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Put blame on Russia if treaty dies

Kay Bailey Hutchison

OPINION

Why did Russia argue that the United States should keep the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty intact and then recently declare its own suspension of the treaty? After all, it has deployed many of the very missiles banned by the treaty. Russia began the covert development of this class of missiles, probably in the mid-2000s, in a way designed to disguise its true nature. This decision has undermined over 30 years of good-faith nuclear arms control efforts and puts America, its allies and its partners at risk.

The I.N.F. Treaty, signed in 1987, prohibits the United States and Russia from possessing ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 kilometers to 5,500 kilometers (310 miles to 3,418 miles). The treaty eliminated an entire class of

A missile agreement has boosted trans-Atlantic security since 1987. But Moscow has been cheating.

weapons and, in good faith, the United States and Russia collectively destroyed over 2,600 missiles — an accomplishment that made both our countries and the Euro-Atlantic region more stable and secure.

But just this month, the United States and its NATO allies again reaffirmed unequivocally that Russia is violating the treaty. Unless Russia returns to compliance, the United States will withdraw from the treaty effective in six months, according to the treaty's terms.

In reality, the breakdown of the treaty started in 2007, when Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, signaled his desire to undercut the treaty in a speech at the Munich Security Conference.

Mr. Putin suggested then that Russia was rethinking the treaty, because other countries like North Korea, South Korea, India, Iran and Pakistan, as he claimed, possessed missiles banned by the treaty but were not party to it. "It is obvious that in these conditions we must think about ensuring our own security," he said. A day later, Russia's defense minister, Sergei Ivanov, called the I.N.F. Treaty a "relic of the Cold War" that "will not last forever." The same month, Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky, chief of Russia's General Staff, asserted that a party to the treaty could withdraw "if it provides convincing evidence that it is necessary to do so," adding "we have such evidence at present." That same year, Russia — *HUTCHISON, PAGE 11*

The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.



SAMYUKTA LAKSHMI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The five nuns who have supported a fellow nun's accusation of rape against a bishop in Kerala State, India. The women have defied the Catholic Church to stage public protests.

Rape accusation divides India

KOCHI, INDIA

Nun says Catholic bishop assaulted her, then church officials urged silence

BY MARIA ABI-HABIB
AND SUHASINI RAJ

When Bishop Franco Mulakkal agreed to personally celebrate the First Communion for Darly's son, a rare honor in their Catholic church in India, the family was overcome with pride.

During the ceremony, Darly looked at her sister, a nun who worked with the bishop, to see her eyes spilling over with tears — tears of joy, she figured. Only later would she learn of her sister's allegation that the night before, the bishop had summoned the nun to his quarters and raped her. The family says that was the first assault in a two-year ordeal in which the prelate raped her 13 times.

The bishop, who has maintained his innocence, will be charged and face trial by a special prosecutor on accusations of rape and intimidation, the police investigating the case said. The church acknowledged the nun's accusations only after five of her fellow nuns publicly rallied to her side to draw attention to her

yearlong quest for justice, despite what they described as heavy pressure to remain silent.

"We used to see the fathers of the church as equivalent to God, but not anymore," said Darly, her voice shaking with emotion. "How can I tell my son about this, that the person teaching us the difference between right and wrong gave him his First Communion after committing such a terrible sin?"

The case in India, in the southern state of Kerala, is part of a larger problem in the church that Pope Francis addressed for the first time last week after decades of silence from the Vatican. He acknowledged that sexual abuse of nuns by clerics is a continuing problem.

At a time when church attendance in the West is low, and empty parishes and monasteries are being shuttered across Europe and America, the Vatican increasingly relies on places like India to keep the faith growing.

The scandal in Kerala is dividing India's Catholics, who number about 20 million, a small minority in a population of about 1.3 billion.

And there may be more to come: Other nuns have stepped forward to report sexual abuse at the hands of priests, the police in Kerala say. In Kerala's Pathanamthitta district, four priests have been accused of blackmailing women during confession, using the



SIVARAM V./REUTERS

Bishop Franco Mulakkal, center, leaving after questioning by the police near Kochi, India, in September. The bishop has denied accusations that he raped a nun 13 times.

information to coerce them into sex, according to Sudhakaran Pillai, a police official.

"If this case goes ahead, it will be a new beginning, and priests and bishops will be forced to be held accountable," said the Rev. Augustine Vattoly, a priest in Kerala who was an early supporter of the nun's accusations. He said he was or-

dered by his superiors to back away or face repercussions.

"The church is losing its moral authority," Father Vattoly said. "We are losing the faith of the people. The church will become a place without people if this continues. Just like in Europe, the young will no longer come here."

INDIA, PAGE 4

A Dutch tradition on Austrian ice



PETE KIEHART FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dutch skaters in Weissensee, Austria, at an event that stands in for a 120-plus-mile race in the Netherlands that has not been held since 1997 because ice wasn't thick enough.

WEISSENSEE, AUSTRIA

6,000 climate migrants relocate a skating race sacred to the Netherlands

BY ANDREW KEH

A thousand Dutch skaters congregated before dawn on the frozen surface of the Weissensee, the long, slender lake that gives this small Austrian mountain town its name. The sky was dark, and the headlamps of the shivering skaters cast a spiritual glow onto the charcoal ice. They had been warned not to remove their goggles, lest their eyeballs frost over in the wind.

The conditions, by any reasonable standard, were brutal. But the skaters were in heaven.

"The most beautiful thing in life is skating on a floor of black ice, in the cold, hearing the sounds of ice skating in nature," said Wim Wiltenburg, 53, a banker

visiting from Tilburg, the Netherlands. "It's better than sex."

Speedskating on natural ice is a beloved Dutch national pastime. The tradition is alive and well — just not necessarily in the Netherlands, where climate change now yields winters too warm for the waterways to freeze over with any consistency.

The consequences of this have been felt most profoundly in a historical event called the Elfstedentocht, a one-day, long-distance speedskating tour through 11 cities of the province of Friesland. It maintains a sacred place in Dutch sports culture. The race, whose name translates to "11 cities tour," has been held casually since the late 1700s and more officially since 1909.

Covering a continuous route of about 200 kilometers, or 124 miles, the Elfstedentocht takes place only when the lakes and canals of Friesland develop 15 centimeters (almost six inches) or more of ice. That was once a relatively common phenomenon; lately, it has been exceedingly rare.

SKATING, PAGE 12

More attacks on Taliban as U.S. pushes for peace

WASHINGTON

Raids and airstrikes stepped up in Afghanistan to gain leverage in talks

BY THOMAS GIBBONS-NEFF
AND MUJIB MASHAL

The Pentagon has stepped up airstrikes and special operations raids in Afghanistan to the highest levels since 2014 in what Defense Department officials described as a coordinated series of attacks on Taliban leaders and fighters.

The surge, which began during the fall, is intended to give American negotiators leverage in peace talks with the Taliban after President Trump said he would begin withdrawing troops and wind down the nearly 18-year war.

The campaign appears to have registered with the militants: During negotiations, the Taliban complained about the torrent of airstrikes, according to two senior Afghan officials who have spoken to Zalmay Khalilzad, the American special envoy who is leading the talks.

"They say they have learned from their mistakes of the past," Mr. Khalilzad said in a speech on Friday in Washington. He said the Taliban did not want to be "a pariah state" and had told him that they did not see a military solution to the conflict.

The military strategy, devised by Gen. Austin S. Miller, the current commander of the American-led mission in Afghanistan, is similar to past attempts to bleed the militant group. But it is tied to a more specific ambition, coming as the United States is negotiating directly with the Taliban.

Last year, the United States dropped more than 7,000 bombs, missiles and other munitions on extremists in Afghanistan — up from 2,365 in 2014, military data show. Since September, the United States has launched about 2,100 air and artillery strikes in Afghanistan.

Additionally, American and Afghan commandos more than doubled the number of joint raids conducted from September to early February, compared with the same five-month period a year earlier, the military data show. Generally, the joint forces conduct dozens of raids each month.

And on Friday, reports of attacks on the Taliban by Afghan and American units surfaced from the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand and Nangarhar — including one that killed two low-level Taliban commanders and another that killed a Taliban intelligence chief.

The increase in lethal operations is not without cost to both American and Afghan forces.

In January, two American commandos were killed, and about two dozen have been wounded since General Miller took command in September — about as many as during the same period in AFGHANISTAN, PAGE 5

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PAGE TWO

‘Shoplifters’ director pierces Japan’s darker side

PROFILE
TOKYO

Hirokazu Kore-eda specializes in stories about almost unbearable sadness

BY MOTOKO RICH

As befits a director whose movies chart the untidiness of Japanese family life, the office of Hirokazu Kore-eda is cluttered with piles of papers, books, photographs, videocassettes and CDs. But it's the dozens of dolls of Frankenstein's monster around the room that really capture his emotional point of view.

"I love Frankenstein," Mr. Kore-eda said, reverently. "He is just so melancholy."

Mr. Kore-eda, 56, whose latest work, "Shoplifters," has received an Oscar nomination for best foreign-language film and has been a box office hit in Japan, specializes in stories about people who endure almost unbearable sadness.

In "Shoplifters," which won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival last May, a group of outcasts who live together as a family rescue a little girl from abusive parents and induct her into their clan of petty thievery. For a while, their ragtag clan seems more authentically connected than some families that share DNA. But — spoiler alert — ethical doubts late in the movie lead to a devastating rupture.

Mr. Kore-eda says his films represent an implicit criticism of modern Japan. They tackle themes of isolation and social invisibility, as well as the numbing of souls that can come with professional success.

"Nobody Knows," one of Mr. Kore-eda's best-known films internationally before "Shoplifters," is the story of four young children abandoned by their mother in their small Tokyo apartment. In "Like Father, Like Son," which won the Jury Prize in Cannes in 2013, two sets of parents learn that their 6-year-old sons were switched at birth in the hospital, leading to agonizing decisions that expose class divisions between the families and leave them psychologically battered.

"I don't portray people or make movies where viewers can easily find hope," said Mr. Kore-eda, during an interview in his studio in the Shibuya neighborhood of Tokyo. "Some people want to see characters who grow and become stronger over the course of a film. But I don't want to make such a movie."

"It's such a lie," he added. "And I don't want to tell a lie."

Mr. Kore-eda's vision is starkly at odds with that of Japan's leaders. With the economy enjoying modest expansion after decades of stagnation, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in a speech at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, last month, pronounced a "long-awaited positive feedback cycle" and trumpeted Japan as having a "hope-driven economy."

Such rosy rhetoric belies the demo-



NORIKO HAYASHI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Hirokazu Kore-eda's movies tackle themes of isolation and social invisibility. "I don't portray people or make movies where viewers can easily find hope," he said.

graphic challenges that Japan faces, with a declining and rapidly aging population and mounting labor shortages. It also overlooks the insecurity that many Japanese feel working in contract or part-time jobs with scant chance of advancement. A little over one in six people live in poverty. And those who hold full-time jobs are often forced to toil for such long hours that some of them are dying from overwork.

"I don't think it's right for the government and moviemakers to get too close. So I wanted to keep a distance from the government."

Against this backdrop, Mr. Kore-eda has diagnosed a society where local ties have weakened and nationalism is on the rise, particularly under Mr. Abe's right-leaning government.

So when, after Mr. Kore-eda won the Palme d'Or, the country's education minister invited him for a congratulatory meeting, the director demurred.

"I didn't get the point of why they were trying to congratulate me," Mr. Kore-eda said. "I don't think it's right for the government and moviemakers to

get too close. So I wanted to keep a distance from the government."

"Shoplifters" was made in part with government funding, and some critics on social media have bashed the director as anti-Japan or hypocritical. "You took the money and then say that you want to keep a distance" from the government, wrote one blogger. "What a convenient excuse you make." On Twitter, Tsuneyasu Takeda, a conservative commentator, accused Mr. Kore-eda of being a "shoplifting director."

Mr. Kore-eda told an interviewer from Mainichi Shimbun, a Japanese newspaper, that he was grateful for the public money but viewed it as a subsidy from taxpayers rather than a grant from any particular administration.

"If you think of culture as something that transcends the state," he said, "then you understand that cultural grants don't always coincide with the interests of the state."

The son of a soldier who served in the Japanese Kwantung Army during World War II in the puppet state of Manchukuo in China, Mr. Kore-eda grew up attuned to the vagaries of class within his own family. His father, who was a Soviet prisoner of war in Siberia, hopped from job to job, an anomaly in



MAGNOLIA PICTURES

Lily Franky, left, and Jyo Kairi in a scene from "Shoplifters." The movie has received an Oscar nomination for best foreign-language film and has been a box office hit in Japan.

the postwar era of lifetime employment.

Mr. Kore-eda remembered visiting his father at work at a chemical factory on the outskirts of Tokyo, expecting that he would observe him dressed in a lab coat

mixing compounds in test tubes. Instead, Mr. Kore-eda found his father on the factory floor, wearing a jumpsuit covered in oil stains.

"I could tell he was not well treated or

respected in the company," said Mr. Kore-eda, who is now married with an elementary school-age daughter. "It was really shocking, and after coming home I could not really tell him how I felt about him. I felt pity for him."

His mother, who had grown up in a wealthy family, ended up supporting her children when her husband could not find or keep a job. She worked at a recycling factory and a plant that made cakes.

Mr. Kore-eda said his two older sisters had warned him not to talk about their mother's work history, out of embarrassment.

She nourished a love of movies in her son, watching Western films starring her favorites, Vivien Leigh and Joan Fontaine, on television with him after school.

But it was Mr. Kore-eda's father who ultimately supported his decision to pursue a career as an artist. His mother urged him to find more stable employment.

At Waseda University in Tokyo, Mr. Kore-eda started out intending to become a novelist. But he watched a lot of Japanese television dramas and considered switching to screenwriting. He often cut class to go to the cinema to watch movies by Italian greats like Rossellini, Fellini and Visconti.

"It's a bit cringy to say," he said, a trace of a smile emerging from his salt-and-pepper stubble.

After graduation, he started out making documentaries, but switched to fictional, feature-length films in 1995 with "Maborosi," the story of a woman recovering from the suicide of her husband. Stephen Holden, writing in The New York Times, described it as "a pictorial tone poem of astonishing visual intensity and emotional depth."

The seed of "Shoplifters," Mr. Kore-eda said, came from a news article about an entire family put on trial for shoplifting in Osaka, Japan's third-largest city. And after making "Like Father, Like Son," he wanted to further explore the theme of family beyond blood bonds.

In Japan, he said, "people still put a big emphasis on blood ties and family bonds," a fixation that he sees as sometimes unhealthy.

Masahiro Yamada, a sociologist at Chuo University who has written about Mr. Kore-eda's films, said that "Shoplifters" was a rebuke of the traditional view of the Japanese family, where only blood relations can be trusted.

"There are many families whose members don't communicate or interact well," Mr. Yamada said. "But the mock family members in the movie care for each other more than some real families."

In their own way, Mr. Kore-eda's movies offer slivers of optimism as well as moments of impish humor. But does he still have hope for his country?

He paused for several beats.

"I have not thrown away hope," he said.

Hisako Ueno contributed reporting. Makiko Inoue contributed research.

Best-selling author of ‘The Shell Seekers’

ROSAMUNDE PILCHER
1924-2019

BY NEIL GENZLINGER

Rosamunde Pilcher, a British writer whose romance and generation-spanning novels like "The Shell Seekers" regularly made best-seller lists and were turned into television movies and mini-series, died on Wednesday in Dundee, Scotland. She was 94.

Her agent, Felicity Bryan, said she died in a hospital after a short illness.

Ms. Pilcher had been writing short stories and novels for years, first under a pen name and then under her own, when "The Shell Seekers," published in 1987, elevated her to a new level of sales and fame.

"The Shell Seekers" was the quintessential word-of-mouth book in hardcover," Thomas J. McCormack, then chairman of St. Martin's Press, which published the book in the United States, told The New York Times in 1990.

The novel's main character, Penelope, is an artist's daughter who in the course of the book looks back on her life and relationships. The title refers to a painting by Penelope's father.

"It is a measure of this story's strength and success that a reader can be carried for more than 500 pages in total involvement with Penelope, her children, her past and the painting that hangs in her country cottage," the novelist Maeve Binchy wrote in reviewing the book in The New York Times Book Review in 1988. "The Shell Seekers" is a deeply satisfying story, written with love and confidence."

Riding the international success of that book, Ms. Pilcher's next novel, "September," about a prominent family in the Scottish Highlands, made its debut on The Times's hardcover fiction best-seller list in 1990 at No. 1, dislodging Robert Ludlum's "The Bourne Ultimatum."

Television adaptations of her work were frequent and often featured high-profile stars. "The Shell Seekers" was twice adapted for television: in 1989, with a cast that included Angela Lansbury, and in 2006, with Vanessa Redgrave. A 1996 television adaptation of



DIETHER ENDLICH/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rosamunde Pilcher in 2005. She had been writing short stories and novels for decades before finding international success with "The Shell Seekers" in 1987.

"September" starred, among others, Jacqueline Bisset, Mariel Hemingway and Michael York.

A string of German TV productions based on her books and short stories was so popular in that country that German tourists traveled by the thousands to Cornwall to see the area where the films were shot and where some of her stories were set.

"The Germans come to Cornwall thinking it is gloriously sunny here all the time, due to the movies," one prominent resident, James Molesworth-St. Aubyn, told The Guardian in 2013. "We occasionally have to explain that one of the reasons Cornwall is so beautiful is because it rains."

Rosamunde Scott was born on Sept. 22, 1924, in Lelant, a village on the southwestern tip of Cornwall. Her father, Charles, worked for the India Civil Service and was posted overseas for much of her childhood. ("He came home every four years when he got a leave," Ms. Pilcher told The Times in 1995, "but that time went very quickly.") Her mother, Helen, raised her in Cornwall.

When World War II broke out, Rosamunde left school, learned shorthand and went to work for the Foreign Office. She spent two years working in Portsmouth, England, and in 1944, after D-Day, joined the Women's Royal Naval Service, known as the Wrens. She was stationed in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) when the war ended.

"While in Ceylon I wrote a short story, and my father submitted it to Woman and Home magazine," she told The Western Morning News of Plymouth, England, in 2013. "The day he sent me a cable to say it had been published for 15 guineas really was the best moment of my life. It was the moment I knew that I could do it."

She married a veteran, Graham Pilcher, in 1946, and they moved to Scotland, settling in Dundee. She then began writing in earnest.

"Because I had spent a long time meeting with and living with so many young people in Portsmouth and Ceylon, I'd seen countless love affairs starting, blossoming, crashing and ending," she said. "So off I went. There were doz-

ens of different characters stored in my memory, and these formed the basis of these stories."

Her first novel, "Half-Way to the Moon," was published in 1949 under the name Jane Fraser. She continued writing books under that name into the early 1960s, but in 1955 she also published her first book under her own name, "A Secret to Tell."

In an obituary she wrote for The Guardian, Ms. Bryan, Ms Pilcher's agent, described how this writer of only moderately successful romances became an international star.

"By the time I became her literary agent in 1973, she was publishing short novels as Rosamunde Pilcher on the Collins Romance list," Ms. Bryan wrote. "Her breakthrough came when a young American editor with St. Martin's Press, Tom Dunne, recognized her sparkling prose and pitch-perfect dialogue and launched her books in the U.S."

Ms. Dunne, Ms. Bryan said, helped Ms. Pilcher map out the plot of "The Shell Seekers." The book, which took Ms. Pilcher two years to write, has sold millions of copies.

Ms. Pilcher's later books included "Coming Home" (1995) — a "not so fictional" story, as she put it, about a family's experiences in the World War II years, some of which paralleled her real-life experiences.

It, too, ended up on television, as a 1998 mini-series with a cast that included Emily Mortimer, Peter O'Toole and Joanna Lumley.

Her last book, "Winter Solstice," was published in 2000.

Graham Pilcher died in 2009. Ms. Pilcher's survivors include two daughters, Fiona and Philippa; two sons, Robin and Mark; 14 grandchildren; and 17 great-grandchildren.

In a 1990 interview with People magazine, Ms. Pilcher related an anecdote from her days as a fledgling novelist with young children.

"I always practice my dialogue out loud," she said. "Once, when Fiona was small, she had a friend over, and I was hanging up the washing and running through my dialogue. Her friend said, 'Look, your mummy's lips are moving.' And Fiona said: 'Don't be stupid. She's writing.'"

Court orders Austria to pay \$1.7 million for Hitler birthplace

BY ILIANA MAGRA

A decades-long dispute involving the house where Hitler was born took a new turn after a court in Austria ordered the country's government to pay the former owner of the building about \$1.7 million.

The Austrian government had sought for decades to take over the three-story property in the medieval town of Braunau am Inn to ensure that it did not fall into the hands of someone seeking to glorify its dark history. It used a compulsory purchase order in 2016 to buy the property for 310,000 euros, or \$350,000 at current exchange rates, according to Deutsche Welle, the German public broadcaster — a bargain price for a historic property of its size.

Unfairly so, ruled the district court in Ried im Innkreis, a town about 25 miles away, on Thursday. It ordered the Austrian government to pay Gerlinde Pommer, a descendant of the original owners, €1.5 million, precisely the amount she had sought after having the property appraised.

The state has the right to appeal, but it was not clear if it would. Neither the Interior Ministry nor Gerhard Lebitsch, Ms. Pommer's lawyer, responded to requests for comment.

Hitler was born in one of the upper-

floor apartments of the three-story house on Salzburger Vorstadt in Braunau on April 20, 1889, and lived there until the age of 3. Though he showed no interest in the property later in his life, it became something of a Nazi shrine during his rule, and a magnet for neo-Nazis long after he was gone.

The Austrian authorities grappled for years with the conundrum the house presented: Demolish it, and be accused of erasing the country's troubled history; or maintain it, and risk having the property continue to draw far-right extremists from across Europe.

The government took over the main lease of the property in 1972. It also offered to buy it from Ms. Pommer in 1984, but for three decades, she refused.

The Austrian Parliament's home affairs committee submitted a petition in October 2016 to expropriate the building, offering financial compensation to Ms. Pommer in return.

Even if the decision on Thursday settles the financial terms of the property's transfer, it does not answer the question of what to do with the property. There have been proposals to have it restored and used to fight Nazi ideology, torn down and replaced with a structure with no links to the Nazi era or rehabilitated into a center for refugees.



LAETITIA VANCON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Hitler was born in a building, right, on Salzburger Vorstadt in Braunau am Inn, Austria.

World

Maduro finds help, but his people may pay

CARACAS, VENEZUELA

As U.S. oil sanctions begin to hurt, a Russian lifeline for Venezuela’s president

BY ANATOLY KURMANAEV AND CLIFFORD KRAUSS

When President Trump slapped surprise oil sanctions on Venezuela aimed at toppling President Nicolás Maduro, exports plunged and banking froze as the effects hit harder and faster than expected.

But in recent days it has become clear that Venezuela’s state oil company, the main target of the sanctions as Mr. Maduro’s chief source of funds, has found a few ways to survive, with some Russian help.

Many in Venezuela fear that the sanctions, imposed on Jan. 28, will push the already suffering nation of 30 million people into an even greater humanitarian catastrophe.

“I’m not sure the U.S. has a Plan B if this doesn’t work in getting rid of Maduro,” said Francisco Rodríguez, a Venezuelan economist at Torino Capital, a brokerage firm. “I’m afraid that if these sanctions are implemented in their current form, we’re looking at starvation.”

Venezuelan oil exports to the United States, which provide the biggest source of cash for Mr. Maduro’s government, plummeted 40 percent in the first week of February. Customers suspended contracts, banks suspended Venezuelan accounts, and a dozen tankers filled with Venezuelan crude sat stranded across the Caribbean.

“We can’t charge. We can’t receive money. Our finances are paralyzed,” said Reinaldo Quintero, head of the Venezuelan Oil Chamber, an industry group that represents the country’s 500 biggest oil service companies. “There will be major collateral damage.”

But crucial help came from Venezuela’s biggest oil investor, the Russian state-run oil company Rosneft. The company said last week that it would increase its output in Venezuela this year despite the sanctions, and that it re-



MERIDITH KOHUT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A soup kitchen in Caracas that is sponsored by opposition politicians. A Venezuelan economist said that if oil sanctions are fully implemented, “we’re looking at starvation.”

mained committed to the country, throwing a lifeline to Mr. Maduro’s government.

Venezuela’s economy has already shrunk by about half since Mr. Maduro came to power in 2013, causing millions of people to flee the country or skip meals to survive. Now the new American sanctions could cut Venezuela’s oil exports by two-thirds, to \$14 billion this year, and lead to a 26 percent reduction

in the economy’s size, according to Mr. Rodríguez, the economist.

Mr. Trump said the oil sanctions were meant to punish Mr. Maduro for human rights violations and force him to cede power to Juan Guaidó, the opposition leader whom the United States and many other countries have recognized as the rightful Venezuelan president.

The sanctions, announced by the United States Treasury Department,

barred American companies and individuals from dealing with Venezuela’s state-run oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela, or Pdvs, which provides 90 percent of the country’s hard currency. The sanctions essentially shut Venezuelan oil out of the American market.

Mr. Maduro, accusing the United States of sponsoring a coup attempt, has vowed to remain in power.

Before the sanctions, his country im-

ported about 120,000 barrels of oil and refined petroleum products a day from the United States. The Venezuelans blended the lighter American oil with their own thick crude oil so it could flow through pipelines to ports. The American shipments have halted.

But Russia’s state-run oil company, Rosneft, agreed to continue providing Petróleos de Venezuela with vital oil products in exchange for Venezuelan

crude, partly replacing the lost American supplies, according to two oil traders and two partners of a Venezuelan firm familiar with the matter.

Such deals allow Petróleos de Venezuela to continue functioning — albeit a day at a time — without access to the international banking system. The oil company’s officials told partners last week that the country had secured gasoline supplies until late March, avoiding the imminent energy crisis caused by the American sanctions. A Rosneft spokesman said the company pursues only business interests in Venezuela and declined to comment on any barter deals with Petróleos de Venezuela.

Energy experts said the nature of the global oil market was such that Venezuela would be able to keep some oil income coming by lowering the price and finding alternative customers in Asia.

“At the end of the day there will always be someone who will buy a limited volume of crude that doesn’t have a home,” said Ali Moshiri, who ran Chevron’s operations in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America until 2017, “but it will be at a heavy discount.”

Many Venezuelans worry that while the reduced revenue streams may allow Mr. Maduro to remain in power, they will drastically worsen the dire shortages of food and medicine and shutter the few remaining private businesses.

“If these sanctions don’t force the endgame soon, they will cause a lot of pain for the people,” said José Bodas, an antigovernment oil union leader in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela. “The rich will not stop getting richer, it’s the workers who will shoulder the cost of these measures.”

On Friday, Mr. Maduro said the aid was not needed.

“They want to draw a caricature of a country in a humanitarian crisis, a dictatorship, and the U.S. opening their hands to help a people in need,” he said of the opposition. “The reality is that it is not any help, it is a message of humiliation to a people.”

Nicholas Casey reported from Cucuta, Colombia. Anatoly KurmanaeV reported from Caracas, and Clifford Krauss from Houston. Isayen Herrera and Ana Vanessa Herrero contributed reporting.

Survivor of a capsized ferry

Alone in a dark hull for over 40 hours in an African lake

BY JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN

The water kept rising. The air pocket around his head kept shrinking. And nearly two days after his ferry capsized, no one seemed to realize that someone was still alive, trapped in the pitch black of the engine room.

So Augustine Charahani, the engineer, simply waited, helplessly, clinging to a staircase in the capsized vessel, caught between hope and hopelessness.

“I am going to die, but maybe I will be rescued,” he remembered telling himself during the more than 40 torturous hours he survived inside the overturned hull.

He was alone down there. When the ferry capsized on Sept. 20, it was nearing its destination: the small island of Ukara in Tanzania. The ferry — the main link between remote islands in Lake Victoria — was overcrowded, with more than 265 passengers and crew members on board. Many were returning from shopping trips to a larger island about an hour away.

In the initial moments after the ferry flipped, about 40 people were able to swim ashore or stay afloat long enough to be picked up by fishermen and other rescuers, Tanzanian officials said. In all, 228 people drowned, including many caught inside the main passenger cabin.

But long after everyone else had drowned or made it ashore, Tanzanian officials said, Mr. Charahani managed to stay alive — trapped beneath the ferry, often in complete darkness, for two nights and parts of three days.

“I knew it was my turn to die, but I remained hopeful that someone out there was coming,” he remembered thinking.

It is still unclear why the ferry, the Nyerere, flipped as it neared the island. Some survivors say the sudden rush of people toward the front, as they jockeyed for position to disembark, caused the boat to tip. Other survivors quoted in local news articles have said the captain made a sharp turn after realizing he was approaching the dock from the wrong side.

When the ferry overturned, Mr. Charahani was in the engine room, filling out paperwork about a journey that should have been minutes from ending. He was knocked to the ground. It took him a moment to get his bearings. The engines, he realized, were upside down.

He heard an inrush of water. And he heard passengers wailing.

“Mother, we are dying,” people called out.

The engine room is tall, with a meter or two of clearance above his head. Steep stairs run along one wall. There are a couple of windows and paneling on

the door that let light through. The room had flipped over, no longer so familiar. He put on a life jacket.

He could no longer hear any voices. The silence came on so quickly that it confused him.

“Their screams were so loud,” Mr. Charahani remembered. “I think they struggled and drowned almost immediately.”

Water began trickling into the engine room.

DARKNESS

It was dark. At some point, Mr. Charahani said he fell asleep and dreamed of Jesus. He awoke thinking he would live through this ordeal, knowing there must be divers looking for survivors. He guessed that the room was half-submerged.

“Help me,” he remembered screaming, banging on the wall with his fists. “There were moments I screamed until my voice went out.”



HEMED MANYEKO

Augustine Charahani, a ferry engineer and father of four, was trapped in the engine room in a shrinking air pocket.

At first, Mr. Charahani assumed there were other survivors who had found air pockets like he did. But as the silence deepened and his shouts went unanswered, he began to think he was the only one.

“I alone am stuck down here still alive,” he thought.

Using his keys, he began rapping on the wall, three knocks at a time. Once — he believes it was during the second day — he heard someone knocking back. He was elated.

But no one came for him. Mr. Charahani slept some more, curling up on the steep stairs, his head resting on a second life jacket.

“Anytime I slept, there was a good chance of me sliding and falling back into the water,” he remembered thinking.

WATER RISES

As the hours passed, Mr. Charahani could see dimly at times the light seeming to come through the panel on the door.

The engine room’s windows were underwater. He tried to guess how submerged he was, unable to tell whether

the boat was still floating on the surface, or had sunk far beneath it.

He began to feel faint with hunger. His thoughts turned away from drowning toward starvation and heat exhaustion. The room was growing warmer and warmer. With his cupped hands he began to pour water over his head. But there was so much oil that soon he was covered in it. He banged on the walls, three strikes in quick succession.

A father of four, Mr. Charahani thought of his family, wondering what he could have done to make things better for them. How would his family survive after he died, he asked himself?

He had loved his job. What a fool he had been, he thought. Why had he chosen a dangerous job on the water, he wondered. He had never thought of his work as particularly dangerous before. But here he was, trapped.

The room was perhaps three-quarters full of water, he guessed. He wondered if he would have the strength to find and break one of the windows. His heart began to race as he imagined the final moments, when he would have to leave his ladder and try to get to the surface. He poured more water on himself trying to keep cool. Oil coated his face.

RESCUE

On Saturday morning, 42 or 43 hours after the ferry overturned, he felt a hand grasp his ankle. It was a scuba diver, part of a team recovering bodies. Mr. Charahani gave his leg a shake, he said, so the diver would know he was alive.

The diver greeted him. “Salaam alaikum.” Or peace be upon you.

“Are you O.K.?” the diver wanted to know. Mr. Charahani nodded.

The diver looked around for other survivors in the engine room.

“I’m alone,” the engineer said.

The diver disappeared, returning sometime later with others on his team. The divers conferred among themselves, planning the route out.

The sunlight overwhelmed him as he reached the surface, some time, he believes, before 10 a.m. on Saturday morning, Sept. 22. Ukara Island, the ferry’s destination, was there right in front of him.

On shore, he was loaded into an ambulance, which rushed toward the nearest health clinic, sirens blaring.

The ambulance came to a stop. A scrum of soldiers and medical workers lifted him up and carried him feet first toward the clinic. He was taken past coffins that lay on the dusty ground, through throngs of relatives still waiting for the bodies of their drowned loved ones.

“This is my second chance to live,” he thought.

Orton Kiishweko and Dotto Bulendu contributed reporting from Mwanza, Tanzania. Alain Delaquerière contributed research from New York.



GRACE AND CHARACTER

CHAUMET
PARIS

— L’art de la joaillerie depuis 1780 —

WORLD

Qaeda affiliates in Africa invoke Palestinians

DAKAR, SENEGAL

Militant attacks come after move of American Embassy to Jerusalem

BY DIONNE SEARCEY, DAVID M. HALBFINGER AND RUKMINI CALLIMACHI

When terrorists in Africa delivered two devastating attacks last month, they invoked a battle cry seldom heard in recent militant activity on the continent: the Palestinian cause.

The gunmen in a hotel complex in Kenya and a military installation in Mali were lauded by Al Qaeda's central leadership, which praised its branches in Somalia and Mali for the deadly attacks.

"We emphasize and appreciate the high efforts and beautiful words of all the vibrant jihadist work to prevent the Judaization of Palestine," a statement from the group's leaders said, according to SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors online extremist content.

The rallying cry, thousands of miles away from where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is playing out, was ordered up by Ayman al-Zawahri, the head of Al Qaeda who late last year reiterated calls for the group's franchises to target Zionists.

Major terrorist activities by Qaeda branches in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years seem motivated by other causes, security analysts said. They were intended to expand into new territory, lash out at Western military action or remind the world of Al Qaeda's relevance as global powers focused on its headline-grabbing rival, the Islamic State.

"We emphasize and appreciate the high efforts and beautiful words of all the vibrant jihadist work."

In the last two weeks, thousands of people have been streaming out of the last parcels of land under Islamic State control in Iraq and Syria. The group once controlled an area the size of Britain. "The Islamic State is, to a certain extent, on its back foot right now, allowing Al Qaeda an opportunity to remind people who they are and that they, too, have a geopolitical agenda," said Jason Warner, director of Africa research for West Point's Combating Terrorism Center.

The Qaeda affiliates behind the attacks in Mali and Kenya both cited the Palestinian cause as a motive.

In the first attack, gunmen from the Shabab, the East Africa branch of Al Qaeda, stormed a hotel complex in Nairobi and killed 14, with many more wounded. Days later in Mali, JNIM, a North African affiliate of Al Qaeda, targeted peacekeeping soldiers from Chad, killing 10 and wounding 25.

The attacks came seven months after President Trump moved the American Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the disputed holy city, which Mr. Trump recognized as the country's capital. Widely seen as inflaming tensions and as a demonstration of the administration's favoritism toward Israel in its long conflict with the Palestinians, the move drew condemnation at the time from many corners, including Al Qaeda and other extremist militant organizations.



KHALIL SENOSI/ASSOCIATED PRESS



MENAHEM KAHANA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Clockwise from top: Civilians fled as security forces fired at attacking Shabab militants at a hotel last month in Nairobi, Kenya; Shabab fighters preparing to enter Mogadishu, Somalia, in 2008; Ivanka Trump during the opening of the United States Embassy in Jerusalem. The Shabab has talked of liberating Jerusalem for more than a decade.



FARAH ABDI WARSAMEH/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The suffering of the Palestinians has long been an animating cause for Al Qaeda, a stand-in for the victimization of Muslims at the hands of Western powers. Biographies of Osama bin Laden say that as an adolescent, he cried watching news coverage of displaced Palestinians who had been forced off their land.

For its part, the Shabab has talked of liberating Jerusalem for more than a decade. And a past iteration of JNIM called for attacking Jews after Israel temporarily closed a prominent mosque in Jerusalem in 2017.

Al Qaeda appears to have seized on the moving of the embassy as a rationale for attacks.

"This rhetoric is, of course, exactly what it looks like: opportunistic exploitation of a major human rights issue

and geopolitical controversy," said Rita Katz, co-founder of SITE. "Outside of this rhetoric, Al Qaeda has not actually provided any sort of effective assistance to Palestinians."

Mr. Zawahri has been hammering on the issue in communications since at least September.

"When Trump insists on moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem as an open show of American recognition of Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel, his decision does not emerge from a vacuum; rather it is a clear-cut articulation of this Judeo-Christian bias," he said in one message, according to SITE, which provided a translation.

"Consider Palestine. Who leads the gang of criminals who have violated its sanctity? It is again America," Mr. Zawahri said.

Then, at the end of December, he urged Saudi Muslims to wage jihad and called on them to attack American and Israeli interests, according to SITE. He specifically cited the embassy move.

"When the Americans decided to reveal their blatant hostility to the Muslims, they did so without shame, where Trump announced the new stage, starting with the transfer of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem," he said.

For Israel, the violence may serve to advance its efforts to make common cause with African governments, particularly on security issues.

The attacks in Kenya and Mali also coincided with Israel's stepping up its influence on the African continent. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled to Chad days before the attack in Mali, which operatives cited as a reason for

targeting Chadians.

Since 2016, Israel has made a concerted strategic push into Africa, from Conakry, Guinea, on the Atlantic Coast to the Horn of Africa in the east. It reinstated long-severed diplomatic ties, chipping away at what had been a reliable bloc of votes against Israel in the United Nations and flexing its muscles in a part of the world where African solidarity with Muslim nations had for decades mandated the rejection of relations with Israel.

"Israel has returned to Africa, and in a big way," Mr. Netanyahu declared on a visit to Liberia in 2017.

The Israeli leader has made four trips to the continent since mid-2016, and a visit to Israel by the prime minister of Mali, another majority-Muslim country that cut its ties in the 1970s, is expected

Rape case against bishop shocks India's Catholics

INDIA, FROM PAGE 1

Details of the nun's accusations came from interviews with law enforcement officials, from her family and from the five other nuns who saw the saga unfold inside the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church.

Copies of the official complaints the nun addressed to the church authorities by email and post were provided to The New York Times. (The nun is not being named and her sister is being identified only by her first name because under Indian law, the media, including international news organizations, cannot identify rape victims.)

The nun's family accuses Bishop Mulakkal, 54, of raping her repeatedly over a two-year period, beginning May 5, 2014.

The bishop could not be reached for comment, but church officials and the Kerala police said he maintains that he is innocent.

The nun, who belongs to the Missionaries of Jesus religious order, first informed the church authorities of the alleged assaults in January 2017, approaching nearly a dozen church officials, including bishops, a cardinal and representatives of the Vatican. Some cautioned her to wait, assuring her that the church would take action. Other officials forbade her to go to the police, her family said.

The only action came in September, after the church's silence led five other nuns to stage a dayslong protest at Kerala's High Court.

They sat in front of a large poster of the Pietà, the sculpture housed in St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City depicting Mary holding the limp body of Jesus in her lap after his crucifixion. Instead of Jesus, the poster featured a nun's life-



SAMYUKTA LAKSHMI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Rev. Augustine Vattoly was an early supporter of the nun's accusations. He said he was ordered by his superiors to back away from the case or face repercussions.

less body. A placard read "Justice for nuns."

About two weeks after the protests started, the Vatican stripped Bishop Mulakkal of his administrative duties. The next day, Sept. 21, the Kerala police arrested him.

"Retrospectively, the church should have taken action quicker if we had known a crime had really happened. If she thought the church was not acting properly, she should have gone to the police sooner," said the Rev. Paul Karendan, a spokesman for the archdiocese that oversees the headquarters of the Syro-Malabar Church.

Father Karendan said that the church was slow to act at first, as they thought

the nun was resisting transfer orders given by Bishop Mulakkal.

In Kerala, it is not uncommon for families to have one or two daughters take vows as nuns. Statues of Mary and Jesus line the streets, and even weekday Mass is well attended.

India's Christians, who make up only about 2 percent of the country's population, tend to stand together during a crisis.

India's governing bloc, the Bharatiya Janata Party, or B.J.P., led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is rooted in Hindu nationalism. In that environment, the scandal in Kerala has pitted Christians who believe the case is a stark call for reform within the church

against those who want to maintain unity out of fear.

Mary Mavelly, a 36-year-old Catholic in Delhi, said she was willing to give the nuns the benefit of the doubt as opposed to her mother, who immediately stood by the bishop.

"For my mother, she thinks that in the current political climate if we put the church in a bad light it is an opportunity for B.J.P. to blow things out of proportion. For me, I want it treated as a criminal offense, and we should let the court decide," Ms. Mavelly said.

When Bishop Mulakkal was released on bail in October, he was cheered and showered with flower petals when he returned to his diocese. His church posted a large banner featuring his photo and proclaiming a "hearty welcome."

A senior policeman investigating the case said he believed that the authorities had sufficient evidence to charge Bishop Mulakkal with both raping the nun, and then intimidating her family and the families of the nuns who initiated the protest in an effort to silence them. The policeman spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the case.

"We are broken. The church we have given our lives to won't even give an ear to us," said Anupama Kelamangalathuvelli, a nun who served at the convent at the same time as the nun who said she had been raped.

"This fight isn't just for us," she added. "The church needs to listen to women and not just the priests and bishops."

In November 2017, Cardinal George Alencherry discouraged the nun from taking her case to the media or the police, according to the nun's family and the other nuns. Representatives of Cardinal Alencherry did not respond to requests for comment.

Desperate, the nun decided to take her case directly to the Vatican by writing to the pope's representative in India, Archbishop Giambattista Diquattro.

"No sooner I reached the room than he pulled me toward him. I was numbed and terrified by his act. I took all efforts to get out, but in vain. He raped me brutally," reads a letter the nun wrote to Archbishop Diquattro on January 28 of last year.

The letter went on to accuse Bishop Mulakkal of intimidating her and others into silence, and to explain how she had complained to various church authorities who failed to act.

Multiple emails and phone calls to Archbishop Diquattro requesting comment went unanswered.

"The church needs to listen to women and not just the priests."

Through more than a year of efforts to receive help within the church, she confided in five other nuns who had at one point lived with her at the convent, the St. Francis Mission Home, tucked away in thick jungle in rural Kerala.

In April last year, the five nuns, some who had been moved to other convents, defied church rules to slip away from their residences across India, taking buses and trains to travel hundreds of miles to join their sister and support her.

The nuns said they decided to go public only after Bishop Mulakkal filed several police cases against them and their families in June, accusing them of plotting his murder. The police said his accusations had been dismissed.

The nun wrote a second letter to Archbishop Diquattro on June 25, days after

soon, according to Israeli news media.

In January, Mr. Netanyahu traveled to Chad, where he restored ties that had been severed in 1972, calling it evidence of a "revolution in our relations with the Arab and Muslim world."

The push into Africa has not been welcomed by everyone in Israel. Some think Mr. Netanyahu should deal with issues closer to home.

Avi Gabbay, head of the left-leaning Labor Party and a candidate for prime minister, said that if Israel really wants to normalize, it needs to open ties with the Persian Gulf countries. And that is not going to happen without movement on the peace process, which under Mr. Netanyahu has been at a virtual standstill for years.

"Chad, all due respect, has about 12 million people, and I don't know how many have telephones or internet," Mr. Gabbay said. "Chad is just covering up for the fact that he's not dealing with the Palestinian issue."

As a tangible benefit to Israeli consumers from its African diplomacy, the Netanyahu government highlighted the possibility of commercial overflight agreements that would shorten the travel time from Tel Aviv to Latin America by a few hours. But the symbolic value of each large Muslim country that normalizes ties with Israel may far surpass any practical gains, experts said.

In East Africa, at least, Israel's efforts involve its own security concerns like preventing Hamas, the militant group that controls the Palestinian territory of Gaza, from importing Iranian weapons and munitions by the Red Sea. According to American officials, Israel bombed a weapons convoy bound for Gaza in Sudan in 2009, before Sudan broke off relations with Iran.

Similarly, Israel sees Ethiopia and Kenya as close allies against Islamists in Somalia who perpetrated the 2013 attack on the Israeli-owned Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, that killed 71 people. Israel has also turned to both Rwanda and Uganda to accept African migrants it wants to deport.

For African nations, Israel is attractive as a source of military expertise, arms and, in particular, military drones. Governments like Mali's, hard-pressed to control vast territories, see drones as a way to keep tabs on insurgent groups.

And Mr. Netanyahu's close relationship with President Trump has given him added cachet with African leaders eager to find favor with the White House.

On the civilian side, Israeli advances in drip-irrigation, desalination and water-purification technology promise to enhance agriculture in arid regions. Israel's small renewable-energy industry first brought solar power to Rwanda in 2015, and a year ago, Israel signed on to the American-led Power Africa initiative to bring electricity to 60 million homes.

The country's engagement in Africa may actually be coming full circle.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Israeli and African leaders bonded over their nations' anticolonial struggles as Israel aided African armies and paramilitary organizations.

The Arab boycott in the 1970s led to pressure on African leaders to cut ties with Israel, and Israel's response — forging close ties with what was then the apartheid government of South Africa — only worsened its standing elsewhere on the continent.

Dionne Searcey reported from Dakar, David M. Halbfinger from Jerusalem and Rukmini Callimachi from Baghdad.

Bishop Mulakkal filed his accusations with the police.

"I was waiting for the Catholic Church to give me justice," she wrote. The letter, written in halting English, said that as her situation grew worse, she was "forced to approach for the legal procedures."

Three days later, she went to the police and filed a complaint accusing Bishop Mulakkal of rape.

As the weeks went by, the church ordered the nuns to leave St. Francis and to return to their convents.

Worried that they would be evicted, and with the police slow to respond, the nuns decided in early September to take the nearly two-hour drive to Kochi, a major city in Kerala, and protest outside the High Court. When they returned the next day with their placards, they were surprised to see dozens of churchgoers, activists and even priests, holding their own signs demanding that Bishop Mulakkal be held accountable.

The nuns are now filing multiple civil cases against church officials in India, claiming that they tried to intimidate them to drop the case or ignored the rape accusations. The nuns are still at St. Francis, after having ignored repeated orders from the church authorities to disband. On Saturday, with the nuns planning another public protest, the church revoked those orders, giving the nuns a small victory.

"We took a vow to be in a congregation, to make the congregation our family," said Sister Josephine Villoonickal, one of the nuns ordered to return to her convent. "They are now trying to destroy this family."

Shalini Venugopal and Hari Kumar contributed reporting from New Delhi.



American soldiers at a training session for the Afghan Army. American and Afghan forces have increasingly carried out a series of attacks on Taliban leaders and fighters.

Attacks on Taliban stepped up

AFGHANISTAN, FROM PAGE 1
od the year before, said two Defense Department officials who described the campaign only on the condition of anonymity.

And Defense Department officials said a steady rise of support in funding and small arms to the Taliban — from Iran and Russia — could complicate not only the American military strategy but also larger peace efforts.

Last week, a Taliban delegation and Afghan politicians were among 50 negotiators who met in a Kremlin-owned hotel in Moscow. It was the most significant contact between senior Afghan leaders and the Taliban since the United States toppled the Islamist extremists after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

As the White House pushes to end the war, officials said General Miller has focused the relatively small number of American commandos in Afghanistan on killing the Taliban and its leaders. It is a strategy he has pursued throughout a career in the commando forces, including his last job as head of the shadowy Joint Special Operations Command.

In December, as the peace negotiations were continuing, Mr. Trump told Pentagon officials to plan to halve the 14,000 American forces in Afghanistan. On Wednesday, a Taliban official, Abdul Salam Hanafi, said in Moscow that the American negotiators had promised to withdraw 7,000 troops by April, a timeline that American diplomats and military officials based in Kabul, the Afghan capital, have denied.

Ultimately, military officials said, American counterterrorism forces could remain in Afghanistan even after the withdrawal of other troops, continuing to pursue the Islamic State or the hundreds of fighters from Al Qaeda still there. In the current calculations for a peace deal, the Taliban could take part in future Afghan governments but must agree to not let terrorist groups plan and launch attacks from Afghan soil.

Mr. Khalilzad said the United States hoped to complete a peace agreement before Afghan presidential elections scheduled for July. That was a shift from his earlier prediction that a deal could be achieved by April.

“We have a long way to go,” he said. “What we have achieved so far is signifi-



Zalmay Khalilzad, the American special envoy, said the Taliban did not see a military solution to the conflict. “They say they have learned from their mistakes,” he said.

cant, but these are two or three small steps in a long journey.”

Earlier military strategies to defeat the Taliban have been abandoned, including airstrikes on drug labs that have served as a key part of their financial pipeline, according to current and former military officials who have served in Afghanistan.

General Miller is gathering reconnaissance aircraft, artillery, air support and American and Afghan commandos against pockets of Taliban fighters

The Taliban have struck back with attacks against outposts and police checkpoints, including an Afghan intelligence base.

spread across the country. In recent “SecDef weekly” updates to the acting defense secretary, Patrick M. Shanahan, military officials said General Miller had highlighted the increasing number of Taliban fighters killed.

“Everything we do is focused on denying safe haven to terrorists — whether that be setting conditions for a political settlement with the Taliban, raiding alongside our Afghan partners or strik-

ing and killing ISIS and Al Qaeda,” said Col. Dave Butler, a spokesman for the American-led military mission in Afghanistan.

Taking place during Afghanistan’s colder months, the increased assaults have helped keep the Taliban engaged in peace talks while giving the beleaguered Afghan military time to regroup.

One senior Defense Department official said the Afghan military’s performance during each summertime fighting season since 2014 was worrying; if they continue, staggering casualties might point to a possible fracturing among the Afghan security forces.

Last month, President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan said 45,000 members of the security forces had died since he took office in 2014 — a much higher total than his government had previously acknowledged.

The fighting season in Afghanistan begins in the spring, coinciding with the end of the annual poppy harvest, and runs through the summer. The Taliban briefly seized control of Ghazni Province in August.

Attacking the Taliban through the winter, the senior Defense Department official said, could force the militant group to spend the spring and summer

reconstituting its forces instead of attacking towns and cities.

“We want to prolong these operations because it really brings the Taliban momentum down and decreases insurgents’ coordinated attacks against our security forces,” said Dadullah Qani, a member of the Farah provincial council.

But the Taliban have also struck back with attacks against outposts and police checkpoints. In late January, Taliban fighters overran an Afghan intelligence base in Wardak Province, killing dozens in what Afghan officials said was one of the deadliest assaults against the intelligence service of the war.

The ramped-up attacks against the Taliban come as the American military is also trying to fight the Islamic State in Khorasan, as the group’s affiliate in Afghanistan calls itself. Khorasan fighters have been firmly rooted in the country’s mountainous east since 2015, and their forces have steadily grown.

The strategy against the Taliban is reminiscent of the American military’s attempt to keep the North Vietnamese involved in peace talks in the early 1970s.

In 1972, the military launched an extensive bombing campaign around Hanoi and Haiphong, known as Operation Linebacker II, after North Vietnamese leaders rejected new diplomatic demands from the United States and South Vietnam and refused to set a date for further talks.

Some historians believe that the 11 days of bombing brought the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table. But the United States also made a series of concessions, which likely helped.

In Afghanistan, “at the last minute, we’re tripling down on all of our worst instincts of the past with hope it turns out differently,” said Jason Dempsey, who served as an Army infantry officer in Iraq and Afghanistan and is now an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security.

Thomas Gibbons-Neff reported from Washington, and Mujib Mashal from Kabul, Afghanistan. Reporting was contributed by Eric Schmitt in Washington, and Najim Rahim in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan; Taimoor Shah in Kandahar, Afghanistan; and David Zucchino in Kabul.

A death shows how women have advanced in military

BY RICHARD A. OPPEL JR.

Given who she really was, military officials had little choice in how they described Shannon Kent. They said only that she was a “cryptologic technician,” which anyone might assume meant that her most breakneck work was behind a desk.

In reality, she spent much of her professional life wearing body armor and toting an M4 rifle, a SIG Sauer pistol strapped to her thigh, on operations with Navy SEALs and other elite American forces — until a suicide bombing took her life last month in northeastern Syria.

She was, in all but name, part of the military’s top-tier Special Operations forces. Officially a chief petty officer in the Navy, she actually worked closely with the nation’s most secretive intelligence outfit, the National Security Agency, to target leaders of the Islamic State.

The last few years have seen a profound shift in attitudes toward women in combat roles. Since 2016, combat jobs have been open to female service members, and they have been permitted to try out for Special Operations units. More than a dozen have completed the Army’s Ranger school, one of the most challenging in the military. Some have graduated from infantry officer courses, and even command combat units. And in November, a woman completed the Army’s grueling Special Forces Assessment and Selection course, the initial step to becoming a Green Beret.

Yet Chief Kent illustrates an unspoken truth: that for many years women have been doing military jobs as dangerous, secretive and specialized as anything men do.

She would sometimes muse that the conversation — even with people who had top security clearances — would be simpler if she could just join a Special Operations unit.

“She’d tell me, ‘You can say what you do in two words, but I have to explain over and over to people what I do, and half of them don’t believe me;’” said her husband, Joe Kent, who recently retired after a 20-year career in the special forces. “As the years went on, she wished she could just say, ‘Hey, I’m Joe, and I’m a Green Beret.’”

“In many ways, she did way more than any of us who have a funny green hat.”

Only in death can friends and family talk about a life that showed just how far women had quietly advanced into the nucleus of the United States’ most elite forces.

“Her job was to go out and blend her knowledge of cryptology and sigint and humint to help the task force find the right guys to paint the ‘X’ on for a strike or a raid,” Mr. Kent said.

Cryptology is code breaking; sigint is signals intelligence, like intercepting and interpreting phone calls and other communications; humint is human intelligence, the art of persuading people, against their instincts, to provide information.

At 35, Shannon Kent was expert in all three. Her husband credits a knack for gleaning information picked up from her father, a lifelong police officer.

“She understood how all the pieces came together,” he said. “She wasn’t just relying on local informants. She knew how to fill in the gaps through her knowledge of different intelligence capabilities. She was kind of a one-stop-shop for finding bad guys.”

Chief Kent spoke a half-dozen Arabic dialects and four other languages. She was one of the first women to complete the rigorous course required for other troops to accompany Navy SEALs on raids. She could run a 3:30 marathon, do a dozen full-arm-hang pull-ups and march for miles with a 50-pound rucksack.

She did this while raising two boys, now ages 3 and 18 months, and, for a time, battling cancer.

She used her five overseas combat de-

ployments to master the collection of human intelligence, gaining the trust of tribal leaders, merchants, and local government officials who confided in her, often at great risk to themselves.

That is the kind of mission she had been on Jan. 16, when a bomber killed her and three other Americans at a restaurant in Manbij, Syria. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. She became the first female service member to die in Syria since American forces arrived in 2015.

She had enlisted for the same reasons and around the same time as many of her female peers: after Sept. 11, 2001. (Her father, a New York State Police commander, and her uncle, a firefighter, both responded to the attacks.)

By the time the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were reaching their highest pitch, women had been trained as intelligence collectors, linguists, interrogators and other specialty operatives that put them on the front lines.

Chief Kent developed skills that have become critical over the last two decades, including the immediate exploitation of documents, hard drives and other intelligence found during raids, and sophisticated methods of targeting that combined eavesdropping, human intelligence and relationship mapping.

Early in her career her language skills and easy manner had made her good at “tactical questioning” of people during missions. “That was her foot in the door,” Mr. Kent said.

“Back then I don’t think SEALs were enthusiastic about talking to locals, and Shannon found a place where she could be of value, and she poured her heart and soul into it,” he said.



Chief Petty Officer Shannon Kent, in Iraq in 2007, was an expert at breaking codes.

The Kents first met during intelligence targeting training at Fort Belvoir, Va., where Mr. Kent had been assigned to an Army Special Operations command after seven deployments to Iraq. They were married Christmas Eve 2014.

But for a cancer diagnosis — and the Pentagon bureaucracy — Chief Kent would not even have been in Syria.

After so many hard missions and becoming a mother, she had decided to become a clinical psychologist and treat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.

That meant becoming a Navy officer and spending six years studying and training. She was scheduled to go to the Navy’s Officer Development School in Rhode Island last June, and to begin her classes for her Ph.D. in the fall.

But she had been diagnosed with thyroid cancer in 2016. She told her husband, then on a deployment, only after the surgery was successful.

“She just sent me a picture of her throat scar and said, ‘I had a little cancer, but I got it cut out. I didn’t want to bug you,’” Mr. Kent said.

Even though she was considered cancer-free, the military’s rules blocked her from becoming a commissioned officer. But the rules still allowed her to deploy to the most hard-fought combat zones.

She pressed her case with congressional representatives, and her husband followed up with the Navy after her death. Last week, the Navy modified its rules to make it easier for enlisted service members who wish to become officers to petition for medical waivers.

“The Navy fixed everything that kind of screwed Shannon,” Mr. Kent said.

A young island may reveal clues to how water shaped Mars

BY NIRAJ CHOKSHI

Four years ago, an underwater volcano erupted in the South Pacific, creating a new island. And NASA took notice.

The island’s evolution could hold clues to how water might have shaped similar features on Mars billions of years ago, NASA officials believed, so the American space agency began collecting satellite photos to track how the elements were carving and clawing away at the land.

The images yielded insights into how the island was eroding, but the story they told was limited. NASA could wring more information from those photographs with measurements taken from the ground, but James Garvin, the chief scientist at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md., could not justify the cost of sending a team. Then an opportunity presented itself.

The Sea Education Association, a study abroad program, was planning to take a group of college students and faculty and staff members to the island, and NASA was welcome to hitch a ride.

Mr. Garvin jumped at the chance, sending along Dan Slayback, a research scientist for NASA who had been working on the effort to track the island’s pro-

gression. Mr. Slayback sailed on that trip last fall, finding an island of black rock that was, to his surprise, also teeming with life. “It was very dramatic,” he said. “Just beautifully dramatic.”

The island, part of Tonga, is about 500 acres in size and about 1,300 miles northeast of New Zealand. It has not yet been named, but is unofficially referred to as Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai, a combination of the names of the two older, uninhabited islands it sits between. (A land bridge connects all three.)

Its most prominent features are a turquoise lake and a croissant-shaped ridge — the remnants of a cone made from hardened volcanic ash — that stretches about 400 feet high and about a mile across, Mr. Slayback said.

After spending years staring at satellite photographs of the island, he was overwhelmed to finally see the landscape up close in early October. He was also eager to get to work.

The satellite photos reveal how the island has eroded over time, but their level of detail is limited without three-dimensional points of reference as context. So, with the help of the students, Mr. Slayback roamed the island with a finely tuned GPS device, recording the location of various features visible in the



The island in the Pacific that was created in 2014 from a volcanic eruption. NASA scientists are comparing it with volcanic shapes and erosion patterns on Mars.

photographs with an accuracy of a few inches.

Those measurements will allow the NASA team to refine the models it had created and more narrowly track erosion going forward, Mr. Garvin said.

“Instead of a map with a resolution the size of a chair that you’d sit at your desk in, we have a map of the topography, the three-dimensionality, of this new island that’s good to the size of a few fingers,” he said.

With those finer models, scientists can better compare the changing shape of Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai to volcanic shapes and erosion patterns on Mars to better understand the degree to which water was present there and the role it might have played in shaping the landscape.

In addition to helping Mr. Slayback with the measurements, the students and faculty collected rock samples and documented the vegetation growing on the island. They were also surprised to find a thriving bird population.

“The number of birds, the number of bird eggs, the number of baby chicks was astounding,” Rachel Scudder, the chief scientist for the Sea Education Association, said. “There were places where we could not actually get up to the wall of the caldera for fear of stepping on baby chicks.”

The birds included nesting sooty terns and at least one barn owl, Mr. Slayback said. The group also found grass and beach morning glories sprouting from soil-like patches on the island’s otherwise barren, rocky surface.

They came across signs of human life, too: Garbage was strewn about parts of the island. Most of it was probably churned up last year by Tropical Cy-

clone Gita, though some of the trash might have been left behind by visitors from nearby islands, according to Jeffrey Wescott, an anthropology professor with the program. The students filled and removed about a dozen bags of trash, most of it plastic bottles.

The volcanic eruption that birthed the island occurred in December 2014, sending ash as high as 30,000 feet into the air and disrupting flights. The island was formed in part when that ash fell back to earth and hardened after mixing with warm water, Mr. Garvin said.

NASA originally thought the island might not last a decade.

When the island was created, the NASA team thought it might not survive much longer than a decade. (That was part of the reason it could not justify sending a team there.) Now, after sampling rocks from the island, visiting it and watching it weather the elements, the team expects it to remain for anywhere from a few decades to hundreds of years. “Right now, things look good,” Mr. Garvin said. “The island may be cementing itself.”

WORLD

Virginia scandals test the limits of forgiveness

Americans confront ritual of politicians apologizing for missteps of the past

BY JULIE BOSMAN AND JOHN ELIGON

They are very, very sorry, they tell their constituents, lips pursed, eyes downcast, forehead sweat glistening in front of the television cameras as they try to explain their transgressions. Implicit in their words of remorse is a question: Will you forgive me?

That wearying American political ritual repeated itself once again during a circuslike week in Virginia that was thick with accusations and apologies. The governor, Ralph Northam, and the attorney general admitted to wearing blackface in the 1980s; the lieutenant governor has been accused of sexual assault by two separate women; and the majority leader in the State Senate was revealed to be a top editor of a 1968 college yearbook whose pages included racial slurs and pictures of students in blackface.

But the chaos in Virginia spilled over the state's borders, plunging Americans into an uncomfortable bout of national soul-searching on matters of wrongs and redemption. They flipped through tattered yearbooks. They thought about how Jesus might respond. They considered questions that went beyond one state's gut-wrenching political scandal: When is it right to forgive, and when is an act unforgivable?

The now-infamous photograph on Mr. Northam's page of his medical school yearbook — in which one man wore blackface and the other a Ku Klux Klan robe — has prompted plenty of reactions. There has been shock at seeing the national sin of racism on such stark display. There has been talk of youthful indiscretions and paying for behavior so egregious it cannot be swept away.

Some Americans have wondered about lesser failings of their own, particularly acts as a younger person that were stupid or cruel. Others recalled incidents they had witnessed — an ill-advised costume, an alcohol-impaired decision, a failure of judgment — but not necessarily condemned at the time. Many came to the conclusion they had nothing in their closets even close to slathering shoe polish on their faces or wearing a costume of the Klan and smiling into the camera.

The yearbook image being scrutinized in Virginia prompted Wayne Lomax, a minister who pastors a non-denominational church in Miami Gardens, Fla., to ponder the concept of forgiveness.

“I think all of our views on forgiveness change over time, particularly as we recognize our own mortality and moral failures,” said Mr. Lomax, who added that forgiving the governor does not mean believing he should stay in office.

Joseph Werns, a computer programmer in Murrysville, Pa., said that after



Gov. Ralph Northam of Virginia, at the governor's mansion with his wife, Pam. Mr. Northam apologized for wearing blackface in the 1980s but has said he would not resign.



Demonstrators outside the governor's mansion in Richmond called for Mr. Northam to resign after images from his medical school yearbook were made public.

watching the events in Virginia, particularly Mr. Northam's apology, he thought about his own family.

Up until five years ago, Mr. Werns casually used homophobic slurs. “What are you, gay?” he recalled saying.

His older son, who is transgender, explained to him why those words were offensive, and Mr. Werns stopped.

“When my son came out, he sought to educate me, and that's when I learned,” Mr. Werns said, adding that sometimes he slips up and uses the wrong pronouns, but corrects himself. “I might have thought I was being funny, but I wasn't. I would hate to be judged on that person I was.”

Should change count for something, Americans wondered aloud, or does an earlier failing itself make any evolution of thinking and behavior moot? The answer was by no means agreed upon, particularly as people pondered a range of failings too disparate and different to be weighed one against the other.

For elected officials, though, a different truth held: They chose to place themselves on display, knowing that past errors could be fodder for public discussion. Forgiveness seems harder to grant when it comes to those held up as leaders or role models.

“All of our views on forgiveness change over time, particularly as we recognize our own mortality and moral failures.”

Stuart Clark, a 66-year-old retired teacher from Virginia Beach, said he took into consideration the person's position. Politicians, for instance, should be held to a higher standard than celebrities, he said. (The actor Liam Neeson said on Tuesday he was “not a racist” after an interview in which he revealed that in the past he had hoped to kill a “black bastard” after a friend told him

she had been raped by a black man.)

And timing matters, but it's a sliding, shifting scale: There is no agreed-upon statute of limitations for a long-ago failing and people measure errors through their own benchmarks of time and memory. Someone who is a high school student might be given more leeway than someone earning an advanced degree or well into adulthood.

Shouldn't Mr. Northam, many people asked, have been mature enough in medical school to know better than to allow the offensive photograph to be posted beside his name and image?

“He thought that was O.K. to put that photograph out to the public,” Mr. Clark said. “He was a grown man who made a conscious decision about something.”

Mr. Northam initially acknowledged that he was in the photograph and apologized, then reversed course and said he was sure it was not him, though he simultaneously acknowledged using shoe polish to darken his face for a Michael Jackson costume.

Sylvainia Preston, 60, a retired teacher living in Virginia Beach, said that the explosive week had resurfaced memories of her own, when she was in college and had taunted women who were trying to join her sorority.

“I regret that in my life,” she said, adding that the experience influences how she views others when they make mistakes. “What do you have to stand on when you know that you haven't always been a saint all your life?”

The nation's mood on forgiveness is by no means static. The tumult in Virginia brought up memories of other politicians' scandals. MacRae O'Brien, 40, a school social worker in Alexandria, Va., who voted for Mr. Northam but believed he should resign, thought of President Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky. At the time, Ms. O'Brien believed Mr. Clinton deserved to stay in office. The #MeToo movement has made her think differently about which politicians are deserving of redemption.

“I feel bad that I maybe assumed, like most people, that she was the one to be blamed,” she said. “And over the years I've placed more of my disappointment and blame on Bill Clinton.”

But it is clear that forgiving politicians is not the same as trusting them.

“You can be forgiven, but you might not be qualified to be a leader,” said Nikki Louie, a 33-year-old homemaker living in Virginia Beach. “Forgiveness doesn't equal trust.”

For her, physical transgressions like sexual assault or violence are more difficult to forgive than verbal ones. And for anyone to earn forgiveness, she said, they have to seek it and show that they deserve it with their behavior.

“If someone makes an off-color joke once,” she said, “O.K., like everyone says stupid stuff. I can forgive what people say a little bit more. When it becomes a pattern of their reputation, then it's a little harder.”

Audra D. S. Burch contributed reporting.

Opponents of border wall organize acts of defiance

Protests have been held, resolutions passed and aid allocated for migrants

BY JAMIE STOCKWELL

As a political fight rages in Washington over President Trump's demand for \$5.7 billion in border wall funding, there have been spirited acts of resistance on the United States-Mexico border.

Protests have been held, resolutions passed and initiatives funded to help the very people the wall is aimed to keep out.

BUTTERFLIES VS. THE BORDER WALL

Bulldozers arrived last week near the National Butterfly Center in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, signaling the Trump administration's intention to begin construction on a steel and concrete barrier that would swallow more than two-thirds of the 100-acre wildlife refuge and botanical garden. The nonprofit center, which abuts the Rio Grande, sits on the path of a six-mile stretch of wall that has already been funded.

Federal government officials had said construction was scheduled to begin this month, despite an ongoing lawsuit filed by the center more than a year ago, said the center's director, Marianna Trevino Wright. The center planned to file a restraining order to prevent workers from beginning construction on the wall, which would rise to 36 feet in some areas.

The federal government waived 28 environmental laws to expedite construction.

The Rio Grande Valley is one of the most biologically diverse regions in the country and a major bird migration corridor, with more than 500 species recorded.

In a campaign on the website Go-FundMe that has raised more than half of a \$100,000 goal to pay for legal fees associated with ongoing litigation against the Trump administration, the center's director wrote that the issue “is not whether butterflies can fly over a wall, but whether private property (farms, businesses, homes) should be seized and destroyed for a project that does not serve the greater good or enhance national security.”

EL PASO DISPUTES TRUMP'S CLAIMS

In his State of the Union address last Tuesday, Mr. Trump claimed the border city of El Paso was once among America's most violent cities — until a “powerful barrier” was constructed. And then, “immediately upon its building,” it became “one of the safest cities in our country.”

But that is not true. Before border fencing was erected in El Paso, the city of about 680,000 residents had the second-lowest violent crime rate among more than 20 cities of similar size. In 2010, after the barrier was built, that rate held that spot.

Residents and elected officials immediately took to social media to dispel the notion that border cities are dangerous.

Mr. Trump is scheduled to hold a 2020 campaign rally on Monday in El Paso, where about 26 percent of registered voters cast ballots for him two years ago. El Paso is also the hometown of Beto O'Rourke, the Democratic former congressman who has said he's considering jumping into the crowded field of candidates vying to challenge the president.

Few elected officials were enthusiastic about the president's coming visit, with one, State Representative César J. Blanco, issuing a statement that said the president's “fear-mongering and lies have hurt our border economy and community.” Mr. Blanco, a Democrat whose House District 76 includes part of El Paso County, said the city “should not be rolling out the red carpet, so he can come lie in our backyard.”

The city's mayor, Dee Margo, a Republican, also quickly defended El Paso, saying on Twitter late Tuesday night that the city's law enforcement officers kept the border community safe.

NATIONAL GUARD LEVEL CUT

Shortly before Mr. Trump appeared before Congress on Tuesday to deliver a speech that would again include arguments for a border wall, New Mexico's governor announced she had ordered a partial withdrawal of National Guard troops from her state.

“New Mexico will not take part in the president's charade of border fear-mongering by misusing our diligent National Guard troops,” Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Democrat, said in a statement. Her decision was a reversal of her



A demonstration in El Paso against the proposed border wall. Many residents object to President Trump's descriptions of the Texas city.

predecessor's deployment of 118 National Guard personnel last April.

About a dozen guardsmen will remain in the southwestern part of the state, she said, to help with humanitarian aid for migrants who cross the border into the United States. And she directed the deployment of six state police officers to assist local law enforcement officers in Hidalgo County, saying she recognized the county's “legitimate concerns” about the number of asylum seekers arriving in the state.

Hundreds of migrants have surrendered to the Border Patrol in New Mexico in recent weeks, including children in need of immediate medical care — a situation state officials say is without precedent.

Prompting these trips to ever-more-remote border locations: The nearly 700

miles of border wall and fencing built since 2006, and the Trump administration's increasingly rigid immigration policies aimed at deterring the flow of migrant families, mostly from Central America, who have streamed in from Mexico since 2014.

CITY COUNCIL SAYS NO BARBED WIRE

About 20,000 people live in Nogales, Ariz., and close to another half-million live across the border in Nogales, Mexico. A fence about 10 feet tall divides the two, but like most communities along the United States-Mexico border, their economies, cultures and daily lives are intertwined.

In November, the United States military descended on Nogales and promptly got to work installing barbed wire at the port of entry and atop the in-

ternational border wall. This month, the military added horizontal strands of wire to the United States side of the fence, from the top of the wall to the ground.

On Wednesday, the Nogales City Council passed a resolution condemning the installation of the wire, calling it an “indiscriminate use of lethal force” that is “typically only found in a war, battlefield or prison setting.” With its sharp razor-like blades, barbed wire is “designed to entangle its victim as the razors slice/cut deeply in to the flesh” and would kill anyone who tried to scale the wall.

The City Council said it wanted the federal government to remove the wire, and has vowed to sue the Trump administration if that does not happen. The resolution came one day after Mr. Trump addressed the nation and im-



A butterfly at the National Butterfly Center, which is fighting plans to build a border wall on its site in South Texas.

plored Americans to support his case for a border wall.

Barbed wire has been installed on fencing across Arizona, Texas and California.

CALIFORNIA HELPS ASYLUM SEEKERS

In California, where about 105 miles of the state's 140-mile border with Mexico have some sort of fencing, elected officials have pushed back against the Trump administration's pledge to fill in the spaces. Residents of Calexico, a small border town that recently saw the completion of renovations to a steel barrier, chafed at the barbed wire that also was installed, with one chalking it up to political propaganda from a White House that cannot fathom life along the southwest frontier.

Gov. Gavin Newsom of California has asked state lawmakers to provide \$5 million in immediate funding to local charities that help asylum seekers. The aid would be followed by another \$20 million over three years, intended to assist groups that have helped migrants who were dropped off by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents at bus stations.

As the number of migrant families in recent months has overwhelmed the government's detention facilities, the Trump administration has drastically reduced its efforts to ensure the migrants' safety after they are released. Stepping into the void has been a growing network of charities, expanding along the border from California to Texas.

Business

Proposals to tax the wealthy gain traction

Democrats’ policy ideas that had seemed unlikely are getting a big response

BY PATRICIA COHEN AND MAGGIE ASTOR

The only thing more startling than the flurry of tax proposals Democrats have unveiled in recent weeks is the full-throttle response they’ve gotten from the American public.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez suggested a near doubling of the top income-tax rate. Senator Bernie Sanders, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats, introduced a bill to raise taxes on dynastic heirs. And Senator Elizabeth Warren proposed a levy that has never existed in the United States: a wealth tax, assessed annually on America’s biggest fortunes.

The soak-the-rich plans — ones that were only recently considered ridiculously far-fetched or political poison — have received serious and sober treatment, even by critics, and remarkably broad encouragement from the electorate. Roughly three out of four registered voters surveyed in recent polls supported higher taxes on the wealthy. Even a majority of Republicans back higher rates on those earning more than \$10 million, according to a Fox News poll conducted in mid-January.

Riding the momentum of a 40-seat pickup in the midterm elections, Democrats are bringing to the fore audacious policy ideas that have been simmering mostly on the sidelines. As the middle class continues to thin out and wealth concentrates among a tiny sliver of Americans, the party’s powerhouses are questioning economic verities that have stood for decades.

Not since President Bill Clinton urged Americans to embrace a hands-off, neoliberal approach to markets — declaring in his 1996 State of the Union address that “the era of big government is over” — have Democrats experimented with such a shift in fundamental economic assumptions. Taxes, deficits, spending, financial deregulation — everything is up for appraisal.

“This is clearly a tectonic shift in what

Democrats are willing to propose,” said William Gale, a co-director of the non-partisan Tax Policy Center, referring specifically to the latest tax proposals. “It just feels like a very different environment for policy discussions than, say, two or three months ago.”

The new terrain comes with risks, revealing potential philosophical and tactical fault lines among Democrats, who must decide whether to get out in front of the movement or exercise caution. Some hopefuls for the party’s 2020 nomination, certainly, are staking out more moderate positions — a group that includes former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. and younger challengers like Senators Kamala Harris, Kirsten Gillibrand and Cory Booker. And it is an open question whether aggressively redistributive tax plans will continue to resonate with voters or come to be seen as a move to the hard left that alienates the middle of the country.

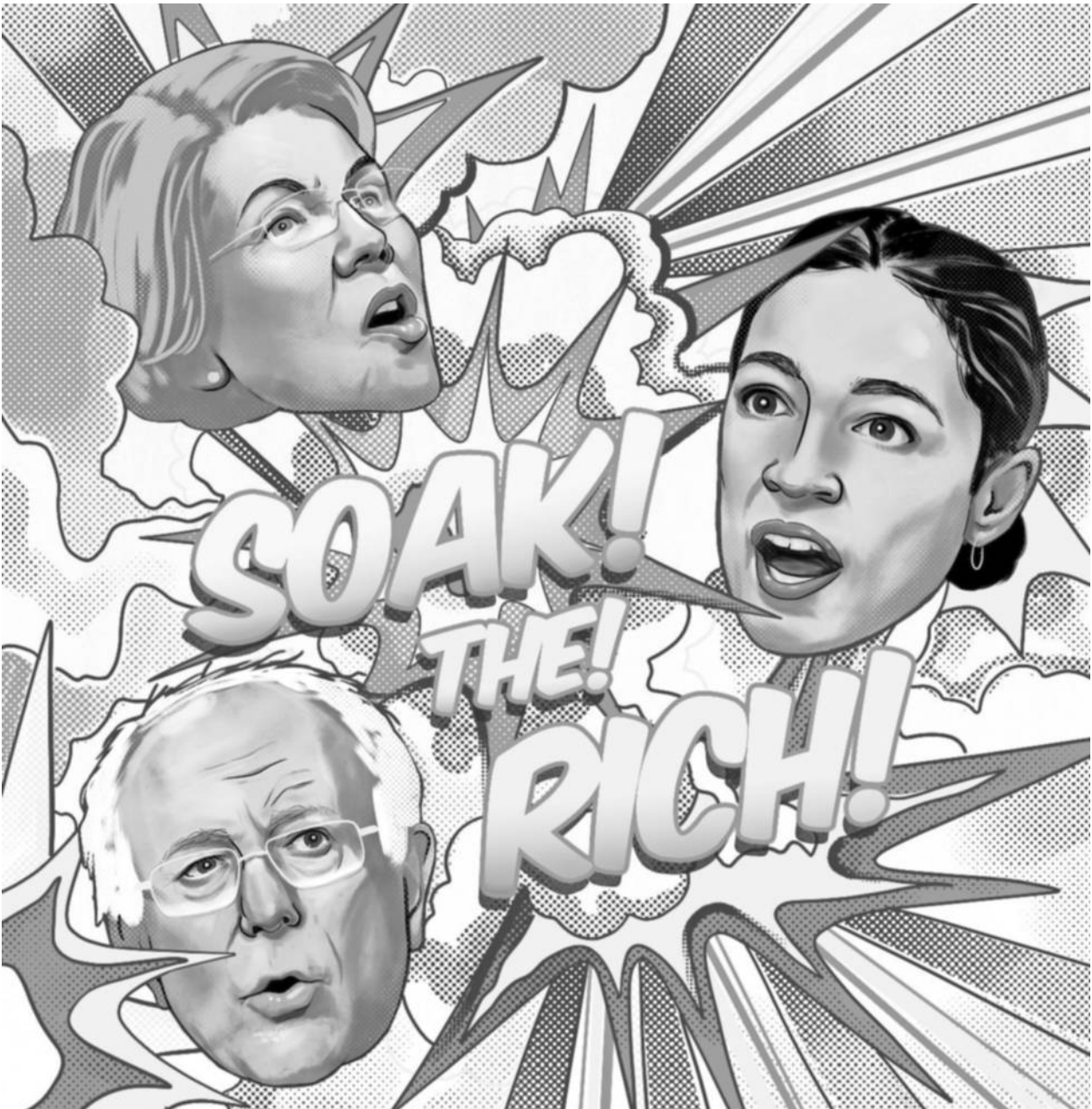
Perhaps sensing an opening, President Trump used his State of the Union address to observe: “Here in the United States, we are alarmed by new calls to adopt socialism in our country.” He added, “Tonight, we resolve that America will never be a socialist country.”

What is palatable politically and economically, though, has been refigured by Mr. Trump’s own unorthodox presidency — and by the brushoff Republicans gave the deficit when they passed a \$1.5 trillion tax bill in 2017 that primarily benefited upper-income households and corporations.

Those developments are helping shoot-the-moon visions on the left — like “Medicare for all” or a “Green New Deal” — to halt climate change with enormous public investment — find firmer footing on political ground. The result is that ideas that have long nipped at the edges of the political conversation are now smack in the middle of it, and think tanks, industry groups and candidates are earnestly analyzing their costs and benefits.

The latest string of ambitious tax proposals all “pass a plausibility smell test,” said Jared Bernstein, former chief economic adviser to Mr. Biden.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, for instance, billionaires and business professors discussed



JONATHAN BARTLETT

Ms. Ocasio-Cortez’s views on tax rates.

“There are an increasing number of Democrats who believe they have the clearance to do something big and bold,” Mr. Bernstein said. “I think the critics will be less successful.”

WHAT’S IN THE PLANS?

Ms. Warren, who formally announced her presidential bid over the weekend, has gone the furthest in marrying big ideas and granular wonkiness, with a plan that calls for an extra 2 percent an-

nual tax not on income but on all assets — like stocks, real estate and art — owned by households above the \$50 million level. The rate would rise to 3 percent on fortunes above \$1 billion. The Massachusetts senator’s campaign esti-

You call that meat?

SAN FRANCISCO

Some ranchers want to bar the word from lab-grown and vegetarian products

BY NATHANIEL POPPER

The cattle ranchers and farm bureaus of the United States are not going to give up their hold on the word meat without a fight.

In recent weeks, beef and farming industry groups have persuaded legislators in more than a dozen states to introduce laws that would make it illegal to use the word meat to describe burgers and sausages that are created from plant-based ingredients or are grown in labs. Just this month, new meat-labeling bills were introduced in Arizona and Arkansas.

These meat alternatives may look and taste and even bleed like meat, but cattle ranchers want to make sure that the new competition can’t use the meat label.

“The word meat, to me, should mean a product from a live animal,” said Jim Dinklage, a rancher and the president of the Independent Cattlemen of Nebraska, who has testified in support of meat-labeling legislation in his state.

The push for state labeling laws is a reflection of how quickly start-ups like Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods, which produce burgers from plant-based ingredients, have grown to challenge the traditional meat industry. Sales of plant-based meat substitutes in-

creased 22 percent to \$1.5 billion last year, according to Euromonitor International, a market research firm.

Other start-ups are getting closer to being able to create chicken nuggets and sausage from actual meat cells grown in a lab. Even though it is not yet commercially viable, traditional meat producers are worried the lab-grown meat could eventually become a low-cost alternative with little regulatory oversight.

“About a year and a half ago, this wasn’t on my radar whatsoever,” said Mark Dopp, the head of regulatory affairs at the North American Meat Association. “All of a sudden, this is getting closer. This is likely to happen in the near future, and we need to have a regulatory system in place to deal with it.”

Meat producers say they don’t want to lose control of labeling like the dairy industry, which lost its battle to keep almond and soy producers from using the word milk on their beverages. Egg and even mayonnaise producers have faced similar fights.

“Almonds don’t produce milk,” said Bill Pigott, a Republican state representative in Mississippi who wrote the legislation there. He owns a farm that has produced both dairy and beef. But his worries have gone beyond almond and soy liquids.

“The fake, lab-produced meat is a little bit more of a science fiction-type deal that concerns me more,” Mr. Pigott said.

He introduced his bill in January after the local association of cattle ranchers contacted him. It passed in Mississippi’s House and is waiting for debate in the State Senate.

The various legislative efforts are

likely to face tough challenges — and not just from vegetarians.

A bill in Virginia was voted down after lawmakers received a letter from the National Grocers Association, the Grocery Manufacturers Association and the Plant Based Foods Association that defended increasingly popular products. It said requiring “new and unfamiliar packaging would only confuse shoppers and frustrate retailers at a time when demand for such options is at an all-time high,” growing at 23 percent a year.

The most restrictive proposal, in Washington State, would make it a crime to sell lab-grown meat and would bar state funds from being used for research in the area because some lawmakers say not enough is known about it to consider it safe. The bill has not yet come up for a vote.

Surprising coalitions are forming around the future of lab-grown meat. The North American Meat Association has said it wants lab-grown meat to be referred to as meat to ensure that new products are not able to shirk the regulations applied to traditional meat. And most large meat companies have stayed out of the debate. Some of them, including Tyson and Cargill, have made investments in lab-grown-meat start-ups.

In Nebraska, a meat-labeling bill was written by Carol Blood, a Democratic state senator from suburban Omaha. Despite her last name, Ms. Blood has been a vegan for years. She said she had decided to pursue her bill after overhearing two women in her local Fresh Thyme supermarket expressing confusion about whether a package of Beyond Meat burgers contained animal flesh.

MEAT, PAGE 8



ANTHONY L. LINDSEY/IMPOSSIBLE FOODS

Impossible Foods’ burgers, which are made from plant-based ingredients. Meat producers don’t want to lose control of labeling.

“Gripping, disturbing and ferociously addictive.”
—Esquire

“A scary but astonishingly informative new podcast.”
—The Guardian

“Essential listening, full stop.”
—New York Magazine

The New York Times
Caliphate

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BUSINESS

When rich families squabble, their lawyers win

Wealth Matters

PAUL SULLIVAN

There are private family squabbles, and then there are family squabbles that splash into public view, shining a spotlight on a bitter dispute.

Take the case of Belinda Neumann-Donnelly, who sued her father, Hubert Neumann, claiming he drove down the price of Jean-Michel Basquiat’s “Flesh and Spirit,” which sold for \$30.7 million at auction last May.

But Ms. Neumann-Donnelly, representing her mother’s estate, claims that the painting could have fetched far more had it not been for her father’s interference. He had sued the auction house, Sotheby’s, to block the sale, an effort that she said had scared off potential buyers.

In her suit, she described her father as “the epitome of the child with rich parents who wakes up on third base and thinks he hit a triple.”

Last month, Ms. Neumann-Donnelly filed another lawsuit, this time against her father and two sisters, to try to force them to sell art held in trust that had a value estimated to be more than \$50 million.

Despite the large sums of money, the fight is a family squabble like any other, although one that played out in New York newspapers and trade publications. Most people would want to avoid such costly and destructive courtroom battles, but they are increasingly common. In fact, legal action among family members has become a booming business for lawyers who specialize in estate litigation.

“If I was mentoring a young lawyer, I’d direct him to the trust and estate litigation practice,” said Jeffrey P. Geida, the head of tax and estate planning at Weinstock Manion, a law firm in Los Angeles. “We can’t hire enough attorneys.”

One reason for the uptick in litigation, Mr. Geida said, is that blended families, where a couple has children from previous relationships, often divide into factions that are rife with conflicting interests.

Another reason is there is simply so much wealth now to argue over, said Amanda K. DiChello, a trusts and estates lawyer at Cozen O’Connor’s private client services practice.

The Neumann case is not an outlier, she said. “It doesn’t matter the amount of wealth,” she said. “There are plenty of cases where people will fight over \$500,000 or \$300,000.”

But what’s good for young lawyers building a career is not good for families that want harmony — or at least want to avoid squandering millions on legal bills.

Avoiding destructive family squabbles is both straightforward and incredibly complex. Family members must be willing to put in effort that may be unpleasant and difficult.

Step one is to talk through the plan.



Jean-Michel Basquiat’s “Flesh and Spirit,” which sold for \$30.7 million. Belinda Neumann-Donnelly has sued her father, Hubert Neumann, saying he drove down the price.

That’s easier said than done.

“There is no magic solution to address a conflict,” said Blanche Lark Christerson, managing director at Deutsche Bank Wealth Management. “Underneath it all is the simmering resentment that ‘Mom always liked you better.’ Maybe that is true. But it’s advisable to talk someone out of this example.”

Ms. Christerson, who has three decades of experience advising wealthy families, said she had counseled parents who divided their estate unequally to discuss the reasons and the ramifications.

Often these talks are not about dividing the money as much as they are about defining a family’s values and addressing existing conflicts. Understanding that allows parents to put a plan in place, along the lines of governance principles that companies use.

“You can then say, ‘This is the contract we have as a family. God forbid, if conflict does arise, we can look back and say this is the path we should be walking down,’” said Zachary Conway, managing director of Conway Wealth Group.

Unequal divisions of estates are often just an extension of how parents treated their children while the parents

were alive. But without them around to explain their actions, their children are left to create their own stories, which can deepen an existing rivalry.

When it comes to the estate itself — often a mix of cash, securities, homes and tangible objects like art, cars and collections — a lack of clear reasons for the divisions can create conflict.

Paul Karger, co-founder and managing partner of TwinFocus, which advises ultra-wealthy families, said the most difficult things to divide were what he calls troubled assets, which are so complex that they defy the capabilities of most wealth managers.

He cited the example of a billionaire who, before he died, had troubled assets, including a yacht, two jets and real estate developments that were all uncompleted. All of the assets were valuable, but the exact amounts were unknown, and his heirs did not know who was to inherit what.

“The way to guard against this is to be as detailed as possible,” Mr. Karger said. “We even suggest, where great wealth isn’t a factor, that parents have a side letter saying who gets this furniture or that clock.”

If an estate is going to be divided unequally, the heirs should know ahead of time.

In the case of the Neumann Basquiat, Ms. Neumann-Donnelly claimed in a suit that her mother had written her father out of the will and left the painting to her alone. Lawyers say disinheriting someone almost always guarantees a family fight.

Dean R. Nicyper, a partner at the law firm Withers Worldwide, said parents might feel they had justifiable reasons for writing a child out of their will.

“During their lifetime, a particular event arose or there was a long time with no contact and the parent says, ‘I see no reason why I should give my child anything; he was never here for me,’ or, ‘He did something and I can’t forgive him,’” Mr. Nicyper said.

In some instances, reaching a resolution may be impossible. Selling assets held jointly may be the only solution. Ms. Neumann-Donnelly argued in her court filing that owning the artworks with her father and sisters was no longer possible, so they should be sold and the proceeds divided evenly.

“That’s how court resolves this,” Mr. Nicyper said. “You often see this with big estates with one big piece of property. After five generations, you don’t have two people owning it, you have 40 people.”

Selling assets and splitting the money is fair in the eyes of the courts, but it often does not tamp down inflamed emotions. Often, they are family heirlooms, not securities in a portfolio.

There are legal strategies to address this, including an in terrorem, or no-contest, clause. In exchange for not suing the estate, for instance, the person who is disinherited is given a token amount that will be forfeited if a suit is filed.

Not every state allows these clauses. Florida, where some of the wealthiest Americans claim residency, does not allow in terrorem clauses. The State of New York allows them but with caveats.

“If there’s something fishy in a will, people should be able to say that,” Ms. Christerson said. “It boils down to transparency and what you have and what your plans are.”

If parents do not lay out their wishes in complex family situations, they need to understand that litigation is a possibility.

“I always try to understand why a party is litigating a case when their position is flatly wrong,” Ms. DiChello said. “There’s always a deep history of emotion.”

You call that meat? Not so fast, ranchers say

MEAT, FROM PAGE 7

“I don’t care that it says burger — I care that it says it’s meat,” Ms. Blood said. “I have this thing that sticks in my craw when people are trying to be deceitful.”

Beyond Meat is not, in fact, produced with any meat. It gets its trademark bloody look from beet juice.

“We provide the consumer with meat made from plants, and believe that it is reasonable for the consumer and for us to refer to our products as plant-based meats,” the chief executive of Beyond Meat, Ethan Brown, said in an email.

Last year, Missouri passed the first law that barred companies from “misrepresenting a product as meat that is not derived from harvested production livestock or poultry.”

That law has been challenged in court by the company Tofurky, which specializes in tofu and other soy-based foods, as well as the local branch of the American Civil Liberties Union and other groups.

Sarah Sorscher, who works on regulatory affairs at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, said there was little evidence that consumers were confused by the labeling of alternative meat companies.

“We think the issue of whether they use a term like meat is a proxy for this bigger issue, which is that the meat industry is concerned about competition from these products,” Ms. Sorscher said. “The bills don’t seem to be directed at solving a problem in the marketplace. It is about fighting off competition.”

Beyond Meat has received assurances from the authorities in Missouri that its labels make it clear that the product is not meat and will not run afoul of the new law.

The Good Food Institute, which represents both plant-based meat companies and cell-based-meat start-ups, has scrambled to get employees and lobbyists to state capitals where laws are being considered.

Jessica Almy, who is the policy director for the organization, said she believed that most of the state laws and proposals would be rendered moot if and when the Agriculture Department weighed in on labeling for lab-grown meat, which it promised to do last year. Still, she argues that the state-mandated labels could create more confusion.

“There is no truthful way to refer to it without using meat terms,” Ms. Almy said.

Mr. Dinklage, the Nebraska rancher, said he was also interested in providing clarity to consumers.

He also wants to protect a livelihood that is growing harder to maintain all the time.

“Just think what it actually costs eventually in a lab as compared to running a ranching operation,” he said. “It would be a lot cheaper, and that puts me out of business.”

Proposals to tax the wealthy gain traction

TAXES, FROM PAGE 7

estates above \$1 billion. Wojciech Kopczuk, a Columbia University professor of economics, estimated that the Sanders plan would capture money from 8,000 estates per year that currently owe no estate taxes.

Mr. Sanders would also eliminate dynasty trusts, which allow families to shelter colossal holdings from taxes as they pass from one generation to the next. His office estimated that the bill would raise at least \$315 billion over 10 years.

Aside from his policy particulars, Mr. Sanders has been explicit in his broader aims to restrain a homegrown aristocracy that inherits entrenched power and money. In announcing his tax proposal, he quoted Teddy Roosevelt’s warning about the dangers of a small class of enormously wealthy individuals “whose chief object is to hold and increase their power,” and underscored the moral and political imperative to put some limits on dynastic wealth.

“It is a very dangerous and unjust situation where so few have so much and so many have so little,” Mr. Sanders said in an interview. “When 46 percent of all new income goes to the top 1 percent, who believes that that is right or that that is good for the economy?”

Ms. Warren and Ms. Ocasio-Cortez have expressed similar sentiments. Warning of a poisoned democracy, Ms. Warren said government had “become a tool for the wealthy and well-connected.” Ms. Ocasio-Cortez told an interviewer: “I do think that a system that allows billionaires to exist when there are parts of Alabama where people are still getting ringworm because they don’t have access to public health is wrong.”

DIFFERENCES AMONG DEMOCRATS

If such comments inspire supporters, they also reveal potential divisions among the rising crop of Democrats.

The left-leaning Ms. Ocasio-Cortez, Ms. Warren and Mr. Sanders are all viewed as less business-friendly than Ms. Gillibrand, Mr. Booker and Ms. Harris, who have not made taxes on the rich a centerpiece of their public pitches. In that sense the latter trio is following the



Michael R. Bloomberg, a former mayor of New York, generally has called for higher taxes on the rich and investment income, along with more tax credits for the middle class.

example set by Hillary Clinton in the 2016 campaign and President Barack Obama before her, with comparatively establishment-minded thinking on progressive taxation.

Ms. Harris, for example, was asked at a Drake University town hall in Des Moines about the morality of multi-billionaires in a society with so many poverty-stricken children; she responded by calling for more taxes on the top 1 percent. Yet the California Democrat’s language, approach and proposals have a distinctly different tone than, say, that of Mr. Sanders, and she has not focused her campaign so far on attacking the wealthy or warning about an oligarchy. Her tax bill offers credits up to \$6,000 for families earning less than \$100,000 a year, without providing many details of who would make up the difference.

Ms. Gillibrand backs a broader estate tax and Mr. Sanders’ financial-transactions tax. Like Ms. Harris, though, her focus has been on bolstering people at the bottom and in the middle, with more generous tax credits for the working poor and middle-class tax cuts.

Mr. Booker of New Jersey, the most recent entrant in the Democratic field,

supports returning the estate tax to 2009 levels, as Mr. Sanders does, noting that inheritances widen the wealth gap and particularly disadvantage minorities. Mr. Booker has also opposed a loophole that enables heirs to avoid paying taxes on capital gains.

But in the early days of his presidential campaign, he has avoided charged language about taxing the superrich and played on more familiar turf such as the carried-interest loophole, which benefits hedge-fund and private-equity executives. That tax break is so widely scorned outside Wall Street that even Donald Trump campaigned against it in 2016.

A more traditional blend of fiscal conservatism and social liberalism can also be found among several self-designated centrists and pragmatists, like Mr. Biden and Michael R. Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York City, who officially registered with the party in October.

Mr. Biden, who has not formally announced that he will seek the White House in 2020, has called generally for higher taxes on the rich and investment income, along with more generous tax credits for the working middle class.

Mr. Bloomberg, a billionaire dozens of times over, previously supported reducing and simplifying corporate tax rates, though he denounced the Republican tax program that passed in 2017. And he backed increasing the earned-income tax credit to help lower-income working families.

But Mr. Bloomberg, who has castigated Ms. Warren’s proposed wealth tax as disastrous and unconstitutional, rejects the premise that wealth has an insidious effect on democracy.

And among potential Democratic presidential candidates, he is the only one who has continued to sound the deficit alarm, warning that ambitious proposals for health care or climate control could bankrupt the government.

Mr. Bloomberg’s positions highlight tensions likely to arise between an activist wing eager to energize voters and an establishment wary of turning off moderates and independents who dislike President Trump but are alarmed by jeremiads about wealth.

THE MOST INFLUENTIAL ECONOMISTS

“Gradually and then suddenly” is how a character in Ernest Hemingway’s “The Sun Also Rises” explains going bankrupt. The same might be said of political tipping points.

A midterm election that gave Democrats control of the House and brought in a vocal class of more liberal representatives is one reason the range of proposals has so quickly expanded. But just as important as that electoral victory was a previous one — by Mr. Trump — that showed bravura and brashness could prevail over conventional wisdom and caution.

“Trump’s election has scrambled people’s views a little bit of what’s politically possible and what is not,” said Jacob Leibenluft, who led Hillary Clinton’s economic policy team during her presidential campaign and served on the Obama administration’s National Economic Council. “It opened up space for set of policies that simultaneously have a populist feel to them and are grounded in economics.”

At the same time, enthusiasm for the suddenly popular propositions has

deeper roots. Several ideas about taxes, public spending and deficits rattled around liberal circles for years, or surfaced during Mr. Sanders’s 2016 campaign, before their recent move to center stage.

Over the last couple of decades, economists have produced terabytes of new economic data and research charting the effect of the neoliberal cocktail of deregulation, low taxes and cranked-up competition in a global economy. Among the most influential work: findings by the economists Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman detailing the concentration of wealth. Using advanced computing technology

“It is a very dangerous and unjust situation where so few have so much and so many have so little.”

and novel data sets, they cataloged the economic fallout that market forces have wrought with unprecedented specificity and range. They also outlined how a wealth tax could work.

“We would have had a picture, a sense that something was wrong,” said Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel-prize winning economist who has sounded warnings about growing inequality since the early 2000s. “But they nailed down the numbers that showed 40 percent of the world’s wealth is controlled by 1 percent of the people.”

Mr. Zucman said he and Mr. Saez first started meeting with Ms. Warren and other potential presidential candidates in 2014. Last month, the two economists — both professors at the University of California, Berkeley — vetted her wealth-tax proposals and calculated the revenue estimates.

Beyond taxes, ideas out of academia have also shifted the political conversation around deficits.

Notably, there’s modern monetary theory, pushed by a group of economists led by Stephanie Kelton, a professor of public policy and economics at Stony Brook University, in New York. She argues that societal needs should deter-

mine public spending, not deficits.

The call to end Washington’s talk about red ink has attracted some other surprising advocates, who took a decidedly different route to get there.

Lawrence Summers, Treasury secretary during the Clinton administration and the director of President Obama’s National Economic Council, and Jason Furman, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers during the Obama administration, recently published an article in the journal Foreign Affairs declaring that everyone should stop worrying so much about the deficit. Government deficits matter, they said, just not as much as other things like investing in education, health care, persistent poverty or climate change.

“I don’t think there’s any question that the economic reality has changed in ways that should change policy choices,” Mr. Summers said in an interview. “And one should be more worried about issues of fairness and appropriate regulation, more worried about assuring adequate demand and social protection in the balance than would have been the case 20 or 25 years ago.”

Deficit hawks, naturally, are not about to concede without a fight. “The challenges facing the economy feel so big that big solutions seem to be the answer,” said Maya MacGuineas, president of the bipartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. “But we just don’t have the fiscal environment to support that. When interest payments are the fastest-growing part of your budget, that is a warning.”

The next national elections are still nearly two years away, of course, and the list of potential Democratic presidential hopefuls stretches far. Policy disagreements will sharpen. What should take priority now, veteran Democratic operatives are emphasizing, is the big picture, rather than brass-tacks policy debates. “Sometimes we argue and negotiate among ourselves to the point where we absolutely smother our aspirations,” said Mr. Bernstein, Mr. Biden’s former adviser. “That’s not just a tactical mistake, but a political one and an economic one. Now the moment belongs to the bold.”

Opinion

Why is Italy picking a fight with France?

How the country's leaders are tapping resentments, old and new, over immigration, fine art and béchamel.

Ilaria Maria Sala

White sauce and migration, the fork and the Mona Lisa, a fast train and an African currency — the points of contention are many. Since coming to power eight months ago, the most unpredictable and quarrelsome government Italy has ever known has managed to pick a colossal fight with, yes, France.

On Thursday, the French government called back for “consultations” its ambassador to Italy. Matteo Salvini and Luigi Di Maio, both deputy prime ministers of Italy, had said that they gave their full support to the Gilets Jaunes (Yellow Vests), who have been protesting throughout France for weeks, rattling the presidency of Emmanuel Macron. Then, after meeting representatives of the movement a few days ago, Mr. Di Maio declared that a “new Europe is being born.” The French foreign ministry called the statement yet more “provocation” and manipulation for “electoral aims.”

Italy's two-headed government — an opportunistic alliance between the extreme-right League of Mr. Salvini and the populist, anti-establishment Five Star Movement of Mr. Di Maio — has made a sport of going after

A populist, right-wing government needs an enemy to rally its electorate, in particular at a time of economic difficulties.

France, especially Mr. Macron. Mr. Di Maio, in particular, has called out France's supposedly neocolonialist relationship with its former territories in Africa, which supposedly impoverishes the continent and causes its people to flee — for Italy. On a popular TV talk show recently, Alessandro Di

Battista, a prominent leader of the Five Star Movement and the group's unofficial economic theorist, pulled out of his pocket a copy of a C.F.A. franc bank note. The C.F.A., which is used in 14 African states, is pegged to the euro and guaranteed by the French treasury against those states' foreign reserves. Mr. Di Battista tore the bill apart angrily, blaming the currency for keeping Africa down and under France's yoke.

He didn't mention Italy's own adventures in Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries, when Italian troops are said to have raped, murdered and gassed civilians, bombed the Red Cross and starved children held in detention. (Those facts still hardly feature on the history curriculum of Italian schools.) Nor did he mention that many asylum seekers who arrive in Italy today come from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia — an area once colonized in parts by Italy. This flimsy anticolonial stance may be designed to give the Italian government a patina of idealism, but it reveals a muddled understanding of African political and economic dynamics. A new unit called “Task Force Cina”(Task Force China) has been set up in the Ministry of Economic Development, which is under Mr. Di Maio's control: Its goal is to increase economic exchanges with China and stop migration to Italy by helping China invest in Africa. The Italian government calls France's involvement in Africa exploitative but seems to think that China's is no problem.



VALÉRY HACHE/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

This French-bashing is a new twist in an old story of resentment and rivalry — a medley of unprocessed feelings that can be triggered just as easily by talk of the Napoleonic invasions or the French soccer player Zinedine Zidane's famous head-butt against an Italian player in the 2006 World Cup Final. Italy won the championship, but with a whiff of illegitimacy after Zidane was taken out of the game.

For a long time, I think, some Italians have felt that our country's contribution to French culture has gone unacknowledged. But now, in the hands of Mr. Salvini and Mr. Di Maio, this sentiment is reaching new heights, in terms of both political expedience and pettiness.

The Louvre museum in Paris, where the Mona Lisa is exhibited, has been preparing to commemorate later this year the 500th anniversary of Leonardo da Vinci's death. The painting became the property of Francis I, a king of France and Leonardo's patron, after Leonardo's death in France in the early 16th century — a time when the concept of Italy as a nation was shaky

at best. Last year, Italy promised to contribute to the special exhibit by lending the Louvre major, sumptuous pieces, but the new government is mulling how to renege on that pledge.

A popular myth has resurfaced on Twitter in these fractious days about how both haute cuisine and humble utensils were introduced to the French court by Catherine de Medici, after she was sent from Florence to Paris to marry Henry II in 1533. Search Twitter for “mangiavate ancora con le mani” (“You'd still be eating with your hands”) and see. Catherine made a rookie's mistake: She fell in love with her husband even though he was besotted with another woman (Diane de Poitiers). When I was in high school (in Florence), my history teacher consistently referred to her as “la poverina” — the poor thing — for having been twice cheated by the French, out of her love and her culinary expertise.

Food historians may have serious grounds to debate the exact parentage of béchamel and the fork, but many assumptions driving the current government's revisionism are unquestion-

ably wrong. Whatever Mr. Di Battista thinks of French monetary policies in Africa, for example, the highest number of African migrants to Italy come from Nigeria, a former British colony, and not from French-speaking countries.

But a populist, right-wing government such as Italy's today needs an enemy to rally its electorate, in particular at a time of deep economic difficulties. Better to redirect attention on immigration and the French than face up to high unemployment and overall stagnation: Italy formally entered a recession this quarter.

Of course, Mr. Macron hasn't helped matters by hardly behaving diplomatically himself. When Mr. Salvini, also Italy's interior minister, announced that migrant boats would no longer be allowed to dock in Italian ports, the French president called the move “cynical and irresponsible.” This, even though France's border with Italy has been closed to migrants and French authorities have been pushing them back into Italy. It is also undeniable that Europe's southernmost countries like Italy bear a heavier share of the

immigration crisis than other European states, partly because of the Dublin Regulation, a much-criticized European law that requires the countries where asylum seekers arrive to screen them and take care of them.

And yet, when the European Parliament has discussed reforms aimed at spreading more evenly the burden of immigration among members of the European Union, the League did not participate, and representatives of the Five Star Movement abstained from voting. At a final session last June, the Dublin Regulation wasn't amended, for lack of votes in favor of reform.

Not all Italians are on board, of course. On Thursday, after France called back its ambassador, Cuneo, a small Italian town near the French border, had something like the “Mar-seillaise” moment in the movie “Casa-blanca”: Federico Borgna, the leftist mayor, flew the French flag from a balcony of city hall — an unlikely symbol of dissent in an even more unlikely dispute.

ILARIA MARIA SALA is an Italian journalist based in Hong Kong.

Flags compete during a Yellow Vests demonstration in Ventimiglia, Italy, near the French border.

A military dictatorship like no other

In Thailand, the army proposes and the king disposes. Not the other way around.

Eugénie Mérieau

When last Friday Ubolratana Rajakanya Sirivadhana Varnavadi, a sister of the king of Thailand, applied to be a candidate for prime minister in upcoming elections, she threw an already intricate political scene for a loop. Ms. Ubolratana would run for Thai Raksa Chat, one of two parties affiliated with Thaksin Shinawatra and his sister Yingluck, both former prime ministers who were democratically elected and then deposed in military coups, he in 2006 and she in 2014.

With that, Ms. Ubolratana seemed to directly take on Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, a former general who heads the junta that staged the 2014 coup, and himself a candidate for prime minister on the ticket of the pro-military Phalang Pracharath Party. Mr. Prayuth, who seized power vowing to “worship and protect the monarchy,” has fended off a return of the Shinawatras — who remain popular, especially among the rural poor, despite convictions for corruption.

Within hours, King Maha Vajiralongkorn Bodindradabayavarangkun was declaring that his sister's nomination would be “inappropriate” and that it ran against the “intention of the

Constitution” because members of the royal family were “above politics.”

A frenzy of commentary erupted on Thai social media.

Beyond this theorizing and all the jostling yet to come, the extraordinary developments of last week — actually, of the last months — reveal that Thailand is a military dictatorship like no other. It is a military dictatorship under royal command.

Whatever happens after the voting in March — whether civilian parties win, or military forces do, or some combination of both form a government together — the election will not bring democracy back to Thailand. What this election will do, however, is lay bare the mechanisms that really drive Thai politics. Contrary to a commonly held view, the military is not in charge. In Thailand, the army proposes and the king disposes, not the other way around.

After repeatedly delaying the next election, Mr. Prayuth seemed to bank that his party could do well in the contest and earn some measure of popular legitimacy. He might even remain prime minister. Under the military-drafted Constitution of 2017, after a general election, the prime minister is to be chosen by a simple majority of the legislature. Since the Constitution also provides that the senate's 250 members are to be se-



ATHIT PERAWONGMETHA/REUTERS

Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya Sirivadhana Varnavadi, a sister of the king of Thailand, applied on Friday to be a candidate for prime minister in upcoming elections.

lected by the junta, it would appear that Mr. Prayuth's party (and allies) could get to name the next prime minister if they win just 126 seats out of the 500 in the lower house.

But the military only nominates senators; the king must validate the selection. The royal signature is required before almost all executive

appointments and pieces of legislation can go through — in other words, the king of Thailand has veto power on most major matters. And it's impossible to predict how that power might be used.

Still, one pattern has emerged so far: King Vajiralongkorn has defied expectations by steadily — and, one

could say, aggressively — exerting these royal prerogatives since he ascended to the throne in late 2016, following the death of his father, King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

First, he delayed the promulgation of the 2017 Constitution by refusing to sign it — a condition for its entry into force — until the text was amended as he requested. One of those changes redefined the role of the Privy Council, a powerful advisory body headed by Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda — a key ally of King Bhumibol and a former prime minister — stripping it of its power to act as regent.

King Vajiralongkorn also radically changed the composition of the Privy Council. And he has obtained amendments to both the Sangha Act, which governs the Buddhist monastic order, and the law that governs the Crown Property Bureau, the body that manages the royal family's huge wealth. All of these changes have strengthened his authority.

Mr. Prayuth faces other challenges as well. Last month, King Vajiralongkorn named Gen. Apirat Kongsompong, a member of his personal guard, to the Crown Property Bureau — this, after having already appointed General Apirat as the new army chief, even though such promotions traditionally are the preserve of the military. MÉRIEAU, PAGE 11

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A THREADBARE COVERUP UNRAVELS

Saudi Arabia’s crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, was overheard threatening to silence the self-exiled Washington Post journalist “with a bullet.”

The Saudi heir and his friends in the White House evidently calculated that the outcry over the barbarous murder of Jamal Khashoggi would die out over time, and that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman would be free to continue on his autocratic way, repressing critics and dissidents with impunity. They were wrong.

More than four months have passed since Mr. Khashoggi was savagely throttled and dismembered in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul and then discarded, but the bald lies told by the Saudi government to protect the prince — including the attempt to pin the murder on 11 anonymous Saudis, of whom five are said to face execution — and the cynical argument by President Trump that Saudi largesse is more important than justice, have only intensified demands for a full reckoning.

The latest have come from American intelligence agencies, a United Nations investigator and a coalition of nongovernmental organizations, sources that in their diversity and breadth should serve notice on Prince Mohammed that all his oil wealth and powerful friends will not wash away the blood of the slain journalist.

A report in The Times on Thursday said the National Security Agency and other American spy agencies have uncovered an intercepted conversation in which Prince Mohammed tells a top aide more than a year before Mr. Khashoggi’s murder that if the self-exiled journalist cannot be enticed back to Saudi Arabia, he should be brought back by force. And if that didn’t work, the prince is heard to say, he would go after Mr. Khashoggi “with a bullet.”

A Saudi official, Turki Aldakhil, called the allegations “categorically false.”

They appear to be a continuation of various efforts by different parties to connect His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to this horrific crime,” he said. “These efforts will prove futile.”

Whether Prince Mohammed meant that literally or figuratively, the quote reveals a young, ruthlessly ambitious autocrat furious that a one-time insider dared criticize him as he sought to impose his will on the kingdom, including the repression of all who dare speak their mind. It was shortly after that conversation that Mr. Khashoggi produced his first column for The Washington Post, where he wrote: “I have left my home, my family and my job, and I am raising my voice. To do otherwise would betray those who languish in prison. I can speak when so many cannot.”

“We Saudis deserve better,” he concluded.

Despite Mr. Trump’s efforts to blunt the allegations against Prince Mohammed, who had cultivated a close relationship with the president and Jared Kushner, his son-in-law and senior adviser, an assessment by the Central Intelligence Agency weeks after the killing concluded that the crown prince had to have ordered it.

The Saudi government has denied that the crown prince was involved in any way in the murder. President Trump has cast doubt on his own intelligence officials’ assessment that Prince Mohammed, next in line to the throne behind his ailing father, King Salman, ordered the hit.

At the United Nations, the special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, Agnes Callamard, reported Thursday that her initial findings “show prime facie case that Mr. Khashoggi was the victim of a brutal and premeditated killing, planned and perpetrated by officials of the state of Saudi Arabia.” Though that essentially confirmed what is already widely accepted, the very fact of the independent United Nations investigation under a respected human-rights expert (Ms. Callamard, of France, is also director of Columbia University’s Global Freedom of Expression project), whose team includes a British barrister and a Portuguese forensics expert, is a welcome escalation of the pressures on Saudi Arabia to come clean. The panel will report its full findings in June.

A coalition of prominent nongovernment organizations, meanwhile, issued a joint statement accusing the Saudi government of continuing to persecute dissidents, activists, journalists and independent clerics. The group — the Committee to Protect Journalists, Human Rights First, Human Rights Watch, Open Society Justice Initiative, PEN America and Reporters Without Borders — also accused the Trump administration of a “cover-up on behalf of the Saudi government” and called the trial of 11 Saudi individuals accused of killing Mr. Khashoggi “a sham.”

The pressure must continue. Congress should continue to demand a full disclosure of C.I.A. records related to Mr. Khashoggi’s murder, with the identities of all those responsible for it. The United Nations special rapporteur’s investigation should receive the full support of the Turkish, Saudi, American and other governments. And all who rue Mr. Khashoggi’s fate should demand that Saudi Arabia cease the repression of those Saudis in whose name he spoke out.

Make me a cold and pitiless goddess

Sharma Shields

Obsessed with mythology as a girl, I read and reread the “Book of Greek Myths,” by Ingri and Edgar Parin d’Aulaire. I fell in love with Artemis — her lack of sentimentality, her plea to Zeus to never have to marry. I even admired her assassination of Actaeon, the man who spied on her as she bathed. She splashed him with water and turned him into a stag; he was devoured by his own hounds. The book calls her “a cold and pitiless goddess,” but to me she was self-assured, unapologetically powerful. In fourth grade, then fifth, I dorked out in the forest behind our farmhouse after school, wielding a plastic bow and

hiding in the trees whenever a car passed by. Every now and again I declared to no one, “I shall not marry!” I was a friend to wild animals and an enemy of insolent men. My mind spiraled open, ablaze with transformations, woman to tree, woman to white deer, woman to spider. Metamorphosis and power.

While reading my favorite book, I wondered about the word “rape,” as in the Rape of Persephone. I lingered over the illustration of her descent into the yawning pit, Hades’ arm securing her to the chariot. Above, in a blue dress, searching and despairing, was the faint figure of Demeter, the woebegone mother. I thought I understood what rape meant: *When someone does something unwanted.*

In sex ed class we watched a cartoon

of an older man looming over a young girl. *Your bathing suit covers your private parts.* There was a rumor floating around about wicked things that happened to girls who walked around too stupidly on lonely streets at night. Kicking and screaming in cold stairwells. That word again: rape. We giggled nervously. It felt like a sick joke.

None of this prepared me for what a boy would do to me when I was 14 and he was 17. This was the moment of my own metamorphosis — one moment I was someone, the next, someone else. Like Persephone, like Daphne, I was changed utterly by a desire that in no way reflected my own. The coldness that followed was more Pygmalion than Apollonian, more marble than wood. I told myself I felt nothing because nothing had happened. It didn’t even occur

to me to call it rape. I’m still unwilling to say it aloud, as if it gives him power over me, when I want rather to put my foot to his throat and tell him, *Give it back.*

I’ve been revisiting the d’Aulaires’ text, still a staple of school libraries, sharing it with my children. They, too, have their favorites. My daughter loves Athena and Arachne; my son, the Minotaur and Medusa. One evening I found myself reading aloud, “Daphne would rather be an unmoving tree than the bride of the great god Apollo, but all the other nymphs loved to sit at his feet and listen to his enchanting music, and were very honored when he or any of the other great Olympian gods chose one of them as a bride.”

In other words: *Trust us, plenty of babes are jonesing for these fine dudes.*

“You know what,” I told my son, age 9, and my daughter, age 6. “I don’t agree with this at all.”

We talked, as we have before, about consent, about their ownership over their own bodies. I didn’t go in depth with them about the euphemism of “bride” for “sexual partner,” but it’s irritating. No wonder I felt so little for Daphne until I was old enough to recognize the familiarity of her desperation. No wonder I thought Hera was a jerk, Persephone a ditz. The book that told their stories also derided them. *Artemis was a cold and pitiless goddess.* Even Medusa, who was my gateway into mythology and monstrousness, is dumbed-down by the d’Aulaires. Ovid’s “Metamorphoses” recounts the birth of Medusa’s hideousness: She is raped by Poseidon in Athena’s temple. Like many abusers, Poseidon faces no personal consequence. Athena can’t reach him with her wrath — he is too powerful, even for a goddess — and so she ruins Medusa instead. Snakes for hair, reptile skin, a repulsiveness that renders her not only undesirable but dangerous. In the d’Aulaires’ recounting, Medusa’s back story is ignored; Perseus cuts off her ugly head while she sleeps. He uses a mirror to guide his stroke — a mirror that reflects the victim and not the perpetrator.

After my own metamorphosis — a virgin, then not — I called the 17-year-old to break up with him. “You’re stupid,” he said, laughing. “You’re immature. You don’t just break up with someone because you’re unhappy.” The words paralyzed me. Around him I grew murderously watchful, even as I let him do things to me I didn’t want. There was horror there but also a disturbing curiosity. He’d already taken everything, so what else could he do to me?

My mom, like Demeter, stomped overhead, calling my name. She sensed I was gone, that something major was amiss. “Get out of this,” she said. “Get away from him.” She was worried I loved him, that I’d marry him and ruin my life. I laughed at her. *Love him?* I hated him. I told her to leave me alone, but now I look at the picture of the girl being dragged into the underworld and I marvel that my mom reached for me as

SHIELDS, PAGE 11



Hades carrying Persephone off to the underworld, by the 19th-century Italian artist Luigi Basiletti.

Trump does his divisive El Paso number



Roger Cohen

EL PASO This tranquil city of bilingual trans-border commerce is where lurid fantasy meets humdrum reality. President Trump was set to come here Monday, risking life and limb at “our very dangerous southern border,” that “lawless” frontier facing a “tremendous onslaught.” I can reassure the president: He will be able to gaze at Mexico without breaking a sweat or putting his hairdo at risk.

Trump will attribute the calm to fencing completed a decade ago and recently extended with what looks like junkyard metal. In his State of the Union address, he claimed the barrier transformed El Paso from “one of our nation’s most dangerous cities” into “one of our safest cities.” This was a lie.

It incensed the mayor, Dee Margo, who tweeted: “El Paso was *never* one of the *most* dangerous cities in the U.S.” It incensed Representative Veronica Escobar, a Democrat, who accused the president in a tweet of spreading “falsehoods.” For a city of its size, El Paso has eased from pretty safe to super safe as its violent crime rate has dropped since the mid-1990s. The city’s story is not a fence story.

Margo, in an interview, said: “I hope we have some adult behavior. Egos are overriding common sense and I think it’s ridiculous.” Escobar told me: “Trump’s wall obsession is his way of keeping a campaign promise to the core of his base, many of whom are xenophobic and some outright racist.”

El Paso is as good a place as any to grasp America’s warped political discourse, the crazed way it’s abandoned rational debate of real problems for the sterile shrieking of tribes. The United States has a broken immigration system that’s an affront to a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws, but nobody really wants to talk about why or how to fix it.

Trump is Exhibit A in the process. Someone perceived early in his campaign that immigration was an issue around which a simple galvanizing argument could be advanced that Trump might actually understand: build a wall from sea to shining sea, keep out Mexican “rapists,” have Mexico pay, and claim an invasion of brown-skinned illegals has been stopped in the name of American jobs, security and identity. As for reality, forget it.

Some version of this fear-stoking fable will be repeated by Trump on Monday night at the El Paso County Coliseum. It’s no accident he has chosen this Texas border city for his first “Make America Great Again” rally of the 2020 cycle. The president will portray himself as the man standing between the country and the abyss of invasion, lawlessness and socialism. He will do so in the city of Beto O’Rourke, the charismatic former congressman weighing

a presidential campaign. He will try to skewer Democrats like O’Rourke as immigrant-huggers.

If Trump were interested in facts rather rabble-raising mendacity and the theatrical stringing of concertina wire by military forces needlessly dispatched to the border, he might note the following: Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras — not Mexico — are now the overwhelming source of northward migration. Poverty, violence, corrupt governments (Guatemala’s vigorously supported by the Trump administration)

The immigration system is broken but the president has no interest in fixing it.

organized crime and longstanding mistreatment of indigenous peoples feed the flow. A Marshall Plan for Central America would do more for border security than any barrier.

So would patient, respectful diplomacy, rather than wild outbursts, with the Mexican government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who holds the key to the porous Mexican-Guatemalan border.

More than 600 miles of fencing already cover about a third of the border. Trump’s wild talk of his WALL, drugs and terrorism is pure obfuscation. It ignores where a barrier might be useful, how narcotics come in, and the real sources of terrorist threats.

The United States border force has been placed in an impossible situation. It was trained to deal with single Mexican males striving to escape capture. It

now faces a different phenomenon: thousands of mainly Guatemalan families a month driven northward on buses and intent on presenting themselves to border guards once in.

They do so in the social-media-transmitted knowledge that the zigzags of Trump administration policy (including the cruel separation of thousands of children from their parents during the “zero tolerance” interlude) have ended in a situation where these families know they will be released within 20 days by ICE and go to the back of an 800,000-person line awaiting their day in immigration court. That’s a virtual guarantee of at least two to three years in the country (though the administration is trying to make them wait in a Mexican limbo that could be nightmarish).

These immigrants are no different from those who arrived at Ellis Island: They are fleeing misery and often violence in search of a better life. Some are bona fide refugees legally entitled to protection. The United States, nation of migration and churn, must treat them with humanity. Openness, not walls, has served the country and preserves its spirit. The United States is also a nation of laws. Trump has turned a serious dilemma into a theater of racist scapegoating and so served division, not needed immigration reform. No Democrat could vote to finance his bigotry; plenty of Democrats could vote for a secure border. Trump won 25.7 percent of the vote in El Paso. That’s because people on the border understand the benefits of binational flux. They see through Trump’s chest-beating America First to its un-American core.

Sports

Warming sends Dutch skaters to Austria

SKATING, FROM PAGE 1

From its inception in 1909 to 1963, the Elfstedentocht was held 12 times. Since then, there have been three, most recently in 1997. Some in Friesland wonder if it will ever be held there again.

Last week, the original Elfstedentocht passed a worrisome milestone: Friday was the 8,070th day since the previous edition, the longest period without a race since its inception.

But the Dutch refuse to let its spirit die. So every winter, close to 6,000 people from the Netherlands make a pilgrimage to Weissensee (population 753). Climate migrants of the sports world, they seek the cold and the ice of this town's enormous, asparagus-shaped lake. Known as the Alternative Elfstedentocht, the relocated race has been embraced by the Dutch as the rare chance to skate the same, staggering 200-kilometer distance (roughly the driving distance between Los Angeles and San Diego) that their ancestors did.

"In the past, our canals and lakes were always frozen," said Toine Doreleijers, one of the Alternative Elfstedentocht's organizers. "That's not the case anymore, but it's still in our blood."

Climate scientists in the Netherlands point to the disappearing Elfstedentocht as a vivid example of the grave trends they see in their work. According to Hans Visser, a statistician from the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, the annual chance of an Elfstedentocht dropped from 26 percent in 1950 to 6.7 percent in 2017 (or, in terms of average return periods, from once in four years in 1950 to once in 15 years in 2017).

Geert Jan van Oldenborgh, a climate researcher at the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute, said if the earth's average temperature increased more than two degrees Celsius, or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, from preindustrial levels — a popularly referenced threshold for severe effects of climate change — the Elfstedentocht would most likely cease to occur in the Netherlands at all. (There would, of course, be a host of far more catastrophic changes to the environment.)

"The chances of an 11 Cities Tour decrease every year because of global warming," van Oldenborgh said. "That should be a good incentive for the Dutch to do something about it."

In the meantime, the Alternative Elfstedentocht in Austria tries to address the Dutch yearning for ice. The 12.5-kilometer course last month folded back and forth along the lake, a setup that, from afar, resembled a busy ant farm, with packs of skaters zooming along a track resembling a maze.

Participants skated 16 laps, keeping one eye at all times on the ice, which showed long, hazardous cracks, like ancient marble. They hydrated and hoarded calories, grabbing cold raisin bread again and again from trackside tables. They ranged in age from 14 to 77. Everyone started the tour in the dark, and the last skaters finished in the dark, 11 hours later. Icicles formed on facial hair. Injuries abounded.

Marieke Lassche, 59, finished in 9 hours 53 minutes 11 seconds. A teacher from Ommen in the eastern Netherlands, she skated the actual Elfstedentocht in 1986, when she was 26. She said she appreciated the pristine setting of Weissensee, but dreamed of skating through the cacophony of Friesland one more time.



PETE KIEHART FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Clockwise from above: The lake that gives Weissensee, Austria, its name is the alternative site for a speedskating tour of 11 Dutch cities; Norbert Jank, the "ice master" for all 31 editions of the Austrian version of the race; the last Dutch race, held in 1997; Klasina Seinstra, the first woman finisher in 1997, has been traveling to Weissensee for 27 years.



PETE KIEHART FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"You start in Leeuwarden when it's dark, but there are cars with their headlights on and people and music and all these bands," Lassche said about that experience 33 years ago. "You come into the city, and everybody's shouting, 'Go on, you can do it!' You get wings."

For some, the Alternative Elfstedentocht — the main distance event is run four times over a two-week period each winter, with shorter trials and professional races scattered between — has



DIMITRI GEORGANAS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

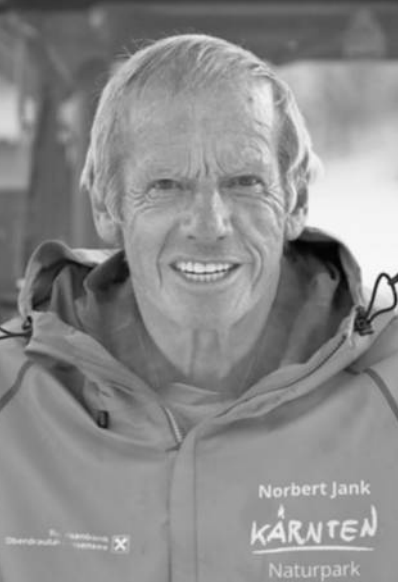
been a way to train for the actual Elfstedentocht, should it ever occur.

Klasina Seinstra, 50, has been traveling to Weissensee for 27 years, first as a skater and now as a coach. She clocked the fastest women's time on the Austrian lake in 1995, 1996 and 1997 before becoming the first woman across the finish line at the 1997 Elfstedentocht, the last held in the Netherlands. Thinking about that day now still gives her goose bumps.

"I get tears in my eyes," she said. "I never had that feeling again."

Others are desperate to feel it even once.

Erben Wennemars, a professional speedskater, has become obsessed with one day competing in the original Elfstedentocht. At 43, he has largely retired from skating but has continued competing a few times a year to maintain his eligibility for the professional portion of the race.



PETE KIEHART FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Wennemars said the purity of the race (it has only a few local sponsors, and the winner receives no prize money) was an antidote to the overly "programmed" world of modern elite sports.

"I'm an eight-time world champion, I won two Olympic medals, but I would throw it all away for the Elfstedentocht," he said. "There are a lot of people who have gold medals. But if you win the Elfstedentocht, you'll be known for the rest of your life."

Among radical proposals: Make teams competitive

On Baseball

BY TYLER KEPNER

Spring training camps open this week, and while Major League Baseball would never say it, the industry badly needs a better season than last year.

There were highlights, to be sure — there always are — but the problems were obvious to all: fewer fans in the seats and more hopeless teams than ever. The malaise has continued deep into the off-season, with more than 100 free agents still unsigned, including the marquee stars Bryce Harper and Manny Machado.

Last week, at least, it was fun to have some on-field news to debate. The commissioner's office and the players' association had traded proposals that could lead to several significant rule changes. The designated hitter might be coming to the National League, although probably not until 2020. Pitchers might be required to face at least three batters. Rosters might be expanded to 26 from 25 in the regular season but reduced to a maximum of 28 from 40 in September.

Those possibilities and more — reported by The Athletic and ESPN — were confirmed on Wednesday by multiple officials with the league and the union who were not authorized to speak publicly about continuing negotiations. Whatever comes from the proposals, it is nice to see the sides talking, undercutting the perception that a skeptical union was simply

freezing out Commissioner Rob Manfred.

"The players are always looking to find ways to streamline the game to make it more competitive and to put a better product for fans on the field," said Chris Iannetta, the veteran catcher for the Colorado Rockies, in a telephone interview. "What we're against is making wholesale changes we don't feel are going to be meaningful."

There is incentive for the players to engage Manfred, because the collective bargaining agreement, which runs through 2021, gives him the right to unilaterally impose some ideas he proposed last year, including a 20-second pitch clock. But Iannetta, a member of the union's executive subcommittee, said the players' primary objective was to create a sport in which more teams actively try to win.

Naturally, when teams shrug at the free-agent market, it manifests itself in salaries below players' expectations. But the widespread rebuilding phenomenon — or tanking, as some call it — resulted in eight teams with at least 95 losses last season, the most in history. It was no coincidence that attendance also dropped by more than three million fans, falling below 70 million for the first time since 2003.

"The numbers are very telling, and I think it's derived from the competitiveness of the individual teams," Iannetta said. "There's teams that can become much more competitive just from tapping into the talent pool that's available on the free-agent market right now, and not being willing to do that should be alarming to everybody."



MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES

The Boston Red Sox accepted the luxury-tax implications of signing J.D. Martinez, right, last year. He hit .330 with 43 homers and helped the team win the World Series.

"It's easy to say, 'We're going to be the Cubs or the Astros,' but that's a very difficult thing to do — and keep in mind the Cubs and Astros used veteran talent to groom those players, and when it was time to win, they significantly added veteran players."

Both sides offer examples of the wisdom or folly of spending big on free agents. The Boston Red Sox stormed past the luxury-tax threshold — which most teams see as a de facto salary cap — and signed designated hitter J.D. Martinez to a five-year, \$110 million contract last February. Martinez

hit .330 with 43 homers and helped lead Boston to the World Series title.

But what about the Baltimore Orioles? They signed a free-agent starter, Alex Cobb, to a four-year, \$57 million contract last spring, only to watch him go 5-15 with a 4.90 E.R.A. The team set a franchise record for losses, with 115. Cobb was signed as a rotation stabilizer, not a star, but the move signaled the Orioles' intentions to marginally improve. It turned out to be another cautionary tale.

"Teams used to pay big money for mediocrity, for the average player,"

said Steve Phillips, the former Mets general manager and a host on MLB Network Radio. "And now they're not willing to do that, because you can find close to average with a young guy who's not going to cost you money."

Iannetta, in the second season of a two-year, \$8.5 million deal, sits squarely in baseball's middle class. He said the union cares equally about the welfare of all members — from stars to rookies — and said players were frustrated by a system that squeezes out qualified veterans while also keeping elite prospects (think Vladimir Guerrero Jr. of the Toronto Blue Jays) in the minors to manipulate their service time and keep their price low.

As it stands, the worst teams get the best draft picks and the most money to spend on amateur talent. The Astros and the Cubs showed that weathering years of struggle can help lead to sustained success — but, of course, not all rebuilding teams will win big.

In their proposal to the owners, the players have advocated a system that would incentivize winning: lower draft position for perennial losers, better draft position for low-revenue teams that win, and so on.

"One thing that's going come up in the next few years is: 'Oh, this is all about dollars and cents; this is all about players being greedy and wanting more,' and that's not the case," Iannetta said. "We play a game our whole lives and we work our butts off, and we want to compete against the best — and when the best isn't out there on the field, it doesn't feel right."

"A lot of my colleagues looking for jobs are better than players on rosters

The aura of the original race — which features a competitive event and a recreational tour for amateurs — has only grown in its absence.

For now, the 10 volunteer board members of the Royal Organization for the Eleven Frisian Cities, which oversees the race, prepare extensively for it all year, every year, as if it will happen. They have no choice but to be ready: The current preparations are based on estimates of 30,000 skaters, almost 1.5 million spectators along the route and 20 million more on television.

"There will be a year that makes up for all the years we wait," Sytse Prins, a board member, said.

Wiebe Wieling, the board chairman, said it was too early to consider scaling back the yearly preparations. He noted that even with global warming, there could be bursts of extreme cold that sufficiently freeze the canals. "But let's say if in the next 10 years we still don't have an edition, you will hear a different discussion," he said.

Dutch skaters, naturally, have grown impatient.

The concept of an Alternative Elfstedentocht was born in the 1970s, when a Dutch businessman named Aart Koopmans began looking for sites around the world that featured consistently frozen water. The legend goes that he and a co-organizer, Leo van Hees, learned about Weissensee after seeing Timothy Dalton drive an Aston Martin on the surface of the lake in the 1987 James Bond film, "The Living Daylights."

Two years later, they organized their first speedskating race on that same surface.

Weissensee now has become a regular stop for many Dutch speedskaters. Last year, the airline Transavia created a direct flight route from Rotterdam to Klagenfurt, Austria, to help accommodate the pilgrims. During last month's event, Dutch national flags were stretched across balconies, and Dutch visitors zipped along snow-covered roads on their bicycles.

After the second running last month, hundreds of the skaters, some cheekily dressed in traditional Austrian clothes, packed into a lakeside tent for the Blister Ball, a raucous party that featured floor-swaying singalongs, plumes of fake snow and at least four people dancing with newly broken arms.

"For two weeks, Weissensee becomes Dutch," said Gerhard Koch, 48, the mayor of the town.

Amid all the skating and revelry, the most important person on site might have been Norbert Jank, a 72-year-old Weissensee resident who has served as the "ice master" for all 31 editions of the Alternative Elfstedentocht. He monitors ice conditions and prepares the course with an arsenal of homemade tools and retrofitted vehicles.

"Thank you for the good ice!" someone shouted to him in Dutch-accented German one afternoon last month.

Jank waved back and smiled. The ice was indeed good. And yet it was not as good as it has been, he said. It was only half as thick as it was when the Dutch first started coming. Back then, he said, they always skated around the entire lake, but lately only half the lake has had ice thick enough for skating. And Jank, who does not wear a cap or gloves unless the temperature reaches minus 25 Celsius, has simply noticed more warm days each winter.

It is all rather worrying, he said.

right now, and that's not fair," he added. "That's not putting the best product on the field. There's talent right now that's not being utilized, for whatever reason. And it's not fair to the fans that are spending their money, either."

Phillips, who was the New York Mets' general manager from 1997 to 2003, said impulsive owners once pushed salaries higher and higher by basing free-agent decisions largely on emotion. Now, he said, more and more

owners defer to general managers who rely increasingly on analytics. Players and their agents, perhaps, must recognize and adapt to this new world.

But something seems off when an industry that boasts record revenues

suddenly gets smart, all at the same time. The owners may be far too canny to collude against players as they did in the 1980s. But whether it's groupthink or a flawed system, something needs to change to revive the sport.

After a troubling regular season and another frigid off-season, the players — those with jobs, anyway — will soon return to work. They'll have a lot on their minds.

"It's a critical point," Iannetta said. "We need to really be cognizant of putting the right ideas first and the right values first — and that's maintaining the competitive nature and the free-market system and going from there."

Whatever comes from the proposals, it is nice to see the league and the union talking.

SPORTS

Soccer pioneers, relegated by progress

ROSSINGTON, ENGLAND

Doncaster Belles fell victim to big English clubs' moves to finance women's teams

BY RORY SMITH

Over the years, Sheila Edmunds has done pretty much everything for the Doncaster Belles. Half a century ago, she was among the group of friends who founded the soccer club. For 25 years, she wore the team's No. 8 jersey and, for a while, its captain's armband.

When she retired, she filled in wherever required: welfare officer, first-aid practitioner, physiotherapist. Now her official title is president and general manager. If that sounds like an honorary position, it is not.

An hour or so before a game at the windswept stadium that the Belles now call home, Edmunds can be found in the simple wooden cabin that passes for a ticket office. At her back is an electric heater, on futile full blast to stave off the bitter cold. She welcomes fans warmly, as if each one is an old friend, as they hand over the entrance fee of 5 pounds, or \$6.50.

In quiet moments, she might help out at the trestle table that serves as the Belles' merchandising arm. After kick-off, she keeps one eye on the game as she totals up the day's takings; it is easier this way, she says. She is the one, after all, who will have to enter it all into the club's accounts later.

There is more money in women's soccer in England than there has ever been. Last summer, the country's highest tier — the Women's Super League (W.S.L.) — became, for the first time, fully professional, with a broadcasting arrangement with the BBC. England's biggest clubs, including Manchester City, Chelsea and Arsenal, all have invested heavily in their women's teams in recent years, spending not just on homegrown players but on high-profile imports, too. Manchester United has finally joined the fray: It introduced its women's team, in the second-tier Championship, last year, and immediately set about recruiting an all-star roster.

The effect has been seismic, not just in terms of results — Manchester City reached the Champions League semifinals the last two seasons, and England's national team finished third in the



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW TESTA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, the Doncaster Belles during a pregame warm-up. Below, Sheila Edmunds played for the Belles for a quarter-century. "The women's game has changed," she said.

2015 Women's World Cup — but in terms of interest, too. More than 45,000 people attended last season's women's F.A. Cup final, and two million more watched it live on television.

Little or none of that growth, though, has found its way to Doncaster; or, more accurately, Rossington, a village on the outskirts of the town, where Doncaster Rovers Belles play their home games in the third tier of English women's soccer.

Crowds rarely number much more than a hundred here. There are no television cameras. Last summer, the club's biggest sponsor walked away; the team's income now does not stretch far beyond the cash Edmunds sifts through in front of that electric heater.

And yet this is the team that has, arguably, done more for women's soccer in England than any other, a club that was synonymous with the sport for decades. In the 1980s and early 1990s, long before the professional clubs showed any interest in women's soccer, the Belles were its pre-eminent force.

Between 1983 and 1994, the Belles



reached 11 of 12 women's F.A. Cup finals, and won the trophy six times. The team won the first women's national league title, in 1992, and regained the crown in 1994; it would finish as runner-up seven times in the following years.

Back then, its players formed the backbone of the English national team.

"At one point, we had seven or eight players in the squad," said Gillian Coulter, who spent 21 years playing for the Belles in the team's heyday and picked up 119 appearances for England.

Doncaster, of course, was proud of the Belles: A small, tight-knit town on the edge of the South Yorkshire coal field, it

is not a place that attracts much national attention or frequently enjoys much sporting success. The Belles changed that. "We won so much," Coulter said. "The cup finals were on television. We felt like we represented Doncaster and South Yorkshire. We kept the town at the pinnacle."

To many, at a time when women's soccer received scant investment and commanded little attention, the Belles were the sport's most prominent face. "They were the epitome of women's football," said Mike Blackham. Like most of the people who go to watch the Belles now, Blackham and his wife, Jane, have a personal connection to the club: A friend plays for the first team.

That is testament to how the club's horizons have retracted in recent years. As the fortunes of women's soccer have risen, those of the Belles have ebbed. "The women's game has changed," Edmunds said. "It is more financially driven. We have been left behind a little bit."

In 2013, when the Football Association, the sport's governing body in Eng-

land, expanded the Women's Super League to two divisions, the Doncaster Belles were demoted to the second tier and Manchester City's women's team — far younger but aligned with a Premier League behemoth — were promoted. Vic Akers, then the manager of Arsenal Ladies, described the decision as "morally scandalous."

Doncaster was promoted back to the top flight in 2015 but lasted only a season before being relegated again.

It won the second division last year, its first trophy since 1994, but did not take up its place in the top tier: The F.A. had changed the licensing criteria, and the Belles — lacking a headline sponsor and a major men's team to bankroll the club — could not meet the new requirements. "Financially, we could not do it," Edmunds said.

All but two members of the championship-winning side departed, many for Manchester United's new women's team. Neil Redfearn, the manager, left. The Belles decided against using the Keepmoat Stadium, the neat, modern venue that is home to Doncaster Rovers, the men's team with which they have a mostly symbolic alliance, and set up instead in Rossington, where the two stands are little more than a few steps covered by a roof. Smaller surroundings, Edmunds said, would not be as "daunting" for the Belles' players.

In Doncaster, the Belles' fame endures, and so does the affection and esteem in which they are held. Edmunds, for example, is well-known enough in the town that, a few years ago, when she was awarded an honor in London for her contribution to sports, the local paper afforded her the ultimate accolade: It referred to her by only her first name.

Blackham, who coaches a local junior team, finds that while young boys dream of become stars in the Premier League, girls tend to have a different ambition. "They don't talk about playing for Manchester City or Chelsea or Arsenal," he said. "They want to play for the Belles."

There is some regret at the club's diminished status — "the demise of it is very sad, because it was so unique," said Coulter — but there is no resentment of the game's authorities, no lingering anger at the Football Association for failing to curate the most famous women's team of all. "That era has gone," Edmunds said. "We do not want people to forget that history, because so many people put so much into it, but we do not dwell on it."

NON SEQUITUR



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8	6	2						
					9	2		5
	9		2	3				
			1		8			
7								

Fill the grid so that every row, column 3x3 box and shaded 3x3 box contains each of the numbers 1 to 9 exactly once.

For solving tips and more puzzles: www.nytimes.com/sudoku

JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

TAKEW

RSUBT

DOGRUN

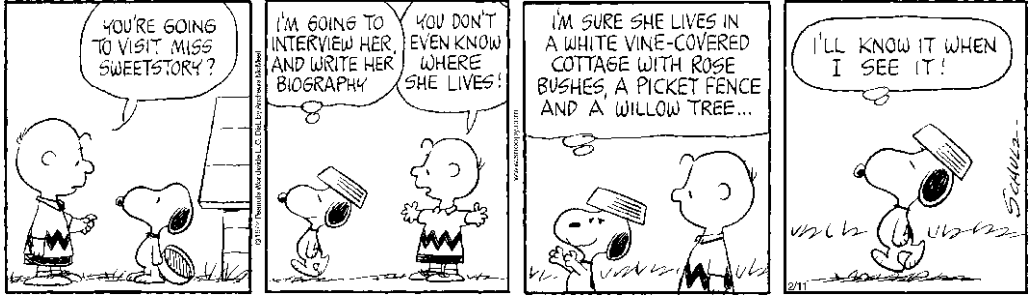
SIYEFT

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

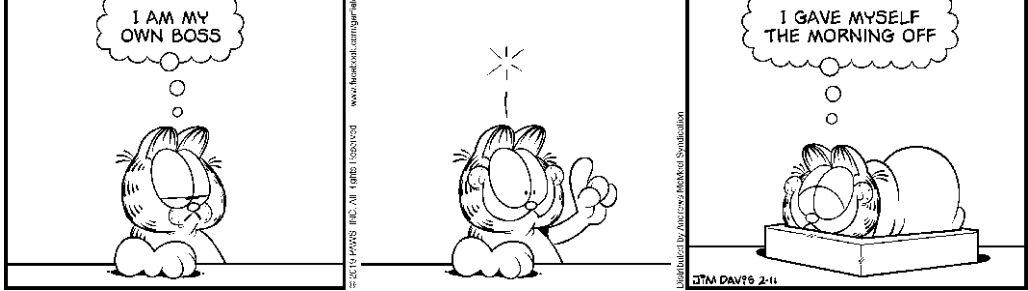
(Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: KNACK PLUMB SHAGGY SEPTUIM Answer: The telemarketer with emotional issues had a lot of — HANG-UPS

PEANUTS



GARFIELD



WIZARD of ID



KENKEN

1	2÷	3-	6×
9+			
	4+	1-	
		2÷	

Fill the grids with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

For solving tips and more KenKen puzzles: www.nytimes.com/kenken. For Feedback: nytimes@kenken.com

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Answers to Previous Puzzles

2	3	4	1
1	2	3	4
4	1	2	3
3	4	1	2

1	2	6	5	3	4
6	3	5	2	4	1
4	5	2	6	1	3
2	1	4	3	6	5
5	4	3	1	2	6
3	6	1	4	5	2

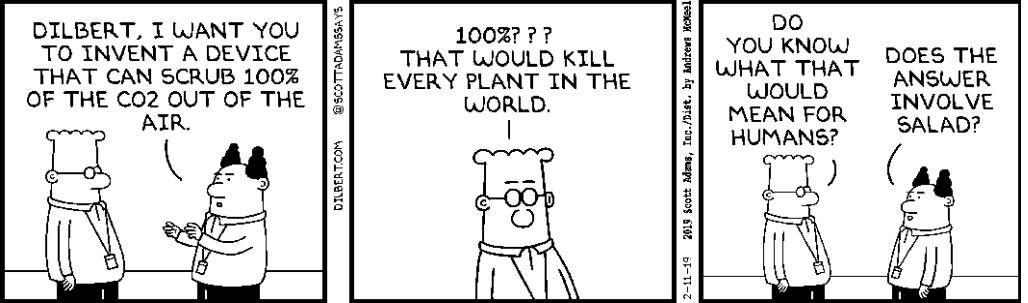
DOONESBURY CLASSIC 1991



CALVIN AND HOBBS



DILBERT



CROSSWORD | Edited by Will Shortz

- Across**
- 1 Closes
 - 6 Like the voice of someone who's stuffed up
 - 11 (Guests must provide their drinks)
 - 15 Went after
 - 16 Sheep-related
 - 17 Where the first presidential caucuses are held
 - 18 "Crossing my fingers!"
 - 19 Squiggly mark in "piñata"
 - 20 Earl ___ tea
 - 21 2001 Tom Cruise thriller
 - 23 Some rides from the airport, nowadays
 - 24 Leave out
 - 25 James who sang "At Last"
 - 27 Nickname for former N.B.A. star Darryl Dawkins
 - 35 "Star Wars" princess
 - 36 Maya who designed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
 - 37 Diamond pattern
 - 38 Suffix with different or confident
 - 39 "Chill out!"
 - 42 Connected PC system
 - 43 Ready to assemble, as a home
 - 45 Reef predator
 - 46 Flowy hair
 - 47 Amy Adams or Emma Stone, hairwise
 - 51 Keep it ___ (be honest)
 - 52 Sound from a ghost
 - 53 "What a shame!"
 - 56 Kind of ice cream suggested by the starts of 21-, 27- and 47-Across
 - 62 Swear
 - 63 Largest city in South Florida
 - 64 Japanese dog breed
 - 65 "Look how great I did!"
 - 66 Shenanigan
 - 67 Enticed
 - 68 Kill, as a dragon
 - 69 Sits for a photo
 - 70 Venue often named for its sponsor
- Down**
- 1 Makeshift knife
 - 2 Funny (or sarcastic) joke response
 - 3 Japanese noodle type
 - 4 Pudding ingredient
 - 5 Patron for sailors
 - 6 Friendly response to "Do you mind?"
 - 7 Hertz rival
 - 8 ___ Road, route for Marco Polo
 - 9 "Still ..."
 - 10 Director Spike
 - 11 Beginning of the universe
 - 12 Days of ___
 - 13 One with a debt
 - 14 Large inlets
 - 22 Rapper ___ Wayne
 - 23 Maneuver upon missing a GPS instruction
 - 26 Take out of the freezer
 - 40 Group that inspired "Mamma Mia!"
 - 41 The first modern one was held in Athens in 1896
 - 44 Off in the distance
 - 46 Nickname
 - 48 Pacific weather phenomenon
 - 49 Unfortunate crowd reaction to a performer
 - 50 [I don't know the words to this part]
 - 53 College entrance exams
 - 54 Egg-shaped
 - 55 Mr. Pibb or Dr Pepper
 - 57 Has a nosh
 - 58 French female friend
 - 59 Ocean motion
 - 60 Heaps
 - 61 Nickname for grandma
 - 63 It may include the words "You are here"

I	D	B	R	A	C	E	L	E	T	E	D	I	T
B	O	O	K	R	E	V	I	E	W	N	I	N	E
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N	R	A	M	E	N	T	O	O	T	I	E		
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PUZZLE BY HOWARD BARKIN

Culture

A Victorian critic’s resurgence

LONDON

200 years after his birth, John Ruskin is saluted in Britain and beyond

BY SCOTT REYBURN

Time hasn’t been kind to the reputation of John Ruskin. Two hundred years after his birth, hardly anyone today remembers Victorian England’s pre-eminent art critic and social philosopher for his books. Instead, his main claim to fame is his ill-starred wedding night, during which unspecified “circumstances” in the “person” of his beautiful young wife, Effie Gray, repelled the religious-minded Ruskin. The marriage was never consummated.

The subject of a 2014 movie and a fair amount of inconclusive scholarly research, his miserable six-year marriage with a woman almost a decade his junior was annulled in 1854 on the grounds of Ruskin’s “incurable impotency.” (Soon after, Gray married the Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais, by whom she had eight children.)

Ruskin would seem to be an eminent Victorian way out of step with our times. But are his ideas due for a comeback? The 200th anniversary of Ruskin’s birth is being celebrated in Britain and beyond with a yearlong program of exhibitions, conferences and other events that will highlight the progressive influence he once exerted — and might continue to exert — on culture and society.

Ruskin was appalled by the way industrialization dehumanized workers, stifled creativity and polluted the environment. Using lectures and open letters, he encouraged workers to improve their lives through self-education. He founded a drawing school in Oxford (now known as the Ruskin School of Art), and he created one of Britain’s first regional museums, in Sheffield, in northern England. His watercolors, imitably capturing the delicacy of a single flower or a Gothic facade, celebrated the beauty of both divine and human creation.

But for Ruskin, the pen was always mightier than the brush. He was an extraordinarily prolific writer. The official Library Edition of his works runs to a forbidding 39 volumes. Of this prodigious output, only “Unto This Last,” his ferocious critique of laissez-faire capitalism, and his autobiography, “Praeterita,” remain readily available in print.

“He’s a dazzling intellectual and an enormously great writer, but other things in his life have got in the way,” said the scholar Clive Wilmer, referring to the current fixation with Ruskin’s sexuality. Mr. Wilmer is master of the Guild of St. George, a charity Ruskin founded in Sheffield in the 1870s to give practical application to his utopian ideas.

The appropriately Victorian venue of Two Temple Place in London is currently showing almost 200 artworks and objects from the guild’s eclectic study collection. Including original Ruskin drawings, medieval manuscripts, minerals, daguerreotypes, metalwork and plaster casts, they form the centerpiece of the comprehensive bicentennial exhibition “John Ruskin: The Power of Seeing.”

“It’s a cluttered treasure box,” said Louise Pullen, curator of the Ruskin collection at Museums Sheffield. “It was a people’s collection, something that would make the lives of workmen and everyday people better.” Ruskin wanted



COLLECTION OF THE GUILD OF ST. GEORGE/MUSEUMS SHEFFIELD



COLLECTION OF THE GUILD OF ST. GEORGE/MUSEUMS SHEFFIELD

Top, John Ruskin, Victorian England’s pre-eminent art critic and social philosopher, in the 1880s. Above, “Study of Spray of Dead Oak Leaves,” a watercolor by Ruskin from 1879. Right, his watercolor “Santa Maria Della Spina, Pisa; East End,” from 1846-47.

them to “stop, look and appreciate” beauty in art and nature, she said. “He thought that was the key to well-being.”

The exhibition, as well as “Ruskin, Turner and the Storm Cloud: Watercolors and Drawings,” focusing on Ruskin’s visionary environmentalism and opening next month at the York Art Gallery in northern England, aims to highlight the thinker’s enduring relevance.

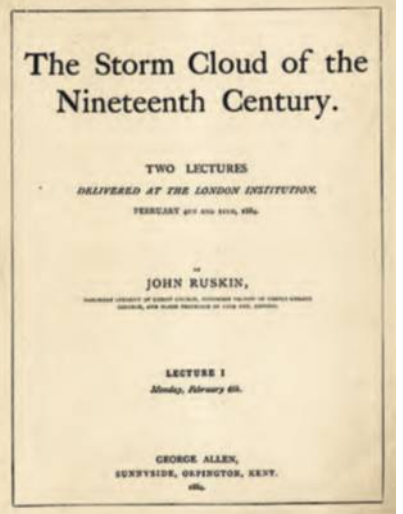
Robert Hewison, author or editor of more than a dozen books on Ruskin, said in an interview that Ruskin was the first

major literary figure to write about pollution and climate change.

In an 1884 lecture to the London Institution, “The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century,” Ruskin spoke of a “Thunderstorm; pitch dark, with no blackness — but deep, high, filthiness of lurid, yet not sublimely lurid, smokecloud; dense manufacturing mist.” He was describing a new meteorological phenomenon he called the “plague wind,” tainted with soot from a nearby steel factory, observed at his home in the



COLLECTION OF THE GUILD OF ST. GEORGE/MUSEUMS SHEFFIELD



A print version of a lecture Ruskin delivered at the London Institution in 1884.

Lake District in northwest England. “This and his observations on glaciers are something that make him a justified prophet,” Mr. Hewison said. “Pollution was emblematic of the corruption in contemporary capitalism, the destruction of nature by man and his greed.”

Quoting Ruskin’s “Unto This Last,” Mr. Hewison added, “He famously wrote ‘there is no wealth but life,’ and his attack on liberal economics could just as easily be a critique of neoliberalism now.”

But the evangelical density of Ruskin’s prose can intimidate. “It’s a barrier,” Mr. Hewison said. “You can look at his drawings to get a sense of the man he was and what he was interested in. He drew as powerfully as he wrote.”

Ruskin’s watercolor studies of the natural world and architecture, often used to illustrate his books or lectures, are remarkable for their intensity of feeling and observation. More than 40 of these drawings will be included in the York Art Gallery show, alongside a dozen works by Ruskin’s hero, the painter J. M. W. Turner. Others are currently on display in the exhibition “Victorian Visionary: John Ruskin and the Realization of the Ideal,” at the Houghton Library at Harvard, as well as at Two Temple Place.

But can watercolors really compare to what Ruskin achieved with words? Take “The Stones of Venice,” his 1851-53 account of the rise and fall of the Italian city as a political and artistic power. In the stand-alone chapter “The Nature of Gothic,” he eloquently extolled the collaborative dignity of medieval architecture, establishing the ideological foundation of the Arts and Crafts movement, and of thousands of neo-Gothic buildings across the world.

Ruskin’s 1864 lecture “Traffic,” in which he tells a planning committee in the industrial English city of Bradford of the contempt he feels for their proposed wool exchange building because it would be a symbol of the exploitation of human labor, still has the power to jolt.

“He holds our feet to the moral fire. He makes us disconcerted,” said James Spates, one of the coordinators of a Ruskin conference and exhibition in December at the Huntington Library in San Marino, Calif. “My belief is Ruskin is a spot-on critic of modern America, and is relevant now as he was then.”

What would Ruskin have made of “post-truth” politics, of the richest 1 percent owning almost half the world’s wealth, of a plastic-strewn planet where climate change may be beyond repair?

Maybe we should go back to him: He saw it coming.

Who’s seen ‘Roma’? Netflix offers clues

LOS ANGELES

The company has given Alfonso Cuarón’s film a notable theatrical release

BY BROOKS BARNES

For weeks, “Roma,” the Netflix movie directed by Alfonso Cuarón, has occupied an odd position in Hollywood: both omnipresent and mysterious.

The combination of Mr. Cuarón’s powerful filmmaking and Netflix’s marketing muscle has pushed the drama about Mexico City life in the 1970s to the front of the Oscar race.

Everywhere you turn in the movie capital, or so it seems, people are discussing the merits of “Roma” or gazing at a Netflix ad playing up the film’s 10 Oscar nominations.

Yet the unique way “Roma” was released — a three-week run in theaters before arriving online, with Netflix refusing to disclose ticket sales — has left Mr. Cuarón’s film encircled in questions. Just who is watching it? And where?

For the first time, Netflix is offering bits of information about the “Roma” audience and big-screen rollout, putting to bed the notion — asserted by rival studios — that the film received only a token release in theaters.

“The theatrical release has been way beyond even my highest expectations,”

Mr. Cuarón said. “I thought we might be limited to the cosmopolitan centers. We’re now in Waco, Texas. We’re in Boise, Idaho!”

The director said Netflix had initially committed to theatrical release in about seven countries. “Roma” has now played in 41.

In total, “Roma” has appeared in 1,100 theaters around the world since it was released on Nov. 21, according to Netflix. About 250 of those locations have been in the United States, where the film continues to run despite its availability in living rooms and on smartphones. Netflix released “Roma” on its global streaming platform (190 countries) on Dec. 14.

In some cases, Netflix has paid theaters to show the film in a contentious practice that is the equivalent of self-publishing in cinema.

On the first weekend in February, “Roma” played in 100 theaters in the United States; 45 of those were new, including locations in Wisconsin, Maine and Pennsylvania, according to Netflix. Theaters in 12 cities have played the movie in 70-millimeter format, a premium film format associated with Hollywood spectacles of the 1950s and 1960s.

“Roma” may be playing in more theaters than expected, but streaming remains its primary home. Netflix declined to say how “Roma” had performed online in the United States but said it had caught fire in Mexico: Mr. Cuarón’s film has been viewed on 50 percent of Netflix’s Mexico accounts, or



NETFLIX, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

An image from the Netflix film “Roma,” which received 10 Oscar nominations.

nearly four million, ranking as the service’s second most popular original movie ever in the country, behind “Bird Box.” To count as a “view,” at least 70 percent of the movie must be streamed, Netflix said.

Netflix’s lack of transparency about viewer information has been met by howls of protest by competitors, who say there is no credibility to the data that

does seep out, because there is no independent verification or context. In particular, Netflix has enraged art film distributors by keeping box-office figures for “Roma” under wraps: Why should we have to withstand public scrutiny when they don’t have to?

One person who has been publicly critical of Netflix is John Fithian, the president of the National Association of

Theater Owners, who has contended that the company is giving “Roma” a theatrical run only as part of a disingenuous effort to court Oscar voters and make Mr. Cuarón happy. “In its pursuit of prestige films and filmmakers, Netflix has had to turn to the theatrical space that it has too often denigrated,” he wrote in a recent column in Variety.

The theatrical footprint for “Roma” is tiny by blockbuster standards. “Bohemian Rhapsody,” the Queen biopic, rolled out on 4,000 screens in North America in November and has played in more than 10,000 locations worldwide over the course of its run.

But “Roma” is not a Hollywood movie. It is an unhurried black-and-white film with characters who speak Spanish and Mixtec. By foreign-language-film standards, its theatrical release has been respectable.

The Polish period romance “Cold War,” for instance, has played in roughly 275 theaters in the United States since arriving on Dec. 21, generating more than \$2 million in ticket sales. (“Cold War,” nominated for three Oscars, comes from Amazon Studios, which adheres to traditional Hollywood release patterns; it will not be available for streaming on Amazon Prime Video until March 22.)

Netflix cobbled together a theatrical run for “Roma” despite opposition from the biggest theater owners, including AMC Theaters and Regal Cinemas. Most movies still arrive in the same way they have for decades: first in theaters,

for an exclusive run of about 90 days, and then in homes. AMC, Regal and other theater companies worry that shortening that period will hurt their already fragile business.

Why trek to theaters and buy tickets if the same film will be available at home (or in your pocket) just a few weeks (or days) later?

Mr. Cuarón, who has become something of a Netflix evangelist, said “Roma” had proved that kind of thinking wrong.

“I’m always going to defend and fight for the theatrical experience,” he said. “But they are completely compatible,” he continued, referring to streaming and theatrical exhibition. “And in many ways one informs the other.”

One recent night, Valerie Navarrete and her mother, Martha, drove through a downpour to catch a 7 p.m. screening of “Roma” at the Regency 14 multiplex in Commerce, south of Los Angeles. Yes, they subscribe to Netflix and could have watched the film at home, Valerie Navarrete acknowledged. “But my mom really wanted to see it on the big screen,” she said.

The screening attracted 26 people. The theater had about 100 seats. Tickets cost \$10.

Ms. Navarrete said in a text message the next day, “My mom loved seeing a movie that actually captures where we are from in Mexico. There are not many Hispanic figures like this in movies. It gave her pleasure to share the experience with other people.”

Behind a play, a true tale of forgiveness

BALTIMORE

A couple whose son died in a car crash use theater to help them heal

BY ERIC GRODE

The seats are no more than 14 inches from the Everyman Theater stage here. There are two of them, and they each bear the name of Shawn Laken, an aspiring painter and filmmaker who would have turned 50 last year.

Shawn had never set foot in this theater, which is currently presenting “Everything Is Wonderful,” a bruising story by Chelsea Marcantel of rage and absolute within an Amish community. Shawn died in 1988 in a car accident on a winding road in New York State near Bard College, where he was a junior. He was buried on what would have been his 20th birthday.

Sandy and Mark Laken, Shawn’s parents and the sponsors of this production, have spent a lot of time at Everyman recently. Opening night, Feb. 1, was their fourth time seeing the play in a week. But a different couple sat in the front-row seats marked “In memory of Shawn Laken” that night. Sandy and Mark had moved a few rows back. They were, both literally and emotionally, too close to the work.

LOOKING FOR SPONSORSHIP “Everything Is Wonderful” takes place in the aftermath of a car accident, one that kills two children in an Amish family. The father’s decision to invite the driver into their home dredges up a series of confrontations that test the community’s ability to forgive any and all acts if they are properly repented.

Ms. Marcantel said she came up with the idea for the play, which had its premiere in 2017 at the Contemporary American Theater Festival in Shepherdstown, W. Va., after seeing a Werner Herzog documentary about a fatal car accident involving an Amish buggy.

The subject matter hadn’t occurred to Vincent Lancisi, Everyman’s artistic director, when he was explaining the theater’s finances to members of its board of directors. Like most theaters, Everyman — which has its own repertory company and relocated in 2013 to a converted vaudeville theater in downtown Baltimore’s arts district after an \$18 million capital campaign — seeks sponsorship for its productions, typically to the tune of \$10,000. And this year’s offerings by the likes of Oscar Wilde and Brian Friel had already found takers.

The only sponsor-free play left was “Everything Is Wonderful,” and when Mr. Lancisi mentioned that it was a drama about forgiveness within an Amish community after a tragedy, Sandy — a new board member — raised her hand and said, “Oh, we’ll do that.”

Minutes later, however, Mr. Lancisi remembered a conversation he had had with her a year or so before, where she had mentioned the death of her younger son. “So I called Sandy and said, ‘Listen, you should know a bit more about this show.’”

She and her husband asked to read a copy of the script. Shortly afterward, they called Mr. Lancisi back and said they were still in. “It was a no-brainer,” Sandy said.

“IT HAS CHANGED OUR LIVES”

Their involvement with “Everything Is Wonderful” has also spurred the Lakens — who have met with and counseled many other grieving parents in the decades since Shawn’s death — to take on another project. In response to the play’s message of forgiveness and reconciliation, Sandy and Mark are searching for the man who they feel was responsible.

The details as to who this man might be are murky. The police record for that



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUSTIN T. GELLERSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above left, Chelsea Marcantel, who wrote “Everything Is Wonderful,” meeting Sandy and Mark Laken. Far left, the Lakens’ son Shawn. Left, seats at the Everyman Theater named for him.



nice to get a thumbs-up from the universe like this.”

Mr. Lancisi said the Lakens had attended various rehearsals of “Everything Is Wonderful” but originally planned to save their first viewing until opening night. “She didn’t want to see it for the longest time,” he said of Sandy. “She read it. She researched the hell out of it. But once we realized the emotional power of this play — for anyone, not just the Lakens — I said to my staff, ‘She’s got to come earlier. Otherwise she will melt on opening night.’”

So the Lakens came to the first preview. And again two nights later. And a third time.

In the process, they initiated a discussion that was severed 31 years earlier. “Once a child dies, there’s no subsequent conversation you can have with that child,” Mr. Botstein said. “That may be the hardest part.”

And so the Lakens wish instead to speak with another person, the one who they believe was responsible for Shawn’s death. “I just want to say to him, ‘Tell me what happened,’” Mark said.

While that question lingers — not yet known, possibly unknowable — Sandy and Mark hold hands in the dark night after night, watching six performers tell an eerily similar story with a bitter-sweet resolution that has eluded them.

They cry each time at the ending, as do many others in the audience. And the distance between art and life, between 1988 and 2019, between themselves and Shawn, collapses.

September night is gone, and more than three decades have blunted the memories of many involved. Everyone agrees that Shawn was driving a friend home that night on River Road. Everyone agrees that he swerved, crashed into a tree and died instantly.

The Lakens’ telling of that night includes two other cars. One was right behind Shawn, and its driver saw the accident. The other was coming the opposite way on the two-lane road, driving in a way that forced Shawn off the road.

Two Bard officials who were working there at the time — Leon Botstein, the school’s president, and Mark Primoff, its associate vice president for communications — remember this purely as a one-car accident. As it happens, Mr. Botstein had lost his own young daughter in a hit-and-run incident several years earlier, and both he and the Lakens recall this tragic coincidence as being helpful in the

aftermath of Shawn’s death.

As the Lakens recall it, though, the driver of this other car — who was not a Bard student — surfaced a few days later. And they say Mr. Botstein offered them the opportunity to meet with him.

After learning her sponsors’ connection to her subject, the playwright described the circumstances as a near miracle.

“We were so grief-struck and shocked that we chose not to,” Sandy said. “Had we had more wisdom at the time, we would have.”

Why? “To tell him that we forgive him,” she said. “This play has taught me that.”

Neither of the two Bard officials can recall the possibility of such a meeting.

“Nobody here is disputing anything that the Lakens said, because we have no reason to,” Mr. Primoff said. “But we have not been able to supply the details that would help give them the closure they want. And we have looked extensively.”

For his part, Mr. Botstein — who declined to press charges after his daughter was killed — speaks from experience about the harrowing questions that he, the Lakens and every other person in their situation asks themselves:

“For every parent who loses a child, it’s very hard not to feel some responsibility. There’s always the counterfactual of ‘If only I had. . . .’ You personalize it.”

In the wake of the emotions brought to the surface by “Everything Is Wonderful,” the Lakens have reached out to the passenger in Shawn’s car, who suffered only minor injuries, as well as the driver of the car behind them, in the hopes of

finding threads that might lead them to this other driver. They have also asked Bard and the Dutchess County, N.Y., police department to assist in their search.

Regardless of what they learn, Sandy said, “We know it was meant for us to be involved with this play. It has changed our lives.”

Mark is less effusive than his wife, but he echoed the power of this work. “People who see this play will start to think about forgiving others,” he said.

A REASON TO WRITE PLAYS

The night before “Everything Is Wonderful” opened, the Lakens met Ms. Marcantel for the first time and discussed their personal connection to it. She described this set of circumstances as something close to a miracle.

“You get a lot of signals from the universe that you should stop doing theater, that it doesn’t matter,” she said. “So it’s

From a critic, roses and poison

BOOK REVIEW

Nobody’s Looking at You: Essays

By Janet Malcolm. 289 pp. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$27.

BY PARUL SEHGAL

For all the festivity that attends a harsh review or magazine profile, critics tend to be remembered for their loves, not their hatreds; for whom they defended, not destroyed. The critics who endure — Jarrell, Sontag, Berger, Barthes — are shameless proselytizers for their enthusiasms, as insistent as Jehovah’s Witnesses pressing upon you the good news.

The exception might be Janet Malcolm, she of the slashing style and Jovian pronouncements. For 40 years, she has written about literature, photography and psychoanalysis, inspired always by the “specter of wrongdoing,” especially the malice that blooms in the relationship between artist and subject. “We are certainly not a ‘helping profession,’” she once said of journalists. “If we help anyone, it is ourselves, to what our subjects don’t realize they’re letting us take.”

Malcolm has been called a vampire, “the most dangerous interviewer in journalism,” famously “not-nice” — and all this by her fans. Lucian Freud said that a good painting always contains “a little bit of poison.” Malcolm lets it pour. “I have never found anything any artist has said about his work interesting,” she remarked in a piece on the artist David Salle.

Her new collection of reviews, profiles and essays, “Nobody’s Looking at You,” is a reminder, however, that she is also a great champion. Her lodestar is Chekhov and “the values by which Chekhov’s good characters are ruled: patient, habitual work and sensible, calm behavior.”

She is drawn to decency, cleanliness, sanity, simplicity — these words recur in her work like talismans, when she writes about Edith Wharton or the biographer Quentin Bell. Goodness, but of a narrow kind, matters intensely to her. Malcolm is impatient with weakness and a lack of self-control — with people who “leak.” The goodness that attracts her is born of strength, reserve and resources. It is tangled up with tastefulness, too. The critic Gary Indiana wrote that her reporting is “studied with such novelistic details, which twinkle class assurance from reporter

to reader: never mind what X thinks, he or she lives alone in an apartment so messy you and I would never dream of living there.”

The new book follows two more cohesive collections, “The Purloined Clinic” (1992) and “Forty-One False Starts” (2013). Malcolm writes here about the fashion designer Eileen Fisher, the concert pianist Yuja Wang, Tolstoy in translation, a favorite bookstore. What unites these pieces is a mood — heavy, autumnal, nostalgic.

There is a note of valediction. “God-speed, wonderful bookshop, on your journey into the uncertain future,” Malcolm writes to Argosy, a family-owned holdout in gentrified Manhattan. She writes a eulogy for her friend Joseph Mitchell, the matchless chronicler of New York, and memorializes a long-running radio program she loved in her youth. Several pieces are bouquets to the artists she loves. Memoir has always bored Malcolm, but around the edges of these pieces a furtive autobiography takes shape — we see glimpses of her childhood; the world of her parents, Czech refugees; and how their tastes shaped her own.

There is stirring, beautifully structured writing here, particularly in the title essay, a profile of Fisher, which



NINA SUBIN

Janet Malcolm.

combines many of the writer’s signal interests — our unconscious aggression and the way we methodically and unknowingly recreate the world of our childhood in our adult lives.

Several pieces, however, particularly the short reviews, make for intimate but curiously unsatisfying reading. Revering Malcolm, as I do, I was at first confused. What has gone wrong? Even if her subjects bore you, she is never dull. As she wrote of Irving Penn, his portraits are Penns before

they are photographs of his subjects. We read a piece by Malcolm for Malcolm — for the complicity she creates with the reader, the novelistic eye for gestures, the density of detail.

There is a clue to the source of this trouble in her profile of Wang, the celebrated pianist who has a taste for performing in skintight dresses and spiked heels. Malcolm quotes The Times’s critic Zachary Woolfe on how these outfits produce a dramatic contrast between the body and the instrument — “It turns a recital into a performance.”

Criticism itself is a performance of a kind; this is why I suspect Malcolm is moved, and not impressed, by Wang. But too often in this book we watch a powerful critic taking on targets that feel unworthy — not because they are small but because she does not elevate them or make a sufficient case for their importance. She flatters them instead, bathes them in adjectives.

She is rapturous on a book about email etiquette and, somehow, even more effusive about Alexander McCall Smith’s series “The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency”: “a literary confection of such gossamer deliciousness that one feels it can only be good for one. Fortunately, since texts aren’t cakes, there is

no end to the pleasure that may be extracted from these six books.”

Then there is Rachel Maddow, the object of Malcolm’s most unabashed admiration. Maddow is “magnificent,” her powers of storytelling “inimitable.” Her cable news show is a “delicious experience,” “lucid and enthralling,” “TV entertainment at its finest.”

With all due respect to both Maddow and Malcolm, I started to feel a little insane.

Malcolm can praise well; she did so especially forcefully in “Forty-One False Starts” when she came to the defense of two books most maligned in their time: Norman Podhoretz’s memoir “Making It” and J.D. Salinger’s “Franny and Zooey.”

They were defenses, though, and that makes all the difference.

“Scratch a great photograph and find a painting (or painterly influence),” she once wrote. Scratch Malcolm’s nonfiction and find a 19th-century novel. Many of her best pieces hinge on bygone plot devices: a lost journal, a missing letter, a misheard word. She is the sleuth who divines the details, pieces the story together, restores order. But as her new book proves, there is no story — there is no hero — without, first, a worthy antagonist.

TRAVEL

An island nation best savored slowly

FRUGAL TRAVELER

Trains are a great way to see Sri Lanka, but be sure to book in advance

BY LUCAS PETERSON

It's common while traveling to be approached by locals trying to make a few bucks by offering to show you around. I typically respond with a polite "no," but on this particular morning in Kandy, a small city in the center of Sri Lanka, I was looking for someone to take me on a tour of the sights. Santha, a small, middle-aged man with a big smile, must have sensed it because he made a bee-line for me as I approached the small park near the Kandy Municipal Market in the center of town.

After a quick negotiation we were off, crammed into the back of a blue tuk-tuk, zooming down streets slick from the morning's rain and smelling of wet leaves. Santha yelled to me over the loud buzz of the auto rickshaw's engine: "I was born in Kandy, raised in Kandy and married in Kandy." He added, "And I will die in Kandy!"

I could easily have spent months in Sri Lanka, the small island nation off the southern tip of India. Full of fantastic food, kind people and astonishing natural wonder, Sri Lanka is a place best seen slowly, even if you have only four days on the ground as I did. The train was my preferred means of transport (when I wasn't in a tuk-tuk), winding from Colombo to Kandy before I took another train down to Ella, on what was one of the most beautiful and scenic train rides I've ever experienced. And I was able to keep my expenses comfortably under control.

A train trip in Sri Lanka requires planning. Many popular routes, including the one from Kandy to Ella, can sell out reserved seats weeks in advance. The Sri Lanka Railways website isn't going to be much help here: You can reserve tickets only in person or through your local mobile phone. I consulted the website The Man in Seat 61 and eventually decided to place my trust in Visit Sri Lanka Tours to make my bookings.

My ticket in the observation car from Colombo to Kandy, with comfortable seats and a big picture window at the front of the compartment, cost 11 British pounds, or about \$14 for the two-and-a-half hour ride. (The agency is based in Britain and charges can be paid through PayPal.) I booked 20 days in advance and snagged the last reserved second-class seat on the Kandy to Ella route, paying £13 for the more ponderous, nearly seven-hour jaunt through the green hills and tea plantations of central Sri Lanka.

The Airtel SIM card I purchased in India didn't work when I landed at Bandara International Airport on a Sri-Lankan Airlines flight (about \$180 for a one-way flight from Chennai, India). Luckily, I had bought an AIS travel SIM card for about \$18 ahead of time: It is good for eight consecutive days of travel in over a dozen Asian countries. I had no trouble plugging the card into my un-



Passengers on the train from Kandy to Ella in central Sri Lanka.

locked iPhone and using it over the next several days in Sri Lanka.

I picked up my train ticket at Colombo's Fort Railway Station and had just enough time to stop at the nearby Highland Milk Bar for a creamy chocolate milk from a glass bottle and a bag of chips, which cost 120 Sri Lankan rupees, or about 65 cents. The first part of the ride heading east was unexceptional, but things changed around Rambukkana. Suddenly the air seemed heavier, and the vegetation became denser, as we passed train stations painted in muted pastels.

Pelting rain greeted us as we entered Kandy, once an independent kingdom on the island until it fell victim to British colonial power in the early 19th century. I put on a poncho I'd brought for the occasion and walked down William Gopallawa Mawatha Street in search of my lodgings. "Gamage?" I asked passers-by, unsure how to pronounce the name of my host family. Eventually, someone pointed me toward a fluorescent light inside a small grocery, and I sloshed toward it. A woman peered out the door and waved. "Peterson?" she yelled from across the street.



The colonial-era Nine Arch Bridge in Ella, Sri Lanka. Ella's downtown is geared to tourists and backpackers, with Western-style coffee shops, bars and souvenir stores.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID BLACKER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The lovely Gamage family (pronounced GAH-mah-gay), an extended family all under one roof, put me up for two nights in their home for about \$10 per night, booked through the site Hotels.com. My room was basic but comfortable and came with an outstanding breakfast: curried mango, daal, beans, beets, rice, eggs and tea. Mrs. Gamage told me I could easily find someone in a tuk-tuk to show me around town.

Rain made trekking difficult, but I had the mountain to myself.

When I found Santha the next day near the park (or rather, he found me), we quickly agreed on a price for a tour of the city: 2,000 rupees (a little more than \$11). "We have very good history here," he said to me as the tuk-tuk labored uphill toward Sri Mahabodhi Maha Viharaya Buddhist temple, a little over a mile from the town center. Sri Lanka is a majority Buddhist nation, and many of the culturally and historically significant places of worship are Buddhist.

son? he asked me. I didn't have a good answer.

The Royal Botanic Gardens was the final stop on our tour. Despite the relatively hefty entrance fee (1,500 rupees for foreigners, 60 rupees for locals), I found the gardens a lovely respite from the traffic and hubbub of the area. The gardens felt like an arboretum and I admired mazelike java fig trees, a towering smooth-barked kauri and a fascinating cannonball tree, which holds dozens of large, spherical fruits.

The food is wonderful in Sri Lanka; bright flavors, sharp spices and complex curries usually eaten with rice as the centerpiece. I thoroughly enjoyed the Flavors of Sri Lanka cooking class I booked as an Airbnb experience (\$22), with the friendly Chitra taking the lead and her daughter Hasara assisting. Learning about the different spices and produce — like gotu kola, an herb, and goraka, a small, sharply acidic fruit that's commonly dried and used to flavor meat and fish — was a delicious education.

A 400-rupee tuk-tuk ride from Chitra's house on the western side of town took me to Sri Dalada Maligawa, or Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic (1,500 rupees admission) just in time for the 6:30 p.m. puja, or worship ceremony. Hundreds of people packed into the temple, fragrant with flowers and ringing with the rhythm of drums beaten by men in traditional dress. After the puja, I wandered north along a narrow moat until I came to a man standing in front of an old, regal building. He introduced himself as Vipula, and we chatted about the building, which was the residence of Kandy's king until the British seized the kingdom in 1815. The king, Vipula said sadly, was betrayed by his own people.

After an early breakfast the next morning, I boarded a bright blue train to Ella, a small town southeast of Kandy. Traveling by train is one of my favorite ways to get to know a place, because it offers a sense of moving from one place to another, while creating a sense of community with the others aboard. From my second-class seat (about \$16.50, again booked through Visit Sri Lanka Tours), I could enjoy the percussive clacking of the train as it wound through the intensely lush, hilly terrain, with row after row of perfectly manicured tea plants.

With tourists and locals hanging out of the doors and windows — some to get a good selfie, others to get some air — we pulled into Ella station. I made the short walk to the Sunnyside Holiday Bungalow, where I had booked a room for just under \$30 per night. The owners were kind and the property, with gardens and a big shaded porch, was beautiful. The one downside was that there seems to be a trash processing facility across the road, which can be slightly irksome when the wind blows the wrong way.

Ella's downtown is geared to tourists and backpackers with Western-style coffee shops, bars and souvenir stores, so I didn't spend much time there. My first morning in Ella, I set out to find the Nine Arch Bridge, a gorgeous old colonial-era railway bridge that has, as you might expect, nine big arches. I was fortunate to arrive just as a big red and green engine with a few cars behind it came barreling around the bend.

After a morning of walking around, it started to pour. I ducked into the restaurant at the 98 Acres Resort & Spa, which

sits atop a hill and provides an awesome view of the surrounding countryside, even in the rain. I sipped a cappuccino (400 rupees) and lamented the weather.

But an hour or so later, I had my chance. The downpour had eased to a light smattering, and I set out to hike Lit-

tle Adam's Peak, a slightly rigorous but doable trek to the south. It was a bit more difficult after the rain, but the trade-off is that I had it all to myself; I didn't meet a soul on the way up.

Nor was there anyone at the summit. I approached a small shrine that had a

covered golden Buddha statue and multicolored prayer flags fluttering lightly, and admired the vista of low-lying clouds resting gently on what seemed like an endless series of rolling, green hills. Even through the rain, it was a spectacular sight.



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