

business

US in criminal probe of China's Huawei: report



Individuals with flowers exiting from a vehicle with consular plates arrive at the residence of Huawei Technologies Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou(R) after she was released on bail in Vancouver, British Columbia. (file)

Washington, United States

US authorities are in the "advanced" stages of a criminal probe that could result in an indictment of Chinese technology giant Huawei, a report said Wednesday.

The *Wall Street Journal*, citing anonymous sources, said the Department of Justice is looking into allegations of theft of trade secrets from Huawei's US business partners, including a T-Mobile robotic device used to test smartphones.

Huawei and the Department of Justice declined to comment on the media report.

However, Huawei noted that "Huawei and T-Mobile settled their disputes in 2017 following a US jury verdict finding neither damage, unjust enrichment nor willful and malicious conduct by Huawei in T-Mobile's trade secret claim."

The move would further escalate tensions between the US and China after the arrest last year in Canada of Huawei's chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou, who is the daughter of the company founder.

The case of Meng, under house arrest awaiting proceedings, has inflamed US-China and Canada-China relations.

Two Canadians have been detained in China since Meng's arrest and a third has been sentenced to death on drug trafficking charges -- moves observers see as attempts by Beijing to pressure Ottawa over her case.

Huawei, the second-largest global smartphone maker and biggest producer of telecommunications equipment, has for years been under scrutiny in the US over purported links to the Chinese government.

Huawei's reclusive founder Ren Zhengfei, in a rare media interview Tuesday, forcefully denied accusations that his firm engaged in espionage on behalf of the Chinese government.

Back on the brink

UK PM May reaches out to rivals after winning confidence vote

● **May must return to parliament on Monday with a Plan B**

● **More than a third of the Conservatives and all 10 DUP members of parliament voted against**

AFP | London, United Kingdom

British Prime Minister Theresa May has reached out to her opponents after narrowly surviving a confidence vote in parliament of her Brexit deal.

After a tumultuous 24 hours which she admitted voters might find "unsettling", she conceded the divorce terms she struck with the EU had been roundly rejected, but vowed to work to find an alternative.

"Now MPs have made clear what they don't want, we must all work constructively together to set out what parliament does want," May said in a televised evening address to the nation.

On Tuesday, MPs dealt the prime minister the heaviest drubbing in modern British political history by rejecting the divorce agreement by a stunning 432 votes to 202.

But May emerged victorious on Wednesday night in a confidence vote triggered by the opposition Labour party, the first for 26 years, winning 325 votes to 306.

She set out a schedule of cross-party talks that began immediately with meetings with the Scottish nationalist, Welsh nationalist and the pro-EU Liberal Democrat leaders.

"We must find solutions that are negotiable and command sufficient support in this



Political satire artist Kaya Mar poses with one of his artworks depicting Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May outside the Houses of Parliament in central London



European leaders have repeatedly said they will not reopen the draft withdrawal agreement sealed at a special Brussels summit in December.

House," she had told earlier told parliament.

Opposition leaders set out a list of demands for cooperating, including discussing delaying Brexit beyond March 29, and ruling out the possibility that Britain crashes out without any deal at all.

Late-night talks

The prime minister is working to the tightest-possible deadline as Britain prepares to leave the bloc that for half a century defined its economic and

political relations with the rest of the world.

Her defeat sparked warnings from European leaders that the prospect of "no deal" had increased, with the potential for huge economic disruption on both sides of the Channel.

May must return to parliament on Monday with a Plan B that she and her team intend to negotiate with various MPs through the weekend.

But main opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said he would only meet May if she could "remove clearly, once and for all the prospect of the catastrophe of a no-deal Brexit".

May said she was "disappointed" by Corbyn's decision and stressed that "our door remains open".

On Wednesday evening her spokesman said the possibility of a "no deal" had not been ruled out.

Ian Blackford of the Scottish National Party (SNP) said his party would only participate if she were prepared to consider delaying Brexit, ruling out "no deal" and the option of holding a second referendum.

May has flatly rejected a second vote.

Her offer to meet with the opposition "rings hollow without evidence of her readiness to compromise on the substance of Brexit", the Guardian newspaper said, pushing for a "menu of options" to be presented to parliament.

Meanwhile the Daily Telegraph warned that parliament "may be planning a betrayal".

"After two-and-a-half years, Plan B is to let parliament take over," the Telegraph said. "At least it is a plan; but is parliament capable of delivering on the referendum result, or is this the start of a great betrayal of that vote?"

Microsoft pledges \$500 million to ease local housing crunch

San Francisco, United States

Microsoft on Wednesday pledged \$500 million for loans and grants aimed at ramping up construction of affordable housing in the Puget Sound area of Washington state where the US technology giant has its home.

"In recent years, our region hasn't built enough housing for the people who live here," Microsoft executives Amy Hood and Brad Smith said in a blog post.

"We are committing \$500 million as a company to advance affordable housing solutions."

Microsoft was only a few years old when it moved from New Mexico to the Seattle area city of Bellevue in 1979, and now has its headquarters in nearby Redmond.



Representative picture (Courtesy of the New York Times)

Since 2011, job growth in the region has been 21 per cent while housing construction growth has trailed at 13pc.

A gap in available housing has caused housing prices to nearly double in the past eight years, making the greater Seattle area

the sixth most expensive region in the US, according to Hood and Smith.

"The gap between job growth

and housing growth has been even greater in the suburban cities around Seattle than in Seattle itself," the blog post said.

"This is a big problem. And it's a problem that is continuing to get worse."

The \$500 million will be used to "help kick-start new solutions" to the housing crisis, according to the executives.

Microsoft planned to make \$225 million available at below-market rates to subsidize preservation and construction of middle-income housing, initially targeting six cities east of Seattle and Lake Washington.

"Median income in the region hasn't kept pace with rising housing costs, increasingly making it impossible for lower- and middle-income workers to afford to live close to where they

work," Hood and Smith said.

"Teachers, nurses, first responders and many in key roles at nonprofits, businesses and tech companies now begin and end their workdays with long commutes."

A total of \$250 million will be made available at market rates for low-income housing development, while \$25 million will be devoted to philanthropic grants aimed at addressing homelessness, according to Microsoft.

"With these and similar investments, it's possible to lend money, accelerate progress, be repaid and then lend this money again," Hood and Smith said.

"Our goal is to move as quickly as possible with targeted investments that will have an outsized impact."