VOA NEWS

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VOA news. I'm Christopher Cruise reporting.

Ukraine's parliament approved President Petro Poroshenko's call to impose martial law in parts of Ukraine on Monday after Russia seized three Ukrainian ships and their crews in the Black Sea on Sunday.

Reuters correspondent ??? reports.

Martial law is introduced in order to strengthen Ukraine's defense capabilities amid increasing aggression and, according to international law, a cold act of aggression by the Russian Federation.

Martial law does not mean a refusal to resolve the issue of liberating Ukrainian territory by political and diplomatic means.

We intend to keep at hearing to all international obligations.

Sunday's incident happened off the coast of Russia-annexed Crimea. Russia says the two artillery vessels and a tug boat had entered its territorial waters illegally and ignored warnings to stop with the aim of stirring up tensions.

But Ukraine denied the ships had done anything wrong.

The U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Nikki Haley, responded to the incident at a special meeting of the U.N. Security Council. She told the council that she had spoken with both President Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and her statement reflects concerns at the highest level of the U.S. government.

"We strongly support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters. We express our deep concern over the incident, which represent a dangerous escalation and violation of international law. We look forward to discussing Russia's provocation under the appropriate agenda item."

The U.S. Space Agency NASA says its latest Mars probe has successfully touched down on the planet with a unique mission to explore Mars' interior.

It was a six-month-long journey to the planet.

This is VOA news.

The United States has closed its embassy in the Democratic Republic of Congo because of what it says is "credible and specific" information about a terror threat.

The embassy in Kinshasa will remain closed at least through Tuesday and all American citizens in the country are being "strongly encouraged" to keep a low profile.

Five international charities on Monday urged the United States to halt all military support for a Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's Shi'ite rebels. They say it would save millions of lives.

A joint statement by the International Rescue Committee, Oxfam America, CARE US, Save the Children and the Norwegian Refugee Council said 14 million people are at risk of starving to death in Yemen if the parties to the conflict don't change course immediately.

Britain's political leader has kicked off her fight to seal a Brexit deal to a skeptical country with a speech to Parliament.

Associated Press correspondent Charles De Ledesma reports.

Prime Minister Theresa May has made a blunt appeal to lawmakers to back her divorce deal with the EU. "It isn't perfect," she says, "but it's all there is, and the alternative is a leap into the unknown."

In essence, she urged Parliament: Let's agree and move on, for the sake of the voters.

But scores of lawmakers from both the opposition and May's governing Conservative Party have vowed to oppose it. Rejection would plunge Britain into a political crisis just weeks before it's due to leave the EU on March 29.

Jury selection began Monday in the trial of an American man accused of driving into a crowd of counter-protesters a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, [North Carolina] Virginia, and killing a woman. It happened last year.

Associated Press correspondent Ben Thomas reports.

The "Unite the Right" rally by white nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia, last year exploded in chaos, with racist chants, smoke bombs roaring in the streets. It culminated with a car racing into a crowd of counter-protesters, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer and injuring dozens of others.

James Alex Fields Jr. of Ohio is accused of being the man behind the wheel. He is facing a first degree murder charge for Heyer's death.

The largest U.S. car company, General Motors, announced Monday it's slashing 15 percent of its workforce. It's restructuring and trying to adopt a 21 century technology.

As many as 15,000 blue-collar workers and executives will lose their jobs. Seven plants may be closed, including in Detroit, Baltimore, Lordstown, Ohio, Warren, Michigan, one near Toronto and two unnamed plants outside North America.

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