

China Offers Help to Venezuela to Restore Power

BEIJING - China offered on Wednesday to help Venezuela restore its power grid, after President Nicolas Maduro accused U.S. counterpart Donald Trump of cyber "sabotage" that plunged the South American country into its worst blackout on record. Maduro, who retains control of the military and other state institutions as well as the backing of Russia and China, has blamed Washington for his nation's economic turmoil and denounced opposition leader Juan Guaido as a puppet of the United States. With the power blackout in its sixth day, hospitals struggled to keep equipment running, food rotted in the tropical heat and exports from the country's main oil terminal were shut down. Speaking in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman



Lu Kang said China had noted reports that the power grid had gone down due to a hacking attack. "China is deeply concerned about this," Lu said.

"China hopes that the Venezuelan side can discover the reason for this issue as soon as possible and resume normal power supply and social order. China is willing to provide help

and technical support to restore Venezuela's power grid." He gave no details. Power returned to many parts of the country on Tuesday, including some areas that had not had electricity since last Thursday, according to witnesses and social media. But power was still out in parts of the capital of Caracas and the western region near the border with Colombia. Information Minister Jorge Rodriguez said power had been restored in the "vast majority" of the country. The blackout was likely caused by a technical problem with transmission lines linking the Guri hydroelectric plant in southeastern Venezuela to the national power grid, experts have told Reuters. ...*(More on P4)...(16)*

French Mps Approve Anti-Riot Bill amid Yellow Vest Protests, Rights Watchdog Sounds Alarm

PARIS - The upper house of the French parliament has greenlighted a bill giving police broad powers to quell unrest. It comes as a rights watchdog warned of civil liberties being undermined in France due to crackdowns on protest. Following hours of tense debate on Tuesday, the French Senate approved an anti-hooligan ("anticasseurs") bill by a margin of 210 votes to 115. The bill has courted widespread controversy, having been denounced as "liberticide" by the left and hailed as a "the law of

protections" by the French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner. The government insists that the legislation will allow to distinguish between law-abiding protesters and violent rioters, while providing protection for both law enforcement and Yellow Vest demonstrators. Speaking ahead of the vote on Tuesday, Castaner defended the bill, saying that it "safeguards the right to demonstrate," while brushing off concerns that it encroaches on civil freedoms. (RT)

'Blatant Extortion': German Ex-Chancellor Lashes Out at US Threat to Withhold Intel over China

BERLIN - Washington's threat to downgrade its intelligence-sharing with Berlin if Germany buys Chinese 5G equipment is an example of why Berlin should seek more independence in its policies, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder said. The US Ambassador to Germany reportedly threatened the hosting country this week with a number of consequences for dealing with China, including withholding US intelligence information. The move was

criticized by Schroeder, who is a long-time critic of Washington's habit of using political leverage on Germany. "This is such blatant extortion," the politician said on Tuesday at an event organized by the business newspaper Handelsblatt in Berlin. Washington basically said: "Since you don't comply, we will not share with you," he added. He argued that Germany, and Europe in general, needs relative independence from the US and its economic and



foreign policies. The Europeans may have their own interests in dealing with countries like China or Russia, said Schroeder, who chairs the supervisory board of the Nord Stream gas pipeline. ...*(More on P4)...(17)*

Neighbor News

Pakistan Tests New Homegrown 'Smart Weapon' amid Tensions with India

ISLAMABAD - The Pakistan Air Force has successfully tested a new domestically-built extended-range missile, said to be a "smart weapon." It also vowed to respond "with full force" if subjected to any foreign aggression. The weapon, which is apparently an air-to-surface missile, has been deployed by a JF-17 Thunder - a Chinese-Pakistani multi-role fighter jet - the Air Force said on Tuesday. No characteristics of the new missile have been made publicly available, yet it is described as a "smart weapon" which has an "extended" range.

A short and grainy video of the test has been released, showing a fighter jet deploying

the missile which then hits the designated area at a proving ground. Footage ends with a still showing the crater made by the missile. The development and successful test of the new weapon has been lauded by the Chief of Air Staff, Mujahid Anwar Khan, who praised the country's engineers and scientists for this achievement.

"Pakistan is a peace loving nation but if subjected to aggression by [an] adversary, we would respond with full force," the official warned.

The test comes amid the standoff between Pakistan and India, which has continued between the two nuclear-armed nations since late February. (RT)

Iranian President Meets Shiite Spiritual Leader in Iraq

BAGHDAD - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday met with Iraq's most revered Shiite spiritual leader Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in the holy city of Najaf, a provincial source said.

On the last day of his official visit, Rouhani and his accompanying delegation arrived in the airport of Najaf, some 160 km south of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, and was received by its provincial governor Luay al-Yasiri before heading to al-Sistani's house where the two held an hour-long meeting, a source from the provincial media office told Xinhua on condition of anonymity. "Al-Sistani and Rouhani discussed relations between the two countries and the need to distance Iraq from any regional or

international conflict," the source said.

"The meeting was attended by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Iraj Masjedi," the source added.

Rouhani and his delegation are scheduled to visit the mausoleum of Imam Ali, the cousin of the Prophet Mohammed, in the old city center of Najaf, which attracts millions of Shiite pilgrims every year. Rouhani's meeting with Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, who has a large number of followers inside Iran, is of symbolic importance in both Iraq and Iran. On Monday, Rouhani arrived in Baghdad on a landmark three-day visit to Iraq at the invitation of his Iraqi counterpart Barham Salih. (Xinhua)

Iran to Rethink Strategy in Wake of 'Suspicious Nuclear Projects' in the Region - Top Official

TEHRAN - Iran will adjust to threats from countries that ready their own nuclear programs, the nation's security official has warned. His words come as the US holds talks on selling nuclear tech to the Saudis.

Tehran is paying attention to nations in the region "spending their petro-dollars on suspicious nuclear projects that can endanger the security in the world," the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani said on Wednesday.

"New threats like this will force us to revise our strategy" and "predict the requirements of our country and armed forces," he stressed. Shamkhani didn't mention any country by name but his remarks came amid reports that

Washington is holding talks to sell civil nuclear technology to its important longtime ally against Iran - Saudi Arabia.

"Our intent is for them to be our partner as they build their nuclear energy," US Secretary of Energy Rick Perry told the Financial Times earlier this week, noting that the sides have made some progress but the negotiations are still ongoing. The US seeks to ensure that the deal wouldn't lead to proliferation of nuclear weapons, Perry said.

Washington's desire to strike a deal with Riyadh, meanwhile, led to some backlash at home. In February, the Democratic Party-controlled House Committee on Oversight and Reform launched a probe into the negotiations. (RT)

Uzbekistan Closes Airports for Boeing 737 MAX

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan's airports are temporarily closed for receiving and sending Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, Trend reports with reference to the Civil Aviation Agency under Uzbek Ministry of Transport.

Uzbek airports from 05:00 pm (GMT +5) on March 13 are closed for receiving and sending Boeing 737-8 MAX and Boeing 737-9 MAX air-

craft for a period of one month.

The aviation industry clarified that the ban does not apply to flights of this type of aircraft over Uzbekistan.

After the collapse of Boeing 737-8 MAX liner in Ethiopia on Sunday, many countries suspended the operation of these liners. The United States does not intend to impose such a ban. (Trend)

'Tell Us What You Want': European Officials Scold UK, Say London Has to Get Its Act Together



LONDON - European officials expressed irritation and skepticism on Wednesday over the Brexit standoff in

the British parliament, which rejected for a second time a deal negotiated by Prime Minister Theresa May with the

EU. "We are at the very limits of what's bearable," Germany's Europe Minister Michael Roth told Deutschlandfunk radio regarding the Brexit debacle. "We have already changed the exit agreement once to suit Britain... We are open and prepared to talk but we aren't getting any clear views from Britain on what they want, only what they don't want." His fellow cabinet member, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, said that by rejecting an orderly

exit from the EU British politicians were playing "with the welfare of their citizens and the economy in a reckless way." British MPs are expected to again express 'what they don't want' from Brexit on Wednesday by rejecting a no-deal withdrawal from the European Union. They may later vote on whether to ask the EU for an extension of the current Brexit deadline, which is currently set for March 29. Guy Verhofstadt, the

Ethiopia Crash Pilot Had Control Problems, Black Boxes Bound for Europe

ADDIS ABABA - The Ethiopian Airlines pilot whose jet crashed killing 157 people had reported flight-control problems, the company said on Wednesday, as it prepared to send the black boxes to Europe from a disaster that has rocked the global airline industry.

The still unexplained crash, just after take-off from Addis Ababa, followed another disaster involving a Boeing 737 MAX in Indonesia five months ago that killed 189 people. Though there is no evidence of links, the twin dis-

asters have spooked passengers worldwide, led to the grounding of most of Boeing's 737 MAX aircraft, and sending shares in the world's biggest planemaker plunging. The investigation may focus on an automated anti-stall system that dips the aircraft's nose down.

Asrat Begashaw, a spokesman for Ethiopia Airlines, told Reuters the pilot had reported flight control problems - as opposed to external factors such as birds - and had requested to turn back to Addis Ababa. (Reuters)

Rights Group: EU Complicit in Violence against Migrants

BIHAC, Bosnia-Herzegovina - A leading rights group has accused European Union states of complacency in the "systematic, unlawful and frequently violent pushbacks" by Croatian border guards of thousands of asylum-seekers to squalid and unsafe refugee camps in Bosnia. Amnesty International said in a report released Wednesday that "European governments are not just turning a blind eye to vicious assaults by the Croatian police, but also funding their activities." The report said that "in doing so, they are fueling a growing humanitarian crisis on the edge of the European Union." (AP)

Russian Foreign Ministry Condemns New U.S. Sanctions, Threats

MOSCOW - The Russian Foreign Ministry on Wednesday condemned new U.S. sanctions applied against a Russian-Venezuelan bank and is threatening to punish Russia's oil giant Rosneft for cooperating with Venezuela.

"We urge the United States to think again and, instead of imposing bans on foreign companies and banks, to finally shift to normal joint work under the aegis of the UN (United Nations) to help stabilize the situation in Venezuela based on the principles of international law," the ministry said in a statement. The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) on Monday imposed sanctions on Evrofinance Mosnarbank, a Moscow-based bank jointly owned by Russian and Venezuelan state-owned companies, for "attempting to circumvent U.S. sanctions on Venezuela." (Xinhua)

'Dictator' V 'Tyrant': Erdogan & Netanyahu Trade Insults in Public Spat over Who Is Worse... Again

ANKARA/ JERUSALEM - There is no love lost between leaders of Israel and Turkey. This week, they engaged in their latest public spat, trying to determine which of them is a worse oppressor of people. The latest exchange of insults stems from comments by Benjamin Netanyahu, who attacked Israeli TV presenter Rotem Sela for calling on viewers to sympathize with Arab Israelis. The prime minister rebuffed the comments, saying that "Israel is not a state of all its citizens. According to the Nation-State Law that we passed, Israel is



the nation-state of the Jewish people, and them alone."

The apparently discriminatory remark made waves inside Israel and attracted some scolding rebukes, like those from Israeli Wonder Woman star Gal Gadot. A spokesman for Turkish Presi-

dent Recep Tayyip Erdogan decided to have a say too, condemning the "blatant racism and discrimination" on Twitter last Tuesday. Netanyahu fired back at Turkey and its leadership early on Wednesday. "Turkey's dictator ...*(More on P4)...(19)*

Pompeo Seeks to Recruit Top World Oil Execs to Promote US Foreign Policy

WASHINGTON - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has sought to recruit some of the top oil industry guns to serve as Washington's foreign policy tools to crack down on "bad actors" like Venezuela, Russia and Iran.

Addressing members of IHS Markit's CERAWEEK annual energy conference in Houston, Texas on Tuesday, Pompeo divulged what has long been an open secret - that the US is willing to use all its political clout to propel its economic

interests and vice versa.

Pompeo said that American shale oil and natural gas should become instruments to "strengthen" the US "hand in foreign policy." As an example of such an intertwined approach, the top US diplomat referred to the crisis in Venezuela, which has the largest proven oil reserves in the world. The Latin American country has seen its economy crumbling under Washington's stifling economic sanctions for years. (RT)

Chinese Ambassador Urges More Financial Cooperation between China and Britain

LONDON - Chinese Ambassador to Britain Liu Xiaoming on Tuesday called on China and Britain to seize opportunities to advance financial cooperation.

Liu made the appeal at a dinner hosted by Britain's 48 Group Club and the China Chamber of Commerce in Britain. He said that in recent years, financial cooperation between China and Britain has enjoyed strong growth.

Liu said that financial cooperation has increasingly become a "new engine" for business cooperation between both countries. Noting that the two countries have issued a strategic plan for financial services, Liu said this has laid a solid foundation for closer cooperation on financial supervision and business partnership. Liu also said that bilateral financial cooperation has found a "new platform" in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

He said that recent years have seen fruitful results in financial cooperation between China and Britain on the BRI, adding that Britain was the first to apply to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the first to contribute to the AIIB special fund.

The ambassador said that the RMB internationalization has created "new opportunities" for financial cooperation between China and Britain. Britain has always played an important role in RMB internationalization, Liu said, adding that it is only natural that London becomes the world's largest offshore RMB market outside Asia. (Xinhua)