

Politics



John Bolton said he favoured keeping up the pressure on North Korea in the run-up to proposed talks on its nuclear programme. Mr Bolton was speaking three days after President Donald Trump appointed him as his national security adviser, replacing H.R. McMaster. Mr Bolton has in the past advocated pre-emptive military strikes to prevent the rogue regime in Pyongyang from acquiring the ability to hit America with nuclear missiles. He has also suggested bombing Iran's nuclear reactors.

Mr Trump signed a \$1.3trn **spending bill** passed by Congress that avoids a government shutdown and funds public services until October. The president had threatened to veto the bill because, among other things, it did not resolve the legal status of the Dreamers (immigrants brought to America illegally as children), or provide the full \$25bn to build his border wall.

Tens of thousands of people, many of them high-school students, rallied in Washington, DC, in favour of gun control. The **March for our Lives** was led by survivors of the mass shooting in February at a school in Parkland, Florida. The measures that the demonstrators called for, such as banning semi-automatic weapons, are unlikely to be passed by Congress.

We all stand together

America decided to expel 60 **Russian** diplomats in protest at the attempted murder on British soil of a former spy, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter. They were attacked with a

nerve agent. More than 25 other countries and NATO have supported the move against Russia by announcing their own expulsions.

A fire in a shopping complex in the **Siberian** city of Kemerovo killed at least 64 people, more than 40 of them children. The government's slow response triggered huge demonstrations; some called for President Vladimir Putin to resign.

Italy's parliamentarians elected new speakers for the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. Some saw the choices as a sign that a coalition government involving the two big populist parties, the Northern League and the Five Star Movement, is in the offing.



Violent protests erupted in Catalonia following the arrest of the **Spanish** region's leader in Germany. Carles Puigdemont is wanted in Spain on charges of sedition for declaring Catalan independence after an illegal referendum. German police took him into custody as he tried to return to Belgium, where he has been living in exile since October.

A new broom

Martín Vizcarra was sworn in as **Peru's** president, following the resignation of Pedro Pablo Kuczynski. Mr Kuczynski was facing impeachment, after evidence emerged linking him to Odebrecht, a Brazilian construction company involved in corruption across Latin America. "We've had enough," said Mr Vizcarra in his inaugural speech.

Court documents emerged showing that Nicolás Maduro, **Venezuela's** socialist president, gave Odebrecht priority

in \$4bn-worth of public-works contracts, which also involved the Brazilian Development Bank. In return, Odebrecht pledged \$35m in donations to Mr Maduro's presidential campaign. Most of the projects, including a metro line, were never finished.

Brazil's president, Michel Temer said that he plans to run for re-election in October, despite popularity ratings in the single digits. He later announced that Henrique Meirelles, the finance secretary, will resign in order to launch a campaign of his own.

The proxy war

The Houthi rebel group in **Yemen** fired a barrage of missiles at **Saudi Arabia**, which is bombing the Iranian-backed fighters in a bloody campaign. The Saudis claim to have shot down several missiles, but debris fell on a home in Riyadh, killing one person.

In a deal arranged by Russia, some 7,000 people were allowed to leave Eastern Ghouta, as **Syrian** rebels surrendered one of their last strongholds to the government after a bombardment lasting months.

Jacob Zuma, the scandal-plagued former president of **South Africa**, was summoned to appear in court on April 6th to face corruption charges related to an old arms deal.

The ruling coalition in **Ethiopia** named Abiy Ahmed as its new chairman, signalling that he will replace Hailemariam Desalegn as prime minister. Abiy is the chairman of the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation, which is part of the ruling coalition but has been sympathetic to protests against the government.

José Filomeno dos Santos, the son of **Angola's** former president, was accused of fraud and embezzlement. Mr dos Santos had been chairman of Angola's sovereign-wealth fund until João Lourenço, the current president, removed him in January.



Egyptians voted in a presidential election, which Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, the incumbent, is sure to win. The authorities prevented any serious challengers from running.

Kim-Xi talks on nuclear pickle

Kim Jong Un, **North Korea's** dictator, visited China in what was his first trip abroad since taking power in 2011. He reiterated to Xi Jinping, China's president, his offer to give up nuclear weapons in exchange for security guarantees. He is supposed to meet South Korea's president in April and Donald Trump in May.

Lee Myung-bak, a former **South Korean** president, was charged with corruption in relation to bribes he allegedly took from companies, which he denies. Mr Lee's successor, Park Geun-hye, is in jail awaiting the verdict in her trial on charges of bribery.

Malaysia's government introduced a bill in parliament to outlaw **fake news**, with offenders facing possible prison sentences of up to ten years. A deputy minister said that any news not verified by the government about a huge corruption scandal involving the government would be deemed "fake". The opposition said this was a blatant attempt to silence criticism ahead of an election this year.

A prominent politician was sentenced to 14 years in prison in **India** for running a "fodder scam". Lalu Prasad Yadav, a former chief minister of the impoverished state of Bihar, was convicted of inventing imaginary herds of cows and goats in order to obtain public money for food and medicines for them.

Business

America and China made efforts to step back from a damaging **trade war**. Officials from both countries held talks after President Donald Trump announced plans to impose levies on \$60bn-worth of Chinese imports for alleged unfair trade practices. China is said to have offered to buy more American semiconductors to help reduce its trade surplus with the United States; it may also hasten a measure to allow foreign companies to take majority stakes in Chinese securities firms. But China announced proposed tariffs on 128 American products, including fruit, pork and wine, in response to earlier levies on steel and aluminium.

The EU, Argentina, Australia, Brazil and South Korea joined Canada and Mexico in gaining exemptions from America's punitive tariffs on **steel and aluminium** imports. **South Korea** won a permanent exemption by agreeing to revise its free-trade pact with America. The new deal imposes quotas on South Korea's steel exports and extends tariffs for its truckmakers.

A trade off

Markets see-sawed. **Stock-markets** plunged when America proposed tariffs on China, causing one measure of market volatility, the **VIX**, to soar by 30%. They bounced back on hopes of a negotiated outcome. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 669 points in a day, the third-largest increase to date by that measure.

Facebook's share price took another hammering, after America's Federal Trade Commission opened an investigation into its privacy practices following the scandal in which data on 50m users were obtained by a political-analytics firm. Mark Zuckerberg has been asked to attend hearings in Congress, where he has few friends. Fears of regulation caused an index of ten American tech firms, the **FANG+**, to suffer its biggest one-day loss.

Tesla Motors's share price tanked by 8%. Moody's downgraded the company's credit rating because of the "significant shortfall" in production of its new Model 3 electric car. One of its Model X cars also crashed, killing the driver and raising fresh concerns about self-driving technologies following the first fatal accident involving a pedestrian and an Uber car.

Uber sold its business in South-East Asia to **Grab**, a rival based in Singapore with operations in almost 200 cities throughout the region. It is the latest instance of Uber exiting a market in which it is not the biggest ride-hailing firm, having reached similar agreements in China and Russia.

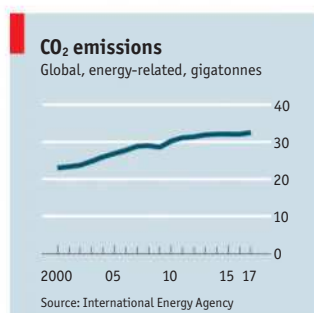
A federal appeals court found that **Google's** use of **Oracle's** Java technology in its Android operating system did not constitute "fair use" under copyright law, overturning a jury's decision that had favoured Google. The court ordered that the case be reheard to settle damages.

The board of **Deutsche Bank** was reported to be seeking a replacement for John Cryan as chief executive, two years before his contract ends. The

German bank's investors are unhappy about its run of annual losses and anaemic share price.

Get your coat

Under pressure from investors to increase shareholder value after a bruising battle last year to fend off a takeover bid, **AkzoNobel** struck a deal to sell its specialty-chemicals division to a consortium led by Carlyle, a private-equity firm. The Dutch paint-and-coatings group valued the acquisition at €10.1bn (\$12.6bn).



Global energy-related **carbon-dioxide** emissions grew by 1.4% last year, according to the International Energy Agency, to a record 32.5 gigatonnes. Some big economies, such as America and Japan, saw their emissions decrease; Britain's fell by 3.8%. Asian countries accounted for two-thirds of the global increase. Despite the

growth in renewables, the share of fossil fuels in the world's energy mix remains at 81%, the same level it has been for three decades.

SoftBank's technology fund signed a memorandum of understanding with **Saudi Arabia** to expand solar power in the kingdom. If completed, the \$200bn project would add 200 gigawatts of solar capacity; the world currently has around 400GW of capacity.

Remington filed for bankruptcy protection. The gunmaker, founded in 1816, piled on debt when investors pulled out following the Sandy Hook school massacre in 2012, in which the gunman used a Bushmaster rifle, a brand owned by Remington.

It's a small(er) world

Qantas began operating the first direct flights from **Australia to Britain**. The Australian airline now flies passengers 14,498km non-stop from Perth to London in Boeing Dreamliner planes. The 28,996km round trip can be completed in just over 40 hours, including a generous few hours in between for sightseeing.

For other economic data and news see **Indicators** section

