

## SpaceX to lay off 10 per cent of workforce

Los Angeles, United States

SpaceX plans to lay off 10 per cent of its more than 6,000 employees, a source familiar with the decision said yesterday.

"To continue delivering for our customers and to succeed in developing interplanetary spacecraft and a global space-based Internet, SpaceX must become a leaner company," the California-based company, headed by Elon Musk, said in a statement.

"Either of these developments, even when attempted separately, have bankrupted other organizations," it added.

"This means we must part ways with some talented and hardworking members of our team."



Elon Musk

It added that the trim down was "only due to the extraordinarily difficult challenges ahead."

SpaceX in November won authorization from US officials to put nearly 12,000 satellites into orbit in order to boost cheap, wireless internet access by the 2020s.

## Elon Musk shows off prototype of Mars-bound rocket, Starship

Washington, United States

SpaceX CEO Elon Musk has unveiled the first pictures of a retro-looking, steely rocket called Starship that may one day carry people to the Moon and Mars.

Musk posted pictures on Twitter late Thursday of the Starship Hopper prototype, which awaits its first flight test in Texas in the coming weeks.

"Starship test flight rocket just finished assembly at the @SpaceX Texas launch site. This is an actual picture, not a rendering," he wrote.

The prototype built in Boca Chica, along the Gulf Coast of Texas, is nine yards (eight meters) in diameter -- like the future rocket will be -- but is shorter.

Its first test flights -- suborbital "hops" reaching several miles (kilometers) in the air before landing back on Earth -- could come in March or April.

An orbital prototype is expected in June. That

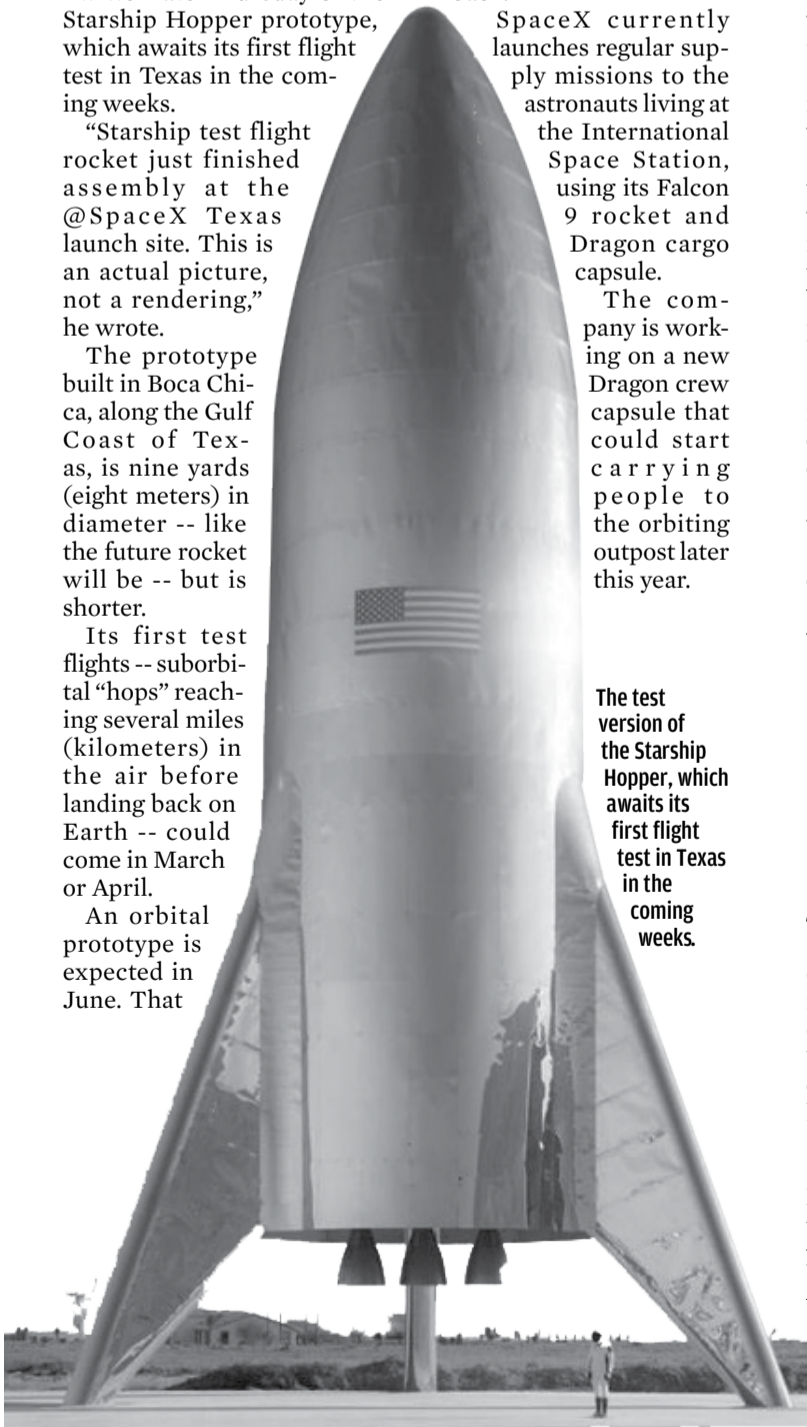
version will be paired with a massive rocket booster known as the Super Heavy.

SpaceX has said the duo could one day transport people from city to city on Earth, as well as propel passengers around the Moon, to the lunar surface, and even to Mars and back.

SpaceX currently launches regular supply missions to the astronauts living at the International Space Station, using its Falcon 9 rocket and Dragon cargo capsule.

The company is working on a new Dragon crew capsule that could start carrying people to the orbiting outpost later this year.

The test version of the Starship Hopper, which awaits its first flight test in Texas in the coming weeks.



## UK mulls limiting jail term of six months or less

London, United Kingdom

The British government is considering scrapping jail sentences of six months or less for most crimes in a bid to reduce reoffending and ease pressure on the system, the prisons minister said yesterday.

The move could see tens of thousands of people convicted of non-violent or non-sexual crimes, such as burglary and shoplifting, spared jail under the plan, Rory Stewart told *The*



England and Wales's prison population has doubled since the early 1990s to now stand at more than 80,000 inmates

*Daily Telegraph*.

In an interview with the newspaper's magazine, he said that short jail terms were "long enough to damage you and not long enough to heal you."

"You bring somebody in for three or four weeks, they lose their house, their job, their family, their reputation."

"They come (into prison), they meet a lot of interesting characters and then you whap them on to the streets again," he said.

"The public are safer if we have a good community sentence... and it will relieve a lot of pressure on prisons."

The change would mirror 2010 reforms in Scotland, where judges are now guided by a legal presumption against custodial sentences of less than three months.

Reoffending rates there have since fallen to their lowest levels for nearly two decades, and the Scottish government is considering extending it to less than a year.

## China's Huawei fires employee detained

AFP | Beijing, China

Huawei said yesterday it has fired a Chinese employee who was arrested in Poland on espionage allegations, as China's telecom giant distanced itself from the case amid Western concerns that it could act as a proxy for Chinese security services.

This week's detention of Wang Weijing follows the December arrest of Huawei's chief financial officer in Canada and US efforts to blacklist the company internationally over security concerns.

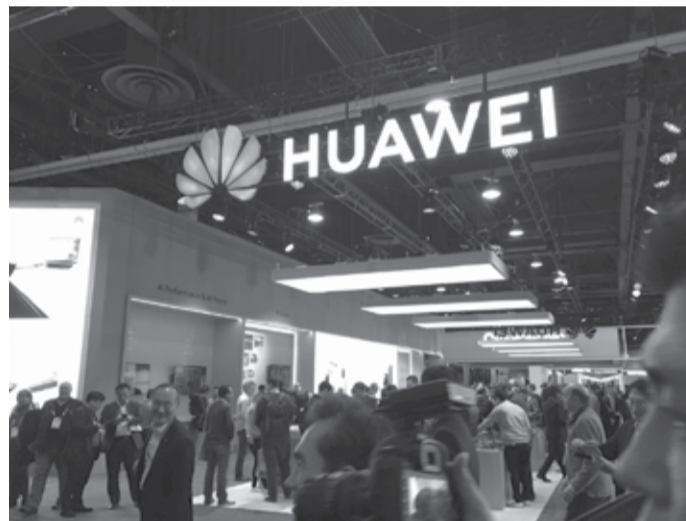
While China's government has vociferously defended Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou and demanded her release, the firm swiftly sacked Wang, who works at its representative office in Poland.

"His alleged actions have no relation to the company," Huawei said in a statement.

"In accordance with the terms and conditions of Huawei's labour contract, we have made this decision because the incident in question has brought Huawei into disrepute," it said.

"Huawei complies with all applicable laws and regulations in the countries where it operates, and we require every employee to abide by the laws and regulations in the countries where they are based."

A Polish man was also arrested for alleged espionage along



The Huawei booth is seen during CES 2019 consumer electronics show



Huawei's chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou was arrested in Vancouver on December 1 on request from the United States, which has accused her of fraud related to violations of Iran sanctions. Meng is the daughter of Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei

with Wang on Tuesday. Both men are suspected of having "worked for Chinese services and to the detriment of Poland," said Polish special services spokesman Stanislaw Zaryn.

He said their apartments and workplaces were searched, adding that the Polish suspect had worked "for several state institutions".

The Chinese foreign ministry said Friday it was "highly concerned" about the case and later said it was seeking to arrange a consular visit for Wang as soon as possible.

The Chinese embassy in Poland has also asked Warsaw to "effectively ensure the legitimate rights and interests, and humanitarian and safe treatment of the person involved."

## US Navy chief heads to China

Washington, United States

The head of the US Navy will visit his Chinese counterpart next week, officials said Friday, as the two powers seek to reduce military risks amid ongoing trade tensions.

Chief of Naval Operations Admiral John Richardson will travel to Beijing and Nanjing from January 13-16, when he will meet with Vice Admiral Shen Jinlong, who commands the People's Liberation Army Navy.

"A routine exchange of views is essential, especially in times of friction, in order to reduce risk and avoid miscalculation," Richardson said in a statement.

"Honest and frank dialogue can improve the relationship in constructive ways, help explore areas where we share common interests, and reduce risk while we work through our differences."

## Egypt police kill 6 militants in shootout: ministry

Cairo, Egypt

Egyptian police killed six suspected Islamist militants in a shootout early yesterday in the country's south, the interior ministry said.

The clashes broke out during a police raid on a militant hideout in a mountainous area on the edge of the southern province of Sohag, some 460 kilometres (285 miles) south of Cairo, the ministry said in a statement.

Police seized weapons and ammunition, it added.

## Many feared dead after tanker blast in Nigeria

Warri, Nigeria

Nigerian police yesterday said many people were feared dead after a petrol tanker veered off the road, caught fire and exploded as people tried to recover fuel.

The vehicle crashed in the Odukpani area of the southeastern state of Cross River, just north of the state capital, Calabar, at about 5pm (1600 GMT) on Friday.

## Thai security forces kill two linked to deadly shooting at school

Bangkok, Thailand

Two insurgents believed to be tied to a motorcycle drive-by shooting at a school in Thailand's south were shot dead yesterday, police said, as UNICEF warned of trauma for children near the scene of the lunchtime violence.

Since 2004 clashes between Malay-Muslim rebels and the Buddhist-majority Thai state that annexed the area over 100 years ago have killed nearly 7,000 people, mostly civilians of both faiths. The conflict rarely makes global headlines but is a reality for residents of border provinces where security forces maintain a large



Paramedics take away a body after four Thai civil defense volunteers were shot and killed by suspected insurgents outside of a school in the southern province of Pattani on January 10. (AFP)

footprint, aided by poorly paid defence "volunteers" drawn from local communities.

The four men killed in Thursday's shooting were all Mus-

lims and were guarding a school in Pattani province when the attackers struck just before lunchtime with students mere metres away.