VOA NEWS

March 14, 2018

From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Tommie McNeil reporting.

British Prime Minister Theresa May said Wednesday she reached a conclusion that Russia was culpable for the attempted murder of former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter. Expelling 23 Russian diplomats from Britain is just one of the actions May is proposing in response.

And during a U.N. Security Council meeting, [U.N.] U.S. Ambassador to [the United States] the United Nations Nikki Haley also said the U.S. believes Russia is behind this and she prompted the U.N. to take action.

"Now one member stands accused of using chemical weapons on the sovereign soil of another member. The credibility of this council will not survive if we fail to hold Russia accountable."

Russia has denied any involvement.

Thousands of students walked out of classes at midmorning Wednesday to protest a lack of congressional action to combat gun violence at American schools. But members of the U.S. House of Representatives did approve a bill to improve school safety.

Ted Deutch is a Democratic congressman from the state of Florida. "You know we need to do and I'm committed to taking any step to get in any new policy across the finish line that will make our kids safer. This bill, the Stop School Violence Act, is a good bill."

John Rutherford is a Republican congressman from the same state. "And this is why this bill invests in early intervention and prevention programs in our local schools, so that our communities and law enforcement can be partners in preventing these horrific acts from occurring. We need to give students, teachers and law enforcement the tools and training they need to identify warning signs and to know who to contact and provide them an anonymous tip source to provide that information."

That bill did pass and it headed over to the U.S. Senate.

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U.S. President Donald Trump may be [out] about to take a direct shot at Chinese trade.

One retail lobbyist told Reuters they're concerned tariffs could include items that call for intensive labor in China that would equal pricier back-to-school basics like T-shirts, jeans and shoes. And the biggest worry, China might push back. While last week's proposed tariffs on metals are seen as trivial for Chinese trade, experts say moves to target the country directly risk a harsh response from Beijing. The metal terrace have also left Trump isolated from allies in place like Europe at a bad time. A source in China told Reuters there has been a clear effort by the U.S. for half a year to recruit allies against Beijing to tackle issues like abuse of intellectual property. Now the question moving forward is if China retaliates, will Washington retaliate back."

That's Reuters Grace Lee reporting.

The United States is rejecting as "laughable and patently false" Iranian allegations that American troops in Afghanistan support Islamic State militants.

Citing "intelligence as well as eyewitness accounts," Iran's foreign minister earlier this week alleged U.S. military helicopters were seen rescuing and airlifting IS militants from battle zones and an eastern Afghan prison to unknown locations.

Both the U.S. ambassador to Kabul and NATO's Resolute Support military mission in separate statements dismissed those accusations as propaganda.

British theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking has died.

We get more from Reuters Ryan Brooks.

A spokesman for his family confirmed the news on Wednesday. He was one of the most respected and well-known scientists in modern history.

Hawking tried to explain some of the most complicated questions of life to the masses while working under the shadow of a likely premature death.

He was diagnosed with the wasting motor neuron disease at the age of 21 and was confined for most of his life in a wheelchair. As his condition grew worse, he had to resort to speaking through a voice synthesizer.

His book, *A Brief History of Time*, published in 1988, made him household name across the world.

And that's Reuters Ryan Brooks.

One of the biggest bitcoin exchanges has struck a rare deal which will allow it to open a bank account with Britain's Barclays, making it easier for U.K. customers of the exchange to buy and sell cryptocurrencies.

Large global banks have been reluctant to do business with companies that handle bitcoin and other digital coins because of concerns they are used by criminals to launder money that regulators will soon crack down on.

The San Francisco-based exchange, Coinbase, said its U.K. subsidiary was the first to be granted an e-money license by the U.K.'s financial watchdog.

I'm Tommie McNeil, VOA news.

That's the latest world news from VOA.