

Beijing mum on Trump-Xi meeting at G20 summit

Beijing, China

China yesterday did not confirm a planned face-to-face meeting between President Xi Jinping and his American counterpart Donald Trump, after the US leader threatened new tariffs against Beijing amid an escalating trade war.

Trump said a meeting with Xi has been "scheduled" during the G20 summit in Japan later this month, and that he expected the Chinese leader to attend.

"We have noticed that the US has repeatedly publicly expressed its expectation that the Chinese and US heads of state will meet during the G20 summit," foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a regular briefing.

"If there is any news in this regard, we will release it in due time."

EU blocks Thyssenkrupp-Tata steel merger plan

Brussels, Belgium

The EU's powerful anti-trust authority on Tuesday blocked the merger of German industrial conglomerate Thyssenkrupp with Indian steel giant Tata, an expected veto that kills the deal.

"We prohibited the merger to avoid serious harm to European industrial customers and consumers," EU competition commissioner Margrethe Vestager said in a statement.

The aim of the merger had been to create the second largest European steel company behind multinational giant ArcelorMittal and to join forces in the face of the surge of Chinese steel.

The companies last month abandoned the merger on expectations that the EU would refuse the deal, with Thyssenkrupp announcing it would slash 6,000 jobs as a result, mainly in Germany.

Ubisoft plays into streaming trend at E3 video game event

Uplay+ service launching on September 3 will let players access Ubisoft's library of games on Windows-powered personal computer

Los Angeles

French video game titan Ubisoft on Monday unveiled a new subscription service and a Brexit-tinged title as it taps into the industry trend toward streaming games.

A Uplay+ service launching on September 3 will let players access Ubisoft's library of games on Windows-powered personal computers, according to vice president of platform and product management Brenda Panagrossi.

"We're excited about this," Panagrossi said during a behind-the-scenes briefing at the Electronic Entertainment Expo video game industry gathering.

"It provides tremendous value that we think will bring in new players."

Uplay+ subscriptions will cost \$14.99 monthly when it launches in the US and much of Europe. Subscribers will be able to download whichever titles they wish from the Ubisoft library for play on personal computers.

Next year, Uplay+ will launch on Google's new streaming video game service Stadia, which will let titles hosted in the internet cloud be playable on a wide range of devices, according to Panagrossi.

Ubisoft has a history of boldly embracing new styles of play and gaming devices, and was an early partner with Google while the California-based technology giant was developing Stadia.

"The video game industry is constantly shifting, and our players' needs are evolving," Panagrossi said.

"With Uplay+ we are able to provide more freedom for players by making it even easier to access our extensive catalogue."

Post-Brexit dystopia

As the multi-billion dollar video game industry turns to streaming games the way Netflix does video or Apple Music does songs, a key will be fresh, captivating content to attract and keep subscribers, according to industry insiders.

Ubisoft on Monday showed off coming games during a colorful, high-energy show in the Orpheum Theater in down-



Brenda Panagrossi, Ubisoft vice president of platform and product management, said Uplay+ will launch next year on Google's new streaming video game service Stadia



Ubisoft's Clint Hocking introduces "Watch Dogs Legion," set in a future London in crisis, with automation and artificial intelligence devastating the economy



US actor Jon Bernthal is joined by his dog Bam Bam on stage as he introduces "Ghost Recon Breakpoint", at the Ubisoft E3 press conference

town Los Angeles on the eve of the official opening of E3.

Games on the way included a new

addition to the "Watch Dogs" franchise in which players take on the role of a cyber-savvy hero whose arsenal includes

hacking people and systems in a technology-driven world.

"Watch Dogs Legion" is set in a future London in crisis, with automation and artificial intelligence devastating the economy. Cryptocurrency has replaced the pound. Extremists and organized crime control the government in a city under constant surveillance and patrolled by drones.

"We wanted to make a game relevant to the world we live in today, but with a goal of challenging the imagination," said Alexandre Parizeau, managing director at Ubisoft's studio in Toronto.

"Your mission is to build a resistance and fight back against the emergence of an authoritarian regime."

In a technical accomplishment, any character in the game city of London can be recruited to the resistance and eventually played, opening up myriad options.

Creative director Clint Hocking described the game world as a post-Brexit Britain at a turning point, and where citizens are called on to fight extremism.

"It's a story about freeing London and the world from tyranny," Hocking said.

Watch Dog Legion was slated for launch in March of next year.

Hollywood touch

Ubisoft announced it is collaborating with Netflix on a film being made from its military action game "Tom Clancy's: The Division" which is to star actors Jessica Chastain and Jake Gyllenhaal.

Rob McElhenney, creator of comedy series "It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia" said during the presentation that he partnered with Ubisoft to make a comedy for a coming Apple TV+ service set in a game development study.

"I love games; I wanted to express that love by making a TV show about them," McElhenney said while providing a glimpse of what he is working on.

The show, in which McElhenney plays an egotistical creative director, is called "Mythic Quest: Raven's Banquet."

In another celebrity alliance, Ubisoft based a fearsome military foe in a coming "Ghost Recon: Breakpoint" game on actor Jon Bernthal, who is known for roles in "The Walking Dead" and "The Punisher."

His character in the game leads an elite fighting unit called the Wolves.

"I've had a chance to play some pretty tough guys," said Bernthal, who came on stage with his dog.

Amazon dethrones Google as top global brand: survey

Alibaba beat Tencent to become the most valuable Chinese brand

London, United Kingdom

US retail giant Amazon has moved past hi-tech titans Apple and Google to become the world's most valuable brand, a key survey showed Tuesday.

The brand value of Amazon surged by 52 percent to \$315 billion, global market research agency Kantar said in its 2019 100 Top BrandZ report.

Amazon jumped from third to first place to eclipse Google -- which slid from first to third place with Apple holding on to the second spot.

The Seattle-based retail be-



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hemoth, founded by Jeff Bezos in his garage in 1994, topped the table thanks to key acquisitions,

superior customer services and a disruptive business model, Kantar said in a statement.

"Amazon's smart acquisitions, that have led to new revenue

streams, excellent customer service provision and its ability to stay ahead of its competitors by offering a diverse ecosystem of products and services, have allowed Amazon to continuously accelerate its brand value



The top ten companies were once again dominated by US firms, with Apple on \$309.5 billion, Google on \$309 billion and Microsoft on \$251 billion.

growth," said Kantar.

The agency, which is owned by British advertising group WPP, added that Amazon showed "little sign" of any slowdown in its growth.

The top ten companies were once again dominated by US firms, with Apple on \$309.5 billion, Google on \$309 billion and Microsoft on \$251 billion.

Payments specialist Visa had the fifth biggest value at almost \$178 billion, while social networking group Facebook was the sixth largest at nearly \$159 billion.

For the first time, Alibaba beat Tencent to become the most valuable Chinese brand.

E-commerce leader Alibaba was the seventh biggest at \$131.2 billion, up two places on the previous year. Internet giant Tencent fell three spots to stand

at number eight with a value of \$130.9 billion.

In a sign of Asia's growing importance, 23 of the top 100 brands were Asian -- including 15 from China.

The leading brands have embraced "disruptive" business models to beat traditional rivals in the technology, finance and retail sectors.

"Amazon's phenomenal brand value growth of almost \$108 billion in the last year demonstrates how brands are now less anchored to individual categories and regions," said Doreen Wang, Kantar's global head of BrandZ.

"The boundaries are blurring as technology fluency allow brands, such as Amazon, Google and Alibaba, to offer a range of services across multiple consumer touchpoints.