

## IN BRIEF


**NASA's Curiosity finds methane spike on Mars**

WASHINGTON  
NASA Curiosity's Sample Analysis at Mars (SAM) has detected the highest ever levels of methane in the course of its mission on Mars, an exciting discovery because the gas could point to the existence of microbial life. But the methane could also be produced as a result of interactions between rocks and water. AFP


**Madonna edges out Springsteen to top charts**

NEW YORK  
Charting like it's 1985? Legends Madonna and Bruce Springsteen are taking fans on a trip down memory lane, respectively nabbing numbers one and two of the U.S. top album tally. Madonna's *Madame X* struck gold on the Billboard 200 chart, landing top slot. Springsteen's *Western Stars* raced in to the second spot. AFP

# Everest turning into a pile of discarded tents, human waste

Crew struggling to clear trash left behind by 700 climbers, guides and porters

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
KATHMANDU

After every party it is time to clean up and Mount Everest is no different. The record number of climbers crowding the world's highest mountain this season has left a government cleanup crew grappling with how to clear away everything from abandoned tents to human waste that threatens drinking water.

Budget expedition companies charge as little as \$30,000 per climber. Everest has so much garbage – depleted oxygen cylinders, food packaging, rope – that climbers use the trash as a kind of signpost. But this year's haul from an estimated 700 climbers, guides and porters on the mountain has been a shock to the ethnic Sherpas who worked on the cleanup drive this spring.

Moreover, the tents are littering South Col, or Camp 4, which, at 8,000 metres (26,240 feet), is the highest campsite on Everest, just below the summit. The high winds at that elevation have scattered the tents and trash



**Herculean task:** Nepalese soldiers carrying empty oxygen cylinders collected from Mount Everest in Namche Bajar, Solukhumbu district, in this file photo. • AP

everywhere. "The altitude, oxygen levels, slippery slopes, and bad weather make it very difficult to bring big things as tents down," said Dawa Steven Sherpa, who led an independent cleanup last month and has been a leading figure in the campaign to clean Mount Everest for the past 12 years.

Exhausted climbers struggling to breathe and battling nausea leave heavy tents behind rather than attempt to carry them down. Mr. Sherpa said the logos on the tents were deliberately ripped out so the culprits could evade detection.

"It took us an hour to dig out just one tent out of the

frozen ice and bring it down," said Sherpa. His expeditions have alone brought down some 20,000 kg of garbage since 2008.

Mr. Sherpa estimated 30 tents had been left on South Col, and as much as 5,000 kg of trash. Bringing it down is a herculean task when any misstep could be fatal.

# AI may not take your job, but it could become your boss

Programs turn adjunct-managers in workplaces

KEVIN ROOSE

When Conor Sprouls, a customer service representative in the call centre of insurance giant MetLife talks to a customer over the phone, he keeps one eye on the bottom-right corner of his screen. There, in a little blue box, artificial intelligence (AI) tells him how he's doing.

Talking too fast? The program flashes an icon of a speedometer, indicating that he should slow down.

Sound sleepy? The software displays an "energy cue," with a picture of a coffee cup.

Not empathetic enough? A heart icon pops up.

For decades, people have fearfully imagined armies of hyper-efficient robots invading offices and factories, gobbling up jobs once done by humans. But in all of the worry about the potential of artificial intelligence to replace rank-and-file workers, we may have overlooked the possibility it will replace the bosses, too.

Mr. Sprouls and the other call centre workers at his office in Warwick, Rhode Island, still have plenty of human supervisors. But the software on their screens – made by Cogito, an AI company in Boston – has become a kind of adjunct manager, always watching them. At the end of every call, Mr. Sprouls' Cogito notifications are tallied and added to a statistics dashboard that his supervisor can view. If he hides the Cogito window by minimizing it, the program notifies his supervisor.

Cogito is one of several AI programs used in call centres and other workplaces. The goal, according to Joshua Feast, Cogito's chief executive, is to make work-



**Being watched:** Conor Sprouls at a MetLife call centre, where an AI program monitors employees, in Warwick. • NYT

ers more effective by giving them real-time feedback.

"There is variability in human performance," Mr. Feast said. "We can infer from the way people are speaking with each other whether things are going well or not."

## Track productivity

The goal of automation has always been efficiency, but in this new kind of workplace, AI sees humanity itself as the thing to be optimised.

Amazon uses complex algorithms to track worker productivity in its fulfillment centres, and can automatically generate the paperwork to fire workers who don't meet their targets, as *The Verge* uncovered this year. (Amazon has disputed that it fires workers without human input, saying that managers can intervene in the process.) IBM has used Watson, its AI platform, during employee reviews to predict future performance and claims it has a 96% accuracy rate.

Then there are the startups. Cogito, which works with large insurance companies like MetLife and Huma-

na as well as financial and retail firms, says it has 20,000 users.

## Source of tension

But using AI to manage workers in conventional, 9-to-5 jobs has been more controversial.

Critics have accused companies of using algorithms for managerial tasks, saying that automated systems can dehumanise and unfairly punish employees. And while it's clear why executives would want AI that can track everything their workers do, it's less clear why workers would.

In the gig economy, management by algorithm has also been a source of tension between workers and the platforms that connect them with customers.

This year, drivers for Postmates, DoorDash and other on-demand delivery companies protested a method of calculating their pay, using an algorithm, that put customer tips toward guaranteed minimum wages – a practice that was nearly invisible to drivers because of the way the platform obscures the details of worker pay. NY TIMES

# Drinking coffee may help fight obesity: study

In future, it may become part of weight management regime and glucose regulation programmes



The study is one of the first to find components which could have a direct effect on 'brown fat'. • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LONDON

Drinking coffee may stimulate the body's own fat-fighting defences, which could be the key to tackling obesity and diabetes, says a study published in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

The study is one of the first to be carried out in humans to find components

which could have a direct effect on 'brown fat' functions, which plays a key role in how quickly we can burn calories as energy.

Initially only attributed to babies and hibernating mammals, it was discovered in recent years that adults can have brown fat too.

"We need to ascertain if caffeine is acting as the sti-

mulus or if there's another component helping with the activation of brown fat," said Professor Michael Symonds, from the University of Nottingham.

"... It could potentially be used as part of a weight management regime or as part of glucose regulation programme to help prevent diabetes," he said.

# 'Everyone is not made the same'

Dutee Chand on finding a sense of love and belonging

ANAHITA PANICKER  
MUMBAI

Sprinter Dutee Chand is wearing tracks, a pair of white sneakers, bright pink nails, and an affable smile as she sits to chat about becoming India's fastest woman, the country's first openly queer athlete, and her plans for the future.

The 23-year-old, who bagged two silver medals at the Asian Games in Jakarta, and who also holds the national record in the 100 metre event, is currently focussing on qualifying for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

## An early start

Ask the Odisha native when it all began, she says, "I must have been five when I started." It was in 2008 when she started winning medals at junior national-level meets. "I didn't know anything about sprinting," she chuckles,



Dutee Chand

"But since my mother and elder sister told me to run, I did."

Her elder sister Saraswati, a sprinter herself, and mother Akhuji Chand have distanced themselves from Ms. Dutee today, following her decision last month to publicly step out of the closet. "[Earlier] my family was so encouraging about my [athletic] performance, and would introduce themselves as 'Dutee's mother' and 'Dutee's sister'. So when it

comes to my personal life, they should also understand that the path that I've taken is right," she says, "My heart has chosen to love whoever it has. That is our own right."

It was Ms. Saraswati who threatened to tell the media about her same-sex relationship with a woman from their village, Chaka Gopalpur.

Ms. Chand has found support in her younger sisters, coach N. Ramesh and the LGBTQ community across the world. She doesn't resent her mother or sister for their hostility, "Aaj nahin toh kal theek ho jayenge! (If not today, tomorrow they'll be fine!)," she declares.

"God has made the world this way, and everyone was not made the same. They take this small topic of hormones, make it a big issue and declare that you cannot run. We are humans".

## Deep impact



**Permanent mark:** An aerial view of a crater on a barley field near Ahlbach, Germany on Monday. Experts say that an air bomb dating to the Second World War exploded in the field, leaving a 10-metre wide and 4-metre deep hole. • AFP

# 'Sperm retains viability in outer space'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LONDON

The human sperm retains its viability within the different gravitational conditions found in outer space, a study, performed using a small aerobatic training aircraft (CAPIO), which can provide short-duration hypogravity exposure, has found.

The plane executed 20 parabolic manoeuvres, providing 8 seconds of microgravity for each parabolic. Overall, sperm samples obtained from ten healthy donors were analysed.

The sperm analysis comprised of concentration, motility, vitality, morphology and DNA fragmentation. Researchers found no difference in any of the parameters between the space samples and the control group samples from the earth.

# Ageing S. Koreans begin a new chapter on catwalk

To realise their dreams, some seniors flock to modelling schools while others become YouTube stars

REUTERS  
SEOUL

Boasting an overgrown beard and grey wavy hair, 65-year-old Kim Chil-doo glared into the wall, poised and confident, as he walked on runway with young models at an academy in Seoul earlier this month.

Mr. Kim became South Korea's first senior fashion model last year, realising his lifelong dream with a charismatic debut at Seoul Fashion Week.

"This was what I wanted to do when I was young, but gave up to make money, and I thought maybe it's worth trying even now," Mr. Kim said. "And I'm glad I did it – being a model is really fun. Senior? It's just a label."

In a country with the world's fastest ageing popu-



**Begin again:** South Korean model Kim Chil-doo, 65, centre, walking down the catwalk in Seoul, South Korea. • REUTERS

lation, many elderly South Koreans like Mr. Kim are venturing into unconventional late career opportunities.

Seniors have flocked to modelling schools after Mr. Kim's success. Others have become YouTube stars or signed up to teach Korean to K-pop fans overseas.

The trend has offered fresh hopes to the elderly, many of whom take low-paying, blue collar jobs to support themselves after retiring. Almost half of South Korean baby boomers live in poverty – the highest among members of the Organisation for Economic Co-opera-

tion and Development.

On a recent weekday afternoon, about two dozen people, mostly in their late 50s to 60s, gathered at a welfare centre in Songpa for catwalk training, hoping to emulate Mr. Kim, now an up-and-coming star in commercials and fashion magazines.

## 'Reviving my youth'

For You Sung-lae, 59, her unfulfilled childhood dream of becoming an actress and her interest in fashion led her to sign up for the course. "Learning modelling feels like reviving my youth that I could not enjoy as I got married and gave birth at a very young age," Ms. Yoo said.

Lim Sung-min, who represents Mr. Kim and is a former model himself, said his agency is seeking to bolster its

ranks of senior models, aiming to cater to the fast-growing elderly industry.

Some firms and local governments are seeking to harness the older generation's untapped potential and help them start a new chapter of life.

Cho Yong-min was a public policy student at Princeton University when he floated a small language exchange project between retired South Korean professionals and foreigners in 2014. He started recruiting elderly volunteers, linking them with Korean students at Princeton and Yale.

"They were too talented to play pool there every day, with so much social and career experience to share," said Mr. Cho, who recently graduated from the school.

# Tax us more, 20 billionaires in U.S. say

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
NEW YORK

"Tax us more!" was the message on Monday from about 20 super-wealthy Americans who urged presidential candidates to back higher taxes on the wealthiest to confront climate change and other priorities.

"America has a moral, ethical and economic responsibility to tax our wealth more," said the group, which included George Soros, Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes, descendants of Walt Disney and the owners of the Hyatt hotel chain.

"A wealth tax could help address the climate crisis, improve the economy, improve health outcomes, fairly create opportunity."

# Soap ad on women's rights sparks row in Pak.

Conservatives lambast the message

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ISLAMABAD

An international detergent brand has come under fire for an advertisement questioning gender stereotypes in the conservative patriarchal country, with critics denouncing the company for allegedly insulting Islam.

The commercial for Ariel soap calls for women to break free of conservative norms and pursue careers. In the ad, several women representing different professions – including a journalist and doctor – are seen pushing dirty sheets hanging on a clothesline off the screen.

The sheets are printed with common refrains used to reinforce the oppression of women in Pakistan, in-

cluding the question "What will people say?", which heralds scandal every time a woman chooses to challenge gender norms. It ends with a close-up shot of the Pakistan women's cricket team captain Bismah Maroof saying: "Stay within the house... these are not only sentences but stains".

Social media was abuzz on the issue, with conservatives lambasting its message using the hashtag "#BoycotAriel" on Twitter.

"They (are) insulting Islamic teaching in their advertising," wrote Binte Suleman on Twitter. Others called for regulators to have the commercial officially censored and removed.

Critics filed a legal petition against the ad.