, 14 inches at Castlewood and Presho, 15 inches at Clear Lake, and 16 inches at Kennebec.

1933: A deadly tornado outbreak affected the Middle Tennessee region, including Nashville, on this day. The outbreak, which produced five or more tornadoes, killed 44 people and injured at least 461 others. The strongest tornado, F3, cut a path through the center of Nashville. About 1,400 homes were damaged or destroyed. Windows were blown out of the State Capitol Building.

1935: Suffocating dust storms frequently occurred in southeast Colorado between the 12th and the 25th of the month. Six people died, and many livestock starved or suffocated. Up to six feet of dust covered the ground. Schools were closed, and tenants deserted many rural homes.

1941 - The most severe blizzard in modern history struck North Dakota and Minnesota. The blizzard hit on a Saturday night while many are traveling, and thus claimed 71 lives. Winds gusted to 75 mph at Duluth MN, and reached 85 mph at Grand Forks ND. Snow drifts twelve feet high were reported in north central Minnesota. A cold front traveling 30 mph crossed Minnesota in just seven hours. (15th-16th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm in the western U.S. produced heavy snow in central Nevada, with 23 inches reported at Austin. High winds raked the desert areas of southern California and southern Arizona. Winds gusted to 59 mph at Douglas AZ. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - More than one hundred hours of continuous snow finally came to an end at Marquette MI, during which time the city was buried under 43 inches of snow. Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S., with forty-one cities reporting record low temperatures for the date. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather from Alabama to the Middle Atlantic Coast. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 80 at Virginia Beach VA. Low pressure in southeastern Ontario produced high winds in the northeastern U.S. Winds gusted to 70 mph at Saint Albans VT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Low pressure crossing the Upper Mississippi Valley produced high winds from the Northern and Central Plains to the Great Lakes Region and Ohio Valley. Winds gusted to 73 mph at Iowa City IA, and wind gusts reached 79 mph at Waukesha WI. Winds of 75 mph were reported around Rapid City SD, with gusts to 100 mph. Up to a foot of snow was reported in western Iowa, western Minnesota, and extreme eastern North Dakota. Blizzard conditions were reported in northeastern North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2008: An EF2 tornado moved through downtown Atlanta, Georgia, shortly before 10 pm, damaging the Georgia Dome where the SEC men's basketball tournament was underway.



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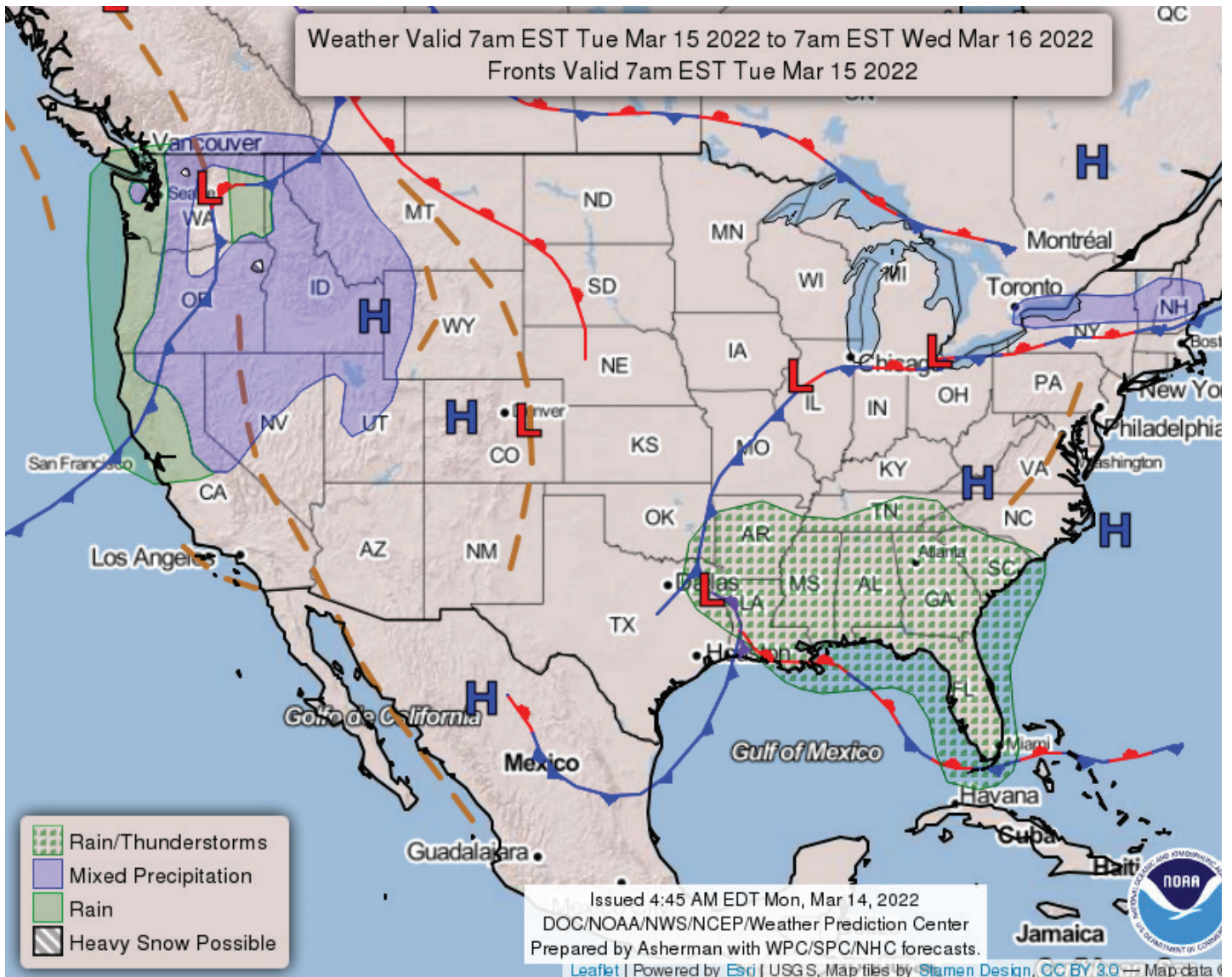
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 43 °F at 4:53 PM**  
**Low Temp: 21 °F at 8:26 AM**  
**Wind: 24 mph at 4:11 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

Day length: 11 hours, 56 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 79 in 2015  
Record Low: -29 in 1897  
Average High: 41°F  
Average Low: 19°F  
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.37  
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 1.54  
Precip Year to Date: 0.97  
Sunset Tonight: 7:39:41 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:40:52 AM



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## MORE THAN LIGHT

In 1787 the HMS Bounty was sent to the Pacific Ocean on a botanical mission. After some time at sea, a seaman, Christian Fletcher, led a mutiny against Captain William Bligh. Bligh and eighteen of his men were forced off the Bounty on a small vessel.

Most of the mutineers who remained on the Bounty were able to escape to Pitcairn Island. Among them were sixteen men and twelve native women who decided to form a colony. It was not long before the men learned how to make liquor. Soon the island became a place where drunkenness and disorderliness were a way of life. In a few years, fifteen of the sixteen men were dead. The only one who survived was John Adams.

One day he was searching through an old chest that the men had taken from the Bounty. In it, he found an old, tattered Bible. He opened it, and shortly after he began to read it, the Holy Spirit spoke to his heart, and he became a Christian. Immediately, he began to study the Bible and was so moved by its message of hope that he began to teach others the Word of God.

About twenty years later an American ship visited the island. Much to their surprise, they found a culture that was founded and governed by Christian principles. There was no crime, no racial strife, no alcohol abuse and no social problems. When Adams was asked how this came to be, he simply responded by saying, "The Bible."

"The unfolding of Your words gives light," wrote the Psalmist. God's Word will bring justice and right living if followed.

Prayer: Lord, how wonderful our lives will be when we follow Your ways. Give us the wisdom to correctly unfold Your word and courage and willingness to obey. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The unfolding of Your words gives light. Psalm 119:130a



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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

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## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) \_ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Monday:

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$22 million

Powerball

21-28-32-44-49, Powerball: 6, Power Play: 3

(twenty-one, twenty-eight, thirty-two, forty-four, forty-nine; Powerball: six; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$124 million

### Sioux Falls officer injured in attack by suspect

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Sioux Falls officer was injured in attack after responding to a report of an unknown man sleeping outside an apartment building, according to police.

Residents called police Sunday afternoon after they found a sleeping man they knew did not reside in the apartment building.

Police spokesman Sam Clemens said the 34-year-old Sioux Falls man attacked the responding officer by grabbing her hair and gun belt and placing her in a chokehold.

Some residents who called police tried to help the officer, but Clemens says it wasn't until backup arrived that the man was taken into custody. The officer received injuries to her neck.

Police said they found the man possessed methamphetamine and a syringe. He was detained on possible charges of resisting arrest, obstruction, aggravated assault, possession of controlled substances and drug paraphernalia.

### VA recommends new health system in Rapid City

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Department of Veterans Affairs has released its set of recommendations for the future of veteran care in the U.S., following years of research and analysis.

For South Dakota, the Asset and Infrastructure Review report recommends building a new VA health system in Rapid City, while closing the Wagner clinic and the the Fort Meade hospital.

The report released Monday was issued as part of the 2018 Mission Act, which required an assessment of the current and future health care needs of U.S. veterans.

The VA predicts that enrollment for veterans across South Dakota will decrease in the next 10 years.

Four recommendations were made for the future of the VA hospital in Sioux Falls, including moving inpatient and surgical services to partner health care providers and changing the emergency department into an urgent care facility, the Argus Leader reported.

"At the Sioux Falls VAMC, there is currently low inpatient medical and surgical demand. Community providers have adequate capacity to absorb veteran demand," according to the report.

The Sioux Falls Community Living Center however would have its beds increased by 30 to meet veteran demand. Wagner clinic would be fully shut down and services would be transitioned to either Yankton or Mitchell or to the Indian Health Services clinic, according to the report.

The recommendation stated that the Fort Meade and Hot Springs hospitals were "not sustainable," because Rapid City has become the largest population center in western South Dakota.

The VA will be holding listening sessions across the nation until next January. The recommendations would go to President Joe Biden no later than Jan. 31, 2023 and he then has 45 days to issue his approval or disapproval.

## 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 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.

## Leaders of 3 EU states head to Kyiv as attacks intensify

By VANESSA GERA and RAF CASERT Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — The leaders of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia traveled by train on Tuesday to Kyiv to meet with Ukraine's top leadership as Russia's offensive moved closer to the center of the capital.

The visit by the leaders of three countries which belong to the EU but also NATO, comes as a series of strikes hit a residential neighborhood in Kyiv.

They described their visit into the war zone as a mission by the European Union to support Ukraine, though EU officials characterized it as trip the central European leaders had undertaken independently despite the security risks.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki of Poland announced he was joined by Petr Fiala of the Czech Republic and Janez Jansa of Slovenia. Also traveling is Jaroslaw Kaczynski, Poland's de-facto leader.

Kaczynski's presence carries a certain symbolic significance. He is the surviving twin of the late President Lech Kaczynski, who died in a plane crash on Russian soil in 2010 along with 95 other Poles, among them political and military leaders, as they traveled to commemorate Poles executed by the Soviet secret police during World War II.

A Polish investigation determined that the crash was an accident caused by fog and pilot error, but Kaczynski, 72, has long suspected that Russian President Vladimir Putin had a role in provoking the accident, a suspicion he has so far failed to prove.

The leaders traveling to Kyiv on Tuesday are to meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal.

"The aim of the visit is to express the European Union's unequivocal support for Ukraine and its freedom and independence," said Fiala.

Morawiecki said on Facebook that he and the other leaders were making a visit, which he cast as historic, in agreement with the EU and that the United Nations was also informed.

"In such critical times for the world it is our duty to be where history is forged," Morawiecki said. "Because it's not about us, but about the future of our children who deserve to live in a world free from tyranny."

In Brussels, officials said they had been informed of the visit but characterized it as one taken independently into a war zone.

An EU official, who spoke off the record because of the sensitivity of the trip, said after a summit last week at Versailles, the European Council was informed of the potential mission, but there were "no conclusions or mandate of the European Council as such" for the initiative.

That official said EU Council President Charles Michel also "pointed at the security risks" of such a trip.

Eric Mamer, spokesman of EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, confirmed that both she and Michel were informed of a potential visit on the margins of the Versailles meeting. He stressed that the EU supports Ukraine as it faces attack.

This visit was confirmed yesterday night," Mamer said. "The European Union stands by Ukraine. The EU is working to provide coordinated political, financial, material and humanitarian" support.

The visit had been planned for several days but was kept secret for security reasons, said Michal Dworczyk, the head of Morawiecki's office. He said that Morawiecki and Kaczynski had crossed the Polish border by train into Ukraine on Tuesday morning.

A proposal of concrete help for Ukraine would be presented to Ukraine's leaders, Dworczyk added.

Shortly before dawn as the leaders were en route, large explosions thundered across Kyiv from what Ukrainian authorities said were artillery strikes. The shelling ignited a huge fire and a frantic rescue effort in a 15-story apartment building. At least one person was killed and others remain trapped inside.

Shockwaves from an explosion also damaged the entry to a downtown subway station that has been used as a bomb shelter. City authorities tweeted an image of the blown-out facade, saying trains would



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no longer stop at the station.

Ahead of his departure, Morawiecki on Facebook recalled how the former Polish President Lech Kaczynski had made a visit to the capital of Georgia in 2008 when that ex-Soviet country was under attack from Russia.

He quoted President Kaczynski who said at the time in Tbilisi: "Today Georgia, tomorrow Ukraine, the day after tomorrow the Baltic states, and then maybe it's time for my country, for Poland."

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

Loud blasts thundered through Kyiv just before dawn Tuesday as Russian forces escalated their bombardment on the Ukrainian capital, deepening the humanitarian crisis in the war's third week. Officials from both countries agreed to more talks, despite the failures of diplomacy so far.

The figures tell the story of a devastating human toll. The number of Ukrainians forced to flee their country since the invasion has now surpassed 3 million, the United Nations said, the vast majority women and children. Thousands of soldiers and civilians are dead. Food and water are running out in besieged Mariupol.

On Tuesday a projectile slammed into a 15-story apartment building, killing at least one person.

"Ukraine is on fire," United Nations chief Antonio Guterres warned. "The impact on civilians is reaching terrifying proportions."

As the offensive pressed closer to central Kyiv, the leaders of three European Union countries headed to the battered Ukrainian capital on a surprise visit to show support.

Here are some key things to know about the conflict:

### WHAT IS HAPPENING ON THE GROUND?

Fighting for Kyiv has intensified, with artillery fire echoing through the city and Russia launching a flurry of strikes that early Tuesday blew out windows and ignited a huge fire in an apartment in western Kyiv. At least one person was killed as rescue efforts continued.

Russian forces also stepped up strikes overnight on the capital's northwest suburbs, the head of the Kyiv region said.

Explosions around the city caused significant structural damage, with shockwaves from a blast tearing through the entrance of a downtown subway station that has been used as a bomb shelter and another igniting a fire in Kyiv's Podilsky district.

The day before, at least four people were killed and more wounded when Russian strikes on the capital slammed into Ukraine's largest aircraft factory and a nine-story apartment building. Russian rockets destroyed a television tower in the western city of Rivne, where authorities said Tuesday the death toll had risen to 19.

Elsewhere in the country, Russian forces unleashed scores of new artillery strikes on downtown Kharkiv in the east.

As the sun rose, rescuers pulled bodies from the rubble after attacks on residential buildings in the city's historical center and a major thoroughfare, a local official said. Thousands sought to flee on evacuation trains amid the chaos and destruction.

After days of relentless Russian shelling on encircled Mariupol, 150 cars carrying hundreds of civilians managed to escape the besieged city.

Hundreds of thousands of people, however, remain trapped as Russia renewed its offensive on the Azov Sea port city on Tuesday.

Escalating bombardment again thwarted a convoy of vehicles trying to bring food, water and medicine to desperate residents. Aid groups warn large numbers of people could face starvation. Bodies are now being buried in mass graves.

Turkish officials, however, expressed hope for imminent evacuations as they said work to open humanitarian corridors had gained urgency.

### WHAT HAS THE AP DIRECTLY WITNESSED OR CONFIRMED?

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Flames gutted an apartment building in the Svyatoshynskiy district of western Kyiv as emergency workers rushed to rescue people from ladders and douse the blaze.

Thick, dark smoke choked the air. A firefighter at the scene confirmed one person died and that several have been rescued alive — but that more remained trapped inside. A young woman sobbed outside the charred building and shocked residents assessed the damage.

“People are dying, and the worst thing is that children are dying,” said Andriy, a firefighter at the scene who would only give his first name, before heading back into the burning building.

The war’s burden has continued to fall heaviest on the most vulnerable. Over one million children have fled the country, and many more have been internally displaced.

Pasha Bychkov, 10, said his family escaped the nation’s second-largest city of Kharkiv after a bomb struck their apartment building.

“We don’t want to go back there,” Pasha said from the city of Lviv, where he resumed school on Monday.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF DIPLOMACY?

Although Russian and Ukrainian officials have struck a positive note about ongoing talks, there have been no breakthroughs at the negotiating table.

Ukrainian negotiators were set to meet their Russian counterparts again on Tuesday after a brief pause. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the previous round as “good,” without offering details.

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s spokesman later described negotiations as “difficult.”

A flurry of diplomatic activity drew in leaders around the world.

The leaders of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia were traveling Tuesday to Kyiv on a European Union mission on a mission of solidarity.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett continued his mediation efforts in calls with both Putin and Zelenskyy on Monday.

The U.S. said Russia would have to show signs of de-escalation to demonstrate good faith. Putin’s invasion has sparked talk in the American security establishment of building up U.S. military power in Europe on a scale not seen since the Cold War.

WHAT ABOUT SANCTIONS?

World powers have continued their efforts to punish Moscow.

Japan’s government said it is freezing the assets of 17 more Russian politicians, tycoons and their relatives to pressure Moscow to end its invasion, bringing the total number of Japan’s asset freezes to 61.

The European Union announced that the 27-nation bloc has approved a fourth set of sanctions to further isolate Russia and drain its resources.

France said the EU also approved a declaration to the World Trade Organization to suspend the most-favored-nation clause for Russia that would withdraw its special treatment throughout the bloc.

## Police arrest man suspected of stalking, killing homeless

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN and ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Police said early Tuesday they arrested a suspected gunman who has been stalking homeless men asleep on the streets of New York City and Washington D.C., killing at least two people and wounding three others in less than two weeks.

Law enforcement arrested the suspect in Washington, D.C., and he was being interviewed by police, the Metropolitan Police Department said on Twitter.

Police in the two cities earlier released multiple surveillance photographs, including a close-up snapshot clearly showing the man’s face, and urged people who might know him to come forward.

“Additional information will be forthcoming” the statement on Twitter said. “Thanks to the community for all your tips.”

The mayors of New York City and Washington D.C. had appealed to the public for help Monday in the search for the gunman. Investigators acknowledged Monday, though, that they knew little about the suspected killer or his motive.

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Washington D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser and New York City Mayor Eric Adams, speaking together at a news conference Monday, had urged anyone living on the streets to go to city shelters where they might be safer.

"We know that our unsheltered residents already face a lot of daily dangers and it is unconscionable that anybody would target this vulnerable population," Bowser said.

Adams said New York City police and homeless outreach teams would focus on finding unhoused people in the subways and other locations to urge them to seek refuge at city-owned shelters.

In Washington, city outreach workers were passing out flyers among the homeless population, urging people to "be vigilant" and featuring multiple pictures of the suspect.

Investigators in the two cities began to suspect a link between the shootings on Sunday after a Metropolitan Police Department homicide captain — a former resident of New York City — saw surveillance photos that had been released Saturday night by the New York Police Department while scrolling through social media.

The man in those photos looked similar to the one being sought by his own department.

D.C. Police Chief Robert Contee credited the quick coordination between departments, saying that without that officer making the connection, "It could have been months," before the link between the attacks was discovered.

The earliest known shooting happened at around 4 a.m. on March 3 in Washington D.C., police said, when a man was shot and wounded in the city's Northeast section. A second man was wounded on March 8, just before 1:30 a.m.

At 3 a.m. the next day, March 9, police and firefighters found a dead man inside a burning tent. He was initially thought to have suffered fatal burns, but a subsequent autopsy revealed that the man had died of multiple stab and gunshot wounds.

The killer then traveled north to New York City, police said.

At 4:30 a.m. Saturday, a 38-year-old man sleeping on the street in Manhattan not far from the entrance to the Holland Tunnel was shot in his right arm as he slept.

The victim screamed and the gunman fled, police said.

About 90 minutes later, the gunman fatally shot another man on Lafayette Street in SoHo, police said.

"He looked around. He made sure no one was there. And he intentionally took the life of an innocent person," Adams said.

The man's body was found in his sleeping bag just before 5 p.m. Saturday.

"Any one of us who's homeless could have went to that same situation," said Kess Abraham, who fell into homelessness last month.

After finding refuge in parks and other places across Brooklyn and Manhattan, Abraham tried to find help at the Bowery Mission, which houses hundreds of homeless people in its facilities across the city.

He said he was "pained" to learn of "a guy who lived on the streets who probably was minding his own business getting murdered for no reason."

The latest attacks were reminiscent of the beating deaths of four homeless men as they slept on the streets in New York's Chinatown in the fall of 2019. Another homeless man, Randy Santos, has pleaded not guilty to murder charges in those attacks.

A year ago, four people were stabbed in New York City, two fatally, by a man who randomly attacked homeless people in the subway system. That assailant, who was also homeless, is awaiting trial.

New York City's mayor has been criticized by some anti-poverty advocates for his plan to remove homeless people from the city's subway system by deploying police and mental health workers to keep people from sleeping in trains or stations.

Adams, on Monday, defended the policy, saying it was designed to protect the safety of both commuters and homeless residents.

"There is nothing dignified about allowing people to sleep on subway platforms," he said.

**Live updates: More than 3 million people have fled Ukraine**

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By The Associated Press undefined

The latest developments on the Russia-Ukraine war:

GENEVA — The International Organization for Migration says more than 3 million people have fled Ukraine since Russia invaded last month.

The new milestone also indicated that some 157,000 third-country nationals — people who aren't Ukrainian — were part of the outflow in what U.N. officials have called the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.

IOM spokesman Paul Dillon said at a U.N. news briefing in Geneva on Tuesday that the totals were compiled from figures provided by national authorities.

The U.N. refugee agency UNHCR, which provides a more detailed count than the IOM though based on similar data, has reported that more than 1.8 million of the refugees were in Poland.

UNHCR spokesman Matthew Saltmarsh said some 300,000 had moved on from there to Western Europe and noted that the vast majority of those fleeing have been women and children.

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu says Turkey is talking with both Moscow and Kyiv to secure the evacuation of around 100 Turkish citizens trapped in the besieged city of Mariupol.

Dozens of Turkish nationals and others have been sheltering inside a mosque in Mariupol, seeking refuge from the Russian attack on the encircled port on the Sea of Azov.

Turkish defense ministry officials also said Tuesday they hoped the evacuations from Mariupol would begin soon, following a "security evaluation" by Russian authorities.

The officials said roads in the area had been cleared of mines and that work was underway to open humanitarian corridors and for buses to enter Mariupol. The officials provided the information on condition of anonymity in line with the ministry's rule.

Cavusoglu said Turkey has so far evacuated 14,800 of its citizens from Ukraine.

BEIJING — China insists that its stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine is "impartial and constructive."

The Chinese government is also repeating its accusations that the U.S. is spreading misinformation over reports Beijing has responded positively to a Russian request for military supplies.

Speaking to reporters at a daily briefing Tuesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian accused the U.S. of "immoral and irresponsible" conduct by spreading misinformation.

"What the U.S. should do is to deeply reflect on the role it has played in the development and evolving of the Ukraine crisis and do something practical to ease the tension in Ukraine," he said, in a nod to China's contention that Russia was provoked by NATO's expansion and threats to its security.

The Biden administration is increasingly concerned that China is using the Ukraine war to advance Beijing's long-term interests in its global competition for influence with the United States.

China has refused to criticize Russia over its invasion and the ensuing war, or even to refer to the conflict as such. In keeping with Russian preferences, Zhao referred to the war as the "Ukraine issue." Beijing also opposes sanctions on the Russian economy.

NEW YORK — Russian soccer player Artem Dzyuba has declined a call-up to the national team because he has family in Ukraine, which has been invaded by Russian forces.

The 33-year-old forward is the joint top scorer of the Russian men's national team and is its former captain.

Russian coach Valery Karpin said in a statement on the Russian Football Union website Tuesday that "in connection with the difficult situation in Ukraine, where many of his relatives live," Dzyuba had asked him to be excused from the national team for family reasons.

Russia called up 27 players Tuesday for a national team training camp as it challenges a ruling by FIFA, the sport's world governing body, barring it from playing international games.

Russia was set to host Poland on March 24 for a World Cup qualifying playoff semifinal. Poland cited the war in refusing to play against Russia, with FIFA and European soccer authority UEFA later banning



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Russian national and club teams from their international competitions.

**NICOSIA, Cyprus** — Cyprus's finance minister says the impact of sanctions against Russia on the Cypriot economy is expected to be limited because the east Mediterranean island has significantly reduced its exposure to the Russian economy and suspicious oligarch dealings.

Keen to shake its reputation as a money-laundering haven where Russian oligarchs could park their money, Cyprus instituted a string of measures to safeguard its economy following a 2013 financial crisis.

Finance Minister Constantinos Petrides told The Associated Press Tuesday that the main impact from the ongoing war in Ukraine would be on Russian tourist arrivals and inflationary pressures.

Russian deposits in Cypriot banks have been slashed, while Cypriot banks have closed up to 80,000 accounts deemed suspicious.

Among the recently introduced measures to shield Cyprus from illicit activities such as money-laundering is legislation prohibiting any transaction with known shell companies.

**LVIV, Ukraine** — Local authorities say the number of people killed in a Russian rocket attack on a TV tower in western Ukraine has risen to 19.

The Rivne regional government posted on its Facebook page Tuesday that 19 people were killed and nine were injured in the strike on the TV tower in Antopol, a village outside the city of Rivne.

The village is only about 160 kilometers (100 miles) from the border of NATO member Poland and comes as Russia presses its invasion of Ukraine.

Initial casualty reports had put the death toll from Monday's TV tower attack at nine.

**KYIV, Ukraine** — Outside a Kyiv apartment block hit by overnight Russian shelling, a young firefighter took a moment to rest Tuesday. He sat on the ground, tears falling.

He described rescuing a woman and her daughter and fighting through a flaming corridor before facing a problem with his equipment that forced him to leave.

"It's very difficult. Yesterday we extinguished one fire, today another, it is very difficult," said the firefighter, who would give only his first name, Andriy.

"People are dying, and the worst thing is that children are dying," he told The Associated Press at the scene. "They haven't lived their lives and they have already seen this. This is the worst."

After a brief pause, he went back into the fiery building.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian government announced new aid and evacuation efforts amid Russia's invasion, starting Tuesday morning along nine corridors around the country including the Kyiv region.

**LONDON** — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Tuesday underscored his drive for energy independence, saying the West's failure to wean itself from Russian oil and natural gas after the annexation of Crimea paved the way for the invasion of Ukraine.

Western countries made a "terrible mistake" in returning to normal economic relations with Russia after the Crimean incursion and becoming even more dependent on Russian energy exports, Johnson wrote in a front page article in The Telegraph newspaper.

"And so when (Vladimir Putin) finally came to launch his vicious war in Ukraine, he knew the world would find it very hard to punish him. He knew that he had created an addiction," he said. "That is why he feels able to bomb maternity hospitals. That is why he is emboldened enough to launch indiscriminate assaults on fleeing families."

Ending the world's dependence on Russian energy will starve Putin of cash, Johnson said as he made the case for the U.K. government's plan to phase out imports of oil and gas from Russia by the end of this year.

To replace Russian energy and cut carbon emissions, the U.K. must expand production of wind power, and invest in other forms of renewable energy including solar, tidal, geothermal and hydroelectric power plants, Johnson said. The U.K. must also reverse the "historic mistake" of moving away from nuclear energy, he said.



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LONDON — Britain's defense ministry says Russia may be planning to install a pro-Moscow government in Kherson, a Ukrainian city it has occupied, as it attempts to assert "political control" over areas of Ukraine.

The Ministry of Defense says Russia "may seek to stage a 'referendum' in Kherson in an attempt to legitimize the area as a 'breakaway republic' similar to Donetsk and Luhansk and Crimea."

U.K. Foreign Office Minister James Cleverly said any attempt at local referendums would "be another attempt to put a veneer of credibility on what is an unacceptable, unjustified illegal invasion."

In an intelligence update, the defense ministry says protests have been held against occupying Russian forces in the cities of Melitopol, Berdyansk and Kherson, where troops fired warning shots at demonstrators on Monday.

It says Russia has reportedly installed its own mayor in the southern city Melitopol following the alleged abduction of his predecessor on Friday, and the mayor of another city, Dniprorudne, has also reportedly been abducted by Russian forces.

WARSAW, Poland — The leaders of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia are traveling on Tuesday to Kyiv, Ukraine's capital which is currently under fire, on a European Union mission to show support for Ukraine as Russia's invasion intensifies.

Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said in a tweet: "The aim of the visit is to express the European Union's unequivocal support for Ukraine and its freedom and independence."

He will be joined by Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who is Polish the deputy prime minister for security but also the conservative ruling party leader.

Russia's offensive in Ukraine edged closer to central Kyiv on Tuesday, with a series of strikes hitting a residential neighborhood in the capital as the two countries planned a second day of talks.

This item has been corrected to show that Janez Janša is the Prime Minister of Slovenia, not Slovakia.

KYIV, Ukraine — A series of Russian strikes hit a residential neighborhood of Ukraine's capital on Tuesday, igniting a huge fire and frantic rescue effort in a 15-story Kyiv apartment building. At least one person was killed and others remain trapped inside.

The Ukrainian military said in a statement that the strikes were artillery strikes. They hit the Svyatoshynskiy district of western Kyiv, adjacent to the suburb of Irpin that has seen some of the worst battles of the war.

Flames shot out of the apartment building as firefighters rescued people from ladders. Smoke choked the air.

A firefighter at the scene confirmed one person died and that several have been rescued alive but others are still inside as rescuers try to reach them.

Russian forces also stepped up strikes overnight on the northwest suburbs of Irpin, Hostomel and Bucha, the head of the Kyiv region Oleksiy Kuleba said on Ukrainian television.

Russian forces also renewed efforts Tuesday to capture the important port city of Mariupol in the south, and unleashed new artillery strikes on downtown Kharkiv in the east, the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said on Facebook.

TOKYO — Japan's government is freezing the assets of 17 more Russian politicians tycoons and their relatives to step up sanctions and pressure Moscow to end its invasion of Ukraine.

The list of sanction targets include 11 members of the Russian parliamentary chamber of Duma, banker Yuri Kovalchuk and his relatives, as well as billionaire Viktor Vekselberg, chairman of Renova Group, according to a statement jointly issued by the foreign, finance and trade ministries.

The move brings the number of Russians targeted by Japan's asset freezes to 61.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters Tuesday the additional steps were taken "in

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order to stop Russia's invasion (of Ukraine) as soon as possible."

Matsuno said Japan will cooperate with other Group of Seven nations and other international community to respond appropriately in case of further sanctions.

Japan has previously imposed sanctions against Russian central bank, seven private banks, and Russian and Belarusian individuals and groups. Tokyo also imposed an export ban to Russia of items including high technology equipment that may be used for military purposes.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says that talks between Ukrainian and Russian delegations will continue Tuesday.

Speaking in a video address, Zelenskyy said that the Ukrainian delegation did good work during Monday's talks. He didn't provide further details.

He said he spoke Monday to Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett as part of efforts to "quickly end the war" and achieve "honest peace." Bennett, who has sought to mediate a peaceful settlement, also spoke Monday to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Zelenskyy hailed a Russian state TV employee who interrupted the main evening news program on Russian Channel 1 by running into a studio with a poster against the war in Ukraine. The employee was later arrested by police.

The Ukrainian president again addressed the Russian soldiers, urging them to stop fighting and saying: "I'm offering you a chance to survive."

In a bid to shore up the economy badly battered by the war, Zelenskyy announced a plan to sharply reduce taxes for business.

## Chinese virus cases climb, raise threat of trade disruption

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese authorities on Tuesday tightened anti-virus controls at ports, raising the risk of trade disruptions after some auto and electronics factories shut down as the government fights coronavirus outbreaks.

Stock prices in China and Hong Kong sank for a second day following the shutdown on Monday of Shenzhen, a tech and finance hub adjacent to Hong Kong in the south, and Changchun, an auto center in the northeast. Bus service to Shanghai, China's business capital and biggest city, was suspended.

China's case numbers are low compared with other major countries or Hong Kong. But authorities are enforcing a "zero tolerance" strategy that aims to keep the virus out of the country. It has temporarily shut down major cities to find every infected person.

The restrictions come at a time when the global economy is under pressure from Russia's war on Ukraine, surging oil prices and weak consumer demand.

"We can think of no risk to the global economy, excluding nuclear warfare, that is greater than the risk of a COVID outbreak in China that shuts industrial production," said Carl B. Weinberg of High-Frequency Economics in a report. "Uncountable manufacturing supply chains pass through China."

Economists say for now, smartphone makers and other industries can use factories and suppliers in other parts of China. But a bigger threat looms if business is disrupted at ports in Shenzhen, Shanghai or nearby Ningbo.

They link Chinese factories that assemble most of the world's smartphones and computers, as well as medical devices, appliances and other goods, with foreign components suppliers and customers. A one-month slowdown at Shenzhen's Yantian Port last year caused a backlog of thousands of shipping containers and sent shockwaves through global supply chains.

"The risk here is whether COVID will be found at Yantian Port," said Iris Pang, chief China economist for ING. "If the port has to be suspended, it will affect a lot of electronic imports and exports."

There was no sign of major disruption, but port operators announced curbs on face-to-face contact with shippers and sailors.

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The agency that manages the Shanghai port closed windows where customers submit documents and said that function would go online. It gave no indication cargo-handling or other operations were affected.

The port of Lianyungang, north of Shanghai, announced foreign sailors were barred from leaving ships or using the city to change crews.

Shenzhen suspended cross-border freight service at the Liantang crossing into Hong Kong. It said the Man Kam To crossing would be limited to handling fresh and live food to make sure Hong Kong gets adequate supplies.

"The lockdown of Shenzhen creates significant risks of supply chain disruptions," said Rajiv Biswas, chief Asia economist for IHS Markit, in an email. The risk of global disruption "would escalate if authorities in Shanghai also decide to implement a lockdown."

The number of new cases reported Tuesday on the Chinese mainland more than doubled to 3,507. Almost three-quarters were in Jilin province, where Changchun is located, with 2,601 cases.

Hong Kong, which reports separately, had 26,908 cases on Monday.

The Yantian Port tried to reassure customers operations were normal. A statement on its social media account promised to "make every effort to ensure the smoothness and stability of this 'lifeline for port supply.'"

China, where the pandemic started in late 2019 in the central city of Wuhan, became the first major economy to rebound after Beijing closed factories, shops and offices to contain the disease.

This year, the ruling Communist Party's growth target is 5.5%. If achieved, that would be well below last year's 8.1% expansion. But forecasters consider it aggressive at a time when construction, which supports millions of jobs, is in a slump due to a crackdown on debt in the real estate industry.

Leaders are promising tax cuts for entrepreneurs and higher spending on building public works. That might help to boost consumer spending and cushion the economy from a slowdown in manufacturing.

The latest infection surge, blamed on a fast-spreading variant dubbed "stealth omicron," is challenging Beijing's pandemic strategy.

All businesses in Shenzhen and Changchun except those that supply food, fuel and other necessities were ordered to close. Bus and subway services were suspended. Millions of residents were told to undergo virus testing.

Anyone who wants to enter Shanghai, a city of 24 million people with auto factories, China's biggest stock exchange and offices of global companies, must be tested.

Elsewhere, the populous eastern province of Shandong had 106 new cases on Tuesday. Guangdong in the south, where Shenzhen is located, reported 48. Shanghai had nine and Beijing, six.

Jilin province, where Changchun is located, has barred residents from leaving the province and from traveling between cities within it.

Automakers Volkswagen and Toyota, iPhone assembler Foxconn and smaller companies have announced they are suspending production at some factories.

Others including telecom equipment maker Huawei Technologies Ltd., Apple Inc., General Motors Co. and electric vehicle brand BYD Auto didn't respond Tuesday to questions about how they might be affected.

"The risk of broader lockdowns is increasing," Bank of America economists said in a report.

Volkswagen AG said Changchun factories for the VW and Audi brands shut down from Monday to Wednesday.

Toyota Motor Co. said its Changchun factory that makes RAV4 and Harrier SUVs suspended operations Monday.

Shenzhen, a city of 17.5 million people, is home to some of China's biggest companies including Huawei, BYD Auto, Ping An Insurance Co. of China and Tencent Holding, operator of the popular WeChat message system. Taiwanese-owned Foxconn, which assembles Apple's iPhones, has its China base in Shenzhen.

Foxconn assembles some smartphones and tablet computers in Shenzhen but has moved most production out of the city. Other manufacturers also have shifted to less expensive parts of China or abroad. They keep research and development, finance and marketing in Shenzhen — functions that can be done

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by employees working from home.

"Manufacturing is in other places, so unless all of China is affected by COVID, it is not going to be really a shortage of particular goods. For example, phones," said ING's Pang.

Also, authorities appear to be trying out a "dynamic 'zero COVID' policy" that still aims to keep out the virus but uses "targeted lockdowns" to try to reduce the economic and social cost, said David Chao of Invesco.

"Many see this as a huge COVID risk that could potentially cause further weakness in the Chinese economy," said Chao. "But I think this gives policymakers the opportunity to evolve their pandemic policies."

## Ukraine's capital under fire; 3 EU nation leaders to visit

By ANDREA ROSA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia's relentless bombardment of Ukraine edged closer to central Kyiv on Tuesday, with a series of strikes hitting a residential neighborhood as the leaders of three European Union countries planned a bold visit to Ukraine's embattled capital in a show of support.

Shortly before dawn, large explosions thundered across Kyiv from what Ukrainian authorities said was artillery strikes. The shelling ignited a huge fire and a frantic rescue effort in a 15-story apartment building in a western district of the city. At least one person was killed in the blast.

Shockwaves from an explosion also damaged the entry to a downtown subway station that has been used as a bomb shelter. City authorities tweeted an image of the blown-out facade, saying trains would no longer stop at the station.

As Russia stepped up its assault on Kyiv, the leaders of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia announced they would travel to Ukraine's capital Tuesday on a European Union mission to show support for the country.

"The aim of the visit is to express the European Union's unequivocal support for Ukraine and its freedom and independence," Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said in a tweet.

He will be joined by Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who is Poland's deputy prime minister for security and the leader of the conservative ruling party.

Russian and Ukrainian negotiators also planned to hold a second day of talks as Russia's invasion of Ukraine entered its 20th day. The Red Cross and the United Nations refugee agency say millions of people face food and medicine shortages along with the immediate conflict threats of shelling and air attacks.

The International Organization for Migration reported that the number of people who have fled Ukraine since Russia invaded on Feb. 24 passed 3 million on Tuesday. The U.N. has described the flood of people crossing into Poland and other neighboring countries as Europe's biggest refugee crisis since World War II.

When Russia launched the war nearly three weeks ago, fear of an imminent invasion gripped the Ukrainian capital, and residents slept in subway stations or crammed onto trains to flee. But as the Russian offensive bogged down, Kyiv saw a relative lull.

Fighting has intensified on the city's outskirts in recent days, and sporadic air raid sirens ring out around the capital.

Tuesday's early morning artillery strikes hit the Svyatoshynskyi district of western Kyiv, adjacent to the suburb of Irpin, which has seen some of the worst battles of the war.

Flames shot out of the 15-story apartment building and smoke choked the air as firefighters climbed ladders to rescue people. The assault blackened several floors of the building, ripped a hole in the ground outside and blew out windows in neighboring apartment blocks.

A firefighter at the scene confirmed one person had died and that several had been rescued, but others remained inside as rescuers tried to reach them.

A 10-story apartment building in the Podilsky district of Kyiv, north of the government quarter, also was damaged by unspecified ammunition. Russian forces also stepped up strikes overnight on Irpin and the northwest Kyiv suburbs of Hostomel and Bucha, said the head of the capital region, Oleksiy Kuleba.



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"Many streets (in those areas) have been turned into a mush of steel and concrete. People have been hiding for weeks in basements, and are afraid to go out even for evacuations," Kuleba said on Ukrainian television.

Russian forces also stepped up their attacks on Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv in the east, with more than 60 strikes overnight, according to regional administration chief Oleh Sinehubov.

"Fires are raging in the city, and there are not enough firefighters," he said.

The strikes hit the city's historical center, including the main marketplace and Gagarin Avenue, a major thoroughfare.

Rescuers have pulled out "dozens of bodies of civilian residents," from the ruins of destroyed apartment buildings, he said on Ukrainian television.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is seeking to extend martial law until April 24 and to require men ages 18 to 60 to stay in the country to fight. Zelenskyy submitted the extension in a bill to parliament, which is expected to vote on it this week.

Talks between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators were due to resume Tuesday, after failing to make a break through — or to break down — on Monday. The two sides had expressed some optimism about the negotiations, which Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhailo Podolyak said would discuss "peace, ceasefire, immediate withdrawal of troops & security guarantees."

Russia's military is bigger and better equipped than Ukraine's, but its troops have faced stiffer-than-expected resistance, bolstered by arms supplied by the West.

U.S. officials said Russian troops made little progress on the ground in recent days and were still about 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the center of Kyiv as of Monday. The Pentagon said Russian forces have launched more than 900 missiles but not taken control of the air above Ukraine.

U.S. administration officials alleged that China had signaled to Moscow that it would be willing to provide both military support in Ukraine and financial backing to help stave off effects of Western sanctions.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan warned China against helping Russia during a meeting in Rome on Monday with a senior Chinese diplomat. The Kremlin denied asking China for military equipment to use in Ukraine.

With each day, the human cost of the grinding war continues to rise. The Ukrainian general prosecutor's office released details of two deadly Russian attacks that took place Monday: an artillery strike that hit a university and open-air market in the northern city of Chernihiv, killing 10, and the shooting of a 65-year-old woman on a bus that was evacuating civilians from a Kyiv suburb.

The number of people killed in a Russian rocket attack on a TV tower in western Ukraine on Monday rose to 19, authorities in the Rivne region said Tuesday. The Rivne regional government posted on its Facebook page that 19 people were killed and nine were injured in the strike on the TV tower in Antopol, a village that is about 160 kilometers (100 miles) from the border of NATO member Poland.

A Russian airstrike near a Ukrainian checkpoint caused extensive damage to a downtown Kyiv neighborhood, killing one person, Ukraine's emergency agency said.

Kateryna Lot said she was in her apartment as her child did homework when they heard a loud explosion and ran to take shelter.

"The child became hysterical. Our windows and the balcony were shattered. Part of the floor fell down," she said. "It was very, very scary."

In an area outside Kyiv, Fox News reporter Benjamin Hall was injured while reporting and was hospitalized, the network said.

There was a rare glimmer of hope in the encircled port city of Mariupol after a convoy of 160 civilian cars left along a designated humanitarian route, the city council reported Monday. Over the past 10 days or so, the lethal siege has pulverized homes and other buildings and left people desperate for food, water, heat and medicine.

Previous attempts to evacuate civilians and deliver humanitarian aid to the southern city of 430,000 were thwarted by fighting.



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Ukraine's military said it repelled an attempt Monday to take control of Mariupol by Russian forces, who were forced to retreat. Satellite images from Maxar Technologies showed fires burning across the city, with many high-rise apartment buildings heavily damaged or destroyed.

Ukraine claims its forces have killed 150 Russian troops and destroyed two Russian tanks in the battle for Mariupol.

The Kremlin-backed leader of the Russian region of Chechnya said on a messaging app that Chechen fighters were spearheading the offensive on Mariupol.

Elsewhere, the Russian military said 20 civilians in the separatist-controlled city of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine were killed by a ballistic missile launched by Ukrainian forces. The claim could not be independently verified.

In Russia, the live main evening news program on state television was briefly interrupted by a woman who walked into the studio holding a poster against the war. The OVD-Info website that monitors political arrests identified her as a Channel 1 employee and said she was taken into police custody.

The U.N. refugee agency said Sunday that it had recorded at least 596 civilian deaths since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, though it believes the true toll is much higher.

## **EXPLAINER: How plausible is Chinese military aid for Russia?**

BEIJING (AP) — The U.S. says Russia has asked China to provide military assistance for its war in Ukraine, and that China has responded affirmatively. Both Moscow and Beijing have denied the allegation, with a Chinese spokesperson dismissing it as "disinformation."

Still, the claims have generated conjecture over how far Beijing would be willing to go in backing its "most important strategic partner," as China's foreign minister recently described Russia.

### **WHAT DID THE U.S. SAY?**

Following initial reports that Russia had asked China for military aid, unnamed U.S. officials said that Washington had determined that China had sent a signal to Russia: Beijing would be willing to provide both military support for the campaign in Ukraine and financial backing to help stave off the impact of severe sanctions imposed by the West.

At a meeting in Rome on Monday, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan warned senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi against providing such support, even as the Kremlin denied requesting military equipment.

The U.S. is wary of China's intentions because the government of President Xi Jinping has refused to criticize the Russian invasion, even as it seeks to distance itself from the Kremlin's war by calling for dialogue and reiterating its position that a nation's territory must be respected.

### **WHAT MIGHT CHINA OFFER?**

If anything, smaller items such as bullets and meals are more likely than fighter jets and tanks, experts said.

China "probably wants to avoid high-profile or big-ticket arms sales to Russia in the midst of a conflict which would expose Beijing to international sanctions," said Drew Thompson, a former U.S. Defense Department official currently at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore.

Beijing would be more willing to provide spare parts, consumables, ammunition, and dual-use items that don't contravene sanctions and could fall below the threshold of international reprisals, Thompson said.

For example, Russian helicopters are likely using up their flares to counter portable short-range missiles like the Stinger. China could conceivably sell Russia some of its flares, if they are compatible with Russian systems, Thompson said. China might also share surveillance and intelligence, he said.

Given Washington's warnings, any Chinese aid would likely involve "very basic stuff," such as ration packs for soldiers, said Sam Roggeveen, director of the International Security Program at Australia's Lowy Institute.

He added that Russia would find it virtually impossible to integrate Chinese armaments into its armed forces on such short notice.

### **WOULD CHINA DO IT?**

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While not impossible, both Chinese and non-Chinese experts say there are several factors working against it. For starters, it could look bad.

"China will be very careful trying its best to avoid its aid and other assistance being used on the battlefields of Ukraine," said Shi Yinhong, a professor of international relations at Renmin University in Beijing. He added that China "has no motive to provide any assistance to Russia's operation in Ukraine."

Roggeveen concurred that there is no "obvious upside" for China in aiding Moscow, adding that a weakened Russia could work to China's strategic and economic advantage.

Chinese officials have also said throughout the crisis that the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries should be respected — though critics say its refusal to criticize Russia's invasion is in fundamental contradiction to that position.

"Russia's military operation in Ukraine has in nature become an invasion, and China will never provide arms to help a country attack another sovereign county and that is not in accordance with international law," said Li Xin, director of the Institute of European and Asian Studies at Shanghai University of Political Science and Law.

China also does not want to see the conflict worsen or be dragged in as a co-belligerent, so any Chinese support "would be measured and carefully calibrated," Thompson said.

## Ukraine war recalls trauma for survivors of Aleppo siege

By AJ NADDAFF Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — When Afraa Hashem thinks back about living through the siege of Aleppo, she remembers how inventive everyone was.

In late 2016, Syrian government forces had sealed off Aleppo's rebel-held eastern half, with 270,000 people inside, and for months they and Russian warplanes blasted it to rubble. Food was scarce. Hashem's family, like others, was largely surviving off one meal a day.

One day, her eldest son Wisam, 11 at the time, asked out of nowhere: "Mommy, can we have fish?"

Her three kids didn't even really like fish. But when you have almost nothing, you miss even things you don't like, she recalled.

Unwilling to cave in to despair, Hashem fried up moldy bread, found some coriander, garlic and Aleppo's famed red pepper flakes and told them it was tilapia. Together, they all pretended it was fish — the kids even said they could taste it.

"It wasn't just me, but all the women in Aleppo were doing these inventions to feed their children," she said.

Hashem and other Aleppo survivors on Tuesday mark the 11th anniversary of Syria's revolution-turned-civil war. This year, many of them are not just reflecting on their own fates, they are watching in shock as Ukrainians face familiar horrors: bombardment, brutal siege and flight from their homes.

In Syria's war, Russia helped President Bashar Assad's government gain the upper hand with a ruthless strategy. One by one, they locked sieges around opposition-held areas, bombarding and starving them until the population's ability to hold out collapsed.

The siege of Aleppo was among the most brutal. Aleppo was Syria's most populous city, famed for its unique cuisine of elaborate dishes and its millennia-old Old City.

When the war began, its eastern districts fought off the government for four years, brimming with revolutionary fervor. But nearly six months of siege reduced much of the east to empty rubble, its population dispersed or dead.

In Ukraine, a similar siege has been underway for nearly two weeks on the port city of Mariupol, where tens of thousands are scrounging for food and shelter under Russian bombardment. The fear is that Russian President Vladimir Putin will expand a Syria-style siege strategy across Ukraine.

Now in London with her husband and children, Hashem said she stood in solidarity with Ukraine from the first day of Russia's invasion.

"A lot of people ask if I am mad that the world sympathizes more with Ukraine than it did with Syria. I

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tell them I don't care if people sympathize more. I care that they are victims," she said.

In a corner of Syria still outside government control, another Aleppo survivor, Abdulkafi Alhamdo, is also trying to connect with Ukraine.

He lives in opposition-held Idlib province and works as a literature professor in the nearby Turkish-controlled town of Azaz.

In class, "I am always linking Big Brother in George Orwell's '1984' novel to Putin, both in Syria and now in Ukraine," he said.

Alhamdo printed two Ukrainian flags to wave alongside the Syrian revolution flags at a local protest in Idlib marking the anniversary this week.

When Syria's conflict began in 2011, Hashem worked as a school principal and activist. Her hopes for change in Syria rose with opposition gains, including its capture of Aleppo's eastern half from the government. Hashem worked with the local council running the city and helped organize protests.

Over the next years, Russian and government warplanes increasingly bombed east Aleppo as they battled rebel forces in the countryside. Hashem moved her school into a basement and turned the darkened rooms into classrooms and shelters. She started a theater there, writing plays for the students to perform.

With fighting growing worse, the ordinary life she once had grew more remote. In the mornings she would pass by the hill separating her part of east Aleppo from government-held west Aleppo.

It was as impassable as the Berlin Wall, she recalled. If you got too close, snipers would shoot you. But she wanted to hear cars, any sound from the other side that would bring the memory of friends and relatives who lived there.

"I would always wonder, 'What is life like in that second universe?'"

Her universe tumbled into complete hell when siege was imposed on the east in July 2016.

East Aleppo was sealed off, with hardly any supplies getting in. Russian and government bombardment smashed everything, including hospitals and schools. Residential blocks were left in ruins.

Early on, one of Hashem's students was killed. She stopped the school theater. The district's few gardens became cemeteries. Medicines ran out. The sound of explosions was constant. Hashem's apartment building was bombed multiple times, before and during the siege, and they moved often.

With no electricity and limited fuel, residents turned to "plastic gasoline," extracting fuel from plastic bottles and containers. It was bad for the generators and gave off a toxic smell. But it helped generate enough electricity for people to charge car batteries, mobile phones and small LED lights.

With no gas for cooking, families collected furniture and scraps of wood to burn from the ever-growing number of bombed-out buildings.

Prices spiraled. There were no fruits and few vegetables. Flour was almost impossible to come by, so Hashem and other families made bread by grinding white beans.

As winter cold set in, scrap wood was needed for warmth, too. Her kids missed saheb, a sweet, warm comfort-drink that's a wintertime favorite across the Middle East. It's made from the tubers of an orchid, impossible to find during the siege.

So Hesham again improvised. She dipped into her precious reserve of flour, boiled it with water and sugar, "and that was like you are drinking saheb but in a different way."

Soon after, in late December 2016, she was among tens of thousands of residents who agreed to leave under an evacuation deal. She went to opposition-held northwest Syria, then into Turkey.

On her first night in an apartment in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, she watched the washing machine spinning for the first time in years - and cried.

Hesham took her kids to a mall, to the "promised land" of the food court. "We bought all kinds of food that we'd dreamed of eating. Pizza, hamburgers, chicken nuggets, fish and chips. All of that."

Today, a Syrian regime soldier lives in her old home, relatives still in the city tell her, reflecting a government trend to confiscate properties after battles.

Iman Khaled Aboud, a 40-year-old widow, also left Aleppo in the same evacuation on a foggy December day with snow and bitter cold, similar to temperatures in Ukraine now.

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She described seeing Russian troops for the first time as the evacuation buses passed through checkpoints — after months of being at the receiving end of Russian strikes. Her son and her husband were both killed in a Russian strike, she said. Under bombardment, she and her family had to move 15 times during the siege.

Aboud said she hopes Ukrainians don't have to go through what she did. But, she said, "I would advise them to stock up on food."

In February 2020, Hashem was invited to attend the British Academy Film Awards for her participation in the award-winning movie, "For Sama," which follows the birth of a child during Aleppo's siege and prominently features Hashem's family. In Britain, she was able to claim asylum.

For the anniversary of the war, Hashem plans to attend a protest in London against the Syrian government, where they will also raise banners against Russia's invasion of Ukraine,

"I want to show the world that our disaster and experience might be transferred to another country."

## Hijab bans deepen Hindu-Muslim fault lines in Indian state

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

UDUPI, India (AP) — When Aliya Assadi was 12, she wore a hijab while representing her southern Indian state of Karnataka at a karate competition. She won gold.

Five years later she tried to wear one to her junior college, the equivalent of a U.S. high school. She never made it past the campus gate, turned away under a new policy barring the religious headgear.

"It's not just a piece of cloth," Assadi said while visiting a friend's house. She wore a niqab, an even more concealing garment that veils nearly the entire face with just a slit for the eyes, which she dons when away from home. "Hijab is my identity. And right now what they're doing is taking away my identity from me."

She's one of countless Muslim students in Karnataka who have found themselves thrust into the center of a stormy debate about banning the hijab in schools and the Islamic head coverings' place in this Hindu-majority but constitutionally secular nation.

The issue has become a flashpoint for the battle over the rights of Muslims, who fear they are being shunted aside as a minority in India and see hijab restrictions as a worrying escalation of Hindu nationalism under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

On Tuesday, an Indian court upheld the ban, saying the Muslim headscarf is not an essential religious practice of Islam.

The hijab is worn by many Muslim women to maintain modesty or as a religious symbol, often seen as not just a bit of clothing but something mandated by their faith. Opponents consider it a symbol of oppression, imposed on women. Hijab supporters deny that and say it has different meanings depending on the individual, including as a proud expression of Muslim identity.

The furor began in January in India, where Muslims make up just 14% of the country's 1.4 billion people but are still numerous enough to make it the second-largest Muslim population of any nation, after Indonesia.

Staffers at a government-run junior college in Udupi, a coastal city in Karnataka, began refusing admission to girls who showed up in a hijab, saying they were violating the uniform code.

The students protested by camping outside and holding their lessons there, arguing that Muslim students had long been allowed to wear headscarves at school. More schools in the state soon imposed similar bans, prompting demonstrations by hundreds of Muslim women.

That led to counterprotests by Hindu students wearing saffron shawls, a color closely associated with that religion and favored by Hindu nationalists. They shouted slogans like "Hail Lord Ram," a phrase that traditionally was used to celebrate the Hindu deity but has been co-opted by nationalists.

At one campus a boy climbed a flagpole and hoisted a saffron flag to cheers from friends. At another a girl in a hijab was met by shouted Hindu slogans from a group of boys; she raised her fist and cried, "Allahu akbar!" — "God is great," in Arabic.

To quell tensions the state, governed by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, shut schools and colleges for three days. It then slapped a statewide ban on the hijab in classes, saying "religious clothing" in government-run



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schools “disturbs equality, integrity and public law and order.”

Some students gave in and attended with their heads uncovered. Others refused and have been barred from school for nearly two months — students like Ayesha Anwar, an 18-year-old in Udupi who has missed exams and is falling behind her peers.

“I feel like we are being let down by everyone,” Anwar said while surrounded by friends in a dimly lit cafe, her voice barely a whisper from behind her cloth veil.

Six students sued to overturn the state’s ban, now upheld by the court, arguing it violates their rights to education and religious freedom. One of the plaintiffs to the challenge was Aliya Assadi.

“I’m an Indian and a Muslim,” she said. “When I see this with the point of view of a Muslim, I see my hijab is at a stake, and as an Indian, I see my constitutional values have been violated.”

There’s a cost to her activism: Hindu nationalists doxxed her personal details on social media, unleashing a flood of online abuse and harassment. She lost friends who depicted her actions as Muslim fundamentalism.

But she’s steadfast about wearing the hijab. She first did so as a child, imitating her mother, carefully arranging the headscarf in front of the mirror each morning. Today she enjoys the privacy it affords and the sense of religious pride it conveys: “It makes me confident.”

Ayesha Imtiaz, another student barred from school, said she wears it as a token of devotion to Islam but acknowledged that opinions vary even among Muslim women.

“There are so many of my friends who do not wear hijab inside the classroom,” said Imtiaz, 20. “They feel empowered in their own way, and I feel empowered in my own way.”

In her eyes, the bans segregate women according to faith and contravene core Indian values on diversity. “It’s Islamophobia,” Imtiaz said.

Hijab restrictions have surfaced elsewhere, including France, which in 2004 banned them in schools. Other European countries have enacted regulations for public spaces, usually aimed at the more concealing garments such as niqabs and burqas. Usage of head coverings has divided even some Muslim communities.

In India, the hijab has historically been neither prohibited nor limited in public spheres. Women donning the headscarf is common across the country, which has religious freedom enshrined in its national charter with the secular state as a cornerstone.

But critics of Modi say India has steadily drifted from that commitment to secularism and today is deeply fractured along religious lines. The prime minister and top Cabinet officials often perform Hindu rituals and prayers on television, blurring the lines between religion and the state.

Since coming into office in 2014, Modi’s government has passed a raft of laws that opponents call anti-Muslim, though his party rejects accusations of being discriminatory.

Meanwhile calls for violence against Muslims have moved from society’s fringes toward the mainstream. Watchdog groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have warned that attacks could escalate against Muslims, who are disproportionately represented in India’s most impoverished neighborhoods and in prisons.

Some of the anti-Islam sentiment has specifically targeted women — recently many in the country were outraged by a website that was set up offering a fake “auction” of more than 100 prominent Indian Muslim women, including journalists, activists, artists and movie stars.

Muslim students allege that behind the counterprotests in Karnataka was Hindu Jagran Vedike, a nationalist group associated with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a far-right Hindu organization ideologically linked to Modi’s political party.

Mahesh Bailur, a senior member of Hindu Jagran Vedike, denied that his group organized demonstrations and said it only offered “moral support” to the saffron shawls and their cause.

“Today these girls are demanding hijab in colleges. Tomorrow they will want to pray there. Finally, they’ll want separate classrooms for themselves,” he said. “This is unacceptable.”

Bailur, 36, is a proponent of a discredited conspiracy theory that holds Muslims are plotting to convert India’s Hindu population and eventually remake it as an Islamic nation. Demands to wear the hijab in classes, he argued, are part of that.

Manavi Atri, a human rights lawyer based in Bengaluru, the capital of Karnataka, said the hijab ban is



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among many assaults on expressions of Muslim identity in India today, violates principles of state neutrality on religious matters, and inflates an "us-versus-them philosophy" in a country already riven by sectarian divisions. Most troubling, she said, is the pressure it puts on girls and young women in their formative years.

"This choice (between education and faith) that people are being forced to make is not a choice one has to be exercising at that age," she said.

In the court case, lawyers for Karnataka state argued that the Quran does not clearly establish wearing the hijab as an essential spiritual practice, so banning it does not violate religious freedom.

Many Muslims reject that interpretation.

On a recent Friday, Rasheed Ahmad, the head imam of Udupi's grand mosque, delivered a sermon before hundreds of worshippers. His voice thundering through loudspeakers mounted on the minarets, he railed against the bans as an attack on Islam.

"Hijab is not just our right," he said later in an interview, "but an order from God."

Assadi said she and the others are determined to prevail.

"We are brave Muslim women," she said, "and we know how to fight for our rights."

## India court upholds ban on hijab in schools and colleges

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — An Indian court Tuesday upheld a ban on wearing hijab in class in the southern state of Karnataka, saying the Muslim headscarf is not an essential religious practice of Islam in a ruling that is likely to further deepen religious tensions in the country.

The high court in Karnataka state delivered the verdict after considering petitions filed by Muslim students challenging a government ban on hijabs that some schools and colleges have implemented in the last two months. The ban does not extend to other Indian states, but the court ruling could set a precedent for the rest of the country.

The dispute began in January when a government-run school in Karnataka's Udupi district barred students wearing hijabs from entering classrooms, triggering protests by Muslims who said they were being deprived of their fundamental rights to education and religion. That led to counterprotests by Hindu students wearing saffron shawls, a color closely associated with that religion and favored by Hindu nationalists.

More schools in the state followed with similar bans and the state's top court disallowed students from wearing hijab and any religious clothing pending a verdict.

The court in its ruling said the state government had the power to prescribe uniform guidelines for students as a "reasonable restriction on fundamental rights."

The ruling came at a time when violence and hate speech against Muslims have increased under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's governing Hindu nationalist party, which also governs Karnataka state. Over the last few weeks, the issue has become a flashpoint for the battle over the rights of Muslims, who fear they are being shunted aside as a minority in India and see hijab bans as a worrying escalation of Hindu nationalism under Modi's government.

Some rights activists have voiced concerns that the ban could increase Islamophobia.

"No one can understand our anxiousness about what is to follow," Afreen Fatima, a New Delhi-based student activist, wrote on Twitter. "The court's Hijab ban is a great injustice and a very worrying precedence. The scale of its repercussion is going to be brutal and inhuman."

Karnataka's education minister B. C. Nagesh told reporters that female Muslim students who were protesting against the ban must respect the court's verdict and return to classes. He said his government will try to win the hearts of "misguided" students and "bring them in mainstream of education."

Some Muslim politicians called the verdict disappointing.

"I hope this judgement will not be used to legitimize harassment of hijab-wearing women," said Asaduddin Owaisi, a member of the Indian parliament.

Ahead of the verdict, the Karnataka government banned large gatherings for a week in state capital Bengaluru "to maintain public peace and order" and declared a holiday Tuesday in schools and colleges

in Udupi.

The hijab is worn by many Muslim women to maintain modesty or as a religious symbol, often seen as not just a bit of clothing but something mandated by their faith.

Hijab restrictions have surfaced elsewhere, including France, which in 2004 banned them in schools. But in India, where Muslims make up 14% of the country's 1.4 billion people, the hijab has historically been neither prohibited nor limited in public spheres. Women donning the headscarf is common across the country, which has religious freedom enshrined in its national charter with the secular state as a cornerstone.

## War in Ukraine disrupts key supply chains - and lives

By MATT O'BRIEN Associated Press

It can be hard to measure the ways that Russia's war in Ukraine has disrupted the global supply of parts and raw materials needed to complete a variety of products – from cars to computer chips.

But cutting off one of those supply links brought a "depressing feeling" to Andrey Bibik, head of the Interpipe steel plant in Dnipro, Ukraine. He spent the first hours of the war winding down his bustling 24-hour operation and sending almost everyone home.

"It's empty and lonely. You don't hear a sound. You see everything is frozen," he said.

Getting Interpipe's steel transmission pipes to Texas oil companies and its railway wheels to European high-speed train operators has been put on hold. Hundreds of the plant's roughly 10,000 employees have joined the fight against Russia. Others have fled; a remaining skeleton crew runs its canteens and makes spikey metal obstacles to block Russian tanks and convoys. Its bomb shelters house dozens of local families at night.

"It was a hard choice to stop production. We had plenty of orders, a lot of customers awaiting our material. But if you have to choose between safety, and possible profits, I think the answer is obvious," said Bibik, who's worked at the company for nearly two decades. "The most important thing we have is life and we really need to take care of the people we love."

Similar production halts have spread across other industries in Ukraine, motivated not just by safety concerns but also because the war and mass exodus of refugees have closed off roads and railways to commercial freight traffic. Some of Interpipe's finished products bound for overseas export are now stalled at the Black Sea port of Odesa.

Ukraine accounts for only about 0.3% of the world's exports, while Russia's share is about 1.9%, according to a report by the Dutch bank ING. Still, some industries doing business with these nations are starting to feel the war's impact.

For Russia, a key producer of energy, steel and raw metals such as nickel, copper, platinum and palladium — many of which are important to the auto industry — the supply concerns are tied to punishing Western economic sanctions and Russia's moves to retaliate against them. For Ukraine, the war itself is cutting off supplies.

"We want to give priority to the refugees, people trying to move out of the war zone, and humanitarian and military convoys," said Interpipe's Houston-based chairman and former CEO Fadi Hraibi.

The disruption of another Ukrainian industry — the making of wiring harnesses used in cars — is already hurting European automakers. Ukraine has more than 30 automotive plants, most of them centered near the western border with Poland and other European neighbors, according to a government agency that promotes foreign investment.

German parts supplier Leoni said production has been interrupted at its two western Ukraine plants in Styri and Kolomyja and that it's looking for temporary alternatives. "We are aware that this situation is currently affecting not only Leoni, but the entire industry," said spokesperson Gregor le Claire.

Ukraine is also among the world's largest suppliers of neon, a gas used in lasers that help etch integrated circuits onto computer chips. That worries auto industry executives, who fear that tight neon supplies could worsen a global chip shortage that has already forced production cuts and made vehicles scarce worldwide.

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Interpipe has five factories in Ukraine, all located in the industrial hub of Dnipro and its surrounding oblast, or region, which holds a strategic position on the Dnieper River southeast of the capital, Kyiv.

Until Russian airstrikes began targeting Dnipro on Friday, the country's fourth-largest city had been mostly quiet — except for occasional air raid sirens — in the two weeks since Russia invaded the country. But executives at Interpipe made a quick decision on Feb. 24 to shut down all of its facilities.

Russian President Vladimir Putin launched the invasion before dawn and by lunchtime, plant operations were wound down, Bibik said. That evening, he watched the last five workers get shuttled off to the suburb where they live. All of Interpipe's workers are still being paid, Bibik and Hraibi said.

Interpipe's customers in the energy and rail industries typically order their pipes, wheels and other products months in advance, but Hraibi said the disruptions will cause shortages and lead some to look for alternatives. For some wheel customers, such a Saudi Arabian railway operator, Interpipe is the sole supplier, he said. Two of the company's chief steel industry rivals, OMK and Evraz, are in Russia and he hopes customers will avoid them.

"I don't know if our business will survive," he said. "We do all that's necessary to support the people, to keep our employees, to be able to restart in a month or two or three, whenever things get back to — at least closer to — normal. But in reality, nobody can predict what's going to happen."

## Shot 9 times at New Zealand mosque, survivor walks for peace

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — The lingering injuries from being shot nine times did not stop Temel Atacocugu from completing a two-week walk and bike ride for peace on Tuesday, the third anniversary of a gunman's slaughter of 51 Muslim worshippers.

Atacocugu set out to retrace the gunman's 360-kilometer (224-mile) drive from Dunedin to the two Christchurch mosques where he carried out his attack.

"I wanted to fix this damage," Atacocugu said. "Because three years ago, he started that journey with hate."

Atacocugu, 47, said he wanted to bless the route, and raise money for charity along the way.

He had intended to walk the entire distance, but about halfway through he got bad blisters after the weather changed from hot one day to rain the next. He also got a mysterious case of blood poisoning, and ended up spending a couple of days in a local hospital.

"The best point was meeting lots of beautiful people and getting great support from them," he said. "The low point was being in the emergency room. But I was not going to give up. I got on my bike straight after discharge."

That helped him make up lost time. On Tuesday, he was joined by about 50 supporters as he walked the final stretch to the Al Noor mosque, entering at 1:40 p.m. — the exact time he was shot during Friday prayers in 2019.

"I made a speech, it was very emotional," Atacocugu said. "I was so happy. It was a big relief to have completed my mission."

During the attack, Atacocugu was shot in the mouth, his left arm and both legs, and he said he often felt pain from the injuries during his walk and ride. He said he planned to recuperate with a big sleep, and maybe a sauna and spa.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told lawmakers that in the aftermath of the attack, the Muslim community had shown courage, unity and determination.

"March 15 is a date in our collective national history where we learned about the very worst and the very best of humanity," Ardern said.

Australian white supremacist Brenton Tarrant in 2020 pleaded guilty to 51 counts of murder, 40 counts of attempted murder and one count of terrorism after carrying out the attacks. He was sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

An online donations page showed that by Tuesday afternoon, Atacocugu had raised about 64,000 New

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Zealand dollars (\$43,000) for three charities benefitting children.

"All New Zealand is one," Atacocugu said. "Terrorist is nil."

## Ukraine war may lead to rethinking of US defense of Europe

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine and his push to upend the broader security order in Europe may lead to a historic shift in American thinking about defense of the continent. Depending on how far Putin goes, this could mean a buildup of U.S. military power in Europe not seen since the Cold War.

The prospect of a bigger U.S. military footprint in Europe is a remarkable turnaround from just two years ago.

In 2020, President Donald Trump ordered thousands of American troops out of Germany as part of his argument that Europeans were undeserving allies. Just days after taking office, President Joe Biden stopped the withdrawal before it could start, and his administration has stressed NATO's importance even as Biden identifies China as the main long-term threat to U.S. security.

Then came Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"We are in a new era of sustained confrontation with Russia," says Alexander Vershbow, a former U.S. ambassador to Russia and former deputy secretary-general of NATO. He argues that the United States, in cooperation with NATO allies, will need to establish a more muscular stance to deal with a more threatening Russia. That is especially so in Eastern Europe, where Russia's proximity poses a problem for the three Baltic nations that are former Soviet states.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was flying to Europe on Tuesday for his second recent round of Ukraine consultations at NATO headquarters in Brussels. He also will travel to two Eastern European NATO countries — Slovakia, which borders Ukraine, and Bulgaria, which does not. After a NATO meeting last month, Austin visited two other allies on the eastern flank — Poland and Lithuania.

In just the past two months, the U.S. presence in Europe has jumped from about 80,000 troops to about 100,000, which is nearly as many as were there in 1997 when the United States and its NATO allies began an expansion of the alliance that Putin says threatens Russia and must be reversed. By comparison, in 1991, the year the Soviet Union dissolved, the United States had 305,000 troops in Europe, including 224,000 in Germany alone, according to Pentagon records. The number then dropped steadily, reaching 101,000 in 2005 and about 64,000 as recently as 2020.

This year's U.S. troop additions are billed as temporary, but there's no certainty how long they'll stay. They include an armored brigade of the 1st Infantry Division, totaling about 4,000 soldiers, to Germany, and a similar-size infantry brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division, to Poland. Numerous Army headquarters units also have been sent to Poland and Germany. Austin also sent F-35A fighter jets to NATO's eastern flank and Apache attack helicopters to the Baltic states.

A recent Pentagon review of its worldwide military presence concluded that troop levels and positions in Europe were about right. But in testimony before a House committee several days after Putin invaded Ukraine, Mara Karlin, a senior Pentagon official who oversaw the 2021 review, said that conclusion will have to be reconsidered.

The Pentagon must "ensure that we've got deterrence of Russia and that we can absolutely 150% say that NATO is safe and secure," not just in light of Russia's invasion but for the longer term, she said March 1.

Putin's war in Ukraine has prompted a rethinking of regional defense needs not just by Washington but also some European allies, including Germany, which last month broke with a longstanding policy of not exporting weapons to conflict zones by sending anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons to Ukraine. Germany also committed to a much bigger defense budget.

"A new reality," Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared.

Putin has not only demanded that Ukraine disavow its ambition to join NATO but also insisted the alliance withdraw its forces from NATO's eastern flank — demands the U.S. and NATO reject as counter



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to the fundamental rights of nations to decide their foreign relations for themselves and of NATO's basic commitment to provide security for all members equally.

If Russia were to take control of the entirety of Ukraine, it would be on the border of additional NATO countries, including Romania, Slovakia and Hungary. Poland and Lithuania already share a land border with the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, headquarters of the Baltic Fleet of the Russian Navy. There is concern that Putin could decide to make a play for control of that 60-mile-long land corridor, known as the Suwalki Gap, that connects Kaliningrad to Belarus.

Vershbow, the former deputy NATO secretary-general who is now a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council, recommends that the U.S. and NATO move beyond their current reliance on light, battalion-size battle groups in Eastern Europe to instead deploy heavier, larger and permanent forces there.

Such a transition on NATO's eastern flank is just the sort of thing Putin says is a threat to Russia and says he will no longer tolerate. He has demanded a return to the arrangements that existed in 1997, when the NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed.

In that document, Moscow acknowledged that NATO would go ahead with plans to invite Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to join the alliance. Notably, the document also said that "in the foreseeable security environment," NATO would forgo "additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces on the territory of new members."

Does that foreclose the option of a U.S. troop buildup in Eastern Europe? No, says a new report by the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security. It argues that the restrictions on NATO's military presence in Eastern Europe as described in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act are irrelevant in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"We are in new, dangerous territory — a period of sustained tensions, military moves and countermoves, and major intermittent military crises in the Euro-Atlantic area that will ebb and flow for at least the remainder of the 2020s, if not longer," the report says.

## **AP-NORC poll: Many Black Americans doubtful on police reform**

By AARON MORRISON and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Few Americans believe there has been significant progress over the last 50 years in achieving equal treatment for Black people in dealings with police and the criminal justice system.

Most Americans across racial and ethnic groups say more progress is necessary, according to a new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. But Black Americans, many whom may have held hope in Democrats' promises on racial justice initiatives in 2020, are especially pessimistic that any more progress will be made in the coming years.

Overall, only about a quarter of Americans say there has been a great deal or a lot of progress in achieving racial equality in policing and criminal justice. Roughly another third say there's been "some" progress. An overwhelming majority of adults say more progress is needed for racial equality, including about half who say "a lot" more.

"There's more attention around certain issues and there's a realization — more people are waking up to a lot of corruption in the system," said Derek Sims, a 35-year-old bus driver in Austin, Texas, who is Black. He considers himself more optimistic than pessimistic that change will happen.

However, Sims said: "People don't really want to come together and hash out ideas. There's just too much tribalism."

Among those who think more progress is needed on achieving fair treatment for Black Americans by police, 31% say they are optimistic about that happening in the next few years, while 38% are pessimistic. Roughly another third say they hold neither opinion.

Only 20% of Black Americans who think more needs to be done are optimistic; 49% are pessimistic.

The AP-NORC poll results reflect what some criminal justice advocates have warned elected leaders about for more than a year: that unless something definitive is done soon to begin transforming police and the criminal justice system, it could become more difficult to mobilize dissatisfied Black voters in the



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midterm elections.

And already, Democrats' pivot to the center on racial justice issues has given advocates pause. During his first State of the Union address earlier this month, President Joe Biden said the answer to reported rises in violent crime "is not to defund the police."

"The answer is to fund the police with the resources and training they need to protect our communities," Biden said in remarks that have been seen as a clear disavowal of some Black Lives Matter activists' rhetoric.

In 2020, following the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, many Americans across racial and ethnic backgrounds called for criminal justice reforms in nationwide protests. On Capitol Hill, consensus on reforms, via the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, has not been reached nearly two years later.

"What we saw from the George Floyd case, we in the Black community know that those officers were found guilty because of the outcry," DeAnna Hoskins, president and CEO of JustLeadershipUSA, a New York-based nonprofit criminal justice reform advocacy group, told the AP.

"The only reason why you get results is because there was an outcry that included Black and white people. You've got a much larger voter base saying something has to be done," she said.

Due to vastly different lived experiences, it's been harder to get Americans across racial and ethnic groups to sustain their outcries and demand an end to systemic racism, Hoskins added.

The poll shows there is common ground on the issue across racial and ethnic groups, but also suggests there is urgency felt among Black Americans more than white Americans. More white Americans than Black Americans say there has already been significant progress toward racial equality in policing, 30% vs. 10%. Among Black Americans, 40% say there has been no progress at all.

And while at least three-quarters of white and Black Americans say more progress is needed, Black Americans are much more likely than white Americans to say a lot more needs to be done, 70% vs. 47%.

Last year marked 50 years since a war on drugs was declared in America. The bipartisan public policy at the federal and state levels saw the nation's incarceration rate skyrocket to the highest in the industrialized world. Black Americans, in particular, bore the brunt of police militarization and laws that imposed mandatory minimum prison terms.

There were also post-incarceration consequences, such as losing the right to vote, being barred from public housing and certain college financial aid programs, and struggling to find employment with a felony record.

Compared with views on policing and criminal justice, Americans are more likely to think there has been significant progress over the last 50 years in achieving equal treatment for Black Americans in political representation, access to good education, access to good health care and access to good jobs. And there's more pessimism about progress over the next few years in policing and criminal justice than in the other areas.

Heydy Maldonado, 30, blames how crime is covered by TV and print news outlets — which she said often frame violence in a way that suggests it is only endemic to Black and Hispanic communities — for the lack of hope in reforms.

"We get targeted," said Maldonado, whose family is Honduran and Salvadoran. "I'm sure there's more crime out there, and it's not just our race, it's not just people of color. It's an ongoing battle."

"I do feel like we need to be united and speak to each other and keep fighting for change," she added. "Eventually, hopefully, this could all be a thing of the past."

## Russia invasion upends Olympic 'neutrality' — if it existed

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

The International Olympic Committee has always been political, from the sheikhs and royals in its membership to a seat at the United Nations to pushing for peace talks between the Koreans. But Russia's invasion of Ukraine three weeks ago exposed its irreconcilable claims of "political neutrality."

The IOC's politics were evident at Hitler's 1936 Olympics. During the Cold War, the Games were a stage for conflict (Mexico City), violence (Munich) and boycotts (Moscow). To this day, the IOC has partnered with authoritarian states like China and Russia, beginning with the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, through

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the doping-scarred Sochi Games to the just-closed Beijing Winter Olympics.

Yawning gaps exist between what the IOC has long insisted it is — “the very heart of world sport” — and a view that hews closer to reality; a nonprofit sports business, based in Switzerland, that generates about 90% of its income from selling broadcast rights and sponsorships.

Increasingly, the IOC must cater to rich sponsors that were barely a factor 30 years ago as the Games, almost bankrupt, turned commercial and professional. Olympic athletes are pressing for a larger slice of the pie, aware their careers are fragile (only 30% of them attend the Olympics more than once).

The most visible politics involve the 206 nations and territories that march into the Games under national colors, flags, and stirring anthems — but never in a vacuum. By comparison, the U.N. has only 193 member states.

Following the invasion of Ukraine — acting because of a breach of the so-called Olympic Truce and not because of the war itself — the IOC recommended that sports federations and event organizers “not invite or allow” Russian or Belarusian athletes to participate.

But it left loopholes, stayed out of the fray and urged others to act. Many have, leaving Russians and Belarusians out of most sports competitions. The IOC itself has not banned the Russian or Belarusian Olympic committees, nor IOC members from those countries, nor has it asked publicly that top IOC sponsors take any action.

The IOC tries to have it both ways — and often three or four ways.

“To take a strong stand on Russia is relatively safe. And the only critics will be those of us who point out the IOC’s inconsistencies,” said Helen Jefferson Lenskyj, a professor emerita at the University of Toronto and author of “The Olympic Games — A Critical Approach.”

## HEARING ATHLETES’ VOICES?

The IOC has an in-house Athletes Commission, but it faces pressure from outside groups. To participate in the Olympics, athletes must sign away image and likeness rights, limit their freedom of expression and also sign waivers. Waivers for the Tokyo and Beijing Olympics had an added clause that relieved the IOC of responsibility from any fallout linked to COVID-19.

The IOC has said that athletes and national federations have insurance coverage for most eventualities.

Rob Koehler, general secretary of the advocacy group Global Athlete, said his body helped Ukrainian athletes write to the IOC, asking for a ban on Russia and Belarus. He said he has received neither a reply nor an acknowledgement of the letter.

“Failure to act swiftly against Russia and Belarus will continue to erode the Olympic brand,” Koehler said, “and when that brand erodes the people that are most affected are the athletes — the ones that fill the stadium and draw sponsors and broadcasters.”

In his first news conference 8 1/2 years ago as IOC president, Thomas Bach spelled out the organization’s position with a precise ambiguity.

“The IOC cannot be apolitical,” Bach said. “We have to realize that our decisions at events like Olympic Games, they have political implications. And when taking these decisions we have to, of course, consider political implications.”

Before his words could be parsed, though, he added to the riddle: “But in order to fulfill our role to make sure that in the Olympic Games and for the participants the Charter is respected, we have to be strictly politically neutral. And there we also have to protect the athletes.”

A day before the Winter Olympics opened last month, Bach said the position of the IOC must be “political neutrality.” He said to do otherwise would put “the Games at risk.” Three weeks later, after Bach stood next to Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the opening ceremony, Russia invaded Ukraine.

The IOC then acknowledged a reality, saying the war had created a “dilemma which cannot be solved.”

## KEY TO SUCCESS

The key to the Olympics’ success has been as much political as sporting. Part of the compelling tension behind the Olympics is the competition among countries, the nationalism, the flags fluttering and the riveting anthems. Winning the most gold medals becomes a surrogate for national superiority, increasingly

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a competition between authoritarians and democracies.

Many Olympic disciplines have scant popularity, drawing an audience every four years through the quest for gold. Few except for hardcore fans would care about Greco-Roman wrestling, modern pentathlon or fencing — if that is, nationalism were not the obvious backdrop. And China has become a power at the Winter Paralympics, allowing it to tout its lead atop the medal table to an increasingly nationalist audience.

Patriotism and politics drive some of the Olympics' appeal to sponsors and TV broadcasters, while simultaneously the IOC insists it is politically neutral. The IOC has permanent observer status at the United Nations to increase political clout — not reduce it. A sports business, the IOC is among a few nongovernmental bodies — the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is another — that share the status.

Jules Boykoff, a political science professor at Pacific University and a critic of the IOC, suggested that instead of athletes marching under national flags, they should enter under sports disciplines — skaters together, basketball players in a group, gymnasts paired up. "Athletes might get to know each other more with that kind of mingling," said Boykoff, author of "Power Games: A Political History of the Olympics."

But no national flags. Of course, no national flags could be a death knell for the Olympics.

Boykoff said the IOC, if it acknowledges politics, "wedges open the door for a deeper discussion about what sort of politics the IOC supports."

"Over the years the IOC has shown a conspicuous tolerance for tyranny. But by using 'apolitical' as a shield, they can ward off the legitimate criticism and just claim they work with everyone regardless of politics. They choose to ignore the fact that neutrality can mean siding with oppressive forces."

## POLITICAL SINCE THE BEGINNING

Almost every Modern Olympics, dating from the first in 1896, has had political overtones.

In Antwerp in 1920, the countries defeated in World War I were not invited to attend. That meant Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. Nor did the newly formed Soviet Union participate.

In 1936 in Berlin, Hitler hoped to use the Games to tout so-called Aryan racial superiority. Black American Jesse Owens won four gold medals, blunting Hitler's propaganda.

In Mexico City in 1968, Black Americans Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists on the podium in a black-power salute. The U.S. Olympic Committee kicked them off the team, but in 2019 they were inducted into the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee Hall of Fame.

China held the 2008 Olympics under a wide belief they could produce improvements in human rights, The consensus is that such progress did not happen, and the just-completed 2022 Winter Olympics were held in the middle of a pandemic amid worsening human rights conditions for minority Uyghurs and Tibetans, and a tightened grip on Hong Kong.

International Paralympic Committee President Andrew Parsons complained that his speech at the opening ceremony on March 4, which began with an impassioned anti-war plea, was censored by China's state broadcaster. China has declined to publicly criticize Russia's invasion, and Parsons' words in English were left untranslated or muted, which Chinese officials attributed to an unexplained "glitch."

Now, the Olympics move from China, a country that bans virtually all protest, to France, where vigorous street protest is part of the culture — and where dissent could be played up rather than shut down. For Paris, when it comes to keeping order, it could be a rough ride.

Xu Guoqi, a historian at the University of Hong Kong and the author of "Olympic Dreams: China and Sports" suggests that any "new Cold War era" could be bad news for the Games. After all, as Xu points out, during the original Cold War "everything was political" and the Olympics were tinged with three boycotts — Montreal, Moscow and Los Angeles. The Olympic spirit waned then — and could again.

"It seems to me," Xu said, that "there has never existed a pure Olympics."

## COVID-19 cases more than double in China's growing outbreak

BEIJING (AP) — China's new COVID-19 cases Tuesday more than doubled from the previous day as the country faces by far its biggest outbreak since the early days of the pandemic.

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The National Health Commission said 3,507 new locally spread cases had been identified in the latest 24-hour period, up from 1,337 a day earlier.

A fast-spreading variant known as "stealth omicron" is testing China's zero-tolerance strategy, which had kept the virus at bay since the deadly initial outbreak in the city of Wuhan in early 2020. China has recorded more than 10,000 cases in the first two weeks of March, far exceeding previous flare-ups.

No new deaths have been reported in the multiple outbreaks across China, and the case count remains low compared to many other places in the world. The U.K. recorded more than 444,000 cases in the past week. Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous city that tracks its outbreak separately from the mainland, reported 26,908 new cases on Monday alone.

Nearly three-fourths of China's new infections were in Jilin, a province in the northeast that reported 2,601 cases. Smaller outbreaks have hit more than a dozen provinces and major cities including Beijing and Shanghai.

Jilin has barred residents from leaving the province and from traveling between cities within it. The 9 million residents of Changchun, the provincial capital and an auto manufacturing hub, have been locked down since Friday as authorities conduct repeated rounds of mass testing both there and in the city of Jilin.

More than 1,000 medical workers have been flown in from other provinces along with pandemic response supplies, and the province has mobilized 7,000 military reservists to help with the response.

Elsewhere in China, Shandong province had the most new cases with 106. Guangdong province in the southeast, where the metropolis and major tech center of Shenzhen has been locked down since Sunday, reported 48 new cases. Shanghai had nine, and Beijing, six.

## Russia keeps up attacks in Ukraine as two sides hold talks

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia and Ukraine kept a fragile diplomatic path open with a new round of talks Monday even as Moscow's forces pounded away at Kyiv and other cities across the country in a punishing bombardment the Red Cross said has created "nothing short of a nightmare" for civilians.

Shortly before dawn on Tuesday, large explosions thundered across Kyiv as Russia pressed its advance on multiple fronts.

Elsewhere, a convoy of 160 civilian cars left the encircled port city of Mariupol along a designated humanitarian route, the city council reported, in a rare glimmer of hope a week and a half into the lethal siege that has pulverized homes and other buildings and left people desperate for food, water, heat and medicine.

The latest negotiations, held via video conference, were the fourth round involving higher-level officials from the two countries and the first in a week. The talks ended without a breakthrough after several hours, with an aide to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy saying the negotiators took "a technical pause" and planned to meet again Tuesday.

The two sides had expressed some optimism in the past few days. Mykhailo Podolyak, the aide to Zelenskyy, tweeted that the negotiators would discuss "peace, cease-fire, immediate withdrawal of troops & security guarantees."

Previous discussions, held in person in Belarus, produced no lasting humanitarian routes or agreements to end the fighting.

In Washington, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday that while the Biden administration supports Ukraine's participation in the talks with Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin would have to show signs of de-escalating in order to demonstrate good faith.

"And what we're really looking for is evidence of that, and we're not seeing any evidence at this point that President Putin is doing anything to stop the onslaught or de-escalate," she said.

Overall, nearly all of the Russian military offensives remained stalled after making little progress over the weekend, according to a senior U.S. defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the Pentagon's assessment. Russian troops were still about 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the center of



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Kyiv, the official said.

The official said that Russian forces have launched more than 900 missiles but that Ukraine's airspace is still contested, with Russia not achieving total air superiority.

Overnight, air raid alerts sounded in cities and towns around the country, from near the Russian border in the east to the Carpathian Mountains in the west, and fighting continued on the outskirts of Kyiv. Ukrainian officials said Russian forces shelled several suburbs of the capital.

Ukrainian authorities said two people were killed when the Russians struck an airplane factory in Kyiv, sparking a large fire. The Antonov factory is Ukraine's largest aircraft plant and produces many of the world's biggest cargo planes.

Russian artillery fire also hit a nine-story apartment building in the northern Obolonskyi district of the city, killing two more people, authorities said.

And a Russian airstrike near a Ukrainian checkpoint caused extensive damage to a downtown Kyiv neighborhood, killing one person, Ukraine's emergency agency said.

Kateryna Lot said she was in her apartment as her child did homework when they heard a loud explosion and ran to take shelter.

"The child became hysterical. Our windows and the balcony were shattered. Part of the floor fell down," she said. "It was very, very scary."

In an area outside Kyiv, Fox News reporter Benjamin Hall was injured while reporting and was hospitalized, the network said.

In Russia, the live main evening news program on state television was briefly interrupted by a woman who walked into the studio holding a poster against the war. The OVD-Info website that monitors political arrests said she was a Channel 1 employee who taken into police custody.

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, local authorities said.

Airstrikes were reported across the country, including the southern city of Mykolaiv, and the northern city of Chernihiv, where heat was knocked out to most of the town. Explosions also reverberated overnight around the Russian-occupied Black Sea port of Kherson.

Nine people were killed in a rocket attack on a TV tower in the western village of Antopol, according to the region's governor.

In the eastern city of Kharkiv, firefighters doused the smoldering remains of a four-story residential building. It was unclear whether there were casualties.

In the southern city of Mariupol, where the war has produced some of the greatest suffering, the city council didn't say how many people were in the convoy of cars headed westward for the city of Zaporizhzhia. But it said a cease-fire along the route appeared to be holding.

Previous attempts to evacuate civilians and deliver humanitarian aid to the city of 430,000 were thwarted by fighting.

Ukraine's military said it repelled an attempt Monday to take control of Mariupol by Russian forces, who were forced to retreat. Satellite images from Maxar Technologies showed fires burning across the city, with many high-rise apartment buildings heavily damaged or destroyed.

The Kremlin-backed leader of the Russian region of Chechnya said on a messaging app that Chechen fighters were spearheading the offensive on Mariupol.

Robert Mardini, director-general of the International Committee of the Red Cross, said the war has become "nothing short of a nightmare" for those living in besieged cities, and he pleaded for safe corridors for civilians to leave and humanitarian aid to be brought in.

"The situation cannot, cannot continue like this," he said. "History is watching what is happening in Mariupol and other cities."

A pregnant woman who became a symbol of Ukraine's suffering when she was photographed being carried from a bombed maternity hospital in Mariupol last week has died along with her baby, The As-



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sociated Press has learned.

Mariupol residents including Natalia Koldash rushed to shelter inside a building Sunday as an unidentified plane passed overhead.

"We have no information at all," Koldash said. "We know nothing. It looks like we are living in a deep forest."

Associated Press video showed debris from a damaged residential building and another building that a young man named Dima described as an elementary school.

"There was no military at this school," he said. "It's unclear why it was hit."

The Russian military said 20 civilians in the separatist-controlled city of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine were killed by a ballistic missile launched by Ukrainian forces. The claim could not be independently verified.

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. Millions more have fled their homes, with more than 2.8 million crossing into Poland and other neighboring countries in what the U.N. has called Europe's biggest refugee crisis since World War II.

"All day crying from the pain of having to part with loved ones, with my husband, my parents," 33-year-old refugee Alexandra Beltuygova said in the Polish border town of Przemyśl after fleeing the industrial Ukrainian city of Dnipro.

"I understand that we may not see them. I wish this war would end," she said.

Russia's military is bigger and better equipped than Ukraine's, but its troops have faced stiffer-than-expected resistance, bolstered by arms supplied by the West.

During a meeting in Rome with a senior Chinese diplomat, U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan warned China against helping Russia.

Two administration officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive information, said China had signaled to Moscow that it would be willing to provide both military support in Ukraine and financial backing to help stave off effects of Western sanctions, which include a fourth set of EU sanctions announced late Monday.

The Kremlin has denied asking China for military equipment to use in Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that "Russia has its own potential to continue the operation" and that it was "unfolding in accordance with the plan and will be completed on time and in full."

## Seoul's next leader faces limited choices over North Korea

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — After winning a bitterly contested presidential election, South Korean conservative Yoon Suk Yeol will enter office facing a quickly growing North Korean nuclear threat — and with few easy choices ahead to deal with it.

A former prosecutor with no foreign policy experience who kickstarted his political career nine months ago, Yoon will face a turbulent moment in global affairs and the decades-old standoff with the North, over which many experts see Seoul as having lost leverage under the policies of outgoing President Moon Jae-in.

It appears Yoon will be tested quickly, possibly even before he starts his presidency in May. North Korea often attempts to rattle new administrations in Washington or Seoul with major weapons demonstrations and has been signaling a resumption of long-range missile testing this year.

Yoon, who narrowly beat out a liberal ruling party rival in last week's election, has rejected pursuing "talks for talks' sake" and vowed to be sterner with Pyongyang, as the North's accelerating weapons tests in 2022 show a renewed strategy of brinkmanship to pressure Washington and Seoul into giving it badly needed relief from economic sanctions.

But despite Yoon's desire to do something different from the dovish government of Moon, there's no "silver bullet" policy his administration could adopt for dealing with North Korea, said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Seoul's Ewha Womans University.

Improved "inter-Korean relations" will largely depend on the willingness of North Korean leader Kim Jong

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Un to engage with diplomacy and negotiate sanctions relief for denuclearization steps, he said.

"Such willingness is unlikely to materialize until coronavirus risks decrease and domestic economic pressures increase," he explained.

North Korea has conducted nine rounds of missile launches in 2022 alone, with signs of more to come. State media said Friday that Kim Jong Un instructed officials to expand a satellite launch facility to fire a variety of rockets. His comments followed a pair of missile firings in recent weeks that the U.S. and South Korean militaries linked with the development of a new intercontinental ballistic missile system that could be tested at full range soon.

South Korea's military has also detected signs that the North is possibly restoring previously detonated tunnels at a nuclear testing ground that was last active in 2017.

North Korea's stubborn efforts to cement itself as a nuclear power and win economic benefits from a position of strength may present daunting challenges for Yoon. Amid a deepening freeze in nuclear negotiations with Washington and pandemic border closures, North Korea has clearly stated it has no intentions to include Seoul in discussions about its nuclear weapons program, which Kim sees as his strongest guarantee of survival.

Although Yoon plans to restore South Korea's leverage by bolstering its alliance with the U.S., North Korea seems further down the priority list for Washington, which is preoccupied with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and an intensifying rivalry with China.

Yoon, surrounded by foreign policy advisers who have served under Seoul's previous conservative governments, has called for maintaining sanctions and pressure until the North takes meaningful steps to wind down its weapons program.

He has vowed the resumption of major U.S.-South Korean military exercises, which were suspended or significantly downsized in recent years to make room for diplomacy with North Korea.

He also wants an additional deployment of an advanced U.S. anti-missile system, called Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, to better protect the capital Seoul from North Korean missile threats, a move that would infuriate both Pyongyang and Beijing. He plans to further bolster South Korea's defense by pursuing pre-emptive strike capabilities to deter North Korean attacks.

However, the Biden administration may not be able to support all of Yoon's demands and could seek a more assertive role from South Korea in the alliance that goes beyond responding to North Korea.

Washington may call for Yoon's government to take a stronger stance toward China, South Korea's biggest trading partner, or possibly to participate in a newly launched security partnership between the United States, Australia and Britain, according to Park Won Gon, a professor of North Korea studies at Ewha.

In the face of looming foreign policy dilemmas with China, North Korea and the U.S., Yoon will also have to navigate domestic political challenges as Parliament will still be controlled by the country's liberal party.

"South Korea has reached a point where it has to make a choice one way or another and be willing to pay the price for that choice," Park said. "South Korea just can't afford to put everything on the line and strengthen its alliance with Washington unconditionally to confront Beijing."

North Korea will be much less hesitant in its attempts to "tame" Yoon's upcoming government with a long-range rocket test, said analyst Kim Yeol Soo at South Korea's Korea Institute for Military Affairs. After taking office, Yoon will likely respond to serious North Korean provocations by staging joint military exercises with the U.S., which the North condemn as invasion rehearsals. That would make a swift resumption of diplomacy unlikely.

"If they fire a rocket, there will be no talks for at least six months," said Kim.

Moon, a son of North Korean war refugees, was credited for calming war fears triggered by North Korean nuclear and ICBM tests in 2017. He used the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics as an opening to set up summits with Kim and then lobbied hard for Kim's first meeting with then-U.S. President Donald Trump in June that year.

The diplomacy derailed after the second Kim-Trump meeting in 2019, when the Americans rejected North Korea's demand for a major release of U.S.-led sanctions against the North in exchange for a partial sur-

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render of its nuclear capabilities.

Kim has since vowed to strengthen his nuclear forces in the face of "gangster-like" U.S. pressure and rapidly expanded his arsenal of nuclear-capable short-range missiles threatening South Korea. The North also severed all cooperation with the South while expressing anger over Seoul's inability to wrest concessions from Washington on its behalf. The North blew up an empty inter-Korean liaison office in 2020 to demonstrate its displeasure.

The Moon government's largely muted response to North Korea's short-range missile tests and belligerent behavior since 2019 damaged Seoul's leverage with Pyongyang by eliminating a sense of reciprocity, Park said.

"South Korea's influence over North Korea is now very limited," Park said. "North Korea wants to be recognized as a nuclear power foremost and believes all of its other problems will be taken care of from there. Inter-Korean relations is not a priority."

## **Pregnant woman, baby die after Russian bombing in Mariupol**

By MSTYSLAV CHERNOV Associated Press

MARIUPOL, Ukraine (AP) — A wounded pregnant woman who was taken on a stretcher from a maternity hospital that was bombed by Russia last week has died, along with her baby, The Associated Press has learned.

Images of the woman, whom the AP has not been able to identify, were seen around the world, personifying the horror of an attack on civilians.

She was one of at least three pregnant women tracked down by AP from the maternity hospital that was bombarded Wednesday in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol. The other two survived, along with their newborn daughters.

In video and photos shot by AP journalists after the hospital attack, the wounded woman stroked her bloodied lower left abdomen as emergency workers carried her through the rubble, 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 in Ukraine.

The woman was taken to another hospital, closer to the front line, where doctors tried to save her. Realizing she was losing her baby, medics said, she had cried out to them, "Kill me now!"

Dr. Timur Marin said Saturday that the woman's pelvis had been crushed and her hip detached. Her baby was delivered via cesarean section but showed "no signs of life," he said.

They tried to save the woman, and "more than 30 minutes of resuscitation of the mother didn't produce results," Marin said. "Both died."

In the chaos after the airstrike, medical workers did not get her name before her husband and father took away her body. Doctors said they were grateful that she didn't end up in the mass graves being dug for many of Mariupol's dead.

Accused of attacking civilians, Russian officials claimed the maternity hospital had been taken over by Ukrainian 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 falsely described the AP images as fakes.

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 as medical workers shouted and children cried.

The AP team tracked down some of the victims Friday and Saturday after they were transferred to another hospital on the outskirts of Mariupol. The port city on the Sea of Azov has been without supplies of food, water, power or heat for more than a week. Electricity from emergency generators is reserved for operating rooms.

As survivors described their ordeal, explosions shook the walls, causing medical workers to flinch. Shelling and shooting in the area is sporadic but relentless. Emotions ran high, even as doctors and nurses

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focused on their work.

Another pregnant woman, Mariana Vishegirskaia, gave birth to a girl on Thursday. She recounted the bombing to the AP as she wrapped her arm around her newborn daughter, Veronika.

After AP photos and video showed her navigating down debris-strewn stairs in her polka-dot pajamas while clutching a blanket, Russian officials falsely claimed she was an actor in a staged attack.

"It happened on March 9 in Hospital No. 3 in Mariupol. We were lying in wards when glass, frames, windows and walls flew apart," said Vishegirskaia, who has blogged on social media about fashion and beauty.

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

Her ordeal was one among many in the city of 430,000 people, which has become a symbol of resistance to Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine.

The failure to fully capture Mariupol has pushed Russian forces to broaden their offensive elsewhere in Ukraine. The city is a key to creating a land bridge from the Russian border to the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

In a makeshift new maternity ward in Mariupol, each new birth brings renewed tension.

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

A third pregnant woman seen by AP lost some of her toes in the bombing, and medical workers performed a cesarean section on her Friday.

Her baby was rubbed vigorously to stimulate any signs of life. After a few tense moments, the baby began to wail.

Cheers resonated through the room amid the cries of the girl, who was named Alana. Her mother also cried and the medical staff wiped tears from their own eyes.

## 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 new 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 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



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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."

## More Russians find ways around sweeping US asylum limits

By ELLIOT SPAGAT and EUGENE GARCIA Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Maksim Derzhko calls it one of the most terrifying experiences of his life. A long-time opponent of Russian President Vladimir Putin, he flew from Vladivostok to the Mexican border city of Tijuana with his 14-year-daughter and was in a car with seven other Russians. All that separated them from claiming asylum in the United States was a U.S. officer standing in traffic as vehicles inched toward inspection booths.

The emotions are "hard to put into words," he says. "It's fear. The unknown. It's really hard. We had no choice."

The gamble worked. After spending a day in custody, Derzhko was released to seek asylum with his daughter, joining thousands of Russians who have recently taken the same route to America.

Even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to punishing sanctions from the U.S. and its allies, the United States was already seeing an increase in Russian asylum-seekers. More than 8,600 Russians sought refuge on the U.S. border with Mexico from August through January — 35 times the 249 who did so during the same period a year earlier. Nine in 10 used official border crossings in San Diego.

Migrants from other former Soviet republics follow the same route in lower numbers, though some authorities are now anticipating more Ukrainians. The U.S. admitted a Ukrainian family of four on humanitarian grounds Thursday after twice blocking her.

Russians do not need visas to visit Mexico, unlike the U.S. Many fly from Moscow to Cancun, entering Mexico as tourists, and go to Tijuana, where they pool money to squeeze into cars they buy or rent. Adrenaline rushes as they approach San Diego's San Ysidro border crossing, where about 30,000 cars



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enter the United States daily.

Concrete barriers funnel 24 lanes of traffic to a border marked by a few rows of yellow reflector bumps — like the ones that divide highway lanes — before vehicles reach inspection booths. A buffer zone separates the bumps from the inspection booths.

Migrants just have to reach that buffer zone to claim asylum on U.S. soil. But U.S. officers stationed on the Mexican side of the border first try to block them, peering into vehicles, motioning motorists to flash travel documents and stopping cars they deem suspicious.

“It was a very scary moment for all of us to experience,” Derzhko, who crossed in August, said in an interview at his home in Los Angeles. “The children with us, everyone was very worried, very much.”

Russians swap travel tips on social media and messaging services. One unidentified man narrated his trip from Moscow’s Red Square to a San Diego hotel room, with layovers in Cancun and Mexico City. His YouTube video shows him confessing to nerves after buying a used car in Tijuana, but he says later in San Diego that everything went smoothly — despite two days in U.S. custody — and that others considering the journey shouldn’t be afraid.

Russians are virtually guaranteed a shot at asylum if they touch U.S. soil, even though President Joe Biden has kept sweeping, Trump-era asylum restrictions. Border agents can deny migrants a chance to seek asylum on the grounds that it risks spreading COVID-19. But cost, logistics and strained diplomatic relations make it difficult to send people of some nationalities home.

Russians and others from former Soviet republics favor driving through official crossings, rather than trying to cross illegally in deserts and mountains. They generally do not hire smugglers, but “a facilitator” may help arrange travel, said Chad Plantz, special agent in charge of Homeland Security Investigations in San Diego.

While Moscow to Cancun is the most common route, some Russians fly from Amsterdam or Paris to Mexico City and then go to Tijuana, Plantz said.

It has produced some tense confrontations.

In one, a 29-year-old Russian man accelerated after passing the reflector bumps at San Ysidro on Dec. 12 and slammed the brakes, causing a sedan with six Russian asylum-seekers to hit him from behind. An officer fired four shots but no one was injured by gunfire, according to CBP, which says the incident is under investigation.

The SUV driver hit the gas in a state of excitement when he saw an opening between lanes, his lawyer, Martin Molina, told a judge earlier this month. Eleven other Russians, including the man’s wife, 5-year-old daughter and year-old son were in the SUV. Passengers raised their hands and yelled, “Asylum!”

“All that he saw were the bright lights of San Ysidro,” Molina said. “He wanted to get there.”

The judge ordered the driver released after nearly three months in jail. The Associated Press is not identifying him at the request of Molina, who said his client feared exposure may jeopardize his safety. The man, who opposed Russian intervention in the Chechnya region, planned to seek asylum with his family in Brooklyn, New York.

Other incidents have raised security concerns, Plantz said. Also on Dec. 12, the driver of a car with migrants from Ukraine and Tajikistan ignored an officer’s orders to show identification and struck the officer’s hand with a car door mirror when accelerating past him, according to court documents.

“They’re probably a little disoriented themselves, not sure exactly what they’re doing, but they are failing to yield, hitting the gas, blowing through,” Plantz said.

A federal judge in San Diego has ruled it is illegal to block asylum-seekers but has not given specific instructions, allowing authorities to continue their practices. Erika Pinheiro, litigation and policy director for Al Otro Lado, an advocacy group that sued over asylum limits at border crossings, said U.S. authorities coordinate with Mexican officials to keep migrants from reaching the buffer zone.

Yuliya Pashkova, a San Diego attorney who represents Russian asylum-seekers, traces the spike in arrivals to the imprisonment of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny last year. Asylum-seekers include Putin opponents, gay people, Muslims and business owners who have been extorted by authorities.

“When they think of America, they think of freedom, democracy and, frankly, a good economic situa-

tion," she said.

## Russian missile strike near NATO's Poland stirs anxiety

By MONIKA SCISLOWSKA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — A Russian missile attack that killed at least 35 people in western Ukraine, some 15 miles from NATO member Poland, has stirred anxiety and spurred Poles to rush to passport offices and stockpile essentials amid fears the war could cut off supplies, or even spill over into Poland.

A long line of applicants, unseen for decades, formed Monday outside Warsaw's main passport office on Krucza Street. Canned food, bottled water, flashlights and batteries filled shoppers' baskets. People in the street talked of the latest news and their worries for the future.

In the street, outside the passport office, Justyna Winnicka, 44, was filling out the passport form for her 16-year-old daughter, Michalina.

"We want to have a passport because the last one expired and we want to be able to go on vacation, but also want to be able to travel abroad in case something happens here in Poland," Winnicka told The Associated Press.

Asked if she was afraid because of the fighting just across Poland's border, she said "Everybody is a little bit afraid today."

"We all believe that the fact that we are in NATO will protect us in some way, but each of us also remembers the history of World War II and the (failed) alliances of those times," Winnicka said.

"Things can turn out in different ways. In Poland people are a bit afraid," she said.

On Sunday, Anna Kwiatkowska, 42, a mother of two, said a friend working for a foreign firm had advised the family to have their passports ready and some dollars, too.

"So I will apply for passports to be done for my children," said Kwiatkowska, whose children, aged 10 and 8, have not traveled abroad yet.

All this despite the fact that NATO, to which former Eastern bloc nation Poland has belonged since 1999, is strengthening its military presence in eastern Poland, close to the Ukraine border, and stresses that the alliance is fulfilling its task of ensuring Poland's safety.

But Russia's strike Sunday on a Ukrainian military training center in Yavoriv, less than 15 miles (25 kilometers) from the border with Poland, shook the confidence of Poles living near the border and created anxiety among others all too aware of Russia's and the Soviet Union's past control of Poland's territory. On Monday, nine people were killed in a morning rocket attack on a television tower in Antopol, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) from the Polish border.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said the attack, close to a refugee route to Poland, was also intended to "provoke panic among civilians" fleeing the "horrors of the war."

Poland has taken in more than 1.8 million refugees from Ukraine — nearly all women and children — since Feb. 24, when Russian troops invaded Ukraine and then unleashed attacks on hospitals, schools and residential areas.

Morawiecki said that the Yavoriv attack and those on civilians are aimed at "destroying this humanitarian effort ... of help being offered to innocent people, women, children."

Poland's deputy foreign minister, Marcin Przydacz, said he does not believe that Russia, which he asserted "visibly is not coping in Ukraine," would try an attack on a NATO country.

Nevertheless, he stressed "one should be cautious and we are being cautious."

People in the capital, Warsaw, in central Poland, were all too cognizant of the potential threat to Eastern bloc nations that, like Poland, were once under the control of the Soviet Union, for more than four decades after World War II.

"We have lived in safety so far; I had thought the pandemic was the worst I would experience, but now there is war just across our border," said 61-year-old retiree Emilia Gancarz.

"I don't want to experience war, it's the worst thing in the world," she said, adding that she is stocking up on candles, dried food, nuts and canned goods, just in case.

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She said some of her friends are buying small solar panels, in case of power cuts.

Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski urged calm.

"We all watch President (Volodymyr) Zelenskyy. If he doesn't panic, we don't panic. Come on. There is no panic," Trzaskowski told a news conference.

"Of course people ask questions — what if a rocket goes astray? We also ask what if there is a chemical attack. But there is no panic. We feel safe. We have those very important assurances from President (Joe) Biden and the secretary general of NATO and other friends from NATO countries ... who visit us daily," Trzaskowski said.

Meanwhile, some Poles are doing what they can to try to influence public opinion in Russia and its ally Belarus. With Ukrainian blue-and-yellow flags, they block the road to the Polish border crossing with Belarus, stopping trucks with Russian or Belarusian registration plates. They tell the drivers about the targeting of civilians by Russian forces in Ukraine, but the drivers either say they know nothing about it, or are just minding their own business, according to Poland's private TNV24.

The Yavoriv attack early Sunday and the barking of dogs woke up residents of the small Polish village of Wielkie Oczy, just over a mile (two kilometers) from Ukraine. From their balconies they could see the glow of explosions and the billowing smoke.

They later flocked to Mass at the local Roman Catholic church, to share what they saw and seek the comfort of neighbors.

The whole family was "in shock. We were afraid," said 56-year-old Lucyna Lesicka.

The Rev. Jozef Florek, the priest at the Immaculate Conception Church, expressed their anxiety. "If it's bells not explosions that are waking us up, then we are safe. I am not a prophet, but we had bombs falling not far from us today that woke us up."

## Julian Assange denied permission to appeal by UK's top court

By SYLVIA HUI and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's top court on Monday refused WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange permission to appeal against a decision to extradite him to the U.S. to face spying charges.

The court said it refused because the case "didn't raise an arguable point of law."

Assange, 50, has sought for years to avoid a trial in the U.S. on a series of charges related to WikiLeaks' publication of a huge trove of classified documents more than a decade ago.

The case is now expected to be formally sent to British Home Secretary Priti Patel, who will decide whether to grant the extradition.

A British district court judge had initially rejected a U.S. extradition request on the grounds that Assange was likely to kill himself if held under harsh U.S. prison conditions. U.S. authorities later provided assurances that the WikiLeaks founder wouldn't face the severe treatment that his lawyers said would put his physical and mental health at risk.

In December, the High Court overturned the lower court's decision, saying that the U.S. promises were enough to guarantee that Assange would be treated humanely.

Monday's news narrows Assange's options, but his defense team may still seek to take his case to the European Court of Human Rights. Nick Vamos, the former head of extradition at the Crown Prosecution Service, said Assange's lawyers can also seek to challenge other points that he had lost in the original district court decision.

Barry Pollack, Assange's U.S.-based lawyer, said Monday that it was "extremely disappointing" that Britain's Supreme Court is unwilling to hear the appeal.

"Mr. Assange will continue the legal process fighting his extradition to the United States to face criminal charges for publishing truthful and newsworthy information," he said.

Assange's British lawyers, Birnberg Peirce Solicitors, said they can make submissions to the Home Secretary within the next four weeks, ahead of her making any decision.

American prosecutors say Assange unlawfully helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning

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steal classified diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

But supporters and lawyers for Assange argue that he was acting as a journalist and is entitled to First Amendment protections of freedom of speech for publishing documents that exposed U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. They argue that his case is politically motivated.

If convicted, Assange's lawyers say he could face up to 175 years in jail in the U.S., though American authorities have said the sentence was likely to be much lower than that.

Assange has been held at Britain's high-security Belmarsh Prison in London since 2019, when he was arrested for skipping bail during a separate legal battle. Before that, he spent seven years inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London to avoid extradition to Sweden to face allegations of rape and sexual assault.

Sweden dropped the sex crimes investigations in November 2019 because so much time had elapsed.

Assange's partner Stella Moris, who has two young children with him, said Sunday they have been given permission to marry in prison later this month.

## 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.

"Israel will not be a route to bypass sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States and other Western countries," Foreign Minister Yair Lapid declared Monday during a stop in Slovakia.

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. Some of the sanctions stretch back even to before Russia's invasion of Ukraine last month.

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 of the tycoons have kept low public profiles, while others have embraced their Jewish roots, emerging as major philanthropists to Jewish causes or investing in Israel's high-flying technology sector. With a limited number of places to go, a growing number of Jewish tycoons, especially those with Israeli



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citizenship, could find themselves spending more time in Israel.

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 landed in Israel, though it was unclear if he was onboard. Israeli media reported he was seen at Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport on Monday, around the same time as his private jet flew to Istanbul.

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.

On Monday, Lapid said the ministry was working with other government bodies, including Israel's Central Bank, to make sure tycoons do not use the country to avert sanctions.

Lapid also has 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."

## 'I wish this war would end': Ukrainian refugees reach 2.8M

By RAFAL NIEDZIELSKI and JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

PRZEMYSL, Poland (AP) — As Russia's war in Ukraine becomes a grim new reality for millions of Ukrainians, the tens of thousands who make the increasingly treacherous journey toward safety each day in the European Union are left with no sense of when, or if, they'll ever return home.

More than 2.8 million people have fled Ukraine in the wake of Russia's invasion, according to the U.N. refugee agency, the vast majority seeking refuge in Poland, which has taken in more than 1.7 million refugees in the last 19 days.

In the Polish border town of Przemysl, some of those fleeing, mostly women and children, are exhausted and express a simple wish that the war and violence would stop.

"All day crying from the pain of having to part with loved ones, with my husband, my parents," said Alexandra Beltuygova, 33, who fled from Dnipro, a city between the embattled metropolises of Kyiv and Mariupol.

"I understand that we may not see them. I wish this war would end," she said.

At a refugee center in Suceava in northern Romania, 28-year-old Lesia Ostrovska watched over her 1-year-old son as her daughter, who is 8, played nearby with other children displaced by the war.

"I left my husband, my father, my mother, my grandparents," said Ostrovska, who is from Chernivtsi in western Ukraine. "It's hard with kids, in the bus, here in this situation ... We hope that the war is finished soon and we can go back home."

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As the fighting, now in its third week, continues to exact a grievous human toll in Ukraine with Russian troops bombarding many of the country's most populous cities, the number of those crossing into the EU has begun to slowly wane in recent days.

In Hungary, where around 255,000 refugees have entered so far, only 9,000 people crossed the border with Ukraine on Sunday, compared to more than twice that on March 1, according to police.

In Slovakia, where more than 200,000 people have fled, fewer than 9,000 crossed the border on Sunday, down from more than 12,000 four days earlier. In Poland, about 82,000 refugees were admitted, down from an earlier daily peak of around 129,000. Also Sunday, 14,475 Ukrainians entered Romania, down 13% compared to the previous day, border police said.

Gabriela Leu, spokesperson for UNHCR in Romania, said it was difficult to determine what is causing the slowdown in the exodus from Ukraine, but said "I can see the possibility of this being something temporary."

"The situation is very fragile and very fluid ... it's maybe more difficult for people to move, but it's just speculation," Leu said. "But the bottom line is that the numbers continue to grow."

Even as the pace of those leaving Ukraine has slowed, people fleeing the violence continued to arrive in large numbers in countries on Ukraine's western border.

In Przemysl, some recounted seeing military attacks on civilians, something that Russia continues to deny.

"I saw destroyed houses and fighting. I saw a lot of tanks when I was driving from Kyiv. I know that a house near us was completely destroyed this morning," said Inessa Armashova, 40, a resident of the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv. "Many people fled. But many cannot leave, sick children or sick elderly people."

The continued push by Russian forces toward Kyiv comes a day after Russia escalated its offensive by launching airstrikes close to the Polish border, raising fears in the West that the fight was edging closer to the EU and NATO.

Those strikes, which involved waves of deadly Russian missiles hitting a military training base Sunday less than 25 kilometers (15 miles) from Ukraine's border with NATO member Poland, killed at least 35 people. It appeared to be the westernmost target struck during Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Residents of the Polish village of Wielkie Oczy, just 2 kilometers (over a mile) from the border, were jolted awake in the middle of the night by the sounds of the blasts.

"My son went out to the balcony. And the neighbors were already awoken and the dogs in the whole village started to bark," said Franciek Sawicki, 77, who heard the missile attack. "We could see the glow above the forest. It was very noisy and I could hear a loud explosion. And at that moment I knew it was an attack near the border."

The proximity of the attack to Poland dashed the sense of safety in western Ukraine, which until now had mostly remained free of Russian attacks, and raised the possibility that the NATO alliance could be drawn into the fight.

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 into a nuclear confrontation with Russia.

But Anjela, 55, a Ukrainian refugee from Poltava who wouldn't give her last name, said after arriving in Poland that only a NATO intervention could end the violence in Ukraine.

"I don't know when I will see my husband. I don't know when my children will return home," she said. "I beg you, it depends only on you! Close the sky, everything else we will do ourselves."

## Once a powerful symbol in Russia, McDonald's withdraws

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Two months after the Berlin Wall fell, another powerful symbol opened its doors in the middle of Moscow: a gleaming new McDonald's.

It was the first American fast-food restaurant to enter the Soviet Union, reflecting the new political openness of the era. For Vlad Vexler, who as a 9-year-old waited in a two-hour line to enter the restaurant near Moscow's Pushkin Square on its opening day in January 1990, it was a gateway to the utopia

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he imagined the West to be.

"We thought that life there was magical and there were no problems," Vexler said.

So it was all the more poignant for Vexler when McDonald's announced it would temporarily close that store and nearly 850 others in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. McDonald's Russian website on Monday read: "Due to operational, technical and logistical difficulties, McDonald's will temporarily suspend service at its network enterprises from March 14."

"That McDonald's is a sign of optimism that in the end didn't materialize," said Vexler, a political philosopher and author who now lives in London. "Now that Russia is entering the period of contraction, isolation and impoverishment, you look back at these openings and think about what might have been."

McDonald's said in a statement that "at this juncture, it's impossible to predict when we might be able to reopen our restaurants in Russia." But it is continuing to pay its 62,500 Russian employees. The company said this week that it expects the closure to cost around \$50 million per month.

Outside a McDonald's in Moscow last week, student Lev Shalpo bemoaned the closure.

"It's wrong because it was the only affordable place for me where I could eat," he said.

Just as McDonald's paved the way for other brands to enter the Soviet market, its exit led to a cascade of similar announcements from other U.S. brands. Starbucks closed its 130 outlets in Russia. Yum Brands closed its 70 company-owned KFC restaurants and was negotiating the closure of 50 Pizza Huts that are owned by franchisees.

McDonald's entry into the Soviet Union began with a chance meeting. In 1976, McDonald's loaned some buses to organizers of the 1980 Moscow Olympics who were touring Olympic venues in Montreal, Canada. George Cohon, then the head of McDonald's in Canada, took the visitors to McDonald's as part of the tour. That same night, the group began discussing ways to open a McDonald's in the Soviet Union.

Fourteen years later, after Soviet laws loosened and McDonald's built relationships with local farmers, the first McDonald's opened in downtown Moscow. It was a sensation.

On its opening day, the restaurant's 27 cash registers rang up 30,000 meals. Vexler and his grandmother waited in a line with thousands of others to enter the 700-seat store, entertained by traditional Russian musicians and costumed characters like Mickey Mouse.

"The feeling was, 'Let's go and see how Westerners do things better. Let's go and see what a healthy society has to offer,'" Vexler said.

Vexler saved money for weeks to buy his first McDonald's meal: a cheeseburger, fries and a Coca-Cola. The food had a "plasticky goodness" he had never experienced before, he said.

Eileen Kane visited the original McDonald's often in 1991 and 1992 when she was an exchange student at Moscow State University. She found it a striking contrast from the rest of the country, which was suffering frequent food shortages as the Soviet Union collapsed.

"McDonald's was bright and colorful and they never ran out of anything. It was like a party atmosphere," said Kane, who is now a history professor at Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut.

McDonald's entry into the Soviet Union was so groundbreaking it gave rise to a political theory. The Golden Arches Theory holds that two countries that both have McDonald's in them won't go to war, because the presence of a McDonald's is an indicator of the countries' level of inter-dependence and their alignment with U.S. laws, said Bernd Kaussler, a political science professor at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

That theory held until 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, Kaussler said.

Kaussler said the number of countries now withdrawing from Russia, and the speed with which they acted, is unprecedented. He thinks some \_\_ including McDonald's \_\_ might calculate that it's unwise to reopen, which would leave Russia more isolated and the world less secure.

"As the Russian economy is becoming less inter-dependent with the U.S. and Europe, we basically have fewer domestic economic factors that could mitigate current aggressive policies," Kaussler said.

Vexler said the admiration for the West that caused Russians to embrace McDonald's three decades ago has also shifted. Russians now tend to be more anti-Western, he said.

Anastasia Chubina visited a McDonald's in Moscow last week because her child wanted one last meal

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there. But she was indifferent about its closure, suggesting Russians will get healthier if they stop eating fast food.

"I think we lived without it before and will live further," she said.

Entrepreneur Yekaterina Kochergina said the closure could be a good opportunity for Russian fast-food brands to enter the market.

"It is sad, but it's not a big deal. We'll survive without McDonald's," she said.

## Gonzaga lands at No. 1, top seeds are 1-4 in final AP poll

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Basketball Writer

Gonzaga will head into the NCAA Tournament exactly where it ended up in the final AP Top 25: right on top.

In fact, that's where the Bulldogs began the season, too.

It wasn't all smooth sailing for coach Mark Few's team, which dropped as low as fifth after a couple of early losses. But the Bulldogs wound up with 54 of the 61 first-place votes from a national media panel Monday after romping through the West Coast Conference Tournament to land at No. 1 in the final AP Top 25 for the second straight year.

Now, it's a matter of finishing things off. The Bulldogs, who earned the overall No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament for the second consecutive year, lost to Baylor in last year's national championship game.

"It's an amazing accomplishment," Few said. "It's a reward for being good for four months, 4 1/2 months, and this (NCAA) tournament is a reward for being good for three weeks. So I think it's an amazing accomplishment by this group and last year's group, and these No. 1 seeds we've been able to earn is also simply another amazing accomplishment."

The Bulldogs begin their quest for that elusive national title on Thursday against Georgia State in Portland, Oregon, where they should have a hefty fan advantage. They would face Boise State or Memphis in the West Region's second round.

"It's a fool's errand to look down the road. There's so many good teams," Few said. "We just finished a two-game tournament and that's what this is: a two-game tournament. You don't win the first one, you don't get the second one."

The top four teams in the final AP Top 25 landed on the top four seed lines of the NCAA Tournament.

Arizona, which got the other seven first-place votes to finish second, will open against the play-in winner between Wright State and Bryant in the South Region. The Wildcats were followed by at No. 3 by Kansas, the top team in the Midwest, and Big 12 rival Baylor, which landed on the top seed line in the East Region.

The Jayhawks play the Texas Southern-Texas A&M Corpus Christi winner while the Bears open against Norfolk State.

The biggest departure between the bracket and the final poll came with SEC Tournament champ Tennessee, which landed at fifth in the AP Top 25. The Vols didn't get the same kind of support from the selection committee, earning the third seed in the South Region and a tough potential road through Arizona and No. 2 seed Villanova to reach the Final Four.

"Wherever they put us, we'll go. Got to be ready to play, and again," Volunteers coach Rick Barnes said. "Just I'm happy for our guys, and we'll see what happens going forward. We have a new season starting again. We have to be ready."

### BEST OF THE REST

Villanova was sixth in the final Top 25, followed by Kentucky, Auburn and Duke — all of them No. 2 seeds in the NCAA tourney — with Purdue rounding out the top 10. The Boilermakers earned the No. 3 seed in the East Region.

UCLA was 11th and Texas Tech was No. 12. They were followed by Providence and Wisconsin, each of which was left off one of the Top 25 ballots, with Houston coming in at No. 15. Big Ten Tournament champion Iowa was 16th with Arkansas, Saint Mary's, Illinois and Murray State rounding out the top 20. UConn, Southern California, Boise State, Colorado State and Texas finished out the final Top 25 of the



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college basketball season.

## POLE-RIZING PREDICTIONS

No team has been No. 1 in the final Top 25 and gone on to win the national championship since Kentucky in 2012, but that doesn't mean it isn't a good barometer for who to watch in the NCAA Tournament. Each of the last six national champions finished among the top six in the final poll, including Baylor, which was third last season.

In fact, the lowest ranked team to win the title in at least 20 years was UConn, which was 18th in the 2014 final poll.

## UP AND DOWN, IN AND OUT

Iowa was the biggest mover, climbing eight spots to No. 16, while Auburn slid four spots to No. 8. The only newcomer was Boise State at No. 23 while North Carolina fell out after losing to Virginia Tech in the ACC Tournament semifinals.

## CONFERENCE WATCH

The Big 12, Big Ten and Pac-12 tied for the most teams in the final Top 25 with four apiece, while the Pac 12 and Big East each had three. The West Coast and Mountain West conferences each had two teams while the once-mighty ACC had only Duke — the same number of teams as the Ohio Valley (Murray State) and American (Houston) conferences.

## 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 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 Alyssa Carpenter, who has had COVID-19 twice and gets strange fevers that break out unexpectedly, and other unusual symptoms. Alyssa was just 2 years old when she started the study and has since turned 3. 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 Mitchell 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," Mitchell says, before lowering her voice so her daughter can't hear what she's going to say. Her longtime partner, 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," Mitchell says. "The only reason I'm still here is because I have a child."

On school days, Mitchell picks up Brooklynn from Rocketship Rise Academy Public Charter School in

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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 Mitchell 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," Mitchell said. "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."

AP Medical Writer Lauran Neergaard contributed to this report.

## 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.

"He has no sustainable political end-game in the face of what is going to continue to be fierce resistance

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from Ukrainians," Burns said.

European leaders are still trying to maintain dialogue with Putin. Prime Minister Xavier Bettel of Luxembourg spoke Monday with Putin and "pleaded for an immediate ceasefire," according to Bettel's tweet. A spokesperson said Bettel was encouraged to contact Putin by other leaders who "wanted to make sure Putin would continue talking with them." Bettel also spoke with Zelenskyy.

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.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, March 15, the 74th day of 2022. There are 291 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 15, 44 B.C., Roman dictator Julius Caesar was assassinated by a group of nobles that included Brutus and Cassius.

On this date:



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In 1493, Italian explorer Christopher Columbus arrived back in the Spanish harbor of Palos de la Frontera, two months after concluding his first voyage to the Western Hemisphere.

In 1820, Maine became the 23rd state.

In 1917, Czar Nicholas II abdicated in favor of his brother, Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich, who declined the crown, marking the end of imperial rule in Russia.

In 1919, members of the American Expeditionary Force from World War I convened in Paris for a three-day meeting to found the American Legion.

In 1944, during World War II, Allied bombers again raided German-held Monte Cassino.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson, addressing a joint session of Congress, called for new legislation to guarantee every American's right to vote; the result was passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In 1972, "The Godfather," Francis Ford Coppola's epic gangster movie based on the Mario Puzo novel and starring Marlon Brando and Al Pacino, premiered in New York.

In 1977, the situation comedy "Three's Company," starring John Ritter, Joyce DeWitt and Suzanne Somers, premiered on ABC-TV.

In 2005, former WorldCom chief Bernard Ebbers was convicted in New York of engineering the largest corporate fraud in U.S. history. (He was later sentenced to 25 years in prison.)

In 2011, the Syrian civil war had its beginnings with Arab Spring protests across the region that turned into an armed insurgency and eventually became a full-blown conflict.

In 2019, a gunman killed 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, streaming the massacre live on Facebook. (Brenton Tarrant, an Australian white supremacist, was sentenced to life in prison without parole after pleading guilty to 51 counts of murder and other charges.)

In 2020, the Federal Reserve took massive emergency action to help the economy withstand the coronavirus by slashing its benchmark interest rate to near zero and saying it would buy \$700 billion in treasury and mortgage bonds. After initially trying to keep schools open, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said the nation's largest public school system would close in hopes of curbing the spread of the coronavirus.

Ten years ago: Convicted former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (blah-GOY'-uh-vich) walked into a federal prison in Colorado, where the 55-year-old Democrat began serving a 14-year sentence for corruption. (He was released in February 2020 after President Donald Trump commuted his sentence.) The American campaign in Afghanistan suffered a double blow as the Taliban broke off talks with the U.S., and President Hamid Karzai said NATO should pull out of rural areas and speed up the transfer of security responsibilities to Afghan forces nationwide.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump, speaking in Ypsilanti, Michigan, announced that his administration would re-examine federal requirements governing the fuel efficiency of cars and trucks, moving forcefully against Obama-era environmental regulations that Trump said were stifling economic growth; Trump then flew to Nashville to lay a wreath at the tomb of President Andrew Jackson. For the second time, a federal court blocked Trump's efforts to freeze immigration by refugees and citizens of some predominantly Muslim nations.

One year ago: A poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 42% of Republicans said they probably or definitely would not be vaccinated against COVID, compared with 17% of Democrats. The Senate confirmed New Mexico Rep. Deb Haaland as interior secretary, making her the first Native American to lead a Cabinet department. Academy Award nominees included two female directors for the first time, Emerald Fennell for "Promising Young Woman" and Chloé Zhao (the eventual winner) for "Nomadland." Actor Yaphet Kotto, whose films included "Midnight Run," the James Bond movie "Live and Let Die" and "Alien," died in the Philippines at 81.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Judd Hirsch is 87. Jazz musician Charles Lloyd is 84. Rock musician Phil Lesh is 82. Singer Mike Love (The Beach Boys) is 81. Rock singer-musician Sly Stone is 79. Rock singer-musician Howard Scott (War; Lowrider Band) is 76. Rock singer Ry Cooder is 75. Actor Frances Conroy is 69. Actor Craig Wasson is 68. Rock singer Dee Snider (Twisted Sister) is 67. Actor Joaquim de Almeida is 65. Actor Park Overall is 65. Movie director Renny Harlin is 63. Model Fabio is 61. Singer Terence Trent D'Arby (AKA Sananda Maitreya) is 60. Rock singer Bret Michaels (Poison) is 59. R&B singer Rockwell is 58. Actor Chris

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Bruno is 56. Actor Kim Raver is 55. Rock singer Mark McGrath (Sugar Ray) is 54. Rock musician Mark Hoppus is 50. Country singer-musician Matt Thomas (Parmalee) is 48. Actor Eva Longoria is 47. Rapper-musician will.i.am (Black Eyed Peas) is 47. Rock DJ Joseph Hahn (Linkin Park) is 45. Rapper Young Buck is 41. Actor Sean Biggerstaff is 39. Actor Kellan Lutz is 37. Actor Caitlin Wachs is 33.