VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. Via remote, I'm Marissa Melton.

At least 60 people are dead and as many as 3,000 are injured after a massive explosion rocked the port area of Beirut on Tuesday in what a Red Cross official called a "huge catastrophe." Much of the port was destroyed and buildings and parked cars across the Lebanese capital were heavily damaged.

Ambulances carried the wounded away from the area hours after the blast.

As night fell, the exact cause of the explosion was still unknown.

A Lebanese television station said officials suspect highly explosive sodium nitrate stored at the port may have been involved.

Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab [pn...] claimed Wednesday a day of mourning.

A White House official said President Donald Trump has been briefed on Tuesday's explosion and that the United States is praying for the people of Lebanon.

While relations between Israel and Lebanon are currently tense, an Israeli official immediately said Israel had nothing to do with the blast.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres says with schools being forced to shut their doors because of the coronavirus pandemic, the world is facing a "generational catastrophe."

Guterres made the comments Tuesday during a video briefing to launch a new U.N. campaign dubbed "Save Our Future." It's aimed at restoring and bolstering formal education in a post-pandemic world.

The [hea...] head of the world body said that as of mid-July, more than 1 billion children in at least 160 countries are missing out on [foral] formal studies, while at least 40 million children have missed out on pre-school. Guterres said disabled students, members of minority or disadvantaged communities, as well as refugees and displaced persons, are among those at highest risk of being left behind.

From Washington, you're listening to VOA news.

The European Union's antitrust regulators announced on Tuesday they'll launch an investigation into Google's plan to buy Fitbit.

The U.S. tech giant is hoping to break into the wearable technology market and hopes to buy Fitbit for $2.1 billion. Fitbit makes wearable fitness devices. A variety of groups advocating for privacy and consumer rights want to block the deal because of antitrust and privacy concerns.

The EU and many other groups say they are concerned the deal will increase the amount of data to which Google has access, making it increasingly difficult for other companies to compete effectively.

White House officials and top congressional Democrats say they plan to meet again after both sides cited some progress in their effort to find agreement on a new coronavirus aid package.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer told reporters Tuesday that the White House and Democratic lawmakers "have moved closer together on five or six issues" with "many more to go."

The two sides have been divided by the size of their proposed aid packages. Democrats are calling for $3.4 trillion in [a new] new spending and Republicans wanting to limit it to $1 trillion.

The two sides are discussing sending out another round of stimulus payments, helping renters avoid eviction, aiding the Postal Service and action to address $600-per-week federal unemployment payments that expired last week.

New York City's health commissioner, [do..., do...] Dr. Oxiris Barbot, resigned on Tuesday. She expressed her "deep disappointment" with the way New York's Mayor Bill de Blasio has handled the COVID pandemic and his use of the department's expertise.

In her resignation letter, Barbot said she was leaving her job with deep disappointment. This is a quote "that [at the most] during the most critical [hea...] public health crisis in our lifetime, the Health Department's incomparable disease control expertise was not used to the degree it could have been." That's the end of the quote.

And earlier this year, *The New York Times* reported de Blasio initially ignored Barbot's advice about canceling large gatherings and closing businesses. Last month, he stripped control of the city's COVID-19 contact-tracing program from the health department and placed it under the agency that runs the city's public hospitals.

Earlier this year, New York City was the epicenter of the pandemic in the United States. Daily deaths passing 400 per day. But this past month, the city saw the lowest number of hospitalizations since the pandemic began.

President Donald Trump's demand for a payout to the U.S. government for a deal on the Chinese-controlled social media app TikTok drew fire on Tuesday.

Critics say it appears unconstitutional and akin to extortion.

Via remote, I'm Marissa Melton. From Washington, you're listening to VOA news.