

Trump Climbs Down in Wall Row, Congress Passes Bill Ending Shutdown

WASHINGTON - President Donald Trump on Friday brought a temporary end to the longest government shutdown in US history, while dropping his previous insistence on immediate funding for wall construction along the Mexican border.

The announcement in the White House Rose Garden on the bipartisan deal marked a retreat by Trump, suspending a row that paralyzed Washington, disrupted air travel, and left more than 800,000 federal employees without pay for five weeks.

The top Democratic senator, Chuck Schumer, said he hoped Trump had "learned his lesson."

The Senate and House of Representatives both passed the deal by unanimous consent Friday. The White House later confirmed Trump had signed it into law.



Trump's reversal came as the full weight of the shutdown, including the financial cost on struggling employees and the national economy, be-

came clear, and as the president appeared offset by his political nemesis Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic speaker of the House of Representa-

tives.

But while Trump climbed down in agreeing to reopen government without first getting \$5.7 billion in border wall funds, he still threatened to renew hostilities with a new shutdown, or a state of emergency, if there is no breakthrough on his pet project in the next three weeks.

"Over the next 21 days, I expect that both Democrats and Republicans will operate in good faith," he said as he announced he would reopen the government.

"If we don't get a fair deal from Congress, the government either shuts down on February 15th again, or I will use the powers afforded to me under the laws and Constitution of the United States to address this emergency," he warned. (AFP)

Asylum Seekers Worry New US Policy Will Mean More Waiting

TIJUANA, Mexico - Eusebio Gomez thought his arduous journey to the U.S. and months-long wait in the border town of Tijuana, Mexico, would end when he made it to American soil. But a shift in the Trump administration's immigration policy could mean more waiting.

The Mexican government said Friday that the United States plans to return 20 migrants per day at the San Ysidro border crossing as they await an answer

to their asylum requests. The practice could be one of the more significant changes to the immigration system in years.

Gomez, who was one of 25 names called for processing Friday at San Ysidro, said he would feel far less safe waiting in Tijuana, with its sky-high homicide rate. The 18-year-old Honduran said he wanted to come to the U.S. to escape violence.

"It's not about the dollar, it's about safety," Gomez said. (AP)

Syria Calls on Turkey to Withdraw from Syria Under 1998 Plan

DAMASCUS, Syria - Syria is calling on Turkey to withdraw its troops from the country's north and end support for armed opposition groups in order to revive a two-decade old bilateral security agreement.

Russia has encouraged Turkey and Syria to refer to the 1998 treaty to deal with security concerns along their shared borders in the wake of the planned U.S. troop withdrawal from northern Syria.

Turkey says the 1998 treaty gives it the right to move into Syria, justifying



its troop deployment in the country and a possible new offensive designed to push out the Syrian Kurdish militia that Ankara

considers to be an existential threat.

Russia says Damascus should regain control of territories after U.S.

troops withdraw and urged Turkey to talk to the Syrian government to stabilize the border areas. (AP)

EU Nations Give Ultimatum to Venezuela's Maduro as Pressure Mounts



MADRID - Spain, France and Germany gave embattled Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro an ultimatum

ahead of an UN Security Council meeting on Saturday, saying they would recognise opposition leader Juan Guai-

do as president unless he calls elections within eight days.

The ultimatum comes as international pressure mounts on the Maduro regime to agree to a new vote, after the United States, Canada and major South American players recognised Juan Guaido, who proclaimed himself acting president of Venezuela during massive street rallies this week.

After four years of economic pain that has left Venezuelans short of food and medicine and

driven more than two million to flee, Guaido is trying to oust Maduro following controversial elections that saw the socialist leader sworn in for a second term.

"If within eight days there are no fair, free and transparent elections called in Venezuela, Spain will recognise Juan Guaido as Venezuelan president" so that he himself can call such polls, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said in a televised announcement. (AFP)

Algeria's Main Islamist Party to Run in Presidential Poll

ALGIERS - Algeria's main Islamist party, the Movement for the Society of Peace, said Saturday it has decided to take part in April's presidential election.

During the night of Friday to Saturday "the consultative council decided by an overwhelming majority to take part in the presidential election and to present Dr Abderrazak Makri as the party's candidate," the MSP's head of communications Abdellah Bouadji told AFP. Presenting itself as Islamist and moderate,

the MSP had supported ageing incumbent President Abdelaziz Bouteflika within a governing alliance, before going its own way in 2012.

Bouteflika, 81, who uses a wheelchair and has rarely been seen in public since a stroke in 2013, is due to complete a fourth term in office on April 28. The election is set for April 18.

Despite his advanced age and poor health, some of Bouteflika's supporters have called for him to stand for a fifth term. (AFP)

Tunisia Calls for Arab League to Readmit Syria

TUNIS - Syria's "natural place" is within the Arab League, Tunisia's foreign minister said Saturday, ahead of the organization's annual summit in Tunis in March. "Syria is an Arab state, and its natural place is within the Arab League," Khemaies Jhinaoui said during a news conference with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, who is on a tour of North African countries.

The Arab League suspended Syria's membership in November 2011 as the death toll in the country's civil war mounted. (AFP)

Experts, Images Suggest a Saudi Ballistic Missile Program

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates - A military base deep inside Saudi Arabia appears to be testing and possibly manufacturing ballistic missiles, experts and satellite images suggest, evidence of the type of weapons program it has long criticized its archrival Iran for possessing. Further raising the stakes for any such program are comments by Saudi Arabia's powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who said last year the kingdom wouldn't hesitate to develop nuclear weapons if Iran does. Ballistic missiles can carry nuclear warheads to targets thousands of kilometers (miles) away. Officials in Riyadh and the Saudi Embassy in Washington did not respond to requests for comment.

Having such a program could further strain relations with the U.S., the kingdom's longtime security partner, at a time when ties already are being tested by the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi and the Saudi-led war in Yemen. (AP)

Brexit Date Could Be Pushed Back by A 'Couple of Extra Weeks': Leadsom

LONDON - The date Britain leaves the EU could be pushed back by a couple of weeks to give time for legislation to be approved by lawmakers, the leader of Britain's lower house of parliament said, the most senior figure to make such a suggestion. Britain, the world's fifth largest economy, is due to leave the European Union on March 29 but Prime Minister Theresa May's negotiated exit deal was rejected by lawmakers, leaving open the possibility of a disorderly Brexit. Parliament will now vote on a series of amendments on Tues-



day with the United Kingdom facing its deepest political crisis in half a century as it grapples with how, or even whether, to exit the European project it joined in 1973.

"We can get the legislation through and I think we do, in spite

of everything, have a very strong relationship with our EU friends and neighbors and I am absolutely certain that if we needed a couple of extra weeks or something then that would be feasible," Andrea Leadsom told the BBC. (Reuters)

Oscar-Winning 'Umbrellas of Cherbourg' Composer Legrand Dies

PARIS - Oscar-winning composer and pianist Michel Legrand, whose hits included the score for "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg" and the song "The Windmills of Your Mind" and who worked with some of the biggest singers of the 20th century, has died at age 86.

Legrand last performed on stage just last month, and was still composing and practicing piano an hour a day even as fatigue increasingly forced

him to economize his energy, said Claire de Castellane, a musician and producer who organized a series of recent solo piano concerts by Legrand. De Castellane confirmed his death Saturday, without providing details.

"MICHEL LEGRAND Feb. 24, 1932-Jan. 26, 2019," read the home page of his official website Saturday, followed by photographs of Legrand with Barbara Streisand, Miles Davis, Yves Montand and others. (AP)

Day and Night, Yellow Vest Protests Keep Pressure on Macron

PARIS - France's yellow vest protesters hit the streets again Saturday, keeping up pressure on President Emmanuel Macron even as internal divisions and frustration over protest violence cloud the movement's future.

Multiple protests are being held around Paris and other cities, the 11th straight weekend of action prompted by Macron policies seen as favoring the rich.

Macron has sapped some support for the movement by taking an active role in recent days in a national debate in towns across France, launched to address the protesters' concerns.

Some yellow vest leaders are trying to keep up momentum by holding protests after dark as well as during the day. A small crowd of protesters advanced peacefully Saturday morning down the Champs-Elysees, site of recent rioting. Two other groups plan evening events across town, at Place de la Republique in eastern Paris.

France deployed about 80,000 police Saturday against protest violence. About the same number of protesters took to the streets the last two weekends.

Participants at the Champs-Elysees march called Macron's national debate a "smoke screen" to distract the French from his pro-business policies. They expressed views veering from the far left to a middle-ground, middle-class malaise. (AP)

Neighbor News

Turkmenistan Hopes New Highway Will Help Diversify Economy

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan has begun construction on a multi-billion-dollar, cross-country highway project that the gas-rich, largely isolated Central Asian state hopes will help generate more regional trade.

The four-lane highway is projected to link Turkmenistan's capital of Ashgabat, the largest city in Central Asia, to Turkmenabat near the border with Uzbekistan. The government newspaper Neutral Turkmenistan reported on January 25 that the artery, expected to cost \$2.3 billion when completed, will stretch across some 600 kilometers of desert.

It is hoped the new highway will boost regional

trade by linking with another planned artery linking the capital to the port of Turkmenbashi, on the Caspian Sea.

The son of Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov, a deputy regional governor, was on hand for a ceremony to mark the launch of construction on January 25.

Serdar Berdimukhammedov called the highway an example of Turkmenistan's "great support to the private sector, which is developing rapidly in our country."

The road will be constructed by a little-known private company called Turkmen Awtoban, with a loan provided by the national bank. (Agencies)

Pakistan Eases Visa Rules to Promote Tourism

Islamabad - With an objective to promote tourism Pakistan government has announced new visa policy offering visas on arrival to visitors from 50 countries and electronic visas to 175 nationalities.

Pakistan Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry talking to media said that IATA approved tour operators now can bring tourist groups to the country under new policy which, he said, will usher in a new era of progress and prosperity in the country. He said there was great potential to earn foreign ex-

change through tourism as Pakistan was blessed with a lot of tourist spots and scenic beauty. He said the policy had been framed in consultations with all the departments concerned and stakeholders. He said Business visa will now be provided to the citizens of ninety six countries from the previous practice of sixty eight countries. The Business visa will be stamped in eight to ten days. Chaudhry said the duration of diplomatic visas has been extended from one year to three years, while that of students' visas to two years from one year. (IRNA)

Iran Supports Venezuela in Face of US Plots: FM Zarif

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says the Islamic Republic supports the legal government in Venezuela and the country's people in the face of all plots, particularly those hatched by the United States.

The top Iranian diplomat made the remarks in a phone conversation with Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza on Friday amid massive protests organized by the US in the Latin American country.

The Iranian and Venezuelan foreign ministers discussed possible avenues for countering

the US plots against independent countries, particularly Venezuela, through international channels.

Zarif and Arreaza also exchanged views about ways to strengthen negotiations between the Venezuelan government and the opposition groups and find a political solution to the ongoing conflict between the two sides.

At least 10 countries, including Russia, Turkey and Iran, have expressed their support for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and condemned outside interference in Caracas. (Press TV)

Iran Vows to Reconsider Cooperation with Europe in Case of New Sanctions

TEHRAN - Iran has strongly censured France for threatening to impose new sanctions against the Islamic Republic over its missile program, vowing to reconsider its relations with European countries in case such bans are imposed.

The remarks were made by Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassemi in reaction to earlier comments by French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian.

"Iran's military capabilities are part of the country's legitimate defense power and a guarantor of the Islamic Republic's national security, which is based on the doctrine of deterrence," Qassemi said Friday.

"The Islamic Republic has designed its defense capabilities based on a

realistic assessment of the existing threats," he said, vowing that the country would strengthen such capabilities to the extent it deems necessary.

"Iran's missile capability is not negotiable, and this has been brought to the attention of the French side during the ongoing political dialogue between Iran and France," he said.

Qassemi further noted that Le Drian's threat to impose new missile sanctions is against the spirit of political talks and cooperation between the two countries.

He also vowed that Iran will reconsider its interaction with European countries in case these states impose any new sanctions against Tehran. (Press TV)