

# Paid tech firm to favour Trump

Says his ex-lawyer Cohen about rigging online opinion polls

AGENCIES

President Donald Trump's former lawyer Michael Cohen admitted Thursday that he paid a man in 2015 to rig online opinion polls to favour Trump as he began running for the presidency.

Cohen confirmed a Wall Street Journal report that in early 2015 he paid the head of a small technology firm, John Gauger, to write computer script that would place multiple votes for Trump in an online poll of news broadcaster CNBC.

They repeated the effort in an online poll of website Drudge Report, which is popular with conservatives.

Cohen, who also paid Gauger to create a social media account to promote himself, confirmed the main elements of the Journal story.

"What I did was at the direction of and for the sole benefit of @realDonaldTrump @POTUS. I truly regret my blind loyalty to a man who doesn't deserve it," he wrote on Twitter.

Cohen, who was the real estate billionaire's right-hand man and fixer at the Trump Organization in New York at the time, pleaded guilty last year to charges that he violated campaign finance laws by arranging hush payments ahead of the 2016 election to women who claimed credibly to have had extramarital affairs with Trump.



Cohen implicated Trump in that crime, saying he directed the payments. The New York lawyer, 52, was sentenced to three years in jail for the campaign finance violation and other charges, reported Reuters.

But his incarceration has been delayed while he provides support to ongoing investigations into possible Trump campaign collusion with Russia and Trump's finances.

He is scheduled to testify to the newly Democratic-controlled House Oversight Committee on February 7 on his work for Trump.

Meanwhile, a top Democrat in the US Congress has vowed to look into a report that Trump ordered Cohen to lie to Congress to hide dealings with Russia.

Adam Schiff, who heads the Intelligence Committee in the House of Representatives, was reacting to a report late Thursday by the online site BuzzFeed that Trump ordered lawyer Michael Cohen to lie to Congress in 2017 about talks to build a Trump Tower in Moscow during the 2016 presidential campaign, reported AFP.

"The allegation that the President of the United States may have suborned perjury before our committee in an effort to curtail the investigation and cover up his business dealings with Russia is among the most serious to date," Schiff tweeted.

**Democrat vows to probe Cohen's alleged lies about Trump's project in Moscow**



Palestinian women from the village of Kfar Qaddum, near Nablus in the occupied West Bank, scuffle with Israeli soldiers as they try to release a youth from their custody, during clashes following a weekly demonstration there against the expropriation of Palestinian lands by Israel yesterday. Inset, a Palestinian protester uses a slingshot to throw tear gas towards Israeli forces during the demonstration.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'We will miss you' Germany pleads with the British to stay in EU

REUTERS, London

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's protégé yesterday appealed to the British to stay in the European Union, saying her compatriots had not forgotten how Britain welcomed Germany back as a sovereign nation after World War Two.

Conservative leader Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who succeeded Merkel as leader of the Christian Democrats, joined German politicians, industrialists and artists in a last-minute plea to Britons as the clock ticks down to Brexit in 70 days.

"Without your great nation, this continent would not be what it is today," they said in the letter, which was published in The Times newspaper.

"After the horrors of the Second World War, Britain did not give up on us. It has welcomed Germany back as a sovereign nation and a European power."

Besides war and peace, they outlined some of the more quirky qualities which they said they would miss if Britain left the club it joined in 1973.

"We would miss the legendary British black humour and going to the pub after work hours to drink an ale. We would miss

tea with milk and driving on the left-hand side of the road. And we would miss seeing the panto at Christmas."

"But more than anything else, we would miss the British people — our friends across the Channel," they said.

Meanwhile, EU officials said yesterday Prime Minister Theresa May will talk by telephone to EU president Jean-Claude Juncker at the British leader's request.

May and Juncker have only been in touch by text message since Tuesday, when the British parliament rejected their Brexit divorce deal.

"President Juncker will talk to Prime Minister May today early afternoon at her request," European Commission spokesman Margaritis Schinas said.

"I don't know how decisive or not this will be."

British politicians are now wrangling over how to get out of the impasse, which could see Britain crash out of the union without a deal on March 29.

EU leaders have so far ruled out renegotiating the agreement, but have signalled they could postpone the withdrawal if May comes up with a plan.

### BREXIT IMPASSE

### NUCLEAR STANDOFF

## US, N Korean envoys meet in Stockholm

AGENCIES

High-ranking diplomats from the United States and North Korea are currently holding talks in Sweden aiming to end the stand-off between the two countries, a diplomatic source told Reuters yesterday.

"After the meeting in Singapore things have ground to a halt. The purpose of this meeting is to inject some energy and to take steps forward in the relations between US and North Korea," the source said.

The source said the delegations included North Korea's vice foreign minister, Choe Son Hui and Stephen Biegun, the US special representative for North Korea.

The meeting, which started on Thursday and will continue over the weekend, has been planned in secret for months.

Sweden's Foreign Minister Margot Wallström, Cabinet Secretary Annika Söder and Sweden's envoy to Korea, Kent Harstedt, are also sitting in on the talks, the source said.

Trump and Kim met in Singapore in June last year for talks aimed at finding a way to end a nuclear standoff on the Korean peninsula.

Vietnam's premier has said his country is willing to host a much-anticipated second summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Vietnam has cropped up in the swirl of rumours and conjecture over a possible site for the meeting, with the capital Hanoi or the coastal city of Danang seemingly the most likely bases for the summit.

## NEWSIN brief

### US 'jihadist' sought to attack White House

AFP, Washington

Authorities in the US state of Georgia have arrested a 21-year-old man who sought to buy explosives and an anti-tank rocket for a "jihad" suicide attack on the White House planned for Thursday. Byung Pak, the US attorney for the Northern District of Georgia, announced the arrest of Hasher Taheb of Cumming, Georgia late Wednesday.

### Swine flu kills 40 in western India

AFP, Jaipur

At least 40 people have died and more than 1,000 have tested positive for swine flu since the beginning of this year in a western Indian state popular with foreigners, authorities said yesterday. Last year around 1,100 people died by the A H1N1 virus.

### Lanka seize explosives from Islamist radicals

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's police seized a haul of high explosives stashed near a wildlife sanctuary following the arrest of four men from a newly formed radical Muslim group, officials said yesterday. Commandos recovered the explosives from a makeshift warehouse near Wilpattu national park.

### BITS OF HISTORY (JANUARY 18)

**1919:** The Versailles Peace Conference ending World War One opened.

**2007:** Atomic scientists adjust Doomsday clock, placing hands at five minutes to midnight in light of global nuclear threat.

**2014:** Syrian opposition agrees to attend international peace talks.



People take part in a candlelight vigil to honour victims, close to the scene of a car bomb attack on a police cadet training school in Bogota that left 21 people dead and 68 injured on Thursday. Story on page 16.

## 'Example to the world'

Lankan president praises Duterte's drugs war; rights groups express alarm

REUTERS, Manila

Human rights groups yesterday expressed alarm at Sri Lanka's leader for praising Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and his bloody war on drugs as an "example to the whole world".

Despite international condemnation of a crackdown that has killed thousands of Filipinos, visiting Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena told Duterte during a banquet this week that he wanted to "follow your footsteps to control this hazard".

Carlos Conde, Philippines researcher for the New York-based Human Rights Watch, said Duterte's campaign was "a human rights calamity that no country in the world should even try to emulate".

"No 'drug war' that treated the drug problem purely from a crime perspective has ever succeeded," he said. "What they

have wrought are untold suffering and the further destruction of the rule of law and the diminution of human rights".

The Philippine government has consistently refuted that and said the crackdown, which started in July 2016, was being administered lawfully.

Yesterday, presidential spokesman, Salvador Panelo, said any allegations of state-sponsored killings were "pure hog wash".

Police say they have since killed at least 5,000 suspected drug dealers, although activists say the number could be far higher and they dispute official accounts that the killings were all in self-defence.

More than 200 people in Bangladesh have been killed by police in a similar campaign.

International drug smugglers have increasingly turned to Sri Lanka as a transit hub in Asia, authorities there have said.



## Pakistan's 'poetic justice' takes oath

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's new chief justice was sworn yesterday, pledging reform of a Supreme Court whose controversial decisions include ousting a prime minister and freeing a Christian accused of blasphemy.

Asif Saeed Khan Khosa, 64, became the 26th Chief Justice of Pakistan after a televised ceremony at President's House in Islamabad saw the judge take the oath in front a crowd of dignitaries.

"I will do right to all manner of people, according to law, without fear or favour," said Khosa.

Known as the "poetic justice" for his habit of citing works of literature in his judgements, he is regarded as Pakistan's top expert in criminal law.

Khosa was a member of the Supreme Court panel that last year overturned the death penalty then freed a Christian woman jailed for blasphemy, sparking days of violent protests by Muslim hardliners.

He was also among the judges who disqualified from politics for life former prime minister Nawaz Sharif after corruption allegations in 2017.

In his judgement, he cited the Balzac epigraph from Mario Puzo's 1969 novel "The Godfather", which reads: "Behind every great fortune there is a crime."

## Social Democrat Lofven wins Swedish PM race

Populists left in cold after deadlock ends

REUTERS, Stockholm

Sweden's parliament handed Social Democrat leader Stefan Lofven a second term in office yesterday, ending more than four months of deadlock after an inconclusive election that had allowed a populist party to threaten the traditional balance of power.

Sweden had looked set for a snap election until last week when Lofven agreed an historic deal with the Centre, Liberal and Green parties, bringing together parties from the centre-right and centre-left to prevent the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats from having a voice in policy.

"Ever more governments are becoming reliant on parties with an anti-democratic agenda," Lofven said after winning the vote in parliament. "But in Sweden we stand up for democracy, for equality. Sweden has

chosen a different path."

The Sweden Democrats polled 17.5 percent in September's election, their support bolstered by voters' growing concerns about immigration amid a surge in shootings and gang violence in major cities.

While Sweden will now have a workable government that will keep the nationalist Sweden Democrats from any influence over policy, Lofven faces major challenges.

The deal with the Centre and Liberal parties requires Lofven, a former welder and union leader, to cut taxes and deregulate the labour and property rental market, a sharp shift to the right that is likely to alienate many of his party's traditional supporters.

It also brings together parties that are ideologically poles apart, raising the risk that the government will be short-lived.



### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

## Congo slaps down AU call to delay result

REUTERS, Kinshasa

Democratic Republic of Congo yesterday rejected an African Union demand to delay announcing final results from its presidential election, compounding the turmoil surrounding a chaotic vote that many fear could fan widespread unrest.

In a surprise announcement on Thursday, the AU called for the results to be postponed because of "serious doubts" over the conduct of the election, which was supposed to mark Congo's first democratic handover of power in 59 years of independence but which the runner-up candidate says was rigged.

The final tally will be released once the Constitutional Court has ruled on challenges to the provisional results. It was expected to decide on appeals, including that of opposition leader and second-placed Martin Fayulu, yesterday or today.

"I do not think anyone has the right to tell the court what to do. I am not under the impression (the AU) fully understands Congo's judicial process," government spokesman Lambert Mende said. "No country in the world can accept that its judicial process be controlled by an (outside) organisation."

The AU's statement said it would send a delegation to Congo to seek "a way out of the post-electoral crisis". The mission will include Rwandan President and AU chair Paul Kagame, Moussa Faki, chairman of the AU Commission, and other heads of state.