

WORLD
world

New blackout hits swaths of Venezuela including Caracas

● Cellphone signals were disrupted and television was blanked out

● President Nicolas Maduro's government blamed the outage on an "attack"

AFP | Caracas, Venezuela

A new blackout swept across Venezuela on Monday, including much of Caracas, sowing alarm two weeks after a nationwide outage that paralyzed the country.

The power cut in the capital occurred around 1:20 pm (1720 GMT) and knocked out electricity in the city center.

After nightfall, many apartment buildings in the Caracas metro area -- home to around six million people -- were aglow again and traffic lights were back on, but people reported they were still in the dark in many other states.

Communications Minister Jorge Rodriguez blamed the latest blackout on "an attack on the charging and transmission center" at the Guri dam, which supplies 80 percent of the power to the country of 30 million.

"What (last time) took days, now has been taken care of in just a few hours," Rodriguez said, saying the fix had been made in "record time."

Earlier, a local newspaper reported that the power was out at Venezuela's main international airport outside Caracas.

Cellphone signals were disrupted and television was blanked out. Shops hastily low-



People queue to get on a bus during a partial power cut in Caracas

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Sitting in the office, without power but with a generator, wondering ‘How long will this new blackout last? Do I have enough water at home? What about the meat and chicken in the freezer?’

ANDRES BETANCOURT

ered shutters, fearing looters.

President Nicolas Maduro's government blamed the outage on an "attack" targeting the Guri hydroelectric plant.

Rodriguez told state television that the opposition was responsible, claiming it "wants

to plunge the population into profound unease."

Juan Guaido, the opposition leader recognized as Venezuela's interim president by the US and many of its allies, countered on Twitter that Maduro's government "uses these moments to disinform and create anxiety."

He said "at least 17" of the country's 23 states were affected, as well as much of the capital district covering Caracas, retweeting a graphic by web monitoring organization Net-Blocks showing the internet down for 57 percent of Venezuela.

Anxious Twitter users who were online said several big cities in the west of the country including Barquisimeto, Maracaibo and Barinas were impacted.

"Not another blackout, no God, no," tweeted Flore Meler, a 29-year-old resident in the town of Ocumare del Tuy

US will not 'stand idly' on Russian role: Pompeo

Washington, United States

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned Russia Monday the United States will not "stand idly by" as Moscow inserts military personnel into Venezuela to support the regime of President Nicolas Maduro.

In a phone call with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Pompeo denounced the growing Russian military reinforcements as prolonging the political crisis in the South American country.

Pompeo told Lavrov "the United States and regional countries will not stand idly by as Russia exacerbates tensions in Venezuela," the State Department said in a statement.

"The continued insertion of Russian military personnel to support the illegitimate regime of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela risks prolonging the suffering of the Venezuelan people who overwhelmingly support interim President Juan Guaido," he said.

Pompeo urged Russia to "cease its unconstructive behavior" and support Guaido.

southeast of Caracas.

During last blackout which started on March 7 and lasted a week, more than a dozen patients in hospitals died, public transport came to a halt, production slowed in the vital oil sector and water supplies were interrupted, forcing citizens to turn to sewage outflows and polluted water sources.

Shakespeare in Cuba



Britain's Prince Charles (2-L) and his wife Camilla (L) unveil a sculpture of English poet, playwright and actor William Shakespeare along with Havana City Historian Eusebio Leal, in Old Havana in the Cuban capital. Britain's Prince Charles and his wife, the Duchess of Cornwall, are on the first royal visit to communist-run Cuba at a time when ally Washington is seeking to ramp up sanctions against the island.

Female reporters quit over Vatican call for 'obedience'

Vatican City, Holy See

The all-female editorial team behind the Vatican's women's magazine have resigned over what they describe as attempts to stifle their reporting and bring in more "obedient" journalists, its founder said.

"We are throwing in the towel because we feel surrounded by a climate of distrust and

progressive de-legitimation," Woman Church World founder Lucetta Scaraffia wrote in an editorial published by Italian religious news blog Il Sis-mografo.

The magazine -- which has not shied away from tackling hard-hitting issues -- began life seven years ago as an insert and is published along with the Vatican's L'Osservatore Romano newspaper.

Egypt puts 145 people on terrorism list: judicial source

Cairo, Egypt

An Egyptian court upheld yesterday a decision to put 145 people, including staunch Muslim Brotherhood supporters, on the country's "terrorism list", a judicial source said.

The Court of Cassation rejected appeals against a ruling passed by a lower court in June last year.

The defendants were accused of training militants and plotting violence in the country, the source said.

The list includes senior Brotherhood figures, many of whom fled Egypt following the military ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013.

The Brotherhood was designated a "terrorist organisation" months after Morsi's overthrow.

India seizes cash, drugs, booze worth \$70m in pre-vote crackdown

AFP | New Delhi, India

Indian authorities have seized more than \$70 million worth of cash, booze and illegal drugs under special laws designed to curb vote buying during the world's biggest election, officials said yesterday.

Around 900 million Indians are eligible to vote in the mammoth polls, which start April 11 and run nearly six weeks in a huge endeavour some experts say could cost \$10 billion.

From the moment the election was announced on March 10, special laws took effect banning all Indians from carrying large amounts of money, gold or silver to reduce the risk of politicians buying votes.

Officials such as police and railway staff are granted temporary powers during the campaign to seize booze, cash or other goods they believe are being used to sway voters.

So far, authorities have confiscated 4.4 million litres of liquor



Indian election officials test and prepare Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) at a distribution centre ahead of the Indian elections in Ahmedabad

and 1.5 billion rupees (\$21.8 million) in cash considered suspicious, the election commission said in a statement.

Illegal drugs worth an almost similar amount had been seized,

the commission said.

"Freebies" stockpiled in trucks along highways worth an estimated 120 million rupees were also confiscated. No exact description of the goods was provided, but in the past political parties have used mobile phones, televisions and other electronic gadgets to entice votes. Poorer voters are particularly targeted by unscrupulous politicians during elections and plied with cash and luxury items to garner support and influence.

To combat this, special election laws prohibit anybody from possessing more than one kilogram of gold or silver, or carrying in excess of one million rupees, until the results are declared on May 23.

In the 2014 elections, 16 million litres of liquor and 17,000 kilograms of drugs seized.

This election, a mobile-based application lets voters report any wrongdoing taking place in their electorate, in a bid to clean up the the poll.