

IN BRIEF



Gucci owner Kering to pay record fine

ROME
The owner of Italian fashion giant Gucci is set to pay a record fine of nearly €1.5 billion euros in a tax evasion case, according to media reports on Friday. Luxury group Kering is expected to sign an agreement on the amount due on May 2. AFP



Burj Khalifa lights up with Sri Lanka flag

DUBAI
Dubai's iconic skyscraper Burj Khalifa lit up to the colours of Sri Lanka's flag to show solidarity with the victims of the bombings on Easter Sunday. "Here's to a world built on tolerance and coexistence," said a tweet on the official Twitter account of the skyscraper. PTI



Taylor Swift releases video titled ME!

NEW YORK
Taylor Swift released an upbeat single on Friday, ending the weeks-long search the pop star set off when she teased fans with clues about a new project. The album titled ME! features Brendon Urie of Panic! at the Disco. AP



Endangered turtles in Cambodia set free

BOEUNG TRACH
Twenty critically endangered 'Royal Turtles' hatched and raised by conservationists were released into a Cambodian river on Friday. The species was once feared extinct because of trafficking and illegal sand mining. AFP

1 million species risk extinction due to humans: draft UN report

The document, to be unveiled on May 6, urges policymakers to make big changes

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

Up to one million species face extinction due to human influence, according to a draft UN report that painstakingly catalogues how humanity has undermined the natural resources upon which its very survival depends.

The accelerating loss of clean air, drinkable water, forests, pollinating insects, protein-rich fish and storm-blocking mangroves – to name but a few of the dwindling services rendered by Nature – poses no less of a threat than climate change, says the report, set to be unveiled on May 6.

Indeed, biodiversity loss and global warming are closely linked, according to the 44-page summary for policymakers, which distils a 1,800-page UN assessment of scientific literature on the state of Nature.

Delegates from 130 na-



A view of the Vohibola forest, one of the last primary forests in eastern Madagascar, where illegal logging is rampant. AFP

tions meeting in Paris from April 29 will vet the executive summary line-by-line. Wording may change, but figures lifted from the underlying report cannot be altered.

"We need to recognise that climate change and loss of Nature are equally important, not just for the environment, but as development and economic issues as well," said Robert Watson,

chair of the UN-mandated body that compiled the report.

Unsustainable methods

"The way we produce our food and energy is undermining the regulating services that we get from Nature," he said, adding that only "transformative change" can stem the damage.

The report warns of "an imminent rapid acceleration

in the global rate of species extinction".

The pace of loss "is already tens to hundreds of times higher than it has been, on average, over the last 10 million years," it notes. "Half-a-million to a million species are projected to be threatened with extinction, many within decades."

"If we're going to have a sustainable planet that provides services to communities around the world, we need to change this trajectory in the next ten years, just as we need to do that with climate," noted WWF chief scientist Rebecca Shaw, formerly a member of the UN scientific bodies for both climate and biodiversity.

The direct causes of species loss, in order of importance, are shrinking habitat and land-use change, hunting for food or illicit trade in wildlife body parts, climate change and pollution, the report finds.

Literature professor to head Swedish Academy

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
STOCKHOLM

The Swedish Academy, which awards the Nobel Literature Prize, said on Friday that it had named a literature professor as its new permanent secretary, after a #MeToo scandal in late 2017 threw the institution into turmoil.

Mats Malm is a professor of literary theory at the University of Gothenburg.

"I am very happy to be given this trust and look forward to the honourable commission as permanent secretary," he said.

Mr. Malm, 54, only joined the Academy four months ago. He takes over from Anders Olsson, who has been serving as head of the Academy since June 2018 after the previous secretary, Sara Danius, was forced to step down amid a scandal sparked by Frenchman Jean-Claude Arnault, an influential figure on Stock-



Mats Malm

holm's cultural scene. Arnault, who is married to a then-member of the Academy who later resigned, was accused and later convicted of rape.

The 18-member Academy was split on how to handle its ties to Arnault.

Ugly public disputes ensued, several members quit, and the body was in such disarray that it ended up postponing the 2018 Nobel Literature Prize for the first time in 70 years. The Academy has said it plans to announce the winner of the 2018 award together with this year's winner.

'Proteins hold key to healthy babies'

Bengaluru researchers estimate nutritional requirement for pregnant women

AFSHAN YASMEEN
BENGALURU

"Eating for two" is a common way women look at nourishment all through pregnancy. Now a study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* shows that a diet with relatively more protein is needed during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy for the growth and development of the baby.

To accurately estimate the daily protein requirement in pregnant Indian women, a whole-body potassium counting instrument was built at St. John's Research Institute in Bengaluru, with financial support from the Centre's Department of Biotechnology.

This facility was used to arrive at estimates of protein requirements in 38 urban, well-nourished, middle class Indian pregnant women, who had normal pregnan-



Health boost: Extra milk and dal is recommended for pregnant women.

cies and delivered babies of an average birth weight of three kg.

For a gestational weight gain of 10 kg, pregnant Indian women should eat an additional 7.6 grams and 17.6 grams of protein per day during the second (3 - 6 months) and third trimester (6-9 months) respectively, the researchers found.

Rebecca Kuriyan Raj, head of the division of nutrition at St. John's Research Institute, who is the lead author of the study, said that in

The Cranberries release album with vocals from late singer

The Irish rockers said it would be their last work as a band

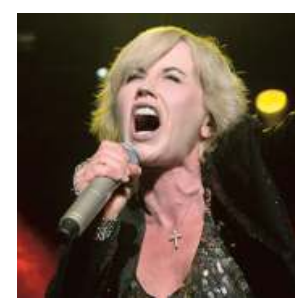
ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW YORK

Irish rockers The Cranberries are saying goodbye with their final album released on Friday, a poignant tribute to lead singer Dolores O'Riordan who died last year.

In the End is the eighth studio album from the band that rose to fame in the early 1990s with hits like *Zombie* and *Linger*, and includes the final recordings by O'Riordan, who drowned in a London hotel bath in January 2018 due to alcohol intoxication.

Whether or not there would be a final Cranberries' album hinged on a hard drive. Months after the singer's death, the other members of the Irish band began combing through unfinished vocals that O'Riordan had sent them.

What they had intrigued them, but they awaited with some anxiety the delivery of O'Riordan's hard drive from her New York home. Relief



Dolores O'Riordan

came as soon as it was plugged in. Her urgent, powerful voice was all over rudimentary songs she hadn't gotten around to email.

"It was just like winning the Lotto," said Noel Hogan, the band's lead guitarist and co-writer. "And that was it. We had the songs."

Like a parting gift, O'Riordan left enough strong vocals on the demos that the Cranberries were able to fashion them into their eighth and final album.

The Cranberries used demo vocal tracks on past albums when a new song

would excite O'Riordan and she would deliver a passionate demo version that she'd be unable to achieve later in a studio. This time, her vocals were especially strong.

"When Dolores was doing the demos, she kind of gave that bit more and was really just feeling very emotional with these songs," said drummer Fergal Lawler. "The songs are about a period of her life that was quite difficult for her and she wanted to get that out and get it down on paper and move past it."

Not having O'Riordan around to offer fresh vocals meant the band had to adapt. If she left behind softly delivered lyrics, the band had to play softer. If an unfinished song needed something in the middle, they had to improvise. *In the End* will be the last Cranberries album, the bandmates vow. They won't be looking for another lead singer. (With inputs from Reuters)

Britain to fund anti-slavery projects

REUTERS
LONDON

Britain on Friday pledged £4 million to support global anti-slavery projects. Six organisations, such as charity Anti-Slavery International and the United Nations University, a research institution, will share the aid money from The Modern Slavery Innovation Fund.

The funding will also be used to run workshops on modern slavery in South Africa, improve support for survivors in India, and develop an online data hub to boost anti-slavery policies, according to Britain's Home Office.

The Modern Slavery Innovation Fund was announced in 2016 and previously gave £6 million to schemes such as awareness-raising campaigns in Nigeria, the Philippines and Vietnam.

Japan's 24/7 shops come under fire

The debate of working around the clock strikes at the heart of labour shortages in the ageing nation

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO

It may be 1a.m. but Tokyo's omnipresent convenience stores, known as "konbini", are busy with customers dropping in for everything from milk to underwear.

Popping in for a flavoured beverage at a busy konbini near Tokyo's Ueno Station, Mai Tsumuraya says: "I finish work late... The supermarket closes early so I come to a convenience store. It's very convenient."

Day or night, they are rarely short of customers, but the much-loved stores are now at the centre of a row over whether they should stay open 24 hours a day, every day of the year – a debate that strikes at the heart of crippling labour shortages in ageing Japan.

Visitors to Tokyo are often amazed at the sheer volume of stores. There are 56,000 across Japan and in the capital, it is not uncommon to see different konbini at all four corners of a crossroads.

They provide a bewildering array of products, from toilet paper to bento boxes to hot chicken yakitori skewers. In addition, customers can do their photocopying, take out cash, pick up deliveries and even pay their bills.

They also play a social role, providing a well-lit and always-staffed sanctuary, as well as a gathering point during natural disasters.

The stores, run by franchisees, never, ever close.

The recent row started with a store in the city of Higashi-Osaka, in the west of



Shoppers browse products at discount retailer Don Quijote Holdings' store in Tokyo. AFP

the country. Franchise owner Mitoshi Matsumoto made national headlines when he started closing his Seven-Eleven store between 1a.m. and 6 a.m., bringing him into conflict with company HQ.

The 57-year-old began shutting up shop in February when his wife, who helped him run the store, died.

But Seven-Eleven Japan insisted he continue the 24-hour service.

"The company thinks we should run 24 hours no matter what, even if we collapse from overwork," he said, adding he once worked for 38 hours straight due to a lack of staff.

with a fine of 17 million yen (\$150,000).

Contacted by AFP, Seven-Eleven Japan declined to comment.

The firm's president Kazuki Furuya stepped down earlier this month. No official reason was given for his departure but critics said he had failed to respond to the discontent among franchisees.

Govt. gets involved

The government has got involved too, with industry minister Hiroshige Seko urging convenience store chains to come up with plans to tackle long hours and labour shortages in the sector, calling konbini part of "Japan's social infrastructure".

Seko's ministry have compiled a survey showing nearly two-thirds of franchisees

(61%) said they cannot find enough staff – up from 22% in 2014. Moreover, 40% said they were unhappy with their situation, complaining of low profits and high royalties paid to the company head office. This was up from 17% four years ago.

"The labour shortage has become more serious than ever in the past few years," Tomomi Nagai, chief analyst at Toray Corporate Business Research, explained.

"It's difficult to keep part-timers after midnight because wages aren't high but the job is complicated due to various services offered at the shops," she said.

"As a result, franchisee owners are forced to work long hours and they're frustrated."

Chains including Seven-Eleven are now beginning to

trial shorter working hours in a handful of stores and are boosting the use of self-checkouts and automation – with one firm testing a human-free system from midnight to 5 a.m. in two shops.

But analysts say the 24-hour system is vital for efficient management of the stores. "Workers clean the shops and renew merchandise at night. They also wait for trucks bringing products," says Masayuki Kubota, chief strategist at Rakuten Securities.

"The supply chain will be less effective if more stores close at night, because deliveries will have to be made mostly in the morning when the road is congested," Mr. Kubota said.

Even disgruntled franchisee Mr. Matsumoto says there needs to be a balance.

He explained: "I'm not saying all the stores should stop operating 24 hours. But we need a flexible system where we can do both 24 hours and shorter hours."

While the Japanese love the convenience offered by the konbini, a recent survey showed that eight out of 10 believe the 24/7 system needed reform.

Kota Shibai, a 22-year-old consultant insists it is "not normal" to operate 24 hours a day when there is insufficient manpower.

And Ms. Tsumuraya, the late-night shopper in Ueno, says: "I'll manage somehow if no konbini is open. But I live my life on the premise that it is." She adds: "I know I'm spoiled."

Relaxing with wax: meet the Slovak 'Monsieur Tussaud'

Roman Bajzik fashions royalty and folklore figures

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ZAVADA

The bald head of Slovak general Milan Rastislav Stefanik is pierced before hairs are inserted into his skull. Stefanik's face remains motionless, his blue eyes do not even blink.

The late founder of the former Czechoslovakia is the latest figure to get the wax treatment from Roman Bajzik, a 48-year-old opera teacher who moonlights as Slovakia's very own Monsieur Tussaud.

"I began creating wax sculptures back in 2002 as I wanted to see what my great-grandfather looked like," Mr. Bajzik said, at his two-room gallery in what was once the family mill.

"I only had an old photo of him and was curious if I could turn him into something three-dimensional," he said in Zavada, a central village of 600 residents, about 150 km from the capital, Bratislava.

Two decades later, there are now 23 motionless family members, royalty, folklore characters and important figures for tourists and schoolchildren to view.

Figures on display past the creaky wooden front door at the mill-turned-gallery include the vampire Nosferatu, Pope John Paul II and a mermaid from Slovak mythology.

The wax museum is open by appointment only for an entry fee of €2.



Fine lines: Roman Bajzik at work. AFP

An experienced tenor who once sang at Austria's prestigious Salzburg Festival, Mr. Bajzik studied opera directing and now teaches operatic acting at the state conservatory in Bratislava.

He likes silence when he sculpts though, usually at night to relax.

Silence is golden
"I have enough singing during the day. I'm pleased to be surrounded by my mute figures," he said.

He lives alone in a high-rise flat in the capital where he has turned one room into a tiny studio whose shelves are filled with chicken mesh, cornstarch, construction foam, silica gel – all used for wax modelling.

Currently he is working on two figures: Stefanik is getting his hair done, while Empress Elisabeth of Aus-

tria, better known as Sissi, is undergoing some facial work.

Mr. Bajzik consulted available photos and busts of Sissi to get her facial measurements just right.

Once the clay head is done, he casts it in plaster and then pours hot wax in the mould before fine-tuning the details.

Wax is ideal for models because it looks similar to human skin, said Mr. Bajzik, whose mix notably includes beeswax and paraffin.

"It has to be carefully blended as wax tends to crack when inserting hairs into the skull," he said.

Mr. Bajzik often transforms everyday items into the props he needs.

When one of his kings required an imperial orb, he just bought a Christmas bauble and added a small cross.