



Best for sport

Ireland must work on defensive errors Eddie O'Sullivan Pages 50-51 Pep wins first trophy for City the game



Let's spend the night together: Rolling Stones to play Croke Park

Jennifer O'Brien
Ireland Arts Correspondent

The Rolling Stones will be announced today as the performers for a fourth concert at Croke Park this summer, *The Times* has learnt.

The announcement will end weeks of speculation surrounding the gig after the standalone show on May 17 was

approved by planners. The band's No Filter tour, which began last year with dates throughout Europe, has been extended to include a concert at GAA headquarters. Dates for London, Manchester, Southampton, Edinburgh and Birmingham are also scheduled.

Aiken Promotions will make the official announcement at 8am today. Mick Jagger said that the band viewed

the concerts in Ireland and Britain as "very special". "It's always exhilarating going to cities we haven't played for quite a while and also some new venues," Jagger, 74, said. "This part of the No Filter tour is really special for the Stones. We are looking forward to getting back onstage in the summer."

It was reported this month that a planning application for a fourth con-

cert at Croke Park this summer had been lodged. Already scheduled are Michael Bublé on July 7 and Taylor Swift on June 15 and 16.

Support acts for the Stones will be announced soon and tickets for the concert will go on sale on March 23.

Irish fans were speculating about the possibility of a Croke Park date last week when several posters featuring

the band's tongue and lips logo appeared throughout Dublin under the tagline "No Stopping".

Keith Richards, 74, said that far from suggesting retirement, the new tour dates mark a new beginning for the group. "It's such a joy to play with this band. There's no stopping us, we're only just getting started really," he said. *Going for Croke*, page 3

Make 2040 ads look like real news, papers told

Regional media 'could not say no' to revenue

Ellen Coyne Senior Ireland Reporter

Regional newspapers were instructed to make government advertorials look like independent stories and in some cases part of "the normal news cycle," *The Times* can reveal.

Editors at several local titles raised concerns after they were instructed not to clearly mark as a commercial feature sponsored content about Ireland 2040, the national development plan.

A similar campaign for Creative Ireland, the government's cultural programme, also banned newspapers from marking its adverts and said that newspapers would have covered the content anyway. *The Times* has learnt.

Leo Varadkar's strategic communications unit is promoting Ireland 2040 in an intense campaign that includes sponsored content in national, regional and local newspapers as well as online publications and cinema adverts. Many of the sponsored articles were written by journalists, with most marked as "in partnership" with the government.

The regional media campaign, which is set to continue for several more weeks, is run by Mediaforce Ireland, which also owns Iconic, a publisher of 15 regional print and online news titles. Senior staff at several newspapers owned by Iconic have told *The Times* that they were directed by Mediaforce to make sponsored content look like news.

One source said there was an understanding at senior level in Iconic that

"this was an extremely important revenue raiser for hard-pressed local titles" though it is understood that in some cases the editors defied the demand and marked the advertorial.

Such content is a regular source of revenue for newspapers and is usually clearly marked. IAB Ireland, an independent trade association, says advertorials should be "clearly and prominently labelled and readily recognisable" as paid-for content.

In some cases, newspapers were required to edit supplied Ireland 2040 copy. In others, reporters were told to "put a local angle" on sections of copy from the national development plan.

The 15-person strategic communications unit (SCU) was set up by Mr Varadkar when he succeeded Enda Kenny as taoiseach. It is led by John Concannon, former head of Creative Ireland.

Creative Ireland ran a similar campaign, also with Mediaforce, last summer with advertorials designed to look like normal news articles in a number of papers across Ireland. Emails told editorial staff that part of Mediaforce's "deal" with the government was that the content was not to be marked as sponsored. Newspapers were also told that no other adverts could run on the same page.

One local editor told *The Times*: "This is fake news. Newspapers are struggling and the government know that, so they've got us by the balls."

Mediaforce warned that the project



Tricoloured tries Ireland made it two victories from three games in the Women's Six Nations Rugby tournament with a 35-12 victory over Wales at Donnybrook stadium in Dublin yesterday. They face Scotland in two weeks' time Sport, page 43

Good Friday agreement 'can stop hard Brexit'

Peter O'Dwyer
Senior Ireland Business Reporter

The Good Friday agreement will force the British government to deliver a soft Brexit that avoids a hard border on the island of Ireland, a minister has said.

Charlie Flanagan, the justice minister, said he believed the peace accord would ensure that Theresa May's government could not follow through on plans to leave the customs union and the single market when Britain leaves the European Union in March 2019. Doing so would create unnecessary tensions in border communities and risk a return to violence in Northern Ireland, he said.

"I am encouraged by the repeated

utterances on the part of the British prime minister ... in which she says that the Good Friday agreement is not going to be set aside," Mr Flanagan told RTÉ's *The Week in Politics*. "The greatest threat to the security of this state comes from dissident republicans along the border, and a hard Brexit — or a difficult Brexit — will feed into tensions and could well give rise to difficulties that none of us want."

Simon Coveney, the foreign affairs minister, will meet Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, in Brussels today to discuss the EU's legal translation of agreements reached last year in the first phase of Brexit talks.

Three options were presented in December for the Irish border: a new

relationship; alternative solutions to be put forward by the UK; and a backstop option of maintaining all regulatory rules and procedures, effectively keeping the North in the customs union.

The Times reported last week that the "bulletproof" backstop would be in a "protocol" document to run alongside the main withdrawal agreement, as opposed to within the agreement itself. The protocol would give it the same legal standing, it is understood.

The Labour Party in Britain is preparing for a significant shift in policy by advocating for the UK to remain in a customs union to cushion the economic blow from Brexit. Sir Keir Starmer, the party's Brexit adviser, said

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Blue wave How Dublin surpassed their 2011 master plan

Sport, pages 56-57



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Introductory offer



Mandarin for beginners
The prep school that's gone Chinese **Pages 44-45**

Border conflict with Britain can be avoided, says Varadkar

Niamh Lyons Ireland Political Editor

A customs and trade relationship with Britain that is "close to the status quo" is still possible, Leo Varadkar said yesterday as he travelled to Brussels for a crunch EU summit.

The Taoiseach said that after his talks with the British prime minister this week he believed that the "border

problem" could be avoided. He stressed, however, that it depended on the positions taken by Theresa May's government in the coming months.

European leaders were unlikely to decide that sufficient progress had been made to move to the next stage of negotiations unless something "dramatic" changed within the next two days, he said. Some issues have been concluded

but three key areas of phase one negotiations — citizens' rights, the financial settlement, and issues relating to Ireland — have been the subject of five rounds of talks between Britain and the EU but deadlock remains.

Mr Varadkar welcomed progress on the matters concerning Ireland, including joint principles on the continuation of the common travel area. "It has also

been agreed that, based on the six guiding principles put forward by the EU, work will start on a common understanding of possible commitments and undertakings necessary to effectively protect the Good Friday Agreement, all its parts, and the gains of the peace process, including avoiding any new barriers to trade or movement on our island," he said. Mr Varadkar said he

had restated the Irish-specific issues, particularly trade with Britain, when he spoke with Mrs May by telephone for 40 minutes on Monday.

"It is still possible that the overall outcome of the negotiations is a trade and customs relationship so close to the status quo that a border problem can be avoided, although that depends very

Continued on page 2, col 5

Cancer drug firm forced HSE to pay inflated fee

Aspen raised price for treatment by 600 per cent

Peter O'Dwyer
Senior Ireland Business Reporter

A pharmaceutical company increased the cost of life-saving cancer drugs by up to 600 per cent and warned the HSE of "severe stock shortages" if it refused to agree to its price demands.

Aspen, which has its European headquarters in Dublin, pushed through price increases of hundreds of per cent on four chemotherapy drugs used to treat cancers including acute forms of leukaemia, ovarian cancer and Hodgkin lymphoma, *The Times* can reveal.

In a series of emails with the HSE in late 2012, Aspen, through an agent, repeatedly warned the HSE that it was "hesitant to replenish" its stock of drugs until the price increases were approved and warned of "severe stock shortages" if the Irish authorities failed to approve them. The matter was of "extreme urgency", it said.

Documents seen by *The Times* show that the HSE told Aspen that it was operating under significant economic constraints caused by the downturn, but eventually caved in to the demand out of fear that the products would be withdrawn.

Recommending the price increases in an internal memo in January 2013, Kate Mulvanna, chief pharmacist at the HSE, said that the drugs were "in active use" and would probably be withdrawn if the price rises were not approved. "We explained the HSE financial

position, including the ban on any price increases. However, the company are adamant they require the price increases to maintain the products in the Irish market," she said.

"Wholesalers have been asked to 'ration' supplies to pharmacies based on historical sales data to stem this leakage. Despite numerous follow up contacts from the company, we have endeavoured to hold off until the new year and the new budgetary allocation, but at this stage, we are at serious risk of the products being withdrawn."

A spokeswoman for the HSE confirmed its concerns that the drugs could be withdrawn and said that the price increases had cost the state an extra €200,000 per year. "The likelihood was these products would be withdrawn by the company, leaving the state to source unlicensed alternative product[s], most likely at even higher prices," she said.

"Despite the significant financial constraints outlined in the HSE service plan 2013, the need to ensure continuity of supply of these medicines, which are used to treat cancer patients, was an influencing factor in approving the price increase."

The cost of Alkeran, a drug used to treat myeloma, melanoma and ovarian cancer, rose by 437 per cent from €12.30 a pack to €66.

Leukeran, which is mainly used in the treatment of chronic lymphocytic leukaemia and Hodgkin lymphoma,



Love is blind October is mating season for fallow deer such as this buck in Phoenix Park, Dublin. Fawns will be born in June

Study to help rape victims 'is unnecessary'

Ellen Coyne Senior Ireland Reporter

Plans for a study to establish the scale of sexual violence in Ireland have been scrapped by the government, *The Times* can reveal.

The move means that victims of rape and domestic abuse will not be counted unless they report their crime to the gardai or are recorded by a charity.

Charlie Flanagan, the justice minister, has reneged on a commitment by Frances Fitzgerald, the tanaiste and his predecessor, to fund the study. Ireland has not conducted any in-depth research into sexual violence since 2002, when the first Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (Savi) study was carried out. A second study would have cost €1 million in total.

The Rape Crisis Network Ireland and

the Dublin Rape Crisis Network have both said that without a second Savi report, the government will underestimate the investment needed in frontline services, because many victims of sexual violence do not come forward.

The Department of Justice confirmed to *The Times* that the project will not go ahead, despite promises from the Fine Gael-led government in 2015.

The statement from the department was issued hours after Leo Varadkar told the Dáil that he would not rule out a second study.

The department claimed that figures on sexual violence were available from other sources such as charities, the gardai or the courts service.

The department had previously said that such data would be supplemented by the Savi report, but a source con-

firmed last night that those plans had been scrapped.

Ms Fitzgerald said a second Savi report was important given the unreliability of garda statistics.

Documents obtained by *The Times* under freedom of information laws show that Regina Doherty, the social protection minister, wrote to three cabinet colleagues in May pleading with them to fund the research. Katherine Zappone, the children and youth affairs minister, Frances Fitzgerald, then the justice minister, and Simon Harris, the health minister, all said they supported the study but could not afford it.

Catherine Connolly, the independent TD for Galway, said yesterday that the study could have been funded instead of the government's €5 million strategic communications unit.

Single mother told to seek support from her abuser

Ellen Coyne Senior Ireland Reporter

Victims of domestic abuse have been told that they could lose single-parent payments unless they tried to obtain maintenance from their abusers.

Women's Aid is concerned that the government is putting women at risk by sending letters telling them to make a "reasonable effort" to contact their partners for financial support.

Spark, which represents single parents, said that it had been in contact with a number of people, including some women who were in refuges, who had received the letter.

One woman said that she was told to pursue the father of her five-month-old baby and was given two weeks to do so. This was despite the fact that at her first social welfare interview the woman had produced a court order banning the man from being near her home.

Kate, which is not her real name, said that on November 25 last year, in the early stages of her pregnancy, she was physically assaulted by her partner. She said that she left her partner of two years, who had also been emotionally and verbally abusing her.

In January she was granted a safety order banning him from threatening her or being near her home. She gave birth to their son in June and in August applied for the one-parent family allowance. "Because I was scared to go near him, I don't want him to come near me or my son," Kate, 38, said.

During her interview at an Intreo office the welfare officer had asked if she had ever lived with the baby's father and she said "no". Kate said that the officer told her that "an awful lot of couples" applied for safety orders even though they were living together "because they are so easy to get these days."

She was granted the allowance in the middle of August but on November 13 Kate received a letter from the "maintenance recovery unit" at the Depart-

ment of Social Protection. It said that the father of her baby was "legally obliged to contribute towards the cost of the one-parent family payment being paid to you".

It added: "Please note that in order to continue receiving one-parent family payment allowance you must make reasonable efforts to look for maintenance from the other parent of the child or children. Failure to do so may result in termination of the payment."

Kate said: "I got the fright of my life, I thought this was sorted. I thought the safety order made me safe. The social protection system is supposed to protect vulnerable people."

The department contacted Kate and said that the letter had been sent from another part of the department, which did not know that she was a domestic abuse victim.

Last week Regina Doherty, the social protection minister, claimed that her department never required sexual violence or domestic abuse victims to pursue partners for maintenance.

"There is absolutely nobody that would be ever required by my department to put himself or herself in a dangerous position to acquire proof. That is why I clearly [said] that a satisfying condition is somebody telling us he or she has been subject to domestic or sexual violence," Ms Doherty said.

Spark said that it had repeatedly raised concerns about victims receiving such letters from the department. Louise Bayliss, its spokeswoman, said: "The government keeps reiterating that survivors should not be forced to contact their abusers, but they have not explained how they identify who survivors are. There needs to be proper protocols in place to ensure these people are protected."

Margaret Martin, the chief executive of Women's Aid, called for comprehensive protocol and sexual violence and abuse training throughout the Department of Social Protection.

Former nurse who cooked dog faces five years in jail

Michael McHugh

A former mental health nurse who strangled and butchered a four-year-old collie before feeding it to another dog had a psychopathic disorder, a doctor said.

Dominic O'Connor, 28, faces up to five years in prison after he used a lead to kill the animal last December. He cut up the body and cooked it with an Oxo cube and onions before using it as pet food for his other dog, Shadow.

"Clearly this is an unusual and extremely disturbing case," Chris Holmes, O'Connor's barrister, told Downpatrick crown court. The father of two had no memory of the incident at his home in Roden Street, in the Co Down village of Kircubbin, he added.

O'Connor was convicted by a jury last month of animal cruelty. He bought the dog on Gumtree from a couple in Lisburn, Co Down, who had not been traced, the court was told. The other animal was rehomed.

Mr Holmes, referring to a medical report, said that O'Connor exhibited quite disturbing personal symptoms leading to a psychopathic disorder and

lacked empathy. Ian Bownes, a consultant psychiatrist, had examined the defendant.

"This is bizarre and the motivation behind it is basically inexplicable," Mr Holmes added.

Judge Piers Grant challenged the lawyer's authority to make those observations but said that much of the evidence came from O'Connor himself.

The defence said that O'Connor was adopted at the age of four, attended third-level education and was employed as a mental health nurse.

He has previous convictions for possession of an offensive weapon and common assault. His position deteriorated comprehensively in 2015 after the death of his mother and his marriage break-up, his lawyer said.

Dr Bownes' report suggested that O'Connor had a disordered personality of the psychopathic type, Mr Holmes said, and a troubled background.

Laura Ivers, the prosecution lawyer, said that the sentence imposed should be a five-year prison term, the maximum possible.

The judge adjourned the case for sentencing next week.



Plucky dip An early-morning swimmer braves the November waters at Banjo Jetty in Swanage. Weather forecast, page 21

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