



DAVID DEE DELGADO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

More than 160 firefighters responded to a fatal fire in a five-story apartment building near the Bronx Zoo on a frigid Thursday night.

At Least 12 Die in Bronx Inferno, City's Deadliest Fire in 27 Years

By **MAGGIE ASTOR**
and **ASHLEY SOUTHALL**

At least 12 people were killed when a fire fueled by gusty winds tore through a century-old apartment building in the Bronx on a frigid Thursday night, New York City officials said. It was the deadliest fire in the city in more than a quarter-century.

In addition to the deaths, four people were critically injured and two people sustained non-life-threatening injuries, Mayor Bill de Blasio said at a news conference late Thursday. The youngest among the dead was 1 year old, the oldest over 50.

"Tonight in the Bronx we've

seen the worst fire tragedy in at least a quarter of a century," the mayor said on Twitter late Thursday. "It is unspeakable, and families have been torn apart."

The first emergency call came at 6:51 p.m. for a fire in a five-story apartment building at 2363 Prospect Avenue in the Belmont neighborhood, a spokesman for the New York City Fire Department said. The department responded in three minutes, the mayor said, and firefighters were able to rescue 12 people.

The fire began on the first floor but quickly spread throughout the building, as the wind fed oxygen to the flames. The people who died were on various floors, the fire

Winds Feed Flames at 5-Story Building

commissioner, Daniel A. Nigro, said.

The blaze grew to five-alarm status, and more than 160 firefighters responded. By the time Mr. de Blasio spoke, around 10 p.m., the flames had been brought under control.

The cause of the fire was not yet clear.

It was a bitterly cold night, with temperatures in the teens, and the wind chill made it feel below zero.

Water leaking from fire hoses froze in streaks on the concrete, and displaced residents walked around draped in American Red Cross blankets. Three young girls were whisked into a neighboring building after climbing down a fire escape with no shoes or coats.

Officials said they were opening up the nearby Grace H. Dodge vocational high school as a reception center for people who needed housing and other services. People looking for relatives who lived in the building were also told to go to the school, or to call 311.

Luz Hernandez said she first realized something was wrong when the smell of burning rubber

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The Most Expensive Mile Of Subway Track on Earth

Archaic Rules and Too-Generous Contracts Combine to Inflate New York's Bills

By **BRIAN M. ROSENTHAL**

An accountant discovered the discrepancy while reviewing the budget for new train platforms under Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan.

The budget showed that 900 workers were being paid to dig caverns for the platforms as part of a 3.5-mile tunnel connecting the historic station to the Long Island Rail Road. But the accountant could only identify about 700 jobs that needed to be done, according to three project supervisors. Officials could not find any reason for the other 200 people to be there.

"Nobody knew what those people were doing, if they were doing anything," said Michael Horodniceanu, who was then the head of construction at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which runs transit in New York. The workers were laid off, Mr. Horodniceanu said, but no one figured out how long they had been employed. "All we knew is they were each being paid about \$1,000 every day."

The discovery, which occurred in 2010 and was not disclosed to the public, illustrates one of the main issues that has helped lead to the increasing delays now tormenting millions of subway riders every day: The leaders entrusted to expand New York's regional transit network have paid the highest construction costs in the

world, spending billions of dollars that could have been used to fix existing subway tunnels, tracks, trains and signals.

The estimated cost of the Long Island Rail Road project, known as East Side Access, has ballooned to \$12 billion, or nearly \$3.5 billion for each new mile of track — seven times the average elsewhere in the world. The recently completed Second Avenue subway on Manhattan's Upper East Side and the 2015 extension of the

SYSTEM FAILURE Excessive Costs

No. 7 line to Hudson Yards also cost far above average, at \$2.5 billion and \$1.5 billion per mile, respectively.

The spending has taken place even as the M.T.A. has cut back on core subway maintenance because, as The New York Times has documented, generations of politicians have diverted money from the transit authority and saddled it with debt.

The Times found that a host of factors have contributed to the transit authority's exorbitant capital costs.

For years, The Times found, Continued on Page A20

Insurgent President Is Changing, Unpredictably, U.S. Global Role

By **MARK LANDLER**

WASHINGTON — President Trump was already revved up when he emerged from his limousine to visit NATO's new headquarters in Brussels last May. He had just met France's recently elected president, Emmanuel Macron, whom he greeted with a white-knuckle handshake and a complaint that Europeans do not pay their fair share of the alliance's costs.

On the long walk through the NATO building's cathedral-like atrium, the president's anger grew. He looked at the polished floors and shimmering glass walls with a property developer's eye. ("It's all glass," he said later. "One bomb could take it out.") By the time he reached an outdoor plaza where he was to speak to the other NATO leaders, Mr. Trump was fuming, according to two aides who were with him that day.

He was there to dedicate the building, but instead he took a shot at it.

"I never asked once what the

new NATO headquarters cost," Mr. Trump told the leaders, his voice thick with sarcasm. "I refuse to do that. But it is beautiful." His visceral reaction to the \$1.2 billion building, more than anything else, colored his first encounter with the alliance, aides said.

Nearly a year into his presiden-

TRUMP'S WAY On the World Stage

cy, Mr. Trump remains an erratic, idiosyncratic leader on the global stage, an insurgent who attacks allies the United States has nurtured since World War II and who can seem more at home with America's adversaries. His Twitter posts, delivered without warning or consultation, often make a mockery of his administration's policies and subvert the messages his emissaries are trying to deliver abroad.

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President Says Inquiry Makes U.S. Look Bad

By **MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT**
and **MICHAEL D. SHEAR**

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Trump said Thursday that he believes Robert S. Mueller III, the special counsel in the Russia investigation, will treat him fairly, contradicting some members of his party who have waged a weekslong campaign to try to discredit Mr. Mueller and the continuing inquiry.

During an impromptu 30-minute interview with The New York Times at his golf club in West Palm Beach, the president did not demand an end to the Russia investigations swirling around his administration, but insisted 16 times that there has been "no collusion" discovered by the inquiry.

"It makes the country look very bad, and it puts the country in a very bad position," Mr. Trump said of the investigation. "So the sooner it's worked out, the better it is for the country."

Asked whether he would order the Justice Department to reopen the investigation into Hillary Clinton's emails, Mr. Trump appeared to remain focused on the Russia investigation.

"I have absolute right to do what I want to do with the Justice Department," he said, echoing claims by his supporters that as president he has the power to open or end an investigation. "But for purposes of hopefully thinking I'm going to be treated fairly, I've stayed uninvolved with this particular matter."

Hours after he accused the Chi-

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JAMES ESTRIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Residents of Clarkstown, N.Y., began lining up at the tax office before 9 a.m. on Thursday.

Lining Up to Prepay Taxes, With No Guarantees

By **BEN CASSELMAN**
and **JEFFERY C. MAYS**

In Hempstead, a Long Island town where the typical property tax bill tops \$10,000, residents have lined up all week to prepay those taxes for next year. They have been trying to save thousands of dollars before the new federal tax bill, which goes into effect on New Year's Day, sharply limits deductions for state and local taxes.

But late on Wednesday, the Internal Revenue Service issued new guidance that those people may not be able to save the money after all, because a loophole that they were hoping to exploit might

I.R.S. Throws Ice Water on Tactic to Thwart Deduction Cap

be narrower than thought. So when Donald X. Clavin Jr., Hempstead's receiver of taxes, showed up to work Thursday morning, the lines were still there — but residents had fresh questions. Mr. Clavin had few answers.

"Everybody on line, they're going, 'Don, are we going to be able to do this?'" Mr. Clavin said. "And I can't give them a yes or a no."

The new tax bill, and its \$10,000

cap on all local and state tax deductions, has generated a variety of strong emotions — including anxiety and frustration — in places like Hempstead.

By Thursday, however, that stew of emotions had been replaced by utter confusion, as well as rage, including among people who had shelled out money only to discover that they might not get any benefit.

This week's tax-prepayment roller coaster could be just the beginning. Republicans pushed through their tax overhaul at blistering speed, giving lawyers and accountants only about a week to study the bill before it takes effect.

But already, those people studying Continued on Page A13

Unlikely Iranian-Saudi Race: Easing Restrictions on Women

By **ANNE BARNARD** and **THOMAS ERDRINK**

BEIRUT, Lebanon — They call each other meddlers, warmongers, religious hypocrites, zealots and sponsors of terrorism. Now Iran and Saudi Arabia, the archrivals of the Middle East, are competing in a surprising new category: gender equality.

They appear to be vying over who can be quicker to overhaul their repressive rules for women.

Tehran's police chief announced this week that the so-called morality police who patrol the capital would no longer automatically detain and punish women seen without the proper hijab head-covering in public, an offense com-

monly called "bad hijab." They will be given counseling instead.

In Saudi Arabia, one of the most restrictive countries for women, the authorities this week allowed female contestants at an international chess tournament to play without the full-body garb known as an abaya. That decision is the latest in a string of liberalizing moves by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the young Saudi ruler, which includes letting women drive.

Saudi Arabia and Iran are on opposite sides in many ways — in their divergent branches of Islam, Continued on Page A6



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Alabama Election Is Official

Less than 24 hours after Roy S. Moore formally challenged his defeat, state officials certified the result. PAGE A11

Voting Mess in Virginia

The state issued a guide on ballot disputes after the Bush-Gore race but now faces a similar problem. PAGE A12

INTERNATIONAL A4-10

Liberia Says It Has New Leader

George Weah, a former soccer star, was well ahead in the presidential election returns, officials said, and will succeed Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. PAGE A4

In Egypt, the Roller Derby Life

The women in Egypt's only roller derby club say the sport helps offer a sense of empowerment. Cairo Journal. PAGE A8

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On Guard in Times Square

Mindful of snipers and bombers, the police strengthened the plan for the Times Square ball drop. PAGE A18



WEEKEND ARTS C1-24

MoMA Looks Beyond Youth

The Museum of Modern Art is highlighting works by artists 45 and older, like this Joan Jonas sculpture. PAGE C17

A New Year's Eve Event Guide

From Cardi B in Queens to Chris Botti at the Blue Note in Manhattan, find a show to ring in 2018. PAGE C2

BUSINESS DAY B1-6

Last Gasp for Book Chains

Book World, founded in 1976, is closing its 45 stores. "The internet is killing retail," its owner said. "Bookstores are just the first to go." PAGE B1

OBITUARIES B12

A 'Dick Van Dyke Show' Star

Rose Marie became famous on the radio as a toddler and then received acclaim on "The Dick Van Dyke Show," playing the witty Sally Rogers. She was 94.

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David Brooks

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SPORTSFRIDAY B7-10

Polishing a Football Legacy

Howard Schnellenberger, who built programs at Miami, Louisville and Florida Atlantic, continues to see his efforts pay off this bowl season. PAGE B7

