

We Must Avoid Mistake of Libya: Italian Deputy FM Speaks out against Venezuela Regime Change

CARACAS - Italy "does not recognise" Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido as its interim president, the European country's deputy foreign minister said, warning that a Libya-style regime change must be avoided.

"Today, the greatest interest we have is to avoid a new war in Venezuela," Manlio Di Stefano told Italy's TV2000 network on Thursday. He added that the kind of regime change that failed in Libya must not be attempted, as it turned out to be a "mistake" that everyone recognized today.

"We must prevent this from happening in Venezuela," he warned.

The Five Star Movement (M5S) politician's comments come the same day the EU Parlia-



ment voted, in a non-legislative resolution, to recognize Guaido as interim president of the oil-rich South American nation.



In addition to MEPs giving their "full support" for Venezuela's opposition-controlled parliament, the National Assembly, the bloc

is also calling for fresh elections in the country in a bid to "restore democracy." (RT)

EU Fears Spread of Nuclear Arms as US Readies to Quit Pact

BUCHAREST, Romania — European Union foreign ministers raised concerns Friday about the spread of nuclear weapons as the United States readied to pull out of a key Cold War-era treaty, blaming Russia for violating it. The Trump administration is poised to announce later Friday that it is withdrawing from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty that the U.S. agreed with the Soviet Union in 1987. The pact bans production, testing and

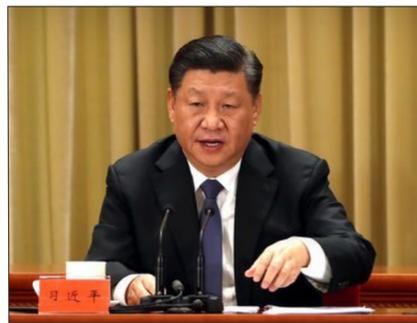
deployment of land-based cruise and ballistic missiles with a range of 500-5,500 kilometers (310-3,400 miles). EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini called on both sides to stick to the treaty. "What we definitely don't want to see is our continent going back to being a battlefield or a place where other super-powers confront themselves. This belongs to a faraway history," Mogherini told reporters in Romania. (AP)

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China's Xi Surprises Beijingers with Casual Pre-New Year Visit

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping dropped in on surprised diners at a small Beijing restaurant and chatted with deliverymen on Friday on an apparently unscripted visit ahead of next week's Lunar New Year holiday. Such relaxed interactions between senior politicians and the public are uncommon in a country where even leaders' birthdays or family backgrounds are often closely held secrets. Leaders generally use

the time around the festival to make carefully choreographed, well pre-arranged inspection trips around the country where they flag important policy initiatives or areas of concern for the year ahead. Xi last year visited villagers in a poor southwestern part of China, to press home his campaign against poverty. On Friday, state television showed Xi walking into the restaurant in a southern district of Beijing known for its traditional alleyways and



courtyards, asking how much the food was and how long the owners had been in the city. As diners stood up to take pictures, Xi told them not to stop eating on his account. "I'm just passing through," he said. (Reuters)

US Seeks to Protect Hegemony by Leaving INF Treaty but Will Only Put Itself in Peril — Experts



WASHINGTON - Washington is about to leave the INF Treaty, a landmark accord that arguably averted a nuclear conflict in Europe during

the Cold War. The US is now scrapping it to assert global hegemony, experts told RT. Signed by US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet

leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty banned all land-based nuclear-capable missiles with a range between 500 km and 5,500 km. Hundreds of such missiles, including those armed with nuclear warheads, were deployed across Europe by both the US and the USSR at the time. This put the world on a brink of accidental annihilation, since the arrival time of such a missile amounted to between mere five and seven minutes and left virtually no

time to verify a suspected launch before retaliating. Washington is about to scrap this key nuclear reduction agreement, with US officials expected to formally announce unilateral withdrawal on Saturday, claiming that Russia is not complying with it anyway and that the INF no longer makes sense in modern world. The treaty indeed applies only to the US and Russia, while many more countries - including China, Iran and Israel - have missiles banned by the INF in their arsenals. (RT)

India Budget Offers Tax Cuts, Handouts for Poor Farmers

NEW DELHI — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government on Friday announced cash handouts for small farmers, a pension scheme for informal workers and a doubling of tax relief for the lower middle class in an interim budget designed to shore up its popularity ahead of national elections due before May. Finance Minister Piyush Goyal presented the budget to Parliament amid media reports that the government was suppressing data show-

ing the country's unemployment rate has hit a 45-year high of 6.1 percent. The government says the data is premature and official figures will be announced in March. Goyal said farmers would be paid 6,000 rupees (\$85) annually, benefiting as many as 120 million households. About 100 million workers in informal sectors would receive a monthly pension of 3,000 rupees (\$40) after retirement at age 60. (AP)

Human Rights Watch Says Myanmar Government Using 'Abusive Laws' to Punish Critics

YANGON - Myanmar's government under Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has used repressive laws to prosecute peaceful critics, dashing hopes that its first democratic leader in decades would safeguard free speech, Human Rights Watch said on Friday. Freedom of expression has been deteriorating since her administration came to power in 2016, with prosecutions creating a "climate of fear" among journalists, the rights group said in its report, "Dashed Hopes: The Criminalization of Peaceful Expression in Myanmar". "Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy promised a new Myanmar but the government still prosecutes peaceful speech and protests and has failed to revise old oppressive laws," Linda Lakshdhir, Asia legal adviser at Human Rights Watch and the report's author, said in a statement. (Reuters)

Merkel: We'll Use Six-Month Withdrawal Period to Talk If U.S. Quits INF Treaty

BERLIN - If the United States announces it will suspend compliance with the INF nuclear missile pact with Russia, Germany will use the six-month period that the formal withdrawal period lasts to hold further discussions, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Friday. "If it does come to a cancellation today, we will do everything possible to use the six-month window to hold further talks," she said. "It is clear to us that Russia has violated this treaty... The important thing is to keep the window for dialogue open." (Reuters)

Syrian Civilians Fleeing Fighting Need Transit Site, Aid: UNHCR

GENEVA - The U.N. refugee agency said on Friday it had asked the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to designate a transit site en route to a camp where civilians fleeing fighting in the harsh winter can get life-saving aid after 29 children died. SDF forces, led by the Kurdish YPG militia, are fighting Islamic State in the Hajin enclave of Deir al-Zor in the northeast. They are in "de facto" control of the transit zone, but have not replied to the request made two weeks ago, it said. Civilians, mainly women and children, are fleeing towards al-Hol camp, whose population has tripled in two



months to 33,000. "The humanitarian situation in this part of Syria is critical right now. That's why we are appealing for the safety of civilians, their ability to move out of the conflict zone, to be aided and provided with basic shelter and life-saving assistance," Andrej Mahacic, spokesman of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told reporters in Geneva. At least 29 children and babies are reported to have died in the camp in northeastern Syria over the past eight weeks, mainly due to hypothermia and malnourishment, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Thursday. (Reuters)

UK Expects to Discuss Backstop Options with EU Soon: May's Spokesman

LONDON - Britain is looking at what options there are to replace the Irish backstop in the Brexit withdrawal deal and expects to discuss them with the European Union shortly, Prime Minister Theresa May's spokesman said on Friday. He said May and her ministers had held a series of meetings about Brexit

since parliament instructed her to seek changes to the backstop - an insurance policy to prevent the return of a hard border in Ireland - and work was ongoing. "We in the UK are looking at the options for how we secure those changes and then you can expect us to discuss those with Brussels shortly," he told reporters. (Reuters)

World Stocks Edge Down Ahead of US Jobs Report

SINGAPORE — World markets edged lower on Friday ahead of the monthly U.S. jobs report and after the U.S.-China trade talks yielded few immediate results. KEEPING SCORE: Germany's DAX fell 0.2 percent to 11,153 and France's CAC 40 fell almost 0.1 percent to 4,991. Britain's FTSE 100 advanced 0.1 percent to 6,978. Wall Street was set for a quiet open. The future contract for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was flat while the S&P 500 futures shed 0.1 percent. THE DAY IN ASIA: Hong Kong's Hang Seng index was flat at 27,930.74 while the Shanghai Composite index jumped 1.3 percent to 2,618.23. Japan's Nikkei 225 index rose less than 0.1 percent to 20,788.39 after the country's unemployment rate unexpectedly fell to 2.4 percent in December from 2.5 percent the month before. South Korea's Kospi was down 0.1 percent at 2,203.46. Australia's S&P ASX 200 edged 0.1 percent lower to 5,862.80. Shares rose in the Philippines and Thailand but fell in Singapore. Markets in Taiwan were closed. CHINA-U.S. TALKS: American and Chinese negotiators wrapped up two days of talks Thursday without a deal but with an upbeat outlook. Presidents Donald Trump said China has agreed to buy more American soybeans, but he expects to meet President Xi Jinping to seek agreement on other contentious issues. (AP)

Neighbor News

HKSCA & EFP-CEO Sign Mou to Enhance Trade Between US & Pakistan

ISLAMABAD - small Suttar, Chairman Employers Federation of Pakistan Economic Council, and Muhammad Saeed Sheikh, President Houston Karachi Sister City Association, signed a MOU for cooperation and collaboration on trade, investment and exchange of business delegations. Present at the ceremony were Governor Sindh Imran Ismail, Majyd Aziz, President EFP, Zaki Ahmed Khan, Vice President EFP, and Executive Committee Members of Karachi Houston Sister City Association Chapter Naeem Qureshi, Asif Vohra, Syed Waseemuddin & Muhammad Ahmed Shamsi. The Houston Karachi Sister City Association (HKSCA) is a not

for profit organization formed jointly by the City Government of Houston, Texas and Karachi. Our mission is the promotion of peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation through people to people exchanges. HKSCA operates under the umbrella of Sister Cities International (SCI), created in 1956 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to foster municipal partnerships between U.S. cities, counties, and states and similar jurisdictions in other nations. President Donald Trump currently serves as Honorary Chair of Sister Cities International and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner serves as the local Honorary Chair of HKSCA. (Agencies)

Turkmenistan to Open EU Representative Office

ASHGABAT - A meeting with the Special Representative of the European Union for Central Asia, Peter Burian, was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, Trend reports referring to the Turkmen foreign ministry. "The issue of opening a representation of the European Union in Turkmenistan for a strengthened cooperation was highlighted," the report says. Opinions on the new EU strategy for Central Asia were exchanged. Issues of developing relations in the areas of logistics, transport and energy were also discussed during the

meeting. The EU and Turkmenistan are committed to the implementation of the project designed to bring Turkmen hydrocarbon energy to European markets. Negotiations have been going on since 2011. The project of laying a 300-kilometer gas pipeline under the Caspian Sea to the shores of Azerbaijan, as noted earlier by the interested parties, is optimal for the delivery of Turkmen resources to the European market. The Turkmen fuel can further reach Turkey, which borders with European countries. (Trend)

Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia Intend to Launch Joint Production of Textiles

TASHKENT - Uztexileprom Association discussed the implementation of joint investment projects in Uzbek textile industry with the delegation of Saudi Arabian Corporation Ajlan & Bros on January 24, 2019, Trend reports via the press service of Association. The leadership and specialists of Uztexileprom Association provided detailed information on competitive advantages and conditions for foreign investors in Uz-

zbekistan, benefits and preferences in the textile and garment and knitwear industry. Representatives of foreign company praised the achievements in the textile industry of Uzbekistan as well as the country's large-scale economic reforms. As a result of the meeting, the foreign side announced its intention to implement an investment project in Uzbekistan to establish the production of finished textiles. (Trend)

Iran Welcomes New Lebanese Govt., Vows Support

TEHRAN - Iran has welcomed the formation of a new government headed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri in Lebanon after a nine-month deadlock and reiterated its support for the country's security. "The Islamic Republic of Iran congratulates the Lebanese government and people on the formation of a new government in Lebanon, which is the result of empathy and understanding among all Lebanese tribes and groups," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Friday. The breakthrough came after rival factions worked out a compromise allowing representation of Sunni lawmakers backed by the Hezbollah resistance movement. Rival political groups had been locked in

disagreement over the make-up of a new government since May, after the country's first parliamentary elections in nine years. Qassemi said the present success is not limited to the formation of the government. "It is rather a sign of the will of a nation and its leaders to draw their future within the framework of independence with unity, consensus and empathy and without any foreign coercion and pressure," he said. Iran, he said, "reiterates its support for Lebanon's stability and security and hopes that the formation of the Lebanese government will open a new stage in the country and lead to further proximity among all political currents and pave the way for Lebanon's development and prosperity." (Press TV)