

VOA NEWS

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This is VOA News. I'm Joe Ramsey.

The U.S. State Department on Wednesday called for calm in the Middle East, with U.S. officials pressing Israel, Iran and others to avoid escalating conflict. Their calls come as the U.S. moves more troops to the region. The U.S. has threatened retaliation if American forces are attacked.

"The message that we are impressing upon everyone in the region is that no party should take any steps to escalate this conflict." :State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller, who also commented on Yahya Sinwar, whose appointment as the top leader of Hamas formalizes a role he assumed in the early hours of October 7, when the surprise attack into Israel that he helped mastermind ushered in the bloodiest chapter of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Sinwar is a brutal terrorist with blood on his hands, including the blood of American citizens, not just American citizens, but citizens of many countries around the world. So remember, it's not just citizens of Israel that were killed."

But Miller continued to push for a cease-fire deal which he said remained in its final stages.

Sinwar is seen as a hardliner with closer ties to Hamas's armed wing than his predecessor, Ismail Haniyeh, who was killed in an explosion in Iran's capital last month. That was widely blamed on Israel and could spark an all-out regional war.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday described a Ukrainian incursion into the country's southwestern Kursk region as a, quote unquote, "large-scale provocation," as his officials say they are fighting off cross-border raids for a second day. Ukrainian officials are remaining quiet about the scope of the operation.

If confirmed, the cross-border foray would be among Ukraine's largest since Russia's full-scale invasion in February, 2022.

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Organizers of three Taylor Swift concerts in Vienna this week called them off on Wednesday after officials announced arrests over an apparent plot to launch an attack on an event in the Vienna area, such as concerts as part of her Eras Tour.

Swift was scheduled to play at the Austrian capital's Ernst Happel Stadium on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Event organizer Barracuda Music said in a post on its Instagram channel late on Wednesday, quote, "we have no choice but to cancel the three scheduled shows for everyone's safety."

Bangladesh's incoming interim leader, Muhammad Yunus, on Wednesday appealed for calm and urged all parties to help the country rebuild after weeks of violence that killed hundreds of people and prompted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to resign and flee to India. AP correspondent Charles De Ledesma reports.

An economist and banker, Yunus, was awarded the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for his work developing microcredit markets.

The decision announced early on Wednesday came during a meeting that included military chiefs and organizers of the student protest that helped drive Hasina from power.

Mainul Islam, coordinator of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, says Bangladeshis want a stable transition into the new government and advises people not to take the law into their own hands against the former regime.

The streets of Dakar, the capital, are calm after violence swept parts of the country amid Hasina's sudden departure.

I'm Charles De Ledesma.

Bangladesh's garment factories reopened on Wednesday and raced to resume full operations after production was halted by the violent protests that ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina this week. Reuters correspondent Zachary Goelman reports.

The South Asian nation is home to over 40,000 garment factories making clothes for international brands including H&M, Zara, Adidas and Nike. But many had been forced to close under curfews imposed during the unrest.

Emdadul Haq is a factory manager for Urmi Garments in Dhaka.

"During this ongoing movement, the factories were fully closed for six days. We faced huge loss in these days. We lost 228,000 pieces of production and \$107,000 in this factory alone."

Urmi Garments has three factories employing nearly 8,000 workers and makes products for H&M, Uniqlo and Marks and Spencer.

Reuters correspondent Zachary Goelman.

Ocean temperatures in the Great Barrier Reef reached the highest they've been in 400 years over the past decade, research published on Wednesday in the journal *Nature* found.

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