VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

Tensions between the United States and Iran continue to escalate Saturday, with Tehran warning it would react sharply to any perceived aggression and U.S. President Donald Trump vowing to impose more sanctions on the Islamic republic.

Trump told reporters at the White House before leaving for Camp David "We are putting additional sanctions on Iran" in an effort to "prevent the country from obtaining nuclear weapons.

"Iran right now is an economic mess, they're going through hell. The sanctions have hit them hard. More sanctions are gonna be put on, a lot more. It's hard to believe you can even put on, but it's a mess. All I want is no nuclear weapons."

Trump also said military action against Iran was still a possibility.

Earlier Saturday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi told the semi-official Tasnim news agency that Iran would not allow any of its borders to be violated. He said, "Iran will firmly confront any aggression or threat by America."

President Donald Trump says he is delaying a nationwide sweep to deport people living in the U.S. illegally.

We get the details from AP's Ben Thomas.

The operation was expected to begin Sunday and would have targeted people with final orders of removal, including families whose immigration cases had been fast-tracked by judges.

But Saturday afternoon, President Trump tweeted from Camp David that he was delaying the sweep for two weeks at the request of Democrats. He says he hopes that will give lawmakers time to work out solutions to the border issues which he identified as the asylum and loophole problems.

In her own tweet, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi says, "Time is needed for comprehensive immigration reform" and the "delay is welcome."

Ben Thomas, Washington.

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Mauritania has begun counting ballots from its presidential election, with supporters of the ruling party candidate Mohamed Ould Ghazouani, a former general and defense minister, claiming victory.

Ghazouani is heavily favored to replace outgoing President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, who is stepping aside after serving the maximum two five-year elected terms.

Opposition candidates have complained about potential fraud, noting the absence of international observers and the printing of ballot papers by a company with ties to the ruling party.

The election was the first in Mauritania's history since independence from France in 1960 to choose a successor to a democratically-elected president.

Anti-Russia protesters gathered in the center of the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, for the third day of demonstrations on Saturday. Thousands of people with banners and crackers calling Russia an occupying state and mocking President Vladimir Putin. He is peacefully listen(ing) to speeches from an improvised stage in front of the parliament building.

Mariam ??? was one of those protesters. "... They destroy our sovereignty and they destroy our independence. So this is a protest. We are free generation, we are independent generation and we want freedom."

Georgia and Russia earlier traded blame for an outbreak of unrest in Tbilisi sparked by the visit by a Russian lawmaker, which led to police using tear gas and rubber bullets to stop furious crowds.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree Friday suspending Russian passenger flights to Georgia beginning July 8th to protect people from what the Kremlin called criminal actions.

The Greek Orthodox church of the United States has its first new leader in 20 years.

Julie Walker tells us who it is.

51-year-old Elpidophoros Lambriniadis, a native of Istanbul and a longtime theology professor in Greece, was enthroned as archbishop in an elaborate ceremony at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Manhattan. Many Greek Americans from across the U.S. came to New York for the event.

"... my heart, my soul, and my mind are ready and eager to embark on this great challenge and charge that our Thrice-Holy God has granted to me by His grace ...."

The archbishop's top priority is completing construction of the St. Nicholas National Shrine next to the World Trade Center. The original Greek Orthodox church was obliterated during the September 11 attacks.

Julie Walker, New York.

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