VOA NEWS

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

U.S. President Donald Trump has announced an agreement between the federal government and an American biotechnology company to manufacture and deliver 100 million doses of a COVID-19 vaccine candidate.

The company, Moderna, is to manufacture the vaccine doses while clinical trials are under way.

Trump told reporters at the White House Tuesday "the federal government will own these vaccine doses - we're buying them."

Three vaccine candidates in the United States are in the final stage of trials.

The president said the nation is "on track to produce 100 million doses as soon as the vaccine is approved and up to 500 million thereafter."

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said in a statement that the Trump administration's latest actions are "increasing the likelihood that the United States will have at least one [safe, ffective] safe, effective vaccine by 2021."

Mr. Trump did not comment on the news earlier today that Russia has already approved a vaccine, but he has recently stated he's optimistic a vaccine for the coronavirus could be ready by the time of the U.S. presidential election in early November.

The World Health Organization said Tuesday said it was holding talks with Russia regarding the recently approved COVID-19 vaccine.

Russia Tuesday became the first country to approve a vaccine for use in tens of thousands of its citizens. In an appearance on Russian television, President Vladimir Putin claimed the vaccine has proved efficient and has passed "all the necessary tests." Those are his words.

The announcement was met with skepticism because the vaccine received Russian approval after less than two months of human trials in the limited number of test subjects.

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Presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has chosen California Senator Kamala Harris as his running mate, making her the first Black woman and the first person of Indian descent to be nominated for a major party's ticket.

In his tweeted announcement Tuesday, Biden called Harris "a fearless fighter for the little guy, and one of the country's finest public servants."

Harris, the 55-year-old daughter of an Indian mother and a Jamaican father, was one of nearly two dozen presidential candidates who challenged Biden for the 2020 Democratic nomination.

Her presidential campaign faded quickly when many progressives and liberals questioned her staunch support for law enforcement while serving as California's attorney general. She was accused of being out of touch over issues of police violence - questions that are bound to be raised again as Americans protest against police brutality against Black people and other people of color.

Harris is the first woman of color to run for vice president on a major party ticket.

Church bells rang and mosques called the faithful to prayer Tuesday in Beirut as the capital of Lebanon marked one week since the catastrophic explosion that killed at least 160 people and devastated the heart of the city.

Last week's massive blast is [to believe] believed to have been caused by the explosion of 2750 metric tons of ammonium nitrate that had been improperly stored at the Port of Beirut for six years. Some 5,000 people are believed to have been injured and 250,000 were left homeless.

Meanwhile, demonstrations continued for a third straight day despite the resignation of the entire government on Monday. Hundreds of protesters gathered outside the parliament building, chanting and throwing stones. Security forces responded with tear gas.

Behind-the-scenes efforts began Tuesday to form a new Lebanese government. Many citizens are demanding an independent Cabinet not supported by any of the political parties that have been accused of mismanaging the country's affairs. Many Lebanese citizens are also calling for an independent investigation into the blast because they don't trust a probe by local authorities.

Lebanese officials have dismissed calls for an international investigation. Before it resigned, the government referred the case Monday to the Supreme Judicial Council, the country's highest judicial body.

And Egypt has reopened Gaza's main passenger crossing point for the first time in months for thousands of Palestinians who've been stranded on both sides of the border because of the coronavirus crisis. The crossing is to be open for three days.

Gaza residents holding Egyptian passports or foreign passports and patients seeking treatment abroad will be allowed to exit. It's the first time the crossing's been open since March.

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