

VOA NEWS

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I'm VOA's Joe Ramsey with this worldwide news update.

All passengers are feared dead after an American Airlines jet carrying 60 passengers and four crew members and a U.S. Army helicopter with three soldiers on board collided mid-air late Wednesday. White House bureau chief Patsy Widakuswara has the story.

Emergency personnel, including divers, worked through the night in the frigid water of the Potomac River near the Reagan Washington National Airport where the wreckage fell.

President Donald Trump offered condolences and speculated on the cause of the crash in remarks to White House reporters Thursday.

"We do not know what led to this crash, but we have some very strong opinions and ideas."

Trump blamed diversity policies in the Federal Aviation Administration under his predecessors Barack Obama and Joe Biden.

"A group within the FAA, another story, determined that the workforce was too white, that they had concerted efforts to get the administration to change that and to change it immediately."

He said the collision should have been prevented.

Shortly before the crash, an air traffic controller asked the helicopter if it could see the plane.

"PAT 2-5 has aircraft in sight, ..."

Officials say dozens of bodies have been pulled from the icy water.

The crash is the first major crisis for Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, who was just sworn in Wednesday.

"We are gonna take responsibility at the Department of Transportation and the FAA to make sure we have the reforms that have been dictated by President Trump."

And for Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who said the soldiers were on a training flight and wearing night vision goggles when the crash happened.

"The military does dangerous things, it does routine things on a regular basis. Tragically last night, a mistake was made."

The crash is the deadliest air disaster in the United States since November of 2001.

Patsy Widakuswara, VOA News, at the White House.

This is VOA News.

Hamas-led militants have freed eight hostages in the latest release since a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip took hold earlier this month. AP correspondent Karen Chammas reports.

Chaotic scenes unfolded as a hostage was led through a crowd in Gaza before being handed over to the Red Cross on Thursday.

Israel was expected to release another 110 Palestinians from Israeli prison.

The hostages released Thursday included a female Israeli soldier, a 29-year-old Israeli woman, an 80-year-old Israeli man and five Thai laborers who had been working in southern Israel when they were captured.

The first hostage to be released on Thursday, female Israeli soldier Agam Berger, met her parents in Israel in a tearful reunion.

Thursday's exchange would be the third since the start of a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip that has held for a week and a half. Over six weeks, Hamas is to free 33 Israeli hostages, roughly one-third of those held, in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails.

I'm Karen Chammas.

U.S. federal agents have stepped up immigration-related arrests in several American cities as part of President Donald Trump's pledge to crack down on undocumented immigrants. VOA's Kane Farabaugh reports from Chicago.

Alderman Michael Rodriguez represents Chicago's 22nd Ward, including the "Little Village" neighborhood. 26th Street is an important thoroughfare here, with stores and merchants that attract immigrants from across the region.

"26th Street is known as the capital of the Mexican Midwest. Our local economy here is thriving and is a generous tax base for the whole region."

A 2020 study by the Delta Institute says the Little Village provides about \$900 million in annual tax revenue for Chicago, the second highest amount for the city. But as federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE,

officers and other agents fan out across the area, as part of the Trump administration's crackdown on undocumented immigrants, the usually bustling 26th Street is noticeably quieter.

"My community members are in absolute fear."

White House "Border Czar" Tom Homan was in Chicago observing federal law enforcement efforts. In an interview at the White House on Wednesday, Homan explained to VOA that law-abiding immigrants in the country legally are not the focus of the crackdown.

"It's an all-government approach to look for criminal aliens throughout the United States. We're going to hit every city in this country and arrest those that are in the country illegally that have a criminal conviction."

On Wednesday, Chicago Police Superintendent Larry Snelling said at least 100 people were arrested in the latest immigration enforcement actions across the city.

Kane Farabaugh, VOA News, Chicago.

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