

IN BRIEF



Rolling Stones cancels tour over Jagger's health
LONDON
British rock icon Mick Jagger said on Saturday that he was "devastated" after his Rolling Stones was forced to cancel their U.S. and Canada tour dates so he could receive "medical treatment". "I really hate letting you down like this," the 75-year-old wrote on his Twitter account. AFP



Volkswagen accounts for 2% of CO₂ emissions
BERLIN
The Volkswagen group alone is responsible for around 2% of global carbon emissions — roughly the same amount as Germany — one of the car manufacturer's senior figures said in an interview on Friday. "It's almost 1% for cars and 1% for trucks," the company said. AFP



Clooney urges boycott of Brunei-owned hotels
WASHINGTON
Actor George Clooney has called for a boycott of nine Brunei-owned hotels in the U.S. over the sultanate's imposition of death penalty for gay sex and adultery. Brunei is a monarchy which has been ruled for 51 years by Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah. AFP



Liam Neeson apologises for past racist thoughts
NEW YORK
Liam Neeson has apologized for revealing that he wanted to kill a random black person nearly 40 years ago after a close friend had been raped by a black man. Mr. Neeson said the comments "do not reflect" his true feelings. AP

Fossils pinpoint day asteroid hit earth, causing mass extinction

Evidence found in North Dakota suggests the event took place 66 mn years ago

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

New research released on Friday captures a fossilised snapshot of the day nearly 66 million years ago when an asteroid smacked the earth, fire rained from the sky and the ground shook far worse than any modern earthquake.

It was the day that nearly all life on the earth went extinct, including the dinosaurs.

Researchers say that when the asteroid hit Mexico, it created a crater known as Chicxulub and caused upheavals across the world, including North Dakota. They found evidence of the impact in North Dakota, including fish with hot glass in their gills from flaming debris that showered back down on the planet. They also reported the discovery of charred trees, evidence of an inland tsunami and melted amber.

Hell Creek, which spans Montana, both Dakotas and Wyoming, is a fossil treasure



Snapshot of past: A file photo of a model of a *T. rex* at the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science. AP

trove that includes numerous types of dinosaurs, mammals, reptiles and fish trapped in clay and stone from 65 to 70 million years ago.

Separately, University of Amsterdam's Jan Smit disclosed that he and his colleagues even found dinosaur footprints from just before their demise. Mr. Smit said the footprints one from a plant-eating hadrosaur and the other of a meat eater, maybe a small Tyrannosaurus Rex is "definite proof

that the dinosaurs were alive and kicking at the time of impact... They were running around, chasing each other" when they were swamped.

Discovery of the century
"This is the death blow preserved at one particular site. This is just spectacular," said Purdue University geophysicist and impact expert Jay Melosh, who wasn't part of the research but edited the paper released on Friday by the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of*

Sciences.

Mr. Melosh called it the field's "discovery of the century." But other experts said that while some of the work is fascinating, they have some concerns.

Kirk Johnson, director of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, who also has studied the Hell Creek area for 38 years, said that the work on the fish, the glass and the trees "demonstrates some of the details of what happened on THE DAY. That's all valid stuff." But he said that because there is restricted access to the site, other scientists can't confirm the research. Mr. Smit said the restrictions were to protect the site from poachers.

For decades, the asteroid crash has been considered the likely cause of the mass extinction. But some scientists have insisted that massive volcanic activity played a role.

Mr. Johnson and Mr. Melosh said this helps prove the asteroid crash case.

Earth takes note



Lights out: A view of Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi before and during the Earth Hour on Saturday. At right, Saints Peter & Paul cathedral in St. Petersburg, Russia. It aims to raise awareness about the impacts of climate change. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR/REUTERS



'Afghan Star' winner to fight Taliban with music

Zahra Elham won the singing contest

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

The first woman to win the Afghan version of American Idol says she will fight the Taliban with her music.

Zahra Elham won the 14th edition of Afghan Star last week, after male contestants took the prize in the hugely popular televised singing competition for 13 years in a row.

Ms. Elham, from Afghanistan's ethnic Hazara minority, enchanted audiences with her high-pitched, raspy voice, performing Hazara and Persian folk music in traditional loose, colourful Afghan dresses and heels.

"I was very proud of myself but at the same time shocked to be the first woman to win the contest," the young woman in her early 20s said.

No one sings in her family, she said. She was inspired from YouTube videos of idols such as Aryana Sayeed, an Afghan pop singer and social media star often likened to Kim Kardashian — a characterisation that in conservative Afghanistan is a bold, deeply political one.

When asked if she, like Ms. Sayeed, is now a role model for Afghanistan's



Zahra Elham

young women, Ms. Elham's response underscored the importance of her new platform in a country where women are largely absent from public spaces. "Yes, my voice is important for the women of Afghanistan," she replied bluntly.

The result made international headlines at a time when many women in the deeply patriarchal country fear their hard-won rights may come under threat as the U.S., seeking a way out of the war, holds talks with the Taliban. But if the Taliban return to some semblance of power in Afghanistan, she says, "I will fight with my music, because I want to make my life music and singing".

The Taliban used their interpretation of Islam to ban music during their rule.

Apple pulls plug on wireless charging mat

AirPower was announced in 2017

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SAN FRANCISCO

Apple Inc on Friday said it is cancelling the AirPower wireless charging mat that the company announced in 2017, a rare public retreat for the gadget maker known for splashy product launches.

The mat was intended to wirelessly charge up to three Apple products at once, such as an iPhone, Apple Watch and AirPods wireless headphones.

While wireless charging has spread through the industry, charging three devices at once with higher wattage "fast charging" has proved challenging. Furni-



The AirPower wireless charging mat at a launch event in 2017. REUTERS

ture seller Ikea, for example, sells a \$60 mat that can handle three phones but it only features slower 5-watt charging.

Apple said that it had concluded that its AirPower mat "will not achieve our high standards."

'Cow toilets' to cut emissions

Bovine urine is kept aside from solid manure to reduce release of ammonia

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
THE HAGUE

Teaching cows to use the toilet is not the easiest task, but a Dutch inventor is banking on a new bovine urinal to help cut emissions that cause environmental damage.

The cow toilets are currently being tested on a farm in Doetinchem and seven of its 58 cows have already learned how to use them without the need for stimulation. The urinal is in a box placed behind the cow, while in front is a feeding trough. Once the animal finishes eating a robot arm stimulates a nerve near the udders, which then makes it want to urinate.



Cows in a Dutch stable, eating hay. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

"The cows have got used to it," Henk Hanskamp, the Dutch inventor and businessman behind the "Cow Toilet", said. "They recognise the box, lift their tail, and pee."

The device collects some

of the 15 to 20 litres of urine that the average cow produces a day.

That produces huge amounts of ammonia in a country like the Netherlands, which is the world's second biggest agricultural

exporter after the U.S. "We are tackling the problem at the source," Mr. Hanskamp said. Bovine urine is kept aside from solid manure to reduce the release of ammonia. The company aims to have the devices on the market by 2020.

"The stables have become cleaner and the ground is drier. Less damp ground is better for the health of the cows' hooves," Jan Velema, a vet who took part in the tests, was quoted as saying by De Volkskrant newspaper.

The Netherlands is already introducing stricter rules on emissions of ammonia, which can cause atmospheric pollution and irritate the eyes in humans.

Keeping the flying spirit alive

'Danza de los voladores' is more than 2,500-year-old ritual of the Totonac people

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PAPANTLA DE OLARTE

Four teenagers climb to the top of a towering pole, fasten themselves to ropes and throw themselves, headfirst and backwards, into the air.

No, it's not the latest social media challenge. It's the "danza de los voladores," the dance of the flyers, a more than 2,500-year-old ritual practiced by the Totonac people of central Mexico, who are fighting to keep the tradition alive by giving it some modern tweaks.

Spinning in widening circles around the pole as they fly upside-down through the air, the four dancers slowly descend to the ground, dressed in white tunics, red



Totonac natives perform the 'Voladores' (flyers) ritual at PapanTLA Indigenous Arts Centre in PapanTLA, Mexico. AFP

pants and conical hats with rainbow-coloured streamers that trail across the sky.

A fifth dancer balances atop the pole — a 30-metre tree trunk — playing a festive

tune on a reed flute while beating a small drum.

Every aspect of the tradition has deeper meaning for the Totonac, who use the dance to ask the gods for rain

and fertility. The four flyers represent the four cardinal points of their cosmology, and the fifth dancer the centre. The 13 circles they spin around the tree trunk, multiplied by four, equal the number of years per cycle in their ancestors' highly advanced calendar: 52. And their colorful streamers represent the rainbow that appears after the rain.

"The dance is an offering that the Totonac people invented to end a terrible drought. The job was given to five chaste young men, who climbed to the top of the tallest tree and threw themselves off like birds," says Cruz Ramirez, 58, a veteran flyer.

Sherpa widows are breaking down taboos as they eye Everest

Furdiki Sherpa and Nima Doma Sherpa were working as guides on simple treks before they decided to climb the world's highest mountain

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KATHMANDU

For generations climbing has been firmly the realm of men among the legendary Sherpas of Nepal, tradition dictating women care for the home while their husbands conquer the Himalayan peaks.

But that convention is being challenged by two Sherpa women attempting to summit Everest and force a rethink about the role of widows in their conservative community, after their husbands died on the world's highest mountain.

Furdiki Sherpa and Nima Doma Sherpa hail from the Himalayan people revered for their skill at high altitudes as climbing guides.

Neither woman ever dreamed of making an expedition to the roof of the world themselves. But that is exactly what they are preparing to do when the short spring climbing season gets underway in April.

"The men climb. We had other things to do. I was running a tea house and taking care of my family. I didn't think about climbing the

mountains," Ms. Furdiki said.

Profound loss

That changed in 2013 when she lost her husband to the mountain as he fixed ropes along the route that aid climbers to the summit.

Like many Sherpa women before her, Ms. Furdiki was suddenly alone without a breadwinner to help raise their three children, bearing the stigma of misfortune that can stalk widows in Nepal.

A year later, another tragedy brought her into contact



Furdiki Sherpa, left, and Nima Doma Sherpa. AFP

with Nima Doma, whose husband was swept to his death with 15 other Nepali guides in

a deadly Everest avalanche. "After our husbands passed away, we spent

months just crying at home over their memories. But we had to take care of our family and ourselves. It was not easy to do this as a widow," said Nima Doma.

In need of work, the pair sought jobs as trekking guides in the capital Kathmandu, and often crossed paths as they lit lamps at a local Buddhist stupa for their deceased husbands.

After the mourning

"We started sharing our stories, our grief, and what we should do in life," Furdiki

said. After helping guide some amateur treks, the women embarked on serious mountaineering training and soon plans to summit Everest took shape.

"They grew up in the mountains," said Ang Tshering Lama, whose Angs Himalayan Adventure company is organising their "Two Widow Expedition" to Everest. "As climbers they are very strong and determined." Their Everest dream comes as attitudes toward women and climbing are slowly changing in the overwhelmingly male-dominated industry. Last season 18 women reached the top of Everest — towering over the world at 29,029-foot — a record number, according to Nepal's department of tourism.

Professional climber Lhakpa Sherpa, 44, is the best known having topped Everest nine times, but she remains very much an anomaly. "Women are rarely encouraged to take up climbing," said Dawa Yangzum Sherpa, the only internationally certified female mountaineering guide in Nepal.