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What's News

Business & Finance

- ◆ **The world's biggest** technology companies are looking to sidestep Trump's \$100,000 H-1B visa fee, potentially leaving the brunt of the new policy to hit smaller startups. **A1**
- ◆ **Paramount enhanced** its hostile offer to acquire Warner Bros. Discovery, raising the stakes in the suitor's quest to prevail over Netflix's deal. **B1, B4**
- ◆ **Major U.S. stock indexes** ended mixed, with the S&P 500 and Nasdaq falling 0.3% and 0.6%, respectively, and the Dow rising 0.1%. **B11**
- ◆ **U.S. retail sales** were flat in December, surprising economists who had expected growth despite concerns about a fragile consumer economy. **A2**
- ◆ **Ford reported** its biggest-ever quarterly loss, at \$11.1 billion, and revealed a \$900 million hit from a truncated tariff-relief program. **B1**
- ◆ **Tesla veteran** Raj Jegannathan left the company a few months after he was promoted to oversee sales and service at the vehicle maker. **B1**
- ◆ **OpenAI cut ties** with one of its top safety executives on the grounds of sexual discrimination after she voiced opposition to the controversial rollout of AI erotica in ChatGPT. **B4**
- ◆ **Coca-Cola said it would** maintain its pricing strategy while tinkering with product sizes and prices to relieve financially stretched consumers. **B2**
- ◆ **Target will lay off** about 500 employees as its new chief executive oversees a restructuring of the retailer. **B3**
- ◆ **BP suspended its share-buyback** program and said it would reduce spending this year to shore up its finances. **B3**

Worldwide

- ◆ **Daily life in Cuba** is grinding to a halt under a U.S. campaign to block its oil imports, drawing international criticism that the island is being pushed toward a humanitarian crisis with no endgame. **A1**
- ◆ **The House voted** down an attempt by Johnson to block votes on resolutions disproving of Trump tariffs, setting up a potential rebuke of the president's policy. **A2**
- ◆ **A grand jury refused** to indict several Democratic lawmakers whom the administration sought to charge over a video they made telling members of the military not to obey illegal orders. **A3**
- ◆ **A mass shooter** killed nine people at a high school and home in British Columbia. **A7**
- ◆ **Commerce Secretary** Howard Lutnick said he visited Epstein's island in 2012 with his wife and children, years after Lutnick said he had cut off ties with the felon. **A4**
- ◆ **The Epstein files** appear to show a 2002 effort to get Trump to contribute to the financier's 50th birthday book. **A4**
- ◆ **A White House official** who unsuccessfully pushed claims of 2020 voter fraud spurred an investigation that led to the search of the main election office in Fulton County, Ga. **A5**
- ◆ **Sen. Susan Collins**, a Republican, said she would run for re-election in Maine. **A5**
- ◆ **The FDA refused** to review Moderna's application to sell a new seasonal flu vaccine. **A3**
- ◆ **U.S. officials** have discussed whether to seize tankers carrying Iranian oil to pressure Tehran but have held off. **A6**

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Images Released, Person Quizzed in Guthrie Case



REUTERS

PROBE INTENSIFIES: Footage released Tuesday shows a masked person at the Arizona home of Nancy Guthrie, the mother of journalist Savannah Guthrie, the day she vanished. A person has been held for questioning. For video, scan code with article on A3.

Life in Cuba Grinds to a Halt As U.S. Blockades Oil Imports

Airlines cancel flights, hotels close and authorities furlough workers

By VERA BERGENGRUEN AND DEBORAH ACOSTA

Daily life in Cuba is grinding to a halt under a U.S. campaign to block the island's oil imports, drawing international criticism that the Trump administration is pushing the island toward a humanitarian crisis with no clear endgame.

The Caribbean island's Communist authorities are rationing dwindling fuel supplies,

curtailing public transportation and furloughing workers. Children are being sent home from school early, people can barely afford basic food like milk and chicken, and long lines have sprung up at gas stations.

Cuba's crucial tourism industry is paralyzed. Some popular hotels, crippled by blackouts, have begun to shut down, ferrying remaining guests to other lodging, Russia's tour-operator agency said.

With more than 4,000 Russian tourists in Cuba, Moscow-backed state airline Aeroflot said it was restricting service and flying an empty plane to pick up tourists.

Air Canada, which said it

had 3,000 customers in Cuba, said it was suspending service to the country because of the fuel shortage. Other airlines said they would refuel on neighboring islands for now.

The swiftly deteriorating conditions in Cuba come after the Trump administration effectively set up an oil blockade in January. The last oil delivery to the country was a Jan. 9 shipment from Mexico, which has since halted supplies under U.S. pressure.

Cuba has also lost crude deliveries from Venezuela since the U.S. raid on Jan. 3 that captured authoritarian leader Nicolás Maduro, ending all support for Cuba from its biggest backer.

President Trump's executive order on Jan. 29 called Cuba "an unusual and extraordinary threat" and warned of new tariffs for any country that supplies oil to the island. The new measures go on top of a comprehensive set of U.S. sanctions on Cuba that began in the early 1960s when the Fidel Castro-led government nationalized U.S. property.

Cuba's government has accused the Trump administration of "blackmail and coercion." The blocking of oil imports has drawn condemnation from the U.K. and Democratic lawmakers in Washington, and the United

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Kennedy Center Revamp Captivates President

WASHINGTON—President Trump knows which slabs of white marble cladding the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts need to be replaced and what type of pipes run through the venue.

By Annie Linskey, Jessica Toonkel, Josh Dawsey and Dave Michaels

He has the cellphone number of the head of building maintenance—and he calls regularly for updates on fixes at the venerated cultural institution, according to people familiar with the matter.

He has told allies he would like to see Live Nation Entertainment involved in the venue's operations, a person with direct knowledge of the conversations said. Kennedy Center officials are in discussions with the company about taking over ticketing.

Overhauling the Kennedy Center has become a fixation for Trump—and no detail is too small for the real-estate-developer-turned-president.

Despite Trump's focus on the Kennedy Center, and in some cases because of it, the president faces major challenges as he seeks to remake the cultural center in his image. Ticket sales have fallen and skeptical artists are canceling performances. And there is mounting consternation from Democrats—and, privately, some Republicans—

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INSIDE



PERSONAL JOURNAL

How to practice the lost art of negotiating the price of a car. **A9**



SPORTS

The Olympics have just begun—but the medals are already falling apart. **A12**

A Stanford Experiment to Pair Singles Has Taken Over Campus

Matchmaking tool is the talk of the school, giving dating-challenged students new hope

By JASMINE LI

When Ben Rosenfeld started working as a residential assistant at a Stanford University dorm, he encountered 77 freshmen possessed by an "all-consuming" force.

His new gig coincided with the release of Date Drop, a matchmaking platform that launched in September and immediately took over conversation in the dorm.

"They're always talking about who they want to be matched with, who they're matched with, who their friends are matched with," said Rosenfeld, a Stanford senior majoring in data science. Created by graduate stu-

dent Henry Weng, Date Drop has students answer 66 questions about their values, lifestyles and political views. These responses are fed into an algorithm to pair compatible students. Matches "drop" every Tuesday night at 9 p.m.

Students huddle in dorm rooms and libraries to find out who the algorithm chose for them. Some take to Fizz, a discussion forum, to complain. "My date drop was chopped," one student wrote, using a slang term for unattractiveness. Those who like what they see often wind up at On Call Café, a popular date spot that offers students a free beverage if they show up with their first

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Retail Revival Vow Burned Investors

Tai Lopez pitched RadioShack, Pier 1 turnarounds; SEC alleges Ponzi scheme

By SUZANNE KAPNER AND ALEXANDER GLADSTONE

Taino "Tai" Lopez was living proof the American dream was still attainable for young men willing to bet on themselves. The entrepreneur hosted parties at a mansion in Beverly Hills and boasted about the black Lamborghini in his garage.

The college dropout had made a name for himself on social media by offering get-

rich-quick advice and self-help courses. He urged his followers to invest in a new company he had started that was scooping up distressed retailers on the cheap—RadioShack, Pier 1 Imports, Dressbarn, Modell's Sporting Goods and Linens 'N Things—with a promise to turn them into e-commerce winners.

Sean Murphy saw Lopez's posts on his Facebook and

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Korea Bitcoin Blunder Doles Out \$40 Billion

By TIMOTHY W. MARTIN AND SOOYOUNG RHEE

SEOUL—The hundreds of prize payouts were mostly just a few bucks each, part of a promotional campaign by a South Korean cryptocurrency exchange. The total reward pot: 620,000 Korean won, or about \$425.

Then came a colossal mistake. A staffer for Bithumb, South Korea's No. 2 crypto exchange, didn't distribute 620,000 won. Rather, the prizes, because of an input error, emerged in a different currency: 620,000 bitcoins, valued at more than \$40 billion.

That meant a winner who should have received a sum of 2,000 won—enough to buy a cheap cup of coffee—reaped, at least momentarily, more than \$120 million in bitcoins.

Enough recipients sought to sell or withdraw bitcoin that the market sank 17%, before Bithumb halted transactions after about 30 minutes. Those affected included investors who had held bitcoin before the botched giveaway.

The losses totaled about \$685,000, Bithumb said.

The company has since said it has reversed the transactions or had recipients voluntarily return more than 99% of the misdistributed bitcoins.

But Bithumb is still trying to persuade users who during the brief window of trading managed to offload more than 100 bitcoins, valued at about \$9 million, to give back the equivalent funds.

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◆ **Crypto tumult hits bitcoin-backed bond sale** **B1**

Tech Giants Prepare To Skirt H-1B Fee

Big firms weigh how to avoid \$100,000 charge, leaving small ones in the lurch

By AMRITH RAMKUMAR

WASHINGTON—The world's biggest technology companies are looking to sidestep President Trump's \$100,000 H-1B visa fee, potentially leaving the brunt of the new policy to hit smaller startups.

Drawing largely on playbooks they have relied on for years, Amazon.com, Microsoft, Alphabet unit Google and others generally plan to find workers in categories that don't have to pay the fee, including existing H-1B visa holders, students and people on other types of visas, according to people familiar with the companies' plans.

Some of the companies have been reducing their reliance on the H-1B program in recent years and are discussing ways to avoid using the system in certain cases, the people said.

But many smaller companies, including startups in specialized areas such as artificial intelligence and healthcare, can't easily navigate the policy changes or invest in alternatives that are cheaper than the \$100,000 fee but still more costly than the status quo.

"It's the big guys who are OK and the small guys who are either choosing a different path or going in a different direction," said Morgan Reed, president of ACT | The App Association, a trade group for smaller tech companies that is asking the administration to give small businesses relief from the fee. "That's antithetical to what

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