

TOPOF THE WORLD



Hallmark Channel had pulled four TV ads that featured same-sex couples

USA

Hallmark says sorry for pulling ads featuring brides kissing

HALLMARK APOLOGISED Sunday after facing days of backlash for pulling four television ads that featured brides kissing. In a statement, Mike Perry, the president and chief executive of Hallmark Cards, said the team at Hallmark Channel's parent company, Crown Media Family Networks, had "been agonising over this decision as we've seen the hurt it has unintentionally caused" and "they believe this was the wrong decision." Hallmark said in the statement it would work with GLAAD, an LGBTQ media advocacy organisation, "to better represent the LGBTQ community across our portfolio of brands".

PAKISTAN

Imran Khan to co-convene Global Refugee Forum

Islamabad: Pakistan on Monday said Prime Minister Imran Khan will go to Geneva to co-convene the first-ever Global Refugee Forum (GRF) commencing on December 17. The Global Refugee Forum — the first major meeting on refugees of the 21st century — will be jointly hosted by the UN-HCR, the UN Refugee Agency and the government of Switzerland on December 17-18, 2019. The forum is expected to galvanise political support and solidarity and broaden the base of commitments to deal with the growing number of refugee situations across the world.

PHILIPPINES

Rappler journalist Ressa launches defence in libel case

Manila: Philippine journalist Maria Ressa said Monday she would not be silenced as she launched her defence against a libel charge that press advocates call an attempt to curb her news site's critical coverage of President Rodrigo Duterte. Her site Rappler has written extensively and often critically on Duterte's policies, including his deadly drugs war that rights groups say may amount to crimes against humanity. "I can go to jail for 12 years for this (case), that is the maximum sentence," she said. "From track record you can see the political goals to shut Rappler up... but we haven't shut up yet," said Ressa, who is free on bail.

BRITAIN

Burglars steal jewellery worth \$64 mn from celeb

London: Tamara Ecclestone, the daughter of former Formula One boss Bernie Ecclestone, has had an estimated \$64 million-worth of jewellery stolen from her home on a London street known as Billionaire Row. A spokesman said the 35-year-old had been left "angry and shaken" over a raid which evaded both the 24-hour security teams that patrol the street and Ecclestone's own internal security system. Ecclestone, a model, had just left the country for the holidays when the burglars entered her property.

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TO VOTE ON IMPEACHMENT WEDNESDAY

House judiciary panel's impeachment report says Trump betrayed nation

MICHAEL D SHEAR

WASHINGTON, DECEMBER 16

THE HOUSE Judiciary Committee formally presented its case for impeaching US President Donald Trump in a 658-page report published online early Monday, arguing just days before a final vote in the House that he "betrayed the nation by abusing his high office."

The report, which echoes similar documents produced after the committee's approval of impeachment articles for Presidents Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton, contains no new allegations or evidence against Trump.

But it offers a detailed road map for the two articles of impeachment the committee approved, charging that Trump abused the power of the presidency to enlist Ukraine in tarnishing his political rivals and obstructing Congress by blocking witnesses from testifying and refusing to provide documents.

The House is expected to vote Wednesday on whether to impeach the sitting president for only the third time in the nation's history, setting in motion a trial in the Senate early next year that could lead to Trump's



Members of the House Judiciary Committee during a hearing. NYT

removal from office.

"President Trump has placed his personal, political interests above our national security, our free and fair elections, and our system of checks and balances," the report states. "He has engaged in a pattern of misconduct that will continue if left unchecked. Accordingly, President Trump should be impeached and removed from office."

The report argues that the House should charge Trump with abuse of power for holding up nearly \$400 million worth of se-

curity aid and the promise of a White House meeting until Ukraine agreed to announce investigations into former Vice President Joe Biden and 2016 election interference.

It also urges the House to approve an article of impeachment charging the president with obstruction of Congress, saying that "President Trump's obstruction of Congress does not benefit the leader of a democratic society. It calls to mind the very claims of royal privilege against which our founders rebelled."

The report includes a scathing 20-page dissent from Rep. Doug Collins of Georgia, the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee, who accuses Democrats on the panel of conducting an unfair process in a partisan attempt to drive Trump from office because of their dislike of him and his policies.

Collins concludes: "Before the House are two articles of impeachment against the president of the United States, Donald John Trump. To these articles, the minority dissents." NYT

EXPLAINED

What happens now in Trump impeachment

WITH THE judiciary committee bringing out its official case for impeachment, the House is expected to vote on whether to impeach Trump or not on Wednesday. The Democrat-majority House is most likely to okay the impeachment. But the President will remain in office pending the outcome of a Senate trial. Before the trial, House lawmakers must choose 'managers' to present their case in the Senate. The trial is likely to take place in January in a Senate which is controlled by Trump's party. This makes it highly unlikely that the Democrats will get the two-thirds majority vote they need to remove the President from office.

Xi vows support for HK leader during 'most difficult' time

NOAH SIN & DONNY KWOK

HONG KONG, DECEMBER 16

CHINESE PRESIDENT Xi Jinping offered his support for Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam on Monday, praising her courage in governing the Chinese-ruled financial hub in these "most difficult" times after months of often violent anti-government protests.

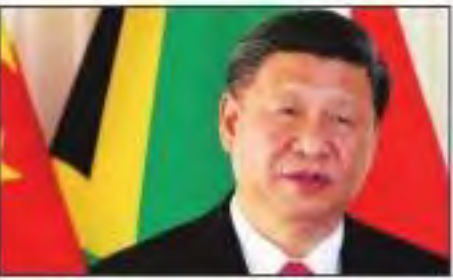
His comments came after Hong Kong police fired teargas in late night street clashes with anti-government protesters as the former British colony's worst political crisis in decades shows no sign of resolution.

"The situation in Hong Kong in 2019 was the most complex and difficult since its return to the motherland," Xi told local media in brief comments before a closed-door meeting with Lam in Beijing.

"The central government fully recognises the courage and assumption of responsibility you have displayed in these exceptional times in Hong Kong."

Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997 with the promise of wide-ranging autonomy under a "one country, two systems" formula, including a free press and independent judiciary, which the protesters say is being eroded by Communist Party rulers in Beijing. China denies the charge.

Hong Kong media have speculated that Lam's talks with Xi could yield fresh directives on



The central government fully recognises the courage and assumption of responsibility you (Carrie Lam) have displayed in these exceptional times in Hong Kong."

— XI JINPING

PRESIDENT OF CHINA

the crisis, including a possible cabinet reshuffle. Xi did not go into specifics, but reiterated his support for Lam despite some previous media reports suggesting she might be replaced.

He added Beijing was "unwavering in supporting Hong Kong police in firmly upholding the law" and said Lam had continued to uphold the "one country, two systems" principle.

Xi said last month that China was "unwavering" in defending national security and sovereignty, implementing the "one country, two systems" policy and opposing foreign forces interfering in Hong Kong. He said Monday that these were Beijing's basic positions on Hong Kong affairs. REUTERS

Amnesty revises Iran protest death toll to 304

London: At least 304 people were killed in Iran during a three-day crackdown against protests across the country in November, according to an Amnesty International toll published Monday.

The rights group had earlier estimated 208 deaths, including two youths aged 15 and 17.

Iran has dismissed such figures as "utter lies".

Amnesty said it collected "harrowing testimony" suggesting that after authorities "massacred" protesters, they orchestrated a "wide-scale clampdown" to cover up the deaths.

"Iran's authorities are carrying out a vicious crackdown following the outbreak of nationwide protests on 15 November," the London-based rights watchdog said in a statement.

"Thousands of protesters as well as journalists, human rights defenders and students" were arrested, Amnesty said, "to stop them from speaking out about Iran's ruthless repression". PTI

2ND CONSECUTIVE NIGHT OF VIOLENCE ROCKS BEIRUT



Anti-government protesters and riot police clash during a protest near Parliament Square in downtown Beirut on Sunday. AP

■ Teargas engulfed central Beirut as security forces chased protesters near Lebanon's Parliament on Sunday in a second night of street clashes that wounded dozens of people.

■ Protesters had returned despite a fierce crackdown by security forces the night before when clashes also injured dozens.

■ It marked the most violent unrest in the capital in a historic wave of protests that has swept Lebanon since October 17 and pushed Saad al-Hariri to resign as PM.

■ The protests erupted from anger at a political elite that has overseen decades of corruption and steered the country toward its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

Qatar: Talks with Saudi Arabia have broken stalemate

Saudi Arabia, UAE, other Gulf countries cut diplomatic and trade relationships with Qatar in 2017

REUTERS

RIYADH, DECEMBER 16

QATAR'S FOREIGN minister said recent talks have broken a protracted stalemate with Saudi Arabia and that Doha was open to studying demands by its rivals in a Gulf dispute but would not turn its back on ally Turkey.

The row between US-allied Arab states saw Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut diplomatic and trade links with Qatar

in June 2017 over allegations that it backs terrorism. Doha denies the charge and says the embargo aims to undermine its sovereignty.

"We have broken the stalemate of non-communication to starting a communication with the Saudis," Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani told CNN on Sunday.

"We want to understand the grievances. We want to study them and to assess them and to look at the solutions that can safeguard us in the future from



Qatar Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani

any other potential crisis," he said without mentioning what

concessions, if any, were possible.

The boycotting nations set 13 demands, including closing Al Jazeera television, shuttering a Turkish military base, downgrading ties with Iran and cutting links to the Muslim Brotherhood.

Sheikh Mohammed, who made an unannounced visit to Riyadh in October amid hints the rift could soon subside, denied Qatar has direct ties with the Brotherhood, which the other countries label a terrorist

MAN EXPECTED TO PLEAD GUILTY TO SENDING A STROBE GIF ON TWITTER TO A REPORTER WHO HAS EPILEPSY

Latest case of cybercrime: A strobe that induces seizures

MANNY FERNANDEZ

HOUSTON, DECEMBER 16

AN UNUSUAL case of cybercrime is playing out in a Dallas courtroom on Monday, with a Maryland man expected to plead guilty to aggravated assault. The victim was a journalist and author. The weapon was a GIF, or animated image, sent on Twitter. And the motive appeared at least in part to be the victim's criticisms of President Trump.

The case has played out for years in the courts, and the scheduled guilty plea by the defendant,

John Rayne Rivello, would be one of the first times the sending of a seizure-inducing tweet was successfully prosecuted as a crime.

Rivello was accused of sending a Twitter message featuring a blinding strobe light to an epileptic author who immediately suffered a seizure upon viewing it in December 2016 in Dallas. The message read, in capital letters: "You deserve a seizure for your posts."

Investigators found several digital clues, including a message they said Rivello sent to other Twitter users reading, "I hope this sends him into a seizure," and



The journalist Kurt Eichenwald was sent an image over Twitter that caused him to suffer an epileptic seizure. NYT

screenshots showing the victim's Wikipedia page with a fake date

of death and epilepsy.com's list of epilepsy seizure triggers.

The victim, Kurt Eichenwald, the author of "The Informant" and a reporter for The New York Times from 1986 to 2006, had been critical of Trump, then a candidate for president, and had appeared on Tucker Carlson's Fox News show just before he received the strobe-light message in 2016.

Eichenwald's attacker also appeared to be motivated by anti-Semitic hatred, according to court documents: The Wikipedia page that Rivello had copied included anti-Semitic references, and the Twitter handle that Rivello used was named @jew_goldstein, with the name Ari Goldstein.

Rivello, 32, a veteran who lived in Salisbury, Maryland, was arrested in 2017 and charged in federal court with cyberstalking. Later that year, federal prosecutors dropped the charge, allowing the Dallas County District Attorney's office to proceed with their case against him. Court records in the case indicated the scheduled guilty plea Monday.

Eichenwald's lawyers have likened the attack to sending a bomb in the mail or anthrax in an envelope.

Eichenwald told investigators he had stepped into his home office that evening in 2016

and clicked on the message from @jew_goldstein. The strobe light GIF caused an immediate seizure that lasted about eight minutes, court papers showed.

Eichenwald's wife, Theresa, walked into his office, called 911 and took a photo of the strobing light on his computer with her phone.

"This is his wife," she replied to the Twitter account, "you caused a seizure. I have your information and have called the police to report the assault."

Federal health officials estimate that 3.4 million Americans are affected by epilepsy. NYT