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

Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaidó is again calling for the military to defect to his side as the country's President Nicholás Maduro proposes to hold early elections that could potentially oust his challenger.

We get details from AP's Julie Walker.

Venezuela's President Nicholás Maduro told thousands at a Saturday rally that he is the fairly elected leader of the country and wants the pro-government constitutional assembly to back his early election plan.

But National Assembly President Juan Guaidó, whom President Trump has recognized as the country's leader, held his own rally for thousands where he vowed to step up his opposition movement and urged military leaders to defect to his side. One Air Force general did defect on Saturday.

I'm Julie Walker.

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in a televised address Saturday that his country is suspending participation in the Cold War-era Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

As Reuters Mia Womersley reports, the Russian action follows a similar announcement from the United States on Friday.

Putin told a government meeting Russia will start work on creating new weapons and instructed ministers not to initiate disarmament talks with Washington.

Moscow maintains that Washington invented the violation in order to exit the agreement, which would allow the U.S. to develop its own new missiles.

Before Pompeo's announcement, NATO said it would fully support the U.S withdrawal notice. But with six months until the withdrawal goes into effect, President Trump said on Friday that he would engage with Russia on arms control negotiations.

China also weighed in on Saturday, urging the United States to resolve its differences with Russia through dialogue and saying that the treaty is hugely significant in maintaining international peace and stability.

Reuters correspondent Mia Womersley.

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Virginia's Governor Ralph Northam is vowing to remain in office despite widespread calls for his resignation after a racist photo surfaced on his medical school yearbook page.

AP's Ben Thomas has details.

"It is definitely not me ...."

Virginia Governor Ralph Northam says there is no way he is the person dressed as a Ku Klux Klan's man in the photo or the person in black face, and he is certain of it because he says he made other memorable mistakes during that period.

"I did participate in a dance contest in San Antonio, in which I darkened my face as part of a Michael Jackson costume."

He says he regrets not realizing at the time how offensive they might be. But he says he wants to earn Virginians' forgiveness and he will not heed calls to resign.

"I cannot in good conscience choose the path that would be easier for me in an effort to duck my responsibility to reconcile."

Northam's departure would mean Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax would become governor. The Democrat is only the second African-American to win statewide office in Virginia.

I'm Ben Thomas.

Fresh demonstrations took place around France to keep pressure on French President Emmanuel Macron and to protest against what is seen as police brutality against yellow vest protesters in anti-government demonstrations.

We get the details from AP's Karen Chammas.

Scuffles erupted in Paris between protesters and the police where police seemed to be trying to disperse the crowd.

Thousands of demonstrators in the French capital also paid tribute to the yellow vests injured during clashes with police, an effort to unify growing divisions in the grassroots movement.

One protester with an injured foot, Antonio Barbetta, is shocked by what he sees to be the police's aggressive reaction to the protests.

"It's shocking, it's scandalous. What it concretely means is that the government is still authorizing the police to continue injuring me today and destroying lives. It's awful."

It was the 12th straight weekend of protest which took place around France to denounce Macron's economic policies, which they view as favoring the rich.

I'm Karen Chammas.

Belgium has agreed to take former Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo in after his shock acquittal at the International Criminal Court.

Gbagbo and his co-defendant Charles Ble Goude were acquitted of crimes against humanity on January 15, but the ICC refused to release them until a host country was found.

And the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency has confirmed it resorted to force-feeding some detainees in custody for illegal immigration after those detainees went on hunger strikes to demand their release.

Detainee rights activists working with the hunger strikers in Texas say the majority of the group is ethnic Indians who entered the United States more than six months ago.

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