VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. Reporting by remote, I'm David Byrd.

Ousted Mali President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita has left the country for medical treatment in Abu Dhabi as talks about a transition back to civilian rule following last month's military coup got off to a chaotic start.

His former chief of staff, Mamadou Camara, told the Reuters news agency that Keita left Bamako on Saturday evening aboard a plane chartered by the United Arab Emirates at the request of Mali's ruling junta.

The 75-year-old Keita was hospitalized in Bamako on Tuesday six days after he was released from detention by the ruling junta, which seized power on August 18.

Talks about the shape of the transition period opened on Saturday with hundreds of representatives from the junta, political parties and civil society groups attending an opening ceremony in Bamako.

Thousands of women marched through the capital of Belarus on Saturday calling for the resignation of the country's authoritarian president, Alexander Lukashenko. University students also took to the streets of Minsk to demonstrate against the detention of classmates during the wave of protests that have gripped the country for four weeks.

For the first time in the weeks of demonstrations, supporters of LGBTQ rights appeared with rainbow flags to join the women's march in Minsk, an indication that Lukashenko's opponents are becoming bolder.

Rescue workers digging through the rubble of a Beirut building for the third day on Saturday said there was no longer any hope of finding someone alive more than a month after a massive port explosion shattered Lebanon's capital.

The authorities held ceremonies on Friday to mark a month since the explosion tore into a city already reeling from a crippling economic crisis.

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The World Health Organization says it is not likely a safe, effective vaccine against COVID-19 will be available for widespread use before the middle of next year. Lisa Schlein reports from Geneva.

Health officials are urging people to lower their expectations. They say the development of a safe, efficacious vaccine takes time and cannot be rushed.

WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris says a vaccine must be proven to be safe and seen to provide protection against the coronavirus in at least 50 percent of subjects before it can be approved for public use.

"The good news is the manufacturers are already putting bets on which one is likely to be the vaccine. And, they are all working on how they can scale-up production of vaccines, once we know which ones are the ones we will roll out."

Harris tells VOA the WHO does not tell governments when a vaccine should be made available for emergency or general use. However, she cautions against raising false hopes about the prospect of an imminent vaccine that will vanquish the pandemic.

Lisa Schlein, for VOA news, Geneva.

Ahead of Labor Day in the United States, unions representing millions across several working-class sectors are threatening to authorize work stoppages in support of the Black Lives Matter movement amid calls for concrete measures that address racial injustice. AP's Julie Walker reports.

In a statement first shared with The Associated Press, labor leaders signaled a willingness to escalate tactics to force lawmakers to take action on police reform and systemic racism.

Working Families Party national director Maurice Mitchell says economic and racial justice are linked.

"Labor unions are recognizing that the power to labor, work stoppages and strikes have a role in the social justice movement and this is an escalation. This is both an escalation and a historic, historic show of solidarity."

He says decision-makers need to take notice.

"If I was one of them, I would be really concerned, I would be even scared."

Mitchell says this opens a new front in the fight for racial justice.

Julie Walker New York

Thousands of Israelis gathered again outside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's official residence in Jerusalem on Saturday to demand the prime minister's resignation as he is on trial for corruption charges.

Netanyahu has vowed to remain in office despite being charged last year with bribery, fraud and breach of trust in the three long-running corruption investigations.

He has rejected the allegations as a witch hunt and has lashed out at the judiciary, law enforcement and the media.

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