

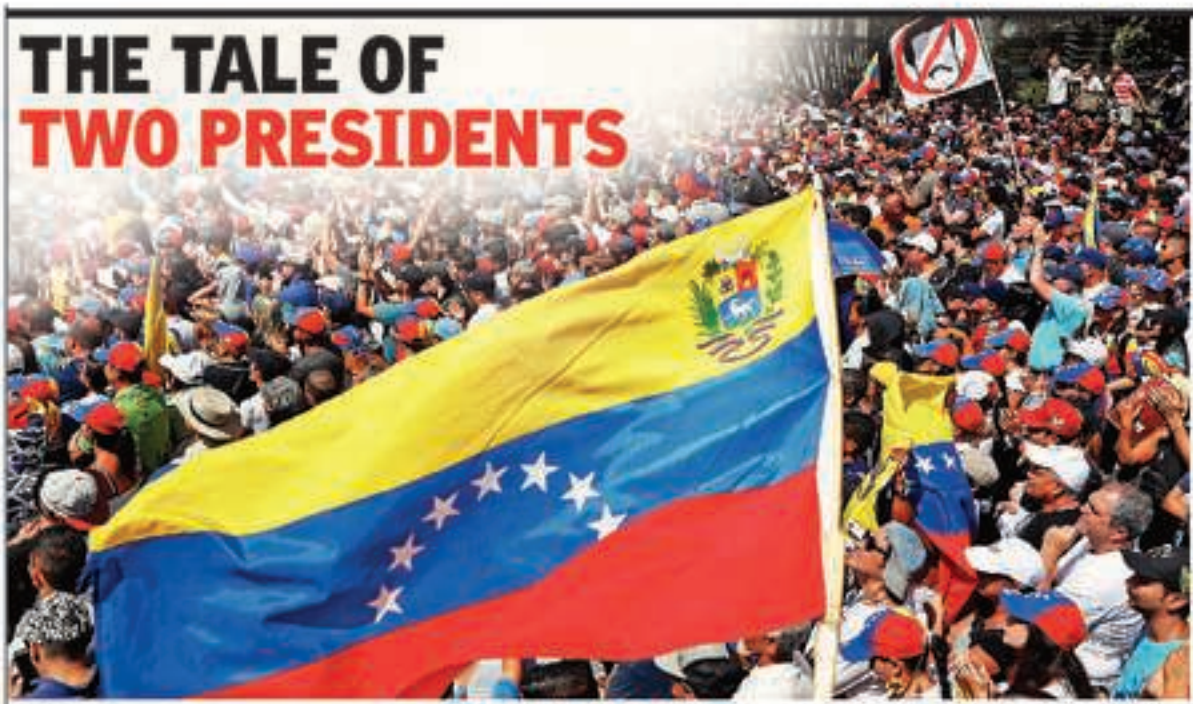
US intensifies anti-Maduro push while Russia supports Venezuelan ally at UN

EU Nations To Back Opponent If New Polls Not Called In 8 Days

United Nations: The United States urged all nations on Saturday to support Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó while Russia accused the Trump administration of attempting “to engineer a coup d’état” against President Nicolás Maduro — a reflection of the world’s deep divisions over the crisis in the embattled Latin American country.

US secretary of state Mike Pompeo told the UN Security Council at a meeting called by the US that it’s beyond time to back the Venezuelan people as they try to free themselves from what he called Maduro’s “illegitimate mafia state” and back Guaidó, who has declared himself the country’s interim president, arguing that Maduro’s re-election was fraudulent.

But Russia’s UN ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said Venezuela doesn’t threaten international peace and security and accused “extremist opponents” of Maduro’s legitimate government of choosing “maximum confrontation”, including the artificial creation of a parallel government. He urged Pompeo to say whether the US will use military force. Pompeo later said: “I am not going to speculate or hypothesize on what the US will do next.” What has played out in Venezuela and the world’s media between supporters and opponents of the Maduro government played out face-to-face in the chamber of the UN’s most powerful body, which has failed to take action on the Venezuelan crisis because of deep divisions, especially among the Security Council’s five veto-wielding permanent members.



HOW VENEZUELA’S POLITICAL CRISIS EVOLVED

Mar 2013 | President Hugo Chavez, 58, dies from cancer. Vice President Nicolás Maduro takes office.

Apr 2013 | Maduro defeats opposition in polls by a thin margin.

Dec 2015 | Opposition Democratic Unity coalition wins control of Venezuela’s National Assembly.

Mar 2016 | SC announces it is taking over the functions of the assembly. Court overturns decision amid international outcry.

July 2017 | Venezuela calls referendum to approve creation of a legislative body called the Constituent Assembly, leading to accusations that Maduro is undermining democracy.

May 2018 | Maduro is re-elected in highly controversial polls, boycotted by opposition. 14 Latin American nations, US and Canada declare the vote illegitimate.

Jan 2019 | Juan Guaidó, a virtually unknown opposition lawmaker, swears himself in as interim president.

The political standoff between President Nicolás Maduro and his opponent Juan Guaidó, who has declared himself as the acting president, has turned the gaze of the international community towards Venezuela’s humanitarian and economic plight.

Quiet diplomacy: Anti-Maduro coalition grew from secret talks

Caracas: The coalition of Latin American governments that joined the US in recognising Juan Guaidó as Venezuela’s interim president came together over weeks of secret diplomacy that included whispered messages to activists under constant surveillance and a high-risk foreign trip by the opposition leader challenging President Maduro for power, those involved in the talks said.

In mid-December, Guaidó quietly travelled to Washington, Colombia and Brazil to brief officials on the opposition’s strategy of mass demonstrations to coincide with Maduro’s expected swearing-in for a second term on January 10 in the face of international condemnation, according to exiled former Caracas mayor Antonio Ledezma, an ally.

To leave Venezuela, he sneaked across the lawless border with Colombia, so as not to raise suspicions among immigration officials, said a different anti-government leader, speaking on condition of anonymity. Long sessions of encrypted text messaging became the norm, the leader said. A US official said intermediaries were used to deliver messages to Guaidó’s political mentor and opposition power broker Leopoldo López, who is under house arrest after he failed to lead a mass uprising against Maduro in 2014. The US official spoke on condition of anonymity. AP

3M Venezuelans have fled the country since 2014, many as refugees

1.3M% Annual inflation rate up to Nov 2018

10M% IMF’s inflation forecast for 2019

\$1 = 637 Bolivars

400 Bolivars Price of a cup of coffee in capital Caracas

Maduro critics argue that woes are the fruit of years of economic mismanagement and corruption, but government supporters blame falling oil prices and international sanctions

US govt reopens, but clock is ticking for a border deal

Sheryl Gay Stolberg

Washington: The reopening of the federal government signals the start of three weeks of intense negotiations over border security in an ideologically divided Congress that threaten to leave Republican and Democratic leaders right where they began: at risk of a government shutdown.

The stopgap spending bill President Donald Trump signed into law on Friday night gives leaders in both chambers until February 15 to devise a bipartisan resolution to their impasse over the president’s demand for \$5.7 billion for a border wall. But whatever they come up with is likely to face obstacles from resurgent liberals in the House and a more conservative Senate.

And Trump is a wild card. The president will have the final word on any deal, and he has already vowed to shut down the government again, or invoke his emergency powers to build a wall, if Congress does not offer a solution he likes. Nodding to the tight deadline, he acknowledged the difficulties ahead. “Will not be easy to make a deal, both parties very dug in,” Trump tweeted on Saturday. “The case for National Security has been greatly enhanced by what has been happening at the Border & through dialogue. We will build the Wall!”

“I think everybody’s relieved that the government’s getting back open,” said Republican senator James Lankford said. “But I think everyone’s still a little tenuous because we’ve got a sword of Damocles hanging over us three weeks from now to see if we can get things worked out.”

This coming week, negotiators from the House and the Senate, led by the top Democrats and Republicans on the Appropriations Committee, will begin meeting to hash out a plan to secure the southwestern border. Also to be determined is a new date for the president to deliver his State of the Union address, which was postponed from January 29 during the shutdown.

Senate Democratic leader, Chuck Schumer said that while his party oppose the wall money, they agree on other ways to secure the border “and that bodes well for coming to an eventual agreement”. NYT



A volunteer at Seattle International Airport giving sight-seeing tips to travellers on Friday as he wears a sign reading ‘Thank a TSA worker today!’ During the shutdown, about 4,20,000 government employees, including air traffic controllers and TSA agents, were working without pay

For 8L govt workers, end of 35-day ordeal brings relief and frustration

Deepan Patel was one of a number of US government workers waiting for a meal on Friday at celebrity chef Jose Andres’ “Chefs for Feds” emergency kitchen, when he heard President Trump had agreed to a 35-day-old partial government shutdown. Like many of the 800,000 furloughed workers across America, Patel, who works for the Internal Revenue Service, expressed both relief and uncertainty about whether the three-week agreement to fund the government would last beyond February 15. “I think it’s a big help, especially to get that back pay, get those paycheques,” Patel said. “And hopefully they make a deal before it shuts down again.” Many of the federal workers were leery of the three-week deal. New worries gnawed: How long before they got paid? Would federal contractors see even a dime of back pay? Racheal Abraham, 53, who has been working without pay as a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officer at Washington’s Reagan National Airport, looked forward to some temporary relief at least. AGENCIES

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US peace envoy heads to Af after progress in talks with Taliban

Kabul: The US peace envoy leading talks with the Taliban to end the long-running war in Afghanistan on Saturday confirmed that “significant progress” had been made in the six days of discussions in Qatar.

Zalmay Khalilzad, the US special representative for Afghan reconciliation, said that no deal had been finalised with the Taliban but he expressed confidence, saying further talks would resume shortly. He said he’s travelling to Afghanistan for more discussions.

“Meetings here were more productive than they have been in the past. We have made significant progress on vital issues,” Khalilzad tweeted. “We will... resume talks shortly. We have a number of issues left to work out.” He tweeted, “Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and ‘everything’ must include an intra-Afghan dialogue and comprehensive ceasefire.” While he did not give further details, floated proposals include a withdrawal by the US of its troops in return for Taliban guarantees not to shelter foreign extremists — the initial reason for the US intervention.

Taliban officials said US negotiators agreed a draft deal stipulating the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan. “In 18 months, if the foreign forces are withdrawn and ceasefire is implemented then other aspects of the peace process can be put into action,” a Taliban source said. It was not clear if the draft described by the Taliban sources is acceptable to both sides. AGENCIES

Taliban officials said US negotiators agreed to a draft deal stipulating the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan within 18 months of the deal being signed

London: Vodafone, the world’s second largest mobile operator, said it was “pausing” the deployment of Huawei equipment in its core networks until Western governments give the Chinese firm full security clearance.

The US and some allies, including Australia and New Zealand, have banned Huawei from 5G networks because of alleged ties to the Chinese government, while the firm has denied that its technology could be used by Beijing for spying.

Vodafone’s CEO Nick Read said on Friday after reporting third-quarter results that the debate was playing out at a “too simplistic level”, adding that Huawei was an important player in an equipment market which it dominates along with Ericsson Sweden’s Ericsson and Nokia. “We have decided to pause further Huawei in our core whilst we engage with the various agencies and governments and Huawei just to finalise the situation, of which I feel Huawei is really open and working hard,” Read said. REUTERS

300 missing, 10 dead after dam at iron ore mine collapses in Brazil

Brumadinho: Teams of rescuers were preparing to dig through thick mud on Saturday in a search for survivors of a dam burst at a Brazilian iron ore mine owned by Vale SA that left hundreds missing and halted operations. Firefighters focused their hopes on a bus, a train, mining offices and nearby homes that were buried on Friday when a torrent of mud was unleashed by the dam break at Vale’s Corrego do Feijão facility in Minas Gerais state.

More than a dozen helicopters flew over the area on Saturday to survey the disaster and aid the rescue teams. The state fire department said in a statement that only 10 bodies had been found so far. In a separate statement, the department reduced the number of missing to roughly 300 people, after 46 were found alive.

“Unfortunately, at this point, the chances of finding survivors are minimal. We’re likely to just be recovering bodies,” Romeu Zema, governor of Minas Gerais, told local media. During a press conference, Zema said the mining com-



Relatives of people who disappeared after the collapse of the dam in Brumadinho on Saturday

plex had all its permits in order and it was unclear what caused the collapse of the dam, which had been inactive for years.

The National Mining Agency ordered Vale, the largest producer of iron ore in the world, to halt operations at the Corrego do Feijão mine, located near the town of Brumadinho in mining-

cus Minas Gerais, according to a document seen by Reuters. State prosecutors have requested that 5 billion reais (\$1.33 billion) in Vale’s accounts be frozen to be directed toward efforts to pay for damages. Antonio Sergio Tonet, a prosecutor with the Minas Gerais Justice Department, told reporters, saying he expected more assets to be frozen.

Earlier, a state judge ordered Vale to freeze 1 billion reais in its accounts. The death toll was expected to rise sharply, according to Avimar de Melo Barcelos, the mayor of Brumadinho. Israel has offered to send search equipment that could be used to find victims in up to 10 meters (33 feet) of mud, Zema said. Search dogs were being flown in from Rio de Janeiro to aid in the rescue efforts.

All of those missing are Vale employees or contractors, a police spokesman said. “I know a lot of the affected people. Two sisters-in-law, a cousin, many friends there in the community. They’re in the mud,” local resident Carlos Jose dos Santos said. REUTERS

UK daily pays damages to Melania over false claims

London: UK’s Telegraph newspaper has apologised and paid damages to US first lady Melania Trump after publishing an article it says contains many false statements.

The daily said it apologises “unreservedly” to Melania and her family for any embarrassment caused by the content of a story published on January 19. “As a mark of our regret we have agreed to pay Mrs Trump damages as well as her legal costs,” it said. It did not disclose the size of the settlement. It said it falsely characterised Melania’s father’s personality, falsely reported the reasons she left an architecture course, and falsely reported that her modelling career was unsuccessful before she met Donald Trump. AP

China helping Saudi to make ballistic missiles?

Dubai: A military base in Saudi Arabia appears to be testing and possibly manufacturing ballistic missiles, experts and satellite images suggest, evidence of the type of weapons programme it has long criticised its archrival Iran for possessing.

Further raising the stakes for any such programme are comments by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who said last year the kingdom wouldn’t hesitate to develop nuclear weapons if Iran does.

The images, first reported by The Washington Post, fo-

cus on a military base some 230km west of Riyadh. Jane’s Defence Weekly identified the base in 2013, suggesting its two launch pads appear oriented to target Israel and Iran with ballistic missiles the kingdom previously bought from China. The images show what appear to be structures big enough to build and fuel ballistic missiles.

The question remains where Saudi Arabia gained the technical know-how to build such a facility. Jeffrey Lewis, a missile expert in California, said the Saudi stand resembles a design used by China, though it is smaller. AP

7 killed in plane-copter crash in Italy

Rome: A collision on Friday between a helicopter and a light aircraft above the Italian Alps has killed at least seven people. A prosecutor is investigating a flight instructor who survived the collision.

The French flight instructor was one of two survivors of the accident. News agency ANSA quoted Aosta chief prosecutor Paolo Fortuna saying he was probing the instructor for alleged manslaughter and had questioned him in a hospital ICU.

ANSA says the instructor reportedly was sitting in the rear of the plane and his students were in front. AGENCIES

Jewish family kicked off flight for ‘body odour’

A family who were thrown off an American Airlines flight for alleged “body odour” have accused the carrier of singling them out for being Jewish. Returning home from holiday, Yossi and Jennie Adler and their 19-month-old daughter were due to fly from Miami to Detroit on 23 January, but after boarding the flight they were asked to leave the plane by crew and were not allowed back on. Staff told them other flyers had been complaining about their odour.

The Adlers filmed an altercation with ground staff after they were thrown off the flight. During the video, the male staff

member says: “You told me for religious reasons you don’t shower?” Yossi can be heard responding: “No, I didn’t! I shower every day,” while Jennie agrees, “We’ve all had showers today.” Yossi adds: “I said you kicked me off because of religious reasons.”

American Airlines said on Wednesday: “Mr Adler and his wife were removed from the flight when several passengers complained about their body odour.” According to the firm’s handbook, staff are allowed to remove flyers from a flight if they have an “offensive odour not caused by disability or illness”. THE INDEPENDENT

YouTube demotes flat-earth, conspiracy theorists

Daisuke Wakabayashi

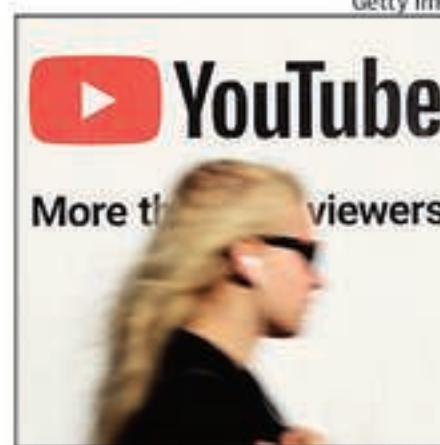
San Francisco: Whether it is a video claiming the Earth is flat or the moon landing was faked, conspiracy theories are not hard to find on Google’s YouTube. But in a significant policy change, YouTube said Friday that it planned to stop recommending them.

After years of criticism that YouTube leads viewers to videos that spread misinformation, the company said it was changing what videos

it recommends to users. In a blog post, YouTube said it would no longer suggest videos with “borderline content” or those that “misinform users in a harmful way” even if the footage does not violate its community guidelines.

YouTube said the number of videos affected by the policy change amounted to less than 1% of all videos on the platform. But given the billions of videos in YouTube’s library, it is still a large number.

YouTube and other po-



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werful technology platforms have faced rising criticism for failing to police the content that users post.

YouTube only provided three examples of the types of videos that it would stop recommending: those promoting a phony miracle cure for a serious illness, ones claiming the Earth is flat, or content making blatantly false claims about historic events like 9/11.

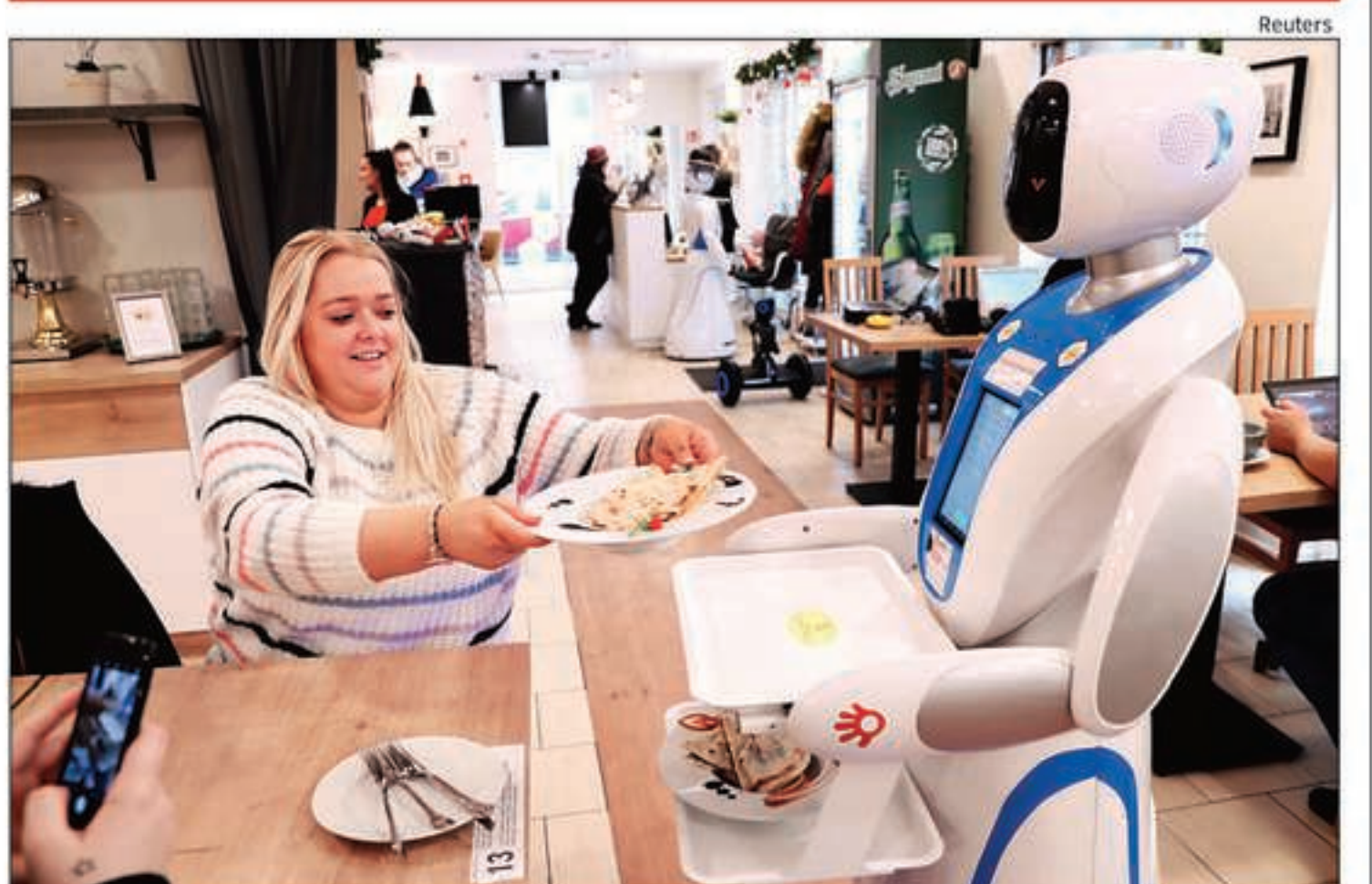
The company declined to provide more detail on what other videos would be

classified borderline.

YouTube is not taking down the targeted videos, and it will still recommend them to users who subscribe to a channel that creates such content. Also, YouTube will not exclude the borderline videos from search results.

“We think this change strikes a balance between maintaining a platform for free speech and living up to our responsibility to users,” YouTube wrote in the blog post. NYT NEWS SERVICE

AROUND THE WORLD



NO TIPPING, PLEASE: The robots at the Enjoy Budapest Cafe can do it all — they can serve food and drinks, tell jokes, dance with the kids or just hang out for a chat with customers. The cafe, opened by an IT company in the Hungarian capital, is staffed by a whole team of robots that aim to help familiarise the public with the technological revolution in automation and artificial intelligence

Vegetarian’s Wurst nightmare? A sausage hotel

What happens when a German butcher opens a hotel? A vegetarian’s Wurst nightmare. There are pictures of sausages on the wallpaper, sausage-shaped pillows on the beds and bratwurst hanging from the ceiling. The room numbers are printed on butcher’s knives and the soaps look like sausages. The “Wurst-restaurant” downstairs serves sausage-related dishes, including sausage ice cream.

“This is the absolute bratwurst heaven,” said Claus Boebel, the owner of the hotel.

Hitler book details Holocaust plans for North America

The Canadian archive has acquired a rare book owned by Adolf Hitler, which is believed to detail the blueprint for a North American Holocaust, the media reported. Library and Archives Canada purchased the document last year for \$4,500 and it was unveiled for the first time on Wednesday, CNN reported on Friday. The 137-page report is titled “Statistics, Media and Organisations of Jewry in the United States and Canada”.

UK man sinks yacht to kill wife during their honeymoon

New pictures have emerged allegedly showing how a British sailor killed his US bride by sinking their catamaran. Lewis Bennett was first charged with murdering Isabella Hellmann, 41, to inherit her wealth. For 18 months he claimed not to know how she disappeared from the yacht as it sailed from Cuba to Florida in 2017. But in November he agreed to admit involuntary manslaughter if a murder charge was dropped. He will be sentenced next week. According to court papers, Bennett, 41, intentionally sank the boat.