

US Urges Resumption of Dialogue Between Serbia and Kosovo

BELGRADE, Serbia — A high-ranking U.S. envoy has urged Serbia and Kosovo to stop provoking each other and to resume their discussions over how to normalize relations between the two former wartime foes.

Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale, who met with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, also called Friday on Kosovo to lift a 100 percent tariff on Serbian goods so that European Union-mediated talks can resume. The call came a day after Kosovo's Parliament adopted a negotiating platform for the talks that involves mutual recognition and keeping the current borders intact. Serbia does not recognize Kosovo's independence, but the two have been told they must improve bilateral relations to join the EU, which has mediated ne-



gotiations aimed at resolving the long-standing Balkan dispute. Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008 after fighting a 1998-99 war

that ended with NATO intervening to stop a bloody Serbian crackdown of Kosovo Albanian separatists. Serbian officials have said the rigid

platform dashes all hopes for a compromise solution. ...*(More on P4)...(13)*

Indonesia Deploys 600 Soldiers to Build Papua Highway

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Indonesia's military says 600 soldiers are being deployed to continue work on the trans Papua highway after civilian workers fled the landmark development project that's become a target for attacks by Papuan independence fighters.

The military spokesman for Indonesia's easternmost Papua region, Muhammad Aidi, said Friday that construction through the mountainous jun-

gle interior of Papua from Wamena to Merauke will continue despite the series of attacks. Some 19 people including one soldier died in a Dec. 2 attack, and three soldiers who were part of a contingent to provide security for military engineers were killed Thursday. Aidi said, "We will not take a step back in order to secure the continuation of development in Papua." *(Fox News)*

China Warns of Repeating History's Mistakes with Venezuela

BEIJING — The Chinese government's top diplomat issued a stern warning on Friday against interfering in Venezuela and imposing sanctions, saying history offered a clear lesson about not "following the same old disastrous road". China has repeatedly called for outsiders not to interfere in Venezuela's internal affairs and has stuck by embattled President Nicolas Maduro. Most Western countries have recognized opposition leader Juan Guaido as Venezuela's legitimate

head of state.

The United States has pledged to "expand the net" of sanctions against Venezuela, including more on banks supporting Maduro's government.

State Councillor Wang Yi, responding to a question on whether China still recognized Maduro or had had contacts with the opposition, said the sovereignty and independence of Latin American countries should be respected. "The internal affairs of every country should be decided by their own peo-



ple. External interference and sanctions will only exacerbate the tension situation, and allow the law of the jungle to once again run amok," Wang said at his annual news conference on the sidelines of China's parliament meeting. *(Reuters)*

French Foreign Ministry Fined \$500k for... Appointing Too Few Women



PARIS — The French Foreign Ministry hired too few women to major positions in 2017, violating the country's

gender equality quotas, Le Monde reports just before the International Women's Day of March 8.

Out of touch with the modern spirit of equality at all costs, the ministry missed the French quota for first-time female appointments set by the 2012 Sauvadet law. Men reportedly occupy five seats too many, which cost the ministry €90,000 each, for a total of €450,000 (about \$504,500). The 2012 law stipulated that by 2017, each gender must have at least a 40-percent representation among civil servants appointed for the first time to positions of

responsibility and management. Only 26 percent of French ambassadors are women, Le Monde reports — including those in Russia and Ukraine, which along with a number of countries in the Eastern hemisphere (not France, though) are marking International Women's Day as a state holiday on Friday. Twenty-four percent of French consuls are likewise female. Most of the women employed by the Foreign Ministry ...*(More on P4)...(14)*

Brazil President Says Military Should Have Benefits Reduced

SAO PAULO — Brazil's president said Thursday that military personnel should have their benefits reduced as part of a reform of the country's troubled pension system, a concession aimed at helping a controversial proposal get past near-certain opposition in Congress. President Jair Bolsonaro made his remarks in a short speech to marine troops in Rio de Janeiro as lawmakers prepare to debate changes which would increase the retirement age to

65 for men and 62 for women.

The prospect for reform is unknown, but securing any modification to the system is a difficult undertaking that requires super majorities in both chambers of Congress.

"I want the armed forces to make a sacrifice and accept the pension reforms," Bolsonaro told troops. "The new pension system will affect the military."

He did not provide additional details. ...*(More on P4)...(15)*

EU 27 Ambassadors to Meet on Brexit at 1400 GMT in Brussels

BRUSSELS — Ambassadors of 27 European Union countries will gather at 1400 GMT (9 a.m. ET) in Brussels to be briefed for one hour by the EU's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier on the latest developments in talks with Britain, EU diplomats said on Friday. The unscheduled meeting was not because of any breakthrough in talks with Britain, the diplomats said, but to update the envoys on the state of affairs.

British Attorney General Geoffrey Cox, initially scheduled to come to Brussels on Friday for further discussions, would not be arriving after all. The ongoing talks are to find a different compromise deal on Britain's withdrawal from the EU on March 29th after the British parliament has decidedly rejected the agreement negotiated by Prime Minister Theresa May. *(Reuters)*

Venezuela Blames Sabotage & 'US Electricity War' after Major Power Outage

CARACAS — Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro accused the US of waging an "electricity war" against the country, as Caracas and other cities were plunged into darkness Thursday night. The government says the incident is likely sabotage. Thousands of commuters in Caracas had to walk home as a power outage shut down the capital's subway, resulting in massive traffic jams. The lights also went out in the largest airport of Caracas. People on social media also described disruptions in most of the nation's regions. President Maduro said the blackout was the result of an "electricity war" waged by "US imperialism." *(RT)*

UN Opens First Reception Center for Venezuelans in Colombia



GENEVA — The U.N. refugee agency says it is opening its first reception center in Colombia to support people leaving neighboring Venezuela. UNHCR spokesman Andrej Mahacic says the center set up along with Colombian authorities in the border city of Maicao opens Friday and can

initially take in up to 350 people. He said it "has the possibility to grow" in the future. The Geneva-based agency said Friday that hundreds of people including children, the elderly and those with medical conditions are "forced to live on the streets" because of a lack of shelter in Maicao.

UNHCR says 2.7 million Venezuelans have left their crisis-ridden country since 2015, and Colombia is the country most-affected by the outflow, with more than 1.1 million. The agency said humanitarian needs have "overwhelmed" Colombia's reception capacity. *(Fox News)*

Pope Meets Jewish Group, decries 'Depraved' Antisemitism

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis is denouncing the "depraved hatred" behind a wave of anti-Semitic attacks in parts of the world and says inter-faith dialogue can help counter it. Francis made the comments during a Friday audience with a delegation of the American Jewish Committee. He lamented that their meeting was taking place amid the spread of a "climate of wickedness and fury, in which an excessive and depraved hat-

red is taking root." And he warned that for Christians, any form of anti-Semitism is "a rejection of one's own origins, a complete contradiction." The audience occurred days after Francis responded to longstanding requests from Jewish groups to open the Vatican archives of its World War II-era pope, Pius XII, accused by some of having failed to speak out enough against the Holocaust. *(Fox News)*

S. Korea, Us Sign Deal On Seoul Paying More for Us Military

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea and the U.S. on Friday formally signed a deal on Seoul's increased payment for the U.S. troop deployment, amid worries about the future of the countries' decades-long military alliance.

President Donald Trump earlier pressured Seoul to increase its share, triggering concerns in South Korea that he might withdraw some of the 28,500 U.S. troops here if Seoul refused to accept his demand. Experts say Trump will likely again apply pressure when the two countries meet in coming months to determine Seoul's contribution next year. South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha and U.S. Ambassador Harry Harris signed the new cost-sharing deal on Friday.

During a signing ceremony, Kang called the deal "the results of hard work and sometimes difficult work" that "the alliance can build upon to become stronger and greater." Harris said the deal's signing underscores "the importance of iron-clad nature of our alliance."

Earlier this week, the two countries eliminated their huge springtime military drills and replaced them with smaller training in what they called a bid to back diplomatic efforts to strip North Korea of its nuclear weapons. Trump tweeted that "the reason I do not want military drills with South Korea is to save hundreds of millions of dollars for the U.S. for which we are not reimbursed." ...*(More on P4)...(16)*

Neighbor News

Khan Says Won't Allow Any Militant Group on Pakistani Soil — Pakistan-India

ISLAMABAD — Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said no militant group would be allowed to operate on Pakistani soil and carry out attacks abroad, days after his government began a crackdown against militant organizations. "This government will not allow Pakistan's land to be used for any kind of outside terrorism," Khan said on Friday while addressing a public rally in southern Pakistan. "We will not allow any militant group to function in our country now." China urged India and Pakistan to move on from the recent esca-

lation on the conflict between the two countries, according to media reports. Talking to reporters in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that New Delhi and Islamabad should "quickly turn the page" and convert the present tensions into "an opportunity for the long term improvement" in their relations, the Indian news agency Press Trust of India reported. "China hopes Pakistan and India will transform the crisis into opportunity and meet each other halfway," Wang said. *(Agencies)*

US Accuses Iran of Defying UN Resolution, Calls for Tough Bans

TEHRAN — The US has accused Iran of violating the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 by testing one of its ballistic missiles and launching two satellites, urging the world body to restore "tougher international sanctions" against the Islamic Republic.

In a letter to the 15-member council, acting US Ambassador to the United Nations Jonathan Cohen said Iran tested a medium-range ballistic missile on Dec. 1, 2018, and attempted to place satellites in orbit on Jan. 15 and Feb. 5. "Iran has carried out these three launches in defiance of the expressed will of the

UN Security Council, and such provocations continue to destabilize the entire Middle East region," Cohen claimed. Cohen's letter called upon the council to "join us in imposing real consequences on Iran for its flagrant defiance of the council's demands and bring back tougher international restrictions to deter Iran's missile program." The US claims about Iran's violation come as Washington turned into a "gross violator of the resolution" after unlawfully leaving the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, and imposing unilateral sanctions against Tehran. *(Press TV)*

The Dream Bakery that Supports Returned Women Migrants in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE — Khursheda Ilchibekova has dreamed of having her own bakery since she was ten years old. She grew up in the beautiful but troubled Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region in eastern Tajikistan, which was stricken by civil war and extreme poverty.

Life was especially hard for families with many small children, as was the case of Khursheda's family of eight. The income from the little business which Khursheda's parents operated was too small to put enough food on the table.

Seeing how difficult it was for her parents to make ends meet, the enterprising girl started her own business selling sunflower seed snacks after school. She started learning

about the market and began thinking of new products and services. She was able to help her parents with the family business by selling homemade pastries and this activity supported her through university. After graduation, she continued working on her business.

"With a growing number of happy customers, I decided to open the bakery I had always dreamed of. However, this was the point when I realized I needed to work more on my business skills, so I enrolled in management training at the University of Central Asia," said Khursheda. The next step for her was when she heard of the IOM programme providing grants for small and medium enterprises. *(Trend)*

Uzbekistan, Russia Discuss Program of Economic Cooperation for 2019-2024

TASHKENT — A meeting with delegation of Russian Ministry of Economic Development headed by Minister Maxim Oreshkin was held at the Uzbek Ministry of Finance, Trend reports with reference to the press service of the Ministry of Finance.

The meeting discussed the Program of Economic Cooperation between the Uzbek and Russian Governments for 2019-2024, the implementation of which is already yielding results. Active work is underway on 54 projects, in particular in such sectors as agrarian, fuel and energy and engineering. Moreover, within the framework of agri-

cultural development projects and increasing its export potential, joint optimization of the supply chains of agricultural products is planned through the creation of a network of wholesale distribution centers.

The importance of further development of bilateral relations between states was emphasized. In connection with the implementation of systemic tax reforms aimed at creating more favorable conditions for both business and population of Uzbekistan, the usefulness of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Russia in terms of technical and advisory assistance was noted. *(Trend)*