



HW CASTS HIS 'DREAM TEAM' OF LAWYERS, IT INCLUDES TWO WHO REPRESENTED HIS ACCUSER ROSE MCGOWAN

RAMI MALEK SAYS WAS 'NOT AWARE' OF MISCONDUCT CLAIMS AGAINST 'BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY' DIRECTOR BRYAN SINGER

Trump backs down as Dems vs prez ties go south over SOTU address

After Exploring Alternative Venues, Prez Says He'll Make Speech Once Shutdown Is Over

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Washington: US President Donald Trump backed down from his confrontation with the country's Democratic leadership, agreeing to postpone his State of the Union address to Congress till the partial government shutdown ends, after initially threatening to force a speech on lawmakers on their turf.

After days of tense back and forth with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi during which the President's aides considered alternate venues for the speech after she rebuffed him, Trump conceded Wednesday that "no venue that can compete with the history, tradition and importance of the House Chamber." "As the Shutdown was going on, Nancy Pelosi asked me to give the State of the Union Address. I agreed," Trump tweeted shortly after 11pm EST. "She then changed her mind because of the Shutdown, suggesting a later date. This is her prerogative — I will do the Address when the Shutdown is over."

Expectation that the shutdown will end rose after compromise moves in Congress to give the president the money he wants for the broader purpose of border security, not just for the wall.

The State of the Union is a time-tested Washington ritual in which the President typically tells the Congress, and through its legislators, the American people, that the country is strong/solid/sturdy/resilient/durable/all of the above. Lawmakers rise in partisan fervor to welcome the president's remarks — or accept in stony silence if they are in the



SHUTDOWN DAY 34: Thousands of furloughed employees show empty paper plates, signifying that they are unable to feed their families, at a rally against the ongoing shutdown outside the Senate offices in Washington on Wednesday. Some 800,000 workers are set to miss another paycheck on Friday

opposition. From the President's entry into the House, greeted by raucous legislators, to the intermittent applause during the speech, it is a choreographed spectacle that has gone on since 1913. For the first time ever, it might not happen on schedule in the Age of Trump. Trump and Speaker Nancy Pelosi have clashed on the issue over the past week, exchanging letters in which the President first insisted on making his annual State of the Union (SOTU) address to the House in person on January 29, riding on the invitation that Pelosi subsequently rescinded, and the speaker confirming that she and her party were in no mood to entertain the president unless he backed down from his stand that has resulted in a partial government shutdown that has lasted a record 33 days.

Although Pelosi has made known that she would prefer Trump delay making his an-

nual address till government reopened and he was welcome to send the SOTU speech in writing or make it from another venue, Trump picked on her excuse that his security could not be assured to insist that he had the security folks' word that he would be fine and insisted on coming to the House. Within hours, Pelosi wrote back to him formally disinviting him — creating an unprecedented impasse.

"I am writing to inform you that the House of Representatives will not consider a concurrent resolution authorising the President's State of the Union address in the House Chamber until government has opened," she said. "Again, I look forward to welcoming you to the House on a mutually agreeable date for this address when government has been opened."

Amid over-the-top speculation whether he would march on the Congress with his followers, Trump himself acknow-

ledged this had never happened before in US history, and said Pelosi had "cancelled" his speech because "she doesn't want to hear the truth". "She doesn't want the American public to hear what's going on. And she's afraid of the truth. The American people want to hear the truth," he told reporters, adding, "It's a sad thing for our country. We'll do something in the alternative."

That something, according to Washington scuttlebutt, could be anything from a sober SOTU address from the Oval Office, to a protest style rally on the steps of the Capitol, to a campaign style speech some place where Trump can rouse his base. "It's really a shame what's happening with the Democrats. They've become radicalized. They don't want to see crime stopped... And it really is a shame what's happening with the Democrats."

In a sign of growing schism in the country, both

Lara Trump: Missed salaries 'sacrifices' for future of US

US President Donald Trump's daughter-in-law told federal workers who remain unpaid due to the ongoing shutdown, that their missed paychecks were "sacrifices" for the "future of the country". Lara Trump, who is married to Eric Trump and is also a campaign adviser, said earlier this week that the president was fighting for "what he knows is the right thing to do", the Washington Post reported on Wednesday. "It's not fair to you, and we all get that, but this is so much bigger than any one person. It is a little bit of pain..."

ideological and geographical, Trump has repeatedly suggested that Democrats have veered further left, and somehow that is dangerous for the US. "I think they've become a very dangerous, a very, very dangerous party for this country. I think that Chuck Schumer (the Senate majority leader), sadly, is dominated by the radical left and he's dominated by Nancy Pelosi. Very strongly dominated. He's a puppet."

The sight of several strong, opinionated women elected to Congress on the Democratic side — many from ethnic minorities — appears to have rattled the traditional white male constituency that some see them as a "danger". Although Trump did not specifically refer to it, lawmakers such as Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and Pramila Jayapal are proposing radical ideas in areas such as taxation and healthcare that strike at the very roots of Republicanism.

Russia warns US against Venezuela intervention

Neil MacFarquhar

Moscow: Russia accused the United States on Thursday of promoting regime change in Venezuela, warning of the "catastrophic" consequences of destabilising one of the Kremlin's key South American allies.

Moscow's warning came a day after the Trump administration recognised an opposition leader as Venezuela's legitimate president, ousting President Nicolas Maduro, who ordered all American diplomats expelled. The US said it would ignore the expulsion order and did not rule out a military intervention in the oil-rich country, where economic hardship and political repression have escalated into a major crisis.

"Any external intervention is very dangerous," Dmitri S. Peskov, the spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin, told reporters in Moscow. "We consider the attempt to usurp the top power in Venezuela as going against the foundations and principles of the international law."



A rally against President Maduro in Caracas on Wednesday. At least 14 people have been killed in clashes with security forces since Tuesday

Putin too called Maduro and expressed support, saying any intervention by other countries "violates the fundamental norms of international law". According to the Kremlin, Maduro thanked Russia for its "principled position" on the crisis. Moscow has been a close ally of Venezuela for more than a decade, shoring up the country's crumbling economy with billions of dollars in loans as well as military support.

Maduro's aides dismissed the announcement on Wednesday by the opposition leader, Juan Guaido, who declared

himself interim president. Guaido made the proclamation at an anti-government rally in Caracas, the capital, on Wednesday a day of nationwide protests that attracted tens of thousands of supporters and was cheered by a number of neighboring countries and the US. The events amounted to the most direct yet to Maduro's hold on power.

The Russian foreign ministry issued a series of blistering statements, particularly concerning the possibility of US military intervention. "We warn against such reckless actions, which threaten catastrophic consequences." It did not specify what those consequences might be.



Juan Guaido

Former Scottish leader charged with attempted rape

London: Former Scottish

leader Alex Salmond, one of the country's best-known politicians, appeared in court on Thursday on charges including attempted rape and sexual assault. Salmond was arrested on Wednesday and faces 14 charges: nine counts of sexual assault, two of attempted rape, two of indecent assault and one breach of the peace. No further details were given, and Salmond was not asked to enter a plea.

"I am innocent of any criminality whatsoever," Salmond said in a brief statement outside Edinburgh court. "I refute absolutely these allegations of criminality and I will defend myself to the utmost in court."

Salmond stepped down as leader of the governing Scottish National Party in August after two women made allegations of sexual harassment. He took legal action against the Scottish devolved government now led by his successor and protégé Nicola Sturgeon over how it handled the complaints process against him.

Salmond, who denied any wrongdoing, won a judicial review earlier this month on how that case was handled by the Scottish government when it conceded it had acted unlawfully in probing the harassment claims. The case pitted the two most popular



Alex Salmond led the pro-independence SNP for 20 years and headed Scotland's semi-autonomous government as first minister from 2007 to 2014

figures in the Scottish independence movement against one another, and some commentators believe it could weaken Sturgeon's leadership just as she seeks to start a new drive for secession amid the chaos of Britain's exit from the EU. A dispute has continued to simmer between two factions in the SNP around what Sturgeon knew about the case and when. An inquiry by the parliament is under way.

Salmond led the pro-independence SNP for 20 years and headed Scotland's semi-autonomous government as first minister from 2007 to 2014. A major figure on the Scottish political stage for decades, he led the SNP to its first majority government in 2011 and took Scotland to the verge of independence from the UK by holding a 2014 referendum. He stepped down after the "remain" side won by 55% to 45%.

'US may offer FTA to Pak for assistance in ending Af war'

Islamabad: The US may offer Pakistan a free trade agreement in return for its assistance in ending the Afghan war, a media report said on Thursday. Dawn reported from Washington that official sources said that Senator Lindsey Graham, who visited Islamabad this week, is believed to have discussed this idea with Pakistani leaders. Graham first proposed offering an FTA to Pakistan, after a visit to Afghanistan. "If we can go to Pakistan and put an FTA on the table to get the Pakistanis to push the Taliban to the peace table, and you can end the Afghan war," he said.

Graham, a Republican member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, is considered President Trump's closest ally in Congress and the US media say that the president often uses him to float ideas that he wants debated publicly. Before leaving for Islamabad last week, Senator Graham is believed to have said in close circles that he would discuss his FTA proposal with Pakistani leaders and explore the possibility of arranging PM Imran Khan's visit to US.

Cohen delays testimony, cites threats from Trump

Washington: President Donald Trump's former lawyer, Michael Cohen, will not testify before a House committee next month as scheduled, his adviser said on Wednesday, depriving Democrats for now of a prime opportunity to scrutinize Trump, his links to Russia and payments to buy the silence of a porn star.

Cohen indefinitely delayed his February 7 appearance before the House Oversight and Reform Committee. He blamed threats from Trump and the president's attorney-spokesman, Rudy Giuliani, and cited his own ongoing cooperation in special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation.

"This is a time where Cohen had to put his family and their safety first," Cohen's adviser said. The statement did not detail the threats. But Trump and Giuliani have urged the justice department to probe Cohen's father-in-law, insinuating he was part of some unspecified criminal activity. Trump, for example, told



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'Senate intel panel subpoenas Cohen'

The Senate intelligence committee on Thursday subpoenaed President Donald Trump's former lawyer Michael Cohen to testify, a day after Cohen said he planned to postpone an appearance next week in the House of Representatives, Cohen's adviser Lanny Davis said. "This morning the Senate Intelligence Committee served Michael Cohen with a subpoena," Davis said in a statement.

Fox News this month that Cohen "should give information maybe on his father-in-law, because that's the one that people want to look at." Asked about the claim

of a threat, Trump accused Cohen of lying. "He's only been threatened by the truth, and he doesn't want to do that, probably for me or other of his clients."

China appears to have blocked MS search engine Bing

Saibal Dasgupta | TNN

Beijing: Microsoft's search engine Bing appeared to have been blocked in China with users saying they have not been able to access the site since Thursday. There was no confirmation if this was a short-term measure by Chinese censors or a permanent blockade.

Microsoft confirmed that the site was inaccessible. The firm said in a statement: "We are engaged to determine the next steps." Bing and Yahoo are the only major foreign search engines accessible from within China's so-called Great Firewall as most others, including Google, Twitter and Facebook, have already been shut out.

There was some confusion as GreatFire.org, a group that tracks what sites are blocked, said Bing was accessible in some parts of China. Experts said the blockade takes time to cover the entire country. Some agency reports too said that Bing was back online for some users. There has been no comment from the Cyberspace Administration of China.

AT \$238M, IT'S HIGHEST-PRICED HOME IN AMERICA

Hedge fund billionaire Kenneth Griffin has purchased a Central Park penthouse apartment for \$238 million — the most anyone has ever paid for a home in the US

NO STRANGER TO MILLION DOLLAR HOMES

Buyer Kenneth Griffin bought several floors of a Chicago condominium in 2017 for \$58.75 million, a record for the most expensive home in Chicago. In 2015, he bought a Miami penthouse for \$60 million, record for a Miami condo. Earlier this month, he acquired a London home for \$122 million



Source: NYT

ALMOST DOUBLE THE PREVIOUS US RECORD PRICES

\$100.5m Cost of NYC record-holder duplex sold in 2014 at One57, a nearby high-rise that helped rechristen a sleepy strip of Midtown across 57th Street as 'Billionaires' Row'

\$137m Previous US record-holder was a East Hampton home that sold in 2014

Chicken tikka on offer in £295 Brexit survival kit

Leeds: With just nine weeks to go until Britain is due to leave the European Union, a company is selling worried Britons a survival kit to help them prepare for the worst.

The "Brexit Box", retailing at 295 pounds (\$380), provides food rations to last 30 days, according to its producer, businessman James Blake who says he has already sold hundreds of them. With still no deal on how Britain will trade with the EU once it leaves, retailers and manufacturers have warned a "no-deal" Brexit could cause food and medicine shortages due to expected chaos at ports that could paralyse supply lines.

The Brexit Box includes 60 portions of freeze-dried British favourites: Chicken tikka, chilli con carne, macaroni cheese and chicken fajitas, 48 portions of dried mince and



Hundreds of the Brexit survival kits, which includes freeze-dried British favourite chicken tikka, have already been sold, its producer claimed chicken, firefighter liquid and an emergency water filter.

Customer Lynda Mayall, 61, who ignored government assurances that there is no need to stockpile food for Brexit, said: "I thought: let's make sure I'm covered in the event of things going awry." The Brexit Box's long shelf life — the canned food will last up to 25 years — is appealing. "In the event I don't need it for Brexit, it is not going to go to waste."

AROUND THE WORLD

Parents want Oscar nod pulled for film on son's murder

The parents of British toddler James Bulger on Thursday urged director Vincent Lambe to withdraw his film about the 1993 murder of their son by schoolboys from Oscars consideration. Jon Venables and his friend Robert Thompson, who were both aged 10 at the time, abducted Bulger, 2, from a shopping centre in Liverpool, England. The little boy's mutilated body was found two days later. Parents Denise Fergus and Ralph Bulger criticised the decision to shortlist "Dedicated", a short film based on police interviews with the killers, for an Oscar and want it pulled from public distribution. "Seeing the images of actors playing James, it's just horrendous," said Fergus. The director defended the film earlier this month, saying that it was "in no way sympathetic to the killers", although he was "sorry" that he had not let Fergus know the film was being made. The film has been shortlisted in the Best Live Action Short Film category.

Man survives ride between two train cars at 200kmph Police say an intoxicated Germ-



OZ SUMMER SPECIAL — SUN-FRIED EGGS: A pan with frying eggs is seen on a pavement in Adelaide. Temperatures in Australia topped 49°C on Thursday, shattering previous records as pub-goers received a free beer each and heat-stressed bats fell from trees. More than 13 towns across Australia have smashed their own heat records. Authorities in central Australia said they had to cull over 50 horses, after they found 90 dead wild brumbies near a dried-up water hole

an man who ducked out of a train for a cigarette during a short stop got into trouble when he tried to jump back on board between two cars after the train departed without him. Police said on Thursday the 33-year-old clung on to the coupling during frigid temperatures, screaming as the train headed toward Hamburg on Wednesday at speeds of 200kmph. Passengers heard the man's cries and were able to trigger

an emergency stop, allowing him to be brought inside. **Drunken man took wrong cab to work home in US** A drunken man in Maine took the wrong Lyft and tried to get into a house he mistakenly thought was his home. Police said he caused a commotion trying to get in, leading the homeowner to call the police. The intoxicated man was taken to the police station to sober up.