VOA NEWS

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This is VOA News. Via remote, I'm Liz Parker.

The omicron variant of the coronavirus continues to spread rapidly in the U.S., but early indications suggest it may be less dangerous than the delta variant. That's according to U.S. officials on Sunday.

President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci told CNN's "State of the Union" scientists need more information before drawing conclusions about omicron severity. But reports from South Africa, where it merged and is becoming the dominant strain, suggest [hospital is] hospitalization rates have not increased alarmingly.

Fauci said the Biden administration is considering lifting travel restrictions against non-citizens entering the United States from several African countries.

The omicron variant has now spread to 40 nations and 16 of the 50 U.S. states.

Gambia's incumbent President Adama Barrow was on course for a resounding election on Sunday. That's according to partial results. A win for Barrow could help to draw a line under recent political turmoil.

Saturday's vote was the first in 27 years without disgraced former President Yahya Jammeh, who lives in exile in Equatorial Guinea after refusing to accept defeat to Barrow in 2016.

U.S. Republican political icon Bob Dole has died at the age of 98. Dole overcame disabling war wounds to become a sharp-tongued Senate leader from the U.S. state of Kansas.

He was a Republican presidential candidate and then a symbol and celebrant of his dwindling generation of World War II veterans.

Dole announced in February, 2021 that he'd been diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer.

His family said he died in his sleep overnight.

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A court in Myanmar is due to deliver the first rulings on Monday in the trial of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. She is the popular former leader ousted by the military in a coup ten months ago.

Suu Kyi faces a dozen cases that include multiple corruption charges plus violations of [state] a state secret(s) act, a telecoms law and COVID-19 regulations. Together the charges carry combined [\*maximun] maximum sentences of more than a century in prison.

The verdicts are deferred from last week, with Suu Kyi and co-defendant Win Myint, the ousted president, facing jail terms of two years for incitement and three years for breaches of coronavirus protocols, if found guilty. They deny the charges.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the February 1 coup, paralyzed by protests and instability that escalated after the junta's deadly crackdown on its opponents, which it calls "terrorists."

The international community has condemned the violence and Western states have demanded Suu Kyi's release.

Belgian police used water cannon and tear gas to disperse some rowdy protesters in Brussels after most marched peacefully to the city to protest tightened COVID-19 restrictions.

Thousands came to protest the new measures that were announced on Friday. This is the third week in a row that the government has tightened its rules as a surge in the cases strains the country's health services.

The main crowd in Sunday's march [has already disper...] had already dispersed when about 100 protesters ran into a riot police [bar...] barricade near the [\*Eurokean] ...pean Commission.

The government on Friday said day care centers and primary schools will close for the holiday season a week early.

Rescuers [are] were sifting through smoldering debris and thick mud in search of survivors a day after the highest volcano on Java island erupted with fury. At least 14 people were killed [when] with searing gas and ash.

Mount Semeru spewed thick columns of ash [we] after a sudden eruption triggered by heavy rains. Villages and nearby towns [are] were blanketed with falling ash and several hamlets buried under tons of mud.

A Norwegian cruise line ship with at least ten passengers and crew members infected with COVID-19 has docked in the U.S. city of New Orleans. Local news outlets confirmed that the ship had arrived in the city.

The state of Louisiana Department of Health said late Saturday that over the week the ship made stops in Belize, Honduras and Mexico.

Via remote, I'm Liz Parker, VOA News.