VOA NEWS

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From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Liz Parker reporting.

China denies oil exchange with North Korea.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry says the country has seized a Hong Kong-flagged ship that transferred oil to a North Korean vessel in international waters despite United Nations Security Council's sanctions.

This comes the same day a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman rejected allegations of any Chinese involvement in smuggling goods. That includes facilitating oil shipments to North Korea.

Thursday, U.S. President Donald Trump said he was disappointed China would take part in an oil exchange with North Korea despite sanctions.

Former soccer star George Weah set to be sworn in as Liberia's new president. This after Liberia's electoral commission declared him the winner of Tuesday's vote.

Weah ran against Vice President Joseph Boakai, who is very popular with young voters.

Weah's victory represents Liberia's first peaceful and democratic transfer of power in more than 70 years.

In Zimbabwe's capital of Harare, some residents are calling on the mayor to step down because of chronic bad tap water. Some parts of the capital city have gone for weeks or months with dry taps while others complain of muddy, colored and smelly drinking water.

Residents directed their anger at Mayor Benard Manyenyeni during a public meeting Friday.

Linda Masarira is one of the residents. "From here, we are going to make an appointment to the local government minister since the mayor said his hands are tied. If we don't get any luck there, we go to the president's office. We will go all the way until safe, clean water is coming out of Harare taps."

Some said they fear the situation will escalate unless Manyenyeni steps down.

The mayor said he won't resign but he won't see reelection.

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The United States is preparing to shift its approach in Syria. The government said Friday it pledges to help with the initial recovery following the collapse of the Islamic State's caliphate.

U.S.-backed forces liberated the terror group's Syrian capital of Raqqa this past October. Since then, Syrian Democratic Forces have focused their efforts on eradicating remnants of the Islamic State.

U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said there will be "more U.S. diplomats on the ground" in what he called a "terrain-seizing approach."

He offered no timeline for when personnel would arrive in Syria.

At least two attackers opened fire on a Coptic church outside of Cairo Friday, just over a week before Orthodox Christmas celebrations in Egypt. Edward Yeranian reports for VOA from Cairo.

Amateur video showed people scrambling for cover as a gun battle rages between Egyptian security forces and militants attacking the Mar Mina Coptic Church in the Cairo suburb of Helwan.

One of the attackers was killed by police and another was apprehended.

Egyptian Health Ministry spokesman Khaled Megahed told Arab media that victims of the attack were taken to several hospitals in the region of Helwan. He says that around 10 people were killed, including one of the attackers, and that patients were taken to a number of local hospitals where some were undergoing emergency surgery.

Edward Yeranian, for VOA news, Cairo.

Now to news on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israeli tanks and aircraft struck the Gaza Strip Friday after three rockets were fired from the Palestinian enclave towards Israel, this according to Palestinian and Israeli military sources.

The attacks occurred as thousands of Palestinians took to the streets of Gaza and the occupied West Bank for a fourth straight day. Dozens are said to have been injured Friday.

The groups were out in protest of U.S. President Trump's decision earlier this month to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Both Israel and Palestine claim the holy city as their capital.

More than three months after Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rico authorities say that nearly half of power customers in the U.S. territory still lack electricity.

Officials said Friday that 55 percent of the nearly 1.5 million customers have power. This is the first time the government has provided the statistic since the mid-September category 4 storm.

And I'm Liz Parker reporting from Washington.

That's the latest world news from VOA.