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Democracy Dies in Darkness

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2024 • **\$3**

Man killed in Spain is Russian defector

Questions arise whether Moscow ordered hit on pilot who fled to Ukraine

BY ROBYN DIXON,
SERHI KOROLCHUK,
BEATRIZ RÍOS
AND NATALIA ABBAKUMOVA

A man's corpse, found riddled with bullets and run over by a vehicle in Spain last week, was identified as that of Russian military pilot Maksim Kuzminov, who flew his Mi-8 helicopter to Ukraine in a dramatic defection in August, Ukrainian officials said.

His apparent murder — after a very public threat to his life last year on Russian state television — has raised questions about whether this was a Russian-ordered assassination carried out on European soil.

News of Kuzminov's violent demise emerged just days after the sudden death in prison of Russian political opposition leader Alexei Navalny, which European and U.S. officials have framed as evidence of the Russian government's unchecked brutality.

The spokesman for Ukraine's intelligence service, Andriy Yusov, confirmed to The Washington Post on Tuesday that the body found at the entrance to a residential complex in Villajoyosa, in Alicante, was Kuzminov's.

Russian officials have not claimed responsibility for the killing. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment on the case Tuesday, saying it was "not on the Kremlin's agenda."

But Sergei Naryshkin, the head of Russia's foreign intelligence service, spoke to Russian journalists Tuesday, saying that Kuzminov was dead the moment he started planning his defection.

"In Russia, it is common to

SEE RUSSIA ON A12

Trump on Navalny: He likens himself to the late Putin critic. **A6**

Treason charges: A Los Angeles woman is arrested in Russia. **A13**

In some states, Medicaid broadens beyond health into a hub for fulfilling social needs



PHOTOS BY KATE MEDLEY FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Prescription: Food and housing

BY AMY GOLDSTEIN

On Sundays, the Rev. Carl Nichols preaches at Big Zion AME Zion Church in little Kenansville on North Carolina's coastal plain. Tuesdays to Fridays, he drives a cargo van on a daily 320-mile circuit along rural roads edged with pine and fields of tobacco, collards and corn. His mission: delivering boxes of food to people who cannot always afford their own.

The minister, his wife, two grown daughters and three helpers make up a tiny nonprofit whose food deliveries are part of an experiment that places North Carolina at a leading edge of the new face of Medicaid. A pillar of the nation's social safety net since the 1960s, Medicaid is the largest public source of health insurance. Now, it is becoming something more.

A growing number of states are broadening the health-coverage program into a hub for fulfilling social

SEE MEDICAID ON A8



TOP: The Rev. Carl Nichols uses his cargo van to deliver boxes of food to people with food insecurity in southeastern North Carolina. **ABOVE:** Montiaara Brown, 34, and her son Messiah, 4, who moved from a cramped home into a bigger one. A Medicaid experiment in the state helped make both endeavors possible.

Magnet school's policies survive

JUSTICES DECLINE VA. ADMISSIONS CASE

Thomas Jefferson high seeks to boost diversity

BY ANN E. MARIMOW
AND KARINA ELWOOD

The Supreme Court will not review a challenge to the admissions system for a prestigious Northern Virginia magnet school, ending a years-long legal battle in the case and signaling a majority of justices may not be ready to quickly revisit the issue of what role race can play in the selection of a student body.

The high court's decision Tuesday not to take the case involving the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology follows its ruling last term rejecting race-conscious admissions programs at Harvard and the University of North Carolina. That historic decision rolled back decades of precedent and has dramatically changed how the nation's private and public universities select their students.

Tuesday's ruling also comes weeks after the Supreme Court refused to immediately force the U.S. Military Academy at West Point to change its race-conscious admissions policies, an issue it left open after the cases last summer.

"I think the Supreme Court is where the American public is," said Richard D. Kahlenberg of George Washington University, an expert witness in favor of socioeconomic admissions who testified on behalf of the group that successfully challenged the Harvard and UNC practices. "They don't like racial preference, but they do want racial diversity. And that's why I think we won't see the Supreme Court saying that race-neutral alternatives are illegal when racial diversity is part of the motive."

The legal battle in Virginia was between a group of parents and the Fairfax County School Board over an admissions policy approved in

SEE ADMISSIONS ON A7

This ancient material is displacing plastics

Billion-dollar cork industry makes homes warmer, cars lighter and clothes biodegradable

BY MARTA VIDAL

CORUCHE, PORTUGAL — The rhythmic noise of axes whacking trees echoes in the depths of the cork oak forest.

But in Coruche, a rural area south of the Tagus River known as Portugal's "cork capital," the bang of trees falling to the ground doesn't follow the sound of the ax strokes. Instead, experienced workers carefully peel away the bark from the tree trunks.

This annual rite of extracting cork in the summer months has been around for thousands of years in the western Mediterranean. Egyptians, Persians, Greeks and Romans used the material to make fishing gear and sandals and to seal jugs, jars and barrels. As glass bottles gained popularity in the 18th century, cork became the preferred sealant because it is durable, waterproof, light and pliable.

Now cork is experiencing a revival as more industries look for sustainable alternatives to plastic and other materials derived from

SEE CORK ON A14



JOSE SARMENTO MATOS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Alona Kozma harvests cork in June in Coruche, Portugal's cork capital. Such work has been happening for thousands of years, but cork is now experiencing a boom amid the search for plastic alternatives.

U.S. vetoes 3rd U.N. call for immediate cease-fire

Envoy cites Gaza talks; vote draws rebukes at Security Council

BY KAREN DEYOUNG

The United States for the third time on Tuesday vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire in the Gaza Strip, arguing that it would undercut ongoing U.S.-led negotiations for a six-week pause in fighting that would see Hamas release more than 100 remaining Israeli hostages in exchange for jailed Palestinians and additional humanitarian aid for civilians.

The resolution, introduced by Algeria on behalf of the Arab group of U.N. members, "would send the wrong message to Hamas," U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said, and "would actually give them something that they have asked for without requiring them to do

something in return."

Instead, Thomas-Greenfield called on council members to support an alternative U.S. resolution, still in draft form, demanding that Israel — along with agreeing to a "temporary ceasefire as soon as practicable" to enable the release of hostages — refrain from a major ground offensive into Rafah and take "immediate measures" to allow the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid into the enclave through additional land and sea entry points.

So far, U.S. appeals directly to Israel on all of those points have met with little positive response, at least in public. President Biden, under pressure at home and abroad to use U.S. leverage more effectively, has become increasingly direct, calling Israeli military tactics "over the top," even as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said he will not bow to international demands until a total victory over Hamas is achieved.

The United States stood alone in opposing the call for an immediate

SEE GAZA ON A10

IN THE NEWS

Earth's 'festival of supernovae' Astronomers have discovered a vast chain of star-forming clouds that apparently crossed paths with our solar system millions of years ago. **A9**

AFL-CIO balks at Va. arena The union group dealt another blow to the proposal that would move the Wizards and Capitals out of D.C. **B1**

THE NATION
President Biden's brother and son prepare to testify in the impeachment probe. **A4**
Confusion gripped Alabama after its high court ruled that frozen embryos are people. **A6**

THE WORLD
Yulia Navalnaya, widow of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, said in a dramatic video announcement that she is picking up her dissident husband's mantle. **A11**

THE ECONOMY
Corporate America has been retreating from DEI-dedicated jobs amid rising legal risk and political animosity. **A15**
An 11-nation bloc of law-enforcement agencies said it took down the world's most prolific ransomware group. **A16**

THE DISTRICT
D.C. homeowners forced to leave a crumbling condo building recount the dreams they had to put on hold. **B1**
A budget proposal for Fairfax County, driven in part by schools and transportation, would raise annual tax bills by an average of \$524. **B1**

STYLE
Despite backlash, LGBTQ-friendly churches in Tennessee are spreading the word about acceptance. **C1**

FOOD
Virginia Ali, the 90-year-old co-founder of D.C.'s iconic Ben's Chili Bowl, is, reluctantly, also a local institution.

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