

'US Not Just Behind Venezuelan Coup, It's Leading It' – Foreign Minister to RT

CARACAS - Venezuela is well aware the US is actually leading an effort to topple President Maduro, but is ready to sit down with the Western-backed opposition and could be doing so "in half an hour," the country's Foreign Minister told RT.

Hitting back at the Western pressure, Venezuelan government will now focus its efforts on "the main leader of the coup, the 'director of the circus,' namely, the US government, Mr Trump and his representatives."

Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza gave an interview to RT Spanish on Sunday. Without further ado, he accused Washington of spearheading what he said an effort to overthrow democratically elected President Nicolas Maduro.

Adding to a US-led pressure for President Maduro to step aside,



Spain, France, Germany and the UK on Saturday issued the elected leader an ultimatum, calling on Maduro to call for new elections within eight days.

"First of all, it is interventionism to the highest degree. Secondly, it is arrogant, and, thirdly, it is

artificial," Arreaza commented. The Venezuelan government will scrutinize ties with countries who backed the opposition but will not put too much emphasis on it.

"The Bolivarian democracy only requires recognition and support from Venezuelan people," he

stated, adding, "other governments are of little interest to us." Nevertheless, Caracas will keep the door open to any talks with pro-Western opposition led by Juan Guaido. The opposition leader declared himself interim president last week, garnering support or recognition from the US and an array of other nations. Russia and Turkey were among those to denounce Guaido's move and said they would further recognize the elected leader Maduro.

"Everyone should know that we are in constant contact with the Venezuelan opposition," said Venezuela's top diplomat. Last December, the government was close to reaching a deal with them but they walked out of the talks after consulting with the State Department. (RT)

Neighbor News

UAE Rulers' Strategic Mistakes Made Ties 'Unacceptable': Iran

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says ties with the UAE have drifted into an "unacceptable" lane due to the strategic mistakes the tiny Arab country's leaders have made over the past years.

"The UAE government, despite maintaining vast economic ties with Iran, has entered an unacceptable confrontational phase in its relations with the Islamic Republic due to the political and strategic mistakes of its leaders," Zarif told a parliament session in Tehran Monday.

In November 2018, an Emirati official said his country was fully complying with the US sanctions imposed the same month on the Islamic Republic. Even before

that, the UAE had taken a tougher line in accordance with Saudi Arabia's hawkish policies on Iran.

Washington's sanctions targeted Iran's shipping sector as well as its banks and national airline, a decision that complicated Iranian oil tankers' port calls in the UAE's Fujairah port for fueling. In response, Iran said it would start bunkering operations at a newly-built ship fueling terminal on the Persian Gulf island of Qeshm, which would reduce costs by as much as \$5-7 per tonne. Zarif said Iran was taking the necessary diplomatic measures to ensure Abu Dhabi would no longer violate the rights of Iranian traders working in the country. (Press TV)

Pakistan Supreme Court to Review Christian Woman's Blasphemy Acquittal

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan's Supreme Court will on Tuesday begin a review of its acquittal of a Christian woman charged with blasphemy, a verdict that sparked days of Islamist protests over a case that has divided society and incited killings.

Asia Bibi, who spent eight years on death row, has been in hiding since the Supreme Court freed her in October, with religious hardliners calling for her death and demanding that the government prevent her from leaving the country. Most reviews of Supreme Court verdicts are dismissed immediately, but

the controversy, anger and fear surrounding the case has added an extra layer of uncertainty. A three-judge panel, including new Supreme Court Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa, is due to hear the case.

Bibi's lawyer, Saif-ul-Malook, who fled to Europe due to fears for his safety last year, told Reuters he expected the case to be dismissed. "They have filed the petition on flimsy grounds. They haven't attempted to counter her release on constitutional grounds," said Malook, who returned to Pakistan this week and will represent Bibi in court. (Agencies)

UNICEF Boss Urges Myanmar to Enact Kofi Annan's Recommendations on Rohingya Crisis

YANGON - The head of the U.N. children's fund urged Myanmar on Monday to implement the recommendations of a panel on the Rohingya crisis led by former U.N. head Kofi Annan, saying it had yet to create conditions right for the return of refugees from Bangladesh.

Speaking at a forum in the capital, Naypyitaw, UNICEF executive director Henrietta Fore said children from the Rohingya

Muslim minority, a persecuted and mostly stateless community from Buddhist-majority Myanmar, were living "a precarious and an almost hopeless existence" in camps in neighboring Bangladesh.

About 730,000 Rohingya have fled Rakhine state, in western Myanmar, since a military crackdown in 2017 after Rohingya insurgents attacked security posts, U.N. agencies estimate. (Reuters)

China Says Canadian Ambassador Sacking an Internal Affair

BEIJING - China's foreign ministry said on Monday that Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's sacking of his ambassador to China was an internal Canadian affair, after the envoy prompted a furor with comments about a high-profile extradition case.

John McCallum had embarrassed Trudeau's government by saying Huawei Technologies Co Ltd Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou could make a strong argument against being sent to the United States.

Meng, the daughter of Huawei's founder, was arrested in Vancouver last month, at the request of U.S. authorities who suspect she violated U.S. sanctions on Iran.

China subsequently detained two Canadian citizens on national security grounds. A Chinese court later retried a Canadian man who had been jailed for drugs smuggling and sentenced him to death.

"The matter you have mentioned is an internal affair for Canada. China will not comment," Chinese foreign ministry



spokesman Geng Shuang told a daily news briefing in Beijing. Geng reiterated China's call for Canada to "make the correct choice" and release Meng so she could return to China. She was granted bail 10 days after her arrest. (Reuters)

Turkey Aims to Form Safe Zones in Syria for Refugees to Return



ISTANBUL - Turkey zones in northern Syria is aiming to form safe so that around 4 million of Syrian refugees hosted by Turkey could

return, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday.

Speaking in Istanbul, Erdogan also said nearly 300,000 Syrians had already returned and that he expected millions of Syrian nationals would return to the safe areas.

U.S. President Donald Trump announced in December the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Syria and Erdogan subsequently said they had discussed setting up a 20-mile-deep safe zone in Syria along the border. (Reuters)

German Chancellor Angela Merkel Receiving Fulbright Prize

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel is receiving the prestigious Fulbright Prize for International Understanding in a ceremony being held for the first time outside the United States.

The Washington-based Fulbright Association is presenting Merkel with the award on Monday in Berlin, citing her "remarkable, compassionate leadership and her strong commitment to mutual

understanding, international cooperation and peace." Previous recipients include Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, and Bill and Melinda Gates. Merkel has been Germany's leader since 2005 and a central figure in international diplomacy and crisis-resolution efforts in Europe and beyond. In arguably her most controversial decision, she allowed large numbers of asylum-seekers into Germany in 2015. (AP)

Uzbek Banks Acquire over \$1B Worth of Foreign Loans

TASHKENT - Commercial banks of Uzbekistan acquired foreign credit lines for the development of small business and private entrepreneurship in the amount of about \$1.04 billion in 2018 which is two times more compared to 2017, Trend reports via UzDaily.

The volume of loans provided by foreign banks amounted to \$397.9 million and international financial organizations to \$641.4 million in 2018, the message of Uzbek Central Bank said.

The main creditors in 2018 were such in-

ternational financial organizations and foreign banks as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (\$220.7 million), the State Development Bank of China (\$161.8 million), the Asian Development Bank (\$179.5 million) and Commerzbank (Germany, \$151.6 million).

The most active in the development of foreign credit lines were Asaka Bank (\$ 234.9 million), National Bank for Foreign Trade (\$ 216.5 million) and Hamkorkbank (\$ 131.7 million). (Trend)

Pakistan to Resume Talks with India Only after Elections with No Big Decisions Expected from Present Govt, Says Islamabad

DUBAI - Pakistan will try to resume peace talks with India only after election results are out as it is "useless" to talk to New Delhi because no big decisions are expected from the present Indian government, a senior minister has said.

Fawad Chaudhry, Minister of Information of Pakistan, said that the time is not right to hold a dialogue as the Indian leaders are preparing for the upcoming general elections, Gulf News reported. "It is useless to talk to them (India) now unless there is some stability. We will move forward once the new government is formed after the elections," he said. "We have delayed our efforts to hold talks with

India because we do not expect any big decision from the present Indian leadership," he said.

He said the Pakistan government would respect any Indian leader and the party elected by the Indian people. When asked which Indian leader will suit Pakistan more when it comes to peace talks Narendra Modi or Rahul Gandhi, the minister said it does not matter for Pakistan. "And, we would like to move forward to hold dialogue with whosoever comes into power in India," he said. The Indo-Pak ties strained after the terror attacks by Pakistan-based terrorists in 2016 and India's surgical strikes inside Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. (Agencies)

World Stocks Fall on Doubts US Shutdown Deal Will Succeed

BANGKOK - Stock markets mostly fell Monday on caution over China-U.S. trade talks and over the ability of U.S. congressional negotiators to forge a government funding bill acceptable to President Donald Trump. KEEPING SCORE: Germany's DAX lost 0.3 percent to 11,252 and the CAC 40 in France gave up 0.5 percent to 4,903. The FTSE 100 in Britain was down 0.4 percent at 6,781. Wall Street looked set for a slow start to the week, with the future contracts for the Dow Jones industrial average and the S&P 500 both down 0.4 percent. TRADE TALKS LOOM: Talks aimed at resolving the impasse over Chinese technology ambitions and other issues are due to resume in Washington this week, led by the U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Chinese Vice Premier Liu He. (AP)

Indian Opposition Leader Gandhi Promises Minimum Income for the Poor

NEW DELHI - The leader of India's main opposition party, Rahul Gandhi, said on Monday his party will provide the poor with a minimum income if it is voted into power in a general election expected in the next few months.

Gandhi's campaign promise is a step toward a universal basic income that some economists have supported instead of subsidies for the poor. "We have decided that every poor person in India would be guaranteed a minimum income after the Congress forms the government in 2019," Gandhi told a rally in the central state of Chhattisgarh. (Reuters)

France's Macron to Press Egyptian President on Human Rights

CAIRO - French President Emmanuel Macron is to hold talks Monday with his Egyptian counterpart in Cairo, saying beforehand that he wants to boost ties with an important ally to fight terrorism but also use the visit to encourage respect for human rights.

Macron, heading a large delegation on a three-day trip to the Arab world's most populous country, said he wants to "pursue a truthful dialogue on topics of public freedoms and human rights" - an area he feels Egypt has not progressed enough on since he raised it



with officials earlier in his mandate. France, which considers itself the birthplace of human rights, has come under pressure by advocates to raise the matter with general-turned-President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, whose human rights record has been

widely condemned and is seen as worsening. Macron said that too many normal people "who do not threaten the regime's stability" were being jailed. "It is on this area of what is happening in Egypt that I will continue to focus things. (AP)

AP-NORC Poll: Most Americans Oppose Trump's Foreign Policy

WASHINGTON - A majority of Americans disapprove of the way President Donald Trump is handling U.S. foreign policy and about half think the country's global standing will deteriorate during the next year, according to new poll that highlighted the nation's partisan divide on foreign issues.

The poll, conducted by Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, also found the public split

about the president's plan to remove U.S. troops from Syria and possibly Afghanistan - and about a quarter don't have an opinion one way or the other. Overall, the president receives low marks from the public for his job handling foreign policy - 35 percent approve, while 63 percent disapprove. Like other issues, the partisan divide is startling. While 76 percent of Republicans approve, just 8 percent of Democrats say the same. (AP)