

VOA NEWS

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

Top U.S. and Russian officials met on Tuesday for landmark talks aimed in part at ending the Ukraine war. AP correspondent Sagar Meghani reports.

It was the most extensive contact since before Moscow's invasion nearly three years ago, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio, his Russian counterpart and others meeting in Riyadh. No one from Ukraine was invited.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has now postponed his own Saudi trip this week, suggesting he did not want his visit being linked to the talks.

Rubio says it will be a long process and Ukraine will play a role.

"But ultimately, the Russian side will be indispensable to this effort."

European security expert Nigel Gould-Davies says that much is clear, since the negotiations are basically being conducted on Russia's terms.

"America hasn't even tried to challenge that" by already suggesting Ukraine will have to give up land and will not join NATO.

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

A pro-Russian hacker group attacked Italian government websites on Tuesday and what it said was a reaction to a speech by Italian President Sergio Mattarella that compared Russia's invasion of Ukraine to the Nazi's wars of conquest. AP correspondent Lawrence Brooks reports.

The NoName057 hacker group, which announced the attacks on social media, hit the websites of the defense, interior and transport ministries as well as law enforcement agencies.

In a speech in Marseille on February 5, Mattarella said the patterns that led to World War II were repeating, that Russian aggression against Europe is of a similar nature to the project of the Third Reich.

I'm Lawrence Brooks.

This is VOA News.

The Vatican said on Tuesday that Pope Francis has the onset of double pneumonia. Reuters correspondent Trevor Koroll reports.

The diagnosis complicates treatment for the 88-year-old pontiff and indicates a further deterioration in his fragile health.

Bilateral pneumonia is a serious infection that can inflame and scar both lungs and makes breathing more difficult.

Francis has been suffering from a respiratory infection for more than a week and was admitted to Rome's Gemelli Hospital on February 14th.

The Vatican said he underwent a CT scan Tuesday afternoon and that his condition continues to present a, quote, "complex picture."

On Tuesday, the Vatican said that Francis was grateful for all the support he has received in recent days.

Reuters correspondent Trevor Koroll.

A U.S. federal judge refused Tuesday to immediately block billionaire Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency, DOGE, from accessing government data systems or participating in worker layoffs. AP correspondent Haya Panjwani reports.

A federal judge found that there are legitimate questions about Musk's authority but said there isn't evidence of the kind of grave legal harm that would justify a temporary restraining order.

The decision came in a lawsuit filed by 14 states challenging DOGE's authority to access sensitive government data. States argue that the actions taken by Musk can only be taken by a nominated and Senate-confirmed official under the Constitution.

White House press secretary Caroline Levitt has maintained that Musk doesn't have authority of his own and layoffs are coming from agency heads.

"DOGE is advising these agencies. It's ultimately up to the discretion of these secretaries to make these hirings and these firings."

Haya Panjwani, Washington.

A federal judge on Tuesday questioned President Donald Trump's motives for issuing an executive order that calls for banning transgender troops from serving in the U.S. military. AP correspondent Donna Warder reports.

U.S. District Judge Ana Reyes says President Trump's executive order calling for banning transgender troops in the U.S. military is, quote, "frankly ridiculous," end quote.

At a hearing Tuesday, Reyes also lauded several active duty troops who sued to block the order, and she asked a government attorney, "If you are in a foxhole, would you care about these individuals' gender identity?"

Six transgender active duty service members and two others wanting to join the military filed the suit.

Reyes indicates she won't rule before early March whether to temporarily block the Trump administration from enforcing the order.

Donna Warder, Washington.

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.