

Mexican troops block US bound caravan travellers

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Ciudad Hidalgo | Mexico

Mexican troops urged some 1,500 Central American migrants to maintain “order and respect” yesterday after the group attempted to force entry into the country from Guatemala in the hopes of trekking onward to the United States.

Standing on the wall above the Rodolfo Robles International Bridge that connects Mexico with its southern neighbor, National Guard General Vincente Hernandez told migrants they would be allowed to cross the border in a “controlled” manner.

“With order and respect, all will be served. There are opportunities for everyone,” said Hernandez, who also coordinates the National Guard operations along the Suchiate River, the natural border between Mexico and Guatemala.

“We understand the situation, you are our brothers from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala,” Hernandez told the car-



Honduran migrants cross the border into Mexico in Ciudad Hidalgo, Mexico

avan. His speech was met with applause.

Some 800 migrants agreed to regularise their status and seek employment in Mexico, an official from the National Institute of Migration (INM) said.

Earlier Saturday, troops had blocked the caravan, scuffling with the migrants as they attempted to cross the border.

One National Guard soldier standing guard at the bridge and speaking over a bullhorn told the travelers they could not enter without a visa or migration document, and that sneaking in was dangerous.

“Do not expose yourself to people traffickers. Your life is in danger,” said the agent, who also told them the idea that the United States will grant them asylum is false.



Mexico has come under pressure from US President Donald Trump to slow a surge of undocumented migrants who arrived at the US-Mexican border last year. Trump threatened in May to impose tariffs on Mexico if the government did not do more to stop them.

Most of the migrants left last Tuesday from Honduras and

had arrived Saturday morning at the bridge over the Suchiate River, which forms the border between Guatemala and Mexico to the north.

Some of the migrants insisted on getting in but others in groups of around 20 turned around and headed back to migration holding facilities on the Guatemalan side of the frontier.

Security beefed up

Mexico had beefed up its forces at the border crossing as it anticipated the arrival of a caravan of some 3,000 people mainly from Honduras and El Salvador.

On Friday, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador offered 4,000 jobs to members of the caravan in an attempt to dissuade them from traveling on to the United States.

Maduro says still in control, open to talks with US: report

Washington

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said he was still comfortably in charge and open to direct negotiations with the US, in an interview published Saturday by *The Washington Post*.

The interview was Maduro's first with a major US outlet since February of last year, when he abruptly ejected all Univision journalists from Venezuela.

“If there's respect between governments, no matter how big the United States is, and if there's a dialogue, an exchange of truthful information, then be sure we can create a new type of relationship,” Maduro told the Post.

The socialist leader said he was ready to hold talks with the US to negotiate an end to sanctions imposed by President Donald Trump intended to throttle the South American country's oil industry and force Maduro from power.

Maduro indicated that, if Trump were to lift sanctions, US oil companies could benefit immensely from Venezuela's oil.

“A relationship of respect and dialogue brings a win-win situation. A confrontational relationship brings a lose-lose situation. That's the formula,” Maduro said.

The US, along with more than 50 other countries, recognizes Maduro's opposition rival Juan Guaido as the country's legitimate interim president.

Guaido has called for a new presidential election to be held, on the grounds that Ma-



Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro

duro is an “illegitimate” president because his 2018 re-election was tainted by fraud.

Oil-rich Venezuela's economy is crumbling under Maduro's rule, and millions have fled the country.

But despite the humanitarian catastrophe and biting US sanctions, Maduro maintains power with the support of the military as well as Russia, China and Cuba.

While speaking to the Post, Maduro also expressed willingness to talk with Guaido, but appeared to dismiss his opponent's main demand that he step down.

Norway has mediated talks between Maduro's and Guaido's representatives, but the meetings broke down in August.

The US in early January threw its support behind negotiations in Venezuela, saying talks could establish a transitional government, lead to fresh elections and bring an end to the country's long-running political crisis.

Solar-powered barge a key ‘interceptor’ for plastic waste

Klang | Malaysia

Scoping waste from a Malaysian river to stop it reaching the sea, a solar-powered barge named the “Interceptor” is the latest weapon in a global battle to rid the world's waters of plastic.

Trash is being dumped into seas and rivers in enormous quantities, polluting vital habitats, endangering a kaleidoscope of marine life and sully once pristine tourist spots.

Some eight million tons of plastics enter the world's oceans every year, from straws tossed into gutters to mismanaged waste from rapidly growing economies, according to US-based group Ocean Conservancy.

But as governments and environmental protection groups struggle in the face of the growing tide, a Dutch non-profit group -- The Ocean Cleanup -- has come up with a novel solution in the form of the Interceptor.

The 24-metre-long (78 feet) vessel resembles a large houseboat and uses a curved barrier to catch waste floating downstream.

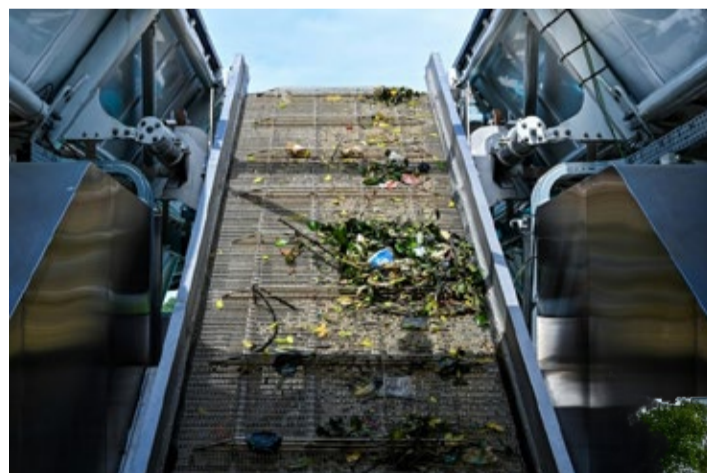
The trash, much of it plastic, is directed to the “mouth” of the barge -- which operates autonomously and silently -- from where it rolls up a conveyor belt and is dropped into dumpsters.

The barge can collect up to 50 tons of waste a day.

In October an Interceptor was stationed on the Klang river, a heavily polluted, major Malaysian waterway which flows



The Interceptor barge can collect up to 50 tons of waste a day



Trash collected by the Interceptor barge rolls up a conveyor belt before being dropped into dumpsters

through the capital Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding areas.

Ocean Cleanup is working with local government company Landasan Lumayan, which started cleaning the river in 2016, and says efforts are bearing fruit.

“The Klang river was like a

floating landfill,” said Syaiful Azmen Nordin, managing director of the Malaysian firm.

“Boats could not pass through, and there was a lot of

plastic. Now you can see the river is generally free from floating debris.”

Tyres and teddies

Ocean Cleanup hopes their project will have a major impact in fighting the waste crisis globally, as rivers are one of the greatest sources of plastic flowing into the seas.

Some 80 percent of plastic waste that ends up in the sea floats down just 1,000 rivers worldwide, according to the group, which hopes to one day station trash-collecting barges in all these waterways.

The Klang river alone sends more than 15,000 tons annually into the sea, a map on their website shows, making it one of the 50 most-polluting rivers across the globe.

“We know the goal of 1,000 rivers is ambitious, but it is a necessary one,” said group spokesman Joost Dubois, adding they aimed to have dealt with the problem within five years.

But the group has some way to go to turn the tide -- they have so far built four Interceptor boats at a cost of 700,000 euros (\$775,000) each, although they expect the price will come down as more are produced.

As well as the barge in Malaysia, one has been stationed in Jakarta, the overcrowded capital of neighbouring Indonesia, while two others will be sent to Vietnam and the Dominican Republic.

Thailand has signed up to put one near Bangkok and an agreement is being negotiated to station a vessel in Los Angeles.

The barge on the 120-kilometre (75-mile) Klang river complements seven existing log barri-

ers placed along the waterway to catch trash.

Rubbish taken out of the river is currently sent to a landfill, although efforts have begun to retrieve recyclables.

Some 50,000 tons of garbage have been hauled from the water since clean-up work started four years ago, according to Syaiful.

“We have (collected) tyres, teddy bears, even dead animals... but generally it is plastic,” he said.

While the barges may help, they will only succeed if people do their part and act responsibly by refraining from thoughtlessly tossing plastic away, Syaiful added.

“Some people don't see the impact of throwing rubbish. They throw the plastic on the streets and eventually the plastic will flow into the river,” he said.

“If we change our behaviour, we can help our rivers (become) clean.”

The Interceptor has been deployed on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur to collect trash in the Klang river

