

VOA NEWS

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This is VOA News. I'm Joe Ramsey.

Arab foreign ministers and a top Palestinian official will meet U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Cairo on Thursday as he pushes for a pause in fighting between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip during his latest tour of the region.

Egyptian security sources said Arab nations will stress the urgency of developing plans for a political situation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such plans had been put on hold as mediators from Qatar, Egypt and the U.S. sought to secure a deal for a cease-fire in Gaza and for the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners.

Hamas is a U.S.-designated terrorist group.

A recent series of Ukrainian drone strikes targeting Russian oil refineries has significantly reduced Moscow's processing capacity. Henry Ridgwell reports from London.

The recent drone attacks have reduced Moscow's overall oil processing capacity by 370,500 barrels per day, or some 7 percent of the total, according to calculations by Reuters.

The Ukrainian strikes could increase the impact of the Western price cap on Russian oil, which was imposed in December, 2022 in a bid to cut the Kremlin's profits.

Henry Ridgwell, VOA News, London.

The United States is in the process of organizing government-chartered helicopter flights to evacuate Americans from Haiti amid rising violence, the State Department deputy spokesman Vaden Patel said at a briefing on Wednesday.

"Our hope is to keep these options available for American citizens who need it and the feasibility and the assessment of that work is gonna be ongoing."

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The United Nations is speaking out against Hong Kong's new security bill. AP correspondent Charles De Ledesma reports.

A national security law, which was unanimously approved by Hong Kong lawmakers on Tuesday, is widely seen as the latest step in a political crackdown triggered by pro-democracy protests in 2019.

Jeremy Laurence, U.N. human rights spokesman, denounces Hong Kong's adoption of the law.

"The broadly defined and vague provisions in the Bill, under Article 23 of Hong Kong's Basic Law, could lead to the criminalization of a wide range of conducts ..."

Laurence adds "the ambiguity is deeply troubling, given its potential misuse and arbitrary application."

I'm Charles De Ledesma.

Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto has been announced the winner of the presidential election in one of the world's largest democracies.

The two losing candidates vowed to contest the result in court over alleged abnormalities. They have three days to do so.

Prabowo was accused of rights abuses under the past dictatorship. He chose the son of the popular outgoing president as his running mate, and a court allowed it even though the son was younger than required.

Prabowo won 58.6 percent of the votes.

A U.S. appeals court panel on Wednesday seemed split over a Texas law that would empower state authorities to arrest and prosecute migrants and asylum seekers suspected of illegally crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Reuters correspondent Freddie Joyner reports.

It comes a day after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the law could go into effect while challenges made their way through the appeals process. But just hours later, the three-judge appeals panel scheduled an emergency hearing and reversed its own earlier ruling, resulting in the state law again being blocked from taking effect.

S.B. 4 would make it a state crime to illegally enter or re-enter Texas from a foreign country and would allow state judges to order that violators leave the United States, with prison sentences up to 20 years for those who refuse to comply.

The Biden administration has sued to block the law, arguing (juris)diction over immigration and enforcement.

The two judges who spoke during Wednesday's hour-long arguments, split sharply over whether S.B. 4 improperly interferes with federal powers.

Reuters correspondent Freddie Joyner.

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, who made history as his country's first gay and first biracial leader, says he'll step down within weeks once a successor is chosen.

He says he is quitting immediately as head of his center-right party, part of Ireland's coalition government. He'll be replaced as prime minister after a party leadership contest.

He said his reasons were both personal and political.

I'm Joe Ramsey, VOA News.