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## A ravaging of Amazonia across Brazil

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### OPINION

**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL** When I first set foot in the Amazon rain forest, in the Anavilhanas Archipelago, northwest of the city of Manaus, I experienced something that can only be described as awe: an overwhelming sense of connection with the universe.

Cheesy, I know. But this is something that we rarely feel — only upon seeing a clear tropical night sky, or the ghostly flickering of the northern lights or even the vastness of a French Gothic cathedral.

From the outside, the Amazon is a massive, undistinguished canopy of trees, but once you're inside it, it is indeed a "monumental universe," in the words of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. It has a strikingly layered structure: The soil lies beneath an entanglement of roots, mosses and decomposing leaves; pale trunks appear and disappear as they climb up into the lush foliage. The tallest trees can reach up to 200 feet, almost the height of the towers of Notre-Dame. And now it is

their turn to burn.

The first sign that the Amazon would not have a good year came this month, when the government sacked the head of the National Institute for Space Research, the physicist Ricardo Galvão, who was unpatriotic enough to release data showing a 278 percent jump in deforestation in July compared with the same month the previous year. President Jair Bolsonaro said that he should have been warned about such evidence, which could cause the country great harm internationally.

"This is not a posture from a Brazilian, someone who wants to serve his country and is concerned about Brazil's businesses," Mr. Bolsonaro said. He suggested that the agency could be lying to make the government look bad.

By then, however, a number of satellite images had emerged showing truly alarming numbers of fires across the Amazon: dozens of smoldering patches of scorched earth, clouding the dark green landscape.

According to the institute, the number of fires detected in Brazil so far this year is 84 percent higher than in the comparable period last year; more than half of those are in the Amazon region. More than 1,300 new fires were

*The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.*



MICKALENE THOMAS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



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Paramedics treating an injured man after a motorcycle accident in Bangkok in April. Thailand had the world's second-highest rate of road fatalities per capita in 2015.

## Asia's deadliest roads

### BANGKOK

In Thailand, the casualties are mostly motorcyclists or pedestrians who are poor

BY HANNAH BEECH

The Thai woman was riding on a motorcycle on her way to work when a pickup truck sideswiped her on a rural stretch of asphalt in northeastern Thailand. The truck's driver was an off-duty police officer. He was drunk.

Orathai Chanhom, the motorcyclist, was catapulted off her bike and killed almost instantly in the crash.

The officer who struck her still has his police job. His driver's license was not taken away. A court declined to sentence him to prison.

In Thailand, one of the world's most unequal societies, even roads have a rigid hierarchy, with the poor far more likely to be killed in accidents than the well-off and well-connected.

And there are many deaths: Thailand had the world's second-highest rate of road fatalities per capita, surpassed only by war-afflicted, lawless Libya, according to a 2015 report from the World Health Organization. When it comes to

per capita motorcycle deaths, the country is No. 1.

"I never thought about road deaths until this happened to my mother," said Chularat Chanhom, Ms. Orathai's adult daughter. "I had no idea it was such a big problem in Thailand."

The government vowed at a United Nations forum in 2015 to halve the number of road traffic deaths by 2020. With less than one year to go before the deadline, however, Thailand is a long way from fulfilling that promise, its roads still ranking among the world's 10 most dangerous, with more than 20,000 preventable fatalities a year.

The country has seen a small dip in road deaths since 2015, and Thailand has in place many of the necessary laws to make its roads safer. But the government has not addressed the country's vast gap in wealth, which is the core issue that not only makes its roads so deadly, but has also split the country into two bitterly divided political camps: Thailand's haves and have-nots.

Thailand, named the most unequal country of the 40 major economies surveyed last year by Credit Suisse, has what might be the world's most toxic combination for traffic safety.

Unlike poorer countries, its roads are well paved and made for speed, and the cars driven by the rich and its growing middle class tend to be new and fast.



A paramedic waiting for an emergency call in Bangkok. Thailand vowed to halve the number of road traffic deaths by 2020, but still has 20,000 preventable fatalities a year.

But many Thai families can afford only a single scooter or motorcycle, and high-quality helmets are a luxury for many.

In accidents on the country's crowded roads, it's a devastating mismatch when an air-conditioned S.U.V. collides with a two-wheeler, and the aftermath of such accidents are a common, macabre sight

on Thai thoroughfares: a shredded tire, a mangled frame of steel, a bloody plastic flip-flop.

Motorcycle accidents can involve multiple fatalities. It's not uncommon to see a couple of adults — and even a child or two crammed between them — balanced on a single bike.

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## Chaotic day displays risk of a global meltdown

### THE UPSHOT

Confusion makes it clear how little central bankers can do to maintain calm

BY NEIL IRWIN

The series of economic and financial developments on Friday was a strange, bewildering, exhausting microcosm of why the global economy is at risk of a meltdown.

It showed the odd interplay at work between the Chinese government's actions in the escalating trade war with the United States, the sober-minded global central bankers who have limited power and an American president whose public pronouncements often appear driven by grievance more than strategy.

President Trump arrived in France on Saturday for a meeting of the Group of 7 industrialized nations, having set the stage for fireworks and confusion. In one dizzying day, he had seemed to be searching for whom or what to blame for economic troubles, first using Twitter to call his own Federal Reserve chief an enemy of the United States and then to urge American companies to stop doing business with China.

And that was just while the markets were open. Later Friday, he said he would apply tariffs to all Chinese imports and increase those already in place.

The global economy may yet turn out fine; most economic data in the United States has been solid. But if a recession and breakdown in international commerce happens in the coming year, histories of the episode may well spend a chapter on the Friday collision of official actions in the government offices of Beijing, in the Grand Tetons in Wyoming and in the Oval Office.

It became clear in real time how the risks of an escalating trade war and the fraying of longstanding financial and political ties could quickly outpace the ability of central banks — the normal first responders to economic distress — to do anything about it.

President Trump's shoot-first approach adds to the risks at a delicate moment, with major economies in Asia and Europe already teetering and policymakers' capacity to contain the damage in question.

"The escalation, the unpredictability, the erratic nature of policy developments is central to what is going on, and these aren't things you can plug into an economic model," said Julia Coronado, president of MacroPolicy Perspectives, an economic consultancy. "Something is breaking. It's very dangerous."

A single news cycle makes vivid how these different areas of policy can influence one another in unpredictable ways.

As Friday dawned in the United States, China announced it would impose

ECONOMY, PAGE 4

## The pioneer who remade pro sports for women

### FROM THE MAGAZINE

Without Venus Williams, there would be no Serena. Has she gotten her due?

BY ELIZABETH WEIL

Venus is hitting the ball, still, after all these years. Venus, the dutiful Williams daughter, who actually followed the 78-page playbook her father wrote even before she was born to make her a tennis champion. Venus, who in following that playbook delivered on the dreams of the old man now sitting courtside on a

Venus Williams has always had a clarity about who she is. "I'm tall. I'm black. Everything's different about me. Just face the facts," she told reporters at age 17.

bench watching her practice in the syrup-thick West Palm Beach morning.

Serena is doing whatever it is that Serena does in addition to her training — attending the royal wedding or dancing in a Beyoncé video or organizing the Met ball. But Venus is here. Venus is loyal. Richard and Serena Williams will tell you Venus is the most loyal person in the world. "There's your average loyalty," Serena told me. Then there's Venus loyalty, which "for lack of a better word is mind-boggling."

Earlier that September morning, before Venus's alarm rang, Richard called and woke her up. Richard likes to do this, and Venus lets him. She's secure and generous that way. Venus's schedule for a normal day is: "I get up, I go practice, I go to the gym. I go to the office normally. I visit my dad. I get home at 8 or 9." If the sun is too hot, Venus avoids doing drills that spray balls all over the practice court. Richard likes to

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