

IN BRIEF



Japanese tycoon needs money, to sell artworks
TOKYO
Japanese fashion tycoon Yusaku Maezawa said he plans to auction off artworks worth millions of dollars because he has no money. Mr. Maezawa, the founder and CEO of online fashion retailer Zozo, said in a Twitter post on Saturday that he plans to sell several items at a Sotheby's auction in New York on May 16. REUTERS



Germany mulls fine to boost measles vaccination
BERLIN
Germany's Health Minister is proposing fines for parents of school-age children who haven't been vaccinated for measles amid concern that the highly contagious and potentially deadly disease could make a comeback. Jens Spahn said parents who can't prove their children have been vaccinated should have to pay up to €2,500. AP



Madonna honoured at GLAAD Media Awards
NEW YORK
Popular singer Madonna was among the many artistes who were honoured at GLAAD Media Awards New York. She gave an emotional speech. The singer also paid tribute to her first dance teacher and mentor, a gay man named Christopher Flynn. IANS

Training for marathon ‘reverses’ ageing of vessels, cuts stroke risk

Novice runners had a four-year reduction in arterial age after training, says study

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA LONDON
Training for and completing a first-time marathon reverses ageing of major blood vessels, according to a study which found that the older and slower runners benefit the most.
A hallmark of normal ageing is stiffening of the blood vessels, which increases the risk of stroke and heart disease even in healthy people. Compared to their peers, lifelong athletes have biologically younger blood vessels, researchers said.
The study investigated if training for a marathon could modify aortic stiffness



Lifelong athletes have biologically younger blood vessels. ■AFP
pressure,” said Anish Bhuvu, from the University College London in the U.K.
“This is comparable to the effect of medication, and if maintained translates to approximately 10% lower risk of stroke over a lifetime,” Mr. Bhuvu said.
The study included 139 healthy first-time marathon runners aged 21-69 years, who were advised to follow a first-time finisher training programme, and ran an estimated 10-20 km a week for six months ahead of completing the 2016 or 2017 London Marathon.
Before the training and two weeks after completing

the marathon, participants had MRI and ultrasound scans of the heart and blood vessels, a fitness test, and measurements of blood pressure and heart rate.
Biological age of the aorta was calculated at both time points. After completing the marathon, aortic stiffness had reduced and the aorta was four years younger than before training.
Older participants and those with longer marathon finish times had greater reductions in aortic stiffness after training. Reductions in aortic stiffness were independent of changes in blood pressure.

Holy procession



Torchbearers: Indonesians taking part in a torch parade to welcome the holy month of Ramzan in North Sumatra. Ramzan begins on Monday, with devotees fasting from dawn to dusk until Id celebrations mark the end of the holy month. ■AFP

Following in Buffett’s footsteps

Berkshire Hathaway’s shareholders meet turns a big draw



Nuggets of wisdom: A shareholder with his son, and a woman, right, posing with a picture of Warren Buffett, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, in Omaha, Nebraska. ■AFP

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE OMAHA

The father and son, both successful entrepreneurs, made the pilgrimage to the U.S. city of Omaha to bask in the wisdom of billionaire Warren Buffett, whose simple approach to investing – and whose mistrust of Wall Street – they share.

Both Paul Singh, who is 68, and son Jay Phoenix Singh, 32, built successful businesses that they were then able to sell for premium prices, making both men multi-millionaires.

Despite their difference in age, the Singhs – one a Baby Boomer, the other a millennial – share a long-time devotion to the words of Warren Buffett, 88, owner of the third-largest fortune in the world.

“Warren Buffett is the quintessential American dream of coming from very little and being able to really make a name for yourself,” said Jay Phoenix.

They were drawn here by the annual shareholders meeting of Buffett’s Berkshire Hathaway holding company, which gives them, and others like them, a chance to soak up the market-moving wisdom of the “Oracle of Omaha.”

The Singhs are big admirers of Buffett’s taste for discretion and his simple but shrewd approach to investment.

“You buy only things that are useful,” said Mr. Paul. “Money doesn’t mean that you have to show off and buy cars with a big torque (or) houses that you don’t need.”

Long-term plan

Mr. Paul follows that advice in his own life: he sports no bling or other showy external signs of wealth.

“I am still driving my 2004 Honda... and I live with my parents,” said Mr. Jay Phoenix, before adding, “but as Mr. Warren says, what matters is your long-term vision, your long-term plan.”

Mr. Paul arrived in the U.S. at the age of 20 to pursue his graduate studies with “50 dollars” in his pocket.

Coming from a poor family in northern India near New Delhi, he managed to gain acceptance to Harvard, where he earned an MBA degree in 1982. He founded three successive companies, of which the latest – Primus Telecommunications – achieved turnover of \$1 billion just six years after its creation.

In the 2000s, this father of two – married to a British woman – created the Rezon8 fund, investing in American startups specialising in software and information technology.

While Mr. Paul has been a mentor to his son, he did not give him the capital for his own startup: “I didn’t want my father to give me money,” said Mr. Jay Phoenix. “I have some savings (and)... was able to count on it.”

With doctorates in psychiatry and psychology, Mr. Jay Phoenix has been one of the youngest lecturers at some of the most prestigious U.S. and British universities (Princeton, Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge).

He established the Violence Research Center, dedicated to the study and prevention of interpersonal violence.

Neither father nor son invests in stocks, preferring the ETFs (exchange-traded funds) that are less speculative but still provide attractive returns.

Among the lessons the Singhs have learned from closely studying Mr. Buffett’s now famous letters to investors is: invest for the long term, and don’t be afraid to make a mistake.

+ Iraqi TV drama returns after 7 years, just in time for Ramzan

The Hotel is a 20-episode drama on human trafficking

ASSOCIATED PRESS BAGHDAD

Every evening at the Muntada al-Masrah theatre on Baghdad’s Rashid street, the cast and crew of the first TV drama filmed in Iraq in seven years take their places among the rooms and courtyard of this 19th-century building and shoot new scenes of their highly-anticipated series.

The arts are coming to life again in Baghdad, bringing with it a touch of hope and comfort as the country works to rebuild after 16 years of war.

And after two decades abroad, two of Iraq’s leading actors have returned to take part in *The Hotel*, the 20-episode drama set to air during the Islamic holy month of Ramzan.

“The Iraqi people are parched for drama,” said Hassan Hosni, a drama star



A dive into drama: Actors preparing to perform their roles in *The Hotel*, at a filming location in Baghdad, Iraq. ■AP

of the 1990s, who returned from Saudi Arabia to direct *The Hotel*, a show about the seedy underbelly of Baghdad and its entanglement with human trafficking.

It is the first Ramzan drama to be produced in Iraq since 2012, according to the cast and crew, and it heralds a return of an essential TV genre to the country.

For years, Iraqis have been watching dramas from other nations, such as *Bab*

al-Hara, the blockbuster Syrian series set during the 1930s independence movement from France.

With *The Hotel*, Iraqis will have a home-grown series to watch for the first time in years, amid the longest stretch of stability Baghdad has experienced since the 2003 U.S. invasion.

“We were waiting for this moment – writers, directors and actors – with total impatience,” said Mr. Hosni.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

The fictional world of the popular TV series *Game of Thrones* may be reinforcing the existing racial, cultural and geographical stereotypes that have been part of the Western imagination of the East for centuries, a study suggests.

Game of Thrones – based on American author George R.R. Martin’s series *A Song of Ice and Fire* – has a reputation of being a ground-breaking portal of escape to an imaginary realm. However, Mr. Martin’s depiction of Eastern people is not far removed from older narratives, according to the study published in the *Canadian Review of American Studies*.

In his study, Mat Hardy, Senior Lecturer at Deakin University in Australia, cited examples from the storyline of Daenerys Targaryen, the heir to the Iron Throne – a white Westerner who navigates the perils of the Eastern lands to claim her birthright.



Old formula: Daenerys Targaryen (Emilia Clarke) with her soldiers, known as the Unsullied, in a scene from *GOT*. ■AP

Westeros is the principal location for most plot arcs. To the East lies Essos, which is chiefly used as a kind of quarantine zone for the development of Daenerys’ story. It serves as a far-away land where she is relatively safe, while advancing her character arc.

To build her army, Daenerys frees thousands of dark-skinned slave soldiers known as the Unsullied, and wins over the Dothraki – a nomadic tribe of barbaric horsemen.

In the eighth and final season of the HBO series, the opening credits did away with the eastern continent of Essos and shifted focus to Westeros, as Mr. Hardy noted.

“The gathering of the Dothraki and Unsullied were major plot points for four seasons but they were about Daenerys’ development. Once she had these tools, she moved up a level of threat and leadership,” he said.

In the third episode of the final season of *Game of*

Thrones, that aired last week, the Dothraki were presumably wiped out by the army of the dead.

“The death of the Dothraki fits a standard plot device in Western media: as strength testers. If you want to show how tough the bad guy is, you need him to slaughter a ton of good guys. Enter the non-white cannon fodder,” Mr. Hardy said.

Basic divisions

In laying out their fantasy worlds, Western authors are inclined to reach for the same basic divisions that exist in the world.

“Inevitably to the north and west of these fictional maps lie snowy forests full of dour, uncomplicated, and noble warriors,” Mr. Hardy wrote in the study.

In the series, the northern stronghold of Winterfell is perennially cold.

According to Mr. Hardy, the Northern and Western peoples – such as the Starks – are portrayed as more hon-

est, more productive, and generally more positive than their Eastern counterparts.

“To the east and south, there are deserts, steppes, and wastelands full of crafty nomads, duplicitous petty rulers, slaves, and evil magicians,” Mr. Hardy wrote.

Another example from the show is fair-skinned Arya Stark’s training in the Eastern city of Braavos. Mr. Hardy noted that this too is a reflection of how the West perceives Eastern martial arts in the real world.

“You pop off to a monastery for a few years and come back as a lethal dealer of death. It doesn’t even have to be explained to an audience. They just accept it,” he said.

Mr. Hardy, who teaches Middle East Studies, wants people to question their assumptions about the Middle East and its people. “Western fantasy authors are lazy when they draw up their maps and cultures and an endemic Euro-centric imagination prevails,” he added.

China cashes in on the cannabis boom

Companies are rushing to meet the demand for medicinal products – especially for cannabidiol – in North America

STEVEN LEE MYERS SHANCHONG

China has made your iPhone, your Nikes and, chances are, the lights on your Christmas tree. Now, it wants to grow your cannabis.

Two of China’s 34 regions are quietly leading a boom in cultivating cannabis to produce cannabidiol, or CBD, the non-intoxicating compound that has become a consumer health and beauty craze in the United States and beyond.

They are doing so even though cannabidiol has not been authorized for consumption in China, a country with some of the strictest drug-enforcement policies in



Yang Ming, one of China’s leading advocates for the use of hemp in textiles, food and medicines. ■NYT

the world.

“It has huge potential,” said Tan Xin, the chairman of Hanma Investment Group, which in 2017 became the first company to receive permission to extract cannabi-

diol here in southern China. The chemical is marketed abroad – in oils, sprays and balms as treatment for insomnia, acne and even diseases like diabetes and multiple sclerosis. (The science,

so far, is not conclusive.)

The movement to legalise the mind-altering kind of cannabis has virtually no chance of emerging in China. But the easing of the plant’s stigma in North America has generated global demand for medicinal products – especially for cannabidiol – that companies in China are rushing to fill.

Hanma’s subsidiary in Shanchong, a village in a remote valley west of Kunming, cultivates more than 1,600 acres of hemp, the variety of cannabis that is also used in rope, paper and fabrics. From the crop, it extracts cannabidiol in oil and crystal form at a gleaming factory it opened two years

ago, in a restricted zone next to a weapons manufacturer.

“It is very good for people’s health,” Tian Wei, general manager of the subsidiary, Hempoul, said.

“China may have become aware of this aspect a little bit late, but there will definitely be opportunities in the future,” Mr. Tian said.

China has, in fact, cultivated cannabis for thousands of years – for textiles, for hemp seeds and oil and even, according to some, for traditional medicine.

Forbidden product

The People’s Republic of China, after its founding in 1949, took a hard line on illegal drugs, and cultivating and

using marijuana are strictly forbidden to this day, with traffickers facing the death penalty in extreme cases.

After signing the United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances in 1985, China went even further. It banned all cultivation of hemp. Farmers produced hemp to make rope and textiles and China had banned it even though it has only trace amounts of tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the mind-altering compound found in marijuana.

Hanma’s ambitions are global. It has acquired an extraction plant in Las Vegas, which is expected to begin production soon, and it plans one in Canada. NY TIMES

Women gossip more than men, but in a neutral way

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE NEW YORK

While people gossip 52 minutes a day on average in 16 waking hours, women don’t engage in “tear-down” gossip any more than men, reveals an interesting study.

According to researchers from University of California-Riverside, lower income people don’t gossip more than their more well-to-do counterparts and younger people are more likely to gossip negatively than their older counterparts.

“There is a surprising dearth of information about who gossips and how, given public interest and opinion on the subject,” said Megan Robbins, assistant professor who led the study.



People gossip for an average 52 minutes a day. ■GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

“Everyone gossips and gossip is ubiquitous,” the researchers noted in the paper published in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

Extraverts gossip far more frequently than introverts while women gossip more than men but only in neutral, information-sharing way, study showed.