

# Trump Under Pressure as Coronavirus Spreads



President Donald Trump holds a photograph of coronavirus as Dr. Steve Monroe, right, with CDC speaks to members of the press at the headquarters of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, March 6, 2020.

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- Concern that President Donald Trump himself could be exposed to the coronavirus through contact with two Republican lawmakers loomed Monday as U.S. stocks plummeted, feeding growing national anxiety.

Trump, who flew back to Washington after a weekend golfing at his Florida resort and having dinner with Brazil's right-wing president, has spent weeks dismissing the seriousness of the threat.

But after an emergency meeting with administration staff, he told journalists that he would propose "very substantial" economic measures to Congress on Tuesday. These will include tax relief and aid

for workers in the gig economy who worry about calling in sick.

Trump said he would hold a press conference to discuss the measures on Tuesday, adding the coronavirus -- which has killed 26 people in the U.S. -- has "blindsided the world."

The run on stock market prices robbed Trump of one of his main talking points ahead of the November presidential election. The Dow Jones closed 7.8 percent lower in the worst session since 2008.

And with pictures of a virus-hit cruise ship constantly on live television, Trump's tweet Monday that "life & the economy go on" seemed increasingly out of touch.

Alarm mounted further after at least two

Republican lawmakers who recently met with the president announced they were going into self-quarantine, fearing that they were exposed to the virus at a conservative conference just outside Washington.

One of them, Representative Matt Gaetz, had traveled with Trump on Air Force One on Monday.

Another, Representative Doug Collins, was with Trump Friday during a coronavirus briefing at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention headquarters.

Trump's incoming chief of staff, Mark Meadows, also went into self-quarantine Monday after learning he may also have been exposed at the same conference.

Although he is not exhibiting symptoms, and a precautionary test came back negative, "he'll be self-quarantined till the 14 day period passes Wednesday," his spokesman said on Twitter.

The spreading virus also raises questions over whether Trump will be able to continue holding the large rallies at the heart of his reelection campaign.

Trump has not been tested for the virus, White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham said Monday evening.

"He has neither had prolonged close contact with any known confirmed COVID-19 patients, nor does he have any symptoms," she said in a statement.

Stories of new cases flooded in across the country -- from a Washington DC church rector to the head of New York's ports authority, while some stores ran out of hand sanitizer and masks.

## Greenpeace Warns of High Radiation Levels in Fukushima



Greenpeace radiation survey team investigates radiation levels in Tsushima, Namie exclusion zone, Fukushima Prefecture, Japan, Nov.1, 2019.

AMSTERDAM (Dispatches) -- A new survey shows that radiation hot spots are still being found in Fukushima, Japan, which is supposed to be a host of part of the Olympic torch relay and several sporting events this summer, according to Greenpeace on Tuesday.

In its report, "Recontamination and weather-related effects in Fukushima," Greenpeace said a number of locations recorded significantly higher levels of radiation than average at key Olympic venues in Fukushima Prefecture, despite the Japanese government's efforts to carry out extensive decontamination work since a 2011 tsunami triggered a meltdown at the nuclear power plant there.

The survey, which was conducted over three weeks in October and November last year, found concentrated radiation levels throughout the prefecture.

These areas were where radioactivity was observed at higher levels than in previous years.

The Japanese government hopes the Olympic games will be able to demonstrate a complete recovery in the areas devastated by the tsunami that left more than 18,000 people dead or missing. But Greenpeace said the effect of typhoons Hagibis and Bualoi, which deposited large volumes of rain across Japan, including in Fukushima last October, have caused an increased migration of radioactivity from mountainous areas through river systems.

"The mountainous forest regions of Fukushima Prefecture, which were never decontaminated, will continue to be long-term sources of recontamination. The findings from our recent radiation survey definitively disprove the myth

of a return to normal in parts of Fukushima," said Kazue Suzuki, an energy campaigner for Greenpeace Japan.

Greenpeace said the hot spots are even being found in downtown Fukushima, despite the government's decontamination efforts.

A court ordered the government and the operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant Tuesday to pay a combined ¥52.9 million (\$513,000) in damages to 89 people who evacuated from their hometowns to Hokkaido after the 2011 nuclear disaster.

The Sapporo District Court ruling marked the seventh case where both the government and Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. were ordered to pay damages, out of 11 cases brought against the two parties. In the four other cases, only Tepco was ordered to pay damages.

It was also the 15th decision handed down around 30 similar damages suits filed across Japan over one of the world's worst nuclear disasters, which were triggered by the massive earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

A total of 257 plaintiffs, 90 percent of whom at the time were living in the city of Fukushima and other locations outside of areas where evacuation orders were issued, had sought a combined ¥4.24 billion from the utility and the state.

"While (the ruling) is a sign of recognition of the government's responsibility, it doesn't reflect the actual lives that those who evacuated to Hokkaido have led," a lawyer representing the plaintiffs told reporters after the court decision.

## Dutch King Apologizes to Indonesia Over Colonial Violence

JAKARTA (Reuters) -- Dutch King Willem-Alexander apologized on Tuesday for the "excessive violence" inflicted on Indonesia during his country's colonial rule, the monarchy's first such admission of regret to the Southeast Asian nation.

The apology addressed the violence by Dutch forces during the period from Indonesia's declaration of independence in 1945 until 1949, when the Netherlands recognized it as an independent nation.

"I would like to express my regret and apologize for excessive violence on the part of the Dutch in those years," King Willem-Alexander said at the presidential palace in Bogor during a visit to Indonesia.

"I do so in the full realization that the pain and sorrow of the families affected continue to be felt today," he said in his speech, a copy of which was posted on the website of the Royal House of the Netherlands.

The Dutch government has previously apologized to Indonesia and paid some damages to survivors for violence carried out during colonial rule.

In 2011, Tjeerd de Zwaan, then the Dutch ambassador, apologized for killings in 1947 in a village in the province

of West Java. Two years later, de Zwaan also apologized for killings in 1947 on the island of Sulawesi.

Last year, a Dutch appeals court in the Hague ordered the hearing of a lawsuit by five Indonesians who hold the Netherlands responsible for the execution of their fathers by Dutch soldiers in 1947.

During the four-day trip, the king and his wife Queen Maxima are set to visit the ancient capital of Yogyakarta and the Segangau National Park in Indonesia's province of Central Kalimantan on Borneo, according to the royal website.

In his speech, the king also offered condolences for seven people killed when two boats collided in Central Kalimantan during preparations for the royal visit.

Indonesia has agreed on new partnerships with the Netherlands on women's issues, peace, and security, as well as on the control of contagious diseases, President Joko Widodo said on Tuesday.

From 1800 to 1949, the archipelago was a colony of the Netherlands known as the Dutch East Indies, and an important source of wealth, thanks to the trade in spices, precious metals and minerals.

## Ruling Party Backs Letting Putin Run for President



Russian President Vladimir Putin walks to his inauguration ceremony at the Kremlin in Moscow in May 2018.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Russia's ruling United Russia party said on Tuesday it would back a constitutional amendment that would allow President Vladimir Putin to run again for president, the RIA news agency reported.

Putin, who in January unveiled a major shake-up of Russian politics and a constitutional overhaul, is required by the constitution to step down in 2024 when his second sequential presidential term ends.

A former KGB officer, Putin, 67, has served four presidential terms in total and also done a stint as prime minister, dominating the Russian political landscape for two decades.

Valentina Tereshkova, a United Russia lawmaker, on Tuesday told parliament she was proposing amending the constitution in a way that would reset Putin's presidential term count back to zero.

The move, if adopted, would allow him to serve another two back-to-back six year terms.

Sergei Neverov, a lawmaker and senior United Russia official, said the party would "no doubt support" such

an idea, but that it would have to be discussed with Putin as well as parliament's leaders.

The lawmaker proposed either scrapping presidential term limits or amending the Russian Constitution to let Putin run again. A series of constitutional amendments are going to a nationwide vote on April 22.

Later Tuesday, Putin said he supports the proposed constitutional amendment. He spoke against scrapping term limits, but backed the idea of revising the ceiling.

He addressed lawmakers during a divisive debate on constitutional amendments he proposed earlier. The amendments are up for a second reading.

The Kremlin-controlled lower house, the State Duma, is set to quickly endorse Putin's proposals. The proposal comes as parliament is examining and preparing to vote on Putin's constitutional shake-up in its second of three readings.

Another ruling party lawmaker on Tuesday proposed holding snap parliamentary elections, currently scheduled for September 2021, once the constitutional reform is out of the way.

## Parliament Blocks Suu Kyi's Bid to Reduce Military Role



Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi walks to take an oath at the lower house of parliament in Naypyitaw, May 2, 2012.

BANGKOK (Reuters) -- Myanmar's parliament blocked a bid by the party of leader Aung San Suu Kyi to reduce the role of the military in politics on Tuesday, almost a decade into a troubled democratic transition.

In the first day of voting on a series of proposed constitutional amendments, lawmakers vetoed changes backed by the ruling party that would have altered the 2008 charter drafted by the former ruling military junta.

The rejected amendments would have gradually reduced the number of military MPs, over a period of 15 years, and abolished a section that names the commander-in-chief of the defense services as the "supreme commander of all armed forces".

The constitution guarantees military members of parliament a quarter of the seats in the legislature. Any changes to the charter require the approval of more than two thirds of lawmakers, giving the army an effective veto.

A spokesman for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) did not answer telephone calls seeking comment. A government spokesman declined to answer questions.

Lawmakers also rejected removing the word "disciplined" from the definition of the country's political system as a "genu-

ine, disciplined multi-party democratic system".

But they approved an amendment that would allow civil servants to belong to political parties.

Nobel laureate Suu Kyi has been under pressure to show progress on constitutional reform - seen as a major stumbling block to democratic hopes - ahead of a general election expected later this year.

She took power in 2016 after a landslide election win, vowing to continue democratic reforms that began in 2011 and end the country's long-running civil wars.

Since then, the administration has come under foreign pressure over a 2017 military crackdown against the Rohingya minority, as well as escalating ethnic conflict.

Myanmar has been accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice in the Hague but denies the charges, saying it was carrying out a legitimate campaign against Rohingya militants who attacked police posts.

Voting on other proposed amendments will continue until March 20, although analysts say the military veto means they are unlikely to pass.

Key sections the NLD aim to reform include one that blocks Suu Kyi from the presidency on account of her foreign-born children, who are British citizens.

## News in Brief

CARACAS (Dispatches) -- Venezuela's West-ern-backed opposition on Tuesday was to march to downtown Caracas with the aim of occupying the national legislature, setting up a showdown with President Nicolas Maduro's government. Opposition leader Juan Guaido for weeks has exhorted his supporters to join the rally as a way of reviving street riots against Maduro that surged in 2019, but have waned as the ruling Socialist Party has stood firm. The rally would be another test of Guaido's capacity to mobilize supporters, who have become increasingly weary with the opposition's inability to oust Maduro despite a broad U.S. sanctions program. Security forces were deployed around the country on Monday as part of military exercises ordered by Maduro. The government called its own separate rallies in downtown Caracas for Tuesday. Socialist Party Vice President Diosdado Cabello said the opposition's march was an attempt to rally its flagging energy. "Every time the right-wing is cornered, they look for events that can raise the excitement of people who stopped being excited a long time ago. They try to create leadership where there is none," Cabello said during Monday a news conference.

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MADRID (Reuters) -- The Spanish parliament on Tuesday rejected for the second time in two years a request by several parties to open an investigation into the business activities of former King Juan Carlos. Unidas Podemos, which is part of the government coalition together with Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's PSOE, had together with other smaller left-wing parties called for an inquiry into reports by Switzerland's La Tribune de Geneve. La Tribune wrote last week that Juan Carlos, who was king at the time, received \$100 million from Saudi Arabia's king 12 years ago, and later gave \$65 million to Corinna zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, a businesswoman whose close relation with Juna Carlos led to his abdication in 2014. According to La Tribune de Geneve, which cited unnamed sources, a Swiss prosecutor's office is investigating the origin of the bank transfer to zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, which it said came via a foundation in Panama.

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MOSCOW (AP) -- U.S. President Donald Trump will not be coming to Moscow for Victory Day celebrations on May 9, the Kremlin said Tuesday. Russia has repeatedly invited Trump to visit Moscow on the 75th anniversary of victory in World War II -- the nation's most important holiday. Trump said last year he appreciated the invitation, but wasn't sure if he could go as the celebration falls "right in the middle of political season." "Via diplomatic channels, we have received information that the (U.S.) president will not be coming," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Tuesday, adding that it remains unclear who will represent the U.S. on the Victory Day in Moscow. In an interview with the state-run Tass news agency, a part of which was released Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin said it would be "a mistake" for world leaders not to attend the Victory Day celebrations this year. "I think that, concerning former members of the anti-Hitler alliance, the right thing to do would be to attend (our event), from both a domestic political stance and a moral one," Putin said. "We look forward to seeing them and we will be glad if they come. If not, well, that's their choice. But I think that would be a mistake for them."

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KASTANIES, Greece (Reuters) -- Nearly 1,000 migrants tried to cross into Greece from Turkey in the past 24 hours despite tight border security, Greek officials said on Tuesday, suggesting little respite in a nearly two-week diplomatic lull-up between Ankara and the European Union. President Tayyip Erdogan, whose decision on Feb. 28 to open Turkey's borders to migrants wishing to leave triggered the crisis at the border, repeated on Tuesday his call for EU member state Greece to let the people through. In a briefing to reporters on the border, Greek officials said 963 people had been prevented from illegally crossing into Greece between 6 a.m. on Monday and 6 a.m. on Tuesday, with 52 of them arrested.

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PRAGUE (Reuters) -- China should replace its ambassador in the Czech Republic after the Chinese embassy sent a threatening letter to Czech authorities, Prime Minister Andrej Babis said, a position that may further strain relations between the two countries. In January, China's embassy in Prague said in a letter sent to the Czech president's office that Beijing would retaliate against Czech companies operating in China if a senior Czech lawmaker went ahead with a planned visit to Taiwan. The Jan. 10 letter suggested that Czech companies operating in mainland China, such as the Volkswagen subsidiary Skoda Auto and lender Home Credit Group, would suffer if then-Senate speaker Jaroslav Kubera visited the island. Kubera died before he could make the trip. His successor, Milos Vystrel, is likely to push for China to replace the ambassador, and Babis would support such a demand, Czech Television reported. Four top Czech officials, including President Milos Zeman, who has pushed for closer ties with China in recent years, will meet on Wednesday for a regular debate on foreign policy, where they are expected to address the matter.