



CHRIS PRATT GETS ENGAGED TO ARNIE'S DAUGHTER KATHERINE SCHWARZENEGGER



HUGH GRANT TWEETS A PLEA FOR THIEF WHO BROKE INTO HIS CAR: PLEASE RETURN THE SCRIPT THAT WAS INSIDE

No Brexit more likely than no deal: May

'Give It A Second Look': PM Says Parliament Risks Break Up Of UK If It Votes Against Agreement

London: British Prime Minister Theresa May urged lawmakers on Monday to take a "second look" at her deal to leave the European Union, a last-ditch effort to win over a parliament that looks set to reject the agreement.

The fate of the United Kingdom's March 29 exit from the EU is in the balance before Tuesday when parliament is widely expected to vote against May's deal, opening up outcomes ranging from a disorderly divorce to reversing Brexit.

In the deepest crisis in British politics for at least half a century, May and EU leaders exchanged letters giving assurances on her withdrawal agreement, though there was little sign of a change of heart among rebel lawmakers.

May used a speech at a china factory in the leave-supporting city of Stoke-on-Trent in central England to say that lawmakers blocking Brexit altogether was now a more likely outcome than Britain leaving without a deal.



A protester outside the UK Parliament in London on Monday

She then returned to parliament, where she asked lawmakers to give her deal a chance, referring to the assurances she secured from Brussels and warning parliament it risked the break up of the United Kingdom if it voted against the agreement.

"So I say to members on all sides of this House (of Commons) — whatever you may

have previously concluded — over these next 24 hours, give this deal a second look," she said. "No it is not perfect. And yes it is a compromise," she said, telling them to think about how any decision will be judged in history books. "I say we should deliver for the British people and get on with building a brighter future for our country by backing this

deal tomorrow."

May has refused to budge over her deal despite criticism from all quarters. The agreement, which envisages close economic ties with the EU, has united the opposing sides of the debate - pro-EU lawmakers who see it as the worst of all worlds, and Brexit supporters who say it will make Britain a vassal state.

As the world's biggest trading bloc tried to brace for an unpredictable ride, Spain said the EU could agree to extend the deadline for Brexit, but not beyond elections for the European Parliament due in May.

As part of the effort to get the deal approved by the British parliament, the EU and May set out some assurances in a choreographed exchange of letters on Monday. The EU told May that it stood by commitments to find ways to avoid triggering the "Irish backstop" in their Brexit deal and that this pledge had legal weight.

In a joint reply to questions from May, European Commis-

sion president Jean-Claude Juncker and European Council president Donald Tusk said the EU stood by its commitment to try and reach a post-Brexit trade deal by the end of next year in order to avoid using the unpopular backstop.

While stressing that nothing in their letter could be seen as changing or being inconsistent with the draft treaty agreed with May last month, they said a commitment to a speedy trade deal made by EU leaders had "legal value" which committed the Union "in the most solemn manner".

However, even if the target date were not met, they wrote, Britain would have the option to extend a status-quo transition period to avoid triggering the backstop, which is meant to avoid a hard customs border for Northern Ireland. "If the backstop were nevertheless to be triggered, it would only apply temporarily, unless and until it is superseded by a subsequent agreement that ensures that a hard border is avoided,"

they said. May said the assurances might not go far enough for some lawmakers.

With no-deal Brexit the default option if May's deal is defeated, some lawmakers are planning to pull control of Brexit from the government. Though May is weakened, the executive has significant powers, especially during times of crisis, so it was unclear how parliament would be able to take control of Brexit.

If May's deal is defeated and the government is unable to have any amended version passed in the next three weeks, one suggestion is for senior lawmakers who chair parliamentary committees to come up with an alternative Brexit plan. "We're in the very, very final stages of the endgame here," said Nick Boles, one of the Conservative lawmakers behind the plan. "What we need to do is find the solution, and if the government can't find the solution.... then parliament needs to," he told BBC radio. REUTERS

Imran asks China to shelve CPEC power project

Omer Farooq Khan | TNN

Islamabad: The multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has received a setback after the Imran Khan government formally asked China to remove one of its major power projects from the agreement. The government, which is already confronted with a serious economic crisis as the country's foreign reserves have almost exhausted, backedtracked from the 1,320MW Rahim Yar Khan Power project after finding it financially nonviable.

Khan has been critical of former PM Nawaz Sharif for the lack of transparency in the CPEC projects. His party has been of the view that though China was pumping in money into Pakistan for the CPEC project, much of the opportunity was exploited by the Chinese companies rather than Pakistani ones.

According to government officials, Islamabad has officially conveyed to Beijing that it was no longer interested in the Rahim Yar Khan power project in view of sufficient generation capacity already lined up for the next few years.

The project was originally pushed as imported coal-based plant by Quaid-i-Azam Thermal Company of the Pu-



Imran Khan has been critical of ex-PM Sharif for the lack of transparency in the CPEC projects

njab government led by then CM Shahbaz Sharif. According to the report, a leading business tycoon had proposed the project and was expected to be one of the key sponsors. However, the project was removed from the CPEC priority list when the then bureaucracy highlighted that surplus generation capacity had already been contracted and more contracts would lead the country to 'capacity trap'. The government had already notified a ban on capacity addition on imported fuels as early as June 2016.

But the Punjab government had pushed for revival of the plant which was included again in the priority list in subsequent CPEC negotiations, a federal secretary was quoted as saying. "It was not needed at all and would have been a burden on the already deteriorating financial condition of the power sector," the official said.

Mueller report: Explosive or dud?

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Washington: What will the Mueller Report say and when will he say it? With a partial government shutdown now in record territory (24 days and counting) and ten inches of snow blanketing Washington DC, talking heads and pontificating pundits in the US Capital, not to speak of President Donald Trump himself, are working themselves into a lather over the conclusion of the FBI special counsel probe and how much or how little it will indict the country's 45th President.

Although the probe by special counsel Robert Mueller was mandated primarily to determine Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election, the steady drip of information, innuendo, and speculation has carried it into the area of treasonous activity, including whether Trump was, or remains, an agent or asset for Moscow. Over the weekend, amid startling disclosures that the president had canned all notes and minutes of his five meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and there was an FBI counterintelligence probe into Trump's conduct, Watergate journalist Carl Bernstein claimed that Mueller's report will say Donald Trump "helped destabilise the US" as a pawn of Moscow.

"This is about the most serious counterintelligence pe-



UNDER FIRE: US President Trump reiterated on Monday that he never worked for Russia. 'I think it's a disgrace that you even asked that question because it's a whole big fat hoax,' he said in response to media questions on a recent report claiming the FBI in 2017 opened a counterintelligence probe into whether he acted on Moscow's behalf

ople we have in the US government saying, 'Oh, my God, the president's words and actions lead us to conclude that somehow he has become a witting, unwitting, or half-witting pawn, certainly in some regards, to Vladimir Putin,' Bernstein told CNN, adding, "He has done what appears to be Putin's goals... helped Putin destabilise the United States and interfere in the election, no matter whether it was purposeful or not."

While Bernstein claimed he knew from his own high-level sources that Mueller's report would discuss this assessment, others professing

similar insider information suggested the report would be a dud. "There have been expectations that have been building, of course, for over a year," ABC News' White House correspondent Jonathan Karl told "This Week" on Sunday. "But people who are closest to what Mueller has been doing, interacting with the special counsel, caution me that this report is almost certain to be anti-climactic."

President Trump and his cohorts on their part have attributed the impression that he is a Russian stooge to an anti-Trump liberal bias, an entrenched establishment,

Trump's AG pick to pledge protection for Russia probe

US President Trump's attorney general nominee William Barr will pledge at his confirmation hearing on Tuesday to protect special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into whether Trump's campaign colluded with Russia and will let the public know about the probe's findings, according to prepared testimony released on Monday. 'I believe it is vitally important that the special counsel be allowed to complete his investigation,' Barr said in prepared remarks. "I believe it is in the best interest of everyone that this matter be resolved." AP

and a "Deep State" conspiracy, among other reasons. Trump also keeps repeating claims that he has been tougher on Russia than any other president, although few people aside from his acolytes agree with the assessment and most experts see his actions as helping Moscow.

On Sunday, Trump retweeted a quote from his favourite news programme @FoxandFriends that read, "Gas prices drop across the United States because President Trump has deregulated Energy and we are now producing a great deal more oil than ever before", before snarkily as-

king, "But this is bad news for Russia, why would President Trump do such a thing? Though he worked for Kremlin?"

"The Fake News gets crazier and more dishonest every single day. Amazing to watch as certain people covering me, and the tremendous success of this administration, have truly gone MAD! Their Fake reporting creates anger and disunity. Take two weeks off and come back rested. Chill!" he tweeted on Monday morning after a weekend of random tweets and ad hominem attacks in the middle of ten-inch snowfall that blanketed the capital.

Among the targets of his attack was Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos, who is also the founder-CEO of Amazon, whose impending divorce following an alleged extramarital affair appeared to fill Trump with schadenfreude — pleasure derived by someone from another person's misfortune.

"So sorry to hear the news about Jeff Bezos being taken down by a competitor whose reporting, I understand, is far more accurate than the reporting in his lobbyist newspaper, the Amazon Washington Post. Hopefully the paper will soon be placed in better & more responsible hands!" the US president tweeted, coining another nickname for a purported opponent, while 8,00,000 federal employees remained out of work and without pay during a snowstorm.

Blast near high-security compound in Kabul kills 4

Kabul: At least four people were killed and more than 50 wounded when a bomb-laden car blew up near a high-security compound in the Afghan capital Kabul on Monday, officials said.

An Afghan government security official said the blast occurred on Jalalabad Road in eastern Kabul near the Green Village compound, home to several international companies and charities. "Most of the victims were civilians," said Najib Danish, an interior ministry spokesman. Police spokesman Basir Muja-hid said a vehicle full of explosives had been detonated. "The area is cordoned off ... and search operation underway for suspects and attackers"

"It was a powerful car bomb that knocked (down) a wall between Green Village and the customs office," a security source said. A senior interior ministry official said the explosion destroyed at least three checkpoints.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility. The latest attack comes as US special peace envoy for Afghanistan was touring the region for meetings aimed at bringing an end to the 17-year war in Afghanistan. REUTERS

Don't sell sub tech to Taiwan: China warns India, other nations

Saibal Dasgupta | TNN

Beijing: China is opposing efforts by India and other countries to sell submarine technology to Taiwan. Countries that supply technology to Taiwan run the risk of harming their diplomatic relations with China, Beijing said on Monday.

India, Japan and the United States are among the countries that have come forward to provide marine technology to Taiwan. Taiwan News, a media outlet, earlier said, "The Indian team has experience with the diesel submarines in service in the Indian Navy." It said another bid was made by a Japanese team which included retired engineers with previous experience working for Mitsubishi on Harushio-class submarines.

Replying to a question,

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said the concerned countries should go by the one-China policy and refuse to form military linkages with Taiwan.

China regards Taiwan as a breakaway territory and is opposed to any country having diplomatic relations with it. "China is firmly opposed to any country to have any military links with Taiwan (sic). China is consistent and clear cut. The US and other countries fully recognise the sensitivity and the danger of this issue," Hua said.

Talking about countries keen to supply submarine technology to Taiwan, Hua said, "They should prudently and properly handle Taiwan-related issues, thus avoiding harming of bilateral relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

Passenger flies with gun from US to Japan

Atlanta: The US Transportation Security Administration has acknowledged that a passenger bound for Tokyo passed through security in Atlanta with an undetected gun.

"TSA has determined standard procedures were not followed and a passenger did in fact pass through a standard screening TSA checkpoint with a firearm at Atlanta International Airport on the morning of January 3," it said in a statement. The passenger notified Delta Airlines officials after landing at Tokyo's Narita International Airport.

The agency said it "will hold those responsible appropriately accountable". No further details were released. The screening took place amid the ongoing government shutdown during which TSA workers aren't being paid. AGENCIES

China court sentences Canadian to death, raises diplomatic tension

Beijing/Ottawa: A Chinese court on Monday sentenced a Canadian man to be executed for drug smuggling, prompting Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to accuse China of using the death penalty arbitrarily.

The ruling, and Trudeau's reaction, could aggravate already sour relations between Beijing and Ottawa following the arrest of a senior Chinese executive in Canada and China's subsequent detention of two Canadians.

The Dalian Intermediate People's Court in China's northeast province of Liaoning re-tried Robert Lloyd Schellenberg, who had appealed his original 15-year prison sentence, and decided on execution, the court said in a statement.

Schellenberg was told in



Canadian PM Justin Trudeau accused China of using the death penalty arbitrarily

court he had the right to appeal to Liaoning high court within 10 days upon receiving the ruling, the intermediate court said.

"It is of extreme concern to us as a government, as it should be to all our international friends and allies, that China has chosen to begin to arbitrarily apply (the) death penalty... as in this case," Trudeau said in Ottawa. Bilateral ties turned icy

in early December after Meng Wanzhou, chief financial officer of Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei Technologies Co Ltd, was arrested in Vancouver on a US extradition warrant.

China denounced her arrest, warning of unspecified consequences unless Meng was released, and detained Michael Kovrig, a Canadian foreign ministry employee on unpaid leave, and Michael Spavor, a Canadian consultant, on suspicion of endangering state security. Beijing has not drawn a direct link between the arrest of Meng, wanted by US authorities for allegedly misleading multinational banks about Iran-linked transactions, and the detention of Spavor and Kovrig. Western diplomats in Beijing, however, say the cases are a tit-for-tat reprisal. REUTERS

Polish mayor stabbed on stage, dies

Warsaw: Pawel Adamowicz, the liberal mayor of the Polish city of Gdansk, died on Monday of his wounds a day after being stabbed by a former convict who rushed onto the stage during one of Poland's biggest annual charity events. Polish officials said the day of Adamowicz's funeral would be a national day of mourning.

Television footage of the attack showed a man screaming "Adamowicz is dead!" as he rushed onto the stage and stabbed the mayor, who crumpled to the floor. Speaking on the stage before he was arrested, the attacker accused the mayor's former party of putting him in prison, where he said he was tortured. Psychiatrists will assess if the attacker can be held criminally responsible for his actions, prosecutor Krzysztof Sierak said. REUTERS

Church, mayor row over coins from Trevi fountain



Coins worth €1.5 million are retrieved from the Trevi fountain every year

Rome: A row has erupted between the mayor of Rome and the Roman Catholic Church over what should happen to coins retrieved from the city's iconic Trevi fountain.

Every year about €1.5 million (\$1.7 million) is fished out of the nearly 300 year-old famous landmark. It is traditionally given to a Catholic charity to help the destitute, the BBC reported on Monday. But now Mayor Virginia Raggi wants the money spent on the

city's crumbling infrastructure instead.

The Catholic charity Caritas has said the loss of income will hit the poor. "We did not foresee this outcome," Caritas director Father Benoni Ambarus told Avvenire, the newspaper of the Italian bishops' conference. "I still hope it will not be final." The newspaper ran an article in its Saturday edition, headlined "Money taken from the poorest".

City councillors have app-

roved the change and it is due to take place in April. However, many Italians have taken to social media to ask the council to reconsider, the Ansa news agency reported.

The Trevi fountain is visited by millions of tourists every year. The tradition of throwing coins was made famous by American singer and actor Frank Sinatra's "Three Coins in the Fountain" in the 1954 romantic comedy of the same name. ANS

AROUND THE WORLD



Commuters brave freezing temperature to take part in the 'No Pants' subway ride in New York on Sunday

Canada ATCs buy pizzas for unpaid US colleagues

Canadian air traffic controllers have bought hundreds of pizzas for their American counterparts over the past few days in what has become an industry-wide show of support during the US government's partial shutdown. Peter Duffey, the head of the Canadian Air Traffic Control Association, said on Sunday the initiative began Thursday when employees at Edmonton's control center took up a collection to buy pies for controllers in Anchorage, Alaska. Other facilities across Canada decided to join in, and the idea snowballed. "As it stands right

now, I believe we're up to 36 facilities that have received pizza from Canada, and that number is growing by the hour," Duffey said. Duffey estimates that as of Sunday afternoon, some 300 pizzas had been received by American controllers, many of whom took to social media to express their gratitude.

Stowaway bird found on plane after 12 hours

A London-bound Singapore Airlines (SIA) flight had an unusual passenger onboard — a mynah bird. Around 12 hours into the 14-hour flight on its way to London recently, the mynah bird was found in the business class section of the aircraft, Straits Times reported. A statement from an SIA spokesperson on Sunday

confirmed that the mynah was onboard the SQ322 flight on January 7. "It was subsequently caught by cabin crew with the assistance of some of the passengers on board," the statement added. A video on Facebook shows the bird perched atop a seat, with a steward trying to capture it.

Daughter's plea draws 50k b'day cards for US veteran

When Sue Morse requested on Facebook that friends send her father well-wishes for his December 30 birthday, she expected maybe 160 cards. At 96, World War II veteran and Purple Heart medal recipient Duane Sherman has survived most of his friends. As of January 9, Sherman received more than 50,000 letters at his home in Fullerton, California.