

Venezuela wins seat on UN rights council despite US opposition

REUTERS, United Nations

Venezuela was elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council on Thursday with 105 votes and a round of applause, despite fierce lobbying by the United States and rights groups, and the late entry of Costa Rica as competition.

In a secret ballot by the 193-member UN General Assembly, Costa Rica garnered 96 votes despite only entering the race this month, when President Carlos Alvarado declared "the Venezuelan regime is not the suitable candidate."

Along with Brazil, the three countries were competing for two seats on the 47-member Human Rights Council starting January 1. Brazil was re-elected for a second three-year term with 153 votes. Members can only serve two consecutive terms.

"It's simply unconscionable that massive human rights violators like the former Maduro regime in Venezuela are allowed to play a role on the (Human Rights Council). I won't stand for it, and neither should the UN," US Ambassador to the United Nations Kelly Craft said on Twitter after the vote.

The United States has for months been trying to oust Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, who has overseen an economic collapse and is accused of corruption, human rights violations and rigging a 2018 presidential election. It is one of more than 50 countries that have recognized opposition leader Juan Guaido as Venezuela's president.

Guaido invoked Venezuela's constitution in January to assume an interim presidency of the OPEC nation.

Swift backlash as Trump picks own golf resort to host G7

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump has awarded hosting of the next G7 summit to one of his own Florida golf clubs, the White House said on Thursday, sparking accusations of corruption from opposition lawmakers and ethics campaigners.

The Trump National Doral Golf Club in Miami was "the best place" among a dozen US venues considered for the June 10-12 gathering next year, acting Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney told reporters at the White House.

But some members of Congress and civil society groups immediately rebuked Trump for what Democrats called "among the most brazen examples yet of the president's corruption."

"He is exploiting his office and making official US government decisions for his personal financial gain," Jerry Nadler, the chairman of the powerful House Judiciary Committee, said in a statement.

Nadler vowed that Trump's "latest abuse of power" would not distract from the Democratic-led impeachment investigation into allegations that the president pressured Ukraine into interfering on his behalf in the 2020 US election.

Democrats were already probing Trump's suggestion at the most recent G7 gathering in France in August that the next one could be hosted at one of his resorts.

Critics say the move would violate both the foreign and domestic emoluments clauses that are designed to shield a US leader from outside influence.

"This is unbelievable," Noah Bookbinder, the executive director of the Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington pressure group, said in a statement.

"Given the potential consequences the president is facing for abusing the presidency for his own gain, we would have thought he would steer clear of blatant corruption at least temporarily; instead he has doubled down on it."

Trump National Doral is vital to Trump's overall finances and was once one of his biggest money-makers -- but it has been in steep decline, according to the Washington Post.

130 gold bars

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suspected that Joynal could be the mule of a gold smuggling ring.

The arrestee had previously visited Bangladesh five times from the UAE and might have smuggled golds during those visits, said Riyadul Islam, a DD of the directorate.

Following a tip-off, Customs officials searched his luggage and found the lamps.

"We broke the lamps and found the gold worth around Tk 6.5 crore," he said.

During primary interrogation, Joynal gave us the names of the people to whom he was to deliver the bars. "We would investigate the matter," he added.



A volunteer carries an injured youth to hospital, following a bomb blast at a mosque in Haska Mina district of Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan yesterday. At least 62 worshippers were killed and dozens wounded by the blast during Friday prayers, officials said, a day after the United Nations said violence in the country had reached "unacceptable" levels.

PHOTO: AFP

Fastest ant found in Sahara

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A quartet of researchers from the Universities of Ulm and Freiburg in Germany tracked down *Cataglyphis bombycina* in the Tunisian desert and set up a field lab as a race course.

"Once we had located a nest, it was simply a matter of connecting an aluminium channel to the entrance and placing a feeder at the end to lure the ants out," said lead author Sarah Pfeffer.

"They shuttled back-and-forth in the channel and we mounted our camera to film them from the top."

Pfeffer and her team also excavated a nest and transported it back to Germany, where they recorded *C. bombycina*'s running prowess in cooler climes.

As expected, when the temperature dropped to a chilly 10 C the ant slowed down by more than a third.

At top speed, the Saharan silver easily outpaces its nearest ant competitor *Cataglyphis fortis* -- despite having significantly shorter legs.

It does this by swinging its tiny 5-mm long appendages at speeds of

up to 1,300 mm per second.

The length of the ant's strides increased four-fold as the animal shifted into high gear, they found.

The scientists also discovered that -- at its fastest -- *C. bombycina* switches from running to a gallop, with all six feet off the ground at regular intervals.

Saharan silver ants are active outside their nests for only about 10 minutes a day, during which they search for heat-stricken lizards and other prey that they can pick apart and carry home.

Brexit hangs on a knife edge

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Johnson said ahead of the first Saturday sitting of parliament since the 1982 Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands.

If he wins the vote, Johnson will go down in history as the leader who delivered Brexit - for good or bad. If he fails, Johnson will face the humiliation of Brexit unraveling after repeatedly promising that he would get it done.

Goldman Sachs said it thought the deal would pass and raised its estimate of Brexit with a deal on Oct. 31 to 65% from 60%. It cut its odds on a no-deal departure to 10% from 15% and kept unchanged its 25% probability of no Brexit.

The pound held at five-month highs of \$1.2874 against the dollar, down from Thursday's peak of \$1.2988.

Johnson won the top job by staking his career on getting Brexit done by the latest deadline of Oct. 31 after his predecessor, Theresa May, was forced to delay the departure date. Parliament rejected her deal three times, by margins of between 58 and 230 votes.

Downing Street is casting the vote today as a last chance to get Brexit done with lawmakers facing the option of either approving the deal or propelling the United Kingdom to a disorderly no-deal exit that could divide the West, hurt global growth and trigger violence in Northern

Ireland.

To win the vote, Johnson must persuade enough Brexit-supporting rebels in both his own Conservative Party and the opposition Labour Party to back his deal.

Concerned about the potential impact of a no-deal departure, Johnson's opponents have already passed a law demanding he delay Brexit unless he gets a withdrawal deal approved by today.

The government has said both that it will comply with this law and that Britain will leave the EU on Oct. 31 whatever happens. Johnson has not explained how he plans to take these two apparently contradictory steps.

The message from Johnson's advisers is: "New deal or no deal but no delay."

The prime minister was due to hold a cabinet meeting at 1500 GMT yesterday.

As lawmakers mull one of the United Kingdom's most significant geopolitical moves since World War Two, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators are due to march towards parliament demanding another referendum on EU membership.

Parliament will sit from 0830 GMT today. Johnson will make a statement to lawmakers, after which there will be a debate and then a vote. The debate was originally scheduled to last 90 minutes, but is no longer time-

limited.

The Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) said it would oppose the deal and lobby a faction of around 28 hardline Brexit supporters in the Conservative Party to do the same.

"We will be encouraging (other lawmakers to vote against) because we believe it does have an impact on the unity of the United Kingdom, will spark further nationalist sentiment in Scotland and will be detrimental to the economy of Northern Ireland," the DUP's Sammy Wilson said.

"Voting this down tomorrow is not the end of the game, in fact it probably opens up possibilities for the government which are not available at present after a general election."

Without the DUP's 10 votes, Johnson will need Brexit-supporting Labour Party rebels to support his deal. Yesterday's vote will be "pretty close" but likely just fall short of approval, said John McDonnell, the second most powerful person in the Labour Party.

"I don't believe it will pass, I think it will be defeated but... the numbers are going to be pretty close," McDonnell told Sky News.

If the vote is a tie, then the speaker of parliament, John Bercow, would hold the deciding vote. According to vague convention, the speaker would seek to keep the issue open for further discussion.

Air raids, shelling test Syria 'truce'

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civilian targets in Ral al Ain.

"Turkey is violating the ceasefire agreement by continuing to attack the town since last night," SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali tweeted.

"Five civilians were killed in Turkish air strikes on the village of Bab al-Kheir, east of Ras al-Ain," Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said. The Britain-based war monitor said four fighters of the Syrian Democratic Forces -- the de facto army of the embattled Kurdish autonomous region -- were killed in the strike.

The deal was aimed at easing a crisis that saw President Donald Trump order a hasty and unexpected US retreat, which his critics say amounted to abandoning loyal Kurdish allies that fought for years alongside US troops against Islamic State.

Trump has praised the deal, saying it would save "millions of lives". White House spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham told Fox News the ceasefire was successful even if halting fighting "takes time".

Turkey cast it as a complete victory in its campaign to control a strip of territory stretching hundreds of miles along the border and more than 30 km (around 20 miles) deep into Syria, to drive out fighters from the YPG, the SDF's main Kurdish component.

"As of now, the 120-hour period is on. In this 120-hour period, the terrorist organisation, the YPG, will leave the area we identified as a safe zone," Erdogan told reporters after Friday prayers in Istanbul. The safe zone would be 32 km deep, and run

"440 km from the very west to the east," he said.

Erdogan warned that Ankara would restart its operation against Kurdish forces on Tuesday evening if they do not withdraw from the "safe zone".

"If the promises are kept until Tuesday evening, the safe zone issue will be resolved. If it fails, the operation... will start the minute 120 hours are over," Erdogan told reporters during a foreign media briefing in Istanbul.

He said Turkish armed forces would remain in the region "because the security there requires this", adding that there had been no issues so far.

But the US special envoy for Syria, James Jeffrey, said the agreement covered only a smaller area where Turkish forces were already operating, without giving details of how far along the border Washington believed it stretched.

The Kurds said it was limited to a small strip between two border towns that have seen the bulk of the fighting: Ras al Ain and Tal Abyad, just 120 km away.

However European Council president Donald Tusk said after a meeting of EU leaders that Turkey's US-brokered truce was not serious and demanded Ankara halt its offensive against Kurdish forces.

"The situation is quite obvious. This so-called 'ceasefire' is not what we expected. In fact it's not a ceasefire, it's a demand of capitulation for the Kurds," he told reporters.

RUSSIA, IRAN FILL VACUUM

With the United States pulling its entire 1,000-strong contingent from northern Syria, the extent of Turkey's ambitions

is likely to be determined by Russia and Iran, filling the vacuum created by the US retreat.

The government of President Bashar al-Assad, backed by Moscow and Tehran, has already taken up positions in territory formerly protected by Washington, invited by the Kurds.

Jeffrey acknowledged that Turkey was now negotiating with Moscow and Damascus over control of areas where Washington was pulling out, which were not covered by the US-Turkish ceasefire agreement.

LIFTING SANCTIONS?

The joint US-Turkish statement released after Thursday's talks said Washington and Ankara would cooperate on handling Islamic State fighters and family members held in prisons and camps, an important international concern.

Pence said US sanctions imposed on Tuesday would be lifted once the ceasefire became permanent.

In Washington, US senators who have criticised the Trump administration for failing to prevent the Turkish assault in the first place said they would press ahead with legislation to impose sanctions against Turkey.

The Turkish assault began after Trump moved US troops out of the way following an Oct 6 phone call with Erdogan.

It has created a new humanitarian crisis in Syria with - according to Red Cross estimates - 200,000 civilians taking flight, a security alert over thousands of Islamic State fighters potentially abandoned in Kurdish jails, and a political storm at home for Trump.

S African govt apologises for rolling blackouts

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's deputy president apologised Thursday for rolling blackouts that could pose a threat to the fragile economy of the continent's most industrialised nation.

The second day of scheduled power rationing -- known as load shedding -- came ahead of a key ratings agency decision on the country's investment grade.

Embattled state-owned utility Eskom, which generates around 95 percent of the country's electricity, has long struggled to produce power due to ageing infrastructure and decades of mismanagement.

Businesses and even some school examinations faced power interruptions on Thursday due to the load-shedding, which is being implemented from 9:00am to 11:00pm (0700 to 2100 GMT) over the next week.

"I think we must on behalf of the government apologise to all businesses, students that could not write (exams)," Deputy President David Mabuza told parliament in Cape Town.

"We are looking at the problems that have affected Eskom and we want to assure South Africans that this problem will be attended to and we will come back to normality."

Eskom announced the stage two load-shedding on Wednesday saying it was "in order to protect the power system from a total collapse."

Ageing power stations, such as the 49-year-old Hendrina plant in the northeastern Mpumalanga province, have contributed to production capacity dropping from 47,000 megawatts to almost 35,000

megawatts in recent years, according to the vice president.

Speaking to journalists on Thursday evening, Eskom chairman Jabu Mabuza, said there was a "short-term" system recovery in progress which would see fewer hours of electricity rationing from yesterday.

The Eskom head said the only way to a long-term sustainable solution required funds to be pumped into the utility.

But "we all know our other conundrum which is, we are experiencing extreme financial constraints that makes this difficult if not impossible," he said.

The company reported a record net loss of 20.7 billion rand (\$1.46 billion) for the year to March, nearly 10 times more than in the previous 12 months.

The Moody's ratings agency is scheduled to review South Africa's investment grade on November 1.

Following rolling blackouts in February and March, ratings agencies raised concerns about the sustainability of the country's state-owned enterprises, rising government debt and low economic growth.

There had been some signs recently that the country's economy was rebounding, notching up 3.1 percent growth in the second quarter of this year.

Abandoned

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The woman left after Peyara said she would not take the baby.

Superintendent of Police Mohammad Yusuf Ali said officers were searching for the baby's parents.

US imposes record \$7.5b tariffs on EU goods

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday imposed tariffs on a record \$7.5-billion worth of European Union goods, despite threats of retaliation, with Airbus, French wine and Scottish whiskies among the high-profile targets.

The tariffs, which took effect just after midnight in Washington (0401 GMT), came after talks between European officials and US trade representatives failed to win a last-minute reprieve.

The WTO-endorsed onslaught from US President Donald Trump also comes as Washington is mired in a trade war with China and could risk destabilising the global economy further.

In the line of fire are civilian aircraft from Britain, France, Germany and Spain -- the countries that formed Airbus -- which will now cost 10 percent more when imported to the US.

But the tariffs also target consumer products such as French wine, which Trump had vowed to attack in recent months. Wine from France, Spain and Germany will now face 25 percent tariffs.

Speaking in Washington hours before the tariffs were due to come into effect, France's Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire warned the move would have serious repercussions.

"Europe is ready to retaliate, in the framework of course of the WTO," he told reporters shortly after meeting with US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund annual meetings.

"These decisions would have very negative consequences both from an economic and a political point of view."

Le Maire was due to meet US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer later yesterday.

He also warned the US against starting another front in its trade conflicts and again called for a negotiated solution.

At a time when the global economy is slowing, "I think that our responsibility is to do our best to avoid that kind of conflict," Le Maire said.

The Europeans have long advocated negotiation over conflict and they themselves will be able to impose tariffs next year to punish the United States for subsidising Boeing.

But EU officials had already offered in July to call a truce on subsidies for planemakers, in which both sides would admit fault and agree to curtail state aid -- to no avail. The two sides have been involved in a row over the subsidies for 15 years.

The tariffs kick in just days after the United States was given the formal go-ahead by the World Trade Organization.

As recently as Wednesday, Trump singled out the Europeans for being unfair with the US on trade, but said his door was open to negotiate a settlement.

The Europeans fear above all that Trump will impose heavy duties on

imports of European cars around mid-November.

This would be a serious blow for the German automotive sector in particular, even if giants such as Volkswagen or BMW also manufacture in the United States.

"Our products are very hard to bring in (to Europe)" when Europeans easily import their cars into the United States, Trump said.

The Airbus-Boeing row is just one of several issues stoking transatlantic tensions that quickly descended into acrimony when Trump took office in 2017.

Trump embraced a protectionist agenda, slapping import duties on steel and aluminium from the EU and other allies, while also threatening tariffs on cars.

Trade groups in Europe such as winemakers, German tool manufacturers and whisky producers in Scotland have kept a clamour of protest, demanding Washington reverse tack.

The US leader and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker agreed in July 2018 to a ceasefire in the conflict to hold trade talks that have so far led nowhere.

The epic legal battle between Airbus and Boeing at the World Trade Organization began in 2004 when Washington accused Britain, France, Germany and Spain of providing illegal subsidies and grants to support the production of a range of Airbus products.

1 held, one jailed

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examination.

In the same upazila, Rana Chasha, 25, and his brother Jagadish Chasha, 28, of Gandhichhara village, were sued yesterday for "attempting to rape" a 20-year-old girl and "physically assaulting" her and her mother.

The victim's father said Rana had been stalking her daughter for a long time. "On Thursday evening, he stormed into her room and tried to rape her. I was not home at the time, so my wife came to rescue her hearing screams. Rana then beat my daughter and wife with a bamboo stick before fleeing," he said.

Locals rescued the two and sent them to Sreemangal Upazila Health Complex. The girl's father filed a written complaint with police the next morning, and said Rana's brother Jagadish threatened him before he went to police.

In Rajanagar upazila, a court on Thursday night sent a man to jail for "raping" his 14-year-old stepdaughter several times in the last two months.

Police said the victim's mother found out about the incident after the girl cried out in pain on Wednesday. On the same night, the mother filed a case against her second husband Russell Ahmed, said OC (investigation) of Rajanagar Police Station Abul Kalam. The accused was arrested and sent to jail the next day.