



A rendering of newly discovered Earth-size planets orbiting a dwarf star named Trappist-1 about 40 light-years from Earth. Some of them could have surface water.

Circling a Star Not Far Away, 7 Shots at Life

By KENNETH CHANG

Not just one, but seven Earth-size planets that could potentially harbor life have been identified orbiting a tiny star not too far away, offering the first realistic opportunity to search for signs of alien life outside the solar system.

The planets orbit a dwarf star named Trappist-1, about 40 light-years, or 235 trillion miles, from Earth. That is quite close in cosmic terms, and by happy accident, the orientation of the orbits of the seven planets allows them to be studied in great detail.

One or more of the exoplanets in this new system could be at the right temperature to be awash in oceans of water, astronomers said, based on the distance of the planets from the dwarf star.

"This is the first time so many planets of this kind are found around the same star," Michael Gillon, an astronomer at the University of Liege in Belgium and the leader of an international team that has been observing Trappist-1, said during a telephone news conference organized by the

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Uber's Culture Of Gutsiness Under Review

By MIKE ISAAC

SAN FRANCISCO — When new employees join Uber, they are asked to subscribe to 14 core company values, including making bold bets, being "obsessed" with the customer, and "always be hustlin'!"

The ride-hailing service particularly emphasizes "meritocracy," the idea that the best and brightest will rise to the top based on their efforts, even if it means stepping on toes to get there.

Those values have helped propel Uber to one of Silicon Valley's biggest success stories. The company is valued at close to \$70 billion by private investors and now operates in more than 70 countries.

Yet the focus on pushing for the best result has also fueled what current and former Uber employees describe as a Hobbesian environment at the company, in which workers are sometimes pitted against one another and where a blind eye is turned to infractions from top performers.

Interviews with more than 30 current and former Uber

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Shadowy Cigarette Sales Filled Secret Bank Account for A.T.F.

By MATT APUZZO

WASHINGTON — Working from an office suite behind a Burger King in southern Virginia, operators used a web of shadowy cigarette sales to funnel tens of millions of dollars into a secret bank account. They weren't known smugglers, but rather agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

The operation, not authorized under Justice Department rules, gave agents an off-the-books way to finance undercover investigations and pay informants without the usual cumbersome paperwork and close oversight, according to court records and people

close to the operation.

The secret account is at the heart of a federal racketeering lawsuit brought by a collective of tobacco farmers who say they were swindled out of \$24 million. A pair of A.T.F. informants received at least \$1 million each from that sum, records show.

The scheme relied on phony shipments of snack food disguised as tobacco. The agents were experts: Their job was to catch cigarette smugglers, so they knew exactly how it was done.

Government records and interviews with people involved reveal an operation that existed on a

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Migrants Hide, Fearing Capture on 'Any Corner'

By VIVIAN YEE

No going to church, no going to the store. No doctor's appointments for some, no school for others. No driving, period — not when a broken taillight could deliver the driver to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

It is happening in the Central Valley of California, where undocumented immigrants pick the fields for survival wages but are keeping their children home from school; on Staten Island, where fewer day laborers haunt street corners in search of work; in West

IMMIGRATION A police department worries a crackdown will harm work to fight gangs. PAGE A14

MEXICO The secretary of state pays a visit at a time of rising tensions. PAGE A15

Phoenix's Isaac School District, where 13 Latino students have dropped out in the past two weeks; and in the horse country of northern New Jersey, where one of the many undocumented grooms who muck out the stables is thinking of moving back to Hon-

duras.

If deportation has always been a threat on paper for the 11 million people living in the country illegally, it rarely imperiled those who did not commit serious crimes. But with the Trump administration intent on curbing illegal immigration — two memos outlining the federal government's plans to accelerate deportations were released Tuesday, another step toward making good on one of President Trump's signature campaign pledges — that threat, for many people, has now begun to distort every movement.

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STEPHEN YANG/GETTY IMAGES

At Protest, Flames and a Partial Exit

Ahead of a Wednesday deadline to leave, protesters of the Dakota Access pipeline set fire to structures in Cannon Ball, N.D. Some protesters stayed past the cutoff. Page A12.

TRUMP RESCINDS OBAMA DIRECTIVE ON BATHROOM USE

ENTERING CULTURE WARS

Question of Transgender Rights Splits DeVos and Sessions

This article is by Jeremy W. Peters, Jo Becker and Julie Hirschfeld Davis.

WASHINGTON — President Trump on Wednesday rescinded protections for transgender students that had allowed them to use bathrooms corresponding with their gender identity, overruling his own education secretary and placing his administration firmly in the middle of the culture wars that many Republicans have tried to leave behind.

In a joint letter, the top civil rights officials from the Justice Department and the Education Department rejected the Obama administration's position that nondiscrimination laws require schools to allow transgender students to use the bathrooms of their choice.

That directive, they said, was improperly and arbitrarily devised, "without due regard for the primary role of the states and local school districts in establishing educational policy."

The question of how to address the "bathroom debate," as it has become known, opened a rift inside the Trump administration, pitting Education Secretary Betsy DeVos against Attorney General Jeff Sessions. Mr. Sessions, who had been expected to move quickly to roll back the civil rights expansions put in place under his Democratic predecessors, wanted to act decisively because of two pending court cases that could have upheld the protections and pushed the government into further litigation.

But Ms. DeVos initially resisted signing off and told Mr. Trump that she was uncomfortable because of the potential harm that rescinding the protections could cause transgender students, according to three Republicans with direct knowledge of the internal discussions.

Mr. Sessions, who has opposed expanding gay, lesbian and transgender rights, pushed Ms. DeVos to relent. After getting nowhere, he took his objections to the White House because he could not go forward without her consent. Mr. Trump sided with his attorney general, the Republicans said, and told Ms. DeVos in a meeting in the Oval Office on Tuesday that he wanted her to drop her opposition. And Ms. DeVos, faced with the alternative of resigning or defying the president, agreed to go along.

Ms. DeVos's unease was evi-

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Behind Airport Killing, Family Turmoil and a Far-Reaching Plot

By RICHARD C. PADDOCK
and CHOE SANG-HUN

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — The two young women were what South Korean intelligence calls "lizard's tails," expendable assets to be cast off after an operation.

Guided by North Korean agents, they practiced at malls in Kuala Lumpur, then set their

sights on the target: Kim Jong-nam, the estranged elder brother of North Korea's erratic leader, Kim Jong-un.

With hands doused with toxic liquid, they rubbed the face of their victim, who was waiting to check in for a flight at Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

Minutes later, their target died on the way to a hospital. The two women washed their hands and fled.

The suspected assassins were swiftly taken into custody as circumstantial evidence mounted that North Korea was responsible for the attack.

The very public killing of Mr. Kim appears to be another remarkable episode in the annals of bizarre North Korean behavior, a whodunit with geopolitical implications. Speculation swirled that

he had been killed to remove him from the line of succession in North Korea.

In the days since the killing was caught on video, the drama has had an ever-expanding and multinational cast of characters — assassins from Indonesia and Vietnam, one of whom was apparently wearing a white shirt emblazoned with the letters LOL; a Malaysian

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INTERNATIONAL A4-11

Recruiting for Al Qaeda

Newly released documents reveal how the U.S. cleric Anwar al-Awlaki recruited a man to stash explosives in his underwear to attack a plane in 2009. PAGE A9

'Brexit' Winners? The Lawyers

As Britain struggles to plot a path toward leaving the European Union, consultants, lawyers and lobbyists are lining up to help its businesses and government agencies. PAGE A4

SPORTSTHURSDAY B10-13

A One-Team Sports Scene

With the Chargers fleeing San Diego, the Padres have no professional counterparts. Glory may be a few years off, but the team believes it is positioning itself for success. PAGE B10

BUSINESS DAY B1-8

Support Grows to Raise Rate

As the United States economy gains strength, some Federal Reserve officials support moving faster to raise the benchmark interest rate, but a core group remains cautious. PAGE B2

Banks Fend Off a Challenge

Financial start-ups hoping to do to banks what Amazon did to the retail industry have found that working with financial institutions is easier than trying to displace them. PAGE B1

NEW YORK A20-21

A Suspect in Two Cold Cases

Kwahuuru Govan, already charged in one decade-old murder case, was accused in another. Below, he was restrained in court in Brooklyn. PAGE A20

ARTS C1-8

Tough Gig on Sunday

Jimmy Kimmel's plan for hosting the Oscars? Perhaps he'll wing it. "We'll do some crowd work and see how it goes." An interview. PAGE C1

THURSDAY STYLES D1-10

An Escape Into Fantasy

At London Fashion Week, British designers like Mulberry, above, found influences ranging from Disney films to the sculptor Henry Moore. PAGE D1

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Nicholas Kristof

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