

NORTH AMERICA



Trump lashes out at Democrats

US President Donald Trump has squared off against House Democrats, packing his increasingly aggressive impeachment defence with name-calling. Quietly but just as resolutely, lawmakers expanded their inquiry, promising a broad new subpoena for documents and witnesses. Democratic leaders put the White House on notice that the wide-ranging subpoena would be coming for information about Trump's actions in the Ukraine controversy.

UK



PM presents Brexit plan

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has sought to build a coalition in the House of Commons to support his fresh Brexit approach – even as European leaders offered a guarded welcome to the measure. The prime minister argued that changes to proposed arrangements to regulate trade between Ireland and Northern Ireland after Brexit should address the concerns that prompted MPs to reject the agreement negotiated by his predecessor three times.

AUSTRALIA



Farmers seek cash injection

NSW farmers struggling with drought have lobbied senior cabinet ministers for a cash injection to survive the shocking dry spell. The barren landscape of Ben Swan's farm near Inverell in the state's north paints a confronting picture of the impact of the region's worst dry spell on record. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, Drought Minister David Littleproud and Nationals MP Barnaby Joyce listen to his story of failed crops and sold breeding stock.

NORTH AMERICA



WWII-era plane crash kills seven

A World War II-era plane with 13 people aboard has crashed and burned at the Hartford airport after encountering mechanical trouble on takeoff, killing seven of them. The four-engine, propeller-driven B-17 bomber struggled to get into the air and slammed into a maintenance building at Bradley International Airport as the pilots circled back for a landing, officials and witnesses said. It had 10 passengers and three crew members, authorities said.

UK



Voters will defect, Tories warned

Millions of Conservatives will vote for the Liberal Democrats because "they will not swallow the line that is peddled about Brexit", Lord Heseltine has warned. The former Tory deputy prime minister and vocal Remain supporter said it was this "audience" Boris Johnson's government should be concerned about. Instead, the Prime Minister was combining "an agenda of right-wing hardline politics with Brexit" in a bid to attract supporters of Nigel Farage at an election, he argued.

NEW ZEALAND



Father's kiss of near death

An Auckland father is facing a long, slow recovery after contracting measles and then encephalitis from a person he came into contact with for less than two minutes. Forty-five-year-old Nick Penny thought he was vaccinated against the highly contagious disease, but caught measles last month and quickly developed potentially fatal swelling of the brain. He's now recovering at home but his wife Nicci Gillies said his diagnosis should act as a warning for others.

NORTH AMERICA



US test-launches ballistic missile

The US Air Force has tested an unarmed Minuteman 3 intercontinental ballistic missile with a launch from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. The missile lifted off from the base, northwest of Los Angeles, and sent a test reentry vehicle on a 4,200-mile (6,760-kilometer) flight over the Pacific Ocean to the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

REST OF THE WORLD



Activity spotted around tanker

Satellite images show that a once-detained Iranian-flagged oil tanker sitting off the coast of Syria has been approached by a smaller Iranian tanker, an indication the ship could be preparing to transfer its cargo. Images released by Maxar Technologies show the Jasmine alongside the *Adrian Darya 1*, with mooring lines between them and a crane deployed on the larger vessel.

AUSTRALIA



Borrowers told to quit big banks

The big four banks have suffered falls on the share market as federal treasurer Josh Frydenberg told mortgage holders to quit major lenders because they didn't pass on an interest rate cut. Prime Minister Scott Morrison also accused the banks of profiteering after official interest rates dipped below one per cent for the first time, hitting a record low of 0.75 per cent in the third cut since June.

NORTH AMERICA



Pence caught up in controversy

President Donald Trump told Vice President Mike Pence to cancel his plans to attend the inauguration of Ukraine's new president earlier this year after initially pushing for him to go, confirming an assertion from the whistleblower now at the center of an impeachment investigation into Trump. Aides to Pence disputed that, blaming logistics – not Trump – for the decision.

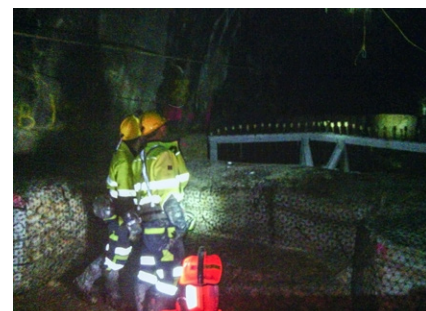
REST OF THE WORLD



Bridge's structure investigated

Investigators are examining possible structural problems surrounding a bridge that collapsed in northeastern Taiwan, killing six people. A 2016 report on bridges in Yilan county had found problems with the expansion joints on the Nanfang'ao bridge, which was completed in 1998 and collapsed earlier this week, the official Central News Agency reported. The joints are designed to absorb changes in temperature.

NEW ZEALAND



Families enter Pike River drift

Pike River families have laid flowers and taken small rocks as mementoes as they visited the seal to the mine for the first time. Twenty-nine men were killed at the mine in November 2010 and work has started to re-enter the 2.3km tunnel. About 30 family members went in small groups 170m into the drift – the start of the long tunnel that leads to the mine itself.



President Donald Trump. - AP

NORTH AMERICA

Trump lashes out at Dems, whistleblower

US President Donald Trump has squared off against House Democrats, packing his increasingly aggressive impeachment defence with name-calling.

Quietly but just as resolutely, lawmakers expanded their inquiry, promising a broad new subpoena for documents and witnesses.

Democratic leaders put the White House on notice that the wide-ranging subpoena would be coming for information about Trump's actions in the Ukraine controversy, the latest move in an impeachment probe that's testing the Constitution's system of checks and balances. They said they'd be going to court if necessary.

Amid the legal skirmishing, it was a day of verbal fireworks.

The president complained that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was handing out subpoenas "like cookies," railed against a government whistleblower as "vicious" and assailed the news media as corrupt and the "enemy." All that alongside a presidential tweetstorm punctuated with an accusation that congressional Democrats are wasting time and money.

Pelosi said Democrats had no choice but to take on the most "solemn" of constitutional responsibilities to put a check on executive power after the national security whistleblower's complaint that recently came to light.

The administration and Congress are on a collision course unseen in a generation after the whistleblower exposed a July phone call the president had with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in which Trump pressed for an investigation of Democratic political rival Joe Biden and his family.

"We take this to be a very sad time" for the American people and the country, Pelosi said. "Impeaching the president isn't anything to be joyful about."

Standing beside her, intelligence committee Chairman Adam Schiff accused Trump of "an incitement to violence" with his attacks on the unnamed whistleblower, who is provided anonymity and other protections under federal law. ■



Emergency crews respond to where a World War II-era bomber B-17 plane crashed at Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks, Connecticut. - AP

NORTH AMERICA

WWII-era bomber crashes, seven dead

A World War II-era plane with 13 people aboard has crashed and burned at the Hartford airport after encountering mechanical trouble on takeoff, killing seven of them.

The four-engine, propeller-driven B-17 bomber struggled to get into the air and slammed into a maintenance building at Bradley International Airport as the pilots circled back for a landing, officials and witnesses said.

It had 10 passengers and three crew members, authorities said.

Connecticut Public Safety Commissioner James Rovella said hours after the crash that some of those on board were burned, and "the victims are very difficult to identify".

Some of the survivors of the crash were critically injured, authorities said. One person on the ground was also hurt in the crash and a firefighter involved in the response suffered a minor injury. No children were on the plane.

The death toll of seven could rise, Rovella said. He said some lives were likely saved by the efforts of people including a person who raced to help the victims and people on the plane who helped others to escape the fire by opening a hatch, Rovella said.

"You're going to hear about some heroic efforts from some of the individuals that were in and around that plane," he said.

The retired, civilian-registered plane was associated with the Collings Foundation, an educational group that brought its Wings of Freedom vintage aircraft display to the airport this week, officials said.

The vintage bomber – also known as a Flying Fortress, one of the most celebrated Allied planes of World War II – was used to take history buffs and aircraft enthusiasts on short flights, during which they could get up and walk around the loud and windy interior.

The National Transportation Safety Board sent a team of 10 to investigate the cause of the crash. ■



Prime Minister Boris Johnson. - AP

UK

Johnson unveils Brexit plan to parliament

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has sought to build a coalition in the House of Commons to support his fresh Brexit approach – even as European leaders offered a guarded welcome to the measure.

Johnson pitched his message to MPs whose constituencies voted to leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum. The prime minister argued that changes to proposed arrangements to regulate trade between Ireland and Northern Ireland after Brexit should address the concerns that prompted MPs to reject the agreement negotiated by his predecessor, Theresa May, three times.

"We have made genuine effort to bridge the chasm, to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable," he said as he opened his remarks.

The new proposals focus on maintaining an open border between the UK's Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland – the key sticking point to a Brexit deal. The UK proposes to do that by keeping Northern Ireland closely aligned to EU rules for trade in goods, possibly for an extended period.

The plan has received a mixed response from European leaders and seems to fall far short of meeting their requirements for keeping an open border.

The European Parliament's chief Brexit official, Guy Verhofstadt, said the plan doesn't give Ireland sufficient guarantees.

"The first assessment of nearly every member in the Brexit Steering Group was not positive," he said, adding that the group would flesh out objections.

Johnson has presented the proposal as a compromise. It would create "an all-island regulatory zone on the island of Ireland, covering all goods including agrifood." That would keep Northern Ireland in a regulatory zone with the EU for food, agricultural and industrial products, removing the need for checks. ■



Lord Michael Heseltine. - AP

UK

Voters will defect, Tory Party warned

Millions of Conservatives will vote for the Liberal Democrats because "they will not swallow the line that is peddled about Brexit", Lord Heseltine has warned.

The former Tory deputy prime minister and vocal Remain supporter said it was this "audience" Boris Johnson's government should be concerned about.

Instead, the Prime Minister was combining "an agenda of right-wing hardline politics with Brexit" in a bid to attract supporters of Nigel Farage at an election, he argued.

Speaking at Westminster, Lord Heseltine said it was "unbelievable" a Conservative Government was risking the future of the UK "on a dogma which was driven by extreme populism". He also said the idea that US President Donald Trump would offer Britain a generous trade deal just as he was seeking re-election was "a delusion of the most naive sort".

Lord Heseltine made his withering criticism during a debate in the House of Lords on withdrawal from the EU, as Johnson unveiled a blueprint aimed at breaking the Brexit deadlock.

Referring to the Tory leader's speech earlier to the Conservative Party conference in Manchester, the non-affiliated peer said Johnson was "without any shadow of doubt the best music hall turn in politics".

He added: "But also it revealed very clearly what the strategy is and what it has been since day one of his premiership.

"It is to combine an agenda of right-wing hardline politics with Brexit to try and get it through a general election campaign by attracting back Nigel Farage's supporters.

"It is as blindingly as obvious as that."

Lord Heseltine said the main problem for the Conservatives was not Jeremy Corbyn, but the Tories themselves given the internal party divisions.

He added: "There are millions of Conservatives who are now voting for the Liberal Democrats because they will not swallow the line that is peddled about Brexit." ■



Cattle are seen on drought stricken farm in northern NSW. - AAP

AUSTRALIA

Drought-hit farmers seek cash injection

NSW farmers struggling with drought have lobbied senior cabinet ministers for a cash injection to survive the shocking dry spell.

The barren landscape of Ben Swan's farm near Inverell in the state's north paints a confronting picture of the impact of the region's worst dry spell on record.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, Drought Minister David Littleproud and Nationals MP Barnaby Joyce listen to his story of failed crops and sold breeding stock.

There's a few factors he's punting on to resurrect his efficient operation including the obvious – rain.

Then there's market improvements and the government looking after the supply chain when things get tough.

"There's no silver bullet," Swan tells the politicians.

"It's a crisis for us. It's gone from being the worst drought in history to the worst drought in history to a factor of whatever."

He urged the man who controls the nation's purse strings to consider further cash injections on top of already-announced drought support to help farmers survive.

His wife Sandy describes the drought as "our GFC".

Colin Dight is the Swans' neighbour.

His family has been on the land for 180 years but now his mixed dry land and irrigated cropping operation is under severe pressure.

"It's an extraordinary time," Dight says.

"It's definitely going to break. It will happen. We've got to get there without the whole district and the whole social infrastructure collapsing."

Dight says every farmer would use a cash injection differently, but all would welcome one.

But even when it rains, it'll be two or three years before this region can get back to normal. ■



- RNZ / Rob Dixon

NEW ZEALAND

Kiss leaves father fighting for his life

An Auckland father is facing a long, slow recovery after contracting measles and then encephalitis from a person he came into contact with for less than two minutes.

Forty-five-year-old Nick Penny thought he was vaccinated against the highly contagious disease, but caught measles last month and quickly developed potentially fatal swelling of the brain.

He's now recovering at home but his wife Nicci Gillies said his diagnosis should act as a warning for others to check their immunity.

She said her husband was currently in a subdued state and that any interaction was physically draining and left him disturbed.

Her husband had been exposed to an individual for less than a few minutes, with that person next morning showing signs of measles before being officially diagnosed.

Nine days after that, her husband developed symptoms.

"He kissed the person on the cheek and he left very quickly. That was the level of his exposure," she said.

The onset of illness had been quick in her husband's case, Gillies said.

"We had friends over for lunch ... and at the end of the lunch, he just said 'I need to go to bed, I'm not well'.

Even so, she said he had managed to work three days from home on restricted hours, before finally being taken to a hospital ward.

"He signed off from his work computer on the Wednesday and that was the last his work had heard from him. And then I was messaging his work to let them know he was at Auckland Hospital," Gillies said.

Gillies said his breathing had laboured and his temperature had hovered around 41C, so she rang for medical advice.

"He was quite disassociated from what was happening. I rang Healthline and they talked me through what was potentially happened and at that point we activated an ambulance to take him to the hospital." ■



An unarmed Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile test launch at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California. – AP

NORTH AMERICA

US test-launches ballistic missile

The US Air Force has tested an unarmed Minuteman 3 intercontinental ballistic missile with a launch from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California.

The missile lifted off from the base, northwest of Los Angeles, and sent a test reentry vehicle on a 4200-mile (6760-kilometer) flight over the Pacific Ocean to the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

An Air Force Global Strike Command statement says such tests demonstrate the capability of the intercontinental ballistic missile system and are not a response to world events or regional tensions.

The launch was conducted by a team of airmen from the 341st Missile Wing at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana. ■



Vice President Mike Pence and President Donald Trump. – AP

NORTH AMERICA

Loyal Pence caught up in controversy

President Donald Trump told Vice President Mike Pence to cancel his plans to attend the inauguration of Ukraine's new president earlier this year after initially pushing for him to go, confirming an assertion from the whistleblower now at the center of an impeachment investigation into Trump.

Aides to Pence disputed that, blaming logistics – not Trump – for the decision.

The aides who rushed to defend Pence added that the vice president never mentioned Trump's potential Democratic rival Joe Biden in repeated conversations he has had with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, including some that were part of a campaign to pressure the new government on corruption.

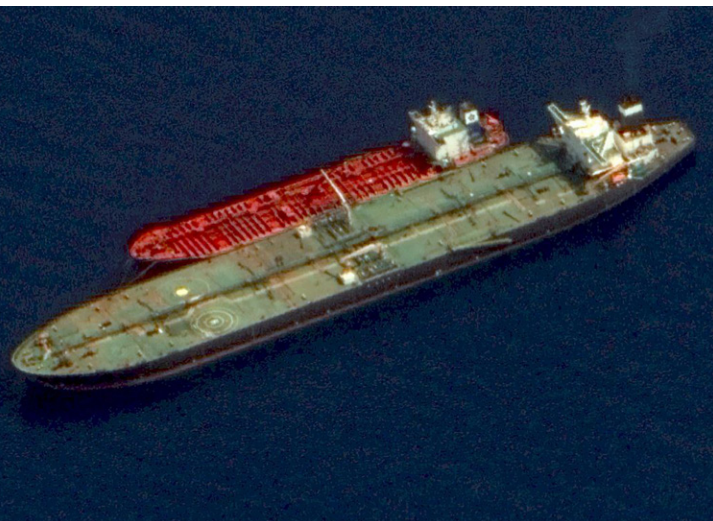
Trump has said he raised Biden as an example of issues in Ukraine in a summertime phone call with Zelenskiy that is now at the center of the impeachment probe. There is no evidence that Biden was involved in deals in the eastern European nation.

Throughout Trump's presidency, Pence has been a loyal lieutenant, praising him effusively and defending him aggressively. But the vice president has rarely been drawn into any direct controversy involving the president until now.

The controversy focuses on a July 25 phone call in which Trump, according to a rough transcript released by the White House, repeatedly pressed Zelenskiy to investigate Biden and his family. The intelligence community whistleblower said it was part of a broader effort by the president and his lawyers to solicit a foreign country to dig up dirt on a political rival for president in 2020.

Pence, according to aides, did not listen in on that call.

Pence has served as a key intermediary between the United States and Ukraine. In the complaint, the whistleblower says they had learned from US officials that "on or around 14 May, the President instructed Vice President Pence to cancel his planned travel to Ukraine to attend President Zelenskiy's inauguration on 20 May". ■



A satellite image shows the two Iranian-flagged tankers, the *Adrian Darya 1* and the *Jasmine*, off the coast of Syria. - AP

REST OF THE WORLD

Activity spotted around formerly detained tanker

Satellite images show that a once-detained Iranian-flagged oil tanker sitting off the coast of Syria has been approached by a smaller Iranian tanker, an indication the ship could be preparing to transfer its cargo.

Images released by Maxar Technologies show the *Jasmine* alongside the *Adrian Darya 1*, with mooring lines between them and a crane deployed on the larger vessel.

The *Adrian Darya 1*, formerly named the *Grace 1*, was detained off the British overseas territory of Gibraltar in July while carrying \$US130 million in crude oil, on suspicion of breaking European Union sanctions by taking the oil to Syria. Gibraltar later released the tanker, after it said Iran promised the ship wouldn't go to Syria.

The ship later sailed toward the Syrian coast, angering Britain.

The oil shipment website TankerTrackers.com said the *Adrian Darya 1* was "postured in an STS (Ship-to-Ship) formation with a smaller Iranian-flagged Handymax (350K barrel capacity) tanker," the *Jasmine*. It noted this was "not a confirmation of any oil transfer just yet. We'll compare imagery later." The image it posted showed the two vessels off the coast of Syria.

However, the later website said it was ending its public coverage of the Iranian tanker's movements due to a tweet by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who used the image of the two tankers in a tweet of his own.

Pompeo tweeted that despite Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's promise to the UK that the *Adrian Darya 1* would not deliver oil to Syria, it is now transferring oil off the Syrian coast. Will the world hold Iran accountable if this oil is delivered to Syria?"

There was no official reaction from Iranian authorities.

Tension has been high between Tehran and Washington following President Donald Trump's decision over a year ago to unilaterally pull out of a nuclear deal between Iran and world powers. The US has imposed sanctions that have kept Iran from selling its oil abroad and have crippled its economy. ■



The collapsed Nanfang'ao Bridge in Nanfang'ao, eastern Taiwan. - AP

REST OF THE WORLD

Collapsed bridge probed for structural issues

Investigators are examining possible structural problems surrounding a bridge that collapsed in northeastern Taiwan, killing six people.

A 2016 report on bridges in Yilan county had found problems with the expansion joints on the Nanfang'ao bridge, which was completed in 1998 and collapsed earlier this week, the official Central News Agency reported. The joints are designed to absorb changes in temperature.

CNA cited the report as saying that motorists could sense a difference of levels on either side of the joints, possibly as a result of warping or other problems.

The company responsible for managing the bridge, Taiwan International Ports Corporation, Ltd., earlier said it cleaned the joints and fixed other problems such as rusted steel reinforcements and guardrails in 2017 and 2018.

Experts are also looking into the condition of the bridge's steel cables, including the possibility of dangerous levels of corrosion.

The 140-metre (460-foot)-long, 18-metre (nearly 60 feet)-high bridge, collapsed into a bay on Taiwan's lightly-populated east coast, about 60km (40 miles) southeast of Taipei. A typhoon swept by the island earlier, but the weather was sunny when the bridge collapsed, and it wasn't clear if the storm was a factor.

Divers were continuing the search for the sixth victim killed when the bridge collapsed onto fishing boats below. Another 10 people were injured, including the driver of an oil tanker truck that was crossing the bridge at the time of its collapse.

Taiwan's military deployed a floating platform to help workers remove debris and extract crushed boats.

TIPC said it would provide 5 million Taiwan dollars (\$US160,857) in compensation to the families of those killed. They were identified as Wartono, 29, Ersone, 32, and Mohamad Domiri, 28, all from Indonesia, along with Philippine citizens Andree Serencio, 44, George Impang 46, and Romulo Escalicas, 29, who remains missing. ■



- AAP

AUSTRALIA

Borrowers urged to quit big banks for better rates

The big four banks have suffered falls on the share market as federal treasurer Josh Frydenberg told mortgage holders to quit major lenders because they didn't pass on an interest rate cut.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison also accused the banks of profiteering after official interest rates dipped below one per cent for the first time, hitting a record low of 0.75 per cent in the third cut since June.

Westpac and ANZ joined the Commonwealth Bank and NAB to reveal their standard variable rates would drop between 13 and 15 basis points instead of the full 25 basis points.

ANZ did pass on the full rate cut for people paying interest-only home loans.

All four banks opened share trading lower, following a second day of significant falls on Wall Street.

"People need to shop around – the only way the banks will get the message is through the voices of their customers and through their customers voting with their feet," Frydenberg said.

"Some of the smaller lenders have actually reduced their rates by that full 25 basis points and are offering rates below three per cent."

Morrison said the banks "never learn".

"Mortgage holders have a reason to be disappointed in the banks, basically, profiteering," he said.

The banks argued they needed to keep some margins in a low interest rate environment, and protect customers who save deposits.

"They'll put their explanations out there and the public will judge them based on what they say, but I'm not buying it," Morrison said.

Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese said the government was complacent about the banks and the economy.

"The government needs to pressure the banks into passing on the full amount," he said. ■



Pike River Recovery Agency workers after reentering the Pike River Mine in New Zealand.

- AAP

NEW ZEALAND

Pike River families revisit mine site

Pike River families have laid flowers and taken small rocks as mementoes as they visited the seal to the mine for the first time.

Twenty-nine men were killed at the mine in November 2010 and work has started to re-enter the 2.3km tunnel.

About 30 family members went in small groups 170m into the drift – the start of the long tunnel that leads to the mine itself.

Anna Osborne and Sonya Rockhouse – who have fought for years for the mine re-entry – were in the first group to go in.

Survivor Daniel Rockhouse was with them – the first time he has been that deep into the tunnel since the day he left it, lucky to be alive.

The women said it was an emotional moment for them and they thought about Ms Rockhouse's son Ben and Osborne's husband Milton on the other side.

"We were able to put our hands on the seal and I was able to talk to Milton and I almost felt him there," Osborne said.

"I just said to him that we hadn't forgotten him, we are coming to you, we're getting closer, and I hope he's proud of us because we won't give up."

Ms Rockhouse said there were "lots of tears" at the seal.

She was thinking both of her son Ben, who died, and her sons Daniel and Matthew, who also went into the tunnel.

"For Daniel, it was a huge thing for him to go up there today," she said.

"He's a huge part of this as well ... it's very difficult for him, he has survivor's guilt and probably always will."

The fate of the next step is for WorkSafe, which has to approve the plan to go beyond the seal. ■