

News in brief

◆ **Home rental company Airbnb Inc** (ABNB.O) said yesterday its non-profit arm Airbnb.org would offer free, temporary housing for up to 100,000 refugees fleeing Ukraine. Chief Executive Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia, the chairman of Airbnb.org, have sent letters to leaders of Poland, Romania, Germany and Hungary offering help to house the refugees. The countries share borders with Ukraine. At least 300,000 Ukrainian refugees have entered the European Union so far after Russia's invasion of the country, and the bloc needs to prepare for millions more, senior EU and French officials have said. Airbnb.org, which provides temporary stays for people during crisis, will work closely with governments to help address needs in each country including by providing longer-term stays.



Airbnb to house up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees

◆ **Poland, Lithuania speed up gas link amid Russia supply worries**



◆ **A natural gas pipeline called GIPL** linking Poland and Lithuania will open on May 1, earlier than the scheduled mid-2022 start, linking the Polish grid with a route to a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in Lithuania. The earlier start was announced after Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Thursday gave rise to worries that Russian gas supplies to Europe could be cut. Poland and Lithuania had been discussing early start to the project for weeks amid the fears of energy supply disruption, senior government sources told Reuters.

◆ **Iran said yesterday efforts to revive a 2015 nuclear deal** could succeed if the United States took a political decision to meet Tehran's remaining demands, as months of negotiations enter what one Iranian diplomat called a "now or never" stage. Iran's foreign ministry spokesman identified the remaining outstanding issues as: the extent to which sanctions would be rolled back, providing guarantees that the United States will not quit the pact again, and resolving questions over uranium traces found at several old but undeclared sites in Iran. All parties involved in the talks say progress has been made toward the restoration of the pact to curb Tehran's nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief, which the United States abandoned in 2018. But both Tehran and Washington have cautioned there are still some significant differences to overcome.

Iran says key issues unresolved in Vienna nuclear talks

◆ **Bolsonaro won't condemn Putin, says Brazil will remain neutral over invasion**

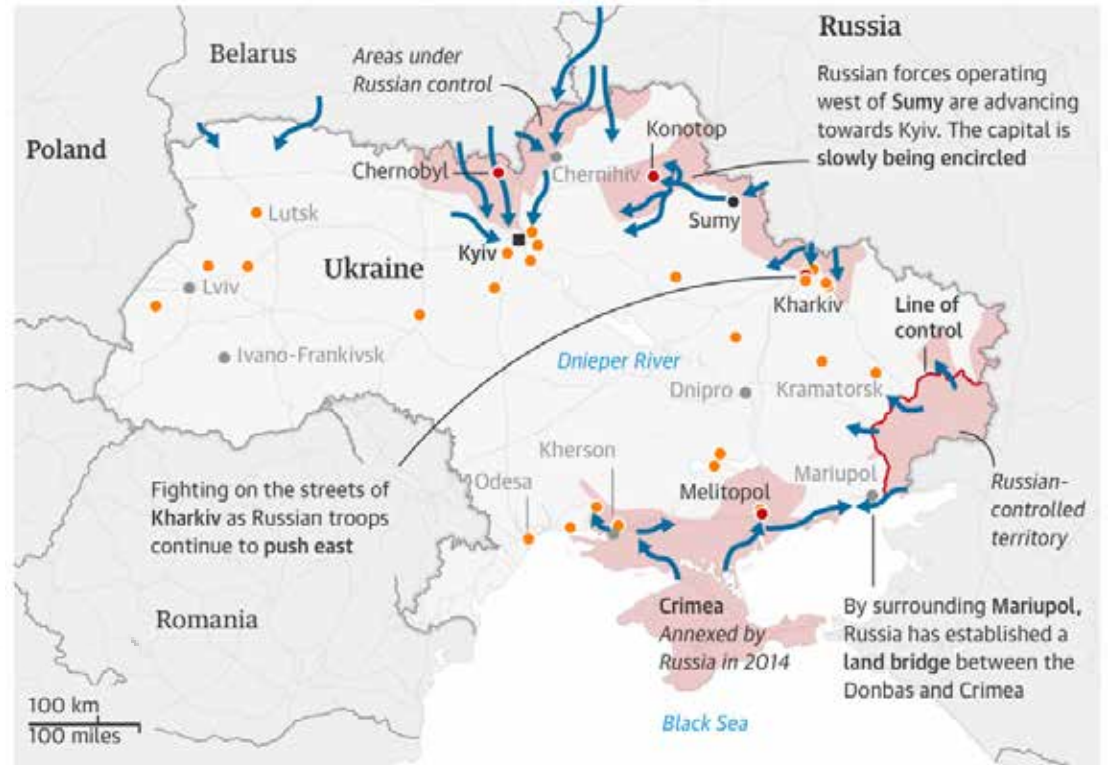
◆ **Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro on Sunday declined** to condemn Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, while departing from his government's official stance at the United Nations to say Brazil would remain neutral. Bolsonaro, a far-right populist, recently snubbed US entreaties not to visit Putin in Moscow ahead of the invasion, and angered Western allies by saying he was "in solidarity with Russia," without elaborating. On Friday, Brazil voted for a draft U.N. Security Council resolution that would have denounced the Russian invasion of Ukraine, despite reluctance by Bolsonaro. Russia vetoed the resolution.

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Russia continues

◆ **Kyiv authorities warned residents emerging from a weekend curfew that they would see newly erected fortifications, tank traps and other defensive installations in the streets as the city girds for further battle.**

● Under Russian control ● Air and missile strikes ← Russian invasion routes



Guardian graphic. Source: Rochan Consulting, Institute for the study of war

TDT | agencies

Blasts were heard before dawn yesterday in the capital Kyiv and in the northeastern city of Kharkiv, Ukrainian authorities said. But Russian ground forces' attempts to capture major urban centres had been repelled, they added. The Ukrainian General Staff said Russian forces were focusing on Chernihiv city, northeast of Kyiv, and parts of Donetsk region in the east among other areas.

Kyiv authorities

would see newly erected fortifications, tank traps and other defensive installations in the streets as the city girds for further battle.



Ukrainian service members are seen after Russia launched a massive military operation against Ukraine, at a check point in the city of Zhytomyr, Ukraine

US shuts embassy evacuation

Reuters | Washington

The United States shuttered its embassy in Minsk and allowed non-emergency employees and family members to leave its embassy in Moscow on Monday as Russia pushed on with its invasion of Ukraine for a fifth day.

"We took these steps due to security and safety issues stemming from the unprovoked and unjustified attack by Russian military forces in Ukraine," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

A photo posted on Twitter by US ambassador to Belarus Julie Fisher yesterday showed mission staff lowering the American flag. All American staff have left Belarus.

Economic reality changed: Kremlin

Reuters | Moscow

The Kremlin yesterday said Russia's economic reality had changed but saw no reason to doubt the effectiveness and reliability of the central bank, which hiked interest rates to 20% as it sought to shield the economy from unprecedented Western sanctions.

The bank has also introduced some capital controls as the West seeks to restrict its ability to deploy \$640 billion of forex and gold reserves and cut Russia's major banks out of the SWIFT financial network, making it hard for lenders and companies



People walk past the Central Bank headquarters in Moscow

to make and receive payments. Those moves have sent the rouble tumbling to record lows.

"The economic reality has considerably changed," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters. "These are heavy sanctions, they are problematic, but Russia has the potential to offset the harm."

"Russia has been making plans for quite a long time for possible sanctions, including

the most severe ones. There are response plans, they were developed and are being implemented as problems appear."

Peskov said sanctions introduced against President Vladimir Putin himself were pointless. "(Putin) is quite indifferent. The sanctions contain absurd claims about some assets," Peskov said. "The president has no assets other than those he has declared."

Putin will work on economic issues today, Peskov said, meeting with officials including Central Bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina, Finance Minister Anton Siluanov, and German Gref, CEO of dominant lender Sberbank.

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	80,567,757	973,119	436,408,735
2 India	42,924,130	513,843	
3 Brazil	28,768,104	649,195	Deaths
4 France	22,689,332	138,135	5,970,292
5 UK	18,804,765	161,224	Recovered:
6 Russia	16,398,036	351,660	367,091,218
7 Germany	14,745,312	123,330	New cases
8 Turkey	14,025,181	94,232	+571,562
9 Italy	12,764,558	154,560	New deaths
10 Spain	10,977,524	99,410	+2,466
11 Argentina	8,897,178	126,120	
12 Iran	7,051,429	136,838	
13 Netherlands	6,361,626	21,554	
14 Colombia	6,062,701	138,693	

Figures as of closing

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	482,248		24,040		412,161	46,047
Saudi Arabia	745,027	+653	8,998	+2	723,549	12,480
UAE	879,973	+605	2,301		834,041	43,631
Kuwait	619,310		2,537		606,657	10,116
Oman	382,244	+863	4,244	+2	368,677	9,323
Qatar	356,982	+311	670	+2	353,139	3,173