

VOA NEWS

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This is VOA News. I'm Alexis Strobe.

Former President Barack Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama endorsed Kamala Harris Thursday night, giving her expected but crucial support in her presidential bid. AP Washington correspondent Sagar Meghani reports.

"Kamala!"

"Hi."

"Hey there."

"Oh."

A campaign video highlights the former president and first lady calling the vice president.

"Michelle and I couldn't be prouder to endorse you and to do everything we can to, to get you through this election and into the Oval Office."

"Oh my goodness."

A person familiar with their talks says Obama and Harris have been in regular touch since President Biden said he'd end his campaign. They'd been close for 20 years, and she's often used him as a sounding board.

"Thank you both. It means so much, and we're gonna have some fun with this too, aren't we?"

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

Venezuela President Nicolás Maduro faces opposition candidate Edmundo González in Sunday's election. Reuters correspondent Alex Cohen has the story.

Maduro has loosened currency controls and curbed once sky-high inflation, but the economy remains stymied by a fall in oil income and enduring sanctions.

González has appealed to Venezuelan voters' emotions, telling supporters that a change in government could motivate some of the more than 7.7 million migrants who have left the country to return. González said Thursday he trusts the country's military will respect the will of the people.

But other members of the opposition and some independent observers have questioned whether the vote will be fair. Maduro has said the country has the world's most transparent electoral system.

The United States and others have dismissed the 2018 reelection of Maduro as a sham.

Alex Cohen from Reuters.

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Russia, peace talks and the U.S. election are among the topics covered by a top adviser [in Ukraine's] to Ukraine's president in an [associate] Associated Press interview. AP correspondent Jennifer King reports.

Signing an agreement with Russia to stop the war with Ukraine would amount to signing a "deal with the devil." That's the position of Mykhailo Podolyak, a top adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

In an Associated Press interview in Kyiv, Podolyak said a deal would only buy time for Vladimir Putin to strengthen his position. He says he wants political elites to realize that a deal where Russia does not lose or bear responsibility for mass crime is like signing a ticket for the continuation of the war on a wider scale.

Asked about U.S. politics, the Ukrainian says he does not expect changes in relation to Ukraine that wishes certain decisions would be sped up.

Podolyak says Kamala Harris reacts hard enough to today's challenges and that Donald Trump is seen as a non-conformist.

I'm Jennifer King.

[French] The French interior minister congratulated security forces after no major incident was reported during the opening Olympic ceremony. A massive security operation was deployed to keep the event safe. The capital streets were blocked off, with squadrons of police patrolling and imposing metal fence security barriers erected like an iron curtain on both sides of the River Seine.

A long-awaited parade of about 10,000 athletes on the river came as France's high-speed rail network was hit with widespread and, quote, "criminal" acts of vandalism, including arson acts (attacks), paralyzing travel to Paris from across the rest of France and Europe.

Mexican drug lord Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada and the son of his former partner Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán were arrested [el] in El Paso, Texas, on Thursday, the Justice Department said. Gabe Singer reports from Reuters.

Two U.S. officials told Reuters the pair were detained after landing in a private plane on Thursday in El Paso, Texas. It's a major coup for U.S. authorities. Both are major figures in the Sinaloa Cartel, one of Mexico's most powerful criminal organizations.

The U.S. Justice Department said in a statement that both Zambada and Guzmán López face multiple charges for heading the cartel's criminal operations, including its deadly fentanyl manufacturing and trafficking networks.

Zambada is one of the most consequential traffickers in Mexico's history and co-founded of the cartel with "El Chapo," who was extradited to the United States in 2017 and is serving a life sentence in a maximum security prison.

Gabe Singer from Reuters.

A U.N. body that regulates deep international waters is preparing to elect its next leader, a crucial position as it faces pressure to either ban, approve or place a moratorium on seabed mining.

The upcoming election comes as the Jamaica-based International Seabed Authority ended a two-week session on Friday without reaching a consensus on a regulatory framework for deep sea mining.

The drawn-out debate raises concerns that the authority could receive an application later this year, seeking the first deep sea mining [exploit...] exploitation license without having rules or regulations in place.

I'm Alexis Strobe.