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Southern DAILY

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Brawling with elite, Russian mercenary boss wishes politician shot

LONDON, Feb 24 (Reuters) - Yevgeny Prigozhin, the shaven-headed former convict and catering magnate who runs Russia's Wagner mercenary army on the Ukraine frontline, said on Friday that a politician who criticised him should be shot and may end up on a pitchfork.

Fuelling a growing standoff with Russia's political and military elite, Prigozhin evoked the actions of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin during World War Two to exorcise a regional governor who had told him to stick to his food business. "During the 1941-45 war, which is now being repeated, Stalin simply shot people like you. I think we're going to return to those times soon," he told Sverdlovsk governor Yevgeny Kuivashev, according to his press service.

"I'm sure that the time is not far off when people will reach boiling point and raise you and people like you up on pitchforks," he added, alluding to peasant rebellions.

Prigozhin, 61, who did nine years' jail for theft and street muggings in the 1980s, has emerged from the shadows to assume a high profile since Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine.

UK issues export bans on every item used by Russia in war
Beaten and divided, Italy's centre-left seeks new leader
Poland has delivered tanks to Ukraine, government announces on war's first anniversary
His fighters, whom he touts as among the best, are spearheading an offensive in eastern Ukraine.

On Friday, the war's anniversary, he announced that his men - including former prisoners like him - had captured a Ukrainian settlement on the outskirts of the small mining city of Bakhmut, which they have besieged for months.

Prigozhin's media profile, political influence, and fondness for profanely lambasting top army brass and anyone else in his way has angered some in government who want him reined in.

However Prigozhin, who grew rich from state contracts awarded to a catering company he controls, has proved hard to tame, given Wagner's big role and the support he has from influential military bloggers and some hawkish politicians.

USEFUL TO PUTIN?

Earlier this week, he accused various regional governors of refusing to bury Wagner fighters with military honours, labelling them as lawless, corrupt bureaucrats.

Kuivashev, the Sverdlovsk governor, hit back on Friday via the 66.ru local news outlet: "If every businessman who makes money on school meals tries to run the country, we won't get very far," he said.

"Everyone has to look after their own business. Cook cutlets and boil pasta, and we in the regions will sort things out ourselves."

From eastern Ukraine, Prigozhin replied that he had stopped being a businessman a year ago and was now de-

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Inside C2



Evgeny Prigozhin (L) assists Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin during a dinner with foreign scholars and journalists at the restaurant Cheval Blanc on the premises of an equestrian complex outside Moscow November 11, 2011. REUTERS/Misha Japaridze/Pool/File Photo

voting his life to leading his fighters.

As well as menacing Kuivashev, he said the mayor of St Petersburg with whom he has a long-running feud, would have also been executed in Stalin's day.

Some analysts believe Prigozhin's thuggish behaviour is useful to the Kremlin as it keeps the elite fearful of what might happen if President Vladimir Putin were to step down.

Others, though, warn that Prigozhin and other figures in Russia with their own private armies, like Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, could one day go rogue.

One source close to the Russian authorities told Reuters in January that though the Kremlin viewed Prigozhin as a useful operator it maintained unspecified safeguards over leaders of armed groups. "There is a ceiling (of growth) and mechanisms in place," said the source, who declined to provide more details.

Food makers, feeling squeezed, pull the plug on slow-selling products

BOCA RATON, Florida/LONDON, Feb 24 (Reuters) - Major consumer companies including Kraft Heinz Co (KHC.O) and Conagra Brands Inc (CAG.N) are culling product lines to combat sky-high costs and falling consumer demand, their executives said this week.

Many companies started slimming their offerings during the pandemic and are aggressively renewing those efforts, eliminating less-popular items to focus on products on which they can more easily raise prices amid prolonged inflation on food items.

Executives at Nestle SA (NESN.S) and Unilever Plc (ULVR.L) said they have seen billions in savings after ditching the laggards in their product

portfolios.

Conagra recently discontinued a Marie Callender's chocolate chip cookie dough cream pie to make room for what the U.S. food company hopes will be a faster-selling no sugar added apple pie.

"No one will have a perfect batting average," said Chief Executive Sean Connolly in an interview. "The key is to have more winners than losers."

Walmart can't beat fine over warehouse worker injury

Volkswagen to build own US plant for Scout brand - Automobilwoche

Mercedes plans to sell auto driving assistant "Drive Pilot" in China - Spiegel

U.S. likely to cap level of S.Korean chips made in China- U.S. official

Japan's consumer inflation hits 41-year high, keeps BOJ under pressure

Eliminating less popular products is part of a "decomplexity program" underway at Kraft Heinz, its executives said at the Consumer Analyst Group of New York Conference this week. It recently discontinued Heinz Real Mayonnaise.

Mondelez International Inc (MDLZ.O) CEO Dirk Van de Put told Wall Street analysts at the conference that the Oreo maker had clear rules on replacing old products with new ones - "one in, one out."

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優秀學員的大型交響樂作品由美國國家青年交響樂團 (National Youth Orchestra)

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LOCAL NEWS

Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates: ChatGPT 'will change our world'

Feb 10 (Reuters) - Florida lawmakers on Friday granted Governor Ron DeSantis effective control of the board that oversees development in and around Walt Disney Co's (DIS.N) central Florida theme parks, escalating the Republican's battle with the company.

State Republicans targeted Disney after it publicly clashed with DeSantis last year over a law that restricts classroom instruction of gender and sexual orientation, known by its opponents as the "Don't Say Gay" measure.

Legislators in Florida gave final approval on Friday to a bill authorizing the governor to appoint five supervisors to run what is now known as the Reedy Creek Improvement District, a quasi-government entity with oversight of the 25,000 acres surrounding the Walt Disney World resort.

The state Senate will confirm board members, and the board will have no role in day-to-day operations of the theme parks.

DeSantis' spokesperson Bryan Griffin said the prior system, under which the Florida legislature in 1967 gave Disney sole control over the district, lacked accountability.

"Florida is ... beginning a new era of accountability and transparency," he said.

Disney World is the largest employer in central Florida with close to 75,000 employees and drew 36.2 million visitors in 2021, according to the Themed Entertainment Association. The legislature voted last year to dissolve the special district, which for more than a half-century gave Disney the autonomy to govern itself, providing such government services as fire protection, water, sewer and waste removal services and infrastructure.

The action, seen as retaliation for Disney's then-Chief Executive Officer Bob Chapek speaking out against the state law limiting classroom discussion of LGBTQ issues, came with unintended consequences.

Tax experts and legislators warned that eliminating the district in



June 2023 would leave county taxpayers liable for nearly \$1.2 billion in bond debt.

The new bill preserves the Reedy Creek special district, though within two years it will be renamed Central Florida Tourism Oversight District. It will have the authority to collect revenue, pay off debt and provide a range of government services. The district is prohibited from operating its own airport or building nuclear power plants.

The legislation also expressly bars anyone with ties to the theme parks over the past three years from serving on the board.

Walt Disney World President Jeff Vahle praised the Reedy Creek district, saying it had helped the theme park grow and contribute to the

state's economy. "We are focused on the future and are ready to work within this new framework," he said in a statement.

The state Senate debated the bill for about an hour on Friday, with a handful of lawmakers voicing opposition.

"This all seems a retaliation by the governor for Disney voicing its support for the LGBTQ community," said Senator Linda Stewart, a Democrat who represents Orange County.

Southern
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Today
Different

Drivers and passengers sit in cars in a traffic jam near a board displaying an image of Russian President Vladimir Putin in Saint Petersburg, Russia, February 25, 2022. The board displays a quote from a recent address by Vladimir Putin to the nation: "We had no other chance but to act differently." REUTERS/Anton Vaganov

Editor's Choice

A Ukrainian serviceman holds a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launcher at fighting positions outside the city of Kharkiv, Ukraine, February 24, 2022. REUTERS/Maksim Levin



A person walks around the wreckage of an unidentified aircraft that crashed into a house in a residential area, in Kyiv, Ukraine, February 25, 2022. REUTERS/Umit Bektas



A man carries an empty water tank through a flooded area after the impact of the tropical storm Julia, in Progreso, Honduras. REUTERS/Yoseph Amaya



People run while police fire tear gas during a protest demanding the resignation of Haiti's Prime Minister Ariel Henry after weeks of shortages, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. REUTERS/Ralph Tedy Erol



Ukrainian Oksana sits in a bus as she arrives at the border crossing between Poland and Ukraine, in Medyka, Poland, February 25, 2022. REUTERS/Kacper Pempel

We'll Be Dealing With Covid-Related Fallout As Long As There Is The Possibility Of New Variants

The 'New World' After The Pandemic – What's In Store?



Covid-19 Testing Site On The Streets Of New York City, January 2022.

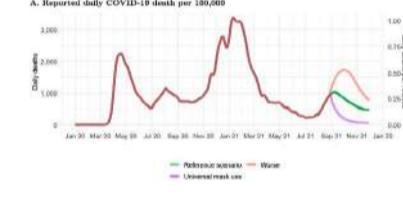
Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

As a virus-weary world limps through the third year of the outbreak, experts are sending out a warning signal: Don't expect omicron to be the last variant we have to contend with — and don't let your guard down yet.

In the midst of a vast wave of milder infections, countries around the world are dialing back restrictions and softening their messaging. Many people are starting to assume they've had their run-in with Covid-19 and that the pandemic is tailing off.

But that's not necessarily the case.

The crisis isn't over until it's over everywhere. The effects will continue to reverberate through wealthier nations — disrupting supply chains, travel plans and health care — as the coronavirus largely hits under-vaccinated developing countries over the coming months.



Before any of that, the world has to get past the current wave. Omicron may appear to cause less severe disease than previous strains, but it is wildly infectious, pushing new case counts to once unimaginable records. Meanwhile, evidence is emerging that the variant may not be as innocuous as early data suggest.

There's also no guarantee that the next mutation — and there will be more — won't be an offshoot of a more dangerous variant such as delta. And your risk of catching Covid more than once is real.

"The virus keeps raising that bar for us every few months," said Akiko Iwasaki, a professor of epidemiology at Yale School of Medicine. "When we were celebrating the amazing effectiveness of booster shots against the delta variant, the bar was already being raised by omicron."

"It seems like we are constantly trying to catch up with the virus," she said.

It's sobering for a world that's been trying to move on from the virus with a new intensity in recent months. But the outlook isn't all gloom. Anti-viral medicines are hitting the market, vaccines are more readily available and tests that can be self-administered in minutes are now easy and cheap to obtain in many places.

Nevertheless, scientists agree it's too soon to assume the situation is under control.

With daily cases peaking at an average

A medical worker waits for antigen test results at the Erez Crossing on the Israel-Gaza border in December. (Photo/ Kobi Wolf/Bloomberg)

In six months' time, many richer countries will have made the transition from pandemic to endemic. But that doesn't mean masks will be a thing of the past. We'll need to grapple with our approach to booster shots, as well as the pandemic's economic and political scars. There's also the shadow of long Covid. Is Covid-19 Here to Stay?

"There is a lot of happy talk that goes along the lines that omicron is a mild virus and it's effectively functioning as an attenuated live vaccine that's going to create massive herd immunity across the globe," said Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. "That's flawed for a number of reasons." Experts now believe that the virus will never go away entirely, and instead will continue to evolve to create new waves of infection. Mutations are possible every time the pathogen replicates, so surging caseloads put everyone in danger.

The sheer size of the current outbreak means more hospitalizations, deaths and virus mutations are all but inevitable. Many people who are infected aren't making it into the official statistics, either because a home test result isn't formally recorded or because the infected person never gets tested at all.

Trevor Bedford, an epidemiologist at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle known for detecting early Covid cases and tracking the outbreak globally, estimates that only about 20% to 25% of omicron infections in the U.S. get reported.

New evidence suggests that delta infections didn't help avert omicron, even in

of more than 800,000 in mid-January, the number of underlying infections may have exceeded 3 million a day — or nearly 1% of the U.S. population, Bedford estimates. Since it takes five to 10 days to recover, as much as 10% of people in the country may have been infected at any one time.



Long lines Queues at a testing station in Seoul on Feb. 6. (Photo/SeongJoon Cho/Bloomberg)

He's not alone in projecting astronomical numbers. At the current infection rate, computer modelling indicates more than half of Europe will have contracted omicron by mid-March, according to Hans Kluge, a regional director for the World Health Organization.

Meanwhile, a sub-variant known as BA.2 is spreading rapidly in South Africa. It appears to be even more transmissible than the original strain and may cause a second surge in the current wave, one of the country's top scientists said.

And just because you've already had the virus doesn't mean you won't get re-infected since Covid doesn't confer lasting immunity.

New evidence suggests that delta infections didn't help avert omicron, even in

vaccinated people. That would explain why places like the U.K. and South Africa experienced such significant outbreaks even after being decimated by delta. Reinfection is also substantially more common with omicron than previous variants.

"With omicron, because it has more of an upper respiratory component, it's even less likely to result in durable immunity" than previous variants, Hotez said. "On that basis, it's incorrect thinking to believe that this is somehow going to be the end of the pandemic."

Preparing for New Variants

Preparing for the next Covid strains is critical.

"As long as there are areas of the world where the virus could be evolving, and new mutants arriving, we all will be susceptible to these new variants," said Glenda Gray, chief executive officer of the South African Medical Research Council.



A child receives a vaccine shot in San Francisco on Jan. 10. (Photo/ David Paul Morris/Bloomberg)

Lockdowns and travel curbs aren't going away, even if they are becoming less restrictive on the whole.

"The things that will matter there are whether we are able to respond when there is a local surge," said Mark McClellan, former director of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and director of the Duke-Margolis Center for Health Policy. "Maybe going back to putting on more masks or being a little bit more cautious about distancing."

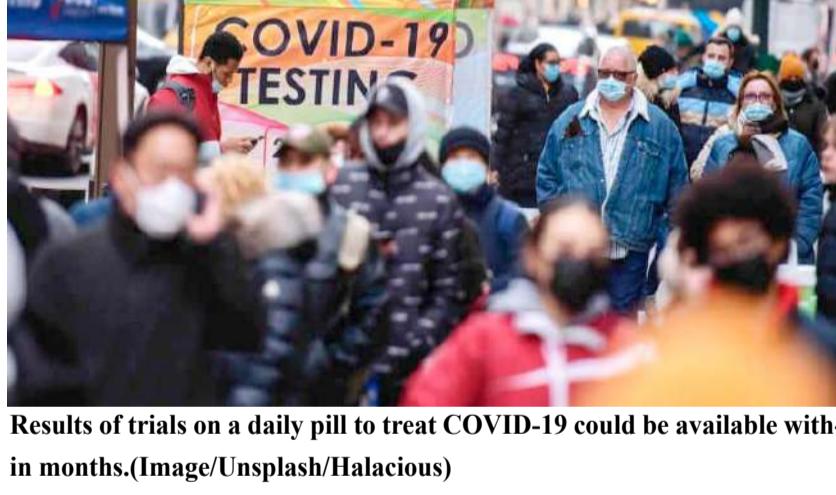
Inoculation is still the world's primary line of defense against Covid. More than 62% of people around the globe have gotten at least one dose, with overall rates in wealthy countries vastly higher than in developing ones. At the current pace, it will take another five months until 75% of the world's population has received their first shot.

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The 'New World' After The Pandemic – What's In Store?

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

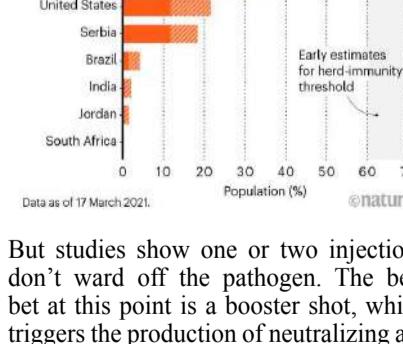


Results of trials on a daily pill to treat COVID-19 could be available within months. (Image/Unsplash/Halacious)

Uneven Access to Vaccines

DISPARITIES IN DISTRIBUTION

The worldwide roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations is uneven, as shown by this selection of countries. Even as some nations approach a theoretical threshold for herd immunity, quashing the spread of the virus will prove difficult.



But studies show one or two injections don't ward off the pathogen. The best bet at this point is a booster shot, which triggers the production of neutralizing antibodies and a deeper immune response. People inoculated with more traditional inactivated vaccines, such as the widely used shots from China's Sinovac Biotech Ltd., will need at least two boosters — preferably with different vaccines — to control the virus, Yale's Iwasaki said. In the next six months, more countries will contend with whether to roll out a fourth shot. Israel has started and the U.S. backs them for vulnerable people, but India is pushing back and refusing to "blindly follow" other countries.

How We'll Know When the Covid-19 Crisis Is Over

While the virus won't be overwhelming hospitals and triggering restrictions forever, it's still unclear when — or how — it will become safe to leave on the back burner.

Experts Bloomberg News spoke to agree that in developed countries including the U.S. and much of Europe, the virus could be well in hand by mid-2022. There will be better access to pills such as Pfizer Inc.'s Paxlovid, rapid antigen tests will be more readily available and people will have become accustomed to the idea that Covid is here to stay.

Transmission electron micrograph of a green monkey kidney cells 24 hours

COMMUNITY

after infection by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. (Source/The University of Hong Kong)

Robert Wachter, chair of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, puts the odds at 10-to-one that by the end of February, most parts of the U.S. and the developed world will no longer be struggling with severe outbreaks. Vaccinations and new treatments, widespread testing and immunity as a result of previous infections are helping. Countries like Denmark are getting rid of all pandemic restrictions despite ongoing outbreaks.

"That is a world that feels fundamentally different from the world of the last two years," he said. "We get to come back to something resembling normal." "I don't think it's irrational for politicians to embrace that, for policies to reflect that."

When Will the Pandemic End?

Elsewhere in the world, the pandemic will be far from over.

The threat of new variants is highest in less wealthy countries, particularly those where immune conditions are more common. The delta mutation was first identified in India while omicron emerged in southern Africa, apparently during a chronic Covid infection in an immunocompromised HIV patient.

"As long as we refuse to vaccinate the world, we will continue to see new waves," Hotez said. "We are going to continue to have pretty dangerous variants coming out of low- and middle-income countries. That's where the battleground is."

Covid-19 testing outside a building placed under lockdown at the City Garden housing estate in Hong Kong, in Jan. 2022. (Photo/Suman Dayal/Bloomberg)

A "door-to-door" vaccination team inoculates residents at a village in the Budgam district of Jammu and Kashmir, India, in August 2021. (Photo/Suman Dayal/Bloomberg)

Amesh Adalja, senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Health Security in Baltimore, sees the pandemic continuing into 2023 for parts of the developing world. "For me, the transition from pandemic

to endemic is when you're not worried about hospitals getting crushed," he said. "That will happen in most Western countries in 2022, and it will take a little bit longer for the rest of the world."

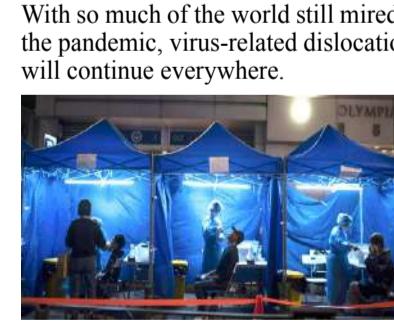
In parts of Asia, public health officials aren't even willing to consider calling the end of the pandemic.

While most of the world now seeks to live alongside Covid, China and Hong Kong are still trying to eliminate it. After spending much of 2021 virtually virus-free, both places are currently dealing with outbreaks.

"We do not possess the prerequisites for living with the virus because the vaccination rate is not good, especially amongst the elderly," said Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam. "I could not stand seeing a lot of old people dying in my hospitals."

Harsh virus restrictions including border closures and quarantines may well be in place until the end of 2022, though the higher contagiousness of the new variants is making that harder to maintain, as Hong Kong's current challenges show. Walling out the virus completely, like a swathe of countries did early in the pandemic, may no longer be possible.

With so much of the world still mired in the pandemic, virus-related dislocations will continue everywhere.



systems around the world face a long, slow recovery after two years of monumental pressure.

And for some individuals, the virus may be a life sentence. Long Covid sufferers have now been experiencing severe fatigue, muscle aches and even brain, heart and organ damage for months.

How long will we be dealing with the long-term ramifications of the virus?

"That's the million-dollar question," South Africa's Gray said. "Hopefully we can control this in the next two years, but the issues of long Covid will persist. We will see a huge burden of people suffering from it."



A temporary Covid treatment facility at the Commonwealth Games Village Sports Complex in New Delhi on Jan. 5. (Photo/T. Narayan/Bloomberg)

Life After the Pandemic

Over the coming months, a sense of what living permanently with Covid really looks like should take shape. Some places may forget about the virus almost entirely, until a flareup means classes are cancelled for a day or companies struggle with workers calling in sick. Other countries may rely on masking up indoors each winter, and an annual Covid vaccine is likely to be offered in conjunction with the flu shot.

To persist, the virus will need to evolve to evade the immunity that's hitting high levels in many parts of the world.

"There could be many scenarios," Yale's Iwasaki said. "One is that the next variant is going to be quite transmissible, but less virulent. It's getting closer and closer to the common cold kind of virus."

If that evolution takes a more toxic path, we will end up with a more severe disease.

"I just hope we don't have to keep making new boosters every so often," she added. "We can't just vaccinate everyone around the world four times a year."

"It's really hard to predict."

(Courtesy Bloomberg.com)