

ELSEWHERE

**Trump is tearing apart the moral fabric of U.S.**

NEW YORK
Democratic presidential candidate Kirsten Gillibrand called President Donald Trump a "coward" who "punches down" and said that he is "tearing apart the moral fabric of our country." Ms. Gillibrand was set to say even more about Mr. Trump on Sunday as she stood in front of one of his signature New York properties. **AP**

Qatani not on trial in Khashoggi killing case

LONDON
Saud al-Qatani, a Saudi royal adviser fired over the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, is not among the 11 suspects on trial at secretive hearings in Riyadh despite Saudi pledges to bring those responsible to justice, sources familiar with the matter said. **AFP**

130 people killed after attack on Mali village

BAMAKO
More than 130 people were killed in an attack on a Fulani village in central Mali on Saturday, the UN said, as a delegation visited the country. Survivors accused traditional Dogon hunters of carrying out the deadly raid in Ogossagou, according to Boubacar Kane, the Governor of Bankass district. A security source said the victims were shot or hacked to death with machetes. **AFP**

U.S. signs strategic port deal with Oman

WASHINGTON
The United States clinched a strategic port deal with Oman on Sunday which U.S. officials say will allow the U.S. military better access the Gulf region and reduce the need to send ships through the Strait of Hormuz, a choke point off Iran. **AFP**

Thai pro-military party takes early lead

Country votes for the first time since Prayuth Chan-o-Cha became Premier following a coup in 2014

REUTERS
BANGKOK

Partial results from Sunday's election in Thailand showed a pro-military party slightly ahead of the populist party leading a "democratic front", an unexpected and – for many – stunning outcome from the country's first poll since a 2014 army coup.

With 93% of overall votes counted, the Election Commission reported the pro-military party Palang Pracharat, which is seeking to keep junta chief Prayuth Chan-o-Cha in power, was leading with 7.59 million votes.

Trailing with 7.12 million votes was Pheu Thai, a party linked to exiled former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, whose loyalists have won every election since 2001.

Pheu Thai could still win
The numbers were for the popular vote, but these did not reflect parliamentary constituency seats that would ultimately be won. Pheu Thai could still win the lion's share of these because of its concentrated populari-



Celebrating democracy: Supporters of the Pheu Thai party react after the preliminary results were announced at the party's headquarters in Bangkok on Sunday. **AFP**

ty in the north and northeast of the country. Nevertheless, there was dismay among many voters who had hoped that the poll would loosen the grip on power that traditional elites and the military have held in a country that has one of the highest measures of inequality in the world. At Pheu Thai's headquarters in Bangkok, the

mood fluctuated from cheer to quiet disbelief. "I didn't think this is likely. I don't think this is what the people wanted," said Pheu Thai supporter Polnotcha Chakphet.

A #PrayforThailand hashtag started trending on Twitter as the results trickled out, and some people tweeted that they would leave the country if Mr. Chan-o-Cha

was returned to power. The Election Commission chairman said unofficial results would be announced on Monday afternoon.

The Commission said turnout was 66%, based on 90% of the vote counted.

The royal family, which wields great influence and commands the devotion of millions of Thais, played a

part in the election though how far it influenced the outcome was unclear.

The King's message

On the eve of the vote, King Maha Vajiralongkorn made an unexpected and cryptic statement, recalling a comment made by his late father in 1969 on the need to put "good people" in power and to prevent "bad people from... creating chaos".

His message was a departure from the approach of his late father: in his latter years, the former King usually kept a distance between the monarchy and politics.

The election will determine the make-up of Parliament's 500-seat House of Representatives.

The lower house and the upper house, the Senate – which is appointed entirely by the ruling junta – will together select the next Prime Minister.

The provision means Mr. Chan-o-Cha's Palang Pracharat Party and allies have to win only 126 seats, while Pheu Thai and its potential "democratic front" partners would need 376.

Stricken Norwegian ship reaches port after airlift rescue

460 of its 1,373 passengers were taken off by helicopters before the vessel's engines restarted



Safe to the shore: Cruise ship *Viking Sky* arriving at a port off Molde, Norway, on Sunday. **AFP**

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
OSLO

A cruise liner that ran into trouble in stormy seas off Norway reached port under its own steam on Sunday after hundreds of passengers were winched to safety by helicopter in a spectacular rescue operation.

Escorted by tugboats, the Viking Sky arrived in the port of Molde at around 4.15 p.m., television images showed. Nearly a third of its 1,373 passengers and crew had already

been airlifted off the ship.

The cruise liner lost power and started drifting on Saturday afternoon two km off a stretch of Norwegian coastline notorious for shipwrecks. The captain sent out a Mayday, prompting authorities to launch the airlift in difficult conditions rather than run the risk of leaving people on board.

Some 460 of the 1,373 people on the ship had been taken off by five helicopters before the airlift was halted.

Police said 17 people had been taken to hospital.

With three of four engines restarted on Sunday, two tugs towed the vessel away from dangerous reefs before it set sail for Molde, 500 km northwest of Oslo, under its own power.

The area where the ship got into problems, known as Hustadvika, is notoriously difficult to navigate. The shallow, 10 nautical mile section of coastline is dotted with small islands and reefs.

Indian-origin Labour MP faces vote of no-confidence

Sharma's views on many issues have stirred up controversy

VIDYA RAM
LONDON

The Indian-origin MP for Ealing Southall, Virendra Sharma, is in the midst of a local political storm, following a vote of no confidence in him by the local constituency Labour Party. The vote is the first in a multi-stage process that could enable the local party to choose a new parliamentary candidate for any future general election.

Those who triggered and supported the motion against Mr. Sharma this week have expressed a number of concerns about his ability to represent the local community, pointing to a

number of factors such as his failure to attend local constituency Labour meetings for the past 21 months. But their deeper concerns relate to his stance on a number of political and international issues, such as his position on issues relating to Kashmir and India-Pakistan bilateral relations, which they say endanger the politics of a very diverse London constituency.

Ealing Southall has one of the largest South Asian diasporas in the U.K., with 29.7% of its population describing itself as of Asian background in the last census. It is also religiously diverse, with 16% identifying as Muslim, 9% as

Hindu, 8% as Sikh and 43% as Christian.

The issue has surfaced locally a number of times, when Mr. Sharma in 2017 referred in Parliament to Pakistan as the "world's leading sponsor of terrorism." Following protests, he subsequently issued an apology to the local community, but the issue has come to the forefront following the Pulwama attacks.

Some have pointed to a range of local issues such as the failure to support a campaign to keep Southall Town Hall – a long-standing community building – secular and avoid it being taken over by a local temple last year.

New Zealand bans gunman's 'manifesto'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DUNEDIN

New Zealanders on Sunday were debating the limits of free speech after their chief censor banned a 74-page manifesto written by the man accused of slaughtering 50 people at two mosques in the city of Christchurch.

The ban, issued on Saturday, means anybody caught with the document on their computer could face up to 10 years in prison, while anyone caught sending it could face 14 years. Chief Censor David Shanks said the manifesto contains justifications for acts of tremendous cruelty like killing children and encourages acts of terrorism.

Ranil lays foundation stone for oil refinery

A Singapore firm, linked to an Indian business, has invested in the project

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on Sunday laid the foundation stone for a nearly \$4-billion oil refinery in the southern, strategically located port town of Hambantota. The project will come up at the investment zone next to a port that Sri Lanka has leased out to a Chinese state-run firm for 99 years.

The mega project has drawn much interest in the past week, after Sri Lanka's Board of Investment (BOI) announced that a Singapore-registered firm, along with Oman, was bringing in the investment. Soon after, Reuters quoted an Omani official as saying the country had no role in the project.

Oman's participation
On Sunday however, Oman's Oil Minister Mohammed bin Hamad Al Rumayhi, who was in Sri Lanka to participate in the ground-breaking cere-



Record investment: Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and Oman Oil Minister Mohammed bin Hamad Al Rumayhi in Hambantota on Sunday. **AFP**

mony, said he was excited to be part of the refinery project, signalling a possible change in stance.

Meanwhile, *The Hindu* had reported last week that the Singapore-registered firm, Silver Park International, said to be bringing in 70% of the share capital, was linked to an Indian business. Three out of four directors of the firm were from the family of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) politician and

businessman S. Jagathrakshakan. The BOI, in its media conference last week, had made no mention of the Indian connection to the massive investment, sparking curiosity over where the huge investment originated, and whether the company was experienced in the sector.

Further, Sri Lankan weekend newspaper *The Sunday Times* reported that a new company named Silver Park Petroleum (Pvt) Ltd had

been incorporated in Sri Lanka on February 21, six days after Development Strategies and International Trade Minister Malik Samarawickrama submitted the latest Cabinet paper on the project.

Speaking at Sunday's ceremony, Mr. Wickremesinghe said he welcomed the investment. "Traders from both Tamil Nadu and Oman have long experience of dealing with Sri Lanka. There is nothing new in this," he said, apparently acknowledging the Indian role in the project. With investments from India, China coming in, and the "interest shown by Omani govt and many other investors, Hambantota is set to become a multinational investment zone", he said. Further, Mr. Wickremesinghe said that within three months, he also hoped to finalise the agreement with Indian airport authorities, to revive the nearby Mattala airport.

'11 U.K. Ministers want PM May to step down'

Media hint at a plot to topple govt.

REUTERS
LONDON

The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (EU) was in disarray on Sunday as Prime Minister Theresa May faced a possible plot by Ministers to topple her and Parliament prepared to grab control of Brexit from the government.

As hundreds of thousands of people marched across central London on Saturday to demand another Brexit referendum, Ms. May was the subject of what *The Sunday Times* said was a "coup" by senior Ministers seeking to oust her.

'An erratic figure'

The newspaper cited 11 unidentified senior Ministers and said they had agreed that the Prime Minister should stand down, warning that she has become a toxic and erratic figure whose judgment has "gone haywire".

But two of the leading candidates as caretaker leaders – Ms. May's de facto



A demonstrator at an anti-Brexit rally in London on Saturday. **AFP**

deputy David Lidington and Environment Secretary Michael Gove – backed her on Sunday.

"I think it is not the time to change the captain of the ship. I think what we need to do is to chart the right course, and the Prime Minister has charted that right course by making sure that we have a deal that honours the referendum mandate," Mr. Gove said.

Trump, lawmakers await details of Mueller report

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

U.S. lawmakers drew battle lines on Sunday over how to handle a Special Counsel report on Russian meddling in the 2016 election that has cast a pall over Donald Trump's presidency.

Members of Congress, the media and Mr. Trump himself were waiting for Attorney-General William Barr to release a summary of the report by Special Counsel Robert Mueller after his 22-month investigation of Rus-

sian connections. Mr. Barr said he hoped to make public a summary of its "principal conclusions".

Call for full release

The White House has not received or been briefed on the report, spokesman Hogan Gidley said on Sunday morning.

Democrats called for the full release of the report, as well as documents backing up its findings, and have promised to subpoena any information they do not get.