

VOA NEWS

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I'm VOA's Richard Green with your worldwide news update.

Relatives of Israeli hostages and their supporters protested outside the country's Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv on Saturday, calling for the release of all remaining captives from Gaza.

Hamas released four Israeli soldiers Saturday in exchange for 200 Palestinian prisoners or detainees in the second hostages for prisoner swap under the Gaza cease-fire deal.

Protesters like ??? said they were "overjoyed" over the return of the hostages, but said they will not let up until all of them are freed.

"Our heart is not full and we don't feel that the mission is complete until all our hostages are back at home."

Saturday's exchange is part of the first phase of the cease-fire agreement brokered by Egypt, Qatar and the U.S. after months of negotiations.

The four soldiers were among 250 people who were kidnapped in the October 7, 2023 invasion of southern Israel by the U.S.-designated terrorist group that also left 1,200 others dead.

Israel's counteroffensive in Gaza has killed more than 47,000 people, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

Meanwhile, Israel's military says it will not complete its withdrawal from southern Lebanon by Sunday as outlined in its cease-fire agreement with Hezbollah militants. The cease-fire for Lebanon gave both sides 60 days to remove their forces from southern Lebanon and for the Lebanese army to move in and secure the area.

Israel says Hezbollah and the Lebanese army have not met their obligations, while Lebanon accuses the Israelis of hindering the Lebanese military from taking over.

VOA's podcast The Issue takes you beyond the headlines, diving into the story shaping our world. Each episode focuses on a single topic, offering in-depth analysis and essential context. This is VOA News.

The far-right Alternative for Germany party kicked off its election campaign on Saturday for next month's snap election.

The massive rally in the eastern city of Halle featured a speech by billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, who addressed the enthusiastic crowd via video link.

"It's proud, it's OK, it's good to be proud of German culture, German values, and not to lose that in, in some sort of multiculturalism that, that, that, that dilutes everything."

The tens of thousands gathered in Berlin and other cities across Germany to protest the rise of the anti-immigrant AfD.

The conservative opposition Christian Democratic Union Party is currently leading in voter opinion polls followed by the AfD. The governing Social Democrats and the Greens are in third and fourth place, respectively.

The U.S. State Department has frozen new funding for almost all U.S. aid programs worldwide, with exceptions for humanitarian food programs and military aid to Israel and Egypt. The order was sent Friday in a cable to U.S. embassies worldwide. AP correspondent Donna Warder has more.

The order threatens to halt countless global projects in health, education, development, job training and other U.S. efforts.

Some aid organizations are interpreting the directive as an immediate stop-work order for U.S.-funded aid work globally.

During the freeze, the State Department will conduct a review, of which of the thousands of U.S. aid and development programs can continue. Once the review is completed, a report will go to Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who will make recommendations to President Donald Trump.

Donna Warder, Washington.

South Africa's Defense Department said Saturday that nine of its soldiers have been killed in eastern Congo's conflict zone. The soldiers were killed amid an effort by Congolese troops and peacekeepers to stop an advance by rebels on the city of Goma.

A three-year insurgency by M23 rebels in the DRC's mineral-rich east intensified in January, with the rebels seizing control of more territory than ever before, prompting the United Nations to warn of the risk of a broader regional war.

U.S.-based National Public Radio says the administration of President Donald Trump is working on a plan to save TikTok.

Under the deal, TikTok's Chinese-based owner ByteDance would retain a minority stake in the company, but the app's algorithm, data collection and software updates would be overseen by software company Oracle, giving the company effective control of the app's global operations.

NPR says Oracle already provides the foundation of TikTok's web infrastructure.

That wraps up this update, but the world and news never stop. For additional updates, visit our website, voanews.com. Richard Green, VOA News.