VOA NEWS

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From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Liz Parker reporting.

Russians charged in U.S.

A U.S. grand jury investigating Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election has indicted 13 Russian nationals.

The indictment describes a conspiracy to disrupt the U.S. election in multiple ways, including fake online profiles and staging political rallies.

The charging document says the efforts were from 2014 until now as part of "Project Lakhta."

"The conspiracy was part of a larger operation called 'Project Lakhta.' Project Lakhta included multiple components, some involving domestic audiences within the Russian Federation and others targeting foreign audiences in multiple countries."

The FBI investigation into Russian election meddling has also looked into collusion with the Trump campaign.

President Donald Trump responded to the charges by tweeting "The Trump campaign did nothing wrong," pointing out the Russian efforts began before he announced his candidacy.

President Trump said Friday he will meet with victims of the Florida mass school shooting. This comes as the FBI confirms it received a tip on the accused gunman in early January, but there was no follow-up.

Here is Special Agent Robert Lasky. "The FBI has determined that protocol was not followed. The information was not provided to the Miami Field Office, and no further investigation was conducted at that time."

Wednesday, Nikolas Cruz is said to have opened fire on a high school in the city of Parkland, Florida, with a semi-automatic rifle shooting and killing 17 people.

He faces seven 17 counts of premeditated murder.

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Visiting U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has met with senior Turkish officials, including Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, amid rising tensions between the two NATO allies. They remain at loggerheads in part over Washington's support of a Kurdish militia in Syria, which Ankara accuses of being a terrorist organization.

VOA's Dorian Jones reports.

Turkey accuses the United States of arming the YPG Syrian Kurdish militia, which Ankara links to the banned PKK, a Kurdish organization waging a deadly insurgency inside Turkey.

For Washington, the YPG is a key ally in the war against the Islamic State group. At a press conference with Çavuşoğlu, Tillerson urged Turkish forces to ease up on their ongoing offensive against the YPG in Syria's Afrin enclave, which has been under the control of Syrian Kurds.

"As to Afrin, we call upon Turkey to show restraint in its operation (and) to minimize the casualties to civilians and avoid actions that would escalate tensions in that area."

Dorian Jones, of VOA news, Istanbul.

Both sides announced a cooperation mechanism to address ongoing differences.

Meanwhile, just in, Syrian Kurdish forces and monitoring groups said the Turkish military carried out a suspected gas attack that wounded six people in Syria's Afrin region on Friday. There is no immediate comment from the Turkish military.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa hailed a "new dawn" for the country and promised to fight corruption following the resignation of his predecessor, Jacob Zuma, who was plagued by corruption scandals.

In his first State of the Nation address to parliament Friday, Ramaphosa struck a note of optimism and outlined a vision to revive the country's economy. He said he would continue Nelson Mandela's long walk.

"... to build a society in which all may be free, in which all may be equal before the law and in which all may share in the wealth of our land and have a better life."

In his speech, he paid tribute to Mandela calling him the most remarkable leader South Africa has ever known.

French officials remain adamant they won't accept the repatriation of French jihadists after their capture on the battlefields of Syria and Iraq for prosecution in France.

U.S. appeals for their countries of origin to accept responsibility for them are still being rejected by the French and British governments.

French citizens are estimated to be among the biggest contingent of overseas fighters who joined the Islamic State terror group and other jihadist factions in the Levant.

I'm Liz Parker in Washington.

That's the latest world news from VOA.