

## China Blasts 'Political Persecution' of Huawei as Canada Goes Ahead with Exec's Extradition to US

BEIJING - Ottawa has formally started an extradition process in the case of Huawei's chief financial officer, who was arrested in Canada after being charged with circumventing US sanctions on Iran. China saw red over the move.

In a statement on Friday, Canada's Department of Justice announced that it had issued "an authority to proceed," thus "formally commencing an extradition process in the case of Ms Meng Wanzhou," the Chinese telecommunication giant's chief financial officer and the daughter of the company's founder.

Meng was arrested in Vancouver at Washington's request in December. The US authorities have rolled out a long list of charges against Meng, which include bank fraud, wire fraud and con-



spiracy to commit these crimes while allegedly breaching the US sanctions on Iran. "An authority to proceed" is the first step in the extradition process, with Meng now set to ap-

pear in court on March 6, where a date will be set for her extradition hearing. The Canadian minister of justice has the final say on whether Meng will be handed over to the US.

The latest development in Meng's case has dealt another blow to already strained relations between Ottawa and Beijing. China's embassy in Canada has lambasted the move as politically motivated, saying in a statement that the Chinese side is "utterly dissatisfied" with how the case has been unfolding.

"This is not a merely judicial case, but a political persecution against a Chinese high-tech enterprise. The subsequent developments have proved this," the embassy said. Meng's lawyer David Martin has also cried foul at the decision, arguing that the charges against the Chinese executive were viewed by the US as a political tool to break an impasse in the China-US trade row. (RT)

### Two More Australian Cabinet Ministers Quit as Election Looms

SYDNEY - Two more ministers in Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison's cabinet said on Saturday they will not contest elections due in May, adding to a flurry of high-profile resignations as opinion polls suggest the center-right government faces a heavy defeat.

Morrison will need to retain all the parliamentary seats held by his coalition government, but his chances are weakened by a wave of incumbent lawmakers in marginal seats set to

retire. Defence Minister Christopher Pyne and Defence Industry Minister Steven Ciobo both announced on Saturday morning that they would not stand in the coming election. Senator Linda Reynolds, Australia's first female brigadier in the Army Reserve, was appointed the new Minister for Defence Industry. Morrison said Reynolds would become Defence Minister should his government be returned to power. (Reuters)

### North Korea's Kim Leaves Vietnam after Summit Breakdown

DONG DANG, Vietnam - Smiling and holding up his clasped hands in a victorious pose, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Saturday boarded his private train at the Vietnam-China border for a 60-plus-hour ride home, ending a trip to Vietnam that saw a summit breakdown with President Donald Trump. He spent his last day in Hanoi laying large red-and-yellow wreaths at a war memorial and at the mausoleum of

national hero Ho Chi Minh, surrounded by Vietnamese soldiers in crisp white uniforms and his own entourage of top North Korean officials. At the border, he got out of his armored limousine and clasped his hands, waving to a crowd of people cheering his departure. Since Trump flew home to Washington, Kim has stepped assuredly into the spotlight, keen to show himself as a poised leader taking his rightful place on the international stage.



He met Friday with President Nguyen Phu Trong, the country's top leader and Communist Party chief, grinning broadly as he was feted by top officials and escorted down a red carpet. (Fox News)

### Islamic State Faces Final Territorial Defeat in Eastern Syria Battle



OUTSKIRTS OF BAGHOUS, Syria - Islamic State faces final territorial defeat as the U.S.-backed Syrian force battling the

jihadists said on Saturday it was closing in on the jihadists' last bastion near the Iraqi border, capping four years

of efforts to roll back the group. While the fall of Baghouz, an eastern Syrian village on the bank of the Euphrates River, would mark a milestone in a global campaign against Islamic State (IS), they remain a threat, using guerrilla tactics and holding some desolate land further west. An array of enemies, both local and international, confronted IS after it declared a modern-day "caliphate" in 2014 across large swathes of territory it had seized in lightning

offensives in Syria and neighboring Iraq. Thousands of IS fighters, followers and civilians, who had retreated to Baghouz as the group was gradually driven out of those lands, have poured out of the tiny cluster of hamlets and farmlands in Deir al-Zor province over the last few weeks. Their evacuation held up the final assault until Friday evening when the SDF said it had advanced and would not stop until the jihadists were defeated. (Reuters)

### Chemical Weapons Watchdog Says Chlorine Was Used in Douma

THE HAGUE, Netherlands - The global chemical weapons watchdog said Friday it found "reasonable grounds" that chlorine was used as a weapon in a deadly attack on the Syrian town of Douma last year. The determination was contained in a detailed report by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' fact finding mission that investigated the April 7, 2018 attack. Medical workers said at the time that the attack killed

more than 40 people. The mission's mandate does not include laying blame. In a statement, the OPCW said the mission visited Douma, analyzed samples taken from the scene and from people affected, interviewed witnesses and studied toxicological and ballistics analyses. The investigators were delayed by several days from reaching the scene by security concerns, leading to fears that evidence could degrade or be cleaned up. (AP)

### Russian Nobel Winner Alferov Dies at 88

MOSCOW - Zhores Alferov, a Russian physicist and Nobel Prize laureate, has died. He was 88. His death was announced Saturday by the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, where Alferov had been a deputy since 1995. News reports said he died of cardiopulmonary failure. Alferov shared the Nobel Physics Prize in 2000 for developments in semiconductor research that have been used in satellite communications and cellular telephones. At the time of the prize he was director of the A.F. Ioffe Physico-Technical Institute in St. Petersburg. He later became chairman of the Russian Academy of Science's nanotechnology committee. In the Duma, he was a member of the Communist Party faction and served on the committee for Eurasian integration and Commonwealth of Independent States affairs. (AP)

### German Leader Clarifies Stance on Student Climate Protests

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel is making clear she supports students protesting around the world against global warming, following widespread criticism of comments seeming to suggest the demonstrations may have been fomented by Russian online agitation. Merkel last month was talking about Russian cyberwarfare at the Munich Security Conference when she brought up the student protests, saying "that suddenly after years all German children suddenly come up with the idea you have to protest, without any external influence, is hard to imagine." (AP)

### Washington Cranks Up Venezuela Sanctions as Guaido Tours South America

WASHINGTON/ASUNCION - The United States on Friday ramped up its attempt to dislodge Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro from power, imposing new sanctions and revoking visas, while opposition leader Juan Guaido said Maduro's support among the military was cracking. Venezuelan military officials last weekend blocked an opposition-backed effort to bring food into the country via its borders with Colombia and Brazil, leaving two aid trucks in flames and five people dead. Guaido, who is recognized by most Western



nations as Venezuela's rightful leader, visited Paraguay and Argentina on Friday to shore up Latin American support for a transition government for the crisis-stricken nation. But Maduro retains control of state institutions and the apparent loyalty of senior figures in the armed forces. (Reuters)

Following a meeting with Argentine President Mauricio Macri in Buenos Aires, Guaido said, without providing evidence, that 80 percent of Venezuela's military nonetheless supported a change in leadership and that he would continue to seek the support of officers. (Reuters)

### EU Ready to Give Britain More Guarantees 'Backstop' Is Temporary: Barnier

BERLIN - The European Union is ready to give Britain more guarantees that the Irish "backstop" is only intended to be temporary, the bloc's chief Brexit negotiator said on Friday. "We know that there are misgivings in Britain that the backstop could keep Britain forever connected to the EU," Michel Barnier said in an interview with Germany's Die Welt newspaper to be published on Saturday. "This is not the case. And we are ready to give further guarantees, assurances

and clarifications that the backstop should only be temporary." The backstop, an arrangement designed to prevent the return of "hard" border infrastructure between EU member Ireland and British-ruled Northern Ireland if there is no trade deal after Brexit that makes it unnecessary, has become the main point of contention in the proposed Brexit deal. "We will not reverse the backstop," Barnier added. "It's an insurance. We don't want to make use of it. (Reuters)

### French Yellow Vests Protest for 16th Straight Weekend

PARIS - French yellow vests were protesting for a 16th straight weekend in Paris and other cities to show they are still mobilized against the government's economic policies they see as favoring the rich.

In Paris, protesters gathered Saturday at the Arc de Triomphe monument as a march was planned through the well-off western neighborhoods of the capital.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday reiterated a call for calm, pointing at "unacceptable" outbreaks of violence since the movement began in November.

Organizers say they want to maintain pressure on the government as a two-month "grand debate" initiated by Macron to let ordinary French people express their views on the country's economic and democratic issues is ending this month.

Sophie Tissier, a coordinator of the Paris protest, told The Associated Press that "we keep protesting every Saturday because Macron doesn't respond at all to the yellow vests' demands. We want to rebuild our democracy and change today's political system."

"Macron is contemptuous and ... does not even try to understand that there are people that are living in great poverty and precariousness, and that there are so many inequalities," she added.

Other protests are taking place in France's major cities of Marseille, Lyon, Bordeaux, Lille and others. (AP)

## Neighbor News

### China's Top Political Advisory Body to Open Annual Session Sunday

BEIJING - The National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), China's top political advisory body, will open its annual session at 3 p.m. on Sunday in Beijing. Over 2,000 members of the CPPCC National Committee from across the country will discuss major political, economic and social issues concerning the country's development during this year's session scheduled to conclude on March 13. Political advisors will

hear and deliberate a report on the work of the Standing Committee of the 13th CPPCC National Committee, and a report on how the Standing Committee has handled proposals from CPPCC National Committee members since the previous session. Radio and TV stations affiliated to the China Media Group will live broadcast the delivering of the work report by Wang Yang, chairman of the CPPCC National Committee. (Xinhua)

### Iran Condemns Britain's Move to Ban Lebanon's Hezbollah

TEHRAN, Iran - Iran's foreign ministry has strongly condemned the British government's move to ban Lebanon's Hezbollah calling it "irresponsible." A Saturday report by the official IRNA news agency quoted Bahram Ghasemi, the ministry's spokesman, as saying the "wrong move" will not serve stability and security in Lebanon and ignores the will of a "large portion" of the Lebanese people. Ghasemi said the Lebanese people support

Hezbollah, which "defends the territorial integrity of Lebanon and fights terrorism." Iran is a key supporter of Hezbollah. Britain's move will make being a member of, or inviting support for, Hezbollah a criminal offense in the U.K., carrying a sentence of up to 10 years in prison. Until now, only the military wing of the Lebanon-based group has been outlawed in Britain, but not its political arm. The U.S. also accuses the group of destabilizing the region. (Fox News)

### US Company Loses Right to Operate Big Uzbek Pharmacy Network

TASHKENT - Uzbek State Committee for Competition terminated an agreement with the American United Investment Healthcare Group on the trust management of 71 percent of the state-owned shares in AK Dori-Darmon, a big pharmaceutical retailer in Uzbekistan, Trend reports citing the retailer's press service. However, no reasons for the agreement termination are reported. About a month after AK Dori-Darmon was transferred to trust management, the UIHG offered a new experienced team of managers along with the implementation of best practices to ensure transparency and accountability, said the United Investment

Healthcare Group, adding these initiatives have not been undertaken. In early December 2018, the Uzbek State Committee for Competition and the United Investment Healthcare Group signed an agreement on transferring the trust management of 71 percent of state-owned shares in AK Dori-Darmon. The contract was signed for five years with a possible extension for five more years. Currently, AK Dori-Darmon includes 8 joint stock companies and 6 limited liability companies. The company's chain has about 2,000 pharmacies and their branches, including 717 at rural medical stations and rural family clinics. (Trend)

### Pakistan Minister Suggests Imran Khan's Name for Nobel Peace Prize

ISLAMABAD - Chaudhry Fawad Hussain said his prime minister deserved the honour for his role in de-escalating hostilities between India and Pakistan. Pakistan's Minister for Information and Broadcasting Chaudhry Fawad Hussain on Saturday submitted a resolution in the country's National Assembly Secretariat, pitching Prime Minister Imran Khan's name for the Nobel Peace Prize, Radio Pakistan reported. Hussain said Khan deserves the honour because of his role in de-escalating hostilities between India and Pakistan.

The resolution said Khan played a "sagacious" role in thawing the tension caused by "the war mongering attitude" of the Indian leadership. It also accused India of bringing the two nuclear states to the brink of war, and praised Khan's "proactive and deft handling" of the situation. Relations between India and Pakistan have been tense since a terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir on February 14, and India has accused its neighbour of protecting terrorist groups. The attack was claimed by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad outfit. India and Pakistan on Wednesday claimed that they had shot down each others' fighter jets, a day after the Indian Air Force had struck a Jaish terror camp in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. India said Pakistan had attempted to target military installations in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday and confirmed a pilot of its Air Force was missing in action after the operation. The next day, Khan announced that Islamabad will release the pilot, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, as a peace gesture. (Agencies)