

Venezuela's Maduro Mocks Trump, Opposition Leader Guaido; Vows to Never Surrender

CARACAS - Embattled Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro vowed to defend his nation's independence with his life during a speech before thousands of cheering supporters Saturday, calling the opposition against him a "small group of dummies" who "can't think for themselves." A defiant Maduro accused the United States of trying to colonize Venezuela and seeking ways to confiscate its oil. He said those opposed to him are letting President Trump call the shots, but the Venezuelan people don't know it.

"It's time for our people to tell Donald Trump, 'Donald Trump, Yankee, go home, Donald Trump,'" Maduro said to throngs of supporters in Caracas wearing red shirts, the color of Venezuela's socialist party.



Maduro also mocked Juan Guaido -- the country's self-declared interim president -- and asked why Guaido hasn't called for an election if he

truly holds power. Maduro also called Guaido a puppet of the White House. Guaido promised to overthrow Maduro a

month ago and restore democracy to the embattled nation as it faces food and medicine shortages, hyperinflation and political unrest.

The U.S. and around 50 other countries recognize Guaido as Venezuela's legitimate leader. Guaido has launched efforts to bring humanitarian aid into Venezuela from neighboring Colombia. On Saturday, demonstrators and security forces clashed as tensions rise over the delivery of the aid. Maduro has denied there is a humanitarian crisis and has resisted calls to accept international aid, particularly from the U.S.

On Saturday, Maduro announced he will break ties with Colombia and ordered its diplomats to leave within 24 hours. (Fox News)

China-Born Filmmakers Strive for Gold in 2019 Oscar Race

LOS ANGELES - As the global film industry's highest accolade -- Hollywood's Academy Awards, or the Oscars -- will be handed out here Sunday, China-born filmmakers are eyeing the prize with their nominated works. Although three Chinese-language feature submissions -- "Hidden Man," "Operation Red Sea," and "The Great Buddha+" -- failed to win a coveted Best Foreign Language Film nomination slot,

three other films with Chinese elements did get the nod and will go on to strive for a win at the 91st annual Academy Awards celebration. China-born Canadian director, Domee Shi, now working at Pixar Animation Studios, was nominated for directing in the Best Animated Short Film category. Shi is the first female short film director and first Chinese writer and director of a Pixar short film in Pixar's history. (Xinhua)

North Korea's Kim on His Way by Train to Summit with Trump in Vietnam

SEOUL/HANOI - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made his way across China by train on Sunday, media reported, bound for a high-stakes second nuclear summit with U.S. President Donald Trump in Vietnam's capital of Hanoi. Few details of Kim's trip have been announced but he left Pyongyang by train on Saturday afternoon for the Feb. 27-28 summit accompanied by senior North Korean officials as well as his influential sister, North

Korea's state media reported. Trump and Kim will meet in Hanoi eight months after their historic summit in Singapore, the first between a sitting U.S. president and a North Korean leader, where they pledged to work toward the complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. With little progress since then, the two leaders are expected to focus on what elements of North Korea's nuclear program it might begin



to give up, in exchange for U.S. concessions. In rare, revealing coverage of Kim's travel, while it is still going on, the North's Rodong Sinmun newspaper featured photographs of him getting a red-carpet send-off in Pyongyang and waving from a train carriage door while holding a cigarette. (Reuters)

EU, Arab Leaders in First Summit Focus on Security, Migrants



SHARM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt - Leaders from European Union and Arab League countries are holding their first-ever

summit, meeting in the Egyptian resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh to discuss migration, security and business deals.

Under tight security, the leaders are likely Sunday to commit to tackle conflicts in Syria and Yemen or stalled Middle East

peace efforts, while papering over major differences about how to resolve them or who might be responsible. Amid this public display of unity, just drafting a summit statement has proved a trying affair. EU-Arab League foreign ministers failed to agree earlier this month on a text after Hungary objected to the section on migration. Europe's migration challenge is at the heart of the two-day meeting, being held under the slogan "Investing in Stability." (Fox News)

'Useless' to Make Arms Together if You Won't Let Us Export Them to Saudis, France Moans to Germany

PARIS - France's Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire has put renewed pressure on Berlin to drop its restrictions on arms exports to Saudi Arabia, imposed last year in the wake of the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. "It is useless to produce weapons through improved cooperation between France and Germany if we are unable to export them," Le Maire told Germany's Welt am Sonntag newspaper. "If you want to be competitive and efficient, we need to be able to export

to countries outside Europe." France and Germany have signed contracts for several major new projects in the past year alone, including Future Combat Air Systems (FCAS) - a next-generation system that will unite planes, drones, satellites and ground missiles into a single operating unit. However, the plans were derailed as emerging facts made it harder to deny Saudi Arabia's role in the death of Khashoggi inside the country's consulate in Istanbul last October. (RT)

Saudi Arabia Names First Woman Envoy to Washington at Critical Time

RIYADH - Saudi Arabia on Saturday named a princess as its first woman ambassador to the United States, a key appointment as the fallout over journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder tests relations between the allies.

Princess Rima bint Bandar replaced Prince Khalid bin Salman, the younger brother of the powerful crown prince who was appointed vice defence minister in a flurry of late-night royal decrees announced on state media.

The reshuffle comes as Saudi Arabia seeks to quell an international outcry over Khashoggi's murder last October in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, which strained relations with its key ally Washington.

After initially denying they knew anything of Khashoggi's disappearance, the kingdom finally acknowledged that Saudi agents killed him inside the consulate, but described it as a rogue operation.

Princess Rima faces hostile US lawmakers who have threatened tough action against Saudi Arabia over the brutal killing amid claims that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman -- the kingdom's de-facto ruler -- was personally responsible. (AFP)

Crew Members Foil Dubai-Bound Plane Hijack Attempt in Bangladesh

DHAKA - Crew members on a Dubai-bound flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines foiled a hijack attempt Sunday by overpowering a suspect who tried to force his way into the cockpit, airport sources said. (Xinhua)

Lavrov Says Russia could Police Syria-Turkey Safe Zone

MOSCOW - Russian military police could be deployed in a proposed "safe zone" along Syria's northern border with Turkey, Russian news agencies cited foreign minister Sergei Lavrov as saying to Chinese and Vietnamese media on Sunday. The suggestion is unlikely to appeal to Ankara, which is keen to set up the zone but has stressed it must be under Turkish control, with only its own forces deployed there. "Our only expectation from our allies is that they provide logistical support," Turkish Pres-



ident Tayyip Erdogan told his supporters in a speech in January. Russia has said that Turkey had no right to set up the zone without seeking and receiving consent from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Lavrov was cited as

saying on Sunday that the format of the safe zone was in the process of being finalized by military leaders, and that any decision would take the interests of Damascus and Ankara into account as far as possible. (Reuters)

PA Slams Arrest of Muslim Clerics in East Jerusalem

RAMALLAH - The Palestinian Authority (PA) official in charge of religious affairs Yousef Edeais Sunday condemned the arrest of Muslim clerics in East Jerusalem by Israeli authorities.

He described the move as "a sign of failure and crisis," saying that the arrested clerics are Chairman of Waqf Council in Jerusalem Sheikh Abdul-Azim Salhab, and Deputy Director of Waqf in Jerusalem Sheikh Najeh Bkerat. A Waqf, also known as habous or mortmain property, is an inalienable

charitable endowment under the Islamic law. Palestinian Religious Affairs Ministry said in a statement that the arrest of the two officials and more than 60 Palestinians from Jerusalem is due to tensions over the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is run by the Islamic Waqf Department. Palestinian Prisoners Association said in that Israeli police handed notices, banning Salhab and Bkerat from access into the Al-Aqsa Mosque for seven days. (Xinhua)

Warren Buffett Is a 'Fraud & Charlatan,' Bitcoin Is the Future -- Max Keiser

UNITED STATES - Warren Buffett's annual letter to shareholders is proof that the investment titan is a "fraud and a charlatan," renegade broadcaster Max Keiser has said. But Buffett's loss may be bitcoin's gain.

Buffett's letter, issued yearly to shareholders of his firm Berkshire Hathaway, "exposes" the kingpin as "an unmitigated fraud and charlatan reliant entirely on taxpayer bailouts and accounting tricks," Keiser exclaimed on Saturday.

"Buffett's frauds are innumerable and date back decades," Keiser told RT, citing Buffett's failure to rein in years of corporate malpractice at Wells Fargo, partly owned by Berkshire Hathaway.

His letter also revealed that Berkshire Hathaway began buying back stock in its own companies last year. Buybacks allow a company to inflate its own stock price, and are generally seen as a sign a company's stock is undervalued.

Buybacks were illegal and considered a form of market manipulation until the Securities and Exchange Commission gave the practice the green light in the early 1980s. It's pure fraud," Keiser continued. "Its sole purpose is to commit accounting fraud for the benefit of insiders." Buffett's letter went on to slam gold, ridiculing the "magical metal" as a poor investment choice. "The real story," Keiser said, "is to put gold in context and understand that Buffett's so-called success is entirely driven by a cozy relationship with Wall Street and the Fed that gives him virtually unlimited access to credit carrying zero percent interest." (RT)

Neighbor News

Iran's President Faces Calls to Resign over Economic Crisis

TEHRAN, Iran - As Iran marked the 40th anniversary of its Islamic Revolution, a white-turbaned Shiite cleric at one commemoration targeted President Hassan Rouhani, a fellow clergyman, with this sign: "You who are the cause of inflation; we hope you won't last until spring."

Already lashed by criticism over his collapsing nuclear deal and renewed tensions with the U.S., the relatively moderate Rouhani faces anger from clerics, hard-line forces and an ever-growing disaffected public that now threatens his position.

Iranian presidents typically see their popularity erode during their second four-year terms, but analysts say Rou-

hani is particularly vulnerable because of the economic crisis assailing the country's rial currency, which has hurt ordinary Iranians and emboldened critics to openly call for his ouster.

Though such a move only has happened once in the Islamic Republic's four-decade history, the popular discontent heard on streets throughout Iran now could make it possible.

"I don't care who is in the presidential palace: a cleric, a general or anybody else," said Qasim Abhari, who sells hats and socks on the streets of Tehran. "We need someone who creates jobs and firmly pushes the brake pedal on rising prices." (Fox News)

Pakistan Parliamentarian Meets PM Modi, EAM Sushma Swaraj

NEW DELHI - Ramesh Kumar Vankwani, a Hindu parliamentarian from Pakistan, on Saturday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj on the sidelines of an event here.

Vankwani, a member of Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, was part of a foreign delegation which was invited to attend the Kumbh Mela by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).

He also met Minister of State for External Affairs V K Singh on the fringes of the event.

Talking to ANI, Vankwani said, "I thank the In-

dian government for the warm welcome accorded to me. I met PM Modi, V K Singh and held discussions with Sushma ji. I assured that there is no Pakistani involvement in the Pulwama attack. We should move in a positive direction, we want peace."

"Whether (Pakistan-based) JeM (Jaish-e-Mohammad) has claimed the responsibility for the attack for taking credit or is actually involved, is a matter of investigation. I can assure you that these days there is no such establishment in Pakistan which can use Pakistan land for acting against other nations," he said. (Agencies)

Czech President Supports Intensification of Economic Diplomacy with Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - Uzbek Ambassador to the Czech Republic with residence in Berlin, Nabijon Kasimov, presented his credentials to Czech President Milos Zeman, Trend reports with reference to the press service of Uzbek Foreign Ministry.

Head of the Czech Republic welcomed the reforms being carried out in Uzbekistan and the policy of openness pursued by the leadership both within the country and internationally during the conversation that held at the ceremony.

President of Czech Republic particularly emphasized the role of Uzbekistan in strengthening good-neighborly relations and cooperation in

Central Asia, as well as involving neighboring Afghanistan in this process, which contributes to ensuring stability and sustainable development in the region.

"President Milos Zeman noted the interest of Czech side in enhancing multi-faceted cooperation with Uzbekistan, as well as the readiness to provide necessary assistance to the reform processes in our country," the press service of Foreign Ministry said. Czech president supported Uzbek side's desire to intensify economic diplomacy in relations between two countries, which could stimulate the promotion of cooperation in other areas. (Trend)

EBRD Consulting Turkmenistan in Trade & Export Issues

ASHGABAT - The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) held a seminar in Ashgabat on best practices in export and trade finance, Trend reports with reference to the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan (UIET).

The event was held with the support of the British Embassy. The UK company Crown Agents conducted a course for local entrepreneurs - managers of plants and export managers in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) of Turkmenistan.

During the training, information was provided on the possibilities of expanding the supply of

the Turkmen products to foreign markets, ways to manage export operations and assess the situation and risks associated with international trade.

Practical interactive sessions, as well as individual consulting sessions, will help entrepreneurs develop an export growth strategy and an action plan that meets their business strategy and goals, the report said. The EBRD invested 272 million euros in various sectors of the economy of Turkmenistan as part of several investment projects, and also supported more than 200 enterprises as part of consulting projects. (Trend)