

ELSEWHERE



Actor charged over hate attack hoax

CHICAGO
A Chicago grand jury on Friday indicted American actor Jussie Smollett on 16 felony counts after allegedly lying to police about being the victim of a racist, homophobic hate crime. Police say Mr. Smollett staged the attack in a bid to gain publicity and a bigger pay cheque. AFP

What Brexit game is the EU playing, asks Leadsom

LONDON
The leader of Britain's Parliament Andrea Leadsom said she was beginning to wonder what game the European Union was playing over Brexit ahead of a vote by lawmakers next week. "There is still hope, but I have to say I'm deeply disappointed with what we're hearing coming out of the EU," Ms. Leadsom said. REUTERS

87 injured as Japan ferry collides with animal

TOKYO
At least 87 passengers in a high speed ferry were injured in an apparent collision with a marine animal in the sea of Japan on Saturday, the Coast Guard and media said. Five people were seriously injured in the accident, which occurred just before the hydrofoil was due to arrive on Sado Island, the Japan Coast Guard said. AFP

China hopeful about next round of trade talks

BEIJING
Beijing is hopeful about its next round of trade talks with the U.S., China's Vice-Minister for Commerce Wang Shouwen said on Saturday. Top-level negotiators have met three times in an attempt to reach an agreement before next week, when additional tariffs could be levied on Chinese goods. AFP

N. Korea may be preparing for a missile or space launch: report

Based on satellite image analysis, NPR says Pyongyang is building a rocket

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SEOUL

North Korea may be preparing for a missile or space launch, U.S. news outlet NPR has reported, based on satellite image analysis of a key facility near Pyongyang.

NPR said the images of Samudong, one of the facilities Pyongyang has used to produce intercontinental ballistic missiles, were taken days before U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un met in Hanoi for their high-stakes summit, which ended in failure.

Photos published

The photos by the firm DigitalGlobe show the presence of cars and trucks at the site on February 22, said NPR, which has exclusive access to the imagery.

It added that rail cars and



New launch ahead? The Samudong research centre, on the outskirts of Pyongyang, in a satellite image. AFP

cranes can also be seen at a yard. "When you put all that together, that's really what it looks like when the North Koreans are in the process of building a rocket," Jeffrey Lewis, a researcher at the Mid-

dlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, was quoted as saying by NPR on Friday.

The Samudong analysis comes days after the specialised website 38 North and

the Center for Strategic and International Studies said Pyongyang may have resumed operations at its long-range rocket launch site at Sohae, based on their study of satellite imagery from March 6.

The development is likely to further compound Washington's frustration over the lack of progress in its bid to get the North to give up its atomic arsenal, especially after the February 27-28 summit between Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim collapsed without a joint statement.

Mr. Trump said on Friday that his relationship with Mr. Kim "remains good", despite the setback in Hanoi.

U.S. officials have said Washington believes the "final, fully verified denuclearisation" of North Korea is still possible by the end of Mr. Trump's first term.

Baby of 'British IS bride' dead

U.K. government criticised for revoking Begum's citizenship

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

The British government drew fresh criticism on Saturday over its decision to revoke citizenship from a London teenager who joined the Islamic State (IS) group in Syria, after her baby died in a refugee camp.

Shamima Begum, 19, had asked to return home after giving birth to her son Jarrah last month in the camp in northeastern Syria, but London refused.

Died due to pneumonia

A spokesman for the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, Mustafa Bali, said the baby had died, without giving further details. The BBC said he had pneumonia, citing a medical certificate.

Ms. Begum's fate has sparked heated debate in Britain, which like many other countries is facing a dilemma over whether to allow jihadists and IS sympathisers home to face pro-



A photo of Shamima Begum. REUTERS

secution, or stop them from returning at all.

Ms. Begum told them she wanted to return home to save her baby, saying that her two older children had died, apparently from illness and malnutrition.

"I don't want to lose this baby as well and this is really not a place to raise children, this camp," she told the BBC at the time.

Opposition Labour MP Diane Abbott said the death of the baby was "a stain on

the conscience of this government".

A British government spokesman said: "The death of any child is tragic and deeply distressing for the family."

But he added that Britons had been warned since 2011 not to travel to Syria because of the conflict there.

"The government will continue to do whatever we can to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and travelling to dangerous conflict zones," he said.

'Morally reprehensible'

Ms. Abbott said: "To leave a vulnerable young woman and an innocent child in a refugee camp, where we know infant mortality to be high, is morally reprehensible."

Aid group Save the Children said the baby's death was "incredibly sad" and urged Britain and other countries to "take responsibility" for their citizens in Syria.

Warren vows to break up Amazon, Google and Facebook if elected

'I don't want a government that's here to work for the giant tech companies. I want a government that's here to work for the people'

REUTERS
NEW YORK

Senator Elizabeth Warren vowed on Friday to break up Amazon, Google and Facebook if elected U.S. President to promote competition in the technology sector.

Seeking to stand out in a crowded field, Ms. Warren said at a campaign event in Queens that it was time to challenge the increasing dominance of America's biggest technology companies.

"We have these giant tech companies that think they rule the earth," she told a crowd of about 300 people in Long Island City. "I don't

want a government that's here to work for the giant tech companies. I want a government that's here to work for the people.

Amazon abruptly scrapped plans in February to build a major outpost in the neighbourhood that could have created 25,000 jobs, blaming opposition from local leaders.

'Bullying smaller firms'

In an event held not far from the proposed Amazon site, Ms. Warren said that big tech companies come into towns, cities and states and "bully everyone into doing what



People's candidate: Senator Elizabeth Warren speaking during a campaign event in New York City on Friday. AFP

they want" and "roll right over" small businesses and start-ups that are a threat.

"Giants are not allowed to buy out the competition. The

competition needs the opportunity to thrive and grow," she said.

Earlier in the day, Ms. Warren said in a post on Me-

dia that she would nominate regulators to unwind acquisitions such as Facebook's deals for WhatsApp and Instagram, Amazon's deals for Whole Foods and Zappos, and Google's purchases of Waze, Nest and DoubleClick.

Online marketplace

Ms. Warren also proposed legislation that would require tech companies like Google and Amazon that offer an online marketplace or exchange to refrain from competing on their own platform. This would, for example, forbid Amazon from

selling on its Amazon Marketplace platform.

It is rare for the government to seek to undo a consummated deal. The most famous case in recent memory is the government's effort to break up Microsoft. The Justice Department won a preliminary victory in 2000 but was reversed on appeal. The case settled with Microsoft intact. U.S. Congress held a series of hearings last year looking at the dominance of major tech companies and their role in displacing or swallowing up existing businesses, among other things.

Tech companies are some

of the biggest political donors. Google spent \$21 million to lobby in 2018 while Amazon spent \$14.2 million and Facebook spent \$12.62 million, according to their filings to U.S. Congress.

Angering a deep-pocketed industry could hurt Democrats, but that is not likely to be a big concern for Ms. Warren, who made her political mark and plenty of enemies by going after big banks after the 2007-09 financial crisis. In the Senate, Ms. Warren continues to be an outspoken critic of Wall Street and is a leader of her party's progressive wing.

Canada political crisis hurting Trudeau's image ahead of polls

His government is accused of meddling in a criminal trial

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
OTTAWA

Justin Trudeau rose to power in Canada as a champion of feminism and indigenous rights, quickly earning him golden boy status at home and abroad as a progressive leader. But a major political scandal that sparked the resignation of two of his Ministers — both women, one indigenous — has tarnished his image just seven months before national elections.

Pundits say Mr. Trudeau, 47, faces a tough battle just to stay in office, with the latest polls showing his Liberals trailing the Conservatives for the first time.

For weeks, Mr. Trudeau's government has been rocked by accusations of meddling in the criminal prosecution of engineering giant SNC-Lavalin, which



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. AFP

was charged with corruption over alleged bribes paid to secure contracts in Libya.

His Attorney-General Jody Wilson-Raybould, who said she experienced "consistent and sustained" political pressure to shield the company from a trial, stepped down. Budget Minister Jane Philpott followed suit, as did longtime Trudeau friend

and top aide Gerry Butts.

On Thursday, Mr. Trudeau addressed the allegations head-on, telling reporters in Ottawa that he had learned "lessons" from the crisis — but denying any wrongdoing.

SNC-Lavalin was charged in 2015 with corruption for allegedly bribing officials in Libya between 2001 and 2011 to secure government contracts. The firm lobbied the government for an out-of-court settlement. But Ms. Wilson-Raybould refused to ask prosecutors to settle, and the trial is set to proceed.

For a hint of how things might play out, many will look to the March 19 federal budget vote. If Liberals, who hold a majority in Parliament, break ranks, it could trigger snap elections.

Malaysian gets 10 years for insulting Islam

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KUALA LUMPUR

A Malaysian citizen was given more than 10 years in jail for insulting Islam and the Prophet Muhammed on social media, police said on Saturday, one of the country's harshest such sentences in recent years.

The person found guilty, known only as Facebook user "Ayea Yea", was jailed for 10 years and 10 months after pleading guilty to 10 charges of anti-religious activity and the misuse of communications networks, said national police chief Mohamad Fuzi Harun.

"The police advise the public not to misuse social media or communication networks by uploading or sharing any form of provocation that can touch racial and religious sensitivities," he said.

Venezuela govt. claims sabotage after blackout

'The electrical war will be defeated'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
CARACAS

Venezuela's government struggled to cope on Friday with a massive electricity blackout that paralysed much of the country as President Nicolás Maduro blamed the chaos on U.S. sabotage. The power cut — which began late on Thursday — was one of the longest and most widespread in memory, heightening tensions in Mr. Maduro's power struggle with his rival, Opposition leader Juan Guaidó.

Power supply was gradually being restored to large areas of Caracas on Friday afternoon, as well as parts of Miranda State and Vargas. "The electrical war announced and directed by U.S. imperialism against our people will be defeated," Mr. Maduro tweeted.



A general view of a street in Caracas. REUTERS

Later, his Communications Minister, Jorge Rodríguez, announced on state television that Venezuela would make a complaint about the U.S.'s alleged role in the blackout before the UN Commission on Human Rights. But U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton blamed the blackout on "years of Maduro's corruption, under-investment, and neglected maintenance."

Trump's budget includes funds for 'Space Force'

President to also seek funding for wall

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump will be making a significant request for border wall funds and seeking money to stand up Space Force as a new branch of the military in the White House budget being released next week, an administration official said.

For the first time, Mr. Trump plans to stick with the strict spending caps imposed years ago, even though lawmakers have largely avoided them with new budget deals. That will likely trigger a showdown with Congress. The official said Friday that the President's plan promises to balance the budget in 15 years.

Mr. Trump will seek \$750 billion for defence, a boost for the military, while cut-

ting non-defence discretionary spending by 5% below the cap, said the official.

Budgets are mainly seen as blueprints for White House priorities. But they are often panned on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers craft the Appropriation Bills that eventually fund the government, if the President signs them into law.

Mr. Trump's budget for the 2020 fiscal year will increase requests for some agencies while reducing others to reflect those priorities. Reductions are proposed, for example, for the Environmental Protection Agency. The cuts being requested by the White House would hit discretionary spending as well as some mandatory safety net programmes, which Mr. Trump has proposed in the past.

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