

Russian Tu-160 Strategic Bombers Land in Venezuela after 10,000km Transatlantic

CARACAS - Venezuela has welcomed the arrival of Russian Tu-160 strategic bombers as an opportunity to demonstrate its resolve to defend the nation against possible foreign military intervention, with the help of "friends" if need be.

Two Tu-160 strategic bombers made a gracious landing at Simón Bolívar International Airport on Monday where they were greeted by the honor guard of the Venezuelan air force. Wearing orange pilot suits and combat helmets, Russian servicemen descended onto the runway where they were eager to present their colleagues with a scaled model of the 'White Swan' bomber, which they had just flown over 10,000 kilometers to reach the Caribbean shores in order to take part in "combined



operational flights" with the Venezuelan Air Force.

And Venezuela "will do it with our friends who advocate respect-based relations between states," Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino

Lopez said after the two bombers, together with An-124 transport and an Il-62 plane, landed in Venezuela.

While the Russian delegation painted their arrival to be a rare friendly visit, the Venezuelan

Defence Ministry noted that 'Russia-Venezuela 2018' operational flights will represent a "demonstration of strength." The training, Caracas maintains, will foster military-technical cooperation and facilitate the exchange of practical experience between the two militaries.

The Tu-160, nicknamed the 'White Swan' in Russia and designated as 'Blackjack' by NATO, is the largest supersonic combat aircraft in the world. The long-range aircraft, capable of carrying nuclear and conventional missiles, can cover a distance of more than 12,000 kilometers without refueling. The Russian Air Force conducted similar non-stop flights to Venezuela in 2008 and 2013. (Russia Today)

Neighbor News

Iran Confirms Missile Test that Angered US

TEHRAN, Iran - Iran has confirmed a recent ballistic missile test that was condemned by the United States.

The semi-official Fars news agency on Tuesday quoted Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh as saying the test was an "important one." Hajizadeh, who leads the Revolutionary Guard's aerospace division, said the American outcry "indicates that the test was very important to them." The U.S. seized on the missile test to urge European coun-

tries to follow its lead in restoring tough sanctions on Iran.

Under the 2015 nuclear accord, Iran was urged to cease its testing of ballistic missiles, but the agreement does not forbid such tests.

President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the landmark agreement in May despite Iran's continued compliance. European nations have been working to salvage the agreement, which curbs Iran's uranium enrichment. (AP)

Imran Chairs Longest-Ever Cabinet Meeting in Pakistan's History

LAHORE - Sitting Pakistani Premier Imran Khan Monday chaired what could possibly be dubbed the longest-ever cabinet meeting held in Pakistan's eventful 71-year history on any subject; research conducted by the "Jang Group and Geo Television Network" shows.

Since 11 am, Imran had sat down in his office to review the three-month performance of each ministry with reference to service delivery, austerity measure undertaken by the respective ministers and their future plans.

The cabinet meeting then extended well past the dinner time, not very usual when it comes to Pakistan, though it suc-

ceeded in neutralizing the rumours and hoaxes that there would be any large-scale reshuffle in the ministries.

It goes without saying that the likes of Nawaz Sharif, Benazir Bhutto, General Musharraf and General Zia etc have been known for holding three to four-hour long cabinet meetings, but the one summoned by Imran Khan on Monday is unprecedented and surely the longest of its kind in country's parliamentary history! But despite presiding over this marathon cabinet meeting, Imran Khan fell short of breaking Spanish military dictator, General Francisco Franco's world record in this regard. (The News)

Thai Government Lifts Politics Bans Ahead of Polls

BANGKOK - Thailand's military government on Tuesday lifted a ban on political activities it imposed when it seized power in a coup more than four years ago, an action taken in preparation for elections promised for early next year.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha invoked a special executive power with publication in the Royal Gazette of the order easing several restrictions that were set after the army seized power from an elected govern-

ment in May 2014.

The order included the lifting of a ban on political gatherings of more than five people that the ruling junta has used as one of many measures to suppress opponents of its rule.

It also unfreezes the bank accounts of politicians who were targeted for restrictions and allows political parties to begin using funds for campaign purposes in the run-up to polls tentatively scheduled for Feb. 24, among other measures. (AP)

May in The Netherlands as She Fights to Save Brexit Deal

THE HAGUE, Netherlands - Top European Union officials on Tuesday ruled out any renegotiation of the divorce agreement with Britain as Prime Minister Theresa May launched her fight to save her Brexit deal by lobbying leaders in Europe's capitals.

May began her quest over breakfast with Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte, a day after she abandoned a vote in the U.K. Parliament to secure support for the agreement thrashed out with the EU over more than a year, sensing that

it would be rejected in London "by a significant margin." While May made no public comment as she met Rutte in The Hague, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker warned that the Brexit agreement cannot be re-opened for negotiation at a summit of EU leaders on Thursday, but he did say that elements of the deal could still be clarified. "There is no room whatsoever for renegotiation," Juncker told EU lawmakers in Strasbourg, France, as he briefed them on the summit.



Juncker, who is set to meet May on Tuesday evening, underlined that "the deal we have achieved is the best deal possible. It is the only deal possible." But he added that "if

used intelligently, (there) is room enough to give further clarification and further interpretations without opening the withdrawal agreement." (Fox News)

U.S. Sanctions Three North Korean Officials for Alleged Rights Abuses



WASHINGTON - The United States said on Monday it had sanctioned three North Korean officials, including a top aide to North Korean

leader Kim Jong Un, for serious human rights abuses and censorship. The U.S. Treasury named the men as Ryong Hae Choe, an aide close

to Kim who leads the Workers' Party of Korea Organization and Guidance Department; State Security Minister Kyong Thae Jong; and Propaganda and Agitation Department head Kwang Ho Pak. It was not clear whether the decision to sanction the three men was related to U.S.-North Korean nuclear diplomacy, which has made little obvious progress since Kim and U.S. President Donald Trump met in Singapore in June.

The sanctions, which freeze any assets the of-

ficials may have under U.S. jurisdiction and generally bar them from transactions with anyone in the United States, were announced as the U.S. State Department released a six-monthly report on North Korean abuses. North Korea has repeatedly rejected accusations of human rights abuses and blames sanctions for a dire humanitarian situation. Pyongyang has been under U.N. sanctions since 2006 over its ballistic missiles and nuclear programs. (Reuters)

UN Science Panel Chief Calls for More Action to Curb Warming

KATOWICE, Poland - The head of the U.N.'s top science panel on climate change said Tuesday the world needs to "do more and faster" to prevent global warming on a scale that would cause irreversible environmental damage and hit poor societies hard. Hoesung Lee, who chairs the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, told diplomats at the U.N. climate summit in Poland that scientists had conducted an exhaustive review of data for

their recent special report on keeping average global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit).

"The report shows that not just action, but urgent action is needed," Lee said.

His comments come as national leaders and ministers gathered in Katowice for the final stretch of the two-week talks, with just days left to break through thorny issues that diplomats have struggled to resolve. (Fox News)

Google CEO Faces House Grilling on Breach, China Censorship

WASHINGTON - Google's CEO faces a grilling from U.S. lawmakers on how the web search giant handled an alarming data breach and whether it may bend to Chinese government censorship demands.

CEO Sundar Pichai's appearance Tuesday before the House Judiciary Committee comes after he angered members of a Senate panel in September by declining their invitation to testify about foreign governments' manipulation of online services to sway U.S. elections. Pichai's no-show at that hearing was marked by an empty chair for Google alongside the Facebook and Twitter executives. (AP)

Spain Grapples with Surging Number of Teenage Migrants

BARCELONA, Spain - Slouched on a bench at a Barcelona police station, five teenagers waited patiently on a recent Friday evening to find out where they would sleep that night: a shelter for young migrants or on that bench.

Earlier that day, another group of boys had been successfully transferred to a nearby shelter, but it was uncertain if any more beds were available.

The boys from Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa had all entered southern Spain as unaccompanied minors, crossing from Morocco on what this year has become the biggest migrant route into Europe. Like thousands of other teenagers, mostly Moroccans, they made their way to Barcelona, a city known to many of them for its legendary soccer club. (AP)

Brazil Will Quit U.N. Migration Pact, Incoming Minister Says

RIO DE JANEIRO - Brazil will pull out of a United Nations pact on dealing with rising migration, the incoming foreign relations minister said, joining the United States and a growing number of countries in rejecting the agreement.

Ernesto Araújo - who will take office in January under right-wing president-elect Jair Bolsonaro - said the international accord was "an inappropriate instrument" to deal with the issue and nations should set their own policies.

With a record 21.3 million refugees globally, the United Nations began work on the non-binding agreement after more than 1 million people arrived in Europe in 2015,



many fleeing civil war in Syria and poverty in Africa. The accord, which addresses issues such as how to protect migrants, integrate them and send them home, has been criticized by mostly right-wing European politicians who say it could increase immigration. All 193 U.N. members except the United States agreed its wording in July, but

only 164 - including representatives of Brazil's current administration - formally ratified it at a ceremony in Marrakesh on Monday. "The Bolsonaro government will dissociate from the Global Compact for Migration ... an inappropriate instrument to deal with the problem," Araújo wrote on Twitter late that same day. (Reuters)

Turkey Says in Talks with U.N. about Khashoggi Investigation

ISTANBUL - Turkey is in talks with the United Nations regarding the investigation into the killing of prominent Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Tuesday.

Last week, U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said an international investigation was needed to determine who was responsible for the murder of Khashoggi, who was

killed in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2.

"Demands for an international investigation have started coming, we are continuing talks with the U.N. on this," Cavusoglu said, speaking at a news conference in Ankara.

"Our expectation is actually for none of this to be necessary and for Saudi Arabia to cooperate for those responsible to be found out." (Reuters)

Yemen's Warring Parties Exchange Prisoner Lists, Talks Focus on Hodeidah

RIMBO, Sweden - Yemen's Houthi movement and the Saudi-backed government on Tuesday exchanged lists of some 15,000 prisoners for a swap agreed as a confidence-building measure at the start of U.N.-sponsored peace talks.

Both parties at the consultations in Sweden, set to last until Dec. 13, have yet to settle major sticking points, including a ceasefire in the port of Hodeidah, reopening of Sanaa airport and shoring up of the central bank.

The talks are being held as Western allies press Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, leaders of a military coalition backing the government of Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, to end a war that has pushed Yemen to the verge of famine.

Delegates said the prisoner swap would be conducted via Houthi-held Sanaa airport in north Yemen and government-held Sayun airport in the south - a process overseen by the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

"We have exchanged more than 7,000 names from each side, including some 200 high-ranking officers," said Ghaleb Mutlaq, a delegate for the Iran-aligned Houthis.

Hadi's foreign minister tweeted that the government had submitted a list of 8,576 prisoners, including activists and journalists.

The Houthi delegate said a joint committee would investigate those still missing. (Reuters)

Uzbek President Enjoys Popularity on Instagram

TASHKENT - President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev is one of the most popular statesmen of the post-Soviet space by the number of subscribers on Instagram, Trend reports on Dec. 11 referring to the World Leaders on Instagram research by the international PR agency BCW (Burson Cohn & Wolfe).

Authors of the research analyzed 426 state accounts on Instagram, including accounts of President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Abdulla Aripov.

The top five in the post-Soviet space included accounts of Prime Minister of Russia Dmitry Medvedev with 2.91 million subscribers, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev with 831,700 subscribers, President

of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev with 236,700 subscribers, President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko with 123,600 subscribers and Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Bakytzhan Sagintayev with 77,900 subscribers. The first place in the world ranking is held by the Instagram account of Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi with 15 million subscribers, followed by the account of President of Indonesia Joko Widodo with over 12 million subscribers and President of the United States Donald Trump with over 10 million subscribers.

According to the research data, over the past year, 793 posts have been posted in the Russian language account of the president of Uzbekistan, including 747 posts with photos and 46 posts with videos. (Trend)

TAPI Gas Pipeline Being Built in Line with Schedule

ASHGABAT - A reporting meeting was held in the central building of the oil and gas complex of Turkmenistan, chaired by Deputy Prime Minister for the Fuel and Energy Complex Myratgeldi Meredov, Trend reports citing the Turkmen State Concern.

At the meeting, information was provided on the progress of the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, which is carried out in accordance with the planned schedule.

In this regard, the deputy prime minister instructed the heads of the relevant departments to keep under special control the construction of the TAPI gas pipeline. The construction of the

pipeline began in December 2015. The possible costs of the TAPI project vary within \$7-10 billion. The consortium, with the participation of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), continues active negotiations with all interested parties. Various options of participation in the project, such as participation in the company's share, project financing, financing through international development banks and with the help of export credit agencies from around the world are being examined.

As the leader of TAPI Pipeline company Limited, Turkmen State Concern, which has a controlling stake, acts as the main financier and project manager. (Trend)