

News in brief

**Marburg virus toll rises to 20 in Equatorial Guinea**



The Marburg virus epidemic in Equatorial Guinea has left 20 people dead over the past two months, the World Health Organisation said yesterday. The outbreak of the haemorrhagic fever, which is almost as deadly as Ebola, has now spread beyond the province of Kie-Ntem, where it caused the first known deaths in January, and has reached Bata, the economic capital of the small central African country, according to the government.

**Australia's prime minister yesterday (Mar 23) made a tearful appeal to voters, asking them to support the creation of an aboriginal "voice" in lawmaking as he announced the wording of the referendum question.**

**Australian PM calls on voters to back aboriginal 'voice'**



Anthony Albanese said that Australians had a chance to make up for centuries of injustice, formally recognise aboriginal and Torres Strait Island groups, and give them a voice in decision-making at a vote later this year. This is "about how our nation sees ourselves. Whether we have the confidence to embrace our history", said Albanese, painting the vote as a chance for Australians to make their country fairer.

**Taiwan recalls ambassador to Honduras over FM's China visit**



Taiwan recalled yesterday its ambassador to Honduras over a visit by Tegucigalpa's foreign minister to China, Taipei's government said in a statement. "Honduras ignored more than 80 years of friendship between (Taiwan and Honduras) when they sent their foreign minister to China, which has seriously damaged the feelings of our government and people," said a foreign ministry statement. "We have decided to immediately recall our ambassador in Honduras to express our strong dissatisfaction." The announcement came as Honduran Foreign Minister Eduardo Enrique Reina was heading to China to hold talks on the establishment of diplomatic relations with Beijing, government officials said.

# Kyiv threatens Bakhmut counterattack

Ukrainian commander warns of impending counterattack against Russian forces in Bakhmut

**Battle for Bakhmut has been longest, bloodiest of war**

AFP | Kyiv

Top Ukrainian commander yesterday threatened an impending counterattack against Russian forces in the frontline town of Bakhmut as President Volodymyr Zelensky visited Kherson, still partially controlled by Russia.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (C) taking a selfie with servicemen after meeting them in a warehouse and handing out awards, near Bakhmut

Oleksandr Syrsky, commander of Ukraine's ground forces, said Russian troops were "exhausted" near Bakhmut, the scene of the longest and bloodiest battle since the Russian invasion last year.

Bakhmut -- an eastern town which once had an estimated population of around 70,000 people -- has virtually emptied of civilians over months of fierce fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces.

"The aggressor has not given up hope of taking Bakhmut at all

costs despite losses in manpower and equipment," said Syrsky.

"Sparing nothing, they are losing significant strength and becoming exhausted.

"Very soon we will take advantage of this opportunity, like we did near Kyiv, Kharkiv, Balakliya and Kupiansk," he added, referring to successful Ukrainian counteroffensives last year.

Kyiv considers Bakhmut key to

holding back Russian forces along the entire eastern front.

Both sides have invested heavily in the fight, even though analysts say the city has little strategic value.

The head of Russia's Wagner mercenary group said this week that his forces were in control of around 70 percent of the city. A Russian aide in the wider Donetsk region has said the city was "prac-

The aggressor has not given up hope of taking Bakhmut at all costs despite losses in manpower and equipment. Sparing nothing, they are losing significant strength and becoming exhausted

OLEKSANDR SYRSKY

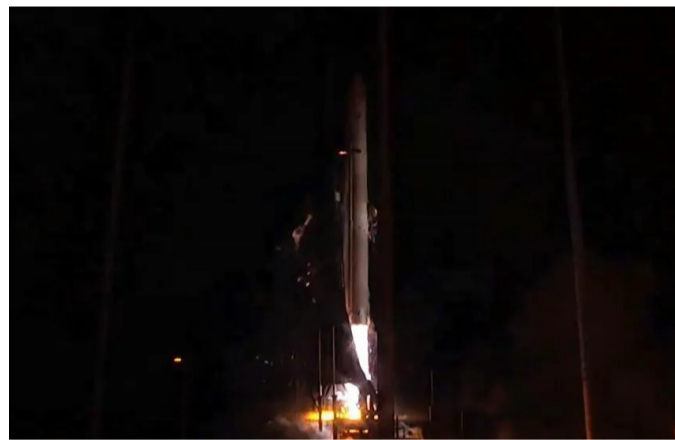
tically surrounded". Zelensky on Wednesday recognised troops had a "difficult" task as he visited the eastern front near Bakhmut.

**'Returning' to Kherson**

Yesterday, he said he was on a "working trip to Kherson region" -- the southern region still partly controlled by the Russians, who are dug in on the eastern bank of the Dnipro river and routinely shell Kherson city, killing civilians.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

**First 3D-printed rocket lifts off but fails to reach orbit**



The first 3D printed rocket, Terran 1, taking off from Launch Complex 16 in Cape Canaveral, Florida  
AFP | Cape Canaveral

The world's first 3D-printed rocket launched successfully yesterday, marking a step forward for the California company behind the innovative spacecraft, though it failed to reach orbit.

Billed as less costly to produce and fly, the unmanned Terran 1 rocket launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida at 11:25 pm (0325 GMT yesterday) but suffered an "anomaly" during second-stage separation as it streamed towards low Earth orbit, according to a livestream broadcast by aerospace startup Relativity Space.

The company did not immediately give further details. While it failed to reach orbit, Wednesday's launch proved that the rocket -- whose mass is 85 percent 3D-printed -- could withstand the rigors of lift-off.

The successful launch came on the third attempt. It had originally been scheduled to launch on March 8 but was postponed at the last minute

**BETTER YOU KNOW**

While it failed to reach orbit, the launch proved that the rocket -- whose mass is 85 percent 3D-printed -- could withstand the rigors of lift-off

because of propellant temperature issues.

A second attempt on March 11 was scrubbed due to fuel pressure problems.

Had Terran 1 reached low Earth orbit, it would have been the first privately funded vehicle using methane fuel to do so on its first try, according to Relativity. Terran 1 was not carrying a payload for its first flight, but the rocket will eventually be capable of putting up to 2,755 pounds (1,250 kilograms) into low Earth orbit.

**China says it warned US warship to leave S. China Sea, US denies claims**

AFP | Beijing

The Chinese military said it warned a US warship to "leave" waters in the disputed South China Sea yesterday, claims swiftly denied as "false" by American forces.

China claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea -- a strategic waterway through which trillions of dollars in trade pass annually -- despite an international court ruling that the assertion has no legal basis.

The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei all have overlapping claims in the sea, while the United States sends naval vessels through it to assert freedom of navigation in international waters.

The Southern Theater Command of China's People's Lib-



The USS Milius DDG69, a multi-mission-capable guided missile destroyer ship, is shown docked at Manila's south harbour

eration Army (PLA) said the USS Milius, a guided missile destroyer, yesterday entered waters around the Paracel Islands, which are also claimed by Vietnam.

The PLA "organised sea and air forces to track and moni-

tor (the ship) in accordance with the law" and "warned it to leave", spokesman Tian Junli said.

The vessel "made an illegal incursion into Chinese territorial waters... without permission from the Chinese government,

harming peace and stability" in the region, he said.

The US military swiftly denied the claims, telling AFP that "the PRC's statement is false", using the acronym for the People's Republic of China.

The vessel "is conducting routine operations in the South China Sea and was not expelled", said a spokesperson for US Indo-Pacific Command.

"The United States will continue to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows," the spokesperson said.

While asserting their claims in the South China Sea, Chinese authorities in recent years have built artificial islands, including some with military facilities and runways.

Regional nations have also accused Chinese vessels of harassing their fishing boats.

**Thai police shoot gunman dead after 15-hour standoff**

AFP | Bangkok

Thai police shot dead a gunman who killed three people and wounded three others, a senior officer said yesterday, after a 15-hour standoff.

The shooter started firing in Phetchaburi, about 100 kilo-



Policemen with guns take positions on a street near the neighborhood of a gunman's house in Phetchaburi province

meters (60 miles) southwest of Bangkok, at around 3 p.m. (0800 GMT) on Wednesday, before police surrounded a house he was in.

The standoff ended early yesterday when armed po-

lice stormed the building and killed the gunman, who has not been named but was reported by local media to be a 29-year-old former national park official.

"We proceeded step by step,

**YOU KNOW WHAT**

Thailand has high rates of gun ownership and there has been a steady number of violent incidents in the past 12 months

starting with negotiation but he kept fighting back and shot others," Police Lt. Gen. Thanawut Wutjarasthamrong said.

"He ran into his room (on the second floor). If we did not have shields, my men would have been shot."