

VOA NEWS

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Alexei Navalny's team confirms his death and says his mother is searching for his body. AP Correspondent Rica Ann Garcia reports.

Alexei Navalny's team confirms his death, and they demand that his body should be handed over to his family immediately.

Alexei Navalny's spokesperson confirmed that the Russian opposition leader has died at a remote Arctic penal colony, but it is unclear where his body is.

Prison authorities informed his team that the body would not be handed over to his relatives until further investigations have been completed.

In St. Petersburg, residents gathered near the city's monument to political prisoners to mourn Navalny's passing.

Hours after Navalny's death was reported, his wife expressed doubt about the news from Russian authorities and called for accountability for the harm inflicted upon their country, family and her husband.

I'm Rica Ann Garcia.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Saturday there is an, quote, "extraordinary opportunity" in the months ahead for Israel to be integrated into the Middle East.

Speaking at a panel at the Munich Security Conference, Blinken said there are new facts that could make peace between Israel and Palestinians easier.

"Starting with the fact that virtually every Arab country now generally wants to integrate Israel into the region, to normalize relations if they haven't already done so, to provide security assurances and commitments, so that Israel can feel more safe and more secure."

Blinken also highlighted the, quote, "urgent" imperative to proceed with a Palestinian state that would also ensure the security of Israel.

German Foreign Minister [anna...] Annalena Baerbock said on the same panel that to establish a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians, there needs to be a guarantee that something like the October 7 attacks by Hamas can never happen again.

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Regional and world leaders met in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, on Saturday for the African Union annual conference at a time when West Africa has been hit by a series of coups. Reuters correspondent David Doyle has more.

The annual African Union summit got underway on Saturday with a warning that problems plaguing the continent have not got any better.

The summit comes at a time when there have been multiple coups in West Africa. Researchers say the African Union should dedicate this year to solving the various issues of instability and restoring credibility in the democratic process.

Leaders at the summit in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, also addressed the war in Gaza. Mohamud raised concerns over the, quote, "tens of thousands of its inhabitants almost exterminated," with their "dignity humiliated and all their rights stripped away."

David Doyle from Reuters.

U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas has met with newly elected Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo and discussed regional migration, security and the economy in the Central American nation.

The meeting Saturday in Germany at the Munich Security Conference comes days after the Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives voted to impeach Mayorkas for the administration's handling of migrants at the U.S. southern border.

The U.S. has pushed allies in Latin America like Guatemala to put up barriers to slow migration north.

AP correspondent Julie Walker reports on researchers' efforts to find new plant sources for producing rubber.

Alternative crops are sprouting up as a way to fight climate change, like sorghum and cassava. Then there's dandelions that could one day replace rubber as well as guayule, which tire maker Bridgestone is interested in, says David Dierig with the company's Agro Operations.

"The reason that we're so interested in guayule is because we need the domestic source of natural rubber."

He says it uses a lot less water than crops like corn, cotton, alfalfa and wheat.

"All those crops use more water than guayule does, so it's really kind of perfect crop that will fit into a farm setting, allowing the grower to make decisions about their other crops."

I'm Julie Walker.

The interior ministers of four Arab countries have held talks in Jordan to discuss ways of combating the illegal drug trade in the region. The ministers of Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon agreed Saturday to set up a joint telecommunications cell to exchange information.

The drug trade has been a source of tension between Jordan and Syria, where the Jordanian Air Force reportedly carried out strikes on Syria's south targeting alleged smugglers and drug manufacturing plants. Smugglers have used Jordan as a corridor in recent years to smuggle highly addictive Captagon amphetamine pills out of Syria, mainly to oil-rich Arab Gulf states.

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