

VOA NEWS

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Hi, I'm VOA's Alexis Strobe with your worldwide news update.

According to a study published Thursday, an official Palestinian tally of direct deaths in the Israel-Hamas war likely undercounted the number of casualties by around 40 percent in the first nine months of the war as the Gaza Strip's health care infrastructure unraveled. Reuters correspondent Lucy Fielder has more.

That's according to a peer-reviewed study published in *The Lancet* medical journal on Thursday.

Researchers estimated there were 64,260 deaths due to traumatic injury from Israel's air and ground campaign in Gaza in the first nine months of the war, from October 2023 to the end of June 2024.

That figure is 41 percent higher than the official Palestinian Health Ministry count for the time. *The Lancet* study said nearly 60 percent of those killed were women, children and people over 65.

Israel says it goes to great lengths to avoid civilian deaths and accuses Hamas of using hospitals as cover for its operations, which the militant group denies.

That was Reuters correspondent Lucy Fielder.

U.S. Supreme Court justices indicated skepticism on Friday toward a challenge by TikTok and its Chinese parent company ByteDance to a law that would force a sale or ban the widely used short video app by January 19 in the United States. Zachary Goelman from Reuters has more.

TikTok and its Chinese parent company ByteDance appealed to the justices over a law that orders ByteDance to sell off TikTok in the next nine days or see it banned in the U.S.

The case pits what TikTok says are free speech rights against what Congress and the White House have called national security concerns.

The Biden administration claims that Chinese government control of TikTok poses a grave threat to American national security. It maintains that TikTok's immense data set on its American users and their non-user contacts gives China a powerful tool for harassment, recruitment and espionage.

TikTok has asked the justices to either strike down the law or put its implementation on hold while they consider the merits.

That was Reuters correspondent Zachary Goelman.

This is VOA News.

U.S. President Joe Biden held a briefing about the fires in Los Angeles. AP correspondent Haya Panjwani reports.

Firefighters are continuing to fight massive blazes in the Los Angeles area. The fires have so far obliterated entire neighborhoods and set the nation's second largest city on edge.

Federal and state officials, including the president and vice president, spoke in the Oval Office about recovery efforts. President Joe Biden announced a plan for FEMA to provide \$750 to survivors.

"... survivors so they can quickly purchase critical items, like water, formula, gasoline, and prescription drugs."

Biden also addressed looting during the wildfires and said he deployed police and the National Guard to improve security in areas affected by the wildfires.

I'm Haya Panjwani.

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was sworn in for a third six-year term after a reelection widely viewed as illegitimate and as his administration grows increasingly brazen in cracking down on its opponents.

On Friday, the European Union imposed sanctions on 15 top Venezuelan officials who had a role in the country's 2024 election, including the president and vice president of Venezuela's Supreme Court. The U.S. and Canada also slapped a new round of sanctions on Venezuelan officials.

A New York judge sentenced Donald Trump in his hush money case but declined to impose any punishment ahead of his White House return. AP correspondent Julie Walker reports.

A stoic Trump appearing on video from Florida.

"This has been a very terrible experience," and calling the case politically motivated. "It's been a political witch hunt. It was done to damage my reputation so that I'd lose the election and obviously that didn't work."

Judge Juan Merchan explaining his rationale for no punishment."

"... pursuant to the rule of law, this court has determined that the only lawful sentence that permits entry of a judgment of conviction without encroaching upon the highest office in the land is an unconditional discharge, ..."

Still, Trump taking office on January 20 as a convicted felon and promising to appeal the 34 felony counts of falsifying business records.

At Criminal Court in Manhattan, I'm Julie Walker.

The United States will return nearly \$53 million in seized assets to Nigeria as part of a years-long corruption probe against former Nigerian oil minister Diezani Alison-Madueke and associates. It marks the first reparation of assets linked to Alison-Madueke, who served as Nigeria's oil minister from 2010 to 2015 under former President Goodluck Jonathan.

She rose to prominence as a powerful figure and became the first female president of oil alliance OPEC.

The seized assets include a superyacht and prime real estate in New York and California.

That wraps up this update, but the world and news never stop. For additional updates, visit our website. I'm Alexis Strobe, VOA News.