

Iran mocks Trump 'blunder' as government supporters rally

06/01/2018 09:23 by admin

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Iranian worshippers chant slogans while they burn a representation of US flag during a rally against anti-government protestors after the Friday prayer ceremony in Tehran on January 5

Tehran: Iran's state TV on Saturday showed several hundred government supporters rallying a day after the foreign minister said a U.S. move to call an emergency U.N. Security Council meeting to discuss anti-government protests was another Trump administration "blunder."

The state broadcaster showed the pro-government rally in the city of Amol, in the northern province of Mazandaram, with hundreds of people waving the Iranian flag and chanting slogans against the U.S. and Israel. State TV described the rally as a "response to rioters and supporters of the riots."

Anti-government protests broke out in Mashhad, Iran's second largest city, on Dec. 28 and have since spread to several other cities and towns. The protests were sparked by a hike in food prices amid soaring unemployment. Some demonstrators have called for the government's overthrow.

At least 21 people have been killed and hundreds have been arrested. Large pro-government rallies have been held in response, and officials have blamed the anti-government unrest on foreign meddling.

U.S. President Donald Trump has voiced encouragement for the anti-government protesters. The U.S. called the U.N. meeting on Friday, portraying the protests as a human rights issue that could spill over into an international problem.

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley said the emergency session put Iran on notice that "the world will be watching" its actions.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote on Twitter after the session that the Security Council "rebuffed the U.S.' naked attempt to hijack its mandate."

He said the majority emphasized the need to fully implement the 2015 nuclear deal and to refrain from interfering in the affairs of other countries. "Another FP (foreign policy) blunder for the Trump administration," he wrote.

Russia portrayed the Security Council meeting as a U.S. attempt to violate Iran's sovereignty. Envoys from several other countries, from China to newcomer Equatorial Guinea, expressed reservations about whether the council was the right forum for the issue.

- AP