



MEANWHILE
PARIS TESTS BUBBLE-SHAPED WATER TAXI
 Paris is testing out a new form of travel: an eco-friendly bubble-shaped taxi that zips along the water up and down the Seine River. Organisers are holding test runs this week on the white, oval-shaped electric hydrofoil boats that resemble tiny space shuttles gliding past Paris monuments. They can fit four passengers, and can be ordered on an app.

TOP OF THE WORLD



JEAN-CLAUDE JUNCKER
 European Commission President

BREXIT
UK heading for no-deal exit, EU leader warns
 THE EUROPEAN Union warned on Wednesday that Britain was headed for a damaging no-deal Brexit, with London's ideas for solving the contentious issue of the Irish border still unlikely to unlock a deal just six weeks before Britain is due to leave. Addressing EU lawmakers in Strasbourg, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said British Prime Minister Boris Johnson had told him on Monday that London still wanted a deal, but would leave with or without one on Oct. 31. "There is very little time left... The risk of a no-deal is very real," said Juncker, his comments weighing on sterling.

Israeli voters deliver deadlock, Netanyahu's tenure in doubt

Weeks of coalition talks to follow as parties of PM, his main contender Gantz fail to secure majority

JEFFREY HELLER
 JERUSALEM, SEPTEMBER 18

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed to win a ruling majority in an election that produced a virtual tie between his right-wing bloc and a centre-left grouping that would be led by former military chief Benny Gantz. The outcome, according to almost complete results published on Wednesday, dealt a new blow to Israel's longest-serving leader, who was already weakened by the inability to put together an administration after an inconclusive election in April. But with coalition-building again key to forming a government, it could be days or even weeks before it becomes clear whether the wily politician hailed by supporters as "King Bibi" has been dethroned after a decade in power. The campaigns run by Netanyahu and Gantz pointed to only narrow differences on many important issues, and an end to the Netanyahu era would be unlikely to bring about significant changes in policy on relations with the United States, the regional struggle against Iran or the Palestinian conflict.



Both Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz addressed their supporters, but neither claimed victory. Reuters

PRELIMINARY RESULTS
 Gantz-led bloc: 56 seats
 Netanyahu-led bloc: 55 seats
 Total seats in Parliament: 120
 Seats needed to form govt: 61

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?
 The President will consult all party leaders about their preference for PM, and will choose the one he thinks has the best chance of putting together a coalition. The nominee has 42 days to form govt.

With Israeli media reporting more than 90 per cent of votes counted in Tuesday's election, the bloc led by Netanyahu's Likud party was more or less even with a likely grouping headed by Gantz's centrist Blue and White party. A Likud-led bloc looked poised to control 55 of parliament's 120 seats, with 56 going to a centre-left alliance — in both cases falling short of a majority government of 61 lawmakers.



The far-right settler Avigdor Lieberman is the central figure in negotiations. He has said the only option he would back is a 'national unity government' that would include his party, Yisrael Beiteinu, Netanyahu's Likud party and Gantz's Blue and White party. According to preliminary results, Lieberman's party is likely to get 10 seats. Source: Reuters

THE KINGMAKER
 The far-right settler Avigdor Lieberman is the central figure in negotiations. He has said the only option he would back is a 'national unity government' that would include his party, Yisrael Beiteinu, Netanyahu's Likud party and Gantz's Blue and White party. According to preliminary results, Lieberman's party is likely to get 10 seats. Source: Reuters

The ballot's wildcard, former defence minister Avigdor Lieberman, emerged as a likely kingmaker as head of the secular-nationalist Yisrael Beiteinu party, projected to capture nine seats. Lieberman has been pushing for a unity government comprised of the biggest parties. He declined to back Netanyahu's bid to form a narrow right-wing and religious coalition after the April election, bringing about Tuesday's unprecedented repeat vote. REUTERS

Trump orders more Iran sanctions, Saudis display 'evidence'

STEPHEN KALIN & PARISA HAFEZI
 JEDDAH, DUBAI, SEPTEMBER 18

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump ordered a major increase in sanctions on Iran on Wednesday as Saudi Arabia displayed remnants of drones and missiles it said were used in a crippling attack on its oil sites "unquestionably sponsored" by Tehran. Trump gave no explanation in a Twitter post announcing the order, but it followed repeated US assertions that the Islamic Republic was behind Saturday's attack and came hours after Saudi Arabia said the strike was a "test of global will". "I have just instructed the Secretary of the Treasury to substantially increase sanctions on the country of Iran!" he wrote. Iran again denied involvement in the Sept. 14 raids, which hit the world's biggest crude oil processing facility. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia showed drone and missile debris it said amounted to undeniable evidence of Iranian aggression. A total of 25 drones and missiles were used in the attacks launched from Iran, not Yemen, Defence Ministry spokesman Colonel Turki al-Malki told a news conference. "The attack was launched from the north and unquestionably sponsored by Iran," he said, adding Iranian Delta Wing unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) were used in addition to cruise missiles. REUTERS

EXPLAINED
Sanctions may be bid to avoid military response

WITH BOTH the US and Saudi Arabia blaming Iran for the attack on Aramco oil facilities, pressure has been mounting on Trump to take action. Though some officials have hinted at a military response, and despite Trump's fiery rhetoric, he has focused more on ending America's wars around the world rather than starting new ones. He has, however, already ratcheted up sanctions on every aspect of Iran's economy, leading to the heightening of tensions in West Asia. Any more US sanctions are unlikely to have much of an effect. It is likely that the latest move to add more sanctions is an attempt to seem like the US has acted against Iran without resorting to war.

SINGAPORE
Couple probed over anti-death penalty shirts

Singapore: A Singaporean couple who wore anti-death penalty t-shirts at a running event are under investigation for violating tough laws against public protests, police said Wednesday. The city-state's laws against dissent and street demonstrations make it illegal for even one person to hold a protest without a police permit. Nafiz Kamarudin and his wife wore the t-shirts at a run Sunday organised by a local group. They bore the words "2nd CHANCES MEANS NOT KILLING THEM" on the front and "#ANTIDEATHPENALTY" on the back.

SRI LANKA
Doctors across country strike over salary

Colombo: Doctors at state-run hospitals across Sri Lanka staged a 24-hour strike on Wednesday, demanding that the government resolve what they say is a salary "injustice." Dr Haritha Aluthge, of the Government Medical Officers Association, said that two years ago, the government gave a high salary increase to legal officers in the government sector, "causing a severe injustice to the doctors and other professionals." "For two years, we have been urging the government to rectify this anomaly," he said.

Duterte says he ordered a politician killed, his aide says he misspoke

JASONGUTIERREZ
 MANILA, SEPTEMBER 18

PRESIDENT RODRIGO Duterte of the Philippines appeared to admit in a speech this week that he had ordered an assassination attempt on a politician last year. His spokesman said on Wednesday that Duterte had misspoken. In a speech on Tuesday night at the presidential palace in Manila, Duterte railed against drug-related corruption in Philippine politics. He mentioned two mayors who were killed by the police after he accused them of drug crimes: Rolando Espinosa, who was gunned down in his jail cell in 2016, and Reynaldo Parojinog, who died in a raid on his home in 2017. Then he mentioned Vicente Loot, a mayor and former general who survived an attack by gunmen in the central Philippines in May 2018. "General Loot, you son of a b***h," he said. "I ambushed you, you animal, and you still survived." A presidential spokesman, Salvador Panelo, said Wednesday that Duterte had meant to say "You were ambushed," not "I ambushed you." NYT



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Many children among 27 killed in Liberia school fire

JONATHAN PAYE-LAYLEH
 PAYNESVILLE, SEPTEMBER 18

A FIRE at a Quranic school outside Liberia's capital has killed at least 27 people and many are thought to be children, police said Wednesday. The fire around midnight gutted a dormitory and school building where students slept, about 11 kilometres east of Monrovia, police spokesman Moses Carter said. Only the imam and two students escaped, he said. The cause of the fire was under investigation. Hundreds of grief-stricken people stood in shock as ambulances took away the bodies. Others wailed and wept as police pushed back a curious, surging crowd. The President of the West African nation, George Weah, visited the scene and was due to attend the victims' funeral at a Monrovia mosque before burial later in the day, said spokesman Isaac Solo Kelgbeh. Pastor Emmanuel Herbert of a nearby church said he and his congregation woke up to sounds of the fire and called for help. "When I turned around to look, the entire place was red. When I looked through the window, I saw the whole place blazing with fire," he said. AP

After deadly Afghanistan attacks, Taliban 'open for new US talks'

4 killed in latest gun, bomb attack on Afghan govt building

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
 KABUL, SEPTEMBER 18

THE TALIBAN'S chief negotiator has said their "doors are open" to resuming talks with Washington, hours after two attacks by the insurgents killed at least 48 people in war-weary Afghanistan. Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai also defended the Taliban's role in recent bloodshed across the country after US President Donald Trump cited an attack that killed an American soldier as his reason for calling off negotiations earlier this month. Speaking to the BBC, Stanikzai argued the Americans had also admitted to killing thousands of Taliban during the discussions, and that the insurgents had done nothing wrong by continuing to fight throughout the talks. "From our side, our doors are open for negotiations," he was quoted as saying. Meanwhile, at least four people were killed and a dozen injured when gunmen stormed a crowded government building in eastern Afghanistan Wednesday following a suicide bombing, with desperate survivors leaping from windows to escape the fighting, witnesses and officials said. Security forces rushed to the scene after armed men attacked the office in Jalalabad, the capital of eastern Nangarhar province. Security forces fought to clear the building for several hours before declaring all three gunmen dead. No group has claimed responsibility.



Afghan security forces fire at insurgents near the site of an attack in Jalalabad on Wednesday. Reuters

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At 17.5 m, Indian diaspora largest in the world: UN report

YOSHITA SINGH
 UNITED NATIONS, SEPTEMBER 18

INDIA WAS the leading country of origin of international migrants in 2019 with a 17.5 million strong diaspora, according to new estimates released by the United Nations, which said the number of migrants globally reached an estimated 272 million. The International Migrant Stock 2019, a dataset released by the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs on Wednesday, provides the latest estimates of the number of international migrants by age, sex and origin for all countries and areas of the world. The estimates are based on official national statistics on the foreign-born or the foreign population obtained from population censuses, population registers or nationally representative surveys. The report said the top 10 countries of origin account for one-third of all international migrants.



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LARGEST DIASPORAS

Indian:	17.5
Mexican:	11.8
Chinese:	10.7
Russian:	10.5
Syrian:	8.2
Bangladeshi:	7.8
Pakistani:	6.3
Ukrainian:	5.9
Filipino:	5.4
Afghan:	5.1

(Numbers in millions)

nationally representative surveys. The report said the top 10 countries of origin account for one-third of all international migrants. In 2019, with 17.5 million persons living abroad, India was the leading country of origin of international migrants. India hosted 5.1 million international migrants in 2019, less than the 5.2 million in 2015. International migrants as a share of total population in India was steady at 0.4 per cent from 2010 to 2019. The country hosted 207,000 refugees, the report said, adding that refugees as a share of international migrants in the country was four per cent. PTI

Trump names his hostage negotiator O'Brien as NSA

REUTERS
 WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 18

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump on Wednesday picked US hostage negotiator Robert O'Brien as national security adviser, replacing hardliner John Bolton who was fired abruptly last week after clashing with the President on a host of issues. O'Brien, who will be the fourth person to hold the post in the Trump administration, has served as Trump's special envoy for hostage affairs at the US Department of State since May 2018 and has a long history in Republican foreign policy circles. "I have worked long & hard with Robert. He will do a great job!" Trump wrote on Twitter. Trump fired Bolton after disagreements over handling foreign policy matters relating to North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan, Russia and Venezuela. O'Brien is an attorney from Los Angeles who has served as a foreign policy adviser to several Republican presidential campaigns, handled a number of high-profile legal cases and previously served in several State Department positions, including as an alternative representative to the UN General Assembly in 2005. Trump had recently dispatched O'Brien to Sweden for the court hearing of US rapper ASAP Rocky, who was later convicted for assault.



Robert O'Brien has a long history in Republican foreign policy circles. AP

SOCIAL MEDIA GIANT CLAIMS AUTOMATED SYSTEMS REMOVE VAST MAJORITY OF PROHIBITED CONTENT BEFORE IT'S REPORTED

Facebook auto-generating pages for Islamic State, Al-Qaeda: whistleblower

DESMOND BUTLER & BARBARA ORTUTAY
 WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 18

IN THE face of criticism that Facebook is not doing enough to combat extremist messaging, the company likes to say that its automated systems remove the vast majority of prohibited content glorifying the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda before it's reported. But a whistleblower's complaint shows that Facebook itself has inadvertently provided the two extremist groups with a networking and recruitment tool by producing dozens of pages in their names. The social networking company appears to have made little progress on the issue in the four months since *The Associated Press* detailed how pages that Facebook auto-generates for businesses are aiding Middle East extremists and white supremacists in the United States. On Wednesday, US senators on the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation will be questioning representatives from social media companies, including Monika Bickert, who heads Facebook's efforts to stem extremist messaging. The new details come from an update of a complaint to the Securities and Exchange Commission that the National Whistleblower Center plans to file this week. The filing obtained by the AP identifies almost 200 auto-generated pages — some for businesses, others for schools or other categories — that directly reference the Islamic State group and dozens more representing Al-Qaeda and other known groups. One page listed as a "political ideology" is titled "I love Islamic state". It features an IS logo inside the outlines of Facebook's famous thumbs-up icon. In response to a request for comment, a Facebook spokesperson told the AP: "Our priority is detecting and removing content posted by people that violates our policy against dangerous individuals and organisations to stay ahead of bad actors. Auto-generated pages are not like normal Facebook pages as people can't comment or post on them and we remove any that violate our policies. While we cannot catch every one, we remain vigilant in this effort." Facebook has a number of functions that auto-generate pages from content posted by users. The updated complaint scrutinises one function that is meant to help business net-

working. It scrapes employment information from users' pages to create pages for businesses. In this case, it may be helping the extremist groups because it allows users to like the pages, potentially providing a list of sympathisers for recruiters. The new filing also found that users' pages promoting extremist groups remain easy to find with simple searches using their names. They uncovered one page for "Mohammed Atta" with an iconic photo of one of the Al-Qaeda adherents, who was a hijacker in the Sept. 11 attacks. The page lists the user's work as "Al Qaidah" and education as "University Master Bin Laden" and "School Terrorist Afghanistan". Facebook has been working to limit the spread of extremist material on its service, so far with mixed success. In March, it expanded its definition of prohibited content to include US white nationalist and white separatist material as well as that from international extremist groups. It says it has banned 200 white supremacist organisations and 26 million pieces of content related to global extremist groups like IS and Al-Qaeda. But as the report shows, plenty of material gets through the cracks — and gets auto-generated. AP



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