

# VOA NEWS

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This is VOA News. I'm Alexis Strobe.

The prime ministers of Italy and Canada signed security deals with Ukraine on Saturday as Western leaders rallied around a war-weary Kyiv on the second anniversary of Russia's military invasion, with no end [in the] in sight to the fighting. Reuters correspondent Olivia Chang reports.

"Today, we are here to tell you that Europe will continue to stand at your side, for as long as it takes ..."

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen vowed on Saturday that Europe would back Ukraine.

Von der Leyen and the prime ministers of Italy, Canada and Belgium arrived in Kyiv to show solidarity on the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion. They joined Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the Hostomel airfield. It was the site of a ferocious battle at the start of the invasion as Russia tried to fly in paratroopers to seize the capital Kyiv.

Zelenskyy embraced the Western leaders and delivered a televised speech. He said "The word 'independent' will always stand next to the word 'Ukraine' in future history."

Olivia Chang from Reuters.

The spokeswoman for Alexei Navalny announced Saturday the body of the Russian opposition leader has been handed over to his mother. VOA's Jeff Caster reports.

In a message posted to her social media accounts, Kira Yarmysh thanked all those who had joined them in calling for the release of Navalny's body. Yarmysh said she did not know if the authorities would allow a funeral to be held, quote, "the way the family wants and or the way Alexei deserves."

On February 16, Russian prison authorities announced Navalny had died suddenly of unexplained causes in an Arctic penal colony where he was serving terms totaling more than 30 years.

Navalny had been Russian President Vladimir Putin's most formidable domestic opponent. Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, had remained in Salekhard, where the prison was located for more than a week seeking return of her son's body.

It's not yet clear when or how a funeral will be held.

Jeff Caster, VOA News.

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U.S. President Joe Biden has announced 500 new sanctions on Russia as the world marks two years since Moscow invaded Ukraine. Biden said the sanctions will target Russia's, quote, "war machine," including weapons procurement, and will also target individuals involved in the imprisonment and death of prominent Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny one week ago. VOA's Senior Diplomatic Correspondent Cindy Saine reports.

Ukraine's Defense Forces continue to try to repel Russia's invading army.

On Friday, President Joe Biden marked the second anniversary of Russia's invasion by announcing sanctions on 500 individuals and entities linked to the invasion and the death in a Russian prison of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

He said Russian President Vladimir Putin badly miscalculated the courage of the people of Ukraine.

Cindy Saine, VOA News.

The U.S. and Britain have struck 18 Houthi targets in Yemen. The strikes on Saturday answer a recent surge in attacks by the Iran-backed militia group on ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

According to U.S. officials, American and British fighter jets hit sites in eight locations. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to provide early details of an ongoing military operation.

This is the fourth time that the U.S. and British militaries have conducted a combined operation against the Houthis since January 12. But the U.S. has also been carrying out almost daily strikes to take out Houthi targets.

The Vatican announced Saturday Pope Francis canceled scheduled meetings because he is suffering from the flu. AP Correspondent Rica Ann Garcia reports.

The Vatican Press Office adds that it was a precaution and that the pope's weekly engagements are still to be confirmed.

The 87-year-old pontiff has had several health problems in recent years. In late November, he was forced to cancel some of his activities because of breathing problems.

Pope Francis has indicated several times that he would be ready to step down if his declining health becomes a barrier in leading the Catholic Church. But in a recent interview, he mentioned feeling healthy and denied any plans to resign soon.

I'm Rica Ann Garcia.

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa has highlighted the achievements of his ruling African National Congress, which has ruled the country for all of its 30 years of democracy, as it heads into a tight race in May's election.

Ramaphosa delivered the party's manifesto to thousands of ANC supporters at the Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban on Saturday. The rally came as South Africa faces increasing poverty, unemployment and crime and a crippling electricity crisis.

Party supporters dressed in yellow, green and black party regalia packed the stadium and sang struggle songs praising Ramaphosa and the ANC.

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