VOA NEWS

May 19, 2019

This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

Austria's Chancellor Sebastian Kurz has proposed a snap election after Vice Chancellor and longtime far-right leader Heinz-Christian Strache stepped down Saturday.

As Reuters Mia Womersley reports, Strache was caught on video allegedly offering lucrative government contracts in exchange for political support.

Strache has headed the Freedom Party since 2005, credited with bringing it back to mainstream electoral success.

The video was reported on Friday by two of neighboring Germany's leading media. It allegedly showed a meeting in Ibiza in July, 2017, between Strache, another party official and a woman purporting to be he niece of a Russian oligarch.

In it, he appeared to offer to direct inflated construction contracts to a company in exchange for support for his party, though he also said he wanted everything to be done legally.

Mia Womersley of Reuters.

A number of Democratic presidential candidates were out campaigning across the United States Saturday. But former Vice President Joe Biden was making headlines with an anti-anger speech in Philadelphia.

AP's Jackie Quinn reports.

Former Vice President Joe Biden vows not to attack other Democrats in the race but took a quite shot at many in the crowded field.

"They say Democrats are so angry, that the angrier a candidate can be, the better chance he or she has to win the Democratic nomination. Well, I don't believe it."

Biden spoke of unity and his concern that President Trump is destroying democracy as we know it.

"... instilling fear, sowing division, ...."

As for the nation's economic boom, Biden says that was the Obama-Biden economic bail out plan that President Trump inherited.

Analysts say that Biden's centrist approach will appeal some Democrats but it could alienates some progressives.

I'm Jackie Quinn.

For more on these stories, be sure to visit our website. This is VOA news.

Australia's ruling conservative coalition won a surprise victory in the country's general election Saturday, defying opinion polls that had tipped the center-left opposition party to oust it from power and promising an end to the revolving door of national leaders.

We get more from Phil Mercer in Sydney.

For months, opinion polls had indicated that Australians had grown tired of feuds within Scott Morrison's conservative government. It's had three prime ministers since it was elected in 2013, but fought this campaign on its economic record.

The prime minister had said the opposition wasn't fit to govern and couldn't manage money.

Australian politics is rarely dull. It's often brutal and petty but also unstable. It's more than a decade since a prime minister here last served a full term in office.

Phil Mercer, for VOA news, Sydney.

U.S. diplomats warned American commercial airliners flying over the Persian Gulf region to use caution as tensions between the United States and Iran continue to escalate.

The warning Saturday came from U.S. diplomats in Kuwait and the UAE two days after it was first issued by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration.

The advisory warned that U.S. airliners flying over the area risk being "misidentified" amid heightened military activities and increased political tensions in the region.

Just days ago, the U.S. ordered warships and bombers to the region in response to an alleged threat from Iran.

The unexplained threat prompted the U.S. to impose more economic sanctions on Tehran and to withdraw non-essential diplomatic staff from its embassy in Baghdad, Iraq.

China's Foreign Ministry said Saturday its senior diplomat Wang Yi told the U.S. secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, that recent U.S. words and actions had harmed the interests of China and its enterprises, and that Washington should show restraint.

Speaking to Pompeo by telephone, Wang said the United States should not go "too far" in the current trade dispute between the two sides. He added that China was still willing to resolve differences through negotiations but they should be on an equal footing.

China struck a more aggressive tone in its trade war with Washington on Friday, suggesting a resumption of talks between the world's two largest economies would be meaningless unless the United States changed course.

And the Netherlands won the 64th Eurovision Song Contest in Israel on Sunday in a songfest that passed off without serious incident despite calls by pro-Palestinian groups to boycott the event.

Duncan Laurence singing "Arcade" beat 25 other contestants in the grand final in Tel Aviv to win the glass microphone trophy.

I'm David Byrd, VOA news.