

VOA NEWS

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This is VOA News. I'm Alexis Strobe.

The Justice Department says Joe Biden "willfully" kept and disclosed classified material while a private citizen. AP Washington correspondent Sagar Meghani reports.

The documents were found in a cardboard box in his Delaware garage in his basement and elsewhere. It's a hard assessment of his handling of sensitive material, but it also clears the president of any criminal wrongdoing.

"... the special counsel in my case decided against moving forward with any charges. And this matter is now closed."

The president at a Democratic retreat, saying he cooperated fully with the year-long probe. It's separate from the one charging Donald Trump with illegally hoarding top secret records at his Florida estate.

Biden's probe likely blunts his efforts to hammer Trump for his as they move toward a likely November showdown. Trump says this is a "two-tiered" justice system and Biden's case was far "more severe" than his.

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

Israeli airstrikes have killed over a dozen people overnight hours after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected Hamas's cease-fire terms and vowed to expand the offensive into the southern Gaza town of Rafah.

More than half of Gaza's population has fled to Rafah on the mostly sealed border with Egypt. It is also the main entry point for humanitarian aid.

Egypt has warned that any ground operation there or mass displacement across the border would undermine its four-decade-old peace treaty with Israel.

Residents at the scene of one of the strikes early on Thursday used their cell phone flashlights as they dug through the rubble with pickaxes and their bare hands.

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President Volodymyr Zelenskyy replaced Ukraine's popular army chief with his ground forces commander on Thursday. Angela Johnston from Reuters reports.

In a statement, Zelenskyy named Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi as the new head of the Armed Forces. Some call Zaluzhny the iron general, and many Ukrainians see him as a national hero.

His dismissal could deal a blow to morale and potentially backfire politically for Zelenskyy. Polling suggests Zaluzhny has more of the public's trust than the president.

Zelenskyy's statement says He asked the general to stay "on his team." For his own part in his own statement, Zaluzhny said the tasks of 2024 are different from those of two years ago. "Everyone must change and adapt to the new realities," he said.

Syrskyi takes over during a period of deep uncertainty. Kyiv is waiting for vital military aid from the United States that has been delayed for months by political infighting.

Angela Johnston from Reuters.

The Senate is beginning work on a package of wartime funding for Ukraine and other U.S. allies, but doubts remained Wednesday about the level of support from Republicans who have rejected a carefully negotiated compromise that also included border enforcement policies.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has tried to salvage \$60 billion in funding for Ukraine, as well as roughly \$35 billion more for Israel, other allies and national security priorities.

The new effort comes after the collapse this week of a bipartisan agreement to tie border enforcement policies to the package. GOP leaders are scrambling to find a plan that their senators can back.

Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, showed the marks left by three [cons...] consecutive days of protests. VOA's Rick Pantaleo tells us more.

Bullet shells and blood stains mark the place where police killed five armed environmental protection agents in the Laboule community on Wednesday.

Prime Minister Ariel Henry urged calm in a public address Thursday following three days of violent protests that paralyzed the country.

"I think the time has arrived for all of us to put our heads together to save Haiti."

Thousands of Haitians gathered daily this week in cities and towns across the country to demand the prime minister step down, saying they will keep protesting until he leaves.

Rick Pantaleo, VOA News.

A panel of U.N.-backed experts that focuses on children's human rights is calling on Russia to prevent efforts to rewrite school curricula and textbooks to reflect the government's, quote, "political and military agenda," including in Ukraine.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child held hearings in Geneva last month before presenting its findings Thursday on conditions in Russia.

The International Criminal Court last year issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin and his children's rights commissioner. It's accusing them of deporting and abducting children from Ukraine.

Russia's mission in Geneva says Moscow will respond to the report.

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