

VOA NEWS

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

U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance met with the German far-right leader as he criticized firewalls in Europe. AP Washington correspondent Sagar Meghani reports.

In Munich, "Free speech I fear is in retreat."

Speaking at a security conference, Vance said democracies simply cannot ignore the voices of voters or parties expressing alternative views.

"There is no room for firewalls."

Mainstream German parties have said they will not work with the far-right and anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany party, a stance often referred to as a firewall.

Vance met with the party's leader hours after top German officials pushed back hard against his anti-democracy complaints, with German Defense Chief Oscar (Boris) Pistorius saying it's "unacceptable" for Vance to compare conditions in parts of Europe with those in authoritarian regimes.

At the White House, "a very good speech, actually a very brilliant speech."

President Trump says Europe has to be careful.

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order in the Oval Office on Friday creating a new energy council, the National Energy Dominance Council, to be led by Interior Secretary Doug Burgum that will seek to expand U.S. output of oil and gas.

The U.S. is already the world's largest producer of those fossil fuels.

"Taxes will be very reasonable based on this. We're gonna make more money than anybody's ever made with energy. We have more energy than anybody else, and it's clean energy, very clean, beautiful energy. We're lucky we have it. I call it liquid gold under our feet, and we're gonna utilize it."

In addition, Trump said more than 600 million acres of offshore federal waters are now open to oil and gas development after former U.S. President Joe Biden had taken them off the table.

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Rwandan-backed M23 rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo have taken control of the strategic Kavumu airport that serves Bukavu, the region's second biggest city, according to the rebel alliance and a civil security source on Friday. VOA's Christina Menenti has more.

The rebels have been trying to push south towards Bukavu since they seized Goma, the largest city in eastern Congo, at the end of last month. The capture of Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province, would represent an unprecedented expansion of territory under the M23's control and deal a further blow to Kinshasa's authority in the east.

Two people who work at the airport, mostly used for NGO and military flights, told Reuters earlier on Friday that it had been effectively closed. Congolese forces had already removed equipment, including drones and military aircraft.

A spokesperson for the rebel alliance that includes M23 said in a post on X that the rebels were in control of the airport and surrounding areas.

Christina Menenti, VOA News.

The U.N. peacekeeping force in Lebanon says the outgoing deputy commander of the force in Lebanon, known as UNIFIL, was injured when protesters attacked a convoy taking peacekeepers to the Beirut airport. The Lebanese army intervened to disperse the protesters.

The army said in a statement that acting commander Major General Hassan Odeh had contacted UNIFIL and promised to "work to arrest the citizens who attacked its members and bring them to justice."

Demonstrators have been protesting a decision by Lebanese authorities to revoke permission for a passenger plane from Iran to fly to Beirut on Thursday.

The Israeli army accuses Iran of smuggling cash to the militant group Hezbollah via civilian flights.

TikTok is returning to app stores in the U.S. AP correspondent Mike Hempen reports.

This follows President Trump delaying the enforcement of a TikTok ban.

TikTok is operated by Chinese technology firm ByteDance. It was removed from the Apple and Google app stores last month to comply with a law that requires ByteDance to divest the app or be banned in the U.S.

TikTok suspended its service in the U.S. for less than a day before restoring it following assurances from Trump that he would postpone banning the app.

TikTok has more than 170 million American users.

I'm Mike Hempen.

References to transgender people have been removed from a National Park Service website for the Stonewall National Monument. It's a park and visitor center in New York City focused on the history of a 1969 police raid on a gay bar that became a watershed moment for the LGBTQ+ rights movement.

The changes were made in the wake of an executive order U.S. President Donald Trump signed on his first day back in office, which called for the federal government to define sex as only "male or female."

New York Governor Kathy Hochul called the move "cruel and petty" in a social media post Thursday.

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