

VOA NEWS

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This is VOA News. I'm Alexis Strobe.

Age [again] is again playing a [ro...] big role in the presidential race after yesterday's special counsel report called out issues with President Biden's memory. AP Washington correspondent Sagar Meghani reports.

The report calls the 81-year-old a "well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory."

"My memory is fine."

He lashed out at the report yesterday but while doing so, "President of Mexico Sisi." He's actually Egypt's president.

The report underscored some voters' concerns about the president's age and mental fitness and those of Donald Trump.

"Nikki Haley is in charge of security," who last month appeared to confuse his GOP challenger with former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

"He's a little confused these days."

Haley said it's time for the older gentleman to take a seat.

"The first party to retire its 80-year-old candidate and it's going to be the party that wins this election."

Trump had his own retort.

"I don't mind being 80, but I'm 77. That's a big difference."

Sagar Meghani, at the White House.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has used an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson to urge Washington to recognize Moscow's interests and persuade Ukraine to sit down for talks. AP [wa...] correspondent Charles De Ledesma reports.

Putin said in the interview aired Thursday, the Russia stands ready to negotiate a potential prisoner exchange that would free Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich. He was detained in March on espionage charges he denies.

Most of the interview, though, focused on Ukraine, where the war's nearing the two-year mark. Putin repeated his claim that his invasion of Ukraine, which Kyiv and its allies describe as an unprovoked act of aggression, was necessary to protect Russian speakers in ethnic Ukraine and halt its accession to NATO.

I'm Charles De Ledesma.

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Global cocoa prices hit fresh record highs on Thursday as traders continued to scramble for supplies, predicting ever wider deficits this season and [with growing c...] with concerns growing for the next. Reuters correspondent Julian Satterthwaite reports.

Cocoa beans are a hot commodity right now. In fact, they've never been more expensive, and that's bad news for chocolate lovers everywhere.

Benchmark cocoa futures have hit all-time highs in New York, approaching \$5,900 per ton. That's close to twice the level this time last year.

Prices have jumped as poor harvests leave supplies running short. In number two producer Ghana, production is expected to hit half a million tons at best. That would be more than 150,000 tons down on the previous year. There's concern over the crop in top producer Ivory Coast, too.

Julian Satterthwaite from Reuters.

Farmers in Italy, Spain and Poland are demonstrating as part of ongoing protests against European Union farming policies.

The actions follow similar ones in other EU member nations in recent weeks, with farmers complaining that the 27-nation bloc's environmental and other policies are a financial burden and make their products more expensive than non-EU imports.

The European Commission has made some concessions to farmers over the last weeks, including shelving plans to halve the use of pesticides and other dangerous substances.

Donald Trump wins the U.S. state of Nevada's Republican Party presidential caucuses. AP correspondent Donna Warder reports.

The former president was the only major candidate to participate in the GOP caucuses and he wins most, if not all, of the state's 26 delegates.

"They sort of knew who was going to really get 98 percent. We wanted to get over 80 and we got 98."

Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley did not participate in the caucuses, blaming which she said was an unfair process that favored Trump.

So far, Trump has won Nevada, Iowa and New Hampshire. And the GOP race now pivots to Haley's home state of South Carolina, which will have its primary on February 24.

I'm Donna Warder.

Pakistan's former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif says he will seek to form a coalition government after his party trailed independent candidates backed by his imprisoned rival Imran Khan in parliamentary election results. Sharif told supporters Friday he was sending his brother to meet other party leaders to invite them to join a coalition.

Nawaz Sharif had rejected the idea of an alliance a day earlier, saying he wanted a single party running Pakistan. But he changed his position after results showed candidates backed by Khan leading in the vote count, a surprise given claims by Khan supporters and national [rights la...] rights body that the balloting was manipulated against him.

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