

Turkey Says Countries Supporting Guaidó Fuel Venezuela Crisis

ISTANBUL - Turkey's foreign minister said on Sunday countries which have recognized Venezuela's self-proclaimed interim president Juan Guaidó were fueling Venezuela's troubles and punishing millions of its people. Turkey has backed Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro in contrast with NATO allies the United States and Canada, and several right-leaning Latin American countries which have recognized Guaidó's move to declare himself interim leader. Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan, who has strengthened economic and political ties with Caracas, called Maduro last month to urge him to stand tall against what he described as "anti-democratic



developments". Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Sunday the countries which were support-

ing Guaidó should instead have worked for negotiations to resolve Venezuela's crisis. (Reuters)

"There is a problem in a country, there is a spark that can turn into a fire at any moment. In this case, they should have contributed to the solution of the problem through dialogue," Cavusoglu told reporters in Istanbul. "But is that how they handled things? No. On the contrary, the event was fueled from the outside. The people of Venezuela are being punished by such approach," he said. Cavusoglu said Turkey had tried to initiate talks on Venezuela last year between Washington and Latin American countries. "But today, none of the countries that have taken these steps against Venezuela has sought dialogue." (Reuters)

Senate Reasserts Foreign Policy Role, Reshapes Trump Agenda

WASHINGTON - Two years into Donald Trump's presidency, his allies in Congress are quietly trying to influence and even reshape his "America First" foreign policy agenda. The Republican-led Senate is reasserting itself as a check on Trump's instincts, while individual GOP lawmakers are seeking sway — defense hawks vying with non-interventionists — over policy in the Middle East, Latin America and beyond. Within one recent week, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio

led a group of lawmakers to the White House encouraging Trump to back Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the interim president. Trump tweeted his support. Days earlier, Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul was at the White House reinforcing Trump's plan to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria and Afghanistan. "It's sort of this great improvisation directed by the president of the United States, that doesn't really follow any of the notes or sheets of music," Katulis said. "Like he's making things up as he goes along." (AP)

Yemen's Warring Parties Meet on Ship to Discuss Stalled Troop Withdrawal

DUBAI/ADEN - Representatives from both sides in the Yemen conflict met on a ship on the Red Sea on Sunday in a U.N.-led push to implement a stalled troop withdrawal from Yemen's main port of Hodeidah as agreed at December peace talks, a U.N. official told Reuters. The United Nations is overseeing the implementation of a ceasefire and troop withdrawal accord in Hodeidah, the main entry point for most of Yemen's imports, in the hope it will lead to a

political solution to the almost four-year war. The warring parties were meant to withdraw their forces by Jan. 7 as part of efforts to avert a full-scale assault on Hodeidah, but have failed to do so as the Iranian-aligned Houthi group and the Saudi-backed government disagree on who should control the city and ports. Sunday's meeting was the third time the U.N.-led Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) convened since it was formed in Decem-



ber, bringing together the Houthis with the Saudi-backed, internationally recognized Yemeni government and U.N. mediators. The parties met on a U.N. ship because at-

tempts to convene the third meeting in territory held by coalition forces failed because the Houthis were unwilling to cross the frontline, sources have told Reuters. (Reuters)

Foreign Businesses Fret as China Fast-Tracks Investment Law



BEIJING - China is fast-tracking a foreign investment law at an unprecedented pace to meet Washington's demands on trade, but businesses

fear that time to review and raise objections on a crucial piece of legislation has been cut short. The law will eliminate the requirement for

foreign enterprises to transfer proprietary technology to Chinese joint-venture partners. It also includes other steps to level the business playing field that Western trading partners have long demanded. China's parliament is expected to vote on the legislation in March — barely two months after debating a first draft. "It is indeed unprecedented that the bill is being moved by the NPC (National People's Congress) at such a fast

pace," Wang Jiangyu, an expert on Chinese law at the National University of Singapore, told AFP. "Normally it would take one to three years for a bill to be passed and signed into law." Foreign businesses worry the draft glosses over details and that vague language leaves room for broad interpretation. For example, it gives China the right to expropriate foreign investment "for the public interest", which foreign business groups fear could be abused. (AFP)

Top German Conservative Hints at Slower Coal Phase-Out in Nod to Party Right

BERLIN - Germany's phasing out of coal-fired power stations could be delayed beyond 2038 if the deadline creates problems for the security of electricity supply, a senior legislator in Chancellor Angela Merkel's party said. The phase-out, proposed last Saturday by a commission tasked with mapping out Germany's transition to a more environmentally friendly low-carbon economy, drew criticism from some in industry who fear the impact of higher energy

prices. But in remarks that appeared aimed at the right of a party not always comfortable with Merkel's centrist approach, Ralph Brinkhaus, chair of the conservative benches in parliament, said it was crucial not to be "dogmatic" in pursuing a goal that was widely accepted. "Energy supply security must be guaranteed," he told Welt am Sonntag newspaper. "If it is endangered, we should be free to do another round and address that, without abandoning the path we've chosen." (Reuters)

Neighbor News

India Must Stop Blaming Pakistan for Its Problems: Pak Foreign Minister Qureshi

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has said that India should stop blaming Islamabad for its problems as it has no intention of interfering in New Delhi's internal affairs. Talking to the media in Islamabad on Saturday, the Minister said it was not a big issue if he had a telephone conversation with senior Kashmiri separatist leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, reports Dawn news. Qureshi on January 29 telephoned Mirwaiz Farooq to brief him about Islamabad's efforts to highlight the human rights viola-

tions in Jammu and Kashmir blamed on India and also to invite him to a conference being held in Britain's House of Commons. "India gets annoyed if the Kashmir issue is highlighted despite the fact that it is a resolvable issue," he said. He said the real face of India would be exposed by presenting Pakistan's point of view on the issue at the international conference. The Minister said regardless of which party wins the next election in India, Pakistan would reciprocate "good gestures" by the new government in New Delhi. (Agencies)

Up to 7k German Firms Eye Trade with Iran: German Official

TEHRAN - Up to 7,000 German business enterprises are estimated to seek continued trade with Iran, says the managing director of the German-Iranian Chamber of Commerce, following the launch of a payment vehicle that enables continued European trade with the Islamic Republic irrespective of unilateral sanctions by the United States. Michael Tockuss said in an interview with the German business news weekly Wirtschaftswoche on Saturday that the launch of the payment vehicle — known as the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges, or INSTEX — was a welcome development and that it would enable European companies to engage in barter transactions with Iran. "Our estimate is that between 5,000 and 7,000

small- and medium-scale businesses are still after trade with Iran," Tockuss said. France, Germany, and Britain unveiled INSTEX, which is a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), on Thursday to facilitate "legitimate trade between European economic operators and Iran." INSTEX took months to prepare, and the idea to set it up came after the US unilaterally withdrew from a multilateral deal with Iran and five other, mainly European, parties. On withdrawal, the US also re-imposed its so-called primary sanctions against Iran and secondary sanctions against countries that continue to do business with it. Iran and the other parties have nevertheless remained in the deal. And Europe considers trade with Iran legitimate. (Press TV)

Uzbekenergo Talks Export of Electricity to Tajikistan

TASHKENT - Uzbekenergo stressed that last year Uzbekistan and Tajikistan did not conclude a contract for sale and purchase of electricity for winter, Trend reports via Gazeta.uz. "There is no contract for supply of electricity in winter with Tajikistan. From April to October, we received about 1.5 billion kWh of electricity from Tajikistan to the Surkhandarya Region. In its turn, Uzbekistan supplied electricity to the Sughd Region [of Tajikistan]. We always pay our debts," the company explained. Earlier, the Minister of Energy and Water Resources of Tajikistan

Usmonali Usmonov said that after a long break, the city of Konibodom in Spitamen District and other settlements of Sughd Region began to receive 3 million kWh of the Uzbek electricity daily, and southern Uzbekistan began to receive 17 million kWh of the Tajik electricity. Uzbekenergo confirmed that from April to October of this year, Tajikistan plans to export 2 billion kWh of electricity to the southern Uzbekistan, which is 500 million kWh more than last year. A meeting of the parties should be held in February to discuss the issue. (Trend)

Turkmenistan Announces Revenues from Exports in 2018

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan's exports to foreign countries in 2018 exceeded \$11.2 billion, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said at a government meeting, Trend reports via Al-tyn Asyr TV channel. Compared to 2017, the total volume of loans issued by banks in the country to expand modern production of export-oriented and import-substituting goods increased by 10.2 percent in 2018,

Turkmenistan State News Agency reported. Turkmenistan aims at diversifying the local economy, the petroleum, textiles have advanced, the oil, gas and chemical industry and the building materials industry are actively developing. Turkmenistan is pursuing industrialization aimed at increasing the volume of production of import-substituting products and export development. (Trend)

Hamas Chief Heads to Cairo for Talks with Egyptian Officials

GAZA - Islamic Hamas movement's politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh, who led a senior Hamas delegation, headed to Cairo on Sunday afternoon for holding talks with senior Egyptian officials, Hamas sources in Gaza said. Haniyeh and Hamas delegation left the Gaza Strip to Egypt through Rafah border crossing point between Egypt and southern Gaza Strip that has been kept open in both directions for the past four days. Hamas sources in Gaza said that Haniyeh and his delegation will resume their talks with senior Egyptian security intelligence officials on a calm understanding that Egypt brokered between Hamas and Israel on November. (Xinhua)

Last Children Held in Notorious Aussie-Run Nauru Detention Camp for Refugees to be Resettled in US

WASHINGTON - The four remaining children in a refugee camp in Nauru are preparing to fly to the US, the Australian PM has said. They would be resettled as part of a deal struck under Barack Obama and slammed by Donald Trump as "dumb." Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that the four minors were the last child asylum seekers living in the Nauru camp. Their looming move, Morrison said, is a proof that his government's approach to implementing Australia's headline immigration policy bears fruit. The PM's Liberal government changed the migration policy, saying the Labor Party, which steered the country from 2007 to 2013, had made many mistakes. (RT)

El Salvador Votes for New President, with Anti-Corruption Outsider in Lead

SAN SALVADOR - Salvadorans will vote in the first round of a presidential election on Sunday, with an energetic former mayor campaigning as an anti-corruption outsider set to win the top job and end decades of a two-party system. Nayib Bukele, 37, has capitalized on the anti-establishment feeling sweeping elections across the region and further afield, as voters seek an alternative to traditional parties. Since the end of its bloody civil war in 1992, El Salvador has been governed by just two parties: ruling leftists the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), and its rival, the conservative Na-



tionalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). Though he describes himself as from the left, and was expelled from the FMLN, Bukele has formed a coalition with parties including a right-wing one who together have just 11 seats in the legislature. Pollster Mitofsky said in a January poll that Bukele

had 57 percent of voter support, while a poll by Gallup showed him with 42 percent. Both polls show ARENA's Carlos Calleja in second place. If no candidate wins more than 50 percent of Sunday's vote, two candidates will pass into a runoff to be held in March. (Reuters)

UK Trade Minister Says EU 'Irresponsible' to Refuse to Reopen Brexit Deal

LONDON - It would be irresponsible for the European Union to refuse to reopen negotiations over Britain's exit deal, British trade minister Liam Fox said in an interview aired on Sunday. British Prime Minister Theresa May has said she is seeking changes to the Withdrawal Agreement she agreed with Brussels last year in order to win the support of parliament. The

EU has said the deal cannot be renegotiated. "Are they really saying that they would rather not negotiate and end up in a 'no-deal' position?" Fox told Sky News in a pre-recorded interview. "It is in all our interests to get to that agreement and for the EU to say we are not going to even discuss it seems to me to be quite irresponsible." (Reuters)

Head of Ukraine's New Orthodox Church Enthroned

KIEV - The leader of the new independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church was enthroned in a ceremony in Kiev on Sunday, formalising a break with the Russian Orthodox Church that has enraged Moscow. During the three-hour event in the gold-decked 11th-century Saint Sophia Cathedral, Metropolitan Yepifaniy became head of the Church, having been elected by bishops last year. The 40-year-old is a critic of Moscow's religious influence in Ukraine and has helped organise humanitarian aid for Kiev's army in its struggle against Russian-backed separatist movements. President Petro Poroshenko, who had promised an independent church ahead of this year's presidential election, attended the ceremony along with other top officials. Last week, he finally confirmed he was running for re-election in the March 31 poll. Poroshenko described Sunday's ceremony as the "completion" of the process to create the Church, in comments carried by Ukrainian TV channels as part of a live broadcast. The new church would be independent of the state, he said. For more than 300 years, the Patriarch of Moscow controlled part of the Ukrainian Church. Kiev now considers this influence unacceptable given its ongoing war with Russia-backed rebels in the east that has already killed around 13,000 people. (AFP)