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Beyond #MeToo
In Istanbul, above, and elsewhere, International Women’s Day events emphasized gender parity and bias in the workplace. Page A4.

Russia’s Biggest Problem in Syria: Assad, Its Ally

By NEIL MacFARQUHAR
MOSCOW — Sitting down with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria late last year, a senior Kremlin envoy described the benefits to come as Moscow shepherded the Syrian conflict toward a political settlement, particularly in rebuilding the war-ravaged country. But Mr. Assad cut the Russian off, asking why, with the Syrian government so close to victory, a political solution was necessary at all, according to a senior Arab diplomat who was briefed on the meeting. Nearly two and a half years after he intervened militarily to prop up Mr. Assad, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia finds himself stuck in Syria, not quite able to find a solution despite hav-

Resisting Putin’s Desire to Negotiate Peace
ing declared “mission accomplished” on at least three occasions. While Mr. Putin’s military intervention established the Kremlin as a major player in the Middle East for the first time in decades, extricating Russia from Syria is proving far more difficult than he envisaged. The problem is that Moscow has effectively tied its fortunes to those of Mr. Assad, with limited room to maneuver. Mr. Putin can neither withdraw nor push real political change in Syria without risking the collapse of the Assad government, which

would jeopardize both the effort to diminish American influence in the region and Mr. Putin’s own prestige. Mr. Assad, well aware of his leverage, resists Russian attempts toward compromise with the Syrian opposition. In that unhappy equilibrium, the war drags on with unknown consequences for Moscow. As the most powerful outside actor, Russia is increasingly blamed for the misery visited on Syrian civilians. On Tuesday, the United Nations released a report that for the first time linked the Russian Air Force to a possible war crime, when a military fighter jet executed a series of attacks in November on the town of Al Atarib, west of Aleppo, killing at least 84 people and wounding more than 150. Continued on Page A8

G.O.P. Opens Wallet to Hold A Fading Seat

By JONATHAN MARTIN
PITTSBURGH — Never has so much money been spent so quickly on a political race with so little real meaning than on the House special election here, but to Republicans, the public relations debacle that would come with a loss this Tuesday is a price they cannot bear. Never mind that this southwest Pennsylvania seat — which envelops suburban Pittsburgh and hugs the West Virginia border — will most likely cease to exist by the November election or that the man occupying it will be shopping for new constituents. Conservative groups have flooded the district with more than \$10 million. President Trump will be here on Saturday to test out the political potency of his new steel tariffs. Vice President Mike Pence has paid a visit. And the Democrats are playing, too. On Tuesday, former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. was at a union carpenters training center glad-handing supporters of Conor Lamb, the 33-year-old Democrat who hopes to pull off a huge upset next week in deepest Trump country. “If he wins, you’re going to see probably another half a dozen Republicans say they’re not running again,” Mr. Biden told a reporter on a meet-and-greet rope line, adding that Mr. Lamb could also show the way toward that holiest of Democratic grails: “getting back working-class people supporting us again.” Republicans explain their extraordinary spending by acknowledging that something far more substantial is at stake than holding a single seat. If Mr. Lamb, a Marine veteran and a former federal prosecutor, defeats State Representative Rick Saccone, a Republican, in a district that the president carried by 20 points, the alarm bells will be audible across the country. The Democrats will have shown that they can breach the Republican hold on the blue-collar white voters who helped deliver Mr. Trump the presidency. “If the Democrats were to prevail in western Pennsylvania, that Continued on Page A15

Crisis Below the Streets Masks Headaches Above

By SARAH MASLIN NIR
The M15 bus rolled through Manhattan, traveling south along Allen Street. As it approached a red light at Hester Street, the signal turned green. Then the same thing happened a block down and again at the next intersection, allowing the bus to slice through the congested warren of Lower Manhattan streets at a surprisingly swift clip. The run of green lights had nothing to do with luck — it was intentional, made possible by a special system that gives the bus the power to use its GPS system to turn traffic lights green or keep them green longer, a relatively cutting edge technology that reduces travel time. “The lights turn green for the bus? Wow,” said Steve Matos, 32, who abandoned the subway when navigating steps with a cane became too difficult after he sprained a toe. “They should do it on every line.” They do not and, in fact, the M15 is the exception. Though the system was introduced seven years ago, it operates on just 11 of the 317 public bus routes in New York City, even as the tool could significantly improve a lumbering and unreliable bus network. While the Metropolitan Transportation Authority is undertaking a widely promoted \$836 mil-



JOSHUA BRIGHT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

lion emergency plan to reverse the New York subway’s precipitous slide, an equally consequential crisis has been brewing aboard the city’s public buses, which provide more than 725 million rides a year and reach places that are not close to a subway line. Despite the city’s growing population, bus ridership has been slipping, declining about 14 percent between 2006 and 2017, to about 725 million rides from about 843 million, with commuters shifting to the faltering subway, bicycles or ride-hailing apps like Uber. “I think in general the subways have soaked up so much of the attention, and so much oxygen, that the crisis with the buses has gone out of sight,” said Councilman Mark D. Levine, a Democrat, who represents parts of northern Manhattan where buses are essential, and who is pushing a bill to accelerate the rollout of the green light syncing system. “Bus transit is less glamorous and sexy than the subways, but it’s a vital piece of our infrastructure.” Continued on Page A20

NORTH KOREA ASKS FOR DIRECT TALKS, AND TRUMP AGREES

Meeting With Kim on Nuclear Program Could Happen Within 2 Months

By MARK LANDLER
WASHINGTON — North Korea’s leader, Kim Jong-un, has invited President Trump to meet for negotiations over its nuclear program, an audacious diplomatic overture that would bring together two strong-willed, idiosyncratic leaders who have traded threats of war. The White House said Mr. Trump had accepted the invitation, and Chung Eui-yong, a South Korean official who conveyed it, told reporters that the president would meet with Mr. Kim within two months. “He expressed his eagerness to meet President Trump as soon as possible,” Mr. Chung said at the White House on Thursday evening after meeting the president. Mr. Trump, he said, agreed to “meet Kim Jong-un by May to achieve permanent denuclearization.” The president expressed his optimism about the meeting in a post on Twitter, saying that Mr. Kim had “talked about denuclearization with the South Korean Representatives, not just a freeze.” “Also, no missile testing by North Korea during this period of time,” Mr. Trump added. “Great progress being made but sanc-

tions will remain until an agreement is reached. Meeting being planned!” Mr. Chung, whose talks with Mr. Kim on Monday in Pyongyang, the North’s capital, resulted in the invitation, noted that the North Korean leader said he understood that joint military exercises with the United States and South Korea would proceed as scheduled after the end of the Paralympic Games this month. For Mr. Trump, a meeting with Mr. Kim, a leader he has threatened with “fire and fury” and has Continued on Page A9



KOREAN CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY

Kim Jong-un of North Korea.

ABOUT-FACE President Trump’s decision reflects an audacious and self-confident approach to international affairs. News Analysis. PAGE A9

A Fresh Salvo In the Pursuit Of More Deals

By NEIL IRWIN
When President Trump signed proclamations to place tariffs on imported steel and aluminum on Thursday, he portrayed it as an effort to throw around America’s economic weight in hope of reaching better deals from major international partners. But Mr. Trump, who had set off warnings by trade experts that this could become the first attack in a global trade war, also sent a different signal. There would be exceptions in the nations that the tariffs are applied to, he said. The result is that the new tariffs look more like a negotiating tactic — less the beginning of a war, more the beginning of a new round of haggling. After announcing last week that the tariffs would apply to imports from all countries, the Trump administration said that they would not apply to Canada or Mexico, pending renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. These exceptions suggest the administration is looking to use the threat of steel and aluminum tariffs as a cudgel to get a better deal out of those two close allies — which are also major exporters of metals to the United States — in mostly unrelated negotiations to revamp the 25-year-old agreement. “I have a feeling we’re going to make a deal on NAFTA,” Mr. Trump said as he announced the Continued on Page A11

What Winners?
Has the president studied the Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930? Maybe he should, James B. Stewart writes. Page B1.

Trump Signs Tariffs, Defying Array of Allies

By PETER BAKER and ANA SWANSON
WASHINGTON — President Trump defied opposition from his own party and protests from overseas as he signed orders on Thursday imposing stiff and sweeping new tariffs on imported steel and aluminum. But he sought to soften the impact on the United States’ closest allies with a more flexible plan than originally envisioned. After a week of furious lobbying and a burst of last-minute internal debates and confusion, Mr. Trump agreed to exempt, for now, Canada and Mexico, and held out the possibility of later excluding allies like Australia. But foreign leaders warned of a trade war that could escalate to other industries and take aim at American goods. “The actions we are taking today are not a matter of choice; they are a matter of necessity for our security,” Mr. Trump said in a ceremony at the White House where he officially authorized the tariffs, which will go into effect in 15 days. Flanked by a handful of steel and aluminum workers, some wearing coveralls and holding hard hats, Mr. Trump presented the move as a way to rebuild vital industries decimated by foreign competition. “Our factories were left to rot and to rust all over the place; thriving communities turned into ghost towns,” he said. “That betrayal is now over.” The orders were Mr. Trump’s most expansive use of federal power to rewrite the rules of global trade since he took office and upended the prevailing consensus on free markets that has largely governed Washington under administrations of both parties for decades. A longtime critic of globalization, Mr. Trump argued that the United States had Continued on Page A12



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In winning a 5 percent raise, West Virginia teachers showed the power of crowdsourced walkout. PAGE A13

Peril for President in Lawsuit
A suit filed by a porn actress against the president could be a risky new legal front for the White House. PAGE A16

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Visits to Washington and New York left a sense that Benjamin Netanyahu’s trip could be his last to the United States as Israel’s prime minister. PAGE A6

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Peter Madsen is accused of murdering a Swedish journalist after inviting her onto his self-built submarine. PAGE A7

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Evidence that might warrant punishment from a campus panel was seen as insufficient for a court of law. PAGE A18



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Japan Rethinks Women’s Work
A labor shortage is pushing Japan to change, but some tone-deaf recruiting efforts are falling flat. PAGE B1

Samsung Plays It Safe
The Galaxy S9 smartphone has some gimmicky features, but it’s a lot like the S8, Brian X. Chen writes. PAGE B3

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A Master Class in Coaching
USA Hockey assigned Jason Wolfe a difficult mission: Make the world’s best sled hockey goalie, twice a Paralympics gold medalist, even better. PAGE B8

Louisville Waits for a Call
The Cardinals were swept from their conference tournament by Virginia, but after a season of scandal and 20 wins, they certainly deserve an N.C.A.A. bid, Coach David Padgett says. PAGE B9

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Spellbound by Zoe Leonard
In an exhibition at the Whitney, the idea of obsolescence — of the present slipping irretrievably into the past — haunts the artist’s work. PAGE C13



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