

VOA NEWS

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This is VOA News. I'm Alexis Strobe.

Russia's prison agency says Alexei Navalny, the strongest adversary of Russian President Vladimir Putin, has died in an Arctic prison at age 47. VOA's Rick Pantaleo has more.

In remarks at the Munich Security Conference, Vice President Kamala Harris says the U.S. is working to confirm reports of Alexei Navalny's death.

"If confirmed, this would be a further sign of Putin's brutality. Whatever story they tell, let us be clear Russia is responsible."

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken says the reported death of Vladimir Putin's top political foe is another sign that Putin holds too much power over his country.

"... the fixation and fear of one man only underscores the weakness and rot at the heart of the system that Putin has built. Russia is responsible for this. We'll be talking to many other countries concerned about Aleksey Navalny, ..."

Rick Pantaleo, VOA News.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has signed a bilateral security agreement with France. It comes hours after he officialized a similar deal with Germany on Friday.

It is a signal of a long-term support [of] as Kyiv works to shore up Western support nearly two years after Russia launched its full-scale war.

Zelenskyy met in Berlin With German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who said Berlin is providing another 1.1 billion euro package of military aid. He then met with French President Emmanuel Macron, who said France is providing an additional package worth 3 billion euros. Ukraine signed last month its first such bilateral agreement with the U.K.

Macron said he would travel to Ukraine by mid-March.

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Satellite photos show Egypt building a wall near Gaza Strip as Israeli offensive on Rafah looms. AP correspondent Jennifer King reports.

Video taken by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights shows cranes lifting tall precast concrete barriers into place and trucks carrying cement blocks. The foundation believes the construction "is intended to create a high-security gated area" in preparation for Palestinian refugees in the case of a mass exodus.

The Wall Street Journal, quoting anonymous Egyptian officials, described "an 8-square-mile walled enclosure" that could accommodate over 100,000 people.

Egypt has repeatedly warned Israel and Israel's defense minister said Friday his country has "no intention" of forcibly expelling over one million displaced Palestinians now in Rafah into its neighbor's territory. Preparations on the Egyptian side suggest Cairo is preparing for just that scenario.

I'm Jennifer King.

Major technology companies signed a pact Friday to voluntarily adopt, quote, "reasonable precautions" to prevent artificial intelligence tools from disrupting democratic elections around the world.

Tech executives from Adobe, Amazon, Google, IBM, Meta, Microsoft, OpenAI and TikTok gathered at the Munich Security Conference to announce a new voluntary framework for how they respond to AI-generated deepfakes that deliberately trick voters. Twelve other companies, including Elon Musk's X, are also signing on.

The accord is largely symbolic, but targets increasingly realistic AI-generated images, audio and video that make candidates say something they didn't or mislead about how to vote.

Tech watchdog said the accord was a positive step, but more action needs to be taken.

Judge Arthur Engoron issued his decision Friday after a two-and-a-half-month civil fraud trial against former President Donald Trump. AP correspondent Shelley Adler reports.

A New York judge has ruled against Donald Trump imposing a \$364 million penalty over what the judge ruled was a years-long scheme to dupe banks and others with financial statements that inflated the former president's wealth.

In delivering the verdict, Judge Arthur Engoron backed away from a prior decision that would have dissolved the former president's companies. Trump has denied wrongdoing, and his lawyers have said they'll appeal.

The stiff penalty was a win for New York Attorney General Letitia James, who sued Trump over what she said was not just harmless bragging but years of deceptive practices.

I'm Shelley Adler.

A Venezuelan businessman who helped hide almost 17 million [dollar] dollars in bribe payments by an ally of President Nicolás Maduro was sentenced to six months in prison Friday by a federal judge who expressed frustration that his cooperation with law enforcement was undone by President Joe Biden's recent pardon of a top U.S. criminal target.

Orlando Contreras had been working with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration since 2019 to investigate corruption in the South American nation. As part of that assistance, he made several dangerous trips to Venezuela to gather evidence against the businessman, Alex Saab.

I'm Alexis Strobe.