

THE WORLD

Claim of attack in Ukraine disputed

ASSOCIATED PRESS

KYIV, Ukraine — The Russian military claimed Sunday to have carried out deadly missile strikes on barracks used by Ukrainian troops in retaliation for the deaths of dozens of Russian soldiers in a rocket attack a week ago. Ukrainian officials denied there were any casualties.

The Russian Defense Ministry said its missiles hit two temporary bases housing 1,300 Ukrainian troops in Kramatorsk, in the eastern region of Donetsk, killing 600 of them.

Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said the strikes were retaliation for Ukraine's attack in Makivka, in which at least 89 Russian soldiers died.

Serhii Cherevatyi, a spokesperson for Ukraine's forces in the east, told the Associated Press that Russian strikes on Kramatorsk damaged only civilian infrastructure, adding: "The armed forces of Ukraine weren't affected."

The Donetsk regional administration said seven Russian missiles hit Kramatorsk and two more hit Kostyantynivka, without causing any casualties. It said an educational institution, an industrial facility and garages were damaged in Kramatorsk, and an industrial zone was hit in Kostyantynivka.

Kramatorsk Mayor Oleksandr Honcharenko said two school buildings and eight apartment houses were damaged.

In the early hours of Jan. 1, Ukrainian forces fired rockets at a facility in Makivka, also in the Donetsk region, where Russian soldiers were stationed, killing dozens of them in one of the deadliest attacks on the Kremlin's forces since the war began more than 10 months ago.

Also Sunday, the Ukrainian military said it hit a residential hall of a medical university in Rubizhne, a town in the Russian-occupied eastern region of Luhansk, killing 14 Russian soldiers housed there. The number of wounded was unknown, it said.

Elsewhere in the east, Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said one person was killed in strikes on Bakhmut, and eight others were wounded.

In the northeastern region of Kharkiv, the town of Merefya was hit during the night, killing one person, and two other settlements in the region were shelled, Gov. Oleh Sinigubov said.



MATHEUS ALVES Deutsche Presse-Agentur

POLICE in Brasilia face supporters of ex-Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro. The protesters refuse to accept that he lost the election.

Bolsonaro backers storm federal sites

The capital of Brazil is overrun by thousands who insist that the last election was flawed.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

RIO DE JANEIRO — Supporters of former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro who refuse to accept his electoral defeat stormed Congress, the supreme court and presidential palace in the capital on Sunday, just a week after the inauguration of his leftist rival, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Thousands of demonstrators bypassed security barricades, climbed on the roofs, broke windows and invaded all three buildings, which are connected through the vast Three Powers square in Brasilia. Some are calling for a military intervention to restore the far-right Bolsonaro to power, or oust Lula from the presidency.

In a news conference from Sao Paulo state, Lula said Bolsonaro had encouraged the uprising by those he termed "fascist fanatics," and he read a freshly signed decree for the federal government to take control of security in the federal district.

"There is no precedent for what they did and these people need to be punished," Lula said.

TV channel Globo News showed protesters wearing

the green and yellow colors of the national flag that also have come to symbolize the nation's conservative movement, and were adopted by Bolsonaro's supporters.

The former president has repeatedly sparred with supreme court justices, and the room where they convene was trashed by the rioters. They sprayed fire hoses inside the Congress building and ransacked offices at the presidential palace. Windows were broken in all of the buildings.

Bolsonaro, who flew to Florida ahead of Lula's inauguration, repudiated the president's accusation late Sunday. He wrote on Twitter that peaceful protest is part of democracy but vandalism and invasion of public buildings are "exceptions to the rule."

Police fired tear gas to try to regain control of the buildings. About 6:30 p.m., less than four hours after the storming, security forces were shown on television backing protesters away from the supreme court and marching them down a ramp to the presidential palace with their hands secured behind their backs. Justice Minister Flavio Dino said in a news conference that roughly 200 people had been arrested, and officers were firing more tear gas to drive lingering protesters from the area.

But with the damage already done, many in Brazil were questioning how the police had ignored abun-

dant warnings, were unprepared or were somehow complicit.

Lula said at his news conference that there was "incompetence or bad faith" on the part of police, and that they had been likewise complicit when Bolsonaro supporters rioted in the capital weeks ago. He promised those officers would be punished and expelled from the corps.

The incidents recalled the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol by supporters of then-President Trump.

Political analysts have warned for months that a similar storming was a possibility in Brazil, given that Bolsonaro has sown doubt about the reliability of the nation's electronic voting system — without any evidence.

The results were recognized as legitimate by politicians from across the spectrum, as well as dozens of foreign governments.

Unlike the 2021 attack in the U.S., it is likely that few officials were working in the Brazilian Congress and supreme court on a Sunday.

President Biden told reporters that the riots in Brazil were "outrageous." His national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, went a step further on Twitter and said the U.S. "condemns any effort to undermine democracy in Brazil," adding that the U.S. support for the country's "democratic institutions is unwavering."

British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly tweeted: "The violent attempts to undermine democracy in Brazil are unjustifiable. President @LulaOfficial and the government of Brazil have the full support of the UK."

Videos on social media showed a limited presence of the capital's military police; one showed officers standing by as people flooded into Congress, with one using his

phone to record images. The capital's security secretariat didn't immediately respond to a request from the Associated Press for comment about the relative absence of the police.

"Brazilian authorities had two years to learn the lessons from the Capitol invasion and to prepare themselves for something similar," said Mauricio Santoro, political science professor at the State University of Rio de Janeiro. "Local security forces in Brasilia failed in a systematic

blocking roads, setting vehicles on fire and gathering outside military buildings, asking armed forces to intervene.

Many believed election results were fraudulent or unreliable.

"This absurd attempt to impose their will by force will not prevail," said Dino, the justice minister, on his Twitter account. "The government of the Federal District has ensured there will be reinforcements. And the forces at our disposal are at work."

‘Brazilian authorities had two years to learn the lessons from the Capitol invasion and to prepare ... for something similar.’

— MAURICIO SANTORO, political science professor, speaking about the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol

As China reopens borders, travelers rush to book trips

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIJING — After years of separation from his wife in mainland China, Hong Kong resident Cheung Seng-bun made sure to be among the first in line following the re-opening Sunday of border crossing points.

The ability of residents of the semiautonomous southern Chinese city to cross over is one of the most visible signs of China's easing of border restrictions imposed almost three years ago, with travelers arriving from abroad no longer required to undergo expensive and time-consuming quarantines.

That comes as the virus continues to spread in China amid what critics say is a lack of transparency from Beijing.

"I'm hurrying to get back to her," Cheung, lugging a heavy suitcase, said as he prepared to cross at Lok Ma Chau station, which was filling with eager travelers.

Those crossing between Hong Kong and mainland China, however, are still required to show a negative COVID-19 test taken within the last 48 hours — a measure China has protested when imposed by other countries.

Hong Kong has been hit hard by the virus. Its land and sea border checkpoints with the mainland have been largely closed for almost three years.

Despite the risk of new infections, the reopening — which will allow tens of thousands of people who have made online bookings to cross each day — is expected to provide a much-needed boost to Hong Kong's tourism and retail sectors.

On a visit to the station Sunday morning, Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee said the sides would continue to expand the number of crossing points from the current seven to the full 14.

"The goal is to get back as quickly as possible to the pre-epidemic normal life," Lee told reporters. "We want to get cooperation between the two sides back on track."

Communist Party newspaper Global Times quoted Tan Luming, a port official in Shenzhen on the border with Hong Kong, saying about 200 passengers were expected to take the ferry to Hong Kong, and 700 more were due to travel in the other direction, on the first day of reopening. Tan said a steady increase in passenger numbers is expected over coming days.

"I stayed up all night and

got up at 4 a.m., as I'm so excited to return to the mainland to see my 80-year-old mother," a Hong Kong woman identified only by her surname, Cheung, said on arrival at Shenzhen, where she was presented with "roses and health kits," the paper said.

Hong Kong media reports said about 300,000 travel bookings from the city to mainland China have been made, with a daily quota of 60,000.

Limited ferry service also was restored from China's Fujian province to the Taiwanese-controlled island of Kinmen just off the Chinese coast.

The border crossing with Russia at Suifenhe in the far northern province of Heilongjiang also resumed normal operations, just in time for the opening of the ice festival in the capital of Harbin, a major tourism draw.

And at Ruili, on the border with Myanmar, normal operations resumed after 1,012 days of full or partial closure in response to outbreaks blamed partly on visitors from China's neighbor, also known as Burma.

So far, only a fraction of the previous number of international flights are arriving at major Chinese airports.

Beijing's main Capital International Airport was expecting eight flights from overseas Sunday. Shanghai, China's largest city, received its first international flight under the new policy at 6:30 a.m., with only a trickle of others to follow.

Since March 2020, all international passenger flights bound for Beijing have been diverted to designated first points of entry into China. Passengers were required to quarantine up to three weeks.

"I've been under isolated quarantine for six times in different cities [in mainland China]," said Ivan Tang, a Hong Kong business traveler. "They were not easy experiences."

Ming Guanghe, a Chinese citizen living in Singapore, said it had been difficult to book a ticket and to find somewhere to take a PCR test. Quarantine measures and uncertainty about outbreaks had kept him from home, Ming said.

Shanghai announced it would again start issuing regular passports to Chinese citizens for foreign travel and family visits, as well as renewing and extending visas for foreigners. Those restrictions have had a particularly devastating effect on foreign businesspeople and stu-

dents in the key Asian financial center.

China is facing a surge in cases and hospitalizations in major cities and is bracing for a further spread into less developed areas with the start of its most important holiday, the Lunar New Year, in coming days.

Authorities say they expect domestic rail and air journeys will double over the same period last year, bringing overall numbers close to those of the 2019 holiday period before the pandemic hit.

Meanwhile, more foreign governments are imposing testing requirements on travelers from China — most recently Germany, Sweden and Portugal. On Saturday, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock urged citizens to avoid "unnecessary" travel to China, noting the rise in coronavirus cases and China's "overburdened" health system.

The German regulation also allows for spot checks on arrival. Germany, like other European nations, will test wastewater from aircraft for possible new virus variants. The measures come into force at midnight Monday and are due to last until April 7.

Apparently concerned about its reputation, China

says the testing requirements aren't science-based and has threatened unspecified countermeasures.

Chinese health authorities publish a daily count of new infections, severe cases and fatalities, but those numbers include only officially confirmed cases and use a very narrow definition of COVID-19-related deaths.

The National Health Commission on Sunday reported 7,072 new confirmed cases of local transmission and two new deaths — even as individual provinces were reporting as many as 1 million cases per day.

Authorities say that since the government ended compulsory testing and permitted people with mild symptoms to test themselves and convalesce at home, it can no longer provide a full picture of the outbreak. China's vulnerabilities are increased by the population's general lack of exposure to the virus and a relatively low vaccination rate among elderly people.

Government spokespeople insist the situation is under control and reject accusations from the World Health Organization and others that they're not being transparent about the outbreak that could lead to the emergence of new variants.