BRITAIN’s energy giants have accused Labour of endangering the country’s progress towards a low carbon future as the party confirmed its determination to nationalise the sector.

Labour said late last night that it would take National Grid into public ownership, creating a National Energy Agency alongside 14 Regional Energy Agencies to replace the system’s current distribution network operators. It added a future Labour government would “make heat and electricity a human right and tackle climate change.”

Publicly owned networks will build out connections to parts of the country with high solar, wind and tidal potential, overcoming the bottlenecks, inefficiencies and underinvestment that has characterised private ownership, the party said.

The publication of Labour’s plans confirmed earlier reports that it intends to pay less than the market price in order to nationalise energy networks. The party cited Northern Rock’s nationalisation in 2008 as justification for parliament setting the price for companies taken over by the state.

National Grid said the “last thing that is needed is the enormous distraction, cost and complexity contained in these plans.”

It added: “Labour has repeatedly said that they are not seeking to return to a top-down, 70s-style state ownership model, however the structures set out in this paper seem to contradict this, with central planning seeming to be a core feature, alongside complex structures.”

National Grid took charge of the networks in 1990 when the Central Electricity Generating Board was privatised. Its shares were initially owned by 12 regional energy companies, before listing in 1995.

This month, the UK went a week without using coal-generated electricity for the first time since 1882.

CONTINUES ON P7

THE CITY VIEW: P3

Trump backs out of online terror pledge

EMILY NICOLLE
@emilyjnicolle

THE UNITED States has refused to join other nations in signing a pledge to tackle the spread of violent and extremist content online.

The White House said while it supported the document’s overall goals, it is “not currently in a position to join the endorsement”.

Named the Christchurch Call, the statement asks governments and companies to take stronger measures in countering terrorist content.

Five tech giants – Facebook, Twitter, Alphabet, Microsoft and Amazon – signed the pledge, alongside a promise to update their terms of use and to publish “transparency reports” on their progress.

The Christchurch Call was led by New Zealand and France, as world leaders gathered in Paris yesterday to launch the pledge. It followed a live-streamed attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in March, in which more than 50 people died.

Facebook also introduced new curbs on its live-streaming feature ahead of the Paris event, including a “one-strike” policy for those found to be uploading violent content.

The White House said freedom of speech and the press must be respected in any measures to combat terrorist messaging online.

CONTINUES ON P7

THE CITY VIEW: P3

SUSIE WOLFF ON F1’S GENDER BATTLE

P30

IS THIS THE LIFE? WHY WE SHOULD LEAVE UNLIMITED HOLIDAY OUT OF OFFICES

P25

NEED FOR SPEED

SUSIE WOLFF ON F1’S GENDER BATTLE

P30

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SEE PAGE 12
#BORN TODEARE

One of the hardest-working players in the history of the sport, he has inspired generations and the growth of football around the world. Entrepreneur, philanthropist and style icon, his influence on popular culture transcends the pitch. Some are born to follow. Others are #BornToDare

BLACK BAY
BRONZE

TUDOR

DAVID BECKHAM
GETAWAY DRIVER: Stolen vintage Ferrari tracked down by police

London HS2 budget surge may ‘short-change’ north

ALEXANDRA ROGERS
@city, @amongers

LONDON risks reaping most of the rewards from HS2, leaving the north “short-changed”, a stinging House of Lords report on the controversial transport project has warned today.

The costs of the £56bn railway “do not appear to be under control” and the government must find ways to reduce them so that the second phase of the railway, based in the north, gets built to current specifications, the Economic Affairs Committee said.

As it stands, the fears a cost overrun in London could mean there is insufficient funding for the rest of the railway.

It said the government had failed to take up previous advice from the committee on how to cut costs, such as reducing the speed of trains and terminating the line in the south at the existing Old Oak Common station, rather than Euston.

“If costs overrun on the first phase of the project, there could be insufficient funding for the rest of the new railway,” said chairman Lord Forsyth of Drumlean.

“The northern sections of High Speed 2 must not be sacrificed to make up for overspending on the railway’s southern sections.”

The report said: “The north is being short-changed by the government’s present plans, especially as construction on HS2 is starting in the south.”

The committee said the government’s priority must instead be to invest in rail infrastructure in the north. It suggested that could be done by integrating the plans for Northern Powerhouse Rail with the plans for the northern section of HS2, and ensuring that funding for the project is ring-fenced.

HS2 is scheduled to open in two phases between 2026 and 2033. The first phase will link Euston and Birmingham, while the second phase will connect the midlands city to Manchester and Leeds.

The project has already faced significant scrutiny. Chief secretary to the Treasury Liz Truss has said the line will go into the spending review, while former Cabinet minister David Davis said the scheme, if scrapped, could finance 28 new projects instead.

A Department for Transport spokesperson said it “fundamentally disagreed” with parts of the Lords’ assessment of the project, adding it had a “clear plan.”

An HS2 spokesperson said it was “actively applying lessons learnt from recent infrastructure projects”.

PENN’S CAUSE DEADLY CALIFORNIA WILDFIRE

California investigators yesterday said they found that PG&E’s equipment sparked the deadliest wildfire in state history, putting additional pressure on an energy firm already facing billions of dollars in potential liability costs.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection determined a transmission line started the fire.

REGULATOR VOWS SCRUTINY OF NEXT WELLS FARGO BOSS

US comptroller of the currency Joseph Otting said his agency will keep close tabs on Wells Fargo and will vet the next chief executive appointed at the banking giant.

FINANCIAL TIMES

GERMAN AUTHORITIES RAID BANKS IN TAX FRAUD PROBE

German criminal prosecutors, police and tax investigators have raided 11 German banks looking for evidence of suspected tax fraud by clients of a former Deutsche Bank offshore unit.

Eight individuals who were clients of a German banks looking for evidence of suspected tax fraud by clients of a British Virgin Islands-based former Deutsche Bank offshore unit.

Other suspicious activity may result in those ultimately being tried for any tax fraud.

JOHN LEWIS STAFF BACK PENSION CHANGES

Staff at the John Lewis Partnership have backed a series of pension reforms that includes closing the group’s generous defined benefit scheme in favour of cheaper defined contribution arrangements. The vote in favour of the changes, which was unanimous, was made by the Partnership Council, a group of 58 people that represent over 80,000 staff.

WHEN THE TIMES SAY THIS MORNING

BRITAIN AND US IN SPAT OVER THREAT FROM IRAN

The British military was engaged in a clash with the Pentagon yesterday over claims by Washington about the threat posed by Iran. The Ministry of Defence backed a senior officer who dismissed warnings from the Pentagon that Iranian-linked groups were preparing to attack western targets in the Middle East.

JEREMY KYLE SHOW AXED AFTER DEATH OF GUEST

ITV has bowed to public pressure and announced that The Jeremy Kyle Show will be permanently axed after the death of guest who failed a lie-detector test.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

PLAYTECH SUFFERS INVESTOR PAY REVOLT

Playtech, the company that provides gambling software to some of the world’s biggest bookmakers, has been left bruised by investors, which revolted against executive pay at the company’s annual general meeting yesterday.

MORRISONS BOSSES WAIVE THIRD OF BONUS

The boss of Morrisons has waived more than a third of his bonus despite the Bradford-based supermarket booking its third straight year of a jump in sales and profit. David Potts was Potts had been eligible for £1.7m but is giving up £588,000 of his bonus after waiving his personal entitlement.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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THE CITY VIEW

Labour’s revolution is a horrifying prospect

ABOUR’s shadow chancellor John McDonnell can be quite charming when he wants to be. He can also be quite thuggish, and has yet to apologise for his comments about “lynching” former Tory minister Esther McVey. But it was charming John who spoke to an audience of chief executive officers earlier this week, during which he was asked by one audience member to name the five most successful Marxist economies. He declined to answer, but instead reiterated his belief that Marxist economic theory must be taken into account when formulating policy. This will doubtless generate much excitement at the Treasury, since McDonnell has vowed to retrain mandarins in “alternative economic theories”.

As he spun his Marxist sentiment to a justifiably alarmed audience, details of Labour’s latest economic policy were leaking out of party HQ. As with the water companies, a Labour government would appropriate (nationalise) Britain’s energy network – including National Grid, SSE and other networks. These operations have a market value of around £60bn but, as with the policy on renationalising water, Labour has no intention of compensating shareholders and pension funds with anything like market value. We should call this audacious raid what it is: theft. The law firm Clifford Chance is putting together a briefing on the legal issues that Labour’s policies raise, and City A.M. has seen an advance copy. A Labour government would depress almost all areas of economic activity, with the exception of lawyers who would be much in demand. As Dan Neidle, a partner at Clifford Chance, says: “International law requires fair market value compensation.” Furthermore, “given the number of investors with potential access to investment treaties [to which the UK is a signatory], this is a huge problem for Labour.” Neidle isn’t a pundit or a campaigner, he is expressing matters of law and, in a move that should excite at the Treasury, since McDonnell has vowed to retrain mandarins in “alternative economic theories”.

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Owen Bennett
@owenjbennett
BREXIT could be abandoned entirely if MPs vote down Theresa May’s deal for a fourth time next month, one of the cabinet’s leading Leave advocates has warned.

International trade secretary Liam Fox urged MPs to “carry out their part of the bargain” which was struck with voters when they backed a referendum in 2016 and vote to ensure the UK leaves the EU.

Speaking at an event held by the Institute for Government think tank, Fox said failure to pass May’s deal when it comes back to parliament during the week commencing 3 June could see the UK leave the EU without an agreement, or Article 50 revoked and Brexit cancelled.

Fox said: “Members of Parliament will need to look and see whether they want to continue down a path which inexorably takes us either to the potential of revocation of Article 50, or leaving without a deal and asking if they think that is the best course?”

 Brexit ‘could be scrapped’ if MPs vote down deal

His warning was echoed by Brexit secretary Stephen Barclay, who told a Lords committee May’s deal would be “dead” if rejected for a fourth time.

Speaking to the Lords European Union Select Committee yesterday, Barclay said: “I think if the House of Commons does not approve the WAB [Withdrawal Act Bill], then the Barnier deal is dead in that form and I think the House will have to then address a much more fundamental question between whether it will pursue... a no-deal option or whether it will revoke.”

Downing Street has vowed to bring the bill to MPs regardless of whether May strikes a deal with Labour.

Jeremy Corbyn told May on Tuesday evening his party would not support her withdrawal agreement in its current form, but a party spokesman yesterday repeatedly refused to rule out Labour MPs abstaining on the vote.

That could see the bill progress to committee stage, where MPs would be able to table amendments in order to substantially change May’s Brexit plan.

Report urges government to do more to help small businesses

Owen Bennett
@owenjbennett
TWO THIRDS of small businesses do not feel the government is on their side, a new survey has revealed in a report calling for a radical shake-up of the tax system.

A YouGov poll for the Centre of Policy Studies think tank shows 62 per cent of small business owners and managers don’t believe those in power are backing them to succeed.

The findings are part of a report by Nick King, special adviser to Sajid Javid when he was business secretary, which calls for a bonfire of red tape for those firms with an annual turnover of less than £1m.

Corporation tax, business rates, VAT and Employer’s National Insurance would all be replaced with a levy on turnover – dubbed the simple consolidated tax.

Javid said: “Small businesses are the engine of the British economy and the millions of people who run businesses up and down the country deserve the government’s full support.”

CALLUM KEOWN
@CallumKeown1
THE BANK of England warned fraud prosecutors against charging Barclays over payments made to Qatar at the height of the financial crisis, it emerged yesterday.

The Bank’s top regulator Sam Woods told the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) in 2017 that criminal charges could threaten Barclays’ safety and soundness, the Financial Times reported yesterday. Woods, head of the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA), is said to have questioned whether a charge was in the public interest, as it could harm the lender.

Despite the intervention, the SFO charged the bank with conspiracy to commit fraud in June 2017. All charges against Barclays were dismissed by the Crown Court last year, followed by the SFO losing a case to reinstate the charges in October.

The charges related to £322m in fees and a £2bn (£2.3bn) loan the bank paid to Qatar during two emergency cash calls that raised £12bn in 2008, as it sought to avoid a government bailout.

A spokesperson for the Bank said: “Whether to take a charging decision or not is a matter for the Serious Fraud Office only, and is not one for the PRA.”

A $2.5bn (£1.9bn) bond from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank was welcomed by the London Stock Exchange yesterday, with its launch dubbed “a vote of confidence in the UK” by chancellor of the exchequer Philip Hammond.
Wework losses narrow ahead of public offering

JESS CLARK

THE WE Company, the parent company of office space provider Wework, reported losses of $264m (£205m) in the first quarter of 2019 ahead of its highly anticipated stock market debut later this year.

Net losses fell $10m from $274m last year, while revenue continued to double annually and the number of large customers doubled from two years ago. The firm released the results last night, having filed confidentially for an initial public offering in April.

The New York-headquartered firm, which operates shared workspaces across London, reported revenue had risen to $728.3m in the first three months of the year.

Memberships jumped to 466,000 between January and March from 219,000 last year and memberships from enterprise clients representing companies with at least 1,000 employees rose to 175,000, representing 40 per cent of the company’s customer base.

Wework’s first-quarter results were published on the same day that the company announced it was launching a $2.9bn property investment platform.

The We Company announced the venture in partnership with Ivanhoe Cambridge, the property arm of Canadian pension fund manager Caisse de Depot et Placement du Quebec (CDPQ), which is providing “substantial capital and support” to the platform.

The platform, which has been named Ark, will be majority owned by The We Company and chaired by Rhone Group managing director Steven Langman.

Ark managing partner Rich Gomel said: “The launch of Ark will help drive growth by leveraging The We Company’s extensive real estate experience and network.

“Ark has been set up to capitalise on that opportunity and allow us to provide different partnership options for the real estate community to participate in the growth and expansion of The We Company.”

Energy firm dividends ‘needed to attract capital for investment’

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Energy UK chief Lawrence Slade said the UK now has the lowest carbon emissions in over a century, which “has been delivered by the current energy system and private investment”. Labour has also pledged to install solar panels on millions of homes.

Shadow business secretary Rebecca Long-Bailey said taking the grid into public ownership was the only way to “decarbonise the economy at the pace needed to secure the planet for our children and grandchildren” while creating jobs, fairer pricing and improving access to heating and electricity.

She added money paid to network companies “is used to line the pockets of shareholders, with over £13bn paid out in dividends over the last five years”.

A spokesperson from the Institute of Directors said: “There is nothing wrong with companies paying dividends, that’s how they get the capital to invest in the first place, but this seems to be the crux of Labour’s objection.”

Trainline owner eyes £1bn sale as float plans build up head of steam

JAMES WARRINGTON

THE OWNER of rail ticketing app Trainline is reportedly exploring a sale of the company alongside plans for a £1bn stock market listing. The move comes as the UK’s largest travel booking app prepares for a potential initial public offering (IPO), which would reportedly value the firm at more than £1bn. KKR is seeking a similar price tag for a sale.

Barclays and Numis Securities have been appointed to work on the float alongside JP Morgan and Morgan Stanley, according to the report. KKR plans to go ahead with the IPO unless it receives a suitable takeover bid this summer, the sources said.

London-based Cinven is among the private equity firms approached about a potential buyout, though the firm is not believed to be interested in the deal.

A float would come four-and-a-half years after Trainline abandoned a previous attempt to go public, opting instead for its £500m sale to KKR. Trainline declined to comment on the reports.

FINABL FLOP

Firm closes down seven per cent on London Stock Exchange debut

SHARES in payments company Finablr closed down nearly seven per cent on its London Stock Exchange debut yesterday. The Travelex owner had cut its offer price to 175p to reflect difficult market conditions, but shares finished at just 163p.

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CYBG posts profit boost after £1.7bn Virgin Money deal

CALLUM KEOWN
@CallumKeown1

CLYDESDALE Bank owner CYBG reported a profit boost yesterday in its first set of results since combining with Virgin Money, following a “resilient” performance in tough market conditions.

Shares surged more than seven per cent in early trading, before closing three per cent up.

The UK’s sixth-biggest bank reported a statutory pre-tax profit of £62m in the six months to 31 March, up from £95m of losses in the same period in 2018. Underlying pre-tax profit was £286m, a five per cent drop on the previous year.

CYBG completed a £1.7bn merger with Virgin Money in October, creating a new challenger bank in the sector.

Chief executive David Duffy said it was a “resilient” performance in the first quarter amid uncertain economic conditions and a competitive mortgage market.

City of London update

City Summit showcase for Green Finance

EGISIATION is open for this year’s Green Finance Summit: Investing in Actions.

Held on 2 July at Guildhall, this flagship annual Green Finance Summit showcases the latest in green financial policy, market developments and thought leadership and will launch the new Green Finance institute.

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Let’s Talk about mental health

SEVENTEEN portraits of people who have experienced mental health difficulties are being exhibited at Guildhall this month to encourage others to talk about their own problems.

Political aide and author, Alastair Campbell; rapper Jordan Stephens from hip-hop duo Rizzle Kicks; and author and journalist, Bryony Gordon, are among those featured in the free outdoor exhibition, Let’s Talk.

Other subjects include a counsellor, activist, researcher, and actor, all of whom were interviewed by photographer, Charlie Cliff, about their lives and mental health, before having words and phrases from their interviews drawn on their faces by lettering artist, Kate Forrester.
Retail troubles take a bite out of British Land

SEBASTIAN MCCARTHY
@SebMcCarthy

BRITISH Land became the latest in a string of property giants to reveal a fall in the value of its assets yesterday, swinging to a loss amid turmoil in the retail sector.

The FTSE 100 group, which owns developments such as the Broadgate campus in the Square Mile, reported a £300m loss for the 12 months to the end of March.

Just a day after fellow developer Landsec reported its empire had shed more than half a billion pounds off its value over the course of 12 months, British Land posted a 4.8 per cent drop in portfolio value from £13.7bn to £12.3bn.

The slump was dragged down by an 11.1 per cent drop in the value of the group’s retail assets.

Losses before tax hit £319m, swinging from a profit of £501m in the year before.

The company, which has been looking to wind down its retail exposure in recent years, said like-for-like rental growth of £15m was enough to offset the £14m impact of retail company voluntary arrangements, a controversial insolvency process.

“To British Land’s credit, it isn’t sitting on its hands while problems unfold, it’s working hard to lower debt levels and is taking strides to streamline the retail portfolio, including the sale of 12 Sainsbury’s stores in the year,” said Hargreaves Lansdown equity analyst Sophie Lund-Yates.

Boss Chris Grigg said: “This has been another year of good strategic and operational progress in an uneven market, as retail remained challenging but the London office market continued to be healthy.

“We delivered further on our strategy to build an increasingly mixed-use business by investing in our campuses, progressing developments and reshaping our retail portfolio.”

ING urged to state intent on Commerzbank

TOBY STERLING

THE ORGANISATION that defends shareholder interests in the Netherlands yesterday called on ING to clarify whether it is interested in acquiring German rival Commerzbank.

On Tuesday, it was reported that Italy’s Unicredit had hired advisers to examine the possibility of a takeover of Commerzbank, while ING had held informal talks with the German lender. ING declined to comment.

The VEB said in a letter to the banking group that “ING cannot delay” disclosure of its intent.

“While ING should not respond to every rumour in the market, in the eyes of the VEB it is in the interest of a honest determination of the market price for ING shares that it give clarity,” the association wrote.

ING spokesman Raymond Vermolen said last night that similar questions were raised at its annual meeting earlier this month.

“We have nothing to add to the response our board gave there,” he said.

Germany is ING’s second largest market after the Netherlands. (Reuters)
Aston Martin in revenue reverse after float skids

JOE CURTIS
@joe_r_curtis

ASTON Martin fell to a £3.2m loss in the first quarter of 2019 even as it boosted production and sales.

The luxury car manufacturer took a hit in the three months to the end of March, recording a pre-tax operating loss of £3.2m, compared to a £22m profit in the same period last year.

Earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation also underwhelmed, with the figure of £28.3m missing company-compiled analyst expectations of £31m.

Revenue beat analyst expectations by £5m, as the makers of James Bond’s favourite car said sales climbed six per cent to £196m.

Higher costs weighed down Aston Martin’s profit as it boosted manufacturing output following its London Stock Exchange float late last year.

The high-end car maker is expanding the range of vehicles it produces as well as investing more in its plants, but surging demand in China and the US offset lower revenue in the UK and Europe.

Growth in Chinese demand soared 29 per cent, while the Americas bought 20 per cent more Aston Martins than last year.

Aston Martin said: “This performance reflects the higher than usual dealer inventory levels at the start of the year, particularly in the UK and Europe given the late December deliveries due to fourth quarter supply chain disruption.”

William Hill looks overseas for expansion

JAMES BOOTH
@Jamesbooth1

BOOKMAKER William Hill said it boosted revenue yesterday after an expansion drive, despite a poor performance from its UK retail business.

In a trading update for the 17 weeks to 30 April, William Hill said net revenue grew two per cent, which it said reflected a “year of transition in retail and online”.

Online net revenue grew eight per cent, which was helped by the acquisition of Swedish online gambling business Mr Green.

US net revenue from the seven states with legal betting on sport was up 48 per cent.

Gaming revenue fell 15 per cent after the introduction of a £2 maximum stake for fixed-odds betting terminals.

Revenue from its retail business fell seven per cent, causing shares to edge downwards.

AJ Bell’s Russ Mould said: “The issue for Hills now is whether online can compensate for weak retail income in the UK and how quickly investments in America can pay-off as a huge market starts to open.”
An introduction to just some of the myriad benefits of joining our exclusive members’ Club

Incentives include lounge access, use of the M screening rooms and access to the Gaucho Box at The O2 opportunities for the M Restaurant special dinners and events.

“Membership at M introduces you to a like-minded group of individuals including the highest profile people in their respective sectors, be it fashion, politics, philanthropy, media or financial services,” says Williams. “These people share a love of fine food and beverages, travel, sports and life! We host complimentary fortuitously members events which celebrate these shared passions; last month we have hosted a Champagne and saborage evening, ice cider tasting, a dinner to support bowel cancer charities, cocktail masterclasses and an evening with Simon Shaw and Six Nations legends. This month we are taking 40 members to Monaco to watch the F1 Grand Prix from our trackside yacht and hosting an event with Simon Mayo to raise funds for our Not For Sale movement, fighting sex-trafficking and modern-day slavery.”

Williams describes M Restaurants as “secret havens for discreet work and play,” where you can work hard or relax with the facilities, which include table football, pool tables and electronic wine tasting machines.

M’s executive chef Mike Reid, who has worked for Gordon Ramsay and the Roux empire, is a self-confessed steak nerd (see Q&A, right) who siz- zles up some of the world’s top cuts of beef aged in M’s very own Hi-zles up some of the world’s top cuts of beef aged in activated charcoal or electronic wine tasting machines. The self-confessed steak nerd tells us about the menu, and what’s big in the food world

TELL US ABOUT THE FOOD CONCEPT AT M RESTAURANTS
Our philosophy is about showcasing the best cuisine from six countries we believe have the best beef and wine in the world. So you’ll find dishes inspired by places from Japan to South Africa, with meat including Kobe and Blackmore wagyu, which is some of the finest beef in the world.

WHAT’S YOUR FAVOURITE DISH ON THE MENU?
The Ranton Iberico pork with kimchi, nashi pear, and pear and lime gel. It has amazing flavours of umami, and each bite make you crave more and more.

M MANNINI shortsighted for Manager of the Year award is ‘extreme aging’ a special cut for us to hit our menus this summer. None of this would be possible without the relationships I’ve forged over the last 20 years.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH SUPPLIERS
It’s one of the most important parts of the job. A good relationship with suppliers will always get you the best picks but also the most unique. We have exclusivity for Blackmore Wagyu beef in the UK, which is some of the most sought after beef in the world. It is a tiny producer in comparison to the main players in the beef industry and only slaughters about 60 heads per month compared to the average abattoir’s 800 heads per day. We are also working very closely with a British beef producer who

HOW MUCH OF A STEAK NERD ARE YOU?
Just referring to the last question you can see I’m an absolute nerd when it comes to beef. I think what takes it to the next level is that I’m never satisfied with what we have – and what we have is incredible! I always want to give our diners something new and exciting, which is hard when you have always given them the highest quality. So it keeps me pushing to develop new ideas and find new ways of innovating with our beef, like the introduction of our Himalayan salt chambers, aging beef in activated charcoal or bees wax. The list goes on!

WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL BE THE NEXT EATING TRENDS IN LONDON?
The emergence of African cuisine and high end African dining will continue to prosper in 2019. Iloyi has done such a fantastic job putting high end African cuisine on the map in London and I know there’s another restaurant that’s set to open later this year that will make some serious waves.

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CITY A.M. CLUB PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

M Restaurant is already a City institution. Here are the benefits they will be offering City A.M. Club members

TELL US YOUR FAVOURITE DISH ON THE MENU?

The self-confessed steak nerd tells us about the menu, and what’s big in the food world
Euronext profit hit by Ireland deal

HARRY ROBERTSON
@harryrobertson

PROFIT fell at European exchange Euronext in the first quarter of 2019, as the consolidation of its purchases of Ireland’s stock exchange and software company Commincise proved costly. Euronext, which received the green light to buy Norway’s Oslo Bors exchange on Monday, said revenue grew in the first quarter due to its acquisitions, its quarterly results yesterday revealed.

Revenue rose 1.4 per cent to €152.6m (£133.1m), with a contribution from recently acquired Euronext Dublin of €7.9m.

The exchange’s profit before tax fell 7.8 per cent year-on-year to €80m in the first quarter of this year. The company’s earnings per share fell 6.6 per cent year-on-year in the first quarter to €0.81.

Euronext got the green light to buy Norway’s Oslo Bors exchange on Monday.

Monzo-backer Accel raises $575m fund

EMILY NICOLLE
@emilynicolle

LONDON venture capital stalwart Accel has today announced its sixth fund for Europe’s early-stage startups, closed at a final raise of $575m (£440m).

The fund will be managed by a core investment team based in its London office, seeking out entrepreneurs across the continent and in Israel both consumer and enterprise sectors at series A stage.

Accel said the UK will continue to be a “core focus” for the team, following its recent investments in GoCardless, Tessian and Soldo.

Since its entrance into London in 2000, Accel has backed the likes of Monzo, Funding Circle and Deliveroo in the earlier stages of their journeys.

It also became the most recent venture backer of digital bank Monzo in October last year.

The venture capital giant’s funds now stand at approximately $3bn.

“The UK continues to be one of the main geographies of focus for us,” Andrei Brasoveanu, a partner at Accel, told City A.M.

“We’re big believers in the technical talent pool in the UK, with a deep bench of highly-skilled software engineers as well as scientists from the top computer science and artificial intelligence research programmes.

“Going forward we continue to see a lot of innovation in the UK, and partner with founders in areas such as enterprise software, fintech, regtech and digital health.”

“Europe’s successes over the last decade are inspiring a new generation of ambitious founders, and the emerging global players are growing faster than ever,” added fellow partner Philipp Botteri.

“It’s a golden time to be an entrepreneur in Europe.”

Europe bounces back, aided by German growth

HARRY ROBERTSON
@harryrobertson

GROWTH in the Eurozone and European Union picked up in the first quarter of the year after a rough patch, with the UK showing solid expansion, the EU’s official statistics body confirmed yesterday.

GDP growth in the EU rose to 0.5 per cent quarter-on-quarter, after growing 0.3 per cent in the previous quarter. The UK economy grew 0.5 per cent, the second-highest rate among the biggest economies.

Yesterday’s figures confirm the estimates made by Eurostat, the EU’s data body, two weeks ago.

Meanwhile Germany’s struggling economy grew 0.4 per cent, a return to growth after stagnating in the final quarter of 2018 and shrinking by 0.2 per cent in the quarter before that, figures released by Germany’s statistics organisation showed.

The growth brought Germany’s annual price-adjusted growth rate to 0.6 per cent, reflecting the torrid time the country’s manufacturers have had amid a global slowdown and tougher car emissions tests. Andrew Scott, associate director at risk advisor JCA, said: “German GDP data for the first quarter provided reasons to be hopeful that Europe’s largest economy isn’t headed for a protracted downturn.”

The Eurozone doubled its growth rate to 0.4 per cent quarter-on-quarter, compared to 0.2 per cent in the last three months of 2018.

Italy escaped recession by posting quarter-on-quarter growth of 0.2 per cent in the first three months of 2019, Eurostat figures confirmed. Its economy had shrunk by 0.2 per cent in the previous two quarters.

Spain posted the best figures among Europe’s largest economies, with 0.7 per cent quarterly growth. This took its annual growth rate to 2.4 per cent, the highest of the continent’s biggest economies.

Stobart names new chairman after battle

ALEXANDRA ROGERS
@city_amrogers

STOBART has chosen a new chairman to succeed the incumbent Iain Tinkler.

Ferguson, who was at the centre of a boardroom battle last year with former chief Andrew Tinkler. The aviation and energy giant yesterday announced that David Shearer, a former senior partner at Deloitte in Scotland and Northern Ireland, will join the Stobart board as a non-executive director and chairman-elect on 1 June.

Shearer will take over after the firm’s annual general meeting later this year.

Ferguson said: “Stobart Group is a much-changed business since I joined six years ago, and one that is now very focused and well-positioned to deliver value to shareholders. Over the last year, we have strengthened the board, adding more expertise, and ensuring shareholders continue to have a strong independent voice.”

Earlier this year, a judge found that while Tinkler had acted in breach of his fiduciary duties during his campaign to oust Ferguson, Stobart could not claim there was an unlawful conspiracy to topple its board.

Stobart is the owner of London’s Southend Airport.
Walmart mulls float for Asda in wake of failed Sainbury’s merger

JAMES WARRINGTON
@j_a_warrington

RETAIL giant Walmart has said it is considering a stock market listing for Asda, just weeks after the supermarket’s failed attempt to merge with rival Sainsbury’s. Walmart International boss Judith McKenna said the US chain is considering an initial public offering (IPO) for its UK subsidiary, but said it was “not rushing into anything”.

Speaking to Asda managers in Leeds, McKenna added that preparations for a market float would “take years”. The comments follow a decision by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) late last month to block a proposed £12bn merger between Asda and Sainsbury’s. The CMA said the tie-up, which would have created Britain’s largest supermarket, would have resulted in “substantial lessening of competition”.

The decision sparked speculation that its parent company Walmart would look to sell, with analysts pointing to potential bids from private equity firms. But McKenna’s comments suggest an IPO is now a more likely option as the world’s largest retailer looks to withdraw from the UK.

Kingfisher sales tick up as boss prepares to exit

JOE CURTIS
@joe_r_curtis

B&Q OWNER Kingfisher said sales edged higher in its latest quarter, thanks to warmer weather and a weaker corresponding period last year.

UK and Ireland sales rose 5.4 per cent in the three months to the end of April compared to the same period the year before at B&Q, while like-for-like sales grew 2.8 per cent.

Meanwhile, the hardware giant’s DIY brand Screwfix brand enjoyed a much-higher 9.6 per cent annual rise in revenue with a 4.5 per cent hike in like-for-like sales.

Overall like-for-likes rose 0.8 per cent across the group’s international brands, and were up 3.4 per cent in the UK, compared to a 3.7 per cent drop in France.

Strong UK growth pushed Kingfisher to £1.28bn in revenue in the country, while France fell 5.1 per cent year on year to just over £1bn in sales. Poland and Romania both exhibited robust growth of 2.9 per cent and six per cent respectively while overall the firm’s international arm expanded 0.7 per cent to £531m.

“This year we are focused on completing the building of our ‘engine’ and making our innovation more visible to customers,” Kingfisher chief executive Veronique Laury said.

“We are also excited to be launching several new ranges this year which are unique to us and will further differentiate us from our competitors.”

However, its shares fell 3.6 per cent yesterday as B&Q continued its hunt for Laury’s replacement. Her decision in March to quit came as a surprise amid store closures, a double-digit drop in profit and midway through a five-year turnaround plan. The FTSE 100 will have just five female bosses after her departure.

No firm date has been set for Kingfisher chief Veronique Laury’s departure
The City AM Club is a new and exclusive membership programme designed specifically for you—London’s professionals. Access a unique and thoughtfully curated experience— from discounts, to added value, events and networking in your favourite restaurants and across leading lifestyle brands. The City AM Club is designed to match your lifestyle and take you through the week—morning till midnight. It’s Better On The Inside—are you in?

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MARSTON’S

Marston’s raises a glass to Easter bump in profit

SEBASTIAN MCCARTHY

PUB GIANT Marston’s posted a bump in underlying revenue and profit yesterday, as a strong Easter showing bolstered the group’s half-year trading performance.

Shares in the brewery firm, which operates more than 1,500 pubs in the UK, closed up four per cent.

For the 26 weeks to 30 March, total like-for-like sales growth climbed 2.2 per cent, accelerating from 1.4 per cent in the first three months to 3.2 per cent for the final 10 weeks.

Revenue jumped five per cent to £553.1m, while underlying profit before tax hit £37m, rising two per cent from the same period in 2018.

The pub firm also said it is targeting £120m of disposal proceeds between 2020 and 2023, with an aim of reducing net debt by £200m by 2023.

Marston’s chief executive Ralph Findlay said the results showed an increased focus on the firm’s top line “in our food businesses with new menus, in picking up trends like healthy eating; [and] in brewing with getting the right brands.”

Russell Pointon, analyst at Edison Investment Research, said: “Against a weak comparative, Marston’s has reported improving momentum in underlying revenue growth through its first half, including a return to growth in the destination and premium brands.”

IN BRIEF

SKY NEWS JOURNALIST JOINS HUAWEI SPIN TEAM
Embattled Chinese tech firm Huawei has hired a veteran Sky News journalist as its new senior spin doctor, as it ramps up efforts to quash accusations of spying. Senior Sky News editor Paul Harrison, who previously served as the network’s royal and business correspondent, said he will join Huawei in a senior communications role this summer.

THARISA HIT BY AFRICAN POWER SHORTAGES
Markets seemed to reward miner Tharisa yesterday despite a poor set of results as the company worked to reconfigure a mine and battled South African power shortages.

Profit before tax fell 72.6 per cent to $10m (£7.7m), the company revealed. Load shedding, a way to avoid blackouts in South Africa’s under-pressure power grid, has had an impact on the business, causing it to splash out on a new diesel generator for its processing plants.

IEA WARNS OIL SURPLUS COULD TURN SOUR
Opec suppliers could have to step in to meet a “highly likely” deficit in global oil markets, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has warned months after the oil producing cartel slashed production. The deficit could reach around 700,000 barrels of oil per day, the IEA said, the same size as the surplus in the first quarter. It comes as US sanctions on Venezuela and Iran have taken the producers offline, with supply concerns rising in Libya.

Problems with 737 Max take a €200m chunk from operator Tui

AUGUST GRAHAM
GERMAN tour operator Tui downgraded its full-year guidance yesterday after the business was hit by the grounding of its fleet of 15 Boeing 737 Max planes.

Losses before income tax grew 47.5 per cent in the first half of the financial year to €381m (£331m), the group revealed.

Turnover grew 1.7 per cent to €6.67bn while gross profit fell 43.3 per cent to €157.3m.

Underlying earnings before interest, tax and amortisation (Ebita) decreased 21.4 per cent in its hotels and resorts business, and 8.4 per cent in its holiday experiences.

Profit in its cruises division increased 13.6 per cent, while destination experiences were up 21.8 per cent, the company said.

Tui said it is set to take a €200m hit to its Ebita after 15 Boeing 737 Max jets were grounded after the model crashed twice in less than a year.

Boeing pilots needed more information on the 737 jet’s anti-stall system, the acting head of the Federal Aviation Administration Daniel Elwell said. The model failed before two recent fatal crashes.

MANUAL UPGRADE

Boeing should have given pilots more information on the 737 jet’s anti-stall system, the acting head of the Federal Aviation Administration Daniel Elwell said. The model failed before two recent fatal crashes.

Problem with 737 Max take a €200m chunk from operator Tui
REASONS TO JOIN THE CLUB

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A MINDFULNESS MESSAGE

Jess Clark looks into one bank’s efforts to lower stress in the City

S

square Mile careers are stereotypically fuelled by mantras such as “work hard, play hard”, achieving “inbox zero”, and “surviving the rat race”. All are excuses for raising your tolerance to stress. As a result, the career pathways of the City are often littered with burned-out workers. Unsurprisingly, stressed workers are not great for employers either.

However, the usual drive for efficiency and profit can send mixed messages to staff, leaving them unable to voice concerns over their own mental health. As Mental Health Week gets into full swing, one banking giant is looking at how to improve it.

“Mental illness is different from the contemporary illness,” Wax said at Barclays’ Canary Wharf headquarters this week. “Mental illness is different from mental health. We’re all stressed and respect” within Barclays, said “putting the humanity back into how we operate with each other” is central to the charter.

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Compass points north after profit and revenue rise

JOE CURTIS
@joe_r_curtis

Food services business Compass bolstered its top and bottom lines in the first half of its financial year as one analyst dubbed the company’s reliable growth as “brilliantly boring”.

Operating profit rose almost seven per cent to £391.4m on year for the six months to the end of March, Compass said yesterday.

Meanwhile revenue climbed 8.8 per cent to £12.3bn as Compass boosted earnings per share by 7.4 per cent to 40.7p, up from 37.9p in the same period last year.

Free cashflow jumped 14 per cent to £350m and Compass told investors to expect an interim dividend per share of 13.1p, higher than last year’s 12.3p per share.

A dedicated telemarketing team which has made more than 30,000 calls to small and medium sized (SME) customers each month has helped forward this new strategy, increasing SME revenues by around a quarter.

Chief executive Dominic Blakemore welcomed a “strong” first half, saying a focus on finding efficiencies has offset inflation and volume weakness in the UK and EU.

“Steady revenue growth and a tight grip on margins have allowed Compass to deliver an impressive returns to shareholders through a growing dividend, and these results are no exception,” Hyett said.

Chief executive Dominic Blakemore welcomed a “strong” first half, saying a focus on finding efficiencies has offset inflation and volume weakness in the UK and EU.

“Following the very strong first half performance we now increase our organic revenue growth guidance for the full year and expect to deliver an impressive returns to shareholders through a growing dividend, and these results are no exception,” Hyett said.

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Cobham will pay government £70m to settle long-running tax dispute

ALEX DANIEL
@alexmdaniel
DEFENCE firm Cobham has agreed to pay the government nearly £70m to settle a long-running tax dispute. Shares rose 0.6 per cent yesterday as the FTSE 250 company announced it would cough up after reaching an agreement “in respect of a significant, previously disclosed and long-running dispute”.

The dispute was in connection with the availability of interest deductions on one of Cobham’s internal financing structures, which was in place between 2008 and 2014. The company, which is Britain’s third-biggest aerospace and defence contractor, said it would make a one-off tax payment of £55m within the coming two months, together with a one-off interest payment of £14m, “to finally settle the group’s exposure to this matter”. “This settlement is within the amounts previously provided by Cobham for tax,” it told markets. Separately, Cobham said it still faces previously-announced investigations relating to European state aid. These could leave the group with an additional tax bill of up to £60m. Cobham is known for its air-to-air refuelling technology.

EXPERIAN profit growth helped by global teams

HARRY ROBERTSON
@henrygrobertson
CREDIT reporting company Experian attributed its full-year profit rise to global expansion, with its North America, Europe, Middle East, Africa (EMEA) and Asia Pacific divisions reporting double-digit revenue growth. Experian’s profit before tax rose at an actual rate of one per cent, reaching £957m (£741m) for the year ended 31 March 2019 from £950m in 2018. The firm said yesterday its revenue grew six per cent to £4.9bn, from £4.6bn a year earlier. The FTSE 100 company, which creates credit reports, said it expects organic revenue growth in the range of six to eight per cent in 2020. Experian used its results to announce a new share repurchase programme of up to £400m, following the completion of £215m of buy-backs in the 2019 financial year. It said in its results that the buy-backs showed “continuing commitment to shareholder returns”. The company’s benchmark operating cash flow rose six per cent to £1.3bn, up from £1.2bn in 2018. Experian’s net debt fell to £3.3bn from £3.4bn a year earlier.

Basic earnings per share fell to $0.769 for the year ended 31 March 2019, from $0.854 a year earlier. The firm’s full-year dividend rose to $0.465 per share in 2019, compared to $0.448 per share in 2018. Chief executive Brian Cassin said: “This was a very good year for Experian. Our investment and innovation agenda delivered strong and broad-based growth with exciting new offers for consumers and businesses.” He added: “We have strengthened our prospects and expanded our opportunities. Both our [business-to-business] and consumer services businesses delivered strongly.”

Earlier this year, Experian scrapped its plans to merge with rival data firm Clearscore, following a warning from the UK’s Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) that it may not approve the tie-up. The CMA warned in November that the £275m deal could stifle development of digital products that help users understand personal finances.

Tencent earnings top forecast as fintech and cloud revenue surges

SIJIA JIANG
TENCENT posted a record quarterly profit yesterday, smashing market expectations, as the Chinese social media and gaming giant booked a rise in the value of its investments while fintech and cloud revenues helped make up for declines in its games arm. Even so, revenue grew at its slowest-ever rate, as heightened regulatory scrutiny hobbled its gaming operations. That allowed earnings from its nascent fintech and business services to eclipse smartphone games for the first time. In the three months ended March, Tencent saw 17 per cent growth in net profit to 27.4 billion yuan (£3bn), beating the 19.4 billion yuan average of 13 analyst estimates compiled by Refinitiv.

Boosting profit was a 46 per cent rise in “net other gains,” such as from investments, to 11.1 billion yuan. Revenue, however, came in just shy of analyst estimates at 85.5 billion yuan, with growth at an all-time low of 16 per cent.
AUDITING in the UK is undergoing unprecedented scrutiny, and the magnifying scope is focusing on all aspects of the sector.

The myriad reviews, some of which are ongoing, are being conducted by regulators, politicians and government departments, each separately looking at audit’s effectiveness, competition across the sector, and its future in general.

Most notably, the function and remit of its soon-to-be reformed regulator – the Financial Reporting Council – has been under examination, along with a focus on the role of the UK’s largest accountancy firms.

High-profile failures of big high street names have captured the headlines and raised questions of “where were the auditors?”, resulting in some having a lack of confidence in the sector’s effectiveness.

Ahead of its own review, the Business Energy and Industrial Skills select committee published a report on the future of audit, which expressed concerns that “misleading audits” were at the heart of some corporate concerns that “misleading audits” were at the heart of some corporate failures.

This survey of 11,000 members of the public in 11 different countries revealed that 55 per cent believe auditors are responsible for avoiding company failures, while 34 per cent expect auditors to always detect and report any fraud. A staggering 70 per cent believe audit should evolve to prevent company failures.

It represents a disconnect between what the profession is delivering, and what the public expect. A staggering 70 per cent believe audit should evolve to prevent company failures.

The aim is to explore what kind of audit future the public expects.

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The audit profession must evolve to be in the public interest.

Helen Brand is chief executive of ACCA.

COOLING OFF
Concerns have also been raised over a conflict of interest in firms selling consultancy services, while their auditing arms are carrying out an audit in the same company.

This has prompted suggestions that a full structural or operational split could be the answer.

In response to these reviews, ACCA has reiterated its long-held belief that there should be a two-year cooling off period, during which non-audit services could not be sold after an audit engagement has ended.

COMING CLEAN
Outside of the reviews and reports, the general public have identified what they see as one answer to improving corporate reporting: good and clean audits.

Despite audit being under growing and intense scrutiny, the public still regard it as part of the solution to what is perceived as unacceptable corporate behaviour.

The purpose of an audit is to ensure that financial statements give a holistic “true and fair view”, ensuring that material fraud is detected, and appropriate levels of professional scepticism are applied.

ACCA recently collaborated with Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand to publish research called “Closing the Expectation Gap in Audit”, which explores why it is in the public interest to have an open dialogue between the profession, stakeholders, and the general public.

The audit profession must evolve to be in the public interest.

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MIND THE GAP
The profession has long spoken about the concept of the “expectation gap”, a concept that dates as far back as 1974. And 45 years on, ACCA’s report highlights that there is little evidence that the gap has narrowed.

Despite repeated attempts to mitigate it, fresh discussions around this inevitably return whenever a new corporate failure occurs.

Our research indicates that in order to reduce the expectation gap, it must be assessed in three components: the knowledge gap, the performance gap, and the evolution gap, all of which need to be tackled separately.

STAKES ARE HIGH
In practice, ACCA believes that improving the public’s knowledge of what an auditor does cannot be achieved by the profession alone.

As the Competition and Markets Authority observed in its review, most people will never read an auditor’s opinion on a company’s accounts.

Everyone with an interest in financial reporting and strong corporate governance has a responsibility to work together to address the public’s legitimate concerns about audit.

Globally, it is clear that the profession must continue to focus on improving audit quality, working proactively with other stakeholders to support better understanding of the auditor’s role.

But, most importantly, all stakeholders connected to the audit process – such as regulators, professional accountancy bodies, investors, governments and the media – have a responsibility to inform the public in a fair, balanced and understandable way about audit regulations and standards. It is in the public interest that they do so.

Helen Brand is chief executive of ACCA.
BROADBAND, phone and TV firms will be forced to tell customers about their best deals under new rules unveiled by Ofcom.

The new regulations mean telecoms firms will have to notify customers when their contracts are coming to an end and lay out the best-value tariffs that are available.

Ofcom said its research had found more than 20m customers have gone beyond their initial contract and could be left paying more than they need to.

The regulator said people who bundle their landline and broadband services together pay on average 20 per cent more when they are out of contract. This rises to 26 per cent for customers who also bundle together their pay TV subscription.

Ofcom said the new rules could help consumers save money by switching provider or signing a new, improved contract with their existing provider. “We’re making sure customers are treated fairly by making companies give them the information they need, when they need it,” said Ofcom consumer group director Lindsey Fussell.

“This will put power in the hands of millions of people who’re paying more than necessary when they’re no longer tied to a contract.”

Under the new rules telecoms companies will have to warn customers that their contract is coming to an end a minimum of 10 days before it expires.

The notification will also have to include any changes to the service and price paid at the end of the contract, any required notice period and the best deals offered by the provider.

Telecoms firms have been given nine months to make the necessary changes to their systems, with customers set to start receiving notifications from February 2020.

“Telecoms giants forced to reveal their best deals”

Telecoms giants forced to reveal their best deals

James Warrington
@j_a_warrington

ADVERTISING firm Ocean Outdoor has posted a double-digit rise in revenue for the first quarter, boosted by recent acquisitions.

The London-listed company reported a 14 per cent rise in revenue to £18.6m, as it ploughed on with an aggressive expansion strategy. The growth was driven by the acquisition of Dutch out-of-home firms Ngage Media and Interbest, which Ocean snapped up in a deal worth €51m (£45m).

Ocean, which manages advertising spaces such as Piccadilly Circus, also said it has secured a long-term deal to develop new locations in Glasgow.

Ocean Outdoor revenue jumps on Dutch business acquisitions

James Warrington
@j_a_warrington

ONLY a quarter of London businesses are aware of the improvements to the apprenticeship levy that were announced in the Spring Statement, new research showed.

In March, the government announced that from last month employers would see the co-investment rate they pay for apprentices cut from 10 per cent to 5 per cent.

Chancellor Philip Hammond also announced that levy-paying employers would be able to share more funds across their supply chains, rising from 10 per cent to 25 per cent. However, just one in four businesses in the capital were aware of the changes, according to a survey of 276 London businesses conducted by YouGov and Pearson Business School.

Pearson Business School has urged the government to make the apprenticeship levy more flexible and less bureaucratic by allowing companies to pay their apprentices in proportion to hours worked, and encourage apprenticeships of different lengths.

“London firms in the dark over apprentice levy”

London firms in the dark over apprentice levy

Jess Clark
@jclarkjourno

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**LONDON REPORT**

**Glimpsing an ease in tensions lifts FTSE index**

Hopes that the United States’ trade tensions with China and Europe will dissipate, combined with a weaker pound, lifted Britain’s main index higher yesterday, as a slew of earnings reports also drove share moves.

The FTSE 100 advanced 0.8 per cent and outperformed its European peers. The FTSE 250 was roughly flat. Markets were initially up beat after US President Donald Trump said talks between Beijing and Washington hadn’t collapsed,terming the Sino-US conflict as “a little squabble”. US officials later said the President was expected to delay a decision on imposing tariffs on imported cars and parts by up to six months.

Asia-focused HSBC provided the biggest boost to the main index, while exporter stocks also supported it, benefited from a drop in sterling as Brexit jitters resurfaced.

Sterling fell to a three-month low, with Prime Minister Theresa May expected to once again fail in getting her Brexit deal approved.

On an earnings-heavy day, Compass Group was among the top blue-chip gainers. The world’s biggest catering company rose 2.9 per cent after raising its forecast for annual organic revenue growth. But home improvement retailer Kingfisher declined 3.6 per cent after lower first-quarter sales in France, its second-bigdest market. SSE and Vodafone Grid fell 2.5 per cent and 0.9 per cent, respectively. The Labour Party published plans to re-nationalise the country’s energy networks, prompting utilities to warn of damage to investment, high taxpayer costs and a slower transition to green energy.

On the mid-cap index, Metro Bank, which has seen volatile trading in recent months after disclosing an accounting error, gained 15 per cent with details of fresh funding from new and existing investors awaited. Provident Financial skidded 6.5 per cent. The company has been subject to a hostile takeover by smaller rival Non-Standard Finance, which said after markets shut that it would go ahead with its £1.3bn takeover.

**TOP RISERS**

1. Auto Trader Up 3.83 per cent
2. Compass Group Up 2.89 per cent
3. DCC Up 2.47 per cent

**TOP FALLERS**

1. Kingfisher Down 3.64 per cent
2. SSE Down 2.92 per cent
3. DS Smith Down 2.22 per cent

**BEST OF THE BROKERS**

To appear in Best of the Brokers, email your research to notes@cityam.com

**NEW YORK REPORT**

**Wall Street up on high hopes for trade talks**

US stocks closed higher on as reports that US President Donald Trump would hold off on imposing tariffs on imported cars and parts eased growth concerns even as economic data disappointed investors. All three major US indexes saw their second straight day of gains following Monday’s steep sell-off, but the S&P 500 remained more than three per cent below its all-time high, reached just over two weeks ago.

The prospect of a six-month postponement of tariffs on imported autos and auto parts, along with treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin’s remarks that he expects trade talks to resume soon in China, was welcome news to investors, who started the session in a selling mood after the underwhelming economic reports. Retail sales posted a surprise drop in April as consumers pulled back on their spending, according to the US Commerce Department. A separate report from the Labor Department showed US industrial production also unexpectedly dipped in April.

Of the 11 major sectors in the S&P 500, eight ended the session in positive territory. Communications services enjoyed the largest percentage gain, led by Alphabet and Facebook. With 455 of S&P 500 companies having posted results, first-quarter earnings season is winding down. Of those who have reported, 75.2 per cent have beat expectations. Analysts now see first-quarter earnings growth of 1.2 per cent, a significant turnaround from the two per cent loss seen on 1 April.

Macy’s dipped 0.5 per cent after the department store beat quarterly expectations but said the recent tariff hikes on Chinese goods will hurt its business.

Agilent was the worst performer for the S&P 500, falling 11.1 per cent after the medical equipment maker reported quarterly profit that fell short of consensus estimates.

Ride-hailing rivals Uber and Lyft saw their second straight day of gains after poor post-debut performances.

**CITY DASHBOARD**

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YOU SHOULD CONSIDER WHETHER YOU UNDERSTAND HOW CFDS WORK AND WHETHER YOU CAN AFFORD TO TAKE THE HIGH RISK OF LOSING YOUR MONEY.
OFFICE POLITICS

We’re all going on a summer, autumn and winter holiday

Unlimited annual leave grabs headlines, but it’s not all it’s cracked up to be...

Unlimited paid holiday might sound too good to be true, but some British businesses are now using this perk as a way to attract employees.

As a general rule, the more trust that is placed in someone, the better they behave, while a happy employee is a more productive employee – one who is far more like to stay loyal to the company.

However, does an offer of unlimited holiday really give power back to an employee, or does it simply create more uncertainty for them?

For a company, advertising a job with unlimited holiday will always grab the headlines, and positive PR flows from that.

But do we then take more holiday?

Well, the answer appears to be no – staff tend to take the same amount of leave with or without the offer of unlimited days off.

Of course, the concept of taking unlimited holiday will always be subject to certain company rules, such as pre-booking your holiday and ensuring that your work is up-to-date.

But that is the problem with this perk. You can take as much holiday as you like, provided your work is complete – but how do you know when your work has been done to an acceptable level? What happens if more work comes in just before you are due to take holiday? Many employees probably fear that this would be seen as negative mark against them.

We all have appraisals, and there will usually be some way of measuring how well you have performed during the year. So the question is: will the company compare your performance with the amount of holiday you have taken?

There is also the question of whether the employees who are performing better than you are taking less holiday. And there’s the other worry that colleagues start to gripe about you taking too much holiday, leaving others to pick up the mess you’ve left behind.

It is all very well to say “take as much holiday as you want”, but if your boss only takes a few weeks off, will you really feel empowered to take more leave than them?

Culture is driven from the top down, so don’t expect people to see unlimited holiday as a big plus if the reality is that they do not feel able to because their manager doesn’t leave the office.

Though at first sight, they might be less headline grabbing, perhaps companies should look at other ways of motivating employees.

For example, companies could offer a set amount of holiday, plus a number of “duvet days”, which would provide true flexibility – this would allow someone to take a certain number of days off a year, with the only requirement being that they advise their employer before a certain time of day.

It would be no different than someone deciding to take a “sickie”, but it takes away most of the fear factor that an employee would otherwise have.

The key to all of this is demonstrating some flexibility on the part of the company, trusting in your employees.

We all like to know what the rules are – if the rules really do allow you some degree of self-choice, that would go far in establishing the right culture, a happy workforce, and a lower turnover of staff.

David Israel is a partner in the employment team at law firm Royds Withy King.
**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

**Chinese whispers**

Financial markets have recently recoiled at the sudden deterioration of US-China trade relations. Determining which party is in the wrong is no easy matter. Sometimes, the de facto compromise in trade deals is built upon a shaky foundation: the US trade deficit is as much a function of spending decisions as Chinese production choices, the woes of US manufacturing workers is more to do with automation than outsourcing, and China’s exchange rate is not especially undervalued.

That said, the White House does have a few legitimate grievances. US companies pay slightly higher tariffs on average when entering foreign markets than their foreign counterparts entering the US. China benefits from a particularly close relationship due to its unorthodox combination of capital controls, state ownership, and unfair local property practices.

Until recently, China had seemed to be inching toward genuine concessions. But the country’s latest proposal abolishes reciprocal tariffs on US goods, having just set a tit-for-tat volley of new tariffs that approximately double the damage inflicted by protections on US imports. This is not enough to induce a recession by itself, but could undermine recent green shoots of growth.

Fortunately, not all hope is lost: neither country wishes to stumble economically and both have delayed their new tariffs for long enough that a constructive dialogue could yet emerge. But so long as the US continues to demand changes to the foundation of the Chinese economy, an accord may prove elusive.

Eric Lascelles, chief economist, RBC Global Asset Management

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**BEST OF TWITTER**

Labour plans to nationalise energy networks at below market value @fawesminster

I met remarkable liberty campaigners from Lebanon last week, who have just changed the law so the private sector can contribute to the nationalised electricity networks, because the state-owned enterprises are failing. Blood brownouts have become so bad. Why would we revert to what other countries are trying to overcome? @kateandrs

Penguin’s victory in this case – which included the prosecutor’s famous question, “Is it a book that you would...even wish your wife or your servants to read?” – led to two million sales. The public wanted to read it, even if the director of public prosecutions did not. @jamesbuk

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**FORUM**

**EDITED BY RACHEL CUNLIFFE**

**The Brexit Party genie cannot be stuffed back into the bottle**

The Faragean phoenix has risen from the flames to lead the polls for the European elections

The broadcast is an entirely policy-free zone. But with a central theme of betrayal by a political class “can no longer be trusted to repre- sent the will of the people”, it shows how the Brexit Party can carve out a space to take a wrecking ball to British politics regardless of what Westminster politicians in their current constellation decide.

If Brexit continues to be delayed, the Brexit Party will reap the electoral dividends of what it terms our “broken politics.” Yet if May’s deal passes with some form of customs union membership as the price for Labour’s support, it will be denounced as a tawdry Westminster compromise designed to cheat the people out of what they voted for.

The trap has been set, and the government is walking right into it. Of the Brexit Party’s response to a massive Brexit Party European election victory and the end of the May premiership is likely to be the election of a no-deal supporting leader to outflank Farage. Yet a no-deal Brexit cannot command sup- port in the House of Commons.

It is therefore unclear how that new leader will be able to deliver upon their position short of engag- ing in the Russian roulette of a Gen- eral Election that could produce any number of outcomes at such a volatile moment, including victory for Jeremy Corbyn.

There remains one pressure valve that may still be available to divert this climactic scenario. A two-part referendum encompassing the Prime Minister’s deal as the first question, and a straight No Deal ver- sus Remain runoff in the second, to pass, would assuage all viewpoints.

The Prime Minister would have a final attempt at redemption for his Brexit position, politicians could offload the five grenade of Brexit back to the people who would once more removed the pin, and the public would be heard decisively with the two most antithetical options fi- nally potentially on offer to them if they so desired.

That being the only way that we will be able to move forward as a nation, without politicians opening them- selves up to the charge of betraying the people. Our leaders can either recognize this, or they will be swept aside in the torrent that follows.

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Gender agenda: Time for the finance world to up its game

Nicky Morgan

NEXT month will be one year since the Treasury Committee published its report on Women in Finance. But has anything happened over this period to provide a ripple of hope for change?

To set the scene, back in 2015 the government appointed Jayne-Anne Gadhia to lead a review on women in financial services. In response to her findings, it launched the Women in Finance Charter, which required signatories to build a more balanced and fairer financial services industry.

More generally, since April 2017, employers with more than 250 staff have been required to publish their gender pay gap, which is the percentage difference between average hourly earnings for men and women. This is the background against which the Treasury Committee launched its inquiry. We heard from Gadhia, recruitment experts, financial services firms, and government ministers.

When we published our report last year, we made a series of recommendations to the government and regulators to encourage the progression of women to senior levels and reduce the gender pay gap.

One of the conclusions was that the gender pay gap exists in part due to significantly more men than women in higher earning and more senior positions. To rectify this, firms should set out how they will abolish their gender pay gap and support the progression of women.

In financial services firms in particular, the culture remains a deterrent for women, especially in terms of bonuses and working hours. Financial services companies need to focus on changing this if they are to narrow the gap.

This will obviously take time and isn’t a quick fix, but the pace of change is still concerning. As a Bloomberg headline stated last month, “second year of UK gender pay gap reporting indicates little has changed so far.”

For the finance industry specifically, some of the data makes shocking reading. Barclays, Lloyds and Clydesdale Bank, for instance, reported a median hourly pay gap of at least 38 per cent, putting them in the top 10 worst offenders in the UK for employers with over 5,000 staff.

The deadline for firms submitting their gender pay gaps for the latest financial year has just passed. It shows that women in the financial services sector were – on average – paid 81.9p for every pound that men earned in 2018. This is a slight improvement on 81.6p in 2017, but any disparity is still too much.

The time is ripe for maximum transparency on this issue – for the finance industry and beyond. While gender pay gap data is published on the government’s rather clunky website, a clear league table, perhaps similar to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, is needed.

This would provide vital information enabling recruits to compare how companies perform.

Furthermore, the table could include firms’ HR policies, such as on maternity, paternity and flexible working, that would offer recruits information about a working environment which they often won’t be aware of until they’ve been hired.

The inaccuracy of the data submitted by companies is also a cause for concern. There should be an audit of submission to ensure that the picture we see is indeed the correct one.

Nearly a year since the publication of our report, the Committee will not let up on this issue.

We’re continuing to monitor the evidence, asking witnesses to explain any gender pay gap that the organisation they’re representing may have, and also looking at the lessons to be learned from best practice.

Next month, the Committee will hold a “one year on” session on what has changed. And we’re beginning to explore what work we can do around other forms of diversity in finance.

The benefits of diversity are clear: better financial performance, reduced groupthink, and more open discussions. The Treasury Committee will do all it can to improve all forms of diversity in finance.

Women in the sector were paid 81.9p for every pound that men earned in 2018

Nicky Morgan MP is a chair of the Treasury Committee.

As Julian Richer hands over company shares, are staff-owned firms better for the economy?

Companies with significant employee ownership schemes tend to have higher productivity – which is exactly what the UK needs right now. Poor productivity performance is a key reason why, despite low unemployment, worker pay growth remains subdued.

Of course, it is important to get employee ownership schemes right. Employees shares must not be given out in a tokenistic manner; they should come with greater employee engagement in the running of a business. To be incentivised to work harder and smarter, employees need to feel that their words and actions can influence the performance of a business and, in turn, the value of their shares.

As well as incentives to work harder, greater employee engagement can help hold senior management to account – giving employees power to challenge issues such as runaway executive pay.

Done right, employee ownership can enrich workers, boost productivity, improve staff retention, and help restore faith in capitalism – that’s a set of prizes worth pursuing.

Scott Corfe is chief economist at the Social Market Foundation.

Catherine McBride

OWNING a share of the business where you work,you become a key decision-maker, which may have been Julian Richer’s intention – but it isn’t always in the best interests of the workers, or the wider economy.

Giving workers a stake in the business might improve outcomes for that particular company in the short term, but there are costs.

The economy needs new market entrants to keep it competitive and vibrant. Therefore, workforce need to be as mobile as anyone, allowing people to move to new opportunities with higher returns, generating a more efficient use of resources. But giving workers a vested interest makes it less likely they will leave and set up rival businesses or move to new industries.

There are other ways to incentivise staff to improve profit margins or sales. A cash bonus from profits, a sales commission, or an employee of the month prize would also work and would allow employees to change jobs without losing their stock options or flexibility.

Catherine McBride is senior economist at the International Trade and Competition Unit at the IEA.
The cyber security industry is failing businesses. Cyber criminals are constantly evolving and evading the market’s most sophisticated detection and security solutions, with government figures showing that 3.2 per cent of UK businesses have faced a cyber attack or data breach in the past year.

Most security solutions take a “best endeavours” approach to defending against threats – offering little more than 95 per cent protection at best.

Yber security can feel like an intractable problem. Every day there seem to be new stories about hacking, scams, and financial fraud that target our reliance on digital tools and use them against us. Just this week, we had news of a spyware attack on Whatsapp. And while cyber attacks are becoming more sophisticated, our defences remain worryingly basic. Despite several warnings by the industry, many of us still use weak passwords to control access to our online accounts. Last month, the UK’s National Cyber Security Centre revealed that 23.2m accounts around the world were protected by the password ‘wait for it’ – “123456”.

Steps are being taken to beef up protections. Many financial institutions are investing in biometric security, such as using fingerprints and asking customers to take selfies to prove who they are. But how can banks tell that these phates are genuine? Someone could use a picture stolen from social media, and if the bank instead asks for video footage of the customer, this can be forged using “deepfake” technology – a system that uses artificial intelligence to create fake video and audio recordings that are incredibly difficult to tell apart from the real thing.

So how can banks better authenticate themselves online? Enter Iproov, a tech company aiming to address this challenge using facial verification.

“The problem with facial recognition is ensuring that you’re looking at a genuinely present person,” explains the company’s founder and chief executive Andrew Bud, “it’s all very well to recognise someone’s face, but you have to be sure that you’re not looking at a deepfake video. Our patented verification technology is one of the only effective ways of doing it in the world.”

Iproov’s system is straightforward to explain. Using the camera on someone’s handheld device, it takes a recording of a random sequence of coloured lights being shone on a user’s face. This footage is then analysed in the cloud to check that the light is bouncing off an actual three-dimensional face and not a mask or photo, and the colour sequence is used to ensure that the video is unique.

“The sequence of colours changes each time – it’s like a spectral timestamp. The colour sequence has to be right, and it’s not, then we’re looking at a morphology,” Bud adds.

The process takes just half a minute. A user can combine this with their device against the data chip in their passport, and are thus able to prove their identity from anywhere in the world.

The cyber security industry stretches back to the nineties, has been working on this technology since 2011, aiming to provide a system for strong access control that is also easy to use.

And the market is responding positively – Iproov’s system is already being adopted by major clients.

For instance, Dutch banking giant Rabobank is allowing customers to use it in order to open accounts and authenticate themselves without having to visit a branch. Meanwhile, the Home Office is using the technology with its EU Settlement Status app, so far 600,000 people have proven their identity remotely via Iproov and gained permanent settled status.

Last year, the company was awarded a contract from the US Department of Homeland Security to make it easier for people to cross the US land border. “The objective is for people to self-certify themselves, so that it will be enough for trusted travellers to use Iproov to legally cross the border, which would produce huge savings in cost and manpower, and be an enormous convenience for travellers,” Bud says. “Before it procured us, the Department of Homeland Security tested every mobile face verification system on the market, and required the only one they were unable to break.”

There’s a sense that most companies are playing catch-up when it comes to cyber security, reacting to new threats only after it’s too late. But, however, is wary of the threat from hackers, so Iproov is being proactive and constantly monitoring cyber attacks around the world in order to stay one step ahead.

“The mistake that was made for a long time was a lack of respect for the attackers. We’re dealing with some of the smartest people in the world, who are very often given a compelling business model,” he says. “We’re up against people who are at least as smart, or possibly smarter than us, and probably have a lot more resources than we do. Our biggest advantage is that we learn more from every attack than they do.”

Iproov is interesting not just because of its technology, but because it’s a reminder in the face of high profile stories about cyber crime that the market is responding to the issue, and that innovative businesses are trying to provide solutions.

Biometrics in the form of fingerprints or Iproov’s facial verification software should mean that our online accounts are better protected. If it’s easy to steal a password, it’s much harder to steal a face.

Luke Graham finds out how facial verification technology can keep your online identity safe.

Being 95 per cent cyber-secure just isn’t good enough.

Yet most companies seem resigned to accepting this risk for their own business and customers.

As it stands, there is very little incentive for the industry to do better. The cyber security market is expected to reach $108bn by 2024, with providers making a lot of money from selling fallible, subpar solutions.

That’s not because 100 per cent secure solutions are not possible – indeed, we’ve proven that they are. By moving away from the traditional detection-based approach, new and wholly effective attack prevention systems can and are being created.

But we will only reach the tipping point where businesses reject the mantra that “95 per cent secure is good enough” when they start to feel the repercussions beyond an initial breach. Insurers and government watchdogs must step away from the culture of “best endeavours” and hold businesses accountable when they are breached due to the use of fallible solutions.

There are plenty of examples of this, going back as far as 2015, when a complaint was filed against California healthcare provider, Cottage Health System, by its cyber insurer, after it was discovered that it hadn’t met the “minimum required practices” when it had been breached.

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The gunplay is tight in this post-apocalyptic shooter but it’s not enough, says Dougie Gerrard

GAME

RAGE 2
PLATFORM: PS4, XBO, PC

I n the face of it, it’s strange that this game even exists, given that the original Rage, released in 2011, sold poorly and left little cultural impression. After playing this drab, repetitive sequel, I’m still unsure why they decided to bring it back for a second outing.

I heard the faint ringing of alarm bells during the game’s opening, which thrusts you abruptly into a post-apocalyptic wasteland, with only the thinnest recap of the first game to provide any context or sense of direction. You take on the role of Walker, the ‘last of the Rangers’, a class of heroes charged with defending what’s left of Earth from a quasi-fascist organisation called “The Authority”.

First, the positives, chief of which is the shooting – bullets explode heads with a satisfying pop, and the weapon selection is eclectic, complemented by a well-designed system of upgrades. There’s also a decent diversity of enemies to mangle, even if the firefights themselves become relatively uniform.

It doesn’t take long, however, before a paucity of inspiration begins to show; missions are hackneyed, iterative affairs, and with no clear centre to the story, no one goal feels worth pursuing over another.

Perhaps the most frustrating feature is the game’s open world, which is vast and – at least superficially – varied but almost impossible to interact with. Try as you might to discover points of interest – and I did; I drove my spectacular-up recon vehicle until my thumbs were numb – there’s little to do with them after that. Occasionally you’ll come across a roadblock or a bandit hideout, but on the whole this is barren terrain. As far as I could tell, whole chunks of the map are almost entirely absent from the story, giving you little incentive to explore.

The dialogue is forgettable, commitment-free stuff – would it have killed them to add a few jokes? – and although you can decide whether Walker is a man or a woman at the beginning, there is nothing distinctive about either iteration. The vehicles, all bulging tires and DIY weaponry, are ripped straight from Mad Max, as is the largely desertified landscape. Someone more charitable might describe this as ‘paying homage’, though I suspect the studio had gruber motivations. There’s no more saturated genre than the post-apocalyptic shooter, and no easier sell to fans than an open world furnished with dilapidated gas stations and busted-up superhighways, not to mention populated by various flavours of mutant. The best fighting mechanic in the world can’t scrub the stench of laziness.

Rage 2 is frustratingly lopsided, its technical grace vitiated by its half-hearted execution. It feels like so much energy went into the shooting that the world-building became an afterthought. If you want your FPS to be more than a brainless bullet orgy, look elsewhere.

The periscope-style camera is designed to be dust and water resistant (though the phone is still not officially rated for taking a plunge), and OnePlus says that the mechanism has been stress tested 300,000 times to ensure durability – the equivalent of 150 times a day for five years. Cleverly, if the phone’s accelerometer senses that the device has been dropped, the quick thinking selfie camera will retreat into the safety of the phone like a frightened tortoise before it hits the ground.

That repositioned selfie camera has made room for the best display ever on a OnePlus phone, and what just might be the best display of any phone on the market. The 6.67-inch QHD+ resolution OLED screen is simply stunning, and runs at a super slick 90Hz refresh rate – 50 per cent faster than most other phones, even the newest iPhones – making it look uncannily smooth and fluid when scrolling and during app and menu animations. This kind of tinkering with the Pixel 3 in low-light and night-time shooting, photographs look crisp across a range of conditions. At £649, this is the most expensive phone OnePlus has made, but it still costs a lot less than the phones it goes toe to toe with. The Galaxy S10 Plus, by comparison, will leave an £899 sized hole in your bank balance. You’ll struggle to see where the compromises have been made to bring the price down by that much; there’s no wireless charging, but that’s unlikely to be a deal-breaker for most. That makes the OnePlus 7 Pro the Android phone to beat at the top end of the market. It’s an astonishing phone at an astonishing price.
Susie Wolff on her new Formula E role and taking on her husband. By Michael Searles

FIVE years ago, Susie Wolff made history by becoming just the sixth woman to be involved in a Formula One grand prix weekend, and the first since 1992. Today, the Scot is continuing to help break down gender barriers in motorsport, although now she is doing so as a team principal, in charge of Venturi, the Formula E outfit founded by Leonardo DiCaprio.

Wolff, 36, has become an inspirational figure to young women in a male-dominated world. It’s a role that she has held since breaking into the DTM touring car series in 2006, although it is not one she necessarily wanted or expected.

“I’m actually just doing the job that I love,” she tells City AM. “I’m not doing it because I want to lead the way for other women. But I know for myself from being a young girl that role models are important, and if I can pave the way to show what’s possible I think that’s really positive.”

It may not have been foremost on her mind as she competed against the likes of former DTM champions Paul di Resta or Gary Paffett – now also in Formula E – or perhaps even when she was testing her Williams Formula One car against the best in the world, that her position in the sport would give her an opportunity to encourage female involvement.

But since retiring from racing in 2016, she has become more active in promoting equal opportunities, launching Dare to Be Different, an initiative aimed at increasing women’s participation in motorsport as well as other male-dominated industries.

Her role as a team principal within the electric racing series also allows her to champion that cause from within, something she feels there is a great appetite for.

“Forumula E have been very supportive in helping us promote diversity and give opportunity to women,” says Wolff. “In the end it’s never down to one person or organisation, it’s about doing something to create change and it being supported as a whole.

“It’s not going to happen overnight, but what’s most important is that we are doing something.”

Wolff is not the only woman to blaze a trail in motorsport, but she is one of very few. Formula One has just two female principals: Monisha Kaltenborn, who took charge at Sauber between 2012 and 2017, and Claire Williams, who is technically a deputy to her father and team founder Frank but runs the team from within, something she feels there is a great appetite for.

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Wolff joined Formula E team Venturi as principal and shareholder last year. They are currently seventh in the championship

Wolff’s success with Mercedes in F1. “I have the perspective of being a driver, a huge network within motorsport and a lot of experience, but I also don’t want to underestimate the luck I’ve had to watch my husband do his job,” she adds. “It’s that knowledge that gave me the belief that I could do this job. I’ve been able to watch him win five world titles so I think the combination of the two has really allowed me to do this.”

From next year, Toto Wolff may have to guard what information he divulges as head of Mercedes-Benz Motorsport, given their impending entry into Formula E. Although their teams will be in direct competition, Wolff says her husband will not take on the same role as in F1 due to the overlapping schedules. Nonetheless, the prospect of inter-family rivalry does not faze her. “We’ll be competing against each other, but I have no issues whatsoever with that,” she says. “We have our work and private life and they’re separate.”

Michael Searles picks his non-Big Six Premier League team of the year

THIS season’s individual accolades unsurprisingly went mostly to players at Liverpool and Manchester City, with the leftovers for players at other Big Six clubs. But the Premier League is home to another 14 teams who have shown an array of talent this season. Here is City AM’s Best of the Rest XI.

LUKASZ FABIAŃSKI: Bounced back from relegation at Swansea to become West Ham’s No1 and no goalkeeper made more saves (148) this season. More significantly his save percentage of 72.4 was the fourth best behind Allison, Hugo Lloris and Vicente Guaita, who played far fewer minutes.

AARON WAN-BISSAKA: The 21-year-old cemented his status as Crystal Palace’s first-choice right-back and showed great attacking instincts as well as exceptional defending. Made the third most tackles with 129 and also had one of the lowest dribbled-past-per-game rates at 0.3.

CONOR COADY: A rock at the back for seventh-placed Wolves. Played in every single match, recovering the ball on 251 occasions while rarely putting a foot wrong as he formed a formidable partnership with Willy Boly.

NATHAN AKÉ: Continues to prove an astute buy at £20m from Chelsea. Particularly effective at clearing the ball and also has an eye for goal, contributing four, including a last-minute winner against Tottenham this month.

LUCA SIGNORE: Beats Ben Chilwell to a well-contested spot after helping Everton keep 12 clean sheets. Surprisingly good in the air as well as in the tackle, winning 205 duels. At the other end he delivered 280 crosses, creating 13 big chances and providing four assists. Also scored four, including a memorable goal in the 4-0 win against Manchester United.

IDRISSA GUEYE: Integral to Everton since his arrival in 2016, he made 142 tackles this season, only one off the most, although he played around 150 minutes less than Wilfred N’didi.

DECLAN RICE: Stepped into the West Ham midfield alongside Mark Noble following an injury to Jack Wilshere and never looked back. His presence in the side coincided with an uplift in form, with his season highlight a man-of-the-match display at home to Arsenal capped by the winning goal.

JAMES MADDISON: Leicester’s £22.5m signing easily made the step up from Championship and has arguably been the best player outside the Big Six. Scored seven goals and got seven assists from midfield, but it could have been more as he created the most chances in the league with 100.

WILFRIED ZAHAt: Had his best goal for team and taking on her husband. By Michael Searles

return to date with 10, plus five assists, but it was his dribbling and all-round attacking threat, which statistics do not fully reflect, that again proved so vital to Palace staying up.

IVAN FRASER: Impossible to leave out given that only Iden Hazard provided more than his 14 assists. What’s more, the Bournemouth midfielder created 28 big chances – defined as an opportunity a player should be reasonably expected to score from – which is 10 more than anyone else.

CALLUM WILSON: Scored a career-high 14 league goals in 30 appearances, including multiple strikes with both feet and his head. Also contributed nine assists and combined particularly well with Fraser as they assisted each other 12 times, just one off the Premier League goal combination record set by Alan Shearer and Chris Sutton 24 years ago.
FRANK'S THROUGH

Marriott goal sends Derby to Wembley

Jack Marriott came off the bench to score twice as Derby County stunned Leeds United 4-2 to reach the Championship play-off final last night. Stuart Dallas put Leeds 2-0 up on aggregate early on but goals from Marriott, Mason Mount and Harry Wilson swung the tie for Derby. Dallas brought it back 3-3 on aggregate before red cards for Gaetano Berardi and Scott Malone were followed by Marriott’s 85th-minute winner. Frank Lampard’s side will play Aston Villa at Wembley on 26 May.

England are redefining ODI batting ahead of World Cup opportunity

For me Buttler is already one of the best ever one-day batsmen. Like South Africa’s fellow genius AB de Villiers he hits balls 360 degrees, often makes a mockery of the bowling and, like many of his teammates, seems to be peaking at the perfect time for the World Cup. People tend to associate England with seam-friendly conditions, but as we are seeing now when it’s dry groundsmen are increasingly curating good batting pitches.

There are no underprepared ones around, meaning batsmen can be confident in hitting through the line of the ball. The result is skyrocketing scores, with teams like England turning ODIs into prolonged Twenty20s and making scores of 320-350 look par.

England will be without captain Eoin Morgan for Friday’s fourth ODI against Pakistan at Trent Bridge, but their form means it’s no problem. Morgan can rest, Buttler may be given the opportunity to captain and James Vince might get the chance to impress. For the next few weeks it’s all about the bowling positions. England’s batting is exactly where they want it.

BUTTLER TO CAPTAIN ENGLAND WITH MORGAN SUSPENDED

- England captain Eoin Morgan has been suspended for the next One-Day International and fined 40 per cent of his match fee for a slow over-rate during Tuesday’s win over Pakistan. Morgan will hand over captancy to Jos Buttler for the fourth ODI against Pakistan at Trent Bridge after England took four hours to bowl their 50 overs in Bristol. Jonny Bairstow, who scored 128 to help England go 2-0 up in the five-match series, was reprimanded after hitting the stumps with his bat when dismissed.

MATURE GARCIA READY TO FACE HOSTILE US PGA ATMOSPHERE

- Sergio Garcia says he will be ready for a hostile reception from the crowd when he tees off at the US PGA Championship today. Garcia famously swore at the Long Island fans in 2002, when he was just 22 years old, but the Spaniard says he won’t be affected this time. “I try to take it as motivation,” he said. “You’re cheering against me? Now I’m gonna try to do something extra good to shut you down; it was rough, but I’m actually glad it happened. It matured me a lot.”

WILDER SAYS HE WANTS TO KILL BREAZEALE BECAUSE IT’S LEGAL

- Deontay Wilder is braced for criticism on Saturday as he says he wants to “kill a man and get paid for it” in the boxing ring. Wilder takes on Dominic Breazeale on Saturday in his first fight since retaining his WBC title with a controversial draw against Tyson Fury in December. The American, 33, sparked controversy ahead of the Fury contest by claiming he “wants a body on his record” and has now reasserted his opinion. “This is the only sport where you can kill a man and get paid for it at the same time,” he said. “It’s legal. So why not use my right to do so?”

SPORT DIGEST

BRIGHTON RECEIVE APOLOGY OVER HUGHTON SACKING

- Anti-discrimination campaign group Kick It Out yesterday apologised to Brighton after its head of development criticised the sacking of Chris Hughton. Troy Townsend told The Telegraph the goal of having more ethnic minority coaches was “now at worst than square one” following Hughton’s dismissal on Monday. In a statement Kick It Out apologised for “any inference” that the dismissal was “in any way linked to his ethnicity” and for “the impact the comments have had on the club’s reputation”.

ACKERMANN WINS STAGE FIVE AFTER DUMOULIN WITHDRAWS

- Former Giro d’Italia winner Tom Dumoulin was forced to pull out of the race in the fifth stage yesterday after injuring his knee in a crash. The Dutch rider abandoned the 235km stage from Orbetello shortly after the start following a fall in a pile-up on Tuesday. Germany’s Pascal Ackermann prevailed in heavy rain to claim his second stage victory, while Primoz Roglic remains in the overall lead, 35 seconds ahead of Britain’s Simon Yates.

What on earth have lightsabers got to do with brewing beer?

It may seem a little excessive, but we check every last cask with what we call our lightsabers. But it’s not from a galaxy far, far away. It’s an ultraviolet light used by our brewing team to inspect our casks for absolute cleanliness. Only when it has passed the ‘lightsaber test’ is a cask considered worthy of becoming home to 72 pints of freshly brewed Landlord. With a beer as finely balanced in flavour as Taylor’s, coaxed from the purest Pennine spring water, aromatic hops and finest barley, we can’t help being just a little picky.

All for that taste of Taylor’s
Prices that take you back.
Hundreds of deals all this month.