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Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Southern Daily News is published by Southern News Group Daily

Thursday, March 17 2022|

Ukraine's Zelenskiy asks U.S. Congress to 'protect our sky' against Russia

WASHINGTON, March 16 (Reuters) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy urged American lawmakers to do more to protect his country from Russia's invasion in an address to the U.S. Congress on Wednesday and pleaded with President Joe Biden to be the world's "leader of peace."

"Russia has turned the Ukrainian sky into a source of death for thousands of people," Zelenskiy said in a virtual address before showing graphic video of death and destruction in his country that ended with an appeal to "close the sky over Ukraine."

Zelenskiy continued his push for the imposition of a no-fly zone over Ukraine and asked for aircraft and defensive systems to respond to the invasion launched by Russia last month that has unleashed a wave of refugees. He also called for more economic sanctions against Russia.

Ukraine is facing terror that Europe had not experienced since World War Two and the nation's destiny is being decided, Zelenskiy said through an interpreter.

"Is this a lot to ask for - to create a no-fly zone over Ukraine to save people? Is this too much?" Zelenskiy asked in remarks from Kyiv, a capital city attacked every day that he said "doesn't give up."

Zelenskiy closed with a direct plea in English to Biden: "I wish you to be the leader of the world. Being the leader of the world means to be the leader of peace."

He received standing ovations before and after his remarks.

Zelenskiy invoked American history, asking the lawmakers to remember the 1941 Japanese bombing of Hawaii's Pearl Harbor, the 2001 al Qaeda attacks on the United States and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 "I have a dream" speech in Washington.

"I have a dream. These words are known to each of you today. I can say: I have a need. I need to protect our sky," Zelenskiy said.

Democratic and Republican lawmakers said after the speech that they were ready to do more for Ukraine quickly by clamping down on Russia, providing more military aid including aircraft and tightening global human rights law. But they again



rejected a no-fly zone, saying there was too great a risk of wider war with nuclear-armed Russia.

Biden and NATO also have opposed establishing a no-fly zone. The White House has not supported a proposal to help transfer Russian-made MiG warplanes into Ukraine, although that idea has some support in Congress - especially among opposition Republicans.

Zelenskiy said Ukraine is grateful to the United States for its overwhelming support and to Biden "for his personal involvement, for his sincere commitment to the defense of Ukraine and democracy all over the world."

"In the darkest time for our country - for the whole Europe - I call on you to do more," Zelenskiy added.

The video presented during his remarks showed buildings exploding into fire, dead and wounded people as well as babies cradled by soldiers and police officers.

Russia calls its actions in Ukraine a "spe-

cial operation."

BILLIONS IN AID

Biden on Tuesday signed into law \$13.6 billion in emergency aid to Ukraine to help it obtain more weaponry and for humanitarian assistance. He previously announced a ban on Russian energy imports and called for a suspension of a trading status that lowers tariffs on Russian exports. The House is expected to vote to suspend that status as soon as this week. [read more](#)

The Senate on Tuesday passed a resolution condemning Russian President Vladimir Putin as a war criminal. [read more](#)

Zelenskiy, who sought to shore up support for his country in speeches to foreign audiences, on Tuesday made a plea to Canada's parliament for a no-fly zone and more Western sanctions on Russia. He made similar appeals to the British and European parliaments this month.

U.S. House of Representatives Speak-

er Nancy Pelosi introduced him with Ukrainian words meaning "glory to Ukraine." At the conclusion of his remarks, Zelenskiy waved and put his hand on his chest in thanks for the reception.

Support for Ukraine is a rare instance in which Republicans and Biden's fellow Democrats have aligned in the sharply divided Congress.

"The carnage is not coming from Russian airplanes and the Russian air force, it's coming from the ground and from missiles," said Representative Hakeem Jeffries, chairman of the House Democratic caucus, making reference to the proposed no-fly zone.



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Inside C2

WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

03/16/2022

**Wea H. Lee**
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Chairman of International District Houston Texas

Publisher Southern Daily Wea H. Lee

Southern News Group Chairman / CEO

Chairman of International Trade & Culture Center
Republic of Guiana Honorary consul at Houston Texas**Return To Our Old Office And Look Back Into The Past**

Yesterday morning Kenneth Li and I accompanied by Commissioner R. Jack Cagle visited Joan Tan Shih Abbot of Chung Tai Zen Center of Houston in the International District.

We received a very warm welcome and saw the Zen Hall which serves the great spiritual needs in our community.

When I returned to this two-story building that we built in the mid-1980's where we spent seventeen years in this location, I was filled with many memories from my life here.

In the early 1980's, Texas was in a big recession. Many

banks and saving and loans had been closed by the FDIC. Many buildings and shopping centers were auctioned off. The only thing new were the Asians. Many overseas immigrants were moving in here during that period of time.

I remembered that I had been invited to a dinner party by the developer, Mr. T.D. Wang. During the event he told me that, "Mr. Lee, the reason I am very confident is that when I read your newspapers in Houston and Dallas, I found out there are so many Asian and Chinese advertisements that it made me decide to build the Ding Ho shopping center on Bellaire Blvd."

I was so moved that our newspapers were such an important reason for him to invest in southwestern Houston, which later became the new Chinatown.

After one year, I decided to move our company to southwest Houston and located at 12129 Bellaire Blvd. Due to

our limited budget, we could only afford to buy piece of land behind Bellaire Blvd. Later, after we built the two-story building and moved in late 1987, one day the owner of the paint store in front of me came to see me and asked me to pay \$25 dollars per square foot for use of his land. It was blackmail, of course. I refused it. After a couple of months, he built an iron fence and put garbage tents in front of our main door. We felt very angry and anxious, but there was nothing we could do, because he had the right to do what he did.

Since then, we decided that we must move out to a different location in order to have enough space to have the big trucks deliver our newspaper rolls.

One day when I was traveling on Bellaire Blvd., I saw a for

sale sign on 11122 Bellaire Blvd. I made up my mind to buy it and with the help from my good friend attorney Mr. Andy Lai, we were able to sell the building to Chung Tai Center. I used the funds to make the down payment to purchase the land at the new location.

Looking back, during the difficult years of my life, with great assistance from our colleagues and supporters, we were able to survive and make Southern News Group a continuing service to our community.

As the old saying goes, it was worth the time to me, and the best time when I returned to my old home. I felt very moved and excited. We are so grateful this great land has given us so much opportunity.

**Editor's Choice**

A woman walks with a bicycle next to a building damaged during the Ukraine-Russia conflict in the separatist-controlled town of Volnovakha in the Donetsk region, Ukraine March 15. REUTERS/Alexander Ermochenko



Ever Forward container ship, owned by Evergreen Marine Corp, sits grounded in the Chesapeake Bay off the shore of Maryland, U.S., March 15, 2022. REUTERS/Julio Cesar Chavez



A woman with face paint attends a celebration during a meeting where leaders from indigenous communities in the Amazon basin demanded South American governments halt extractive industries that damage the rainforest, in Puyo, Ecuador March 15. REUTERS/Johanna Alarcon



Soldiers patrol at night in Dongyin, Taiwan, March 15. REUTERS/Ann Wang

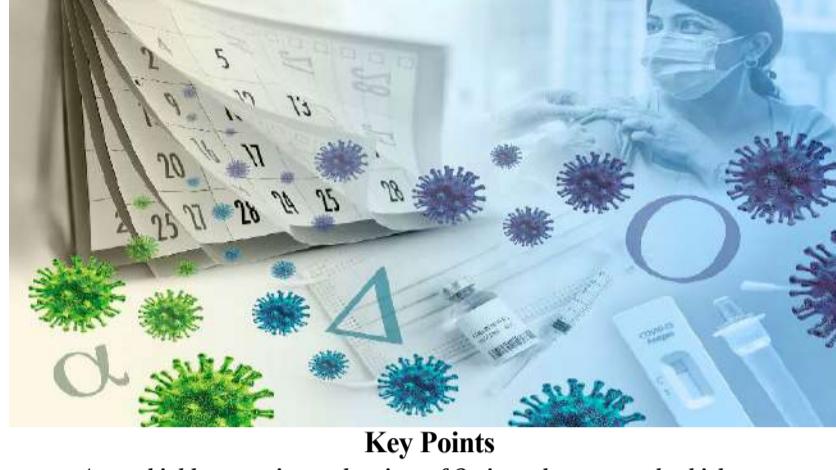


A man walks at the seaside, amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in Odessa, Ukraine March 15. REUTERS/Igor Tkachenko



Chinese artist Ai Weiwei poses for photographers at a news conference before the opening of his exhibition "Search of Humanity" in Vienna, Austria, March 15. REUTERS/Lisa Leutner

Scientists Now On Alert Over Rising Cases Caused By Omicron 'Cousin' BA.2



Key Points

A new, highly contagious subvariant of Omicron has emerged, which some have begun calling a "stealth variant," but public health officials say it's too soon to tell what kind of real threat, if any, this new strain will present. In the meantime, it's worth watching BA.2, the World Health Organization says. The subvariant has been identified across at least 40 countries, including three cases reported in Houston and several in Washington state. BA.2 accounts for only a small minority of reported cases so far, including 5% in India, 4% of those in the United Kingdom, and 2% each of cases in Sweden and Singapore.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

(Reuters) - The highly transmissible Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus - the most common form of which is known as BA.1 - now accounts for nearly all of the coronavirus infections globally, although dramatic surges in COVID cases have already peaked in some countries. Scientists are now tracking a rise in cases caused by a close cousin known as BA.2, which is starting to outcompete BA.1 in parts of Europe and Asia. The following is what we know so far about the new subvariant: The highly transmissible Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus - the most common form of which is known as BA.1 - now accounts for nearly all of the coronavirus infections globally, although dramatic surges in COVID cases have already peaked in some countries. Scientists are now tracking a rise in cases caused by a close cousin known as BA.2, which is starting to outcompete BA.1 in parts of Europe and Asia. The following is what we know so far about the new subvariant:

"STEALTH" SUBVARIANT

Globally, BA.1 accounted for 98.8% of

sequenced cases submitted to the public virus tracking database GISAID as of Jan. 25. But several countries are reporting recent increases in the subvariant known as BA.2, according to the World Health Organization.

In addition to BA.1 and BA.2, the WHO lists two other subvariants under the Omicron umbrella: BA.1.1.529 and BA.3. All are closely related genetically, but each features mutations that could alter how they behave.

The variant, BA.1.1.529, is believed to have emerged in Botswana - from where there are no direct flights to the U.S. - and is also being found in neighboring South Africa.

Hong Kong reported a case after a passenger who had recently traveled from South Africa was found to be infected with the variant, and then infected another person while in the same hotel, quarantining. Israel has also identified a case 'in a person who returned from Malawi,' with 'two more cases of people returning from abroad' placed in quarantine, the country's health ministry said Friday.

The variant - now named Omicron -- by the World Health Organization has caused an 'exponential' rise in infections in South Africa.

Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding, an epidemiologist and senior fellow at the Federation of American Scientists, said initial data from the variant was worrying and border restrictions should be imposed.

'Looks like vaccine evasion could be real with this variant,' he tweeted, pointing out that the two patients in Hong Kong who had the variant were both double-jabbed with the Pfizer vaccine.



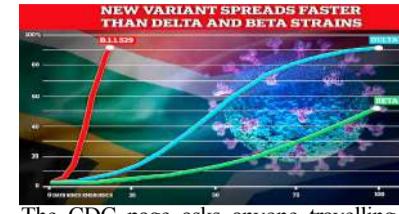
One of the two had recently been in Southern Africa. That person then passed it on to a second person, quarantining in the same hotel.

'It's very airborne,' Feigl-Ding said. 'The hotel guests were in different room across the hallway from each other. Environmental samples found the virus in 25 of 87 swabs across both rooms.'

He added: 'I think border and travel restrictions make sense. Especially since Hong Kong only caught the case because of a mandatory hotel quarantine. Which countries in the west still have that?? Almost none.'

Botswana has four confirmed cases, South Africa 77 - with the real figure likely in the hundreds - and Hong Kong has two, meaning 83 cases of the variant are confirmed so far. But South African scientists tried to backpedal today saying it was 'likely' that vaccines still offered 'high levels of protection' against hospitalizations and deaths from the variant.

As of 5:00 a.m. EST, the CDC website's travel advice page for South Africa had the country listed as 'Level 1: Low Level of COVID-19', with flights to the US permitted from the African country since November 8. The levels range from Level unknown, Level 1: Low, Level 2: Moderate, Level 3: High and Level 4: Very High.



The CDC page asks anyone travelling to or from South Africa to be fully vaccinated, or for those who are not to be tested for Covid. It also recommends travellers follow measures in-place in South Africa, including wearing a mask and social distancing.

South Africa's infection rate spiked 93 per cent in a day yesterday amid fears the strain is driving the surge. Local scientists say it has likely spread to all the country's nine provinces, but there is yet to be a surge in hospitalizations in epicentre Johannesburg. Travellers from South Africa have been allowed entry into the US since November 8, when restrictions barring entry to people from more than 30 countries - implemented at the start of the pandemic - were partially lifted.

The new rules, which came 19 months after the travel ban was implemented, require international visitors to show both proof of vaccination and a negative Covid test.

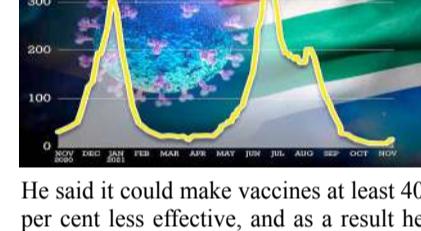
'There's a lot we don't understand about this variant,' said Richard Lessells, an infectious disease physician at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa, at a press briefing organized by South Africa's health department on Thursday.

'The mutation profile gives us concern, but now we need to do the work to understand the significance of this variant and what it means for the response to the pandemic.'

U.S. stock futures dropped in overnight trading on Thursday as concerns about the variant spread.

Futures for the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell more than 400 points, while those for the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq 100 were both in negative territory.

On Thursday Britain's health secretary, Sajid Javid sounded the alarm over what one senior scientific advisor in the UK termed the 'worst-ever' super-mutant COVID variant.



He said it could make vaccines at least 40 per cent less effective, and as a result he said they had banned flights from South Africa and five other regional countries.

Experts explained earlier how the BA.1.1.529 variant has more than 30 muta-

tions - the most ever recorded in a variant and twice as many as Delta - that suggest it could be more jab-resistant and transmissible than any version before it.

In response, Javid announced that flights from South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Eswatini and Zimbabwe will be suspended from midday Friday and all six countries will be added to the red list.

South Africa blasted Britain's travel ban as rushed.

Foreign minister Naledi Pandor said: 'Our immediate concern is the damage that this decision will cause to both the tourism industries and businesses of both countries.' A spokesman for the Government said: 'Imposing bans on travellers from countries where a new variant is reported has not yielded a meaningful outcome.'

Israel was the first country to follow suit, also red-listing the six nations, with Singapore, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands also banning flights from South Africa. A statement from European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said that the EU aims to halt air travel from the region due to concerns over the possible dangers posed by the variant.

Germany's new travel restrictions, starting Friday night, will affect South Africa and 'probably neighbouring nations', Spahn said, with only German nationals allowed entry. They must quarantine for 14 days upon arrival even if vaccinated. In Britain they must quarantine for 11 days in Government hotels for about £2,800.



'The last thing we need now is an introduced new variant that causes even more problems,' Spahn said, with Germany in the grip of a ferocious fourth wave of the pandemic.

In Rome, the government on Friday announced it was banning entry to those who have been in South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia or Eswatini in the past fortnight. Health Minister Roberto Speranza said scientists were studying the new BA.1.1.529 variant, 'and in the meantime, we will follow the path of maximum caution'. Asian countries are also preparing to tighten curbs.

(Article continues below)

Southern **DAILY** Make Today Different

(Article continues from above)

Scientists Now On Alert Over Rising Cases Caused By Omicron 'Cousin' BA.2

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

No cases have been detected in the UK so far but everyone who has returned from the European Union, China, Iran, South Africa, Brazil and India, which had largely stopped travel between the countries.

Some epidemiologists have argued that putting a travel ban in place for South Africa is counterproductive, because it punishes a country that has been transparent with its data.

'Given how transmissible that the new variant apparently is, I do not think that halting travel will ultimately be effective in preventing the variant from arriving,' said Jay Bhattacharya, a professor of health policy at Stanford, whose recent research focuses on the epidemiology of COVID-19 as well as an evaluation of policy responses to the epidemic.

He told DailyMail.com: 'COVID is a global pandemic. No country can isolate itself forever, and halting travel imposes harm on the kind of international cooperation we will need to end the pandemic.'

'A better idea would be for the international community to provide sufficient vaccine supplies to the affected places.' Others, such as Feigl-Ding, insist travel restrictions are necessary.

A photograph of a South African Airways airplane flying in the sky.

The UK and Israel on Thursday effectively stopped travel from Southern Africa,

and some believe the US may follow suit.

Flight 'bans' have been implemented before - although they are rarely an outright ban on a commercial flight from a country. Instead, they are stringent restrictions on who can fly, meaning that the airlines themselves cancel the routes because there are so few people who meet the requirements.

Donald Trump placed restrictions on travel from China to the U.S. in February 2020, and then the border between the U.S. and Canada was closed, and the U.S. and Mexico.

This month Joe Biden ended 18 months of

restrictions placed on arrivals from the European Union, China, Iran, South Africa, Brazil and India, which had largely stopped travel between the countries.

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Others, such as Feigl-Ding, insist travel restrictions are necessary.

'It's got 32 mutations in the spike protein, which is how the virus spreads.'

'And in the province around Johannesburg, there's about 2,500 new cases over the past day, and they think — not proven yet — that this is the predominant variant.'

Siegel said that there were numerous reasons for concern.

'It looks like it's highly contagious,' he said.

'And that is what concerns me, because the other variants that have emerged haven't had a chance against Delta because Delta is so contagious.'

'The other issue is, will the vaccine protect against this variant? Will the treatments protect against this variant? We're keeping a really close eye on this one.'

The British expert whose modeling helped instigate the first coronavirus lockdown said that the decision to impose travel restrictions was 'prudent'.

Professor Neil Ferguson, a member of the British government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), said: 'The BA.1.1.529 variant has an unprecedented number of mutations in the spike protein gene, the protein which is the target of most vaccines.'

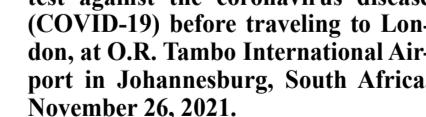
'There is therefore a concern that this variant may have a greater potential to escape prior immunity than previous variants.'

The variant is already in three countries, suggesting it is more widespread than the official tally.

Two cases have been detected in Hong Kong - both of whom had links to South Africa - three have been picked up in Botswana and the remainder are in South Africa.

But a lack of surveillance on continental Africa may be underestimating the true numbers there, scientists warned.

Professor Tulio de Oliveira, a director of COVID surveillance in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal, told a press conference on Thursday that it has been spotted in nearly every corner of South Africa.

A photograph of a healthcare worker in a pink shirt and blue scrubs taking a swab from a woman.

A healthcare worker collects a swab from Bronwen Cook for a PCR test against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) before traveling to London, at O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, South Africa, November 26, 2021.

'It is also concerning that this variant appears to be driving a rapid increase in case numbers in South Africa. The Government's move to restrict travel with South Africa is therefore prudent.'

'However, we do not yet have reliable estimates of the extent to which BA.1.1.529 might be either more transmissible or more resistant to vaccines,'

so it is too early to be able to provide an evidence-based assessment of the risk it

poses.'

Experts from the UKHSA have been advising ministers on the issue, with a number of scientists expressing serious concern over the variant due to the significant number of mutations in the spike protein.

One senior scientist said: 'One of our major worries is this virus spike protein is so dramatically different to the virus spike that was in the original Wuhan strain, and therefore in our vaccines, that it has a great cause of concern.'

Experts from the World Health Organization (WHO) are meeting with South African officials on Friday at 11:00 GMT to assess the evolving situation in the country.

The variant could eventually be given the moniker 'Nu' - with the most concerning variants given names after the Greek alphabet.

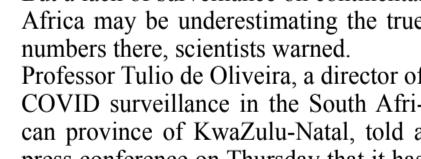
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A photograph of a baby crying while receiving a COVID-19 vaccine shot from a healthcare worker.

A baby cries as her mother receives her Pfizer vaccine against COVID-19, in Diepsloot Township near Johannesburg, South Africa on October 21.

He admitted he was still 'uncertain' about the impact of the variant on the country's epidemic, with other scientists saying that it might be so evolved that it becomes unstable.

But Professor Oliveria explained the new variant is 'clearly very different' from previous strains, including the fact that it has five times more mutations on

a specific part of the spike protein than Delta — meaning it might be better at infecting vaccinated people than the world-dominant strain.

He said that officials 'do expect, unfortunately, to start seeing pressure in the healthcare system in the next few days and weeks.'

Joe Phaahlam, South Africa's Health Minister, warned at the same press conference: 'Here is a mutation variant of serious concern.'

He added: 'We were hopeful that we might have a longer break in between waves - possibly that it would hold off to late December or even next year January.'

Current jabs train the immune system to recognize an older version of the spike, and lots of changes to this protein make it harder for the vaccinated people to fight it off.

What Impact Might BA.1.1.529 Have On Vaccines?

Scientists have raised concern that the super Botswana Covid variant may be better able to dodge vaccine-induced immunity than all previous strains — including Delta. UK Health Security Agency scientists say it is the 'worst ever'.

It combines mutations previously seen on the Beta variant, which sparked concern last year as it was thought to be more vaccine resistant, and those on the more transmissible Alpha strain that was behind the second wave.

Scientists warn it is 'plausible' that the mutant variant is spreading quickly because it is better able to infect people who have immunity either from vaccines or previous infection.

A photograph of a healthcare worker in a white coat and blue gloves holding a syringe with a vaccine.

In South Africa where it is spreading most people already have immunity from previous infection. Some 40 per cent have also received two doses of the Covid jab. But despite the concern lab tests are yet to confirm that the variant is better able to dodge vaccine-triggered immunity than other mutant strains.

Very little is known about its virulence and whether someone who catches the mutant strain is more likely to end up in hospital or dying from the disease.