VOA NEWS

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News. I'm Christopher Cruise reporting.

Russia has detained a U.S. citizen on suspicion of spying.

Russia's domestic security service issued a statement on Monday naming Paul Whelan as a suspect. They said he was arrested in Moscow on December 28 and charged with espionage.

At least three people died and three others were injured in a gas explosion in the Russian city of Magnitogorsk on Monday.

According to the Russian emergencies ministry, the explosion happened at about three in the morning local time. Seventy-nine people are believed to still be trapped under the debris in minus 26 degrees Celsius temperatures.

The partial U.S. government shutdown has entered a second week.

Democrats will take control of the U.S. House this week and they say they have a plan to reopen the government.

The shutdown was caused by a dispute between the Democrats and President Trump over money for a wall between the U.S. and Mexico.

Mr. Trump is now insisting he wants an actual wall as he promised during his campaign despite three of his aides saying a wall may not ever be built.

Associated Press Washington correspondent Sagar Meghani reports.

Outgoing chief of staff John Kelly told the *LA Times* the president abandoned the notion of a solid concrete wall early after taking office, adding "to be honest, it's not a wall" but rather various security enhancements.

After dinning yesterday with the president, Senator Lindsey Graham said much the same.

"The wall has become a metaphor for border security." But the president today tweets "An all concrete Wall was NEVER ABANDONED."

Counselor Kellyanne Conway on Fox News Sunday said there is no contradiction. "It is a silly semantic argument" and says people are trying to turn a wall into "a four-letter word."

President Trump on Monday defended his planned withdrawal of all 2,000 American troops from Syria, attacking critics on Twitter as chronic complainers.

This is VOA news.

Ballot counting was underway in Congo's long-delayed presidential election.

The national poll drew immediate criticism for its lack of organization, allegations of vote-rigging and malfunctioning equipment. While both of the presidential frontrunners say they are confident of victory, critics say this messy situation was part of the plan all along to keep the ruling coalition firmly in control.

VOA's Anita Powell has been monitoring the situation from Johannesburg, South Africa.

Voters in the Democratic Republic of Congo are angry after chaotic Sunday polls with massive irregularities, including alleged errors in the voter roll, delays at polling stations, delayed polling materials and technical malfunctions.

Observers from the Catholic Church observation mission said the poll had been relatively calm as vote counting continued Monday. But the mood in the capital was tense, and local media reported that Internet access had suddenly been cut for an untold number of residents.

Police in Sudan's capital fired tear gas Monday at demonstrators who had planned to march to the presidential palace to call for a change in President Omar al-Bashir's government.

Most shops in the area were closed ahead of the planned march, which was organized by professional groups, including lawyers, doctors and teachers.

Witnesses say police arrested dozens of people. They say demonstrators gathered in downtown Khartoum, but were quickly confronted by security forces and were unable to march to the palace. Some people in the crowd chanted, "The people want the fall of the regime," the main slogan used in the 2011 Arab Spring protests.

Food rations for starving Yemenis are being stolen in areas controlled by Houthi rebels. That from the U.N. World Food Program on Monday.

In a press release, the WFP said that many people entitled to food rations in the capital have not been receiving them and that others have been denied full rations.

The U.N. says about 16 million Yemenis lack food, fresh water and medicine.

Malta's armed forces saved 180 migrants in two rescue operations in the Mediterranean on Monday, less than 24 hours after picking up another group of 69.

A day after winning re-election, Bangladeshi [President] Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina rejected opposition claims that the vote was rigged.

She talked to reporters and election observers at her official residence in Dhaka on Monday, dismissing questions about the fairness of the vote. She said the opposition lacked leadership and did not campaign actively enough.

She said, "The election was totally free and independent. There is no doubt about it."

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