

# PM Truss Apologizes for Threatening UK Economy



Liz Truss, the British prime minister, speaks about her decisions at a news conference.

LONDON (Reuters) -- Prime Minister Liz Truss apologized for threatening Britain's economic stability after she was forced to scrap her vast tax-cutting plans and embark on a program of "eye-watering" public spending cuts instead. After weeks of blaming the markets and "global headwinds" for investors dumping the pound and government bonds, Truss said she was sorry for going "too far and too fast" with her radical economic plan to snap Britain out of years of stagnant growth. Markets, plunged into turmoil after her Sept. 23 "mini-budget", are still under strain even after Truss's finance minister Jeremy Hunt tore up her plans on Monday. It was also not clear whether Truss's apology would quell a growing rebellion in her gov-

erning Conservative Party, with a handful of lawmakers calling for her to quit, while dozens of others are fearing they will lose their jobs in a new election. Even one of her ministers said she could not afford to make any more mistakes - something that could be difficult when her government looks for deep savings. Already Hunt has refused to guarantee the budgets of departments like health and defense. Truss's decision to pull her economic program has so far eased some of the pressure on Britain's elevated borrowing costs, but the scale of the reversal means she is now fighting to survive, just six weeks after she became prime minister. The withdrawal of a two-year energy support scheme plus possible changes to pension and welfare benefit levels means the

country's looming recession is expected to deepen, as households struggle with surging energy and food costs. "I do want to accept responsibility and say sorry for the mistakes that have been made," Truss told the BBC late on Monday. "I wanted to act to help people with their energy bills, to deal with the issue of high taxes, but we went too far and too fast." She added she was "sticking around" and that she would lead the Conservatives into the next election due in about two years time, although the statement was accompanied by a laugh. Truss watched silently in parliament on Monday as Hunt demolished the radical economic agenda she proposed less than a month ago, and which triggered a bond market rout so deep that the Bank of England had to intervene to prevent pension funds from collapsing. For some in the party, the sight of a prime minister humbled in parliament did little to offer any confidence she could fight on. The Daily Mail, which had hailed Truss's plan, ran a front page with the prime minister leaving parliament on Monday underneath the headline "In office, but not in power" while the also supportive Sun newspaper called her "The Ghost PM". James Heappey, a minister for the armed forces, said Truss, his boss, could not afford to make any more mistakes. "To her credit, she has owned it and apologized," he told Sky News.

## UK Warns Pilots Against Training Chinese Army



UK media said that China had recruited over 30 ex-pilots from Britain, with offers upwards of £240,000.

LONDON (AFP) -- The UK government said on Tuesday it was taking "decisive steps" against a Chinese recruitment effort to bring in former and serving British airforce pilots to train its military personnel. While British military personnel frequently take part in training exercises with foreign armies, any collusion by ex-pilots with China -- which London has dubbed the "number one threat" to domestic and global security -- poses a serious concern. "We are taking decisive

steps to stop Chinese recruitment schemes attempting to headhunt serving and former UK Armed Forces pilots to train People's Liberation Army personnel," a spokesperson for the British defense ministry told AFP. UK media said that over 30 ex-pilots had accepted offers upwards of £240,000 (\$273,750) with many of those recruited in their 50s and having recently left the British airforce. The practice has been going on since 2019 but has been stepped up recently, the reports

said. Britain's defense ministry said it was "reviewing the use of confidentiality contracts and non-disclosure agreements", adding that all serving and former personnel are subject to the Official Secrets Act, which prohibits UK public servants from sharing state secrets with foreign powers. "The new National Security Bill will create additional tools to tackle contemporary security challenges -- including this one," the spokesperson added. China's Ministry of National Defense did not respond to calls requesting comment from AFP. Relations between London and Beijing have soured following China's crackdown in former UK colony Hong Kong and disputes over technology giant Huawei's involvement in the roll-out of Britain's 5G network, as well as concerns about human rights and influence peddling. In a speech in London this month, the director of Britain's GCHQ spy agency Jeremy Fleming warned China's growing technological dominance "is an increasingly urgent problem" for Western countries, urging them to act to defend their values and influence.

## Australia Braces for Bigger Crisis Amid Rains

SYDNEY (Reuters) -- Thousands of residents across southeast Australia braced for renewed flooding on Tuesday as weather forecasters warned of more downpours later this week, while swollen rivers continued to roll downstream inundating farms, towns and homes. Australia's longest river, the Murray, which straddles the border between the two most populous states of New South Wales and Victoria, could hit a near 30-year high on Friday around the border towns of Echuca and Moama, home to more than 20,000, the Bureau of Meteorology said in its latest update. In Moama, about 200km north of Melbourne, emergency crews ramped up the delivery of sandbags and set up rescue centers to help shelter hundreds of evacuated residents. Several thousand more in northern Victoria and southern New South Wales have been warned to prepare to leave their homes. Despite the wild weather having eased, major flood warnings remain across wide swaths of southeast after the region received more than a month's total rainfall over two

days last week. "Our dams are full, our rivers are full, so we do expect this to be a difficult time. And even if the skies are blue... please be ready to leave, be ready to evacuate," New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet said during a media briefing. More rain is expected from late Wednesday in some of the flood-hit region with a low-pressure system expected to dump up to 50mm of rain. Federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers has warned flooding in growing areas could push up food prices and flagged more relief spending ahead of a budget due next week. "When some of the best farmland in the world goes underwater that has obvious consequences for crops ... it has consequences for cost of living around Australia too," he said. Plant- and dairy-based beverage maker Nouri, which processes milk at a facility in the flooded town of Shepparton, has flagged operations were running at reduced capacity amid media reports dairy farmers were dumping milk after farms were cut off by rising water.

## Ukraine Says Third of Its Power Stations Destroyed



Smoke rises after Russian shelling in Kyiv, Ukraine, Oct. 18, 2022.

KYIV/MYKOLAIV, Ukraine (Dispatches) -- Ukraine said Russia had destroyed almost a third of its power stations over the past week as Moscow stepped up a pre-winter campaign to strike infrastructure. Missiles struck power generating facilities in a clutch of Ukrainian cities and several people were killed. Moscow acknowledged targeting energy plants, while Ukraine said water infrastructure had also been hit. "The situation is critical now across the country ... the whole country needs to prepare for electricity, water and heating outages," Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of the Ukrainian president's office, told Ukrainian television. "Since Oct 10, 30% of Ukraine's power stations have been destroyed, causing massive blackouts across the country," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky wrote on Twitter. Power cuts were reported in parts of Kyiv, many parts of the Zhytomyr region west of the capital and Dnipro, which, like Mykolaiv, is in the south but also far from the front line where Ukraine is pressing Russian forces. Zelensky reiterated his refusal to negotiate with Russian President Vladimir Putin whom he has accused of immorality. Putin has dismissed Zelensky as a puppet of Washington, which has given

Kyiv more than \$17.5 billion in security aid. There was no immediate word on how many people had been killed in Tuesday's strikes overall, which came a day after Russia sent swarms of drones to attack infrastructure in Kyiv and other cities, killing at least five people. The Russian defense ministry, whose troops have this month been forced to retreat on two separate fronts, reiterated that it was carrying out attacks on military targets and energy infrastructure across Ukraine with high-precision weapons. Russia earlier this month named General Sergei Surovkin as overall commander of Moscow's forces in Ukraine. Surovkin served in Syria and Chechnya. Nicknamed "General Armageddon" by the Russian media because of his alleged toughness, his appointment was followed by the biggest wave of missile strikes against Ukraine since Moscow invaded on Feb. 24. Putin cast those strikes as revenge for what he said was a Ukrainian attack on the bridge which links Russia to Crimea - the peninsula Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014. At least three people were killed in the bombing for which Ukraine has not officially taken responsibility.

## Blinken: China to Seize Taiwan on Much Faster Timeline



In a nearly two-hour speech on Sunday, Chinese President Xi Jinping outlined his vision for the country for the next five years.

SAN FRANCISCO (Dispatches) -- Beijing wants to seize Taiwan "on a much faster timeline" than previously considered, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, claiming that President Xi Jinping was leading China in a more aggressive direction. Xi is on the cusp of securing a third five-year term at the helm of the world's most populous nation, delivering a landmark Communist Party Congress speech on Sunday that hailed his decade in power and restated his vow to one day "reunify," or forcefully take, Taiwan. "We've seen a very different China emerge in recent years under Xi Jinping's leadership," Blinken told a forum at Stanford University with former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice. Blinken accused Xi of "creating tremendous tension" by changing the approach toward self-ruled Taiwan, which China's Communist Party has never controlled but claims as its own. He said China had made a "fundamental decision that the status quo was no longer acceptable, and that Beijing was determined to pursue reunification on a much faster timeline," though he gave no hard estimate or date. China's stance has long been that it seeks "peaceful reunification" with Taiwan but reserves the right to use force if necessary, especially if the island formally declares independence. But the rhetoric and actions towards Tai-

wan have become more pronounced under Xi. He has tied taking Taiwan to his vision of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" and has previously said the goal of reunification cannot continue to be passed indefinitely from generation to generation. In Sunday's speech, he repeated similar themes, saying the "wheels of history are rolling on towards China's reunification" and that "we reserve the option of taking all measures necessary." Ties between Washington and Beijing have been at a decade-low ebb under both the administrations of Donald Trump and his successor President Joe Biden, over a range of issues from trade to security and human rights. But Blinken said the world's two largest economies should be willing to cooperate on shared interests. China cut cooperation with the United States on climate change and drug trafficking in August as part of its protest against U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, which also saw Beijing launch its biggest military drills yet around the island. Responding to Blinken's speech, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin accused Washington of altering its own approach to Taiwan, citing examples such as Pelosi's visit and recent arms sales. "Peacefully resolving the Taiwan issue cannot coexist with Taiwan separatism," Wang said.

## News in Brief

HONG KONG/BEIJING (Reuters) -- China on Tuesday accused "disturbing elements" of illegally entering its consulate in Manchester, following an incident on Sunday in which a Hong Kong protester was seen being pulled into the mission's grounds and beaten up. British police are investigating the incident, which occurred during a demonstration against Chinese President Xi Jinping. Officers entered the consulate grounds to rescue a man who they said "was dragged" inside and assaulted by several men. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin commented on the incident during a regular news conference in Beijing. "Disturbing elements illegally entered the Chinese Consulate General in Manchester and endangered the security of Chinese diplomatic premises," he said in response to a question. "Diplomatic institutions of any country have the right to take the necessary measures to safeguard the peace and dignity of their premises," he added. \*\*\* NEW DELHI (Reuters) -- An India-Russia joint venture that makes nuclear capable supersonic cruise missiles hopes to bag orders worth \$3 billion by 2025, its chairman said on Tuesday, having signed its first export deal of \$375 million this year with the Philippines. BrahMos Aerospace is in discussions with Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam for new orders, chairman Atul D Rane told Reuters partner ANI on Tuesday. The joint venture, with a 50.5% Indian and 49.5% Russian partnership, fits into Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship make-in-India program. India has made Russian MiG fighter planes and Su-30 jets under license and the two have collaborated to make BrahMos missiles in India. Russia has also traditionally been India's main arms supplier. In April last year, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had said the two countries were discussing "additional" production of Russian military equipment in India. India, which has not explicitly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has also emerged as Moscow's second-largest oil customer after China as Indian refiners snap up discounted Russian oil shunned by some Western buyers. \*\*\* LONDON (Reuters) -- A road in the centre of London's government district, near Downing Street where Prime Minister Liz Truss's office and residence is, was closed on Tuesday due to a suspicious package, a policeman at the scene said. A government official said some of the government buildings along Whitehall were being emptied. A Reuters reporter said hundreds of people were gathered at Horse Guards Parade, behind Downing Street. \*\*\* WARSAW (Reuters) -- Poland is not afraid of losing European Union (EU) funds, Polish Prime Minister said on Tuesday, a day after the European Commission warned it could forfeit most development money unless the court system is fixed. "I do not think that the funds from the EU - the cohesion funds, the agricultural funds, and the funds for innovations and others - are at risk," Mateusz Morawiecki said during a press conference. \*\*\* ROME (Reuters) -- Italy's next cabinet is taking shape after rightist leader Giorgia Meloni, set to be appointed prime minister, defused tensions with her coalition partner Silvio Berlusconi over key ministerial posts. Meloni's Brothers of Italy party led a right-wing alliance including Berlusconi's Forza Italia and Matteo Salvini's League to victory in last month's election, promising political stability in the country after years of short-lived governments. However, tensions have been running high in the alliance after most Forza Italia senators refused last week to back the election of Ignazio La Russa from Brothers of Italy as Senate speaker. Political sources said Berlusconi was furious with Meloni due to her reluctance to accept some of his demands on cabinet positions, but the two leaders appeared to have settled their differences at a meeting on Monday. \*\*\* TUNIS (Reuters) - A southern Tunisian coastal town was paralyzed by protests on Tuesday amid growing anger over the fate of people who drowned in a migrant shipwreck last month, with some buried in unmarked graves. The powerful UGTT labor union called a general strike in Zarzis on Tuesday, bringing to a head days of smaller protests to demand authorities do more to find missing bodies and improve living conditions. Images showed the streets of Zarzis packed with protesters chanting anti-authority slogans with shops and government institutions closed. As the economy has lagged and public finances run into crisis amid political upheaval, many Tunisians have taken to often rickety boats to join the illegal migration route to Europe. Dozens have died this year in shipwrecks as boats attempted the journey from Tunisia's eastern coast to the Italian island of Lampedusa. \*\*\* ADDIS ABABA (AFP) -- Tigrayan rebels said Tuesday that Ethiopian army and Eritrean forces had seized a key Tigrayan city, a move coinciding with UN warnings of a spiraling conflict and an "utterly staggering" toll on civilians. The Tigray Central Command said in a statement that the rebels were in a "life or death" struggle. It said the joint forces had entered Shire, a strategic city of about 100,000 people which lies about 300 kilometers (180 miles) by road northwest of the Tigrayan capital Mekele, on Monday. "The enemies are massacring our people with heavy weaponry/armaments in the areas it invades," the statement said. It is not possible to verify battlefield claims as Tigray is under a communications blackout and access to northern Ethiopia is restricted for journalists. The conflict began in November 2020, when Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray after accusing the region's ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) of attacking federal army camps.