

Ex-Trump Campaign Associates Face More Charges

WASHINGTON — Dramatically escalating the pressure and stakes, special counsel Robert Mueller filed additional criminal charges Thursday against President Donald Trump's former campaign chairman and his business associate.

The filing adds allegations of tax evasion and bank fraud and significantly increases the legal jeopardy facing Paul Manafort, who managed Trump's campaign for several months in 2016, and longtime associate Rick Gates. Both had already faced the prospect of at least a decade in prison if convicted at trial.

The two men were initially charged in a 12-count indict-



ment in October that accused them of a multimillion-dollar money-laundering conspiracy tied to lobbying work for a Russia-friendly Ukrainian political party. Manafort and Gates, who also worked on Trump's campaign, both pleaded not guilty after that indictment.

The new charges, contained in a 32-count indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Virginia, allege that Manafort and Gates doctored financial documents, lied to tax preparers and defrauded banks — using money they cycled through offshore accounts to spend lavishly, including on real estate, interior decorating and other luxury goods. (AP)

Boeing, Lockheed Interested in Launching Rockets from Brazil, Minister Says

BRASILIA — Brazil's defense minister said on Thursday that Boeing, Lockheed Martin, SpaceX and other U.S. aerospace companies have expressed interest in launching rockets from its Alcantara military base near the equator and visited the site in December. "They were very impressed," Defense Minister Raul Jungmann told reporters. "They showed interest, but I can't say whether it will materialize."

Alcantara's location makes it attractive because one-fifth less fuel is used to launch satellites into orbit

along the equator compared with sites farther north or south. Besides SpaceX, Lockheed Martin Corp and Boeing Co, the Alcantara visit included smaller aerospace U.S. companies Vector Space Systems, which launches small satellites, and Microcosm, which focuses on providing low-cost access to space, an organizer of the trip said. Rubens Barbosa, a former Brazilian ambassador to the United States who organized the visit to the base, said the U.S. companies were eager to use the Alcantara site. (Reuters)

Modi Hugs Trudeau amid Indo-Canada Invitation Embarrassment

NEW DELHI — Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted his Canadian counterpart Justin Trudeau on Friday with a hug, one day after embarrassed Canadian diplomats had to revoke a party invitation for a man convicted of attempting to kill an Indian politician.

The invitation was the latest blunder in Trudeau's eight-day visit, which has included everything from criticism of his colorful wardrobe to questions about whether his gov-



ernment is sufficiently critical of Sikh extremists. Jaspal Atwal, a Canada-based former member of a banned Sikh separatist group, had been invited by a Canadian mem-

ber of Parliament to a Thursday evening party for Trudeau at Canada's High Commission in New Delhi.

Atwal was convicted of trying to kill an Indian

Cabinet minister during a 1986 visit to Canada. The minister was shot but survived. Atwal was imprisoned, and became a businessman after his release. (AP)

Putin is Heir to Russia's Long Disinformation Experience



MOSCOW — Vladimir Putin doesn't tweet and he claims he doesn't have a smartphone. At first sight, the Russian president's reluctance

to adopt the hyper-connected world's technology might seem at odds with the widespread belief that he signed off on a campaign to undermine

the United States via social media. But he has something likely more important than gadgets — long experience in the KGB and its post-Soviet successor. From the czarist secret police to the present, Russian operatives have adroitly exploited humans' biases and their capacity to believe the unlikely. The elaborate campaign of bogus identities and inflammatory statements alleged in last week's U.S.

indictment of 13 Russians used new technology and platforms, but drew on a century-old spirit. An early and especially notorious example was the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a pamphlet that purported to be the minutes of a secret meeting of Jewish leaders to plot world domination. First appearing in 1903, its origins are open to debate, but many scholars suggest it was commissioned by Okhranka, the czarist secret police, and spread by them to argue against growing calls for modernizing Russia. (AP)

Ivanka Trump Receives Red-Carpet Welcome for Olympic Visit

SEOUL, South Korea — Ivanka Trump received a red-carpet welcome in South Korea on Friday as head of the U.S. delegation to this weekend's closing ceremony for the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. The daughter of President Donald Trump made a brief statement, broadcast live on TV, at the airport before heading to a dinner with President Moon Jae-in in the presidential compound in Seoul.

A high-level North Korean delegation will also attend the closing ceremony, but the South Korean government said it's unlikely that Ivanka Trump will

meet the North Koreans or defectors from North Korea. Speculation is high in South Korea that she might deliver a message from President Trump on North Korea. She said at Incheon airport that "we are very, very excited to attend the 2018 Olympic Winter Games to cheer for Team. The USA and to reaffirm our strong and enduring commitment with the people of the Republic of Korea." South Korean media said Moon would emphasize the importance of holding U.S.-North Korea talks in the dinner with Ivanka Trump and other members of the U.S. delegation. (AP)

South Korea to Fight WTO Ruling on Fukushima Seafood Ban

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea said Friday it will appeal the World Trade Organization's decision against bans on imports of Japanese fishery products after the Fukushima nuclear meltdowns.

The government said in a statement that the appeal was meant to protect public health and safety. It said it will maintain its existing regulations on imports of Japanese seafood. The Geneva-based WTO accepted Japan's complaint, saying South Korea's policies violated the trade body's rules, were discriminatory and served as a trade barrier.

In 2013, South Korea banned imports of all fishery products from eight Japanese provinces near Fukushima after Tokyo Electric Power reported leaks of radiation-contaminated water. (AP)

BMW Looking at Chinese-Made Electric MINI

BEIJING — BMW Group said Friday it is talking with China's biggest SUV maker about a possible partnership to produce electric versions of its MINI as automakers ramp up electric development under pressure from Beijing to meet sales quotas. BMW said it signed a letter of intent with Great Wall Motors Co., headquartered in Baoding, southwest of Beijing, and needs to work out a cooperation agreement and investment details. Auto brands face pressure to meet quotas that require electric vehicles to make up at least 10 percent of sales starting next year. Later, they face pressure to raise that to meet increasingly demanding fuel efficiency standards. Beijing is using access to its auto market, the world's largest, as leverage to induce global automakers to help Chinese brands develop battery and other electric vehicle technology. (AP)

Donors Pledge \$510 Million to West Africa's Sahel Region

BRUSSELS — International donors on Friday pledged 414 million euros (\$510 million) to five impoverished countries in West Africa's Sahel region, much of it to fund a new counter terror force.

The 5,000-strong G5 Sahel force for Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger was seeking around 400 million euros for its mission along mostly desert borders, including near Libya — the main jumping-off point for thousands of African migrants bound for Italy. The amount pledged



"goes far beyond our initial expectations," said EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini. "It's a tremendous result that allows us to begin putting the force into operation." The pledges came at a summit in Brussels of 32 leaders and 60 delegations meant to

show political, development and security support for the five countries. While the funding was welcomed, Niger President Mahamadou Issoufou warned that it would keep the force operational for only one year based on current needs. (AP)

EU to Double Funding for Military Force in West Africa's Sahel

BRUSSELS — The European Union will double its funding for a multinational military operation in West Africa's Sahel region to counter Islamist insurgencies, the EU's top diplomat said on Friday, part of a broader effort to stop migrants and militants.

At a donor conference of about 50 countries including the United States, Japan and Norway, former colonial power France looked set to win enough backing to allow the new regional force to be fully opera-

tional later this year. "This is not about charity, this is a partnership," EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini told reporters, promising a doubling of EU funding to 100 million euros for the G5 Sahel force, made up of troops from Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mauritania.

The G5 Sahel force needs more than 400 million euros (\$494 million) to be able to meet the demands of its Western backers, up from the 250 million euros it has now. (Reuters)

Russians Finally Celebrate Gold at Olympics after Scandals

GANGNEUNG, South Korea — After two weeks of Olympic competition, the "Olympic Athletes from Russia" finally have a gold medal.

Alina Zagitova won the women's figure skating title Friday to become the first Russian to win a Winter Olympic event since the doping-hit 2014 Sochi Games.

"I was trying with all my strength to ignore it but I couldn't," Zagitova said of Russia's lack of gold. "I was really worried because I knew I didn't have the right to make a mistake. I had to skate clean and show my maximum, but I'm so happy I could."

The Russians have one gold, five silver and eight bronze medals at the Pyeongchang Games as of Friday, putting them behind Belarus and Italy on gold medals (the key measure used in Russia), and behind France on total medals. For a traditional winter sports superpower that prided itself on topping the Sochi medals table — even if many athletes were later accused of doping — the wait for gold has been unfamiliar and unpleasant.

Zagitova, who was only 11 during the Sochi Olympics and has never been suspected of doping, didn't hear the Russian national anthem at her medal ceremony. Instead, the Olympic anthem was played and the Olympic flag flew because Russia is officially suspended from the games.

The International Olympic Committee instead invited some from the country to compete in neutral uniforms, which is why Zagitova accepted her medal in a muted gray coat with the inscription "Olympic Athlete from Russia." (AP)

Neighbor News

TAPI to Bring Peace Dividends for Entire Region

ISLAMABAD — Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi Friday said the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project would unite people, boost socio-economic development and bring in peace dividends to the entire region.

Addressing the ground breaking ceremony of the link-up projects of electricity transmission lines and fibre optics at Serhatabad, Turkmenistan, and broadcast live, the Prime Minister said

the "project will have only the winners." Abbasi said he was grateful to the President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov for turning into reality and particularly for recreating the historical linkages of this region.

He said the President of Turkmenistan owing to his vision has converted the TAPI project into an energy and communications corridor that would have IT connectivity, besides road and rail links. (Monitoring Desk)

IAEA Once Again Verifies Iran's Compliance with Nuclear Deal

IAEA — The International Atomic Energy Agency has once again confirmed that Iran is living up to its commitments under the 2015 multilateral nuclear agreement.

The UN nuclear agency said in a report, cited by French news agency AFP, that the Islamic Republic is sticking to the deal's key parameters such as the number of uranium centrifuges and stockpiles.

Iran has informed the IAEA of a decision "to construct naval nuclear propulsion in future" and the agency has requested "further clarifications and amplifications," the report added.

The IAEA, which is tasked with monitoring Iran's nuclear activities, has repeatedly verified Tehran's full commitment to its side of the bargain.

Iran, lifted under the JCPOA, for another 120 days but said he was doing so "for the last time."

He also called on European allies and the US Congress to work with him to "fix the disastrous flaws" in the pact or face a US exit. (PressTV)

Turkmenistan Starts Construction of Power-Line to Pakistan

ASHGABAT — The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAPI) electric power-line construction launch ceremony was held on Feb. 23, a source close to the project told Trend.

Previous reports indicated that Turkish Calyk Holding showed interest in participating in this 500-kilovolt power-line construction.

Turkmenistan currently supplies neighboring Afghanistan with electricity. Turkmenistan built additional stations

and high-voltage power-lines to increase the power export.

There are large possibilities in power export to Tajikistan, Pakistan and India via Afghanistan, Turkmen Energy Ministry said previously.

Turkmenistan exports electric power to Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey. Ashgabat plans to produce 27.4 billion kilowatt-hours of electric power in 2020 and increase the figure to 35.5 billion kilowatt-hours in 2030. (Trend)

Lavrov: Russia, Uzbekistan Established Trusting Political Dialogue

TASHKENT — Moscow and Tashkent have established a trusting political dialogue, the tone of which is set by contacts at the highest level, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at a meeting with Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov on Feb. 23, Tass reports.

"We are glad to see your interdepartmental delegation, which has held different meetings in Moscow," Lavrov said. "We value our trustful dialogue, the tone of which is set by contacts at the highest level."

He further added that the state visit of Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Russia in April 2017 was a turning point in the development of bilateral relations. "We value the close co-

ordination of actions through the Foreign Ministry," the minister said. "The foreign ministries have a responsibility to monitor the implementation of the agreements reached at the highest level. Today we will sign the Plan of the inter-ministerial consultations for 2018-2019, and I expect very useful negotiations."

The trade turnover between Russia and Uzbekistan for 2017 increased by almost 34 percent, to \$3.65 billion compared to the previous year.

"Uzbekistan is one of Russia's leading economic partners in the CIS. Russia's share in the total volume of Uzbekistan's foreign trade hit 18.1 percent in 2017. (Trend)