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KYIV: A CITY UNDER SIEGE

London.—Russian missiles pounded Kyiv yesterday, families cowered in shelters and authorities told residents to prepare Molotov cocktails to defend Ukraine's capital from an assault that the mayor said had already begun with saboteurs in the city.

Moscow claimed to have captured the Hostomel airfield northwest of the capital, a vital staging post for a planned assault on Kyiv, which has been fought over since the first hours of the war. This could not immediately be confirmed and the Ukrainian authorities reported heavy fighting there.

"The city has gone into a defensive phase. Shots and explosions are ringing out in some neighbourhoods. Saboteurs have already entered Kyiv," said Kyiv's mayor, former world heavyweight boxing champion Vitali Klitschko. "The enemy wants to put the capital on its knees and destroy us."

Air raid sirens wailed over the capital of three million people, where some residents sheltered in underground metro stations, a day after Russian President Vladimir Putin launched an invasion that has shocked the world.

Ukrainian officials said a Russian aircraft had been shot down and crashed into a building in Kyiv overnight, setting it ablaze and injuring eight people.

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy tweeted that there had been heavy fighting with people killed at the entrance to the eastern cities of Chernihiv and Melitopol, as well as at Hostomel.

Windows were blasted out of a 10-storey apartment block near Kyiv's main airport, where a two-metre crater filled with rubble showed where a shell had struck before dawn.

"How we can live through it in our time?... Putin should burn in hell along with his whole family," said Oxana Gulenko, sweeping broken glass from her room.

Hundreds of people were crowded into a cramped bomb shelter beneath a building after a televised warning of air strikes.

"We don't know how long we have to stay here. Good we have chairs at least," said Viktoria, 35, while her kids of 5 and 7 slept without taking off their winter coats. "We're shocked... How can you wage a war against peaceful people?"