VOA NEWS

February 2, 2019

This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd in Washington.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence has called on all nations to recognize Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the country's legitimate president.

Speaking to Venezuelan exiles and community leaders in Miami Friday, Pence called on other nations to follow the United States in recognizing Guaidó.

"... there can be no bystanders in the struggle for Venezuela's freedom. The United States today calls on every nation to recognize Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's president and take the side of freedom."

Guaidó, the president of the opposition-controlled National Assembly, declared himself interim president last week after the assembly said that Nicholás Maduro's re-election last May was illegitimate.

Russia, China and Turkey have not recognized Guaidó and the U.N. secretary-general said Thursday that the world body only cooperates with the recognized elected government of Nicholás Maduro.

The United States announced Friday it is pulling back from a decades-old treaty that banned an entire class of nuclear weapons.

AP's Warren Levinson reports that withdrawing from that treaty could backfire.

Kingston Reif of the Arms Control Association says the president is right when he says Russia has been violating the INF treaty but withdrawing from it rewards Moscow with misbehavior.

"I think Russia will certainly prefer that United States withdraws so that Russia can place the blame for the treaty's demise at the feet of the United States."

Reif concedes persuading the Russians to come back into compliance is a long shot but he contends there are diplomatic and even military tools available that the Trump administration is declining to use.

The result, possible renewed missile race in Europe that leads everyone less safe.

I'm Warren Levinson.

For more on these stories and the rest of the day's news, visit voanews.com. This is VOA news.

President Donald Trump doubled down on the need for a border wall with Mexico or possibly declaring a national emergency during a human trafficking event at the White House on Friday.

The president told reporters that "Democrats are doing a tremendous disservice" by refusing to give him nearly $6 billion for the wall. He argues that is exacerbating the human trafficking issue.

"We are doing it regardless have been. We don't have. We haven't declared a national emergency, yet it wouldn't yet we're building a lot of wall. We're continuing to build a lot of wall with, as we were saying, business cash on hand."

Trump has threatened to circumvent Congress and declare a national emergency if lawmakers can't agree to a border deal by a February 15th deadline. The president also hinted he might make an announcement on the matter in his State of the Union speech next Tuesday.

Lawyers for two reporters jailed for seven years in Myanmar lodged an appeal Friday at the Supreme Court against their conviction on charges of breaking the Official Secrets Act.

Reuters Ryan Brooks has details.

The appeal is against their conviction on charges of breaking the Official Secrets Act, for which reporters Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were sentenced to seven years in jail.

"We didn't do anything wrong."

The lawyers cited evidence of a police set-up and lack of proof of a crime.

In a statement Reuters said, "Our petition asks the Supreme Court to finally provide justice to Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, reverse the lower courts' errors, and order the release of our journalists."

The two reporters were convicted by a lower court in September in a landmark case that's raised questions about Myanmar's progress toward democracy and sparked an outcry from diplomats and human rights advocates.

New Jersey Democratic Senator Cory Booker added his name to the growing field of candidates trying to unseat President Donald Trump in next year's presidential election. Booker announced his [candacy] candidacy, that is, Friday and called for an end to an era of bitter political division in the United States.

"We need leadership in this country that understands what patriotism means and patriotism is love of country and you can't love your country unless you love your fellow countrymen and women. It doesn't mean we're always gonna agree or some days we always like each other. But we've got to extend each other grace, less judgment."

Booker enters the field that already includes three of his fellow senators and could add former Vice President Joe Biden.

And U.S. employers shrugged off last month's partial shutdown of the government engaging in a hiring burst in January by adding 304,000 jobs. The unemployment rate did tick up to 4 percent.

For more, visit our website voanews.com. I'm David Byrd, VOA news.