

VOA NEWS

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U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday it was up to Hamas to agree to a cease-fire that would allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza. VOA's Rick Pantaleo has more.

Secretary of State Blinken said Friday that if Hamas agrees to the latest proposed cease-fire, not only would it allow for more humanitarian aid to get into Gaza, but also pave the way for talks on an enduring resolution to the conflict.

"The issue is whether Hamas will decide or not to have a cease-fire that would benefit everyone. The ball is in their court. We're working intensely on it and we'll see what they do."

The Palestinian militant group left talks in Cairo aimed at reaching an agreement to pause fighting ahead of Ramadan amid fears violence could escalate during the Muslim fasting month.

Rick Pantaleo, VOA News.

Sweden has formally joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the intergovernmental military alliance, known as NATO. A decision officials said was prompted by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. VOA's Veronica Balderas Iglesias reports.

As of Thursday, Sweden has become NATO's 32nd member as formally announced by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

"Swedes realized something very profound: that if Putin was willing to try to erase one neighbor on the map, then he might well not stop there."

For its own show of force and unity, NATO began conducting military exercises above the Arctic Circle on Monday. They are part of a larger set of drills that will continue over several months.

Veronica Balderas Iglesias, VOA News.

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Gunmen kidnapped more than 200 school children from a town in Nigeria's northern Kaduna state on Thursday, members of the community have said. Reuters correspondent David Doyle reports.

The attack on the Local Government Education Authority School in Kuriga took place shortly after morning assembly.

Kidnappings for ransom by armed gangs have become endemic in northern Nigeria, disrupting daily lives and keeping thousands of children from attending school.

In Kuriga, parents and residents blamed the abduction on a lack of security in the area. One parent said local vigilantes had tried to repel the gunmen but had been overpowered.

David Doyle from Reuters.

A U.N. fact-finding mission says Iran is responsible for the, quote, "physical violence" that led to the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022 and sparked nationwide protests against the country's mandatory headscarf laws and its ruling theocracy. The U.N. Mission published its findings in the case on Friday.

The wide-ranging initial report submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Council by the fact-finding mission on Iran also found the Islamic Republic employed, quote, "unnecessary and disproportionate use of lethal force" to put down the demonstrations and that Iranian security forces also sexually assaulted detainees.

The security crackdown killed more than 500 people and saw over 22,000 detained. Iranian officials did not respond to multiple requests for comment from The Associated Press.

TikTok faces a big decision in the U.S. as American lawmakers appear set to vote through a bill cracking down on the short video app. It would give owner ByteDance six months to divest TikTok or face a U.S. ban. Reuters correspondent Julian Satterthwaite reports.

A vote on the measure is now expected next week after it was unanimously approved by a congressional committee on Thursday. TikTok has been a target for lawmakers for years, with then President Donald Trump failing in a bid to ban it back in 2020.

Washington is concerned that the app shares data on U.S. users with the Chinese government. ByteDance says it has never done any such thing and never would.

Now it says it's not clear whether Beijing would approve any divestment or whether it could even be done within six months. The company says that makes it a de facto ban.

Julian Satterthwaite from Reuters.

Greek lawmakers have approved sweeping reforms that will end the state monopoly on university education that breaks what powerful left-wing student groups have long regarded as a major taboo.

Hours before the vote, protesters attacked police outside parliament with petrol bombs and firecrackers as some thousands demonstrated in central Athens against the proposed legislation.

Opinion polls indicate that most Greeks agree with the creation of privately-run universities. The center-right government has argued the reform would help [attack] attract skilled workers back to the country.

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