



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 Bubl  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 **Continued on page 2, col 3**



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 RTE'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 **Continued on page 2 col 5**

Ireland news

TODAY'S EDITION

Maternal death inquests urged

Every maternal death in Irish hospitals should result in an automatic inquiry, Peter McKenna, head of the national maternal strategy, has said. **Page 4**

Release killing report, Dáil told

The family of Aidan McAnespie have appealed to the Irish government to release a report on his death, 30 years after he was killed by a British soldier. **Page 5**

Law shields sex attack victims

Irish courts will be able to stop sex offenders contacting their victims for a specified period of time under new laws to be introduced by Charlie Flanagan today. **Page 7**

COMMENT

It appears the Irish prefer their president to be more elder lemon than young pipsqueak

LISE HAND, PAGE 16

Chinese leader may rule for life

Xi Jinping could rule China indefinitely after the Communist Party said that it intended to scrap a clause in the constitution that limits presidents to two terms. **Page 22**

Rolls-Royce 'was on brink'

Rolls-Royce was in a battle for survival during the depths of its financial crisis in 2015 and 2016 and a series of bribery scandals, its chief executive has admitted. **Page 29**

Irish too clinical says Gatland

Warren Gatland believes that Ireland are capable of winning the grand slam but feels Joe Schmidt's side lacks "style" and is content to run down the clock. **Page 52**

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DINNER TONIGHT

Red onion, tomato and mushroom soup with chorizo crisps

Here's a hearty, thick, chunky soup of red onion and tomato, with mushrooms and a finale of chorizo crisps. It goes well with any kind of garlic bread.

Serves 4 Prep 25 min Cook 45 min

Ingredients: 6 red onions, 750g approx; 4 garlic cloves; 1½ tbsp olive oil; 200g closed cap mushrooms; ¼ tsp crushed chilli flakes; 1tbsp flour; 800ml chicken stock; 400g can chopped tomatoes; 1 small lemon; 100g chorizo sausage or 23g packet



chorizo thins; 50g coriander.

Halve, peel and chop onions and thinly slice the garlic. Heat oil over medium heat in spacious, lidded pan. Stir in onions with ½ tsp salt. Stir, cook 5 min, cover and leave to cook, occasionally stirring, while you wipe then thinly slice the mushrooms. When the onions are sloppy, stir in garlic, chilli and mushrooms with pinch

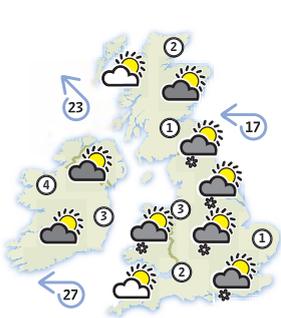
of salt. Keep stirring as mushrooms begin to darken and look damp. Sift the flour over top, stirring until disappeared. Add a cup of stock, stirring as it absorbs the flour and thickens. Add tomatoes and rest of stock. Simmer, partially covered, for about 20 min until cooked. Season with salt and lemon juice. Just before serving add the chorizo crisps and chopped coriander. To make the crisps, peel away the chorizo skin and slice thinly. Heat a heavy frying pan, lay out the chorizo slices and cook for a couple of minutes a side. Rest on kitchen paper. **Lindsey Bareham**

COMMENT

The customs union diverts trade towards Europe at the expense of poorer countries

MATT RIDLEY, PAGE 17

THE WEATHER



A cold day in Ireland with spells of sunshine and a few isolated showers of snow. **Full, page 16**

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Plans afoot to boost protection for battling mortgage holders

Peter O'Dwyer
Senior Ireland Business Reporter

Paschal Donohoe will bring to cabinet this week proposals aimed at beefing up protection for struggling mortgage holders as the government aims to alleviate unease over the sale of home loans to so-called vulture funds.

The finance minister is expected to start a review of the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) after meeting Michael McGrath, the Fianna Fáil finance spokesman, last week.

It is understood that the government will not block the passage of a Fianna Fáil bill to give the Central Bank the power to regulate loan owners, including vulture funds, when it is debated by the Dáil on Wednesday.

Credit-servicing businesses, which typically manage loans on behalf of the ultimate loan owners, are regulated but the businesses themselves are not.

Fianna Fáil's bill was prompted by the news that Permanent TSB was looking to sell 18,000 mortgages with a total value of €3.7 billion, including 14,000 home loans and 4,000 buy-to-let mortgages.

Ulster Bank announced on Friday

that it was to sell up to 7,000 non-performing home loans in an attempt to clean up its balance sheet under pressure from the European Central Bank and the domestic regulator.

Mr McGrath said his party did not agree with the sale of home loans to private equity funds, but added that at a minimum they should be regulated by the Central Bank and a review of the CCMA was not sufficient to appease Fianna Fáil.

"The imperative is to have legislation in place regulating the funds in advance of any prospect of further sales. We do not support such sales. We believe that the bank should be working through their loan books. It's really like the fire service outsourcing the job of putting out fires. The bank should be doing this work themselves but what we certainly cannot countenance is the possibility of sales going ahead without full regulation in place," Mr McGrath said.

"It's not an either-or option in relation to regulation and reforming the CCMA. In our view, both need to be done and I have given the minister my views on the CCMA.

"I think it is timely now for a review to take place because it dates back to

2013 and I have asked that the CCMA would be reviewed, but that's not a substitute for regulation."

Charlie Flanagan, the justice minister, said yesterday it was "absolutely essential" that vulnerable homeowners be protected and that he had had "people in tears" in his constituency office last week.

"I believe this issue must be resolved but there are legal agreements in place here and it's important to note that the terms and conditions of a mortgage document cannot be unilaterally changed by a vulture fund or any other bank. There are legal protections and the Irish courts are very protective of individuals and are very protective of families, and that will not change irrespective of who buys these bad loans," he told *The Week in Politics* on RTE.

He said he expected Mr Donohoe to brief cabinet on the matter tomorrow and to bring forward proposals to resolve the issue. He added that the minister would summon Permanent TSB to let them know his opinion on the matter.

Mr McGrath also warned that it would not be enough for the government to allow the bill to proceed on Wednesday, only to delay it later.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

2040 local media campaign

was a source of "significant revenue" and stressed that the stories should appear as though they were part of "the normal news cycle". Sponsored stories published online included an opinion piece by Heather Humphreys, the former arts minister, on some of the positives of Creative Ireland.

For the Ireland 2040 campaign, it is understood that the government paid one small local paper almost €4,000 for sponsored content. At least three titles have said they understand that the government campaign is paying more than their usual rates, and one editor said it would have been "impossible" to turn down the campaign.

Mediaforce could not be reached for comment last night. A spokesman for the government said that Ireland 2040 was being "communicated to citizens through media partnerships" and that the SCU had "no direct contact with regional media organisations".

"As with previous national development plans run by previous governments, all stories run under the media partnership are clearly labelled as being 'in partnership with the government of Ireland,'" he said. "The only instruction issued to the media buyer by the SCU was that any material should be listed as

being 'in partnership with the government of Ireland' or 'in association with the government of Ireland'. No instruction was issued by the SCU along the lines you allege."

He added that the SCU supplied media organisations with "key facts in relation to the plan — however, the decision relating to editorial style was entirely a matter for each organisation".

Micheál Martin, the Fianna Fáil leader, raised concerns in the Dáil last week about similar content in national newspapers. "The taoiseach must accept there is something at the very least ethically dubious about one arm of the taoiseach's department seeking coverage for so-called exclusives about the plan while another is discussing major advertising spending with the same media outlets," he said.

Mr Varadkar said: "I do not have any role in designing any advertisements or deciding which medium is used, and I am not consulted on this. I have asked not to be constructed on it. I have also asked not to see any advertisements before they are placed and I do not see them before they are placed."

Charlie Flanagan, the justice minister, yesterday dismissed criticism of the government's advertising campaigns, saying on RTE's *The Week in Politics* that concerns raised in the Dáil were just "opposition shadow boxing".

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Brexit risk of hard border

that remaining in a customs union would ease trade with the EU. Mr Flanagan said he took only a "modicum of comfort" from Sir Keir's comments, and that Labour had "its own problems and issues".

Leo Varadkar has warned the British prime minister that she must provide workable solutions to avoid regulatory divergence on the island of Ireland.

He said last week that Mrs May's government was considering a graduated approach to alignment based on "three baskets" of goods and services; one very closely aligned with the EU, one that diverged significantly, and a third that would fall in between the extremes.

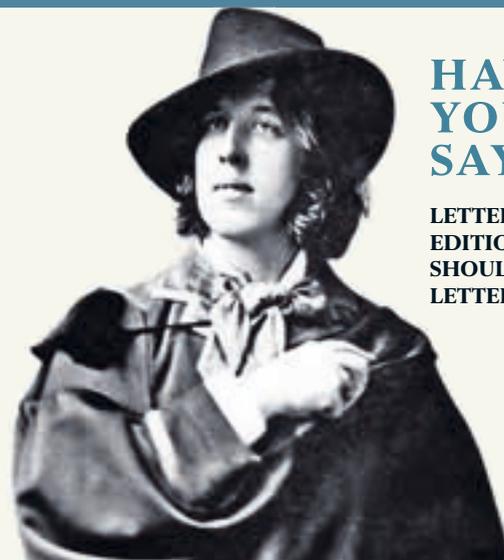
Mr Varadkar said there would be nothing new in such a proposal, which he dismissed as unworkable and "not a significant move away from having your cake and eating it".

Owen Paterson, the former Northern Ireland secretary has criticised the Good Friday agreement in recent weeks, saying it may have "outlived its usefulness".

Mr Varadkar said that critics should respect the Irish electorate's endorsement of the deal as Ireland has respected the UK's vote to leave the EU. **Corbyn customs union call, pages 10-11**

“The opinions of English critics on a French work of mine have, of course, little, if any, interest for me”

OSCAR WILDE
MARCH 2, 1893



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