

IN BRIEF



U.S. regulators approve drug costing \$2 million
U.S. regulators have approved the country's most expensive medicine ever, a therapy meant to cure spinal muscular atrophy, a disorder that rapidly destroys a baby's muscle control and kills most within a couple of years. The one-time gene therapy developed by Novartis is called Zolgensma and costs \$2.125 million. **AP**



Facebook removes 3 billion fake accounts
SAN FRANCISCO
Facebook removed more than 3 billion fake accounts from October to March, twice as many as the previous six months, the company has said. Most were caught before they had a chance to become "active" users of the social network. The company estimates that 5% of its 2.4 billion monthly active users are fake accounts. **AP**



SpaceX launches 60 Starlink satellites
WASHINGTON
SpaceX has launched the first 60 satellites of its "Starlink" constellation, which is intended to provide Internet from space in an array that could one day contain over 12,000 transponders. The final orbit is slightly higher than the International Space Station, but well below terrestrial satellites. **AFP**

‘Summit fever’ takes a toll on three more Indians

Expedition agencies say climbers become exhausted and dehydrated while waiting in the queue on Mt. Everest

UTHRA GANESAN
OM ASTHA RAI
NEW DELHI/KATHMANDU

Three Indians have died on Mt. Everest this week, as crowds of climbers added to the dangers of efforts to scale the world's highest peak.
Nihal Bagwan, a 27-year old from Pune, became the latest victim of an unprecedented rush on the Everest this season. Bagwan, part of a two-member expedition, reportedly died at Camp-IV on Everest on Thursday after being rescued from Balcony by four Sherpas.
“He had collapsed of exhaustion after waiting in line for almost 12 hours. The thing is, when you are con-



Gone too soon: Anjali Kulkarni, left, who died during the descent from Mt. Everest. **•PTI**

stantly climbing, your body stays warm and there is less chance of frostbite. But when you are simply waiting, it becomes very dangerous because there is no motion and you also consume more oxygen,” said Neelan-

jan Patra from Dream Wanderlust, a trekking community.
The hours-long ‘traffic jam’ forced many climbers to wait for their turn to go down through a narrow and steep passage right below

the peak, according to Mira Acharya, head of the mountaineering department of the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB).
Kalpana Dash from Odisha passed away on Thursday near Balcony during her summit attempt. Earlier this week, Anjali Kulkarni from Mumbai, who was accompanied by her husband Sharad Kulkarni, failed to make it back from the top and died near Camp-IV. The 54-year-old was part of a six-member expedition.
Expedition agencies said exhaustion and dehydration were the main reasons behind the fatalities this season. The remains of Ravi Thakar, who breathed his

last at Camp-IV on his descent form the summit last week, have been brought down from the mountain.
Meanwhile, climber Hitenra Mahajan, a resident of Nashik, has been rescued from the South summit. Piya-li Basak, another trekker, was heli-rescued while descending to Camp-II and is still under treatment at the camp.
Approximately 350 climbers are reported to be approaching the summit from both Nepal and Tibet sides, leading to a long queue at the peak. “It is called Summit Fever and is most common from Camp-IV onwards because the summit is visible

and people feel they can reach the top easily. They also think the climb down will be easier and everyone wants to be an Everest. That’s why most fatalities happen on Camp-IV and beyond,” Mr. Patra explained.
Attempts to scale Mt. Everest, Mt. Makalu and Mt. Kanchenjunga this season has also led to a few more deaths of Indians and climbers from other countries. Kuntal Karar and Biplab Baidya died on the Kanchenjunga. Climbers Dipankar Ghosh and Narayan Singh went missing on Mt. Makalu a week ago and their remains were recovered on Friday.

Odisha govt. to bring back body of Dash

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government is working to bring home the body of Kalpana Dash, the first woman from the State to summit the peak. She had first scaled the mountain in 2008. “Kalpana Dash had repeatedly brought accolades to the State. We are committed to bring her mortal remains back to her State. It is reported to be at the Balcony, at an altitude of approximately 8,600 metres,” said Vishal K. Dev, Sports Secretary.



A moment to cherish



March of pride: Several same-sex couples tied the knot in Taiwan on Friday, the first day a landmark decision to legalise same-sex marriages took effect in the country. Taiwan is the first Asian nation to legally recognise gay and lesbian marriages. **•REUTERS**

Art should mess with reality: Stallone

The actor says that his roles have offered a metaphor for life's wins and struggles

NAMRATA JOSHI
CANNES

Sylvester Stallone believes that the Rambo franchise tells a timeless tale.
“There have been so many upheavals and civilisations have been destroyed. But it has been all about fighting back, not accepting defeat, rebuilding yourself and making a comeback,” the actor and director said at the Cannes festival on Friday.
The fifth and last installment of the franchise – *Rambo V Last Blood* – will release on September 20 this year. In the latest in the series, Rambo suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and survivor guilt for not having been able to save several people in Vietnam. Rambo lives in a subterranean darkness of sorts, is a surrogate father and saves his adopted daughter from the bad guy in Mexico who happens to be her real father. “It’s a serious adventure,” said Mr. Stallone.
Two of his most popular incarnations – Rocky Balboa and John Rambo – have both



Back with a punch: Sylvester Stallone at Cannes. **•AP**

personified resilience. Mr Stallone said that it is something ingrained in the nature of human beings.
Calling himself a “political atheist”, the actor said *Rambo* was more about alienation, loneliness and angst than a political story. “It was not a political statement but took a life of its own and became one,” he said.
For him, *Rocky* is not so much about boxing as it is about life. “He could have been baking bread, riding a bicycle. It is a metaphor for a

race against time and fight against all odds,” he said.
Common threads
He also pointed out that all human beings have the thread of fear, victory, isolation, loneliness and love running in us. “Nobody cares if you are above all of it. Then you are not human,” he said. According to him, Rambo is the dark side of nature, while Rocky embodies optimism.
Mr. Stallone said he got lucky that *Rocky* worked

perhaps because it offered a narrative of change in the dark times in the country. “I don’t believe in reality all the time... Art should mess with reality,” he said, expressing a similar scepticism with versatility in acting. No Dustin Hoffman as Rambo and no Stallone in *Tootsie*. “I don’t like to do stuff that is not too much in my box. There are other people who would do it better,” he said.
Though he finds writing the toughest job, he feels there can be no lack of inspiration when it comes to ideas. “Pick up a newspaper and you will find four ideas [for films] every day. The human drama is inexhaustible.”
He feels that the industry has changed, as have the mindsets and technology: “It has become almost scientific now”. When asked about his legacy, he said that it was something determined by the audience than planned by the artist. Far from resting on laurels, he said that “you have to keep punching”, “you always have something to prove”.



Weinstein may settle civil suits in \$44 mn deal

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW YORK

Disgraced Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein has reached a provisional \$44 million settlement with alleged victims and creditors, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on Thursday.
The deal, which has not yet been signed, aims to cover all civil proceedings filed against the fallen Hollywood mogul, including those in Canada and the United Kingdom.
Mr. Weinstein’s spokesperson declined to comment. The settlement does not exempt Weinstein from the criminal proceedings brought against him for sexual assault.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Marvel Comics is giving ink to an unprecedented team-up of its mightiest Asian and Asian American heroes, also known as the new Agents of Atlas. Established icons like martial arts master Shang-Chi and newbies like Wave, the newest Filipino superhero, will team up in a standalone, five-part comic book series starting soon, the publishing giant has said.
The roster of 10 super-powered pan-Asian champions made their debut as a team earlier this month in *The War of the Realms: New Agents of Atlas*. That comic book is one piece of an ongoing saga involving several different groups across the Marvel universe, including the Avengers, doing battle with a fire goddess. But the exclusively Asian limited series is set to roll out in August.
The man leading the heroic charge is veteran comic book writer Greg Pak. Mr. Pak is credited with ushering in a new era of Asian characters in co-creating Amadeus Cho, a Korean-American genius teen. The character first appeared in 2005. A decade later, he absorbed the Hulk’s powers and started going by Brawn.
“It’s always been my dream to do a team book using a bunch of Asian and Asian American heroes,” said Mr. Pak, who thinks there’s more appetite for representation with the success of the movie *Crazy Rich Asians*. “There’s literally never been a better time in my memory with more opportunities for doing work that specifically includes Asian and Asian American characters.”
The decades-old character of Agent Jimmy Woo (portrayed by Randall Park in last year’s *Ant-Man and the Wasp*) leads the pack as head of the revived secret protection society Atlas. Others getting in on the action include Brawn and Cindy Moon, who is the Korean American web-shooter Silk.
Other recruits have only previously been seen in Marvel video games or web com-



The cover of the first issue of *Agents of Atlas*. **•MARVEL/AP**

I think about kids who are reading this new generation of comics and getting to see themselves

LOREN JAVIER
Pop culture critic

ics only available in Asian countries. Among them is Korea-born Luna Snow a.k.a. Seol Hee, a K-pop star who can manipulate frozen elements. There’s also Aero and Sword Master, the products of creative work in China. Besides crime-fighting, the group will spend time doing things like eating dim sum or singing karaoke.
“That kind of diversity within diversity is amazing,” said Mr. Pak, who is half-Korean and half-white. “No one character here has to represent all Asian-ness or Asian American-ness. That’s a ridiculous demand for any character.”
The rest of the “Atlas” creative team includes writer Jeff Parker and artists Nico Leon and Carlo Pagulayan. In the series, the do-gooders find that some-

one has flipped a switch and created a “cross-Asian portal city” called Pan. In Pan, Asian neighbourhoods get geographically scrambled and then stitched together into one city. So, the streets of Tokyo could be next to neighbourhoods from Honolulu, Manila or some of Marvel’s fictitious Asian countries.
Filipino American Loren Javier, 50, discusses Marvel comics on his “Castles, Capes & Clones” blog and podcast. There were few Asian characters in the lexicon he could look up to as a child, and many were often stereotypical mystics or man-servants.
“I love Marvel but I didn’t necessarily see myself in the comics,” said Mr. Javier, who recalls being teased by a classmate who called him “the enemy.”
“Now, finally, I think about kids who are reading this new generation of comics and heroes and getting to see themselves a little bit more,” Mr. Javier said. “It’s very powerful.”

Football fandom still not a level playing field for women in Saudi and Iran

Strict regulations are in place around women attending matches

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DUBAI

Two weeks ahead of a potentially game-changing women’s World Cup, football remains completely male-dominated in large parts of West Asia and North Africa, where female fans are still battling for a level playing field.
Women fans face obstacles in many parts of the region where rival powers Iran and Saudi Arabia have traditionally enforced rules banning women from entering stadiums.

No countries from the region will be among the 24 teams taking part in the tournament in France from June 7, but at least there are signs of flexibility in the region toward a sport igniting more and more female interest across the globe.
In Iran, rules have been relaxed since the 1979 Islamic revolution and women are selectively allowed to attend some matches.
But the fact that a ban has yet to be officially lifted indicates there is still disagreement over the issue among

senior figures in the Islamic republic.
Ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia allowed women into a football stadium for the first time in January 2018 for a regular domestic football league match.

Some reforms

The move was part of reforms introduced by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that included allowing women to drive and take part in other sporting and artistic events.
However, the kingdom’s strict brand of Islam still mandates separation of the sexes in public and women football fans are only admit-



In a rare move, Saudi women were permitted to watch a football match in Riyadh in October last year. **•AFP**

ted to special sections of stadiums and must wear full Islamic veils. Even so 15,000 women, penned in special

sections, were among the 62,000 fans who attended the Italian Super Cup between Juventus and AC Milan

played in Jeddah in January.
Rules banning women from football games in Iran were introduced by religious leaders concerned about public morals and the risk to women of unwanted attention from men in the crush to enter and leave the stadiums.
Exceptions have been made: a handful of Irish women became the first females permitted to watch a match in Islamic Iran when they were allowed to attend a 2001 World Cup qualifier between a visiting Ireland team and the hosts.
More recently 850 Iranian women were allowed to attend the Asian Champions league final between Iran’s

Persepolis FC and Kashima Antlers of Japan. The women had to show up two hours ahead of kick-off, entering well before the men and going to their own separate section of the stadium.
A limited number of women were also permitted to watch Iran’s men’s games in the 2018 World Cup on a giant screen erected in the capital, Tehran.
World Cup in France
However, as women’s football is expected to draw huge attendances at the World Cup in France, Iranian women still face challenges with their attendance at matches remaining controversial.

After a handful of women were allowed to watch a match between Iran and Bolivia in October, Iran’s prosecutor general Mohammad Javad Montazeri said permitting women to watch men in shorts was “a sin”.
Apart from Saudi Arabia and Iran, no other country in the region actively bans women from attending football matches but female football followers are generally in a minority.
Nevertheless, Tunisia has actively encouraged women fans by offering them free tickets to international matches while more Moroccan women are also watching the sport alongside men.