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“TAP TIEFING” FARMERS’ CROPS

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Greene calls out U.K. over Windrush - Page 2



A major tsunami simulation exercise held yesterday in northern Antigua was a collaboration between the National Office of Disaster Services (NODS) and a joint regional project by UNESCO, the Caribbean Tsunami Information Center (CTID) and the European Union’s Disaster Preparedness Program (DIPECHO). **Story on Page 4**

Greene calls out U.K. over Windrush

The announcement that the United Kingdom's government intends to deport scores of Caribbean nationals is drawing the ire of Antigua and Barbuda's Foreign Affairs Minister, Hon. E.P Chet Greene.

Greene was reacting to reports that the U.K had earmarked 59 off-springs of the Windrush Generation for large-scale deportation, 17 of whom left London Tuesday for Jamaica with another 42 in detention waiting to hear their fate.

The foreign minister said the U.K's decision to go through with this action, is a violation of a commitment given to Caribbean Foreign Ministers made at the sidelines of a meeting of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers in London about eighteen months ago.

Greene said he is particularly peeved with the action by Britain as it tanta-



Antigua and Barbuda's Foreign Affairs Minister, Hon. E.P Chet Greene

mount to telling the offspring of the Windrush Generation to 'go home' 'you are not wanted here' even though it was Britain who invited the Caribbean nationals to help rebuild the country in the late 1940's after the devastation of the second World War.

"Every Caribbean citizen whether

at home or in the diaspora should pay close attention to this matter as, for me, it is human rights issue. I am calling on all global human rights organisations to pay keen attention to this issue and to engage in a programme of advocacy on behalf of those earmarked for deportation," Greene remarked.

He noted that the U.K government had promised to review the programme and to 'act on the lessons learned'. However, the foreign minister revealed that even before the report from a commission mandated to look into the issue completes its report, deportations are taking place.

Greene described the deportations as 'wicked' and 'deceptive' and he is called on Britain to honour its promise to 'pause' the programme and to find a solution that is mutually accepted by all.

<p>DAY 2/12</p> <p>Max UV Index: 7 High Wind: ENE at 37 km/h Wind Gusts: 52 km/h Probability of Precipitation: 60% Probability of Thunderstorms: 29% Precipitation: 2.9 mm Rain: 2.9 mm Snow: 0.0 cm Ice: 0.0 mm Hours of Precipitation: 2 Hours of Rain: 2</p> <p>28° Hi</p> <p>Partly sunny and breezy with a passing shower or two</p>	<p>NIGHT 2/12</p> <p>Wind: ENE at 22 km/h Wind Gusts: 35 km/h Probability of Precipitation: 49% Probability of Thunderstorms: 29% Precipitation: 1.8 mm Rain: 1.8 mm Snow: 0.0 cm Ice: 0.0 mm Hours of Precipitation: 1.5 Hours of Rain: 1.5</p> <p>23° Lo</p> <p>Partly cloudy with a shower in places</p>
<p>SUNRISE/SUNSET</p> <p>Sunrise AST 6:35 AM</p> <p>Sunset AST 6:08 PM</p> <p>Duration 11:33 hr</p>	<p>MOONRISE/MOONSET</p> <p>Moonrise AST 9:47 PM</p> <p>Moonset AST 10:03 AM</p> <p>Duration 12:16 hr</p>

“Tap Tiefing” Farmers’ Crops

Newly appointed Agriculture Minister, Samantha Marshall, is making a public appeal to individuals who are in the habit of stealing farmers’ produce whether they be crops or animals.

The minister said the problem of stealing farmers’ crops as well as prae-dial larceny are making problems facing the agricultural sector. “Stop the stealing!” she urged.

“This problem is going to take significant efforts and energy to tackle but it is very serious, and we must find solutions to end it,” the minister stated. According to Marshall she has been meeting with small farmers since her appointment and one recurring theme has been the issue of larceny of crops and livestock.

She is of the view that the problem is ‘a clear and present’ danger to not

just agriculture but the entire nation. It is the government’s stated policy position that agriculture should contribute more to the nation’s gross domestic product, its economic growth.

“We want to develop agriculture in such a way that our young men who may be liming on the block would see the value of getting involved in agriculture where they can become successful young producers of crops or animal products,” she declared.

She announced that her ministry will re-launch the backyard garden initiative to encourage more people to get involved in growing their own foods thus increasing the nation’s food security.

However, the minister is keen on having Antigua and Barbuda increase its agricultural exports thereby in-



Newly appointed Agriculture Minister, Samantha Marshall

creasing revenues from the sector. She also expressed the need for improved standards as this is required by a discerning public, both local and overseas.

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Tsunami drill hailed a success – but with room for improvement

A major tsunami simulation exercise held yesterday in northern Antigua was an overall success, but could have done with better organization, according to one of its main coordinators.

The drill was a collaboration between the National Office of Disaster Services (NODS) and a joint regional project by UNESCO,

the Caribbean Tsunami Information Center (CTID) and the European Union's Disaster Preparedness Program (DIPECHO).

The exercise focused on evacuation procedures in the event of a tsunami approaching, to move people rapidly from areas in danger of inundation to identified safe points that are further

inland and/or at higher elevations.

It was designed to test the tsunami readiness of Antigua and Barbuda, such as the effectiveness of the sirens or other warning systems employed, and routes plotted for mass movement from the danger zones to the designated safe areas.

Similar exercises are being held in several other Caribbean territories supported by the same project, and yesterday's simulation was not the first for Antigua and Barbuda in recent times. During 2019, drills of that nature were conducted at Christian Hill in Bethesda and also at Perry Bay/Gray's Farm on the southern side of St. John's Harbour.

Yesterday, the target areas included large swathes of the capital, St. John's, and

its densely populated outlying communities of Point and Villa on the northern side of the harbour.

"It went very well, but like everything else it showed areas in need of improvement," said Keithley Meade, the former Director of Meteorological Services who is now the Antigua and Barbuda consultant for the UNESCO-CTID project.

"We had very good crowd support and very good participation, but a little better organization and public sensitization may be needed," he added.

Meade said some people said they were not aware of the drill, which he described as "funny, since it was all over the place", noting also that some of those participating needed to be more certain of what they were required or expected to do.

He said the participation from the business sector was generally good when it involved relocating from the lower levels of their buildings and relocating to higher areas of the structures they occupied, where applicable.

Meade felt that one area which definitely needs to be looked at is the audibility of the sirens used to sound the tsunami warning, as "they are probably not powerful enough, since many people claimed not to have heard them."

He noted suggestions that the cruise ships in port could

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have been asked to help by sounding their horns, but said this would be impractical in a real case scenario, as such vessels would most likely be looking to get out of port as quickly as possible.

Meade believes louder sirens may have the effect of impressing upon people that something out of the ordinary was taking place, and they would therefore not be complacent in believing it was the normal run of police, fire and ambulance.

He pointed out that tsunami warnings often come with very little time to act, ranging from 30 or 15 minutes in the case of regional events, and practically no time in the event of a local tsunami. "We therefore must prepare to respond immediately, because in some cases there will be no time for any warning to go out," Meade advised.

NODS Director Philmore Mullin said he was "quite pleased with the turnout", although "it would have



been nice to have more people from the private sector."

Mullin said the exercise provided an opportunity "for testing some new maps that were developed with all the required scientific inputs".

He said almost all the designated safe areas such as the Anglican Cathedral and the Catholic Church near Mount St. John's had appreciable numbers of people who gathered there as part of the simulation.

Mullin mentioned the Ministry of Health, the Villa Primary School and the Princess Margaret School as areas



that produced commendable responses in vertical evacuation – moving persons from the bottom to higher floors so as to escape inundation in the event of a tsunami.



UK High Commissioner seeks assistance for arts and culture

The Antigua and Barbuda High Commission in London continues its efforts to facilitate development through the arts and culture, be it music, visual arts, theatre or dance.

On Tuesday, the High Commission staff met with rising UK dance star and teacher, James Walsh aka 'Sage' and industry veteran, Paul Anthony Skerritt. They will be travelling to Antigua in March to conduct school tours and workshops in African, Breakdance, Freestyle/Improvisation, Hip Hop, Street dance styles and much more.

This will culminate with a show, organised by Mr Skerritt, at the Dean William-Lake Cultural Centre on 29 March 2020 with over 23 performing local and international groups. Sage also shared the inspirational life story of his journey to becoming a professional dancer in the UK and performed for High Commission staff who tried, unsuccessfully, to mimic the complex moves.

High Commissioner,

H.E. Karen-Mae Hill encouraged Sage to share his exceptional talents, discipline, and high standards as demanded from the dance profession in the UK. The High Commissioner also commended Skerritt for his contributions to the development of dance performance and the personal development of dancers in Antigua over the last 5 years.



Coronavirus alert remains high

Health officials in St John's say there are no suspected cases of the novel coronavirus in Antigua and Barbuda nor the wider Caribbean region.

Nonetheless, they say the country remains on alert to ensure that all steps are taken to prevent anyone with possible exposure to the virus from entering the

country, unless he or she is a national,

The ministry of health said Antigua and Barbuda continues to monitor persons who were quarantined

in light of the threat of the novel Coronavirus, now named Covid-19. All persons in quarantine continue to do well and all are as-

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ymptomatic.

The ministry is advising that all nonessential travel to China should be avoided.

Countries across the globe have been asked to work together by the Director General of the World Health Organization to curb the spread of the virus.

National agencies continue to work in tandem to keep Antigua and Barbuda country virus free.

On Tuesday, Health Minister Molywn Joseph as well as other Ministry officials of the Caribbean region, participated in a virtual PAHO information session on the novel Coronavirus. All countries have activated their influenza plans.

Last September, a sub-regional workshop was hosted by the Pan American Health Organization in Montego Bay, Jamaica, to propel countries to update their individual influenza preparedness plans.

The Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment will continue to update the public on all developments related to the novel Coronavirus.

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New release from Drastic

Grammy-nominated songwriter and award-winning Antiguan artist Drastic, known for his versatility and consistency year after year, has announced the release of his highly anticipated new mixtape release.

Aptly titled “15 Grams: The Mixtape” in honor of Antigua and Barbuda’s decriminalization of 15 grams of cannabis back in early 2018, the 15-track mixtape is reportedly en-

dorsed by Antigua’s Prime Minister Hon. Gaston Browne.

Featuring a number of “ganja remixes” to popular songs in hip-hop and afro beats, the project also showcases an original and fun collaboration with Antiguan reggae artist Ras Juba entitled “They Wanna Know”.

The ‘Mixtape’ has been described by industry sources as ‘setting the bar higher in terms of production, delivery and performances alike’.

Providing a plethora of new Antiguan stoner anthems, the mixtape is as personal as it is entertaining.

“Fallen” is a letter to a fellow artist and friend of Drastic who died over the holidays after being shot.

“The same day we were having the mixtape release party, I got news that they had caught Icee’s shooter. That brought everything full circle for me and made the mixtape release even more memorable,” said Drastic when talking about “Fallen”.

This Mixtape release is only part one of two in the overall 15 Grams double album project. Part two will be an original album “15 Grams: The Album”, to be released on April 20, 2020.



A&B shared in CDB disbursement

Antigua and Barbuda is among Caribbean countries that benefitted from increased disbursement of funds by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB).

In a statement, the bank said that it has prioritised improving its disbursements so its Borrowing Member Countries (BMCs) can press forward with implementing critical projects and programmes funded by the Bank.

CDB's disbursements rose 8% in

2019, disclosed Director of the Projects Department Daniel Best on Tuesday. The Bank disbursed USD305 million in 2019.

Speaking at the Bank's Annual News Conference in Wildey, Barbados, Best emphasised the work the Bank has done to ensure approved project funding can be accessed efficiently.

The recent move by APUA to install LED streetlights around the country

forms part of a CDB initiative to install over 200,000 energy efficient LED streetlights in Antigua and Barbuda and five other territories.

The bank official said development does not happen without implementation; and the 8% increase in disbursements over 2018, is again the result of the CDB's renewed emphasis on supervision and providing much needed technical support to its BMCs to implement projects approved.

Nominations open for Women of Wadadli Awards

Nominations are now open for the International Women's Day (IWD) 2020 Women of Wadadli Awards.

The Awards seek to recognize outstanding women in various fields who have made tangible contributions to improving the social, economic, cultural and political status of the country and to promoting gender equality nationally. The Women of Wadadli (WoW) Awards aims to provide a

platform to celebrate the milestones and achievements of women in Antigua and Barbuda and to create an environment that will facilitate the empowerment of women.

The year 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration & Platform for Action and the 40th anniversary of the founding of Antigua & Barbuda's Directorate of Gender Affairs, formerly the Women's

Desk. In keeping with these significant occasions, the Women of Wadadli Awards Gala will honour twenty-five (25) women, and one private-sector agency under the global IWD theme "I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women's Rights".

The Women of Wadadli Awards will also provide an opportunity for young women to learn from the example and expertise of the selected winners through

the Women of Wadadli Mentorship Programme.

Nominations will be open from January 24 – February 24, 2020. Nominations will be accepted from the general public. Prospective nominees can nominate themselves or be nominated by someone who can attest to their work and achievements. Awards and shortlisting will be decided on the basis of the impact of the individual's work, the level of commitment and dedication demonstrated towards their field and to promoting gender equality and women's advancement, as well as the extent to which their contributions has helped to sustain and boost national development. Supporting evidence is required for consideration of nominations.

Persons making nominations are encouraged to pay special attention to the criteria and guidelines that will be provided. A select panel will review all nominations and determine the winners.

A&B to host regional workshop

Antigua and Barbuda will host a major regional workshop that will bring together representatives from the Caribbean Development Bank, CARIFORUM Directorate, the European Union Delegation, and all 15 CARIFORUM Member States.

The Office of the National Authorizing Officer for European Development Fund and EPA Implementation within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Immigration and Trade, will facilitate the workshop to launch the CARIFORUM- EU Economic Partnership Agreement and the CARICOM Single Market and Economy Standby Facility for Capacity Building.

The workshop takes place Thursday and Friday at the Rex Halcyon Cove Hotel where Foreign Affairs, Immigration and

Trade Minister, E.P Chet Greene, who has portfolio responsibilities for the implementation of the CSME and the EPA will deliver the feature address at the launch.

The Caribbean Development Bank and the European Union (EU) entered into a Contribution Agreement for the administration of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Single Market and Economy (CSME) and the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) Standby Facility for Capacity Building. Along with Antigua and Barbuda, participants are expected from, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, St Kitts and Nevis, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

Canadian Prime Minister to meet with CARICOM Heads of Government in Barbados

Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, will travel to Bridgetown, Barbados to participate in the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to build even stronger ties with the region. The Conference will be held 18-19 February 2020.

The announcement was made Tuesday 11 February via a press release from the Prime Minister's office.

The Caribbean region and Caribbean states are important political, economic and cultural partners of Canada, and the visit will serve as an opportunity to further strengthen its partnership with this regional grouping of 20 Caribbean member states and Associate Members, and nearly 20 million people, the release said.

It added that the Prime Minister will discuss challenges of mutual interest, including protecting oceans and the environment in the fight against

climate change – in a region that is particularly vulnerable to its impacts, as well as creating good jobs for the middle class and sustainable economic growth.

According to the press release, Prime Minister Trudeau will participate in group discussions and bilateral meetings with CARICOM leaders. He will be received by the Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley – the current Chair of CARICOM and host of this meeting.

As Canada pursues its candidacy for election to the United Nations Security Council in 2021-2022, we will continue to advance shared interests to benefit people and businesses in Canada, the Caribbean, and around the world.

“Canada and Caribbean countries have always had strong relationships and almost one million people of Caribbean descent live in Canada. These



Canadian Prime Minister to meet with CARICOM Heads of Government in Barbados

relationships are based on shared values and partnerships in the fight against climate change, the promotion of democracy, trade, economic growth, and security. I look forward to meeting the leaders of CARICOM to discuss how we can work together to strengthen the Caribbean, and build a better world,” the Prime Minister said.



UK facilitates Digital Media workshops for Caribbean Journalists

Monday, February 10, 2020 — Media practitioners from Saint Lucia were given the opportunity to hone their craft and develop new skills, thanks to a UK-funded workshop delivered by Multimedia Trainer and Mobile Journalism Specialist, Dan Mason.

Held under the theme: ‘Change Your Story’, the comprehensive workshops were designed to improve the digital media capabilities of participants and encourage a solutions-based approach to journalism. In modern time the media has impacted communities, countries and the globe. The way the story is told can bring a new-found understanding of a situation or create long-lasting negative effects on individuals and society. The hands-on sessions were particularly focused on creating multimedia content using mobile devices, mobile



British High Commission Bridgetown Press Release

photography, podcasts and video editing on the go.

The workshop was part of a training series facilitated by the UK Government across the Eastern Caribbean, for media professionals in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, the Commonwealth of Domi-

nica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines; and Guyana. The course also continues to highlight the opening of new UK High Commissions in Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines – building on

opportunities to foster new relations with key regional contacts.

During his welcome remarks to launch the final workshop in Saint Lucia, Resident British Commissioner to the island, Mr. Steve McCready said:



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17 Deportees Arrive In Kingston From UK

They had earlier arrived at Kingston's Norman Manley International Airport aboard a charter flight from the United Kingdom.

Another 33 Jamaicans were expected to be on the deportation flight, but their repatriation was halted by a last-minute Court of Appeal ruling.

The court ruled that it must be satisfied that while in detention, the deportees were provided with functioning cell phone SIM cards before February

This means they would have been able to contact their lawyers.

At Harman Barracks, relatives of the deportees took up position as they waited for their loved ones.

Among them were Ann-Marie Williams whose son was sent back home.

Majority of the other deportees' families declined to speak on camera.

However, Ricardo Samuels and his mother, said they would be supporting their relative, a convicted drug offender, who has been deported after 20 years in the UK. Meanwhile, like she has done for the past six years, Tasha Shirley was at Harman Barracks today to provide phone calls and other forms of assistance to the deported migrants.

She said she does this year after year out of care for the Jamaicans returning home.



A policeman assists a deported Jamaican with his luggage as he loads them into a vehicle - Ricardo Makyn photo

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Venezuela threats influenced oil contract with Exxon

...UK law firm says gov't renegotiation above board

AN independent investigation into the Government's signing of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement with ExxonMobil has further discredited previous reports that Minister of Natural Resources, Raphael Trotman was influenced by a "lavish Exxon meeting" into the signing.

The report, conducted by UK-based global law firm, Clyde & Co, showed that the signing was influenced, in part, by the government's intent of maintaining a strategic relationship with ExxonMobil and its partners as the country's territorial integrity was at threat by neighbouring Venezuela. Noting several other factors, the report concluded that "the 2016 Agreement was negotiated and orderly executed in accordance with the [Petroleum] Act and the Regulations."

UK-based global law firm, Clyde & Co

The report is another which discredits portions of a recent report by investigative company, Global Witness, which theorised — without proof — that Trotman, who signed the Exxon deal in June 2016, has possibly been compromised.



Minister of Natural Resources, Raphael Trotman

Clyde & Co was contracted by the Ministry of Natural Resources on September 2, 2019, to conduct an independent investigation into the decision-making processes and systems leading to the signing of the 2016 agreement and report on its findings. It presented the report on January 30, 2020.

The Company outlined that the investigation took

on four phases which included documentation enquiries and online searches; interviews /additional documentation; draft report /additional information and the publication of the report. Interviews were had with Trotman; former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carl Greenidge; Head of Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), Newell Dennison; Legal Adviser to

the Minister, Joanna Simmons-Homer; and Petroleum Division, Christopher Lynch. "The investigation was conducted by us on an independent basis as we had no prior involvement in relation to the 2016 Agreement with the MoNR (Ministry of Natural Resources), GGMC or the government," the Company stated.

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CDB sounds note of caution For Region



The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) is projecting regional economic growth to increase to 4.1% in 2020 from 1% in 2019, powered largely by stratospheric growth in Guyana where oil production begins this year.

President of the Bank, Dr Wm. Warren Smith noted that this growth will be uneven, and urged the borrowing member countries (BMCs) of the Bank to pursue policy reforms conducive to sustainable rates of growth.

Speaking at the Bank's annual news conference on Tuesday in Barbados,

Dr Smith said, "Economic growth will remain lopsided and below the sustainable rates needed for long-term resilience. BMCs like Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica and St. Kitts and Nevis must stay on course with their homegrown socio-economic reform programmes."

He also urged others to join the bandwagon and commence, with alacrity, implementation of their own adjustment programmes.

The Bank's President reported on the progress that several BMCs implementing economic adjustment

programmes, noting improved fiscal performance and debt ratios in several states in 2019.

He pointed to Barbados' progress in bringing its debt ratio down from 127% of gross domestic product in 2018 to under 120% last year.

The Bank President confirmed that the Bank was determined to assist the BMCs reach the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

He cited the work which CDB did in 2019 to assist its BMCS in meeting these goals through modernising infrastructure and economic reform.

Duterte terminates Philippines troop pact, U.S. calls move 'unfortunate'

MANILA/WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on Tuesday announced the termination of a two-decade-old Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States (VFA), delivering on threats to downgrade an alliance important to U.S. interests.

U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper called the decision "unfortunate" and said it would be a move in the wrong direction at a time when Washington and its allies were trying to press China to abide by "international rules of order" in Asia.

The mercurial Duterte, who has clashed with the United States over several issues, decided to pull the plug on the troop rotation pact with the former colonial ruler to enable the Philippines to be more independent in its relations with other countries, his spokesman Salvador Panelo said.

"The president will not entertain any initiative coming from the U.S. government to salvage the VFA, neither will he accept any official invitation to visit the United States,"



Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte attends a plenary session at a regional summit in Bangkok, Thailand November 2, 2019. REUTERS/Athit Perawongmetha

Panelo said.

The decision, sparked by the revocation of a U.S. visa held by a former police chief who led Duterte's bloody war on drugs, could complicate U.S. military interests in the Asia-Pacific region as China's ambitions rise.

It would also limit Philippine access to U.S. training and expertise in tackling Islamist extremism,

natural disasters and maritime security threats.

Panelo said Duterte's decision was a consequence of U.S. legislative and executive actions that "bordered on assaulting our sovereignty and disrespecting our judicial system".

Given the importance of the alliance with the Philippines in broader U.S. strategy, Washington hopes the

decision will be reversed or delayed before it takes legal effect in 180 days.

The VFA is important to the overall U.S.-Philippines alliance and sets out rules for U.S. soldiers to operate in the Philippines.

It underpins what Washington has called an "iron-clad" relationship despite Duterte's complaints about U.S. hypocrisy, ill treatment and ageing weapons.



A worker is seen inside a convenience store following an outbreak of the novel coronavirus in Wuhan, Hubei province, China February 11, 2020. REUTERS/Stringer

New coronavirus cases lowest since Jan. 31 in China province at outbreak's epicenter

GUANGZHOU, China/GENEVA (Reuters) - The coronavirus outbreak in China may be over by April, the country's senior medical adviser said on Tuesday, and the latest numbers of new cases may further feed that optimism.

Hubei, the province at the epicenter of the outbreak that has been under virtual lockdown, reported 94 people died and there were 1,068 new coronavirus cases as of Tuesday.

That is down from a peak of over 3,000 new cases on Feb. 4, and the lowest number of new infections since 1,347 were reported on Jan. 31.

But total deaths in China have surpassed 1,100 and the World Health Organization (WHO) warned of a

global threat potentially worse than terrorism.

The world must "wake up and consider this enemy virus as public enemy number one," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters, adding the first vaccine was 18 months away.

China's foremost medical adviser on the outbreak, Zhong Nanshan, said numbers of new cases were falling in some provinces and forecast the epidemic would peak this month.

"I hope this outbreak or this event may be over in something like April," Zhong, an epidemiologist who played a role in combating an outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003, told Reuters.

Even if the epidemic ends soon, it has already taken a toll on China's economy, as companies began laying off workers and other firms said they would need loans running into billions of dollars to stay afloat. Supply chains for car manufacturers to smartphone makers have broken down.

Total cases of the new coronavirus in China have now surpassed 44,000, according to the WHO and Chinese health officials.

Statistics from China indicate about 2% of people infected with the new virus have died, many of them elderly or with prior medical conditions. But the spread of the virus, which can lead to pneumonia, has already caused widespread disruption.

Cyprus 'golden passports' scheme a laundering risk, says watchdog

ATHENS (Reuters) - A European money laundering watchdog has cautioned that a secretive investment-for-passports program run by Cyprus was vulnerable to money laundering and fraught with risk.

The Mediterranean island launched the scheme offering passports for an investment in 2013, with more than 3,000 people gaining citizenship through the program.

A committee of experts from the Council of Europe, known as MONEYVAL, said in a report released on Wednesday that, although Cyprus had broadly taken measures to mitigate key money laundering risks, the risk of vulnerabilities in the investment program had increased "exponentially" via real estate, the investment vehicle of choice.

"These risks have not been properly mitigated," it said. "The risks related to the Cyprus Investment Programme have not been assessed comprehensively."

Although it did not elaborate, real estate is broadly known to be used by money launderers as a stable investment which can ap-

preciate over time, and is normally subject to more limited scrutiny, according to a European Parliament research note issued in 2019.

Under the program, a minimum 2 million euro (\$2.18 million) investment can get a passport and instant visa-free travel throughout the European Union, of which Cyprus is a member.

Supervision of the real estate sector should be significantly enhanced, the MONEYVAL report said, saying there should be more preventive measures by real estate agents.

While Cyprus was instrumental in assisting other countries, it was "not very proactive" at freezing and confiscating foreign criminal proceeds at its own initiative.

The review was conducted in May 2019. Based on the results of its evaluation, MONEYVAL decided to apply an enhanced follow up procedure and invited Cyprus to report back in 2021.

The total amount invested under the investment scheme was 6.64 billion euros between 2013 and 2018,



Representations of virtual currency Bitcoin and euro banknotes are seen in this picture illustration taken January 27, 2020. REUTERS/Dado Ruvic

the MONEYVAL report said, calling it "material" to the economy of Cyprus.

In November 2019 Cyprus said it would review the processes used to grant citizenships in the wake of a report by Reuters that Cambodian nationals in the inner circle of long-time leader Hun Sen had acquired passports..

It said it had introduced additional safeguards to the program since its inception to prevent abuses.

It also said it would start a process to revoke citizenship from 26 individuals. However Cypriot lawmakers told Reuters on Feb. 10 that the process had stalled on a legal technicality.

Italy faces existential threat over low birthrate: president

ROME (Reuters) - Italy's future is threatened by its diminishing birthrate, President Sergio Mattarella said on Tuesday, as new data showed the population had shrunk once again in 2019.

Italy's growing demographic crisis, with births falling and life expectancy rising, is one reason for its chronically stagnant economy, and the situation is getting worse.

National statistics agency ISTAT said there were 435,000 births last year, down 5,000 on 2018 and the lowest level ever recorded in Italy. Deaths totaled 647,000 in 2019, some 14,000 more than the year earlier.

"This is a problem that concerns the very existence of our country," Mattarella said shortly after the data was released. "The fabric of our country is weakening and everything must be done to counter this phenomenon."

"As an old person I am well aware of the falling birth rate," added Mattarella, who is 78.

Italy's overall population fell by 116,000 to 60.3 million, with a steady rise in migrant and immigrant births helping to offset the



Elderly people play cards in Rome, Italy October 8, 2018. REUTERS/Tony Gentile

declining domestic birth rate.

Many other European countries are suffering similar challenges, especially in ex-communist eastern Europe, while Germany has also seen a decline in domestic births partly offset by increased migrant and immigrant births.

Birth rates have held up better in France and Britain.

Italy's population had risen virtually every year since World War One, hitting a peak in 2015 at 60.8 million, but has since started to decline.

ISTAT said the gap be-

tween births and deaths was getting wider, with just 67 newborns last year for every 100 people who died. Ten years ago there were 96 births for every 100 deaths.

Life expectancy in Italy has continued to push up, hitting 85.3 years for women and 81 years for men — one of the highest rates in Europe — while the average age in Italy is now 45.7.

Successive Italian governments have promised to do more to boost births, but have so far failed to resolve the problem.

The current administration has offered lower in-

come couples grants of up to 160 euros (\$175) per month to help cover costs during the first year of a baby's life and also promised young families up to 3,000 euros a year to cover nursery charges. Prayuth said.

He said he was worried that people inside the mall could be accidentally hit by bullets fired by police, but added, "I have checked, that didn't happen."

Video taken outside the mall showed people diving for cover as shots rang out. Many were killed outside the mall, some in cars and others while walking.

Your Stars Foretold



Aries

Aries (Mar 21 – Apr 19)

Your creative star is in the ascendant, and there are those who are rather impressed with you or your performance. Redouble your efforts and magnify the impression.



Libra

Libra (Sep 23 – Oct 22)

If you agree to a course of action that fundamentally irritates you just to terminate a discussion, you could find yourself in a real bind. Stick to your guns and say, "No thanks."



Taurus

Taurus (Apr 20 – May 20)

Examine the ways a venture could be structured so that it takes your creative and economic needs into account. Right now you have a blank canvas upon which you can design whatever you want. So grab your crayons.



Scorpio

Scorpio (Oct 23 – Nov 21)

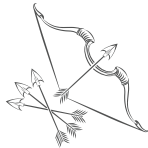
Try to get as much work done as possible. Within a few days, the desire to industriously produce widgets will be replaced by the urge to loll under a tree, while holding a beverage with a parasol in it.



Gemini

Gemini (May 21 – Jun 20)

Your perfectionist tendencies notwithstanding, review some of the activities that you would enjoy but don't actually do because you aren't expert at them. Can you guess the rest? That's right-get out there and do them.



Sagittarius

Sagittarius (Nov 22 – Dec 21)

While there is always a comfort to be derived from familiar routines and patterns, there's a heaping helping of inspiration to be drawn from the untried. Let the unknown take you for a spin today.



Cancer

Cancer (Jun 21 – Jul 22)

If you're looking for inspiration, the instructions are simple. Anything that propels you out of your rut or your routine, even temporarily, is a growth opportunity of the first order.



Capricorn

Capricorn (Dec 22 – Jan 19)

It's possible you've made a choice that you're not entirely crazy about. You didn't actually engrave the agreement in stone, did you? Good, because then there's still time to change your plan.



Leo

Leo (Jul 23 – Aug 22)

Certain business or personal arrangements may no longer be ringing your bell the way they once did. You could gain altitude if you chose to jettison those that are weighing you down.



Aquarius

Aquarius (Jan 20 – Feb 18)

If you're doing what you enjoy doing, carry on. If you aren't-and only you know for sure-you ought to seriously consider what would have to happen for you to feel the love.



Virgo

Virgo (Aug 23 – Sept 22)

There's really no reason to worry about future events. Your time is far better spent becoming excited about the fun you can have extracting enjoyment from your existing-the operative word is existing-resources.



Pisces

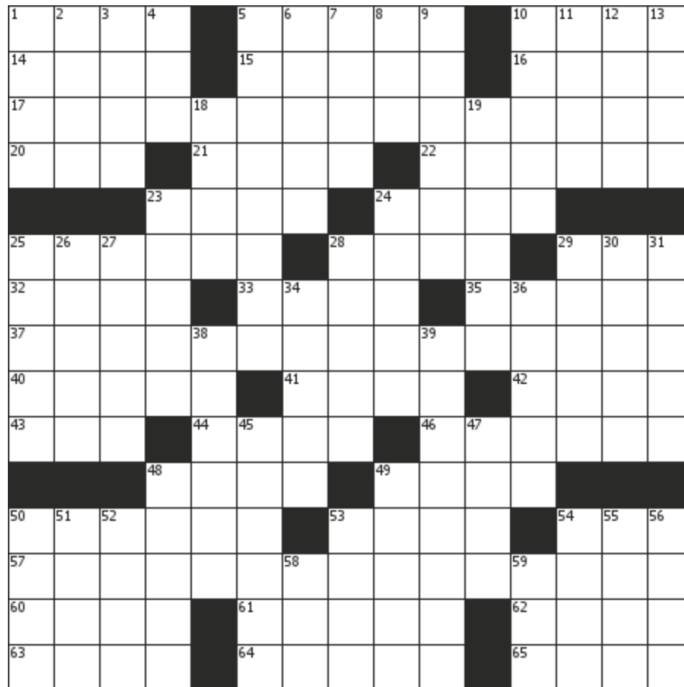
Pisces (Feb 19 – Mar 20)

Have confidence in your efforts. You have quite an assortment of options and a wealth of talents, all of which are far more worthy of your attention than the hole in the bucket, dear 'Liza or Henry.



CROSSWORD PUZZLE

- ross**
- . Big showcase, briefly
 - . Spy in Canaan
 - . "Blue Velvet" star
 - . Check
 - . Japanese port
 - . Falco of "The Sopranos"
 - . Focus of an interplanetary rch
 - . Coquettish
 - . They may be against you
 - . Talented
 - . Tearoom relative
 - . Helvetica, for one
 - . Wankel's creation
 - . Fogginess
 - . Shakespearean segment
 - . Saloon swinger
 - . Poetic color
 - . Shop machine
 - . Calculated conjectures
 - . "Call Me ___"
 - . Sinn ___ (Irish organization)
 - . Word with box or hot
 - . In the style of
 - . Life sci.
 - . Turf grippers
 - . Breather
 - . Sock exchange
 - . Like this clue
 - . ___ mater
 - . Fed. watchdog
 - . Clever
 - . Belonging in a bughouse
 - . Dodge
 - . Carpenter's need
 - . She sheep
 - . Like French doors
 - . Just



Down

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Colonizer of Greenland | 19. Toy piano sound | 45. Arch locale |
| 2. Prefix meaning "alien" | 23. About | 47. Poi party |
| 3. Compassion | 24. Truffles et al. | 48. CBS's eye and NBC's peacock |
| 4. With 59-Down, type of punch | 25. Plant swelling | 49. Cutting edge |
| 5. Loss of courage | 26. Knobby | 50. Equipped |
| 6. "All kidding ___ . . ." | 27. Dutch cheese | 51. Cacophonous cornfield critter |
| 7. Doesn't keep up | 28. Runway figure | 52. "Dirty" Cajun dish |
| 8. Barely make (with "out") | 29. Bewildered | 53. Slippery-eel link |
| 9. City on the Penobscot | 30. Use crib notes | 54. School in Britain |
| 10. Dutch earthenware | 31. Lab work | 55. Combine, as resources |
| 11. Clean up the galley? | 34. Cloud over | 56. Bee's nephew |
| 12. Abundant | 36. Balance sheet item | 58. Gardner of Hollywood |
| 13. Require | 38. Sneak attack | 59. See 4-Down |
| 18. It's often on the house | 39. Mussed | |

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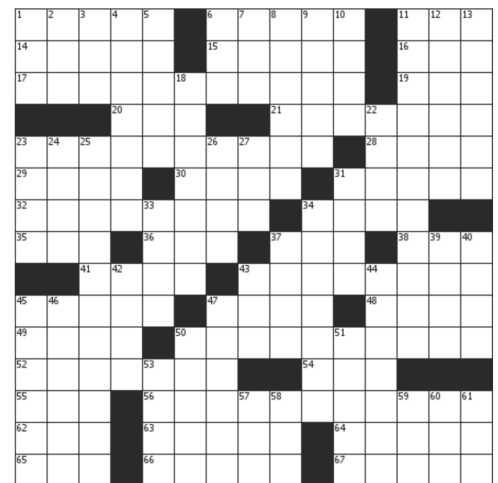
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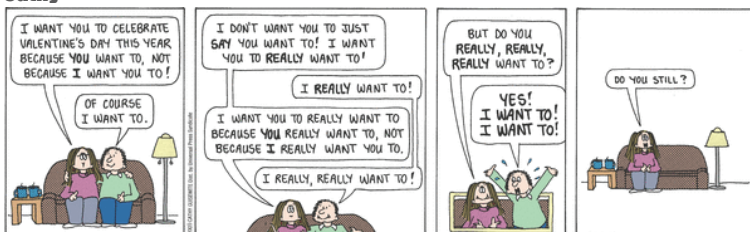


Daily Comics presented by azcentral.

Non Sequitur



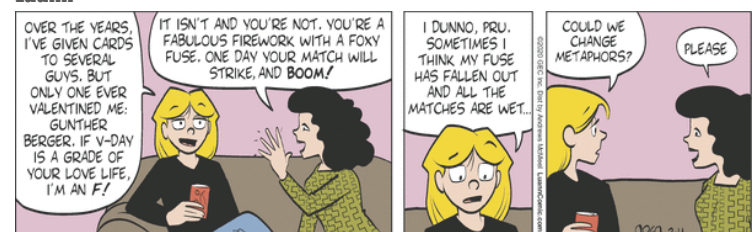
Cathy



Garfield



Luann



LeBron James unsure on playing Olympics but says 'my name is in the hat'



LeBron James says there are multiple factors that will determine whether he ends up playing at the Olympic Games this year.

The Los Angeles Lakers star is one of 44 finalists for a place in the United States men's basketball team and he acknowledged his "name is in the hat".

By early June, that group will be cut down to a final 12 to play at the Olympics in Tokyo and, should he feature, James will join Carmelo Anthony as the second player to represent Team USA at four separate Games.

The 12-team basketball event will run from July 25 until August 9 and James is unsure over his participation at this stage of the NBA season.

But he was thrilled to see five Lakers players make the initial group, with

Anthony Davis, Kyle Kuzma, Dwight Howard and Javale McGee also included.

"Spectacular, it's amazing," said the 35-year-old.

"We're very well represented with the Lake Show representing the red, white and blue. So it's a pretty cool thing."

On his participation, James added: "It's always predicated on: one, my body, how my body is feeling at the end of the season – I hope to make a long playoff run.

"And then where my mind is and then where my family's head is. So it's a lot of factors, but my name is in the hat."

James was speaking after the Lakers cruised to a 125-100 home win over

the Phoenix Suns on Monday, a fourth win from five games moving them to 40-12 for the season.

Davis had 25 points and 10 rebounds, while Rajon Rondo impressed from the bench with 23 points as Howard added 14 points and 15 rebounds.

James, meanwhile, narrowly missed a triple-double with 17 points, nine assists and eight rebounds as the Lakers reached 40 wins before the All-Star break for the first time in nine years.

"It was a great game for our bench," said James.

"Rajon had great pace all night and he was taking all the looks he was getting. Dwight controlled the glass."

Suns coach Monty Williams added: "We dared Rondo to shoot from the perimeter and he made us pay.



Lara and Tendulkar roll back the years as bushfire relief fundraiser brings in millions

Sachin Tendulkar and Brian Lara rolled back the years as Cricket Australia raised over 7.7 million Australian dollars (£3.9million) in the fundraising Bushfire Cricket Bash on Sunday.

At Melbourne's Junction Oval, a Ricky Ponting XI beat an Adam Gilchrist XI by one run, with superstar line-ups turning out in support of the relief effort.

Former Australia captain Ponting made 26 from 14 balls and West Indies great Lara plundered 30 in the 10-overs-a-side match, as

the Ponting XI made 104-5 from their allocation.

In the reply, Gilchrist scored 17 before he was bowled by former Australian rules star Luke Hodge, before Shane Watson cracked three sixes in a nine-ball 30 and Andrew Symonds added 29.

Ponting, Lara, Watson and Symonds all retired to give others a chance to shine in the charity contest, which saw bowlers including Peter Siddle, Courtney Walsh, Wasim Akram and Dan Christian come in for some

uncharitable treatment from batsmen.

Brett Lee's 2-11 from two overs bucked the trend, as the former Baggy Green paceman took the wickets of Gilchrist XI stars Brad Hodge and Yuvraj Singh.

Tendulkar, who was named coach of the Ponting XI, made a crowd-pleasing cameo between innings when he faced an over shared by Ellyse Perry and Annabel Sutherland.

The Gilchrist XI then needed five from the final ball of their 10 overs, but

ex-Aussie rules footballer Nick Riewoldt, attempting to club a six, could only scramble a three to leave his team just short on 103-6.

Cricket Australia centred the match around its Big Appeal campaign, with television coverage taking the match to a large audience, and its fundraising was boosted by an online auction.

At least 33 people died in Australia's bushfire crisis, with wildlife taking the brunt and homes and large areas of land being destroyed.



Jerome Taylor has previously had spells in England with Leicestershire and Sussex and most recently T20 contracts for the last two seasons with Somerset

Gloucestershire sign Taylor to three-year contract

Gloucestershire have signed West Indies paceman Jerome Taylor on a three-year deal, to play in all forms of the game.

The 35-year-old, who was a member of the Windies' 2016 World T20-winning squad, moves across the West Country, having played T20 cricket for Somerset for the last two years.

Gloucestershire head coach Richard Dawson said: "Jerome will add pace

and international experience to the attack.

"He can contribute in all formats so he'll be a valuable addition."

Taylor is the second West Indies fast bowler to play for Gloucestershire in successive seasons following Shannon Gabriel, who played in two first-class matches in 2019.

"I am very excited to be joining Gloucestershire," the Jamaican said.

"I am grateful for the opportunity as I really enjoy playing county cricket and I am hopeful that my experience can help on and off the field."

Promoted Gloucestershire will start the County Championship Division One season against Yorkshire at Headingley on 12 April.

His home debut should be against Lancashire at Nevil Road in Bristol a week later.

