

# Ukraine President Calls Up Reservists for Service



Troops at a command point during an exercise by Russian assault forces in Crimea, on March 19, 2021.

KYIV (Dispatches) -- Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has signed a law allowing reservists to be called up for military service without announcing mobilization, his office said on Wednesday.

Approved by parliament late in March, the measure makes it possible to significantly boost the armed forces, amid escalation of tension with Russia in eastern Ukraine.

"This will make it possible to quickly equip the military units of all defense forces with reservists, thereby significantly increasing their combat effectiveness during military aggression," the office said.

On Tuesday, Zelenskyy challenged

his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, to meet him in the Donbass region for talks to end the conflict there and ease tension between the neighbors.

Kyiv and Moscow have traded blame over increasing clashes in the Donbass, where Ukrainian troops have battled pro-Russian forces in a conflict that Ukraine says has killed 14,000 people since 2014.

Ukraine, its Western allies and NATO have accused Russia of a "provocative" build-up of troops on Ukraine's eastern border and in Crimea. In turn, Russia has accused the United States and NATO of "provocative activity" in the Black Sea region.

Russia on Tuesday restricted civil-

ian flights over the Black Sea and the Crimean Peninsula, amid rising tensions with Ukraine and its Western supporters.

"The area has been declared temporarily dangerous for aircraft flights," Interfax news agency reported, citing an alert to pilots.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the flight restrictions an "absolutely normal world practice" in a press briefing on the same day.

Russia's Defense Ministry previously said it had closed off navigation in parts of the Black Sea to foreign military and commercial ships from mid-April until the end of October for naval and aviation drills.

The flight restrictions come amid an escalation of tensions between Russia and the United States and NATO over Ukraine.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Kubela Dmytro has claimed that 120,000 Russian troops have been deployed to the country's border within a week.

Dmytro said a regiment of Russian paratroopers had also been stationed in Crimea in what appeared to be a permanent deployment.

Russia says the troop build-up is a response to heightened NATO activity near its borders in Ukraine. Moscow has warned that the U.S. and NATO are turning Ukraine into a "powder keg" by increasing arms supplies to Kiev and inflaming tensions in the country's volatile east, where government forces are fighting ethnic Russians.

# Pandemic Exposes Severe Income Shock of UK Families



People shop at market stalls, with skyscrapers of the City of London, Britain financial district seen behind, in London.

LONDON (AP) — Households in Britain, especially poorer ones, are far more likely to have suffered a severe income shock during the coronavirus pandemic over the past year than their counterparts in France and Germany, a well-respected British-based think tank said Wednesday.

The Resolution Foundation also said that households in the UK are also more likely to have run up more debt in response to the financial shockwaves emanating from the pandemic.

In a report, which was entitled "After Shocks" and was supported by U.S. investment bank JPMorgan Chase, researchers said typical household incomes in the UK, France and Germany were broadly similar in the year before the pandemic but that higher levels of inequality and a weaker safety net meant the poorest fifth of British households entered the crisis in a weaker financial position.

"These holes in UK households' financial resilience have been exposed during the COVID-19 crisis," said Maja Gustafsson, an economist at the Resolution Foundation.

The report found that among households in which at least one person had fallen out of work, 41% of British households had suffered a severe income fall of at least 25%, substan-

tially more than the 20% recorded in France and 28% in Germany. It also found that 33% of British households have cut back their spending, more than the 23% recorded in France and 21% in Germany.

The report also found that British households with an income hit were also twice as likely to have taken on more debt during the pandemic to cover living expenses than German and French households, with the proportion of households doing so at 17%, 9% and 8% respectively.

The foundation said the uneven impact of the pandemic on household finances was likely to last far longer than the pandemic itself, with a higher proportion of lowest-income households drawing on savings or taking on debt to support living standards compared with the highest-income households.

By several measures, the British economy suffered one of the deepest and most protracted recessions in the developed world in the wake of the pandemic, with the economy shrinking around 10% in 2020. Many blame that on the Conservative government's repeated failures to back lockdown restrictions early enough, delays that have contributed to the UK recording more than 127,000 coronavirus-related deaths, Europe's highest.

## News in Brief

**BENGALURU (Reuters)** - India reported more than 2,000 deaths from COVID-19 over the last 24 hours, the highest single-day tally for the country so far, health ministry data showed on Wednesday. Coronavirus infections also rose by a record, increasing by 295,041 over the last 24 hours, the data showed. Total deaths reached 182,553. India's overall case tally is now at 15.6 million, second only to the United States, which has over 31 million infections. At least 22 patients died in a hospital in western India after a disruption to their oxygen supply caused by a leaking tank, the health minister said, as a nationwide surge in coronavirus cases soaks up supplies of the crucial gas. The incident in the city of Nashik, one of India's worst-hit areas, happened after the tank of gas leaked, said Rajesh Tope, the health minister of Maharashtra, the richest state, where the city is located. "Patients who were on ventilators at the hospital in Nashik have died," Tope said in televised remarks. "The leakage was spotted at the tank supplying oxygen to these patients. The interrupted supply could be linked to the deaths of the patients in the hospital."

**MONTREAL (Reuters)** -- The Canadian province of Quebec said it would appeal a court ruling that exempts some teachers and provincial politicians from a controversial law that bans public employees from wearing religious symbols. The ruling, which upheld most of a 2019 law, stops it from applying to educators in Quebec's minority English-language school boards since they hold special rights over education under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Quebec Justice Minister Simon Jolin-Barrette said the decision would be appealed to ensure that it applies to all. The law still prohibits many civil servants, including judges and police officers, from wearing religious symbols such as hijabs and turbans on the job. The Quebec government has said the law was designed to preserve secularism in the mainly French-speaking province.

**WASHINGTON (Reuters)** -- White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the Biden administration expects to set "a large cap soon" for how many refugees it will accept in the remaining months of this fiscal year. President Joe Biden last Friday drew criticism by sticking to a refugee cap of 15,000 set by his predecessor, Donald Trump. The White House backtracked in response to the criticism and said it would set a higher cap by mid-May. Psaki told reporters on Tuesday that the administration will set "a large cap soon," probably before May 15. The 2021 fiscal year ends at the end of September.

**SEOUL, South Korea (AP)** -- A South Korean court on Wednesday rejected a claim by South Korean sexual slavery victims and their relatives who sought compensation from the Japanese government over their wartime sufferings. The Seoul Central District Court based its decision on diplomatic considerations and principles of international law that grant states immunity from jurisdiction of foreign courts. This appeared to align with the position maintained by Tokyo, which had boycotted the court proceedings and insists all wartime compensation issues were settled under a 1965 treaty normalizing relations with South Korea. Activists representing sexual slavery victims denounced the decision and said the Seoul Central District Court was ignoring their struggles to restore the women's honor and dignity. They said in a statement that the plaintiffs would appeal. The estranged U.S. allies spent years escalating their feud in public over issues stemming from Japan's brutal occupation of Korea through end of World War II before facing pressure from the Biden administration to mend.

**ALGIERS (Reuters)** -- Islamic parties in Algeria expect to win parliamentary elections in June and take a major role in government, part of a strategy to gradually build clout within a system long dominated by a secular military that regards them with distrust. While the military will retain ultimate power, the Islamic parties are taking advantage of political ructions caused by the mass protests that forced out veteran president Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 2019. The largely secular Hirak protest movement still holds weekly demonstrations to demand a full purge of the old ruling elite and is boycotting the election, viewing it as a charade so long as the military and its allies hold ultimate power. This leaves the way clear for the Islamic groups to win votes from the old nationalist parties, which had senior officials jailed for corruption after the protests, but which are still associated with Bouteflika.

**PRAGUE (Reuters)** -- The Czech Republic will ask European Union and NATO allies to take action in solidarity with Prague in its row with Moscow, including expelling Russian intelligence officers from their countries, acting Foreign Minister Jan Hamacek said. The Central European country on Saturday evicted 18 Russian Embassy staff, whom it identified as intelligence services, over suspicions that Russian secret services were behind explosions at a privately operated arms depot in 2014. Moscow has denied any of its agents were involved in the blast, which killed two people, branding the Czech stance a provocation, and expelled 20 Czech diplomats and other staff in retaliation. The dispute is the biggest between Prague and Moscow since the end of Soviet domination of Eastern Europe in 1989, and comes amid growing tensions between Russia and the West.

# Duterte Threatens to Deploy Troops to South China Sea



Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte gestures during his fourth State of the Nation address at the Philippine Congress in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines, July 22, 2019.

MANILA (Dispatches) -- Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has threatened to deploy military forces to the South China Sea to stop China from claiming natural resources in the contested waters.

Duterte made the remark in a televised address late Monday, while noting that a conflict with China would not end "without any bloodshed" and Manila might not be able to win such a confrontation.

"If we go there to assert our jurisdiction, it will be bloody," Duterte said. "We can retake it only by force."

There is no way we can get back

what they call the Philippine Sea without any bloodshed," he said.

The Philippine president said he was "not so much interested" in confronting China over fishing rights in the disputed waterway.

"I'm not so much interested now in fishing. I don't think there's enough fish to quarrel about," Duterte said.

"But when we start to mine, when we start to get whatever it is in the bowels of the China Sea, our oil, by that time, I will send my grey ships there to stake a claim," he said, referring to Philippine naval ships.

"If they start drilling oil there, I will

tell China, is that part of our agreement? If that is not part of our agreement, I will also drill oil there," he said. "If they get the oil, that would be the time that we should act on it."

The latest development comes at a time of heightened tensions over the disputed South China Sea islands between the two countries in the past weeks.

Duterte's hostile remarks come even though he had tried to seek rapprochement and cooperation with China since coming to power some five years ago.

Earlier this month, the Philippines accused China of scattering "maritime militia" inside the Philippines' 200-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) at Whitsun Reef in the South China Sea.

China has rejected the claim, saying the boats were sheltering from rough seas and no militias were on board.

The United States, which sides with Beijing's rival claimants in the maritime dispute, routinely sends warships and warplanes to the South China Sea to assert what it calls its "right" to "freedom of navigation," ratcheting up tensions with China.

Beijing has constantly warned the U.S. against its military activities in the sea, saying that potential close military encounters by the air and naval forces of the two countries in the region could easily trigger accidents.

# Rebels Seek to March on Chad Capital After Deby Killed

N'DJAMENA (Reuters) -- Rebel forces set their sights on Chad's capital N'Djamena on Wednesday following the battlefield death of President Idriss Deby, threatening to bring more disruption to a country vital to international efforts to combat militants in Africa.

Schools and some businesses were open in N'Djamena on Wednesday but many people had opted to stay home and the streets were quiet, a Reuters witness said.

Authorities imposed a nightly curfew and closed land and air borders after Deby's death was announced. A 14-day period of national mourning is being observed.

Deby, 68, died on Monday on the frontline in a battle against Libya-based fighters, shocking the nation and raising concerns among Western allies.

He had been in power since 1990 and had just been announced winner of a presidential election that would have given him a sixth term in office. His son, Mahamat Idriss Deby, has been named interim president by a transitional council of military officers.

Deby, who often joined soldiers on the battlefield in his military fatigues, was visiting troops after rebel group Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) invaded from Libya and advanced hundreds of miles towards the capital.

FACT rejected the military's transition plan and said they would press on with their offensive on the capital. "Chad is not a monarchy. There can be no dynastic devo-

lution of power in our country," FACT said in a statement. Opposition politicians also called for a move back to civilian rule.

Deby had won friends abroad by sending his well-trained army to fight takfiris including Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin and groups linked to Al-Qaeda and Daesh in the Sahel.

His main ally, France, has about 5,100 troops based across the region, including its main base in N'Djamena.

His death poses questions about stability in the region and inside Chad itself. As well as the rebel threat, the military is divided and the opposition to Deby's authoritarian rule had been growing.

"The potentially explosive consequences of President Deby's death cannot be underestimated -- both for the future of Chad and across the region," Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

The New York-based organization said the military council must respect human rights and ensure that civilians were protected. It also called for a swift transition to democratic civilian rule, and free and fair elections.

"For years, international players have propped up Deby's government for its support for counterterrorism operations... while largely turning a blind eye to his legacy of repression and violations of social and economic rights at home," HRW said in a statement.