

# 13 THE WORLD

## TOP OF THE WORLD



Netanyahu faces a tough challenge in Tuesday's vote

### ISRAEL

#### Govt approves new settlement days before polls

Jerusalem: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government approved a new settlement in the occupied West Bank on Sunday, his office said, just two days ahead of closely fought general elections. Netanyahu's cabinet agreed to turn the wildcat settlement of Mevoot Yericho in the Jordan Valley into an official settlement, the premier's office said. All settlements are viewed as illegal under international law, but Israel distinguishes between those it has approved and those it has not. Sunday's approval follows Netanyahu's pledge last week to annex the Jordan Valley.

### IRELAND

#### Flight diverted as coffee melts button in cockpit

WHEN THE pilot of an international flight spilled a cup of coffee on the cockpit controls midway over the Atlantic Ocean, it melted one of the buttons and the plane was diverted to Ireland, an investigation concluded on Thursday. The Condor airlines flight had been carrying 337 people, including 11 crew members, from Frankfurt to Cancun, Mexico, when the episode occurred aboard the Airbus A330, according to the United Kingdom's aviation authority.

### THAILAND

#### Tigers rescued from temple found dead

Bangkok: More than half of the tigers that Thai authorities confiscated in 2016 from an infamous Tiger Temple tourist attraction have died from a viral disease because their immune systems were weakened by inbreeding, media reported. The Buddhist temple west of Bangkok was a tourist destination where visitors took selfies with tigers and bottled cubs until authorities removed its nearly 150 tigers in 2016 in response to global pressure over wildlife trafficking.



A protestor catches fire after throwing a Molotov cocktail during a demonstration near Central Government Complex in Hong Kong on Sunday. Reuters

## Hong Kong returns to violence with teargas and Molotovs

### AGENCIES

HONG KONG, SEPTEMBER 15

HONG KONG riot police fired teargas and water cannons at hardcore pro-democracy protesters hurling rocks and petrol bombs on Sunday, tipping the violence-plagued city back into chaos after a brief lull in clashes. Tens of thousands of people defied authorities to march through the streets of the city in an unsanctioned rally on Sunday, the latest expression of a popular revolt that has raged for the last 99 days.

But the rally descended into violence when small groups of hardcore activists — known within the movement as "braves" — tried to attack the city's main government complex. Police fired repeated volleys of teargas and deployed water

### EXPLAINED

#### Protests remain intense despite govt concession

EARLIER THIS month, Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam had promised protesters that the controversial extradition Bill, which sparked protests, would be withdrawn. The Bill would have allowed those undergoing trial to be sent to mainland China. However, the protests have moved beyond just calls for revocation of the Bill. Protesters now demand direct elections to the city's government and an independent probe into police actions. The government has said it would not accept these demands. So, despite the immediate trigger for the protests having been resolved, the protesters, who feel Hong Kong's autonomy is eroding, have maintained the intensity of their struggle.

cannon trucks after Molotov cocktails and rocks were thrown over security barriers surrounding the complex, which has become a frequent flashpoint in the

ongoing protests.

Protesters also tore down a banner celebrating the upcoming 70th anniversary of the founding of communist China.

## Taliban revoke ban on Red Cross

### Afghan, US forces kill 2 senior insurgent leaders, 38 fighters

### REUTERS

KABUL, SEPTEMBER 15

THE TALIBAN on Sunday revoked their ban on the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Afghanistan and gave a guarantee of security for its staff doing humanitarian work in areas under their control.

Taliban leaders imposed a ban on the ICRC and the World Health Organisation in April saying the organisations were carrying out "suspicious" activities during vaccination campaigns and not sticking to their declared missions.

Meanwhile, Afghan forces

backed by US forces killed two senior Taliban leaders and at least 38 fighters of the headline insurgent group in joint airstrikes conducted in northern and western regions of Afghanistan, officials said on Sunday.

The operations, launched on Saturday night, were aimed at foiling attacks planned by the Taliban, a security official said.

meanwhile, Afghan forces backed by US forces killed two senior Taliban leaders and at least 38 fighters of the headline insurgent group in joint airstrikes conducted in northern and western regions of Afghanistan, officials said on Sunday.

## Like Hulk, UK will overcome obstacles to exit EU: Boris

### PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LONDON, SEPTEMBER 15

PRIME MINISTER Boris Johnson insisted Sunday that "huge" progress was being made in Brexit talks and declared Britain would break out of the European Union just like the comicbook hero Hulk.

The Conservative leader made the comments ahead of



meetings with European Commission chief Jean-Claude

Juncker and EU negotiator Michel Barnier in Luxembourg on Monday.

In an interview with the Mail on Sunday newspaper, Johnson said he was "very confident" of getting a divorce deal at an EU summit on October 17, in time for Brexit on October 31.

In an odd analogy, he compared Britain to the comic book character Hulk. "The madder

## ATTACK ON SAUDI OIL PLANTS

# Iran rejects US allegations, warns it is ready for war

US assets within range of Iranian missiles: Revolutionary Guards commander

LANIA EL GAMAL & PARISA HAFEZI  
DUBAI, SEPTEMBER 15

IRAN DISMISSED accusations by the United States that it was behind attacks on Saudi oil plants that disrupted world oil production and warned on Sunday that US bases and aircraft carriers in the region were in range of its missiles.

Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi group claimed responsibility for Saturday's attacks that knocked out more than half of Saudi oil output. But US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said there was no evidence the attacks came from Yemen and accused Iran of "an unprecedented attack on the world's energy supply."

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi, speaking on state TV, dismissed the US claim as "pointless". A senior Revolutionary Guards commander warned that the Islamic Republic was ready for "full-fledged" war and that US military assets were within range of Iranian missiles.

"Everybody should know that all American bases and their aircraft carriers in a distance of up to 2,000 kilometres around Iran are within the range of our missiles," the head of the Revolutionary Guards Corps Aerospace Force Amirali Hajizadeh was quoted as saying by the semi-official Tasnim news agency.

State-run oil company Saudi Aramco said the strikes would cut output by 5.7 million barrels per day, or more than five per cent of global crude supply, at a time when Aramco is gearing up for a stock market listing.

Aramco gave no timeline for when output would resume but said early Sunday it would give a progress update in around 48 hours. The kingdom, the world's top oil exporter, ships more than 7 million barrels of oil to global destinations every day, and for years has served as the supplier of last resort to markets. REUTERS

### GERMANY

#### PROTESTERS BLOCK ENTRANCE TO AUTO SHOW

Activists blocked the main entrance to the Frankfurt Motor Show on Sunday in a protest against what they call the "climate and environment destroyers" produced by the auto industry. Hundreds of people wearing white protective suits sat or stood in front of the grounds where the auto show is being held.



Smoke rises from an Aramco facility in Abqaiq, Saudi Arabia, Saturday. Reuters

## Trump-Rouhani meeting not ruled out: White House

### DOINA CHIACU

WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 15

THE WHITE House on Sunday did not rule out a potential meeting between President Donald Trump and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, even after Washington accused Iran of being behind drone attacks on Saudi oil facilities.

White House adviser Kellyanne Conway said the attacks on Saturday "did not help" prospects for a meeting between the two leaders during the United Nations General Assembly this month but she left open the possibility it could happen.

"I'll allow the President (Trump) to announce a meeting or a non-meeting," Conway told "Fox News Sunday."

The Trump administration's sanctions and "maximum pres-



Trump has said he is willing to meet Rouhani

sure" campaign on Iran over its nuclear and ballistic missile program will continue whether or not the two leaders meet, she added.

However, Conway said, "You're not helping your case much," by attacking Saudi Arabia, civilian areas and critical infrastructure that affects global energy markets.

Iran has denied US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's allegations that it was behind the attacks on plants in the heartland of Saudi Arabia's oil industry. REUTERS

### INCREASING ATTACKS ON SAUDI OIL INFRA

There have been multiple attacks on Saudi Arabian oil facilities since May

**MAY 12:** Four ships, including two Saudi oil tankers, are attacked in the Gulf just outside the Strait of Hormuz, a major oil shipping route. US officials pin the blame on Iran, a charge Tehran denies.

**MAY 14:** Saudi Arabia said armed Houthi drones struck two oil pumping stations in the kingdom.

**JUNE 13:** Two tankers are attacked south of Hormuz on June 13.

**SEPT 14:** The Houthis claim responsibility for drone attacks on Saudi Aramco plants in Abqaiq and Khurais.

## Riots break out in Pak's Sindh after principal booked for blasphemy

### PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LAHORE, SEPTEMBER 15

RIOTS BROKE out in Pakistan's Sindh province on Sunday after a school principal from the minority Hindu community was booked on charges of blasphemy, according to a media report.

Widespread protests erupted in Ghotki district after an FIR was filed against the principal of Sindh Public School on the complaint of Abdul Aziz Rajput, a student's father who claimed that the teacher had committed blasphemy.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan shared a video of protesters breaking the infrastructure of the school and expressed concern over the situation.

"Alarming reports of accusations of blasphemy in Ghotki and

the outbreak of mob violence," the rights organisation said in a tweet.

Videos of stick-wielding protesters were shared on social media in which they were seen damaging the school where the incident took place, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Activists and journalists took to Twitter to share videos and images of the rioting and appealed to the Sindh government to protect the minority Hindu community, the report said.

Ghotki Senior Superintendent of Police Farrukh Lanjar, while talking to reporters, said that police were controlling the law and order situation in the area.

Sukkur Additional IGP Jamil Ahmed confirmed the developments in a tweet, saying that police were "trying to deal with a serious situation".

## Calls for Kavanaugh's impeachment after new allegations

### ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 15

AT LEAST two Democratic presidential candidates are calling for the impeachment of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh in the face of a new, uninvestigated, allegation of sexual impropriety when he was in college.

Kavanaugh was confirmed last October after emotional hearings in the Senate over a sexual assault allegation from his high school years. The New York Times now reports that Kavanaugh faced a separate allegation from his time at Yale University and that the FBI did not investigate the claim. The latest claim mirrors one offered during his confirmation process



Kavanaugh has a life-time seat in the Supreme Court

by Deborah Ramirez, a Yale classmate who claimed Kavanaugh exposed himself to her during a drunken party.

When he testified before the Senate last year, Kavanaugh denied all allegations of impropriety. Senator Kamala Harris said after the new report that "Brett Kavanaugh lied to the US Senate and most importantly to the American people." She tweeted,

"He must be impeached."

Her comments followed similar ones from Julian Castro, a former US housing secretary, on Saturday night. "It's more clear than ever that Brett Kavanaugh lied under oath," he tweeted. "He should be impeached and Congress should review the failure of the Department of Justice to properly investigate the matter." AP

### AUTHORITIES REFUSE TO FULLY DISCLOSE RESULTS OF THEIR TESTS

# Notre Dame's toxic fallout: Paris exposed to alarming amounts of lead

### JAMES GLANZ, JEREMY WHITE, ELIAN PELTIER & WEIYI CAI

PARIS, SEPTEMBER 15

THE APRIL fire that engulfed Notre Dame contaminated the cathedral site with clouds of toxic dust and exposed nearby schools, day care centres, public parks and other parts of Paris to alarming levels of lead.

The lead dust came from the cathedral's incinerated roof and spire, which contained about 460 tonnes of the dangerous metal. Five months after the fire, French authorities have refused to fully disclose the results of their testing for lead contamination,

sowing public confusion, while issuing reassuring statements intended to play down the risks.

Their delays and denials have opened authorities to accusations that they put reconstruction of the cathedral — which President Emmanuel Macron has pledged to complete in five years — ahead of the health of thousands of people.

A comprehensive investigation by the New York Times has helped fill out an emerging picture of a failed official response. It found significant lapses by French authorities in alerting the public to health risks, even as their understanding of the danger became clearer.

The April 15 blaze nearly de-

stroyed the 850-year-old cathedral and brought immediate scrutiny to whether adequate fire protections had been in place to safeguard a gem of Gothic architecture visited by 13 million people a year.

The cathedral's roof and spire succumbed to the flames that night and collapsed. But the billowing smoke carried its own perils. It contained massive quantities of lead, according to test results in confidential reports and others released by the government.

The Times' investigation drew from confidential documents, including warnings by labor inspectors, a police report and previously undisclosed lead measurements



Workers wear masks on the roof of Notre Dame cathedral. NYT

by the Culture Ministry.

The documents, as well as scores of interviews, make clear that French authorities had indi-

cations that lead exposure could be a grave problem within 48 hours of the fire.

But it took a month before

city officials conducted the first lead tests at a school close to Notre Dame. Even today, city and regional health officials have not tested every school in proximity to the cathedral.

The tests showed levels of lead dust above the French regulatory standard for buildings hosting children in at least 18 day care centres, preschools and primary schools.

In dozens of other public spaces, like plazas and streets, authorities found lead levels up to 60 times over the safety standard.

The highest contamination levels, revealed in confidential Culture Ministry documents obtained by the Times, were at different spots in, or near, the cath-

edral site. Authorities failed to clean the area in the immediate aftermath of the fire and waited four months to finish a full decontamination of the neighbourhood.

The Culture Ministry, which is responsible for cleaning the site and rebuilding Notre Dame, also failed or refused to enforce safety procedures for workers, leaving them exposed to lead levels more than a thousand times the accepted standard.

"These are astronomical levels, and the attitude of health authorities is inexplicable," said Annie Thébaud-Mony, a prominent public health expert in France, who has been leading public calls for more transparency in the aftermath of the fire.

Some French officials and lead experts have cautioned against "paranoia" and argued that the test results may in part reflect broader underlying problems with lead contamination in Paris.

Lead exposure poses the greatest risk to children as well as pregnant women and nursing mothers, who can pass lead on to their children.

If ingested, lead interferes with the normal development of the nervous system and can leave young children with permanent cognitive damage.

Even so, hundreds of children attended schools near Notre Dame for weeks before authorities began in mid-May to test for lead levels, or to clean the buildings. NYT