

**ON MY WATCH**

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# UKRAINE WAR AND EMERGING FOOD CRISIS

While three summits take place in Brussels on war in Ukraine - NAT, G7, and European Union - all attended by US President Joe Biden, and Russia not keen on any ceasefire until it takes full control of the Southern border of Ukraine, an emerging food crisis poses a threat to many countries away from the Ukraine - Russia war.

One month after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, the war is starting to have devastating effects not only on the ground, but in many countries that rely on Ukraine's important wheat production. The United Nations has warned of a "hunger hurricane", which is already starting to be felt in Northern Africa.

On March 14, the UN's Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a stark warning about the wider threats of the war in Ukraine: world hunger. "We must do everything possible to avert a hurricane of hunger and a meltdown of the global food system," he said.

The head of the World Food Programme, has also warned that: "The bullets and bombs in Ukraine could take the global hunger crisis to catastrophic levels. Supply chains and food prices will be dramatically impacted."

Ukraine, along with Southwestern Russia, has long been known as "Europe's breadbasket" thanks to the region's rich dark soil, chernozem, among the most fertile in the world. The region accounts for about 15 percent of the world's wheat production, and nearly 30 percent of world exports. The two countries, Russia and Ukraine account for 80 percent of the world's sunflower oil production, and Ukraine is the world's fourth largest exporter of maize.

As the fighting in Ukraine continues and the Russian offensive intensifies along the Black Sea coastline, these important crop producers have now been cut off from the world. "Nothing is leaving the Ukrainian ports anymore, and it is impossible to know what the country will be able to produce and harvest in the coming months" say analysts of the current situation.

The conflict is causing concerns for the many countries that depend on Ukrainian wheat and are increasingly worried they will soon be unable to feed their people.

Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria have already started to feel the sting of the wheat-shortage. The Maghreb countries depend heavily on Ukrainian wheat. For Egypt, it's reportedly catastrophic, with Egypt being the world's largest importer of wheat and gets 60 percent of its imports from Russia and 40 percent from Ukraine."

Algeria is trying to fend off the crisis by implementing preventative measures: The government has banned the export of semolina, pasta and other wheat products to safeguard its raw material stocks. "But Algiers has an advantage: They export oil, the price of which is reaching record highs. This gives them the capacity to buy wheat, even with rising prices," Abis said.

North Africa is not the only region affected by the wheat shortage. Indonesia is the world's second largest buyer of Ukrainian wheat, and Pakistan, Turkey, and several countries in Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa depend on it as well.

There is much concern about certain West African countries where cereal stocks are very low, especially in Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal, with current prices for cereals being unsustainable. On Wednesday, the UN called for US\$ 4.3 billion in funds to help more than 17 million people in Yemen, saying the war in Ukraine could make the situation in the country - which has been plagued by war since 2014 - even worse. According to the UN, some 161,000 people in Yemen are likely to experience "catastrophic - or famine-like - levels of hunger" in the second half of this year.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that an additional 8-13 million people worldwide face undernourishment if food exports from Ukraine and Russia are stopped permanently.

Faced with this threat, and the possibility of new "hunger riots" which broke out in several countries in 2008 over soaring grain prices, French Agriculture Minister Julien Denormandie has called on the European Union to cover for the lost Ukraine wheat. "Europe must produce more," he said in an interview with French radio station France Inter on Tuesday, adding it must "take on the mission of providing sustenance".

**ZELENSKY'S CALL**

The Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has called for citizens worldwide to take to the streets "in the name of peace" and hold global protests against Russia's bloody war, one month after the invasion began.

Zelenskiy's appeal came as Western leaders prepared to hold a series of emergency summits in Europe that aim to ratchet up pressure on the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, to end the war.

In a late-night television address from the emptied streets of his nation's besieged capital, Kyiv, a defiant but visibly tired Zelenskiy said on Thursday Ukraine was "waiting for meaningful steps" from the three gatherings - NATO, EU and European Council - and listed some so-far unheeded requests, such as a no-fly zone, aircraft, and tanks. "Our firm position will be represented at these three summits. At these three summits we will see: Who is a friend, who is a partner, and who betrayed us for money."

"The world must stop the war," he said in English. "Come from your offices, your homes, your schools and universities, come in the name of peace, come with Ukrainian symbols to support Ukraine, to support freedom, to support life."

Zelenskiy, who will speak to NATO members by video, also said he is asking the alliance to provide "effective and unrestricted" support to Ukraine, including any weapons the country needs to fend off the Russian invasion. NATO earlier announced it will double its troops along the alliance's Eastern flank, beginning the deployment of four new battle groups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia.

Western leaders remain concerned about any possible escalation in the conflict. NATO countries are expected to agree at Thursday's summit to provide a special kit to protect Ukraine against any chemical, biological or nuclear attacks launched by Russia.

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's Secretary General, also told Russia to stop engaging in "nuclear sabre-rattling" and repeated warnings that the Kremlin could be seeking "a pretext" for using chemical weapons as the war heads into a second month.

In other developments: US is expected to announce a new package of Russia sanctions on Thursday, targeting politicians and oligarchs. More Russian banks and state enterprises may also be added to a blacklist, cutting them off from using the Belgium-based Swift financial messaging system.

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On the eve of a meeting with Biden, European Union nations signed off on another €500m (US\$ 550m) in military aid for Ukraine.

The UK will double the number of missiles it sends to Ukraine and urge Western allies to step up provisions of lethal aid to the country. Boris Johnson said the UK would provide 6,000 new defensive missiles, including high-explosive weapons, and £25m from Foreign Office funds to help Ukraine pay its military and police forces.

Zelenskiy said: "This is a war for independence, and we must win."... "We will rebuild every city, we will bring the invaders to justice for every crime," he said. "All our people will live in a free Ukraine."

**COMING FRENCH ELECTIONS**

Although French President Emmanuel Macron appears to have lost ground slightly in the latest opinion poll released by Elabe on Tuesday, with two and a half weeks to go until the election, he remains out in front ahead of far-right candidate Marine Le Pen and far-left leader Jean-Luc Melancon. The other rival candidates are struggling to get above ten percent.

Although he lost 3.5% of voting intentions since a poll carried out last week (by BFMTV, L'Express and SFR), incumbent President Macron is still ahead with 27.5% according to the latest opinion poll released by Elabe on Tuesday.

Marine Le Pen moved forward by two points and is now on 20% while Jean-Luc Melancon came in at 15%, a point ahead of last week.

On Thursday last week, Macron unveiled his manifesto, pledging among other things, further tax cuts, reforms to the welfare system and major public investments.

One who is rising in the polls, the French election's dark horse Jean-Luc Melancon has promised a reboot of the French Republic, vowing to over-



UN's Secretary-General  
**Antonio Guterres**



NATO Secretary General  
**Jens Stoltenberg**



Ukrainian President  
**Volodymyr Zelenskiy**



French President  
**Emmanuel Macron**



Pakistani Prime Minister  
**Imran Khan**



UK Prime Minister  
**Boris Johnson**

haul a presidential regime that he blames for mounting abstention, disillusion and increasingly violent protests.

Last Sunday's "March for the Sixth Republic" marked the third such rally since Melancon first ran for the presidency a decade ago. It was a chance for the hard-left candidate to flex his muscles as he continues his slow but steady rise in the polls, five years after he narrowly missed out on a place in the all-important presidential run-off.

The promise of a new Republic allowed Melancon to reach beyond his core support, drawing people for whom an overhaul of France's Constitution is the priority. Among them was 32-year-old dance teacher Helene Lallemand, who quipped that she showed up "despite Melancon, rather than because of him".

"It is up to the people to write their Constitution, not a Cabinet of experts," Melancon roared moments later as he addressed the crowd, promising to "breathe new life into a country that is dying a slow death through abstention."

Apathy and disillusion have translated into a steady decline in participation at French elections - leading up to the dismal 35% turnout registered at regional polls last year, in which the pandemic also played a part. Last week, a study commissioned by French daily Le Monde found that fewer than 70% of French voters were certain they would take part in the first round on April 10. The number dropped to 53% for the 18-24 age group.

**PAKISTAN - IMRAN KHAN POSER**

Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan is fighting for his political survival after opposition political parties have moved for a no-confidence

motion in Parliament and the country's powerful military has withdrawn its support for his government. Mr. Khan, the former cricket-star-turned-politician, has announced plans to gather a million supporters in Islamabad, appealed to the Supreme Court to disqualify lawmakers who have defected from his party and denounced his critics as part of an American-influenced conspiracy. But as demands for his resignation mount, critics and analysts say he has lost his majority in Parliament and these measures are unlikely to change that.

"He rightly senses that the end could be near," said Arif Rafiq, President of Vizier Consulting, a political risk advisory company in New York. "And he's a fighter. But it simply just doesn't look like he'll have the numbers to survive a vote of no confidence."

Pakistan, the world's second-largest Muslim country, has been a reluctant if an important American partner in the campaign against terrorism. A nuclear-armed country that backs the Taliban Government in neighbouring Afghanistan, it has drifted further from the United States under Khan, embracing a strategic partnership with China and closer ties with Russia.

But the political threats to Khan are primarily domestic. Pakistan has been buffeted by double-digit inflation, leading to widespread dissatisfaction and fueling criticism that he has mismanaged the economy.

Three major allied political parties that are part of the governing coalition have now indicated that they could side with the Opposition in the Parliamentary vote. That would be enough to topple Khan's Government.

Opposition leaders also claim to have the support of dozens of dissidents within Khan's Party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. Last week, his party was rocked by the defection of at least

a dozen lawmakers who accused their leader of failing to tackle inflation.

"The ruling coalition has effectively lost the majority," Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, a senator belonging to the opposition Pakistan Peoples Party, said in an interview. "The military also appears to be uninterested in saving Imran Khan. The baggage of economic mismanagement is too much to carry."

Khan was elected in 2018, running as a nationalist promising to fight corruption, put the country's anemic economy back on track and maintain an independent, anti-American foreign policy. But aside from the last, he has struggled to fulfill those promises.

In a typically blistering political speech "I am not here to check tomato and potato prices, but to raise a nation," he said at a rally in Hafizabad this month. He has accused the Opposition of "being bought with looted money" and, to the delight of his supporters, refers to the three main opposition parties as the "three stooges" or "the three mice."

**AFGHAN SCHOOLS VS TALIBAN**

The Taliban has ordered girls' secondary schools in Afghanistan to shut Wednesday just hours after they reopened, in a policy reversal by the hardline Islamist group. Crestfallen students, back at school for the first time since the Taliban seized power in August last year, tearfully packed up their belongings and filed out.

"I see my students crying and reluctant to leave classes," said Palwasha, a teacher at Omra Khan girls' school in Kabul. "It is very painful to see your students crying."

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has called on the Taliban authorities to open schools for all students, without any further delay.

The Sec. Gen said: I deeply regret

today's announcement by Taliban authorities in Afghanistan that girls' education from the sixth grade has been suspended until further notice.

The start of the new school year has been anticipated by all students, girls and boys, and parents and families. The *de facto* authorities' failure to reopen schools for girls above the sixth grade, despite repeated commitments, is a profound disappointment and deeply damaging for Afghanistan. The denial of education not only violates the equal rights of women and girls to education, it also jeopardizes the country's future in view of the tremendous contributions by Afghan women and girls.

I urge the Taliban *de facto* authorities to open schools for all students without any further delay.

When the Taliban took over last August, schools were closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but only boys and younger girls were allowed to resume classes two months later.

There were fears the Taliban would shut down all formal education for girls, as they did during their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001.

The international community has made the right to education for all a sticking point in negotiations over aid and recognition of the new Taliban regime, with several nations and organisations offering to pay teachers.

The Education Ministry said reopening the schools was always a government objective and the Taliban were not bowing to international pressure. "We are doing it as part of our responsibility to provide education and other facilities to our students," Ministry Spokesman Rayan told AFP Tuesday.

The Taliban had insisted they wanted to ensure schools for girls aged 12 to 19 were segregated and would operate according to Islamic principles. They have imposed a slew of restrictions on women, effectively banning them from many government jobs, policing what they wear and preventing them from travelling outside of their cities alone.

Human Rights Watch also raised the issue of the few avenues girls are given to apply their education. "Why would you and your family make huge sacrifices for you to study if you can never have the career you dreamed of?" said Sahar Fetrat, an assistant researcher with the group.

**MYANMAR - ROHINGYA KILLINGS**

The US has declared Myanmar's mass killing of the Rohingya Muslim population to be a "genocide".

The Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, made the announcement at the Holocaust Memorial Museum. "The United States has concluded that genocide has been committed seven times. Today marks the eighth. I have determined that members of the Burmese military committed genocide and crimes against humanity," Blinken said. The US Government uses the country's pre-1989 name, Burma.

In his speech Blinken pointed to multiple parallels between the Myanmar military's campaign to wipe out the Rohingya and the Holocaust, the slaughter of Rwandan Tutsi and other genocides. "The attack against Rohingya was widespread and systematic, which was crucial for reaching a determination of crimes against humanity," Blinken said. "The evidence also points to a clear intent behind these mass atrocities, the intent to destroy Rohingya in whole or in part."

In making its genocide designation, US investigators talked to more than 1,000 Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh, after having been displaced by the violence in 2016 or 2017. Blinken said three quarters of those interviewed said that "they personally witnessed members of the military kill someone."

"More than half witnessed acts of sexual violence. One in five witnessed a mass casualty event - that is the killing or injury of more than 100 people in a single incident," he said.

The designation will not bring substantial new economic measures against Myanmar's military-led government, as the US has already imposed multiple layers of sanctions since the campaign against the Rohingya began in the country's Western Rakhine State in 2016.

However, Blinken said the US would be contributing nearly US\$ 1m in additional funding to the Genocide Convention for Myanmar, established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2018, and would share information to support the Gambia's case against Myanmar under the Genocide Convention before the UN's International Court of Justice in The Hague.

"By formally declaring a genocide took place against the Rohingya, the US is firmly acknowledging the scope and horror of the junta's violence," Kyaw Win, the Executive Director of the Burma Human Rights Network, said. He added: "This declaration must be followed by further action. A military that commits genocide and launches a coup to overthrow a democratically elected government has no place in the civilized world."

More than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled from Buddhist-majority Myanmar to refugee camps in Bangladesh since October 2016, when the Myanmar military launched a clearance operation in response to attacks by a rebel group.

Myanmar Security Forces have been accused of mass rapes, killings and the burning of thousands of homes.



Russia - Ukraine war has worsened global hunger.