VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm Marissa Melton.

The last two major U.S. Democratic presidential candidates, former Vice President Joe Biden and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, are debating in the next few hours in an empty TV studio due to precautions against coronavirus.

Biden and Sanders are competing for the Democratic presidential nomination to face Republican President Donald Trump in November's national election. Mr. Trump is seeking a second four-year term in the White House.

Biden holds the lead at the moment ahead of what could be the last debate before the Democratic nominating convention in July after a slow start in the primaries. [bimen] Biden has won [50] 16 of the last 21 state primaries - 16 of 21 - and is heavily favored in the next four on Tuesday.

The governor of Illinois is announcing a drastic step to help contain the spread of the new coronavirus. AP correspondent Jackie Quinn has more.

Illinois's governor's heeding the warning from federal health officials who say Americans really need to hunker down more to help slow the spread of the coronavirus to not overwhelm the medical system.

So J.B. Pritzker announced a major step to keep people home.

"I'm ordering all bars and restaurants in the state of Illinois to close to the public as of the close of business Monday night."

Earlier, he blasted the Trump administration because of long lines of returning international passengers at O'Hare Airport, where some 3,000 people were crammed together in the customs area, very close contact that's discouraged for health safety.

I'm Jackie Quinn.

French voters went to the polls Sunday to cast their votes in [mm...] municipal elections despite the coronavirus outbreak and an outcry that the virus [an...] (and the ) fear of contamination will keep many voters at home.

The president, Emmanuel Macron, has insisted the democratic continuity of the nation would be in jeopardy if the vote were delayed.

Thousands of mayors and municipal councils were to be elected in the two-round polls.

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President Trump is considering pardoning former national security adviser Michael Flynn. AP correspondent Ben Thomas has more.

Flynn pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his dealings with Russia's ambassador before President Trump took office.

The former national security adviser tried to withdraw the guilty plea in January, accusing federal prosecutors of acting in "bad faith" breaking their bargain wit him by seeking prison time.

The judge rejected the charges of misconduct and prosecutors have questioned whether Flynn truly accepts guilt.

But in the tweet, the president cited an unspecified report that the Justice Department has lost records related to Flynn's case and said he strongly considering a full pardon, prompting Flynn's lawyer to tweet back "Thank you, Mr. President."

Ben Thomas, Washington.

Greece is transferring 450 migrants recently detained for trying to reach the island of Lesbos illegally to a facility near Athens. Tommie McNeil reports.

The ship with the migrants landed at a port near Athens and the migrants will be transferred to a facility just north of the capital pending deportation. That's according to an official at the Ministry of Migration.

All of the migrants have been detained since March 1, just days after Turkey said it was opening its borders to the millions of migrants on its soil. In response, Greece has toughened its stance, suspending all asylum applications for a month and jailing migrants and refugees who tried to cross the land border from Turkey.

Although the migrants had been taken to the ship several days ago, the whole operation had been shrouded in secrecy, with officials refusing to comment on the ship's destination.

Tommie McNeil, VOA news, Washington.

Lagos, Nigeria, was rocked by a huge explosion on Sunday. VOA's Jim Bertel has more.

Nigeria's emergency services say an explosion on Sunday killed at least 15 people and destroyed about 50 buildings after a fire broke out in the suburb of Lagos.

This man witnessed the explosion. "Some houses collapsed ... Everywhere collapsed. Some people died. Even the school here. People died. Yes, people died."

Several people were injured and taken to a hospital. The exact cause of the explosion is not yet known.

Jim Bertel, VOA news.

Israeli opposition leader Benny Gantz will be given the first opportunity to form a new government, according to Israel's president.

Gantz, the leader of the Israel's Blue and White party, received 61 votes in the Knesset mandating that Reuven Rivlin allow Gantz to appoint a speaker from his party and begin pushing legislation.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party received the most votes in the early March elections - the third set of elections over the [cur...] course of one year - but failed to receive [the port of] the support of enough allies in parliament to give him control.

VOA news. I'm Marissa Melton. You're listening to VOA news.