

The gentle
genius behind
The Beach Boys

OBITUARIES P34



Feuds and
friendships of
a political wife

BOOKS P21



Streeting's
plan to save
the NHS

TALKING
POINTS P14



THE WEEK

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THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Netanyahu's gamble Can Israel defeat Iran?

Page 2



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Israel takes on Iran: Netanyahu's gamble

Last Thursday night, the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard's aerospace unit, Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, held an emergency meeting at a military base in Tehran. Hajizadeh and his officials had been warned not to congregate in one place, said Steve Bloomfield in *The Observer*, owing to the risk of an imminent Israeli attack, but they assumed that any raid would still be days off. It was a fatal miscalculation. Their bunker was one of dozens of sites targeted that night by Israeli jets, which eviscerated the top ranks of Iran's armed forces and killed some of its leading nuclear experts. Israel has since continued to pummel the country's military and nuclear sites, along with energy infrastructure. Iran has responded by firing ballistic missiles at Israel, a few of which have penetrated its Iron Dome defences, killing dozens of people. Donald Trump, who had previously stressed that the US was not involved, urged Iranians to evacuate Tehran on Tuesday, and demanded the regime's "unconditional surrender". Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei insisted Iran would never compromise with Israel, and threatened the US with "irreparable damage".



The aftermath of a strike in Tehran

Netanyahu seized his chance, said *The Guardian*. He has long wanted to attack Iran, and doing so now had the added bonus of bolstering his weak position at home. You can hardly blame Netanyahu for wanting to stop Tehran's "mad mullahs" get their hands on a nuclear weapon, said Paul Baldwin in the *Daily Express*. "Handwringers" like Keir Starmer may witter about the need for de-escalation, but "they all know Israel has done them and the world a favour".

Israel may have felt that it had no choice but to act, said *The Economist*, but the all-out offensive is nevertheless "a huge gamble". Launched without overt US backing, it has killed at least 100 civilians and it could have all sorts of unpredictable regional and global consequences. And there's no guarantee that it will even succeed. Israeli military strikes did manage to halt the nuclear- weapons programmes of both Iraq and Syria – in 1981 and 2007 respectively – but Iran's is "much more advanced and dispersed than those ever were". It has mastered the process of enrichment and its programme may just start again in the future in a more "virulent" form. In the meantime, Israel has

Israel's strike on Iran's nuclear and missile programmes was years in the planning, said *The Times* of Israel. The operation – dubbed "Rising Lion" – involved over 200 aircraft in the opening strikes, around two-thirds of the country's combat air force. Israel had spent months smuggling precision weapons systems and commandos into Iran. Mossad agents had set up a secret drone base near Tehran. These assets enabled Israel to take out Iranian air defences and hit missile launchers as they emerged from shelters, protecting Israeli pilots and helping them establish complete dominance of the skies over Iran.

"The operation involved over 200 combat aircraft in the opening strikes"

The attack was carefully timed by Israel, said Lina Khatib in *Prospect*. "Never in its history has the Islamic Republic been weaker." Its proxy forces in Gaza and Lebanon – Hamas and Hezbollah – have both been defanged, and the fall of the Assad regime in Syria has deprived it of a key ally. Even before last week, its air defences were in a parlous state owing to earlier Israeli strikes. Trump had set a 60-day deadline for Iran to accept a nuclear deal presented by the US. That ran out last Thursday, giving Israel a perfect "opportunity to go for the jugular". "Ever the opportunist", Israeli PM Benjamin

no clear exit strategy from this war unless the Iranian regime falls or the US gets involved with its superior bunker-busting bombs. A protracted conflict will be hard for either side to sustain, said James Shotter in the *FT*. While Iran is burning through its supplies of missiles, Israel's stocks of interceptors are also limited.

So what will happen next? One possibility, said Michael Burleigh in *The i Paper*, is that Tehran, after some face-saving strikes on Israel, accepts defeat and returns to the negotiating table with the US. Alternatively, it may lash out in desperation and seek to block the Straits of Hormuz, choking global trade. But the conflict may just drag on at a lower level, in a "tit-for-tat forever war". Many in Washington fear that Trump may, as he has hinted, join the bombing campaign in an effort to kill off Iran's nuclear programme once and for all, said Gideon Rachman in the *FT*. It would be a dangerous move. Trump promised to be a peacemaker and cut deals. Only last month, in a speech in Riyadh, he "scorned the idea that outsiders can bring positive change to the Middle East by force". It would be a "supreme irony" if he found himself "dragged into another war for regime change in the Middle East".

It wasn't all bad

Liverpool's modernist Catholic Cathedral has received Grade I listed status – putting it on a par with England's more traditional cathedrals, including the Anglican one about a mile down the road. Designed by Frederick Gibberd, The Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, aka the Wigwam, was built in the 1960s. There had been plans for a grand classical cathedral on the site, designed by Edwin Lutyens, but only the crypt was built before the construction was halted by the Second World War.

A Galápagos tortoise at Miami Zoo has become a father for the first time at the age of 135. Having lived through two world wars and 25 US presidencies, Goliath has had numerous female partners, but he only managed to sire offspring this year, with Sweet Pea, who is thought to be aged 85 to 100. She laid a clutch of eggs in January, one of which hatched. Their keepers think Goliath, who was hatched on the Galápagos Islands in 1890, is the oldest ever first-time father, and that he and Sweet Pea are the oldest first-time parents.



The wreck of *HMS Endeavour* – the ship that Captain Cook sailed to Australia – has been identified, 250 years after it was scuttled off the coast of Rhode Island in 1778, during the American War of Independence. By then, it had been sold, renamed the *Lord Sandwich*, and converted into a troop ship. When the US and French besieged Newport Harbour, it was sunk to create a blockade (and anything of value would have been removed first). The wreck was found years ago, but it has taken extensive research to verify that it is the *Endeavour*.

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COVER CARTOON: HOWARD MCWILLIAM

A regime in crisis

Hours after launching a devastating wave of air strikes against their country, Benjamin Netanyahu urged Iranians to “rise up” and topple the “evil and oppressive regime” in Tehran. It is a “tall order” to foment a revolution from abroad, said Mark Almond in the Daily Mail, but the Israeli PM “can smell the air – and Iran reeks of weakness”. Its 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is ailing. Its nuclear programme has been “knee-capped” by this assault, and its “Axis of Resistance” is in tatters. The result is that, for the first time since the mullahs were swept to power in the Islamic Revolution of 1979, “the collapse of Iran’s tyrannical regime is a realistic prospect”.



An anti-Israel protest in Tehran

The chasm between Iran’s rulers and their subjects is “as great now as it was when Iranians toppled the Shah”, said The Economist. On social media, some Iranians marked the assassination of their generals by sharing emojis of barbecued meat and deriding them as “enemies of the people” – a reference to their brutal suppression of the 2022 “Woman, Life, Freedom” protests. “A few people draped themselves in the Israeli flag, passing around celebratory cakes.” Israel’s attacks have laid bare an “open secret” in Iran, said Rana Rahimpour in The Observer: “the lavish lifestyles” of the country’s elite. Many of the assassinated commanders lived in luxurious high-rise blocks in northern Tehran. For Iranians who had been told for years to tighten their belts in a sanctions-hit economy,

there is a sense of poetic justice about their fate. Now, “after decades of failed protests”, some of Iran’s roughly 90 million people are daring to dream that regime change might actually come about.

Even so, Netanyahu’s pleas for Iranians to revolt will “fall on deaf ears”, said K. Ghorbanpour in Haaretz. Yes, the mullahs are “deeply unpopular”, especially among the intelligentsia. But right now, most Iranians are focused on their own survival; few will be of a mind to cooperate with the country that is destroying their cities with air strikes. Chances are that as civilian casualties mount, Iranians will “rally around the flag”, said Adrian Blomfield in The Daily Telegraph. But even if the public did rise up, Iran’s opposition is “bitterly divided”, and there is no obvious figure to unite behind. Meanwhile, for the

mullahs, holding onto power is a life and death matter, said Michael Day in The Independent. Many are “hanging judges” who’ve condemned dissidents to death in kangaroo courts. Regime change “could see them hanging from lampposts”.

The regime has powerful cheerleaders abroad, said Roger Boyes in The Times. But Russia and China might yet turn on Khamenei. They’ve backed him thus far, but they may also be alarmed by the idea of his regime becoming a nuclear power. We have to hope that the Israelis have thought about what might follow regime change, said Nahal Toosi on Politico. As the West learnt with Iraq, leaderless failed states can become fertile breeding grounds “for all sorts of new problems”.

Iran’s nuclear programme

Benjamin Netanyahu has been claiming for decades that Iran is on the brink of acquiring nuclear weapons, said Paul Nuki in The Daily Telegraph. In 2012, he even took an image of a cartoon-style bomb onto the stage of the UN General Assembly, in a bid to persuade the global community to act. Tehran ridiculed him as “the boy who cried wolf” for his constant public warnings; and his repeated threats to destroy Iran’s nuclear programme became a joke to some. But last week, “Mr Iran” finally authorised a major assault intended to do just that.



Netanyahu at the UN in 2012

He claims that the Iranians are so close to developing nuclear weapons, he had to act. But analysts have cast doubt on that, said Patrick Wintour in The Guardian. As recently as March, the US director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, went on record to say that Iran was not “actively pursuing a nuclear weapon”. Still, Israel has cause to be worried, said Ed Cumming in The Daily Telegraph. Iran’s nuclear programme accelerated sharply after

2018, when Donald Trump collapsed the 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal. That agreement limited its uranium enrichment to 3.67% – only enough for civilian nuclear power. Now it has an estimated 400kg stockpile of uranium enriched to 60%, which, with a bit more enrichment, could be enough to build nine nuclear bombs. Last week the global nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, formally declared Iran in breach of its non-proliferation obligations for the first time in 20 years. And though Israel has killed some 14 of Iran’s nuclear scientists in the past week, and damaged the vital Natanz nuclear facility, the enrichment plant at Fordow “remains unscathed”.

Israel can’t destroy Fordow with its publicly acknowledged weapons, said John Paul Rathbone and Charles Clover in the FT. Even the US’s bunker-buster bombs might struggle to damage its centrifuges, buried 500 metres under a mountain and encased in concrete. But if Fordow is not put out of action, the Iranians might withdraw from the non-proliferation treaty, and rapidly assemble a nuclear weapon while under attack.

THE WEEK

It’s not easy to grasp of the sheer size of state expenditure. According to Robert Colville in The Sunday Times, it equates to £24,000 for every adult in the country – amazing when the average wage is only £37,000. The budget for the Department of Health and Social Care is not far off the GDP of Portugal (see page 14). Yet we still have six million people on NHS waiting lists. By contrast our police have to get by on the GDP of Armenia. Perhaps that is why they fail to solve over 90% of crimes. Their job, after all, has become ever more complicated. They’re dealing with an epidemic of hard-to-solve online fraud; many offences now require them to pore through reams of digital data – and not just in the UK. Dixon of Dock Green might have sought out the local fence in response to a street robbery; today’s stolen mobile phones are rapidly shipped abroad. In a globalised era, crime is global. Still, the sense that law and order is collapsing is real and wears away at the social fabric, so the police need to do all they can to restore confidence. Maybe they could start by addressing the phenomenon Mary Wakefield once described in The Spectator as “clumping”. In London, it’s routine to see eight cops gathered for ages around one forlorn-looking suspect; we learnt lately that six had turned up in three cars to arrest a couple accused of being a nuisance on social media; outside the Covid Inquiry building there are often five or more cops snoozing in the back of a van. If we can’t put more bobbies on the beat, we could at least pull more of them out of clumps.

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Controversy of the week

The grooming gangs

When Louise Casey, the civil service troubleshooter, began her “rapid national audit” of the issue of grooming gangs earlier this year, she believed that a national inquiry was not needed, said *The Times*. Now that she has finished her audit, she thinks that one is “vital”. “The reason can be summed up in one word: denial.” Her report, published on Monday, exposes “a catalogue of failures and cover-ups, a reluctance by politicians, officials and police over many years to grapple with the realities of grooming gangs”, who have abused thousands of girls in dozens of British towns in recent decades. “Officialdom too often turned a blind eye to this dreadful abuse.” Casey found, in particular, a “failure to address questions about the ethnicity of perpetrators”, even to collect accurate data so that the issue could be examined properly. Her recommendations – including that there should be a national inquiry and national data collection, and a change in the law so that all adults who have sex with children receive mandatory rape charges – have all been accepted by Home Secretary Yvette Cooper.



Casey: a damning verdict

“Labour have been backed into a corner,” said Lara Brown in *The Spectator*. They never wanted to have an inquiry. Keir Starmer said in January that those calling for one were jumping on a far-right “bandwagon”. Until recently, ministers dismissed any attempt to discuss the racial dimension as a “dog-whistle”. But Casey has now confirmed that, from the data we do have, there is “clear evidence of over-representation among suspects of Asian and Pakistani heritage men”. The reasons the Government dragged its feet are all too obvious. Most of the areas where these scandals took place were Labour-run: Rotherham, Rochdale, Telford, Oldham. An inquiry will expose “Labour’s guilty men”. The authorities in these places knew exactly what was going on, said *The Sun*. But the police, social services and councils were all too nervous of being accused of racism or stoking racial tensions to take action. They preferred “to sacrifice poor white teenagers on the altar of race relations”.

These children were grievously let down, said Polly Toynbee in *The Guardian*. But we shouldn’t allow “culture warriors” to exploit the issue for political ends. Kemi Badenoch is up in arms; but she was minister for children until 2024. Why didn’t she do more? Where was her inquiry? There is much blame to be shared around, “but it’s only the race angle that excites the culture warriors”. For instance, most of the girls preyed on by grooming gangs were in care. From 2010, the Tories slashed budgets for care and social work. Yet now they cry “crocodile tears” for these vulnerable girls. The inquiry must “look at how we can help this cohort of lost children”, said Alice Thomson in *The Times*. But it also needs to shine a light on the issue of Pakistani-British grooming gangs. The abuse is still happening. As Casey said this week: “If good people don’t grip difficult issues, bad people will.”

Abortion vote

MPs voted to decriminalise abortion on Tuesday. An amendment to the Crime and Policing Bill, which was passed by 379 to 137 in a free vote, is set to change the criminal law in England and Wales so that women procuring a termination outside the legal framework cannot be prosecuted. That framework – with a time limit of 24 weeks in most cases, and the need for two doctors’ signatures – will remain in force. But women who terminate a pregnancy outside it, at any stage of gestation and for any reason, will no longer face arrest or prison. The move came after a series of contentious prosecutions of women for abortion offences. The British Medical Association supported the amendment, but one anti-abortion group described it as “barbaric”.

US trade deal

Donald Trump and Keir Starmer signed the UK-US trade deal at the G7 summit in Canada this week. Tariffs on UK car imports into the US will fall from 25% to 10% from July, and the aerospace sector will face no tariffs at all (see page 36). However, it is uncertain when planned reductions in aluminium and steel tariffs, now at 25%, will kick in. Trump said he’d given the British a good deal “because I like them”.

Spirit of the age

Nearly two-thirds of Britain’s 22 million pet owners celebrate their animal’s birthday or adoption day, spending £121 each on average. Half have thrown parties for their pet. Toys and food are the most common presents, followed by a new bed or blanket, reports *The Times*. However, there are other options, ranging from personalised bowls to AI-generated images of the pet in dress uniform. Guinea pig owners are the most likely to celebrate such landmarks.

NHS staff have spoken out about a growing trend for patients to film their care and upload it to social media. The Society of Radiographers said it was worried about the privacy of other patients and the impact on staff of having their work scrutinised online.

Good week for:

Theatrical innovation, after Rachel Zegler – the star of Jamie Lloyd’s new production of *Evita* at the London Palladium – left the stage on opening night, and performed *Don’t Cry For Me Argentina* from a balcony overlooking the street. Those inside, who had paid up to £250 for their seats, watched her perform the showstopper on a screen. She is expected to do the same every night of the run – attracting large crowds each time.

Blaise Metreweli, who became the first woman to be appointed head of the Secret Intelligence Service, or MI6. The 47-year-old, who has become C, was previously Q, running the department responsible for gadgets and secret communications, but also AI and surveillance technologies.

Roger Daltrey, the rock star, who was knighted in the King’s birthday honours for services to charity and music. Also knighted were the actor Gary Oldman and the footballer David Beckham. The former Tory minister Penny Mordaunt, who played a prominent role at the coronation, was made a dame, as was the author Pat Barker and the ceramicist Emma Bridgewater.

Bad week for:

HS2, which has been delayed again. Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander told the Commons that the project was an “appalling mess”, owing to “years of mismanagement” by Tory governments, and there was “no reasonable way” to get the high-speed Birmingham to London line running by its target date of 2033.

Cabbies, with news that Uber plans to start trialling its driverless “robotaxis” in London next spring.

Poll watch

A quarter of teachers are aware of pupils taking the “zombie drug” spice outside school, a survey by the NASUWT union has found; **9%** are aware of pupils taking the drug on school premises. **19%** say they are aware of children taking cannabis at school; **71%** say the same of energy drinks. **6%** are aware of pupils using gambling websites or apps at school, and **24%** out of school. *The Times*

71% of British adults think that abortion should be legal in all or most cases, but among 16- to 34-year-old men, only **46%** do. (More than a third think it should be illegal in all or most cases.) Among men aged 35 to 54, **77%** think abortion should be legal, rising to **82%** among 55 to 75s. *Ipsos/The Independent*



Nuuk Cold warrior: President Macron of France visited Greenland on Sunday – the first foreign head

of state to visit the Danish autonomous territory since Donald Trump began threatening to seize it, by force if necessary. The symbolic visit – a stop-off on the way to the G7 in Canada – was explicitly aimed at conveying France's and the EU's "solidarity" with Greenland during testing times. Macron criticised the US for "preying" on Greenland, saying "that's not what allies do". He met both Greenland's and Denmark's PMs during the trip.

Frankfurt, Germany

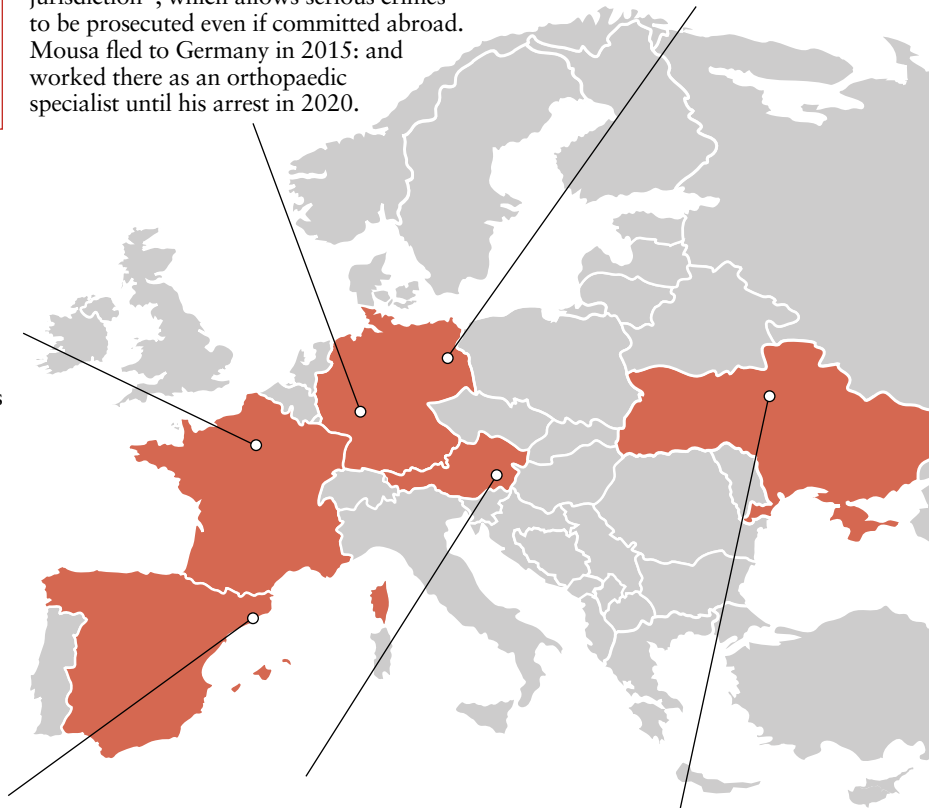
Assad torturer jailed: After a three-and-a-half-year trial, a Syrian doctor has been jailed for life by a German court for crimes against humanity committed during Bashar al-Assad's brutal crackdown of dissent in the early days of the Syrian civil war. Alaa Mousa, who in 2011 and 2012 worked in an army hospital in Homs and a military intelligence prison in Damascus, was convicted of eight counts of torture and two murders. More than 50 witnesses held captive by the regime gave evidence of the sadistic abuse suffered at his hands. They described how he had poured flammable liquid on a prisoner's wounds before setting them alight. Germany has tried several supporters of the Assad regime under the principle of "universal jurisdiction", which allows serious crimes to be prosecuted even if committed abroad. Mousa fled to Germany in 2015: and worked there as an orthopaedic specialist until his arrest in 2020.

Berlin

Veterans' Day: For the first time since the Second World War, Germany has held a Veterans' Day to celebrate the contribution of its servicemen and women to the nation. The legacy of Nazism has hitherto deterred the Federal Republic from showing public appreciation for its armed forces, but attitudes have shifted since Russia's invasion of Ukraine and, on Sunday, events were held across Germany, including the construction of a "veterans' village" next to Berlin's Reichstag building, the seat of the German parliament. The most significant involvement of German soldiers in recent times has been their participation, over a period of almost 20 years, in the US-led war in Afghanistan. Fifty-nine Germans died fighting the Taliban insurgency.

Paris

Social media ban: France "cannot wait," said President Macron last week, as he announced his intention to force social media platforms to ban children under 15 from using their sites. His remarks were spurred by the fatal stabbing of a teaching assistant by a 14-year-old in a Paris suburb, the latest in a spate of knife attacks in French schools. Macron insists that the rising levels of teenage violence has been fuelled by the use of apps such as TikTok and Instagram. His proposal puts him on a collision course with Brussels, which has been reluctant to antagonise the platforms. Macron has vowed that if the European Commission won't act, he will pursue legislation at the national level within a few months. This week, Norway also flagged up plans to bring in a ban for under-15s, and Australia is to implement one for under-16s later this year.



Barcelona, Spain Tourism protests: Protesters took to the streets this week in cities across Spain, Italy and Portugal – the most

widespread action so far staged against the effects of mass tourism. "Your holidays, my misery" was the chant in Barcelona, where people set off coloured flares and fired water pistols, toy weapons that became a symbol of last year's mass protests against "overtourism" in Spain. Protests also took place in Venice, Genoa and Lisbon. A major grievance of the protesters is the impact of Airbnb-style rentals, which has squeezed housing availability and sent rents soaring.

Graz, Austria

School massacre: The man who carried out the deadliest rampage in Austria's recent history – shooting dead ten people at a school in Graz last week – has been identified by police as Arthur A, a 21-year-old serial school drop-out who had attended classes at the school, but never completed them. A dedicated player of online shooting games, he lived with his mother and had recently failed a psychological test to enter the armed forces. He'd once been taught by the teacher he killed, a 59-year-old woman, but his other victims (nine pupils aged between 14 and 17) were apparently unknown to him. He had left a suicide note, saying he'd acted alone. The tragedy has sparked intense debate in Austria over its gun laws: Arthur A had apparently bought his guns legally, having passed the psychological evaluation required to obtain a permit.

Kyiv

Deadly strikes: Russia launched one of its deadliest ever attacks on Kyiv this week, a barrage of drones and missiles that killed at least 28 people in the course of a single night, and wounded more than 100 others. Damage was reported at more than two dozen sites across the city, including a nine-storey apartment block that was hollowed out by a missile strike. Several other cities were also targeted, including Odesa. Russia has stepped up its air strikes on Ukraine's cities this month, often launching 400 or so drones and missiles in a single night; in the entire month of June last year it launched around 550. The attacks, which have stretched Ukraine's air defences and exhausted its civilians, have been accompanied by small but notable advances by Russian forces across the eastern front. Last month, they captured over 200 square miles of territory in a push towards Sumy and two other cities.

Alberta, Canada

Summit disappointment: The Canadian prime minister, Mark Carney, announced C\$2bn in military aid for Ukraine and further sanctions on Russia on Tuesday, the final day of the G7 summit in Alberta. Canada's support, he said, would be "unwavering" until a "just peace for Ukraine" was secured. Nevertheless, Ukraine's President Zelensky left the event frustrated that he had not been able to meet Donald Trump. Zelensky had hoped to persuade the US president to extend US support, but Trump left before their scheduled meeting, saying he needed to focus on the Iran-Israel crisis. A Ukrainian official said that Kyiv was the victim of his "short attention span". Earlier, Trump had blocked the idea of a joint statement on Ukraine, arguing that its language was too critical of Russia and could undermine peace negotiations. The US president also opined that it had been a mistake to eject President Putin from the G8 in 2014.

Los Angeles, California

Cost of the raids: The recent protests and riots in Los Angeles have cost the city \$20m in police overtime and vandalism repairs, a city official estimated this week. The unrest erupted after federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents detained large numbers of immigrants in a largely Hispanic neighbourhood (see page 11). Traders at a local market reported this week that many of their workers – an estimated third of whom in the state are foreign-born – and customers had failed to turn up, for fear of further raids. ICE officials were recently given a target of arresting 3,000 migrants per day. Last week, President Trump exempted farms and hotels (which rely heavily on migrant labour) from the raids in response to industry pressure, only to U-turn days later.

Mexico City

Friendly judges: When Mexico's ruling Morena party proposed that the country should become the first in the world with an all-elected judiciary, it said the reform would make the system more accountable, and help root out corruption and nepotism. But now the result of the elections on 1 June are in, and the result is that Morena-aligned judges now dominate the supreme court and court circuits across the country, as well as a new tribunal that can investigate and dismiss judges, and the court that adjudicates in disputes over national elections. Morena came to power in 2018 under its left-populist founder Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who first proposed the reform. His successor and protégée, President Claudia Sheinbaum, called the election "extraordinary", although turnout was low, at around 13%.

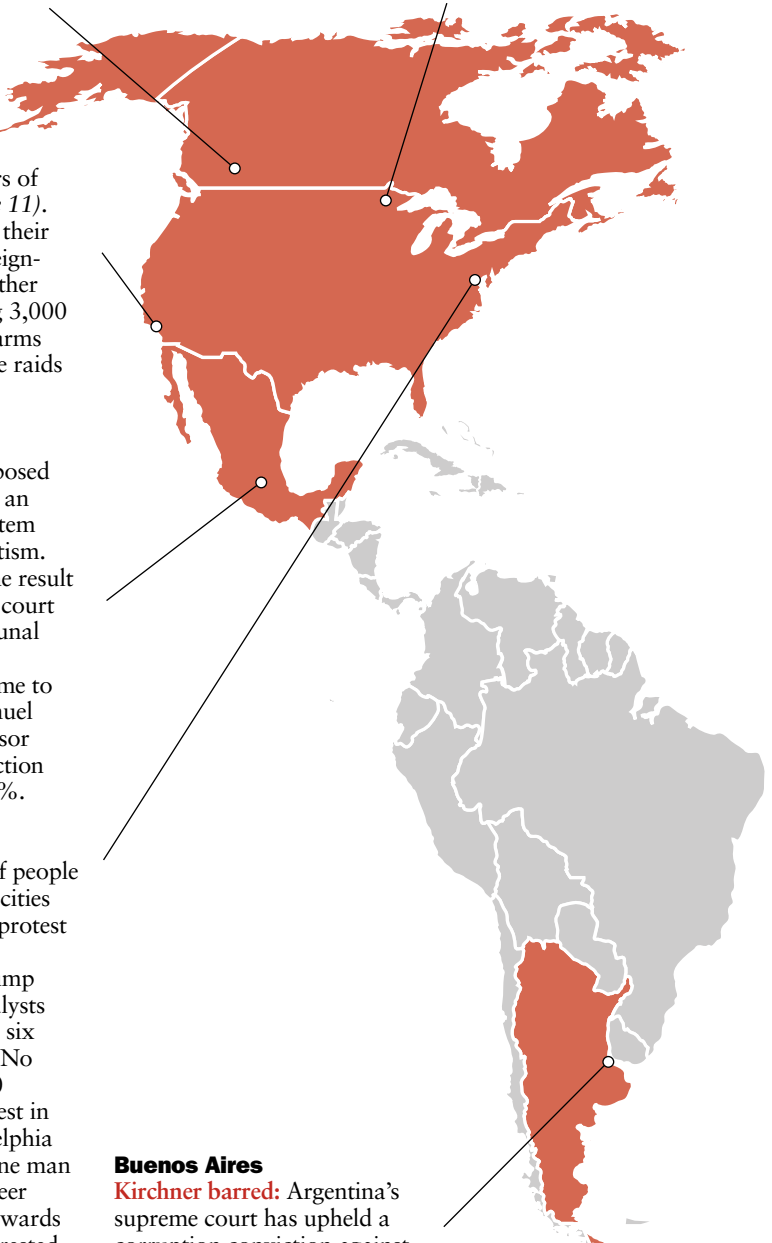
**New York**

"No Kings" protests: Millions of people took to the streets of towns and cities across America last Saturday to protest against what they regard as the authoritarian excesses of the Trump administration. Independent analysts estimated that between four and six million people took part in the "No Kings" protests in roughly 2,100 different locations, with the largest in New York, LA, Chicago, Philadelphia and Atlanta. In Salt Lake City, one man

was killed by a stray bullet when a "peacekeeping" volunteer opened fire on another individual who'd reportedly run towards the crowd with a raised rifle; the man with the rifle was arrested. The marches took place hours before President Trump presided over a grand military parade in Washington DC, to mark the 250th anniversary of the US army (which fell on his 79th birthday). Such parades are rare in the US, and critics described this one (which cost tens of millions of dollars to stage) as a wasteful vanity exercise on the part of the president. On Sunday, Trump responded to the No Kings protests by vowing to intensify his immigration crackdown in large Democratic-voting cities – alleging, without evidence, that the party was using "illegal aliens to expand their voter base".

**St Paul, Minnesota**

Democrat assassinated: The man suspected of the assassination of Melissa Hortman, the Democratic speaker of the Minnesota House of Representatives, and her husband Mark, was arrested after a two-day manhunt. Vance Boelter, 57 (pictured), is also thought to have shot and wounded Democrat state senator John Hoffman and his wife Yvonne. He had allegedly driven to the couples' homes in the early hours last Saturday disguised as a police officer. Prosecutors say a "hit list" of Democratic legislators and abortion-rights activists was found in his car, along with three assault rifles.

**Buenos Aires**

Kirchner barred: Argentina's supreme court has upheld a corruption conviction against ex-president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, barring her from public office and handing her a six-year custodial sentence. Kirchner was president from 2007-15 and is the leader of the opposition left-populist Justicialist Party, that has been a force in Argentinian politics since the 1940s. In 2022, a court found that she had corruptly steered construction contracts to associates. The top court's ruling came a week after Kirchner had unveiled plans for a political comeback. In Argentina, over-70s are usually offered home detention; Kirchner, 72, has been granted permission to serve her sentence at her residence in Buenos Aires.

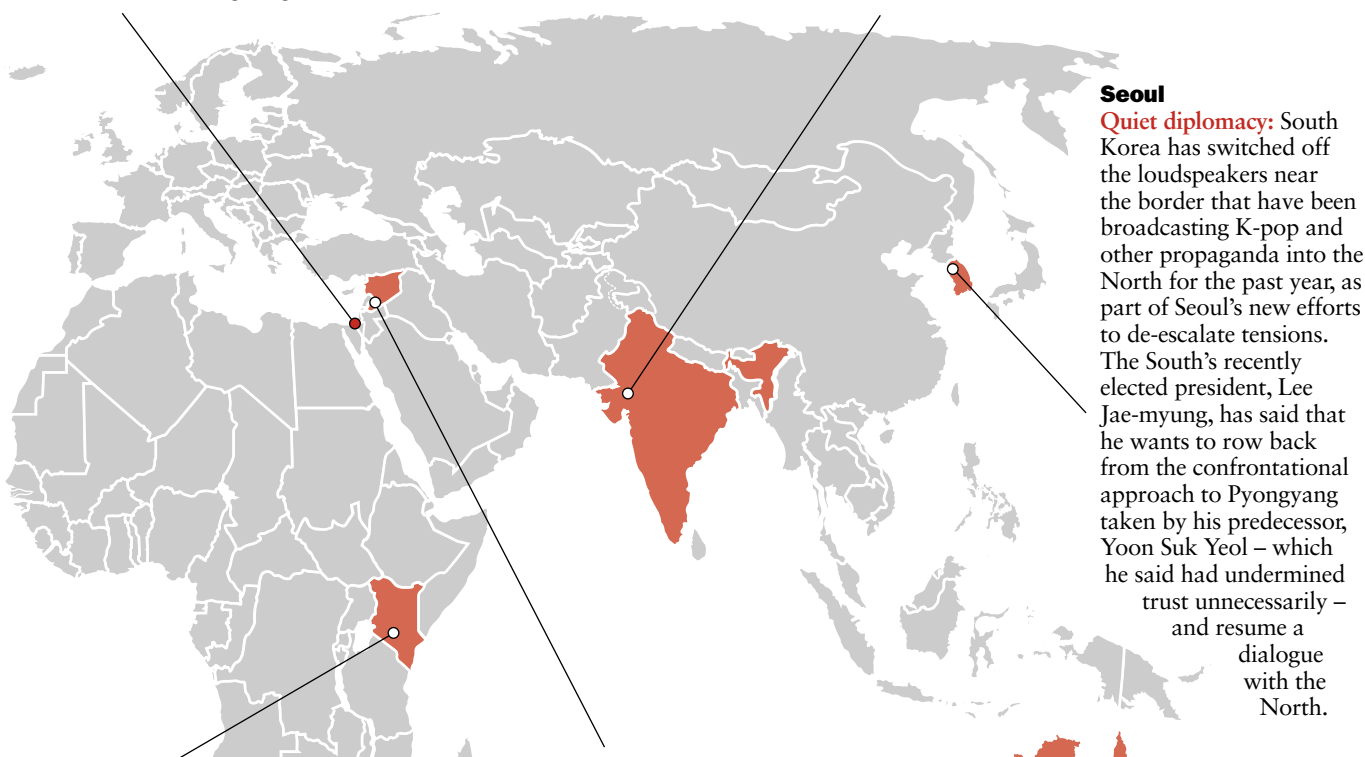
Gaza Strip, Palestinian Territories

Deadly aid: Dozens more Palestinians were shot dead this week in the vicinity of Israel-backed food distribution centres in Gaza. The four sites, which are run by the private US group the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, were set up to largely replace the UN-backed aid system that had been operating in the region until Israel imposed its blockade in March. Since their launch, Israeli forces have opened fire almost daily on Palestinians seeking to access them; at least 37 people were killed in an incident this week. As before, Israel said its troops had acted defensively. A further 51 people were reportedly killed when IDF forces shelled and fired on an area east of Khan Younis, where thousands of Palestinians had gathered in the hopes of getting flour from a World Food Programme site. The IDF said it was investigating the incident.

Ahmedabad, India

Plane tragedy: Investigators looking into the cause of last week's Air India disaster are reported to be focusing on engine failure and possible problems with the Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner's wing flaps and landing gear. Its black boxes have been recovered, along with a recording of the pilot's final call – "Thrust not achieved... falling... Mayday! Mayday!" – which he made seconds before the plane crashed into the ground, killing at least 279 people.

Flight AI 171 left Ahmedabad bound for London Gatwick at 1.39pm local time last Thursday, carrying 12 crew and 230 passengers, including 53 British nationals. Ten seconds later, at roughly 160 metres, its upward motion stalled; it then descended rapidly before crashing into a hostel housing medical students, 2km from the airport, and bursting into flames. The only survivor on board, British passenger Vishwash Kumar Ramesh, from Leicester, had crawled out of the burning wreckage from seat 11A, next to an emergency exit; 38 people were killed on the ground. The crash was the first ever to involve a Boeing 787-8, a model used by most major airlines.



Seoul

Quiet diplomacy: South Korea has switched off the loudspeakers near the border that have been broadcasting K-pop and other propaganda into the North for the past year, as part of Seoul's new efforts to de-escalate tensions. The South's recently elected president, Lee Jae-myung, has said that he wants to row back from the confrontational approach to Pyongyang taken by his predecessor, Yoon Suk Yeol – which he said had undermined trust unnecessarily – and resume a dialogue with the North.

Nairobi

Police killing: Hundreds of people have taken to the streets of Nairobi to protest about the death in custody of a teacher and blogger, who'd been arrested for criticising the country's deputy police chief. Police initially said that Albert Ojwang, 31, had fatally injured himself by banging his head against a wall, but an autopsy indicated that he'd been beaten. Two officers have been arrested and President William Ruto has promised an investigation. Nevertheless, the case has rekindled public outrage about police brutality in Kenya, where extrajudicial killings by security forces are common, but rarely prosecuted. Rights groups fear that Ojwang's death is part of a crackdown on youth-led dissent in the wake of last summer's anti-government protests.



Damascus

Beach "rules": Women in Syria have been asked to wear "burkinis" that cover their bodies when swimming at public beaches and pools, and loose-fitting clothing when on land. Officials have insisted that the directive is advisory, and that more revealing swimwear is not banned. However, the move has reignited fears that Syria's transition government, which toppled the secular Assad regime last year, might come under pressure from hardliners to impose a strict interpretation of Islam, in spite of President Ahmed al-Sharaa's pledge to protect the rights of women and minority groups.



Canberra

Aukus wobbles: Australian PM Anthony Albanese has welcomed reassurance that the UK and the US remain committed to the £176bn Aukus partnership. Last week, the Pentagon said that it was reviewing the Biden-era deal – part of which enables Australia to acquire nuclear submarines using US and British technology to help counter China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific – to ensure it is aligned with its "America First" agenda. That review is ongoing, but during a joint appearance with Donald Trump at G7, Keir Starmer said "we're proceeding" with Aukus.

Life on the outside

It has been two years since a Court of Appeal quashed Andrew Malkinson's wrongful rape conviction. But by the time his name was cleared, he had spent 17 years in jail, often alongside dangerous men; and he has struggled to adjust to life outside. He can't bear confined spaces; he says the sound of police sirens are "like glass in my head"; he experiences bouts of rage and despair; and though he loves science (he took an Open University maths degree in jail), he can no longer bear to read a book. "I think I read my eyeballs out under those terrible yellow strip lights in the cells," he told Emily Dugan in *The Sunday Times*. "I overdosed with book reading." He lives with his dog, Basil, in a housing association flat in Dorset, and he has ruled out starting a romantic relationship: he thinks he would be hard to live with, and is fearful of becoming vulnerable to another false rape accusation. "My life has been desolated," he says. As a young man, he loved to travel, and he plans to do so again. For now, though, he is busy campaigning to ensure that other victims of miscarriages of justice are treated better than he was. And that, at least, is going very well: thanks to him, those wrongly jailed no longer have the costs of prison lodgings deducted from compensation they receive; and thousands of potentially unsafe convictions are being re-examined. "It's a good feeling that something so

dreadful and tragic is leading to real change," he says. Now, "I want to change a lot more."

Playing the villain

As a character actor, Brad Dourif has certainly been prolific, says Chris Godfrey in *The Guardian*. He got his big break when he played Billy Bibbit in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and after that, offers of work just kept coming: in the 1990s, he appeared in up to seven films a year. Few were very distinguished, however. "It really was a pretty low bar that would keep me from doing a movie," he says. "But I always put my heart in it. I would somehow convince myself that we were going to make it good and, you know, I was always wrong!" He was mainly cast as villains, and while he didn't mind being pigeonholed, he began to hate how it made him feel. The first time he struggled to shake off a role was in *Mississippi Burning*, when he played a racist cop who beats his wife, played by Frances McDormand. On set, he recalls looking at her in makeup "after what I had done to her, and I suddenly felt like: 'Is this who I am? Is this what my life is?' And I got really depressed for about two, three years." Watching Wim Wenders' masterpiece *Wings of Desire* lifted him out of this funk. "There was a speech about what it was like to be alive, to be in the world. And that really changed me. It snapped me out of it. I just went: no, this is just my way of being alive."



One of the most garlanded actresses of her generation, Kathy Bates has won an array of awards, including an Oscar and two Golden Globes. Yet right from the start of her career, she had to put up with people suggesting to her that she does not look like a film star, says David Cranfield in *Vanity Fair*. When she was young, her own father told her acting teacher that she wasn't "conventionally attractive". In 1991, she was passed over for the lead role in *Frankie and Johnny*, even though she'd originated it on stage to great acclaim. The film's director, Garry Marshall, didn't think she'd look "romantic" kissing the male lead on screen. A journalist was moved to inform her that "You're not Michelle Pfeiffer." It made the search for good parts more arduous than it need have been, and even when they did turn up, she had to put up with barbed comments: once, Aidan Quinn, who played her on-screen husband in the drama *At Play in the Fields of the Lord*, was asked (in her presence) if it was "believable" that he'd be married to her. "I went upstairs, I locked the door, and I cried like a kindergartner," she recalls. For years, she felt invisible in Hollywood. But at 76, she is experiencing a career renaissance, and being offered a wide range of meaty roles. "It's sweet revenge," she says. "Oh, Miss Beauty Queen, you had a career up until your 40s and you can't work? Too bad!"

Castaway of the week

This week's edition of *Radio 4's Desert Island Discs* featured the politician and campaigner Lord Alf Dubs

- 1 *Má Vlast, JB1:112: No. 2, Vltava (The Moldau)* by Smetana, performed by Czech Philharmonic Orchestra (cond. Jiří Bělohlávek)
- 2 *She's Leaving Home* by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, performed by The Beatles
- 3* *It's Easy To Remember (Take 4)* by Lorenz Hart and Richard Rogers, performed by the John Coltrane Quartet
- 4 *Danny Boy* by Frederic Weatherly, performed by Daniel O'Donnell
- 5 *Horn Concerto No. 1 in D major, K. 412: I. Allegro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, performed by Barry Tuckwell, Academy of Saint Martin in the Fields (cond. Neville Marriner)
- 6 *Take This Waltz* by Leonard Cohen and Federico García Lorca, performed by Leonard Cohen
- 7 *Bandiera Rossa* by Carlo Tuzzi, performed by Canzoniere delle Lame
- 8 *Ode to Joy* by Beethoven, performed by Gewandhausorchester Leipzig (cond. Herbert Blomstedt)

Book: *Germinal* by Émile Zola

Luxury: walking boots

* Choice if allowed only one record

Viewpoint:**On drawing**

"Drawing is the thing you do to understand something, to make it more present in your mind. It is central to understanding and interpreting the world around us. Drawing allows you to see the world more clearly. It's not just about recording reality, but about understanding it in a deeper, more intimate way. The act of drawing forces the artist to slow down, take note of details and look at the world. It's really about noticing, about being alert, being aware, and then showing what you see in a way that speaks to others. It's that act of noticing, of translating what you see and feel, that gives it its profound significance." *David Hockney, quoted in The Times*

Farewell

Alfred Brendel, celebrated pianist who was the first to record all of Beethoven's solo piano works, died 17 June, aged 94.

Violeta Chamorro, post-civil war president of Nicaragua, died 14 June, aged 95.

Kathleen Hughes, sci-fi movie "scream queen" star of *It Came from Outer Space*, died 19 May, aged 96.

Kim Woodburn, sharp-witted star of *How Clean is Your House?*, died 16 June, aged 83.

The Black Lives Matter protests, five years on

In June 2020, the US and much of Europe were convulsed by the anti-racist Black Lives Matter protests

What are the movement's origins?

It emerged in the aftermath of the killing of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old African American who, in 2012, was shot dead in Florida by George Zimmerman, a white self-appointed neighbourhood watch volunteer. The following year, Zimmerman was found not guilty of murder and manslaughter – a verdict met with anguish by African Americans. Alicia Garza, a community organiser, wrote on Facebook that “I continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter”, and a friend, Patrisse Cullors, shared it online with the hashtag #blacklivesmatter. With another activist, Opal Tometi, they created an online movement, which gained traction following the killing of two black men by police in the summer of 2014: Eric Garner in New York and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri – which sparked weeks of protest and riots. Activists involved in the Ferguson protests set up a decentralised network across the US.

What made it grow so big?

A mixture of social and technological factors. US police shoot a lot of people: about 1,000 in 2018 (around 66 times the UK's per capita rate). And of these 23% were black, though African Americans make up only 14% of the population. At the time, police who killed tended not to face justice; neither Garner's nor Brown's killers were indicted. BLM activists were keenly aware of this and other “structural inequalities”, as they called them, such as an incarceration rate five times higher for black people than whites. BLM was a creature of social media and the smartphone: activists mobilised online, while phone videos of police brutality provided evidence that galvanised outrage. In addition, the Covid lockdowns stoked a febrile political atmosphere. These factors came together in the case of George Floyd, who was arrested on 25 May 2020 in Minneapolis following reports that he had bought cigarettes using a counterfeit \$20 bill. Police officers pinned him to the ground; Derek Chauvin, filmed by onlookers, pressed his knee on Floyd's neck. After eight minutes 46 seconds (revised by prosecutors to nine minutes 29 seconds), Floyd died.

What happened next?

His death sparked mass protests in the US and around the world. By early July 2020, up to 26 million Americans are thought to have protested at more than 4,700 demonstrations; several hundred riots erupted. Tens of thousands marched in Europe, Australia, Africa, Asia and Latin America; protests took place in more than 60 countries. Floyd's words, “I can't breathe”, became a global slogan. From Eminem to Keir Starmer, people “took the knee” – a gesture popularised by the American football player Colin Kaepernick. According to Facebook, 28 million people took part in “blackout Tuesday” on 2 June, in which users logged off or posted black squares in solidarity.

What were the movement's aims?

Compared to those of the earlier civil rights movement, they were vague



A George Floyd placard at a protest in NYC, June 2020

and utopian. BLM aimed not just to combat police brutality against black people, but also to challenge “systemic racism” – to “heal the past, reimagine the present, and invest in the future of Black lives through policy change”, as its website states. One of its best known goals was to “defund the police”. This meant calling for government funds to be redistributed away from law enforcement and criminal justice to welfare projects, thus addressing the root causes of crime. In some cases, though, BLM activists wanted to go beyond defunding. Chicago activist Jessica Disu declared: “We need to abolish the police, period.”

Were the police defunded?

Not as a rule, but in some cases: more than 20 US cities cut some \$840m from police departments, with \$160m being invested in community services, according to an analysis by Interrupting Criminalisation. In Austin, Texas, money was redirected to social programmes, notably homeless shelters. The city claimed success: violent crime decreased by 14.5% between 2021 and 2024. In Portland, Oregon, though, the experiment was a disaster. Some \$15m was slashed from police budgets. Violent crime – shootings, homicides, car theft – and disorder surged and funding was mostly restored by 2021.

Did BLM achieve its wider aims?

It certainly raised awareness of police brutality and racism, and drove policing reforms: more than 140 state and local laws were passed in the US, banning chokeholds, mandating the use of body cameras, and increasing civilian oversight of police. But its effect on policing has been ambiguous. Criminologists identified a “Minneapolis effect”, whereby protests led to both a reduction in police brutality, as police trod more softly, and a clear spike in crime and homicides (often badly affecting black communities). And, in 2024, the national number of fatal police killings reached a record high of 1,365. Meanwhile, there was a major political backlash against BLM – not helped by the fact that some of its leaders were accused of corruption. Patrisse Cullors faced criticism for purchasing homes worth \$3m; one board member of

BLM's Global Network Foundation was accused of embezzling \$10m.

BLM in the UK

The British wing of BLM dates to 2016, and in its early days campaigned over deaths in police custody, and on issues such as the Windrush scandal and the Grenfell tower fire. The movement surged after George Floyd's death, with mass protests in London, Manchester, Leeds and beyond. The toppling of the slave trader Edward Colston's statue in Bristol during a BLM march on 7 June 2020 became a defining image, prompting fierce national debates about Britain's colonial legacy – and launching what became known as the “statue wars”. At the Euros in 2021, England's football team took the knee, to boos and applause.

In response, then-PM Boris Johnson set up The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities to analyse the impact of racism in the UK. Chairman Tony Sewell concluded: “we no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities”.

He found that wealth, culture and geography were more important – conclusions met with scorn by black and minority ethnic organisations. As in the US, BLM UK was accused of financial irregularities: in Bristol, Xahra Saleem was jailed for embezzling £32,000 of BLM donations. Also as in the US, it survives to this day, but in a much lower-profile form.

Why was there a backlash?

BLM – utopian, Marxist-leaning, an LGBTQ+ ally – became a symbol of “woke” excess. Donald Trump declared BLM “a symbol of hate”, proclaiming it “inherently racist... because all lives matter”. During the 2020 protests, he reportedly asked his officials why police couldn't “just shoot them in the legs”. Politically, he has made hay from the rioting and disorder. The Democrat strategist James Carville blamed his party's 2024 defeat on the “stench” of identity politics, saying that “defund the police” were “the three stupidest words in the English language”. Since his re-election, Trump has rescinded dozens of “diversity, equity and inclusion” directives. In March, Elon Musk urged him in a tweet to “think about” pardoning Derek Chauvin.

The railway that's gobbling up our future

Simon Jenkins

The Guardian

The Chancellor made no mention of it last week in her spending announcements: the only reference was in a single sentence in a Whitehall handout. If my eye hadn't alighted on it, I'd never have discovered "the elephant in the room", says Simon Jenkins. Over the rest of this parliament, said the sentence, the Government is committed to spending a further £25.3bn on HS2. £25.3bn! That's more than a fifth of the entire investment budget, way more than the outlay on prisons and classrooms. No wonder Rachel Reeves feared to mention it. "The whole of Whitehall now knows HS2 makes no sense." Its northern legs to Leeds and Manchester have both been axed, stripping the project of all "levelling up" value, yet by the time it's completed in the mid-2030s, it could cost close to £100bn according to some reports. Labour should have knocked the scheme on the head the day it won power. It could still do so now, "recouping some billions from selling HS2 land". Just think how many hospitals and schools you could build just by cancelling a railway line from London to Birmingham.

Let's show a red card to the digital ID card

David Frost

The Daily Telegraph

Here we go again, says David Frost. The Government is flirting with the idea of introducing digital ID cards. It's the answer to illegal immigration, goes the cry: it will deter people from crossing the Channel to work here illegally. Really? We need to "give a digital ID to 70 million people to stop 0.05% of that number arriving illegally"? Don't employers already have to ensure that any foreign national has a visa? If many don't bother to demand to see this "boring analogue document", why would they a digital one? What makes digital ID cards so much more insidious than analogue ones is that, overnight, they can "shapeshift" into an instrument of control. During the Covid pandemic we had to display proof of our vaccine status on our phones to access certain places: it's not hard to imagine a future government using like technology to police people's access to, say, unhealthy foods or social media accounts. Sure, we readily hand over our data to commercial firms. But they can't control your life. Governments can. A digital ID would make it "all too easy" for them to do so.

Half in love with the dark satanic mills

Editorial

The Economist

Fixated on factories. That's what governments are these days, says The Economist. By boosting manufacturing they're convinced that they can create jobs for the unskilled, bolster national security and speed growth. Wrong on all counts. Today's highly automated factories don't create many jobs: and those they do create are mainly for technicians and engineers. Since 2013, the number doing factory work globally has, according to Economist research, shrunk by 6%, even as output has risen 5% by value. And neither does reindustrialisation make nations safer: as we learnt in the pandemic, diverse supply chains are "more resilient than national ones". Also mistaken is the idea that manufacturing is essential for growth: India is growing at pace despite its lagging factory output, while China has been struggling to meet growth targets, even as its manufacturers have come to dominate entire sectors such as electric cars. So let's junk this notion we can only compete with China by adopting protectionism and emulating its state-led economy. Britain and its allies need to work together as a rival bloc that champions open trade, not get hung up on reviving manufacturing and competing "for jobs that no longer exist".

"The liveliest effusions of wit and humour"

Lucy Mangan

The i Paper

People like me tend to romanticise the novel, says Lucy Mangan: we think it's the greatest way "of learning how to live", of getting inside the heads of others, of showing how language works. How depressing then to learn from the latest annual survey by the National Literacy Trust that children's enjoyment of reading has fallen to its lowest level since records began. Inevitable, perhaps: they're too distracted by all the messages, videos and games on their screens. What gets me, though, is the number of digital sophisticates who don't see this as a tragedy. Fear not, they say: the shift from paper to interactive screens is just progress – akin to "printing making scribes redundant". No. Books have a power not just as a store of accumulated wisdom, but as physical objects. Their pages light up the same parts of our brain maps do. Studies show that when we read from them we "engage more deeply and retain more information for longer" than when scanning screen images. I can only pity the digital natives who do not know what joys their disjointed state of being "leaves for ever out of reach".

IT MUST BE TRUE... I read it in the tabloids

The Ghana Drunkards Association has issued an ultimatum to the government to reduce the prices of alcoholic beverages, or face a massive nationwide protest from its membership, which it claims is 16.65 million strong. Moses Obuah, believed to be the association's leader, complained that the strength of the Ghanaian currency, the cedi, should have made alcohol cheaper by reducing import prices, but hasn't. The association, which speaks for both drinkers and bar owners, is known for its forceful public interventions.



Bars of soap made from the bathwater of the Hollywood actress Sydney Sweeney sold out immediately when they went on sale last week, and were soon being offered on eBay for \$2,000. Sweeney apparently often receives strange requests from dedicated fans. "When your fans start asking for your bathwater, you can either ignore it, or turn it into a bar of Dr Squatch soap," she said in a press release. The soap, originally sold for \$8, also contains pine bark and exfoliating sand.

As unemployment rises among young Chinese people, a growing number are paying fees to "work" in pretend offices. For the equivalent of about \$4 to \$7 a day, the companies offer desks, lunchrooms, coffee and Wi-Fi. The faux workers can pay extra to pretend to be a manager with an office. "Most of us are just there because it's interesting," said Xu Lin, a content creator. Da Neng Mao, a builder, said he hopes showing up at his fake firm "may create a job opportunity".

Trump's deportation drive: the crackdown on "illegal aliens"

Six armed men showed up outside Linda Shafiroff's office the other day in her sleepy New England town, said Catherine Rampell in [The Washington Post](#). They arrived in unmarked cars, wearing masks. The men approached a Hispanic gardener in the car park and led him into a vehicle. When Shafiroff asked them to show ID or a warrant, they refused. They claimed to be immigration officials, but for all anyone knew they could have been "a ragtag vigilante group, arbitrarily snatching brown-looking people off the street". It's not the sort of thing you expect to see in America, but raids like this are happening across the nation as the administration steps up its deportation drive. It has unsettled even supporters of the immigration crackdown, said Jack Healy in [The New York Times](#). As a Trump voter in a rural Missouri county put it: "No one voted to deport moms. We were all under the impression we were just getting rid of the gangs, the people who came here in droves."



An ICE arrest outside San Diego's immigration court in May

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has traditionally focused on removing those implicated in crimes, said Eric Levitz on [Vox](#). But to speed up deportations, top White House adviser Stephen Miller reportedly instructed the agency in May to start targeting undocumented workers at random. Since then, ICE has arrested people in shops, nail salons, farms, maternity wards and court buildings. The irony is that these tougher tactics were triggered by Trump's success in deterring border crossings. During the Biden presidency, when border agents were encountering 200,000 migrants a month, it was easy for the government to rack up high deportation numbers by turning many new arrivals around almost on the spot. But now that Trump has reduced border encounters to less than 12,000 a month, deportations are happening at a slower pace

than under Biden. That comparison "apparently displeased Trump".

The administration was right to instigate a firm course correction, said Bradley Devlin in [The American Conservative](#). Immigration levels have run out of control in recent years. In January, the US Census Bureau reported that legal and illegal immigrants made up 15.8% of the population, "a full percentage point higher than the previous record set in 1890". Over Biden's four-year term, the foreign-born population increased by 8.3 million. America faces a choice between "mass deportations or mass

amnesty" – and it's obvious which option is better. Trump was elected not just to restore order to the border, but also to expel those with no right to be in the US. Illegal aliens, on average, claim more in benefits than they pay in taxes. The president is, in his heavy-handed way, responding to genuine public anxieties, said David Ignatius in [The Washington Post](#). The mood would have been different if the Democrats hadn't, for years, behaved "as though border enforcement doesn't matter".

Trump is nevertheless aware of the risks of overdoing it, said the [New York Post](#). Last week, he claimed that he didn't want to see people who had worked in the US for decades deported. "We're going to have to use a lot of common sense," he said. It's going to be a hard balance, said Nicole Narea on [Vox](#). Trump, who has himself employed undocumented workers at his hotels and resorts, is wary of alienating too many voters and causing too much disruption to businesses. But as a candidate, he repeatedly promised to deport "millions and millions" of illegal aliens. He has "a political imperative to deliver – or at least give the appearance of delivering" – on his signature pledge.

Where are you, Barack Obama?

Mark Leibovich

[The Atlantic](#)

In these troubled times for America, says Mark Leibovich, the country could do with hearing a bit more from Barack Obama. The former president is still "the most popular Democrat alive", and his communication skills remain as brilliant as ever. Yet he rarely contributes to public debate these days. "His 'audacity of hope' presidency has given way to the fierce lethargy of semi-retirement." His aloofness from the fray feels "jarringly incongruous" in the current political climate. It would be one thing if Obama had disappeared off the scene, perhaps to take up painting like George W. Bush, but he remains very much in the public eye, often cropping up in glamorous settings with famous acquaintances. He's just not saying much of note. In his defence, friends say that he wants to ration his interventions so that they retain some impact, and he doesn't become just another "hack commentator". Aides say that he doesn't want to overshadow the next generation of Democrats, and that he spends a lot of time talking privately to candidates and officials. These are all fair points. The fact is, though, that these are "not normal times" and the Democrats are in a state of complete disarray. Until a new leader emerges, the party – and America – needs Obama to speak up.

It's inevitable: Hollywood is doomed

Christian Schneider

[National Review](#)

Hollywood has fallen on hard times, says Christian Schneider. Once the undisputed capital of the film and television industry, it's fast losing business, owing to its high production costs and new competition from other states and countries offering tax credits to film crews. Only about a fifth of US films and TV shows are now shot in LA. Politicians have belatedly woken up to this crisis, but their solutions will only make things worse. California's governor, Gavin Newsom, has proposed hiking the state's film tax credit, "effectively forcing taxpayers to subsidise the entertainment industry". President Trump, meanwhile, wants to slap a 100% tariff on movies filmed overseas. That would just push up costs, and misses the target in any case, because what's really killing Hollywood is not offshoring, but new technology. It once made sense to base the movie industry around a Californian hub where crews, actors and executives could congregate, and the weather allowed for year-round filming. But people can now create theatre-quality movies without expensive equipment; today there are theatre-quality films made on iPhones, and publicised on social media. They don't need the studio system. Given how lifelike AI-generated characters are becoming, they soon won't need actors either. Neither tax breaks nor tariffs are going to save Hollywood from the inevitable.

Spain's corruption scandal: a godsend to the far-right?

Spain's prime minister, the former economics lecturer Pedro Sánchez, first came to power back in 2018 after a historic no-confidence vote provoked by anger at corruption in the ruling conservative People's Party (PP). Promising to clean up the government, he went on to lead his Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) to victory in the next year's election and, together with the far-left party Podemos, formed Spain's first coalition government since democracy was restored in 1978. In his seven years as PM he has survived a number of "very serious" crises, said *El País*

(Madrid). But none seem comparable to the one that "knocked him out" last Thursday. Late in the afternoon, the Socialist Party leader appeared at a press conference with a "funereal" look on his face, to beg – eight times – for forgiveness over a long-running corruption scandal in which his right-hand man, Santos Cerdán, stands accused of being an accomplice in a scheme to award public contracts in exchange for money. The PM had stood by Cerdán for months and refused to speak to the press. But last week he admitted he should "never have trusted" him. "I have always worked for clean politics," Sánchez insisted.

Who's he kidding? said Albert Sáez in *El Periódico* (Barcelona). This kickbacks swindle goes right to the Socialist Party's "core" – Sánchez had to have known about it. And this is only the latest in a string of scandals that have dragged Spanish public life "down to the sewers", said Pilar Rahola in the same paper. The PM's wife and brother are being investigated for influence peddling; the attorney general is set to go on trial for leaking confidential information in a tax fraud case; the government is accused of targeting the police unit investigating Sánchez's wife. Spanish politics has "plummeted into the deepest quagmire, and no one seems capable of stopping the free fall". The Socialists aren't entirely to blame, said Joaquín Urias in *Público* (Madrid). Ceasing "to act as a neutral arbiter", some of our judges, in league with the conservative opposition, are waging political



Sánchez: "I have always worked for clean politics"

lawfare against Sánchez's coalition. The attorney general himself is now being forced to stand trial for leaking confidential information, though there's no evidence for it whatsoever. And the opposition People's Party (PP) have some neck for organising a march against Sánchez's government, under the banner "mafia or democracy?" said David Torres in the same paper. The last time the PP were in power, several of its officials were convicted in one of Spain's biggest corruption scandals, while the party's current leader is the close friend of a drug trafficker.

Whoever's to blame, all this mud-slinging is beginning to take its toll, said Óscar R. Buznego in *La Nueva España* (Oviedo). The economy may be doing well, but Spaniards are increasingly gloomy about the state of our democracy. And who can blame them, said Astrid Barrio in *El Periódico*. Sánchez has clung on through seven years of chaos and incompetence – from serious unrest in Catalonia, the Covid pandemic, deadly floods in Valencia, and a disastrous blackout across the Iberian peninsula. Throughout, his minority governments have been fragile: legislative activity has stalled; no annual state budget has been voted on for two years. At this point, said José Antonio Gómez in *Diario 16* (Madrid), there's only one "viable solution" to break the permacrisis: we need an election.

Be careful what you wish for, said Aitor Hernández-Morales on *Político* (Brussels). The last few years have been "a godsend for Spain's far-right": the ultranationalist Vox party, surging off the back of the idea that Spain's democratic system is "rotten", could deliver a real shock at the polls. Sánchez is resisting calls for a snap election, said *El Periódico*, insisting he'll serve the rest of his term until 2027. And he's certainly shown a capacity for "emerging alive from the worst of predicaments". Yet with so much pressure building, the end seems nigh, be it through "slow agony" as he clings on, or "sudden death" at the voters' hands.

JAPAN

How to rescue a generation of recluses

The Japan Times
(Tokyo)

"Over one million people live in social isolation in Japan today," cut off from work, education and even family, says Chaa Chaa Ogino – 1.46 million people, or 2% of those aged 15 to 62, according to a 2022 government survey. *Hikikomori*, meaning "pulling inward", is the Japanese term for this acute social withdrawal, popularly associated with young men living in "dark bedrooms", though "the reality is broader". "A significant proportion of *hikikomori* are in their 30s, 40s and even 50s"; many have lost jobs, "and fear judgement". Many are women. The problem is growing, and solving it is difficult. *Hikikomori* are often told by those around them to "just get a job", or to seek help. But "healing from years of silence, trauma and isolation" is not easy. Hospital care is "rigid" and other interventions are short-term; if there's no response after one or two visits, most just "stop knocking". The schemes that work involve challenging negative perceptions and building up confidence over many hours. It's well worth it, both for the *hikikomori* and for the nation at large, with its shrinking population and worker shortages. "Japan cannot afford to lose another generation to disconnection."

ARGENTINA

Get your hands off our stash

Clarín
(Buenos Aires)

Javier Milei's chainsaw can't fix everything, says Pablo Vaca. The president's austerity measures have definitely helped the economy in many ways: since he took office in 2023, inflation has fallen to a manageable 2% monthly, the exchange rate has stabilised, and the budget is actually running a surplus. But none of that is enough to persuade Argentines to stop stashing their US dollars "in the mattress". Milei says his next step is to remonetise the economy by encouraging people to start spending the \$271bn in hard currency they have squirrelled away at home. Penalties for failing to declare assets to the taxman will be waived, he says; all will be forgiven. But Argentines have been traumatised by decades of failed monetary reforms. There was the Convertibility Law, which pegged the peso to the dollar but brought a debt crisis; the "sadistic" 2001 *corralito*, that tried to stop a bank run by limiting our ability to withdraw our own cash; and then the forced pesification, that converted our dollar-denominated bank deposits into pesos. Each time, most of us ended up poorer and some lost everything. Now we won't be willing "to get the money out of the mattress" and into the bank without hard proof that, when we ask for it, banks will actually give us our money back.

What the scientists are saying...

A warning to “skinny jab” users

The new “wonder drug” weight-loss jabs may stop the contraceptive pill working, the regulatory body for medicines has warned. In a safety alert, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said that women taking Mounjaro shouldn’t rely only on oral contraceptives; to avoid unwanted pregnancies, they should use condoms too, or switch to an alternative method of contraception, such as the coil. The regulator has received more than 40 reports of pregnancies in women who were taking drugs including Mounjaro, Ozempic and Wegovy. These GLP-1 drugs slow the emptying of the stomach, and it is thought that this, along with the diarrhoea and vomiting they can cause, may stop the Pill from being absorbed properly. The MHRA said GLP-1 drugs should not be taken by women who are pregnant, trying to get pregnant or breastfeeding, as there has been insufficient research into whether it is safe for babies. There is also concern that the jabs may prevent some forms of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) from working properly.

Have vegetarians got tougher?

Vegetarians used to be stereotyped as mild-mannered, peace-loving sorts. But if that ever had any truth in it, it doesn’t seem to any more. According to new research, vegetarians today tend to be more ambitious and less kind than meat eaters. For the study, researchers showed more than 3,500 adults images of fictional people alongside descriptions such as “being very successful is important to him” and “thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to her”. The participants – about 800 of whom were vegetarians – were then asked how much



The Moon: a rich source of platinum

of themselves they saw in that person, on a scale from one (not like me at all) to six (very much like me). The results indicated that the vegetarians were slightly more likely to align themselves with values linked to power and social status than meat eaters; and they prized benevolence less. They also had more of an appetite for “novelty and challenge”. Lead researcher Professor John Nezlek, of SWPS University, Warsaw, suggested that the difference may reflect the fact that you have to be quite tough, mentally, to stick to a vegetarian diet in the face of mockery or criticism.

The \$1trn opportunity on the Moon

The craters that pockmark the surface of the Moon may hold a trillion dollars’ worth of precious metals, left behind by the asteroids that created them, a Canadian-American team has found. The figure is a rough estimate, based on assessments about how many asteroids containing

platinum group metals (PGMs) are likely to have crashed into the Moon, at a velocity low enough to have left significant remnants behind. The researchers concluded that, out of the approximately 1.3 million craters on the Moon with a diameter of more than a kilometre, nearly 6,500 were made by asteroids containing commercial quantities of the PGMs ruthenium, rhodium, palladium, osmium, iridium and platinum. PGMs are in high demand on Earth for use in everything from cancer drugs to catalytic converters. We mine 600,000kg of them a year. The team estimate that on the Moon, there are about 30 million kilograms of them. The fact that gravity on the Moon is a sixth of that on Earth, and that it has no supply of water, would make the process of extracting them very challenging, said lead author Dr Jayanth Chennamangalam, but it would be easier than trying to gather PGMs on the asteroids themselves – an idea that has sometimes been mooted.

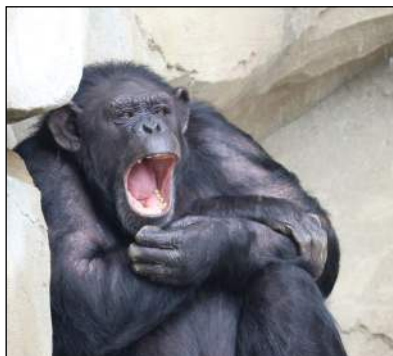
Using soundwaves to kill tumours

Patients with liver cancer are to be offered a groundbreaking new treatment that uses high-frequency ultrasound to destroy tumours. Known as histotripsy, the non-invasive treatment uses soundwaves to expand microbubbles of gas that occur naturally within tumours. When the bubbles pop, they release energy that tears apart the cancer cells, without damaging surrounding tissue. Treatment is delivered in a single session, lasting as little as 30 minutes. Histotripsy was approved by regulators in the US in 2023, and later this year, it will be used for the first time in Europe, at Addenbrooke’s Hospital in Cambridge, using a US-made Edison histotripsy system, acquired with the support of the Li Ka Shing Foundation.

Why yawning is contagious

Yawning is well known to be contagious: studies show that more than two-thirds of us are likely to yawn after seeing someone else doing so. The phenomenon has also been observed between species: dogs, for instance, may “catch” yawns from their owners. It is not clear why this happens. One theory is that the contagion is an indicator of empathy. But new research suggests an alternative explanation: that it evolved to help synchronise sleep patterns.

For the study, scientists filmed 14 chimps in an animal sanctuary as they watched a robotic head that had been designed to make a range of facial expressions, including yawning. They found that the chimps didn’t yawn at all when they saw the robot with its mouth tightly closed. There were some yawns when the bot’s mouth was slightly open, but the most occurred when it shut its eyes and yawned extravagantly. In response to this, some of the chimps not only yawned, but also gathered bedding and lay down, suggesting that the yawn had made them think it was time to rest, said the researchers from City St George’s, University of London.



Baby food alert

Supermarket aisles groan with jars and sachets of baby foods, many of which are marketed as healthy options, packed with vegetables and “goodness”. But nutritionists have long warned that these processed foods often contain high levels of sugar – and now the NHS has advised parents that they should be used only occasionally, and not seen as an “everyday” food. On its Start for Life website, it advises parents that if they do buy ready-made products, they should check the labels and opt for those with the least sugar, and that they should not let babies suck food from the pouches, as this can cause tooth decay. The site also urges parents not to start their baby on solids before about six months – even if the packaging says that the food is appropriate for babies from four months. Baby snacks, such as vegetable straws, should not be given before 12 months.

Pick of the week's *Gossip*

One of **John Lennon**'s letters to his future wife Cynthia is expected to sell for up to £40,000 at auction next month. Running to four pages, it was written from Hamburg in 1962. In it, the 21-year-old complains about Paul McCartney snoring in the top bunk, and says he can't wait to get home. "I love love love you and I'm missing you like mad... I wish I was on the way to your flat with the Sunday papers and chocies [sic] and a throbber. Oh yes!"



Rod Stewart may have no more lands to conquer in the rock world – but that doesn't mean his ambition has died down. The rocker has built a sprint track on his estate in Essex – with a view to becoming the fastest man over 80. So far, his top speed on the 100 metres is 19 seconds, and he admits he will probably never beat the record of 14.21 seconds, but he plans to keep trying, if only "to stay in shape and feed my competitive appetite".

Frederick Forsyth – the journalist, spy and thriller writer, who died last week aged 86 – wrote his books on a manual typewriter, remaining wedded to the technology long after his peers had gone digital. He trusted it, he explained. One of his early machines was a steel-cased portable. "It had a crease across the lid which was done by a bullet in Biafra. It just kept tapping away. It didn't need power, it didn't need batteries, it didn't need recharging." There was no risk of sending text into the cybersphere by accident. "And have you ever tried to hack into my typewriter? It's very secure."

Ballymena: torn apart by race riots

Youths hurling bricks and petrol bombs at the police; baton rounds being fired in return; barricades set on fire. Such scenes are not unfamiliar in Northern Ireland, said Richard Kay in the *Daily Mail*. The disorder, in the town of Ballymena last week, was not triggered by sectarian tensions, however, but by the news that two 14-year-old boys charged with the attempted rape of a local girl had needed a Romanian translator. Over three nights, mobs ransacked and torched the homes of migrant families. Dozens were forced to move out. Others put Union flags in their windows, or signs reading "Locals live here" or "Filipino lives here", in a desperate but not always successful bid to avoid being targeted. In the town of Larne, a leisure centre was set alight after it was reported to be sheltering migrants who'd fled the attacks. The police condemned the rioting as "racially motivated"; yet in Ballymena, people had a more nuanced explanation: they spoke of a recent influx of migrants, many of Roma heritage, that has radically altered their community, and led to a surge in crime and antisocial behaviour.



Burning cars in Ballymena last week

During the Troubles, Northern Ireland did not receive many migrants, said *The Guardian* – for obvious reasons. That people from all over Europe and beyond now settle there, albeit at

rates lower than elsewhere in the UK, could be seen as a sign of progress. But it won't have felt that way to the families cowering in terror last week. Politicians from across the spectrum condemned the riots; but Unionists in particular stressed the existence of "legitimate" grievances. They should tread carefully. If migration has been poorly managed in towns such as Ballymena, where demographic shifts have been unusually rapid and concentrated, that should be addressed; but such talk, incautiously expressed, can inflame grievances in a region where tensions are easily exploited by the far-right groups that have "evolved through close ties to loyalist paramilitaries".

These groups say they're concerned for the safety of local women, said **Róisín Lanigan** in *The Observer*. Rubbish. Northern Ireland has always been a dangerous place to be female, but the rapes and beatings by local men don't lead to riots. Nor has Ballymena been "newly corrupted". The town, in the heart of the "Bible Belt", has a longstanding drug problem (in 2001, it was dubbed the "heroin capital" of the north), and a history of loyalist sectarian violence. In 2005, the council banned the film *Brokeback Mountain* because of its gay love story. Bigotry runs deep in the town; now it has a new target.

The NHS: can Wes Streeting fix it?

The political logic behind the Government's spending plans, revealed by Rachel Reeves last week, is "crude and probably correct", said John Rentoul in *The Independent*. Labour has three main priorities – the cost of living, immigration and the NHS – but there's not a great deal it can do about the first two. "It can talk about growth and hope for the best." It can try to persuade the French to stop the Channel boats. "That leaves the NHS" – and the Chancellor has "put all her chips" on it. The health service received by far the most generous settlement: spending will rise by 3% above inflation, or around £29bn a year, over this parliament. The budget for the NHS in England will soon be roughly equivalent to Portugal's GDP. The danger, of course, is that Reeves is just filling a leaky bucket: though NHS staffing has grown by 17% since before the pandemic, there have been only small increases in productivity, and the service is still in crisis. Next month, the Health Secretary Wes Streeting will have to explain how he's going to fix all this, when he publishes his ten-year plan for the NHS.

Streeting's plan will have three major themes, said **Laura Donnelly** in *The Daily Telegraph*. The NHS, he thinks, must go "from hospital to community, from analogue to digital ... from sickness to prevention". Care is usually easier, and cheaper, when it's close to home. The idea is

that overstretched local GPs will be backed up by neighbourhood health teams, which bring together a range of services: physiotherapists, nurses, podiatrists, and so on. This will also help to prevent illness, or at least to tackle it early – a key to lifting the pressure on the NHS. The problem is that neither of these ideas are new: every health secretary in living memory has pledged to make them happen. Streeting, though, says that the most significant of his themes is moving from analogue to digital. The NHS is "decades behind most modern industries". Bringing it up to date – buying more scanners, fixing web services, improving apps, introducing genome profiling – will, he says, be revolutionary.

For Labour's sake, it had better work, said **Andrew Rawnsley** in *The Observer*. Failing to fix the NHS will "greatly increase the chances that it loses the next election". It could be fatal for the health service, too, said **Shaun Lintern** in *The Times*. At the annual NHS Confederation conference in Manchester last week, there was "a palpable concern that, if the NHS fails to deliver, it could finally, after 77 years, run out of credit with the public". The latest British Social Attitudes survey revealed that dissatisfaction with the NHS has reached its highest level since the survey began in 1983. Support is wavering. This could be the last chance for the NHS.

America: sliding into autocracy?

Is Donald Trump becoming a dictator, or just enjoying playing the part? It's getting harder to tell, said Susan B. Glasser in *The New Yorker*. At the weekend, tanks rolled through Washington as the president hosted a huge military parade on his 79th birthday. The event followed his recent decision to send troops into Los Angeles, against the express wishes of California's Democratic governor, to help quell unrest sparked by his immigration crackdown. Trump and his officials



"When they spit, we hit"

warned that they wouldn't hesitate to send troops into other US cities if needed. Last Thursday, federal agents handcuffed and forcibly removed one of California's senators, Alex Padilla, after he shouted a question at the Homeland Security chief Kristi Noem at a press conference. In his first term, Trump at least nodded to the idea of bipartisanship. Now, with his talk of the "enemy from within" and dismissal of dissent, he's not even pretending to. "This is the line that has been crossed."

Take all the warnings about America's slide into autocracy with a pinch of salt, said Gerard Baker in *The Times*. Does Trump enjoy posing as a "tough-on-crime leader"? Of course. But the fact remains that the levels of illegal immigration were allowed to run out of control under

President Biden, and it's the federal government's job to police the system. Trump has acted within the law, agreed Rich Lowry in *National Review*. Removing illegal aliens and deploying troops to protect federal personnel and property in Los Angeles does not make America a police state.

Trump is hardly the first US president to deploy troops on the home front, said Peggy Noonan in *The Wall Street Journal*. Others, though, have done so reluctantly and have been careful to explain their reasons to the public in measured tones. Trump, by contrast, acted as though he couldn't wait to start busting rioters' heads. "When they spit, we hit," he proclaimed. American presidents don't do that. Nor do they hold "braggadocious" military parades – they leave such things to smaller, more insecure nations. Nor, as Trump did last week at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, do they give highly partisan speeches in front of cheering uniformed troops. "You think this crowd would have showed up for Biden?" he cried, to elicit boos from the audience. Previous leaders knew better than to put members of the military in a position where they could be seen to be showing allegiance to a particular individual or party. America doesn't do those things, and it doesn't do them for good reasons.

Gibraltar: a deal for the Rock

"Get Brexit done." That was the Tory election slogan in 2019; but even after Britain formally left the EU the following year, there was still "substantial unfinished business", said Sean O'Grady in *The Independent*. One of the more intractable problems was Gibraltar, the 2.6-square-mile British overseas territory that shares a land border with Spain. As was the case with Northern Ireland, it was agreed that there should be no "hard border". So how to control the movement of goods and people without checks? "British, Spanish, and indeed Gibraltarian sensitivities proved irreconcilable" on the matter for years. But the problem was finally settled last week, when the UK, the EU and Spain signed an ingenious agreement that allows Britain to retain sovereignty over the Rock while continuing on its wise path towards closer ties with Brussels.



No "hard border" here

The deal is certainly good news for Gibraltar, whose then 33,658 population voted Remain by 96% in 2016, said *The Guardian*. The Rock's economy is heavily dependent on the 15,000 Spanish residents who cross the border to work there each day. It faced an "existential" threat if

their ability to do so wasn't secured. Now, it'll benefit from an agreement that removes all checks on people and goods crossing the land border with Spain. But at what cost to British sovereignty, asked Christopher Howarth in *The Critic*. The text of this deal hasn't been made public. But we know that it will allow Spanish officials to check passports at Gibraltar's airport and port; that Gibraltar will effectively become part of the EU's Schengen free-travel zone; and that, for Britons who wish to visit Gibraltar but don't live there, time spent on the Rock will count towards the 90 days they're allowed to stay in the EU. It is, in short, a disgraceful "sellout".

Nonsense, said *The Times*: the deal is a perfectly reasonable compromise. It does "virtually nothing" to prejudice Britain's claim to Gibraltar, with EU-UK checks at its air and sea ports akin to those carried out by the French at London's Eurostar terminal; and the trade-offs it entailed are a small price to pay for the economic and legal certainty it makes possible. Ignore the cries of "Brexit betrayal" from the usual quarters: this plan "deserves to be given a chance".

Wit & Wisdom

"The state is the great fiction by which everyone endeavours to live at the expense of everyone else."

The French economist Frédéric Bastiat, quoted in The Daily Telegraph

"Streams of oratory do not always come from mountains of thought."
Charles Grant, quoted in Forbes

"When the going gets tough the majority hurt the minority."
Lord Browne, quoted in The Times

"People with bad consciences always fear the judgement of children."
Mary McCarthy quoted on BBC Radio 4

"In the beginning the Universe was created. This has made a lot of people very angry and been widely regarded as a bad move."
Douglas Adams, quoted in the Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

"Those who make the worst use of their time are the first to complain of its brevity."
French philosopher Jean de La Bruyère, quoted in The Knowledge

"The only happiness is on the other side of difficult things."
Mike Skinner, quoted in The Times

"All of the great leaders have had one characteristic in common: it was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time."
J.K. Galbraith, quoted in Forbes

Statistics of the week

More than 5% of children in England (482,640) now have a council-funded education, health and care plan (EHCP) setting out the extra support they are entitled to; a further 14.2% require support for special educational needs (SEN), but do not have a plan.

DfE/Financial Times

Rugby union: Bath lift first league title in 29 years

For many years, Bath have been the “sleeping giant of English club rugby”, said Charles Richardson in *The Daily Telegraph*. The side won a string of titles in the 1980s and 1990s, but have consistently “underperformed” since then – and they plumbed new depths in 2021/22 by finishing bottom of the Premiership. But now, it seems, their troubles are behind them. At Twickenham last Saturday, they capped a glorious season by claiming their first Premiership title since 1996, with a 23-21 victory over “old enemies” Leicester. The win secured a “historic treble”, following their triumphs in the Premiership Rugby Cup and Challenge Cup. Bath were “not at their absolute best”, and committed several handling errors early in the game, said Robert Kitson in *The Guardian*. But “once they finally remembered how to catch a rugby ball”, they had too much for Leicester, whose “spirited final-quarter rally” came too late to catch their opponents. Bath’s standout player was their Scottish fly-half Finn Russell, who scored three penalties and was the architect of the “game-splitting moment” – a “deft interception” in the 49th minute that enabled him to release Max Ojomoh for Bath’s second try.

Bath’s wait for this moment has been “long and frustrating”, said Stephen Jones in *The Sunday Times*. Making it worse is that, since 2010, they’ve been owned by the hugely wealthy businessman



Finn Russell: “the architect”

Bruce Craig – and “when you have riches in your club, it becomes ever-more embarrassing when you have nothing to show for them”. Craig’s stewardship has been questionable at times, but he undoubtedly did the right thing in 2022 when he appointed Johann van Graan as head coach. The “proud South African” – a deeply religious man – has masterminded a transformation of the club’s culture, said Nik Simon in *The Daily Mail*. Known for his unfailing courtesy and meticulous preparation, he has brought the academy and first team closer together – even adapting the changing rooms so there’s no longer a wall between them – and has overhauled the club’s recruitment strategy. Bath’s squad is now the “envy of their Premiership rivals”, and the club, in van Graan’s words, has become a place where “everybody is welcome”.

As in 1996, Bath topped the table this season by “playing the rugby of the gods”, said Michael Aylwin in *The Guardian*. They scored a “remarkable five tries a match on average, comfortably more than anyone else in English rugby history”. And worryingly for their rivals, they may get even better, said Gavin Mairs in *The Sunday Telegraph*. Next season, their squad will be bolstered by two new arrivals – Henry Arundell from Racing 92 and Santiago Carreras from Gloucester – suggesting that van Graan’s team could “go on to dominate the next five years”.

Formula 1: Norris crashes out of the Canadian Grand Prix

You have to “feel for George Russell”, said Tom Cary in *The Daily Telegraph*. Last Sunday should have been a day of unalloyed pleasure for the 27-year-old Mercedes driver, whose “consummate drive from pole position” earned him a fourth career race win at the Canada GP. Instead, his victory was “utterly overshadowed” by an incident further back in the field – involving Lando Norris and his McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri, the two best drivers of the season so far. As the pair approached the end of lap 66 out of 70, Norris, in fifth place, seemed to have passed Piastri, only for Piastri to “get a better run down the back straight” and regain his advantage. Moments later, Norris “had another go”, only to run out of room as he tried to pass Piastri. He hit the back of the Australian’s car and smashed into a pit wall, his “car grinding to halt on a grass verge, wheel hanging off”. Fortunately, he avoided injury. It was, he admitted, a “stupid”



Russell: a deserved win

mistake – one, moreover, that cost him at least ten points in the drivers’ championship, “putting a serious dent in his title hopes”.

Norris’s “mentality has been questioned recently”, following a string of mistakes in qualifying rounds, said Molly Hudson in *The Times*. This latest incident was another example of the 25-year-old seemingly “not showing the racecraft of a champion”. With ten of the season’s 24 races completed, Piastri now leads by 22 points. For Russell, meanwhile, this was a much-deserved “first race win of 2025”, said Tony Dodgins in *The Guardian*. Particularly impressive was the way the Briton withstood the threat of four-time world champion Max Verstappen, who spent the entire race just behind him. In sixth place was Lewis Hamilton, who’d been third on the grid but whose car was badly damaged after running over a groundhog. “I love animals, and I’m so sad about it,” the seven-times champion, a vegan, said.

A “heartening” winner at Queen’s

The first women’s tournament at the Queen’s Club since 1973 reached a surprising – and “heartening” – conclusion on Sunday, with a triumph for a “37-year-old German qualifier and mother of two”, said Stuart Fraser in *The Times*. Tatjana Maria beat Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 6-4 to become the “oldest champion on the WTA tour” since a 38-year-old Serena Williams won the Auckland Open in 2020. The victory – watched by Maria’s husband and two daughters (though her younger daughter, Cecilia, four, slept through much of the match) – is sure to be a highlight of the tennis summer. And it was “no cakewalk” either: along the way, Maria had to beat four top-15 players, including the Australian Open champion Madison Keys.



Maria: age was no barrier

Maria arrived at Queen’s in wretched form, having suffered nine consecutive defeats, said Tumaini Carayol in *The Guardian*. But she’s a player with “significant pedigree” on grass: in 2022 she reached the Wimbledon semi-finals. Thanks to her habit of slicing off both fore- and backhand, she can keep the ball “excruciatingly low on the skidding surface, forcing players to hit the ball far out of the preferred strike zone”. On Sunday, she combined this with “razor-sharp serving” and volleys to keep her “clunkier” opponent off balance, said Simon Briggs in *The Daily Telegraph*. Her play is a delightful “throwback to the delicacy and guile of wooden rackets”. She is definitely a player to watch at Wimbledon.

Sporting headlines

Crickets South Africa beat Australia by five wickets in the World Test Championship final at Lord’s.

Football Liverpool broke their transfer record by agreeing a £116m deal to sign German midfielder Florian Wirtz from Bayer Leverkusen.

Tennis Emma Raducanu’s Wimbledon preparations have been hit by a “lingering” back injury, forcing her to pull out of this week’s Berlin Open.

Golf J.J. Spaun won his first major with a two-shot victory at the US Open. The American clinched victory with a 65-foot putt on the final hole.

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Pick of the week's correspondence

GCSEs: unloved, unfit...

To The Guardian

Sally Weale cogently questions why we need to continue with the outdated GCSE examination, being the only country in Europe to have such an assessment ("They are making young people ill": is it time to scrap GCSEs?). There are two additional reasons that support the case for abolition.

First, the cost. GCSEs are a billion-pound-plus industry. Few people realise that, per student, we spend more on the exam entry than on providing resources to study the subject.

Second, most importantly, GCSE results are standardised as a bell curve of results. A third or more of young people receive below-average results because the statistical model so determines. The Government wants to improve technical and vocational education, but this will not happen while hundreds of thousands of young people are told that they "didn't do very well at school".

Bob Moon, emeritus professor of education, Open University

...and unfair

To The Guardian

In the current round of exams, my grandson had to sit three in one day. How is that fair? How can it be justified? Where's the sense in it? Yes, it's time to scrap GCSEs.

Professor Colin Richards, former HM inspector of schools

Building the future

To The Daily Telegraph

The Government has set the construction industry the ambitious target of building 1.5 million homes by 2029. However, the sector faces an acute skills shortage. According to the Office for National Statistics, there are some 35,000 vacancies which construction companies are struggling to fill. And the Construction Industry Training Board believes that more than a quarter-of-a-million extra construction workers will be required by 2028 in order to meet the demand for new housebuilding.

Britain will not be able to deliver these homes unless we urgently prioritise getting young people excited about science, technology, engineering and maths (Stem). Many

Exchange of the week

A question of nuclear symmetry

To The Times

Your leading article states: "No country can be expected to stand idly by while an avowed enemy works steadily, decade after decade, in secret to create the ultimate weapon."

Although written to justify Israel's actions, this sentiment surely applies both ways. Israel's nuclear programme is shrouded in secrecy and the country is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Furthermore, Israel does not accept International Atomic Energy Agency scrutiny of its activities, whereas Iran was locked in via the Obama agreement. It's this kind of asymmetric situation that is likely to fuel a sense of injustice and unfairness in the minds of Iranians, and a determination to strengthen their position by creating a nuclear weapon.

Catherine Allen, Ruislip, Middlesex

To The Times

Catherine Allen is concerned about the asymmetric position between Iran and Israel. She is quite right. But has there ever been a time when Israel has threatened to use its nuclear/military capacity to destroy, attack/remove the existence of any state, nation or people? Compare that with Iran's oft-stated aim of destroying and annihilating the state of Israel and its population. How about that for being asymmetric?

Leonard A. Daniels, Taunton, Somerset

children thrive on the back of hands-on experience, but such work in schools is in decline. Only 26% of students report doing practical Stem activity at least fortnightly – down from 44% in 2016.

That's why UK plc and Whitehall need to work together to inspire young people to take up science and technology. For companies, this means giving schools access to the shop floor of Britain's makers and showing them what a job in Stem really looks like. For the Government, this means building a curriculum that values practical work more than ever.

P.J. Farr, CEO, UK Connect, Farnborough, Hampshire

Free speech for all

To The Economist

Bartleby is right in recognising that speaking in public is a widely shared fear. The most important thing to realise is that nobody overcomes this fear without practice, and with practice, anyone can. Trust me on this. The academic profession selectively recruits introverts and then expects them to deliver lectures to hundreds of sceptical teenagers.

When we begin our careers, few relish this opportunity but, with practice, it becomes part of a normal day. Sometimes

we even enjoy it. If we can learn to do it, anyone can.

Tom Stafford, professor of cognitive science, University of Sheffield

A taxing problem

To The Daily Telegraph

You report that HMRC is to stop sending letters to customers. A year ago I was encouraged by HMRC to start using its app. I downloaded it and tried to log in but was refused access, as I needed to provide proof of ID – namely a passport or driving licence.

I am in my 80s, my driving licence has been revoked owing to my poor eyesight, and my passport has expired as I no longer travel abroad. My only means of identification is my bus pass, which is not accepted. The alternative was to contact HMRC by phone.

After holding on for an hour, I gave up. HMRC continues to tax my pension with impunity.

George Kelly, Buckingham

Improve homes

To The New Statesman

Congratulations to Anoosh Chakelian for highlighting the lousy quality of much of our new

housing. We need to build many more new homes, particularly affordable ones. But the assumption that weakening the planning system will magic up the homes we need is deeply flawed.

Planning liberalisation, promoted over the past 20 years by developer-funded think tanks, is viewed as a panacea by many on the centre-left. But as Chakelian suggests, we need more planning and better-enforced building standards, not less. Let's build – but let's build homes people will want to live in, and ones we can be proud of in years to come.

Shaun Spiers, executive director, Green Alliance

Notes from a small island

To The Times

Migrants in Calais waiting to enter the UK have understandable reasons for taking the risks involved. One rarely mentioned is the calculation by migrants of a lifetime of remittances sent to families by those who manage, by whatever means, to enter and stay in Britain.

The Rev Larry Wright, Birmingham

Blind faith in bureaucrats

To The Guardian

Polly Toynbee blithely deals with the risks of identity cards in a few lines: a problem like having your "access to everything" cut off would have to be "dealt with instantly by senior enough officials to make robust decisions with rapid appeal to courts not blocked by backlogs". As none of that happens in pretty much any part of our society, a lot needs to change before I'd want to take the BritCard as advertised.

Ian Dawson, Heywood, Lancashire



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Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

How Not to Be a Political Wife

by Sarah Vine

HarperElement 320pp £20

The Week Bookshop £17.99

"Put down your 250th anniversary copy of *Pride and Prejudice* and toss Bill Clinton's thriller, *The First Gentleman*, to one side," said Melanie McDonagh in *The London Standard*. The only book that's "required reading right now" is Sarah Vine's memoir of "politics in the Cameron era" – though "it's just as much social and personal" as political. The former Mrs Michael Gove and her husband were "terrifically matey" with David and Sam in the "early days of the Cameron ascent". The couples holidayed in Ibiza, shared the school run and "had a high old time"; Vine had a "girl crush" on Sam. Yet over time, she came to feel that she and Michael weren't quite good enough for their friends. As she found herself performing "administrative duties", or serving wine at the couple's drinks parties, she began to feel less like "a friend" than "a fixer" – or even "staff". Then came Gove's decision to back Leave, which ended the friendship for good. Now divorced, with fewer friends in high places, Vine wrote the book, she says, "because she had nothing to lose" – which is what makes it "so brilliant".



Cameron's "father was a stockbroker, not the Duke of Devonshire". She really should "pull herself together".

It is, in fact, the personal sections that make this book worth reading, said Gaby Hinsliff in *The Guardian*. Vine writes "unsparingly and grippingly" about her difficult childhood, her "awful postnatal depression", and the "slow death" of her marriage. When it comes to politics, she often loses perspective – writing of Brexit as if it were a minor "political disagreement", not a fundamental issue for the country. Vine has made full use of her "ringside seat at the heart of government", offering "piercing insights into those who lead us", said A.N. Wilson in the *Daily Mail*. These are "perhaps the most riveting political memoirs" since Alan Clark published his diaries back in 1993.

The Haves and Have-Yachts

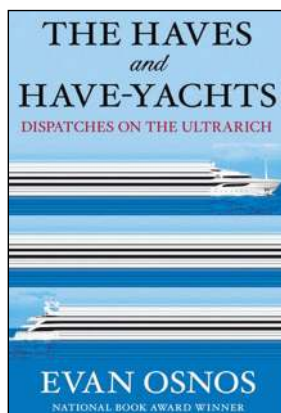
by Evan Osnos

Simon & Schuster 304pp £22

The Week Bookshop £19.99

In 1990, there were 66 billionaires in the US. Today, there are more than 800. In other words, said Madison Darbyshire on Bloomberg, the ranks of the mega-rich have swelled exponentially in recent decades – and in this illuminating book, Evan Osnos "peers into these extraordinary fortunes". Drawn from a collection of New Yorker essays, Osnos's "beautifully written and often amusing book" is largely an inventory of the barmy things that very rich people spend their money on, said Rana Foroohar in the FT. One chapter examines the "world of bunkers being built in places like New Zealand by wealthy dotcom survivalists". Another is about the "rise of one-off luxury services", such as the vogue for hiring pop stars for teenage birthday parties and bar mitzvahs. Around \$300,000 will get you rapper Flo Rida, while \$700,000 can "apparently" get you Duran Duran.

Few things reveal the priorities of the super-rich more clearly than the vogue for super-yachts, said Stuart Jeffries in *The Guardian*. These vessels – Jeff Bezos's \$500m *Koru* yacht is 127 metres long; others are bigger still – enable the planet's wealthiest people to display their wealth, while also keeping themselves discretely separate from "plebs like you and me". As one owner tells Osnos, only yachts allow "what you could call a deep and broad luxe life", with staff-to-passenger ratios that today would seem embarrassing on land. Osnos details the latest super-yacht fashions: eel and stingray leather upholstery; "ski rooms where guests can suit up for a helicopter trip to a mountaintop"; Imax cinemas; "personal submarines". He "lists what can be delivered to your watery fastness: Zabar's bagels, rare melons from Hokkaido, Dom Pérignon, sex workers". His book, "droll and timely", offers a compelling window on today's elite.



Novel of the week

The Director

by Daniel Kehlmann

(translated by Ross Benjamin)

Quercus 352pp £22

The Week Bookshop £19.99

The German novelist Daniel Kehlmann has often blended fact with fiction to dramatise the lives of famous figures, said Malcolm Forbes in *The Washington Post*. *Measuring the World* (2005) "mapped the lives and discoveries of two scientists of the German Enlightenment". In a similar vein, Kehlmann's latest novel focuses on the Austrian film director G.W. Pabst, who discovered the likes of Greta Garbo and Louise Brooks. Pabst fled his homeland when Hitler came to power, but returned to visit his sick mother, and was forced to stay throughout the War, directing Nazi-sponsored films. Composed of a series of "enthralled set pieces", it's a "captivating", "thoroughly satisfying" novel.

Pabst's reputation was all but destroyed by his collaboration with the Nazis, but Kehlmann makes us feel an "aching sympathy" for the director, whom he shows was caught in a situation "beyond his control", said Nina Allan in *The Guardian*. A novel with all the "glittering unease of a modern Grimms' fairy tale", *The Director* is "Kehlmann's best work yet".

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Theatre: Stereophonic

Duke of York's Theatre, London WC2 (0333-009 5399, atgtickets.com) Running time: 3hrs 10mins ★★★★★

David Adjmi's sublime drama is the most Tony-nominated play of all time, said Sarah Crompton on What's on Stage. Its ten-year trek from experimental theatre to the toast of Broadway is "already the stuff of legend" – as is the story it tells. Set in a California recording studio in 1976/77, *Stereophonic* is about the artistic trials and personal tribulations of a mixed-sex, British-American rock band working on a follow-up to their breakthrough album. "Any resemblance to Fleetwood Mac is entirely coincidental" (though it's notable that the producers settled a lawsuit brought by Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*-era sound engineer, who felt that parts of it drew too closely on his memoir). The play – with soaring rock songs by Will Butler of Arcade Fire – is "almost existential in its concerns, yet its overlapping, quickfire dialogue" is "funny, pungent" and naturalistic. I reckon it's a masterpiece – and this London production, directed by David Aukin, is a triumph.

The play is almost Chekhovian in the way that it builds up to "something much greater than the sum of its parts", said Sarah Hemming in the FT. Dramas about backstage bust-ups and troubled artists are nothing new, but Adjmi brings "something deeper, steeping us in the granular detail of the creative process: the craft and the graft, the exhausted wrangling and the sudden



An "extraordinary, electrifying odyssey"

a good half-hour too long. What's missing from it, said Dominic Cavendish in The Daily Telegraph, is context – detail about the characters' lives. It's a rewarding evening with plenty of "gilded moments"; but a modern classic? "Not so sure, man."

soaring ecstasy of the perfect take". And several of Butler's songs could grace a hit album, including *Masquerade* and the "hauntingly lovely" *Bright*. The cast, all of whom play instruments or sing, are exceptional. And David Zinn's set, with its stunningly rendered 1970s studio, is a work of art in itself, said Emma John in The Guardian. It's an "extraordinary, electrifying odyssey".

In the second half, the band squabble about how to cut the album's running time, said Clive Davis in The Times. It's ironic, then, that *Stereophonic*, is itself

The week's other opening

Anna Karenina Chichester Festival Theatre, Chichester (01243-781312). Until 28 June

Natalie Dormer is terrific as Tolstoy's heroine, in an adaptation that makes wonderful use of music and comedic touches; and Phillip Breen's staging "fizzes with theatrical brilliance", even if it doesn't quite capture the depths of the tragedy (Guardian).

Albums of the week: three new releases

Little Simz:
Lotus
AWAL
£13



Despite its name, "there is nothing fragrant nor floral" about this "disturbingly powerful" sixth album from Britain's "most gifted rapper", said Neil McCormick in The Daily Telegraph. Simbiatu Ajikawo should be "on top of the world": at 31, she's lauded by critics and peers, has "imperious lyrical skills", and a second-string as an actor in acclaimed shows such as *Top Boy*. Yet *Lotus* finds the artist lost and angry: many of the songs are fuelled by contempt for the music business (Simz is currently suing her ex-producer for £1.7m), and the mood is dark, with "something bruised and battered at its core". But never has an existential crisis "sounded so gripping".

Simz might be down, but on this wonderful record she has any number of starry collaborators to lift her up, said Roisin O'Connor in The Independent. On *Lion*, the Nigerian singer Obongjayar lays his "chameleonic voice over infectious hooks and playful parps of sax", while Michael Kiwanuka and jazz drummer Yussef Dayes "are a sensational pairing on the sprawling title track".

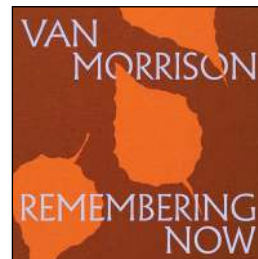
Benjamin Appl:
For Dieter
Alpha Classics
£20



Who possessed the greatest classical singing voice of the 20th century? One contender must be the great German lyric baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, who died in 2012, aged 86, said Geoff Brown in The Times. This elegant tribute album, which marks the centenary of his birth and comes packaged within a lavishly illustrated hardback book, is the work of one of Fischer-Dieskau's later masterclass students, the German-British *Lieder* specialist Benjamin Appl. James Baillieu is the "excellent" pianist, accompanying the 32 songs. At lower volumes, Appl is "almost as beguiling as his idol", though "a hectoring or sour tone can cloud the skies" when he becomes "more unbuttoned".

Still, this is "worthy, heartfelt tribute", on which Appl's performances have the "same attention to detail, both verbal and musical", as his mentor, said Andrew Clements in The Guardian. Schubert is naturally well represented in the sequence, but there are also interesting songs by Eisler and Bruno Walter, and by Fischer-Dieskau's father Albert and brother Klaus.

Van Morrison:
Remembering Now
Exile/Virgin
£13



"One of the greats is back to his best," said Will Hodgkinson in The Times. During Covid, Van Morrison embraced "conspiratorial thinking", in songs with titles such as *They Control the Media* and *The Long Con*. After that, he produced a low-key skiffle album and some new versions of old favourites. Now, on this terrific collection of original songs, the "Belfast cowboy" has made a welcome return – aged 79 – to the "transcendent grooves that made his name". This is Van Morrison doing what he does best – "wrapping one of the greatest voices in music around expressions of love, doubt and soulfulness".

Remembering Now is the singer's "best album in decades", said Andrew Male in Mojo – probably since *Hymns to the Silence* in 1991. It opens with two "easeful, radiant" songs, *Down to Joy*, and *If It Wasn't For Ray*. Other highlights include *I Haven't Lost My Sense of Wonder*, *Once In a Lifetime Feelings* and the "sweetly aching" *Stomping Ground*. The record's first half has a "freewheeling intimacy"; the second is simply "majestic". Welcome back.

Stars reflect the overall quality of reviews and our own independent assessment (5 stars=don't miss; 1 star=don't bother)



Lollipop

1hr 40mins (15)

Gut-punching drama about a homeless mother facing a brutal catch-22

★★★★

Daisy May Hudson fell into filmmaking when her mother and sister were abruptly evicted from their home in east London. A student in Manchester at the time, she returned home to help them through this crisis – and decided to film it for what became a highly acclaimed documentary. Now, she has produced her debut feature, a drama about homelessness – and it's a gut puncher in the Ken Loach tradition, said Emily Maskell in *Little White Lies*. The story follows Molly (Posy Sterling), a young mother who has just been released from a short jail sentence. She is longing to be reunited with her two children, but she finds that they are now in care; and she has lost her home and her job. Molly is thus trapped in “a hellish catch-22”: she can't get her children back until she has a suitable roof over her head, but as her children are not living with her, she doesn't qualify for appropriate housing.

Molly embarks on the battle to win back her children, said Catherine Wheatley in *Sight and Sound*, and until the final ten minutes of the film, it is unclear if she is “heading for disaster or redemption”. There are no “villains” here, only dutiful social workers constrained by a broken system. Nor is Molly held up as heroic: she is “volatile”, “reckless” and unreliable. At one point, we see her losing her temper in a care centre, “screeching” and throwing chairs before dissolving into tears and begging forgiveness. Yet even when her poor judgement “leaves audiences smashing palms to foreheads”, Sterling makes her an “empathetic presence”, world-weary yet girlish. The film sometimes strains too hard to underline the failures of the care system, said Christina Newland in *The i Paper*. But for the most part it is made with admirable “restraint and emotional intelligence”. With her “eye for social realism”, Hudson is a talent to watch.



Echo Valley

1hr 44mins (15)

Tense thriller starring Julianne Moore and Sydney Sweeney

★★★

As Steven Soderbergh observed recently, Hollywood has largely given up on serious movie making, said Kevin Maher in *The Times*. Hooray, then, for *Echo Valley*, a “twisty modern noir” that marks the return of “American cinema for grown-ups”. It is a film for our time, “addressing the cost-of-living crisis with a character whose lavish dreams have come back to bite her”: this is Kate (Julianne Moore), a horse trainer who is grieving the death of her wife and struggling to maintain her idyllic farm in Pennsylvania. She adores her daughter Claire (Sydney Sweeney), but she is a spoiled drug addict whose failed stints in rehab have bled her mother dry.

Trouble starts when Claire shows up one night asking for help, said Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian*. She owes money to a drug dealer (Domhnall Gleeson) and her mother complies. But when Claire then comes back a few days later, saying she has killed her boyfriend during an argument, and has his body stashed in the car, Kate must decide just “how far she will go to protect her daughter”. There is some enjoyable and creepy stuff involving a lake, but after that, the plot becomes increasingly implausible. Well, you could sniff at the film, from British director Michael Pearce, said Danny Leigh in the *Financial Times*, or you could just sit down and relish a thriller that has nods to Hitchcock's *Psycho*, and enough twists to keep you guessing to the end. At a time when most movies are either the “nth instalment” of a franchise or “fishing for an Oscar”, we should rejoice in one like this, that seeks to entertain, while also offering “something to chew on”.



Deep Cover

1hr 49mins (15)

An improv class goes undercover in this London-set crime caper

★★★

This new Netflix feature has an “ingenious” premise, said Ben Travis in *Empire*. If undercover police work is, essentially, a form of Method acting, what would happen if you recruited actors for an undercover sting operation? Bryce Dallas Howard plays Kat, an American running a flagging improv class in London that is frequented by two somewhat pitiable clients: Marlon (Orlando Bloom), a wannabe actor whose biggest job to date has been playing an advertising mascot called the “Pizza Knight”; and “sweet, mild-mannered” IT worker Hugh (Nick Mohammed), who is taking the classes to improve his confidence. Their humdrum routine is brutally interrupted when “gruff northern copper” Billings (Sean Bean) enlists their services to infiltrate a cigarette-smuggling ring. Desperate for the promised £200 fee, all three agree.

The trio get so involved in their task that a crime figure named Fly (Paddy Considine) offers them more work, said Caryn James in *The Hollywood Reporter*. And seeing the potential for unprecedented access to the criminal network, Billings “refuses to let them out of the gig”. Bloom shows hitherto untapped comic talent as the preening Marlon, who constructs over-elaborate backstories for his characters, while Howard brings “energy and conviction” to her part; and Mohammed is terrific as “socially inept” loser Hugh. It's a shame, then, that things soon descend into violent action movie sequences that jar with the general mood of “cheery comedy”, said Guy Lodge in *Variety*. *Deep Cover* is “watchable” enough, but never quite as funny as it promises to be.

Shifty: Adam Curtis's dizzying portrait of late 20th century Britain

For his last film, *Russia 1985-1999: TraumaZone*, Adam Curtis “used archive footage and an increasingly abstract editing style” to portray the collapse of the Soviet Union, said Aris Roussinos on *UnHerd*. It showed political leaders detached from reality, a population that had lost faith in the system, and corrupt oligarchs. His latest series deploys the same techniques to tell the story of the UK from 1979 to the end of the 20th century.

Shifty's story is one of national decline, said Chris Bennion in *The Daily Telegraph*. Its message is that, since the election of Margaret Thatcher, “extreme money” and “hyper-individualism” have destroyed the fabric of British society and left the country “fragmented, atomised and siloed”. Curtis relates this through a bombardment of news footage, TV clips and pop



Tony Blair inspects an ecstasy pill

videos, relying on subtitles to shape his narrative. It jumps all over the place: a segment on Thatcher's failed monetarist policies, for instance, also takes in clips of the production line at a crisp factory, the National Front and a “transgender dog”; all this may sometimes leave you “scratching your head”.

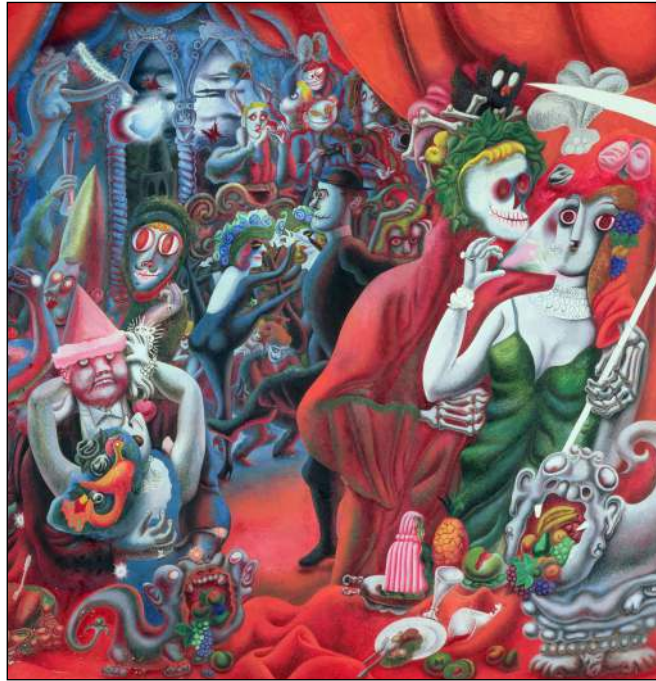
Curtis's arguments can seem reductive, said Dan Einav in the *FT*. Key moments in British history “are boiled down to cherry-picked extracts” or spun into “seemingly unrelated tangents”. But this is not a historical documentary, rather “a kaleidoscopic immersion in time and place” that captures a nation riven by contradiction. It's also “wickedly funny” at times, and balances its pessimism “with a genuine fondness for this curious country”.

Exhibition of the week **Edward Burra**

Tate Britain, London SW1 (020-7887 8888, tate.org.uk). Until 19 October

Edward Burra was a trailblazer, said Nancy Durrant in *The Times*. Whether painting the “Bright Young Things” of the 1920s, or scenes from the Spanish Civil War, Burra (1905–1976) was “as acute an observer as any journalist”, capturing all he saw in expressive, louche and bawdy scenes mostly painted from memory. A notable “boozehound” and an obsessive jazz lover, he painted “pubs, clubs and cabarets”, “shops, speakeasies and seedy streets”. Born to a wealthy family in west London, he was disabled from childhood, suffering from chronic rheumatoid arthritis and anaemia; he spent most of his life with his parents in Rye, East Sussex. Nevertheless, he travelled widely, recording everything with the same photographic eye for the low life – whether in London, Barcelona, Marseille or Harlem. This retrospective at Tate Britain, his first in London for 40 years, presents him as “one of the most distinctive yet overlooked artists of the 20th century”. Bringing together dozens of pictures created throughout his career, it tells his story “through his travels and the art forms that influenced him”.

Burra was “an odd, cussed, unique figure”, said Jonathan Jones in *The Guardian*. Inspired equally by Hogarth and European modernism, he was a consummate social satirist. His 1929 picture *The Tea Shop*, for instance, sees two “prudishly polite women” gazing back at us, somehow ignoring the fact that the waiting



Detail from John Deth (*Hommage to Conrad Aiken*), 1931

staff behind the counter are largely naked. His pictures of nightlife in 1920s Paris are “wondrously hedonistic”: he seems “amazed and delighted” by France’s freedoms. Yet Burra was also a “reactionary”: he sympathised with the fascist cause during Spain’s Civil War. His “big, busy, booming watercolours” of the conflict treat it “as a gaudy spectacle” and parrot the Francoist propaganda line that the Republicans were destroying churches and killing the clergy. For some reason, the Tate never acknowledges this. Here, we get a sanitised version of the artist, supposedly a champion of “queer culture” – when his sexuality was “mysterious”, and his art was complex and “ambivalent”.

Burra’s pictures are “electrifying” nonetheless, said Mark Hudson in *The Independent*. Wherever the artist roamed, his works captured “an atmosphere of tumultuous, slightly sinister hedonism”, bolstered by meticulous details of any given social milieu. *Savoy Ballroom, Harlem* (1934), for example, documents his “sense of wonder” on visiting the centre of African-American life in New York, “without a trace of exoticising distance”. Closer to home, we get suggestions of his (possibly) closeted sexuality: *Soldiers at Rye* (1941), for example, imagines the conscripts stationed in his hometown erupting into “a homoerotic bacchanal”. Burra was “one of the great mavericks” of 20th century British art – and this show is a must.

Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Okiki Akinfe

at Ginny on Frederick

The paintings in *Where the Wild Things Are*, this show by Essex-born artist Okiki Akinfe, vary wildly in size and shape, and are peppered around the gallery space like some berserk sci-fi comic strip – or even, perhaps, the opening credits for the much-loved school drama *Grange Hill*. Small wonder: Akinfe (b.1999) has a thing for cartoons, frequently incorporating likenesses of, say, Wile E. Coyote into her compositions – which range from a tiny yellow triangular picture, like an abstract hazard sign, to a three-metre-long canvas stretched over a concave frame, on which a demented mêlée of body parts is scrambled to the point of near-total abstraction. Some are rendered academically, others as though



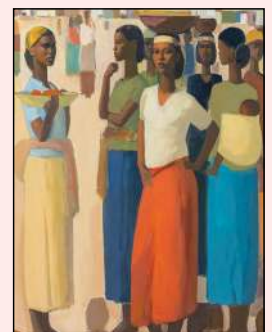
Not Courage (2025)

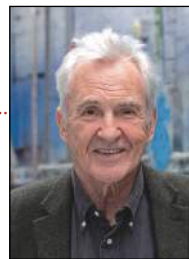
they could have been lifted from an issue of *The Beano*. You occasionally get the sense that the artist is mimicking the kind of imagery conjured by AI, but – unusually for an artist riffing on that subject – she isn’t po-faced or boring about it. Prices on request.

99 Charterhouse Street, London EC1 (mail@ginnyonfrederick.com). Until 26 July

Modern art for Cardiff

“Cardiff is to welcome its first modern art museum,” says Bethan McKernan in *The Guardian*. The Artistic Museum of Contemporary Art (Amoca), a privately owned, not-for-profit organisation, will display about 1,000 works mostly from the collection of co-founder Anders Hedlund, a Welsh-Swedish entrepreneur. It aims to provide “a platform for contemporary local artists” in the Welsh capital, as well as to showcase global talent. Amoca is in the process of buying a permanent venue, which is expected to open in 2026. But before that, the museum is putting on a series of shows in Cardiff. One, featuring the work of 34 world-leading African and African-diaspora artists (*Pillars of Life* by Tadesse Mesfin, above) opened at the Temple of Peace in the city centre last week. Hedlund has been based in Wales for 45 years: he is the founder of stationery manufacturer IG Design Group, which has a factory about 15 miles north of Cardiff.





Best books... Larry Lamb

The actor chooses books from throughout his life. He will be talking about his own recent novel, All Wrapped Up (Softwood Books £9.99), at the Bradford Literature Festival (bradfordlitfest.co.uk) on 28 June

A Bright Shining Lie by Neil Sheehan, 1988 (Vintage £30). In 1968, I was selling encyclopaedias to American servicemen in Germany. Every one of them was either going to Vietnam, returning from Vietnam, or doing all they could to avoid it. Reading this history-biography 50 years later opened my eyes to the reality of the horror show that thousands of young men my age had wasted their lives for.

The Earth by Émile Zola, 1887 (Penguin £12.99). I'd been rebuilding a dilapidated house in a tiny farming community in Normandy, and spoke just enough French to begin to understand the differences between me

and my workmates. Then, recommended by a French friend, I read this and learnt how profound those differences really are.

Damascus Station by David McCloskey, 2021 (Swift Press £9.99). A distinguished gentleman in the upper echelons of British government and counter-espionage recommended this, and I bought it on the spot. Although I'm not a regular reader of thrillers, I was hooked.

Barkskins by Annie Proulx, 2016 (Fourth Estate £14.99). I once lived for two years in Canada in the tribal areas of the Micmac native people, but barely got to know anything

of their story. Many years later I read this novel and marvelled at my ignorance. How could I have lived somewhere so important to North America's history and never asked questions of the people I saw every day? I consumed every word, barely pausing for sleep.

The Usual Desire to Kill by Camilla Barnes, 2025 (Scribner £16.99). I was involved in the evolution of this book from a series of written sketches to a play – both funny and deeply moving – and eventually into its final form. It was a fantastic lesson in the power of the novel, taking me into the minds of characters I thought I knew, and finally telling me the real story.

Titles in print are available from The Week Bookshop on 020-3176 3835. For out-of-print books visit biblio.co.uk

The Week's guide to what's worth seeing

Showing now

The Grange Festival 2025 continues with a new, 1920s-set production of Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* and a two-night celebration of Bernstein on Broadway. Until 6 July, The Grange Theatre, Hampshire (thegrangefestival.co.uk).

It was a hit at the 2017 Edinburgh Fringe. Now **How To Win Against History** – a “clever chamber opera of ... high camp and unexpected poignancy” about the short-lived 5th Marquess of Anglesey – gets a revival (Guardian). Until 12 July, Bristol Old Vic (bristololdvic.org.uk).

The Japanese artist **Yoshitomo Nara** has cornered the market in “cutesy kitsch with a vicious edge”, but this retrospective shows that there is more to his work than the “bug eyed” cartoon kids for which he is known (Guardian). Until 31 August, Hayward Gallery, London SE1 (southbankcentre.co.uk).

Book now

Following its sell-out debut at the National Theatre last year, Beth Steel's “deliriously funny” family drama **Till the Stars Come Down** is



Yoshitomo Nara's *One Foot in the Groove* (2012)

heading to the West End (Daily Telegraph). 1 July-27 September, Theatre Royal Haymarket, London SW1 (nationaltheatre.org.uk).

With its beautiful grounds, Charleston provides a suitably inspiring setting for the **Festival of the Garden** – four days of workshops, walks and talks. Highlights include the folk singer Peggy Seeger in conversation about her music and her activism. 17-20 July, Charleston, Firle, East Sussex (charleston.org.uk).

Television

Programmes

Death in the Desert: The Nurse Helen Mystery

Documentary revisiting the tragic death of a young British nurse in Saudi Arabia in 1979, and asking what the British government knew. Mon 23 Jun, C4 21:00 (60mins).

Storyville: The Wolves Always Come at Night

Poignant docudrama following a young Mongolian herder couple who are forced to leave their rural homeland for the city when a sandstorm wipes out their flock. Tue 24 Jun, BBC4 22:00 (90mins).

Electric Cars: How Safe Are They?

An investigation into public concerns about EVs' safety, featuring new research and interviews with industry experts. Wed 25 Jun, C5 20:00 (60mins).

Dispatches: Will Nigel Farage be Prime Minister?

As Reform UK continues to top the polls, journalist Fraser Nelson explores the party's rise and asks if it could win a general election. Thur 26 Jun, C4 20:00 (60mins).

Films

Walk the Line (2005) Biopic tracing the early years of Johnny Cash (Joaquin Phoenix) and his wife June Carter (an Oscar-winning Reese Witherspoon). Sun 22 Jun, BBC2 22:45 (130mins).

True Grit (1969) Classic western starring John Wayne as a washed-up US marshal hired to help a young girl avenge her father's death. Thur 26 Jun, Film4 12:50 (155mins).

Persuasion (1995) Well regarded screen adaptation of Jane Austen's novel about love and regret, starring Amanda Root and Ciarán Hinds. Thur 26 Jun, BBC4 22:15 (105mins).

New to streaming

The Bear Season four of the popular drama set in a Chicago fine-dining restaurant. Chef Sydney faces a big decision. From 26 June on Disney+.

Smoke US crime writer Dennis Lehane is the creator of this miniseries about a fire investigator and a detective in a race to stop two arsonists. From 27 June on Apple TV+.

The Archers: what happened last week

Brookfield is packed for Open Farm Sunday, but hearing that Bridge Farm has been quiet, David makes a speech, prompting the crowd to head there. “Father” Crispin arrives at St Stephen's to discuss Peggy's funeral, and hits it off with Kate. Noticing a shoulder twinge, Kate offers him a massage; later, she tartly asks Alan to stand outside during the funeral. Thinking about his legacy, Justin tells a shocked Stella that he wants to rewild the Berrow estate. Crispin arrives for his massage, but passes out on the table; Kate panics that she's killed him. Crispin recovers but won't be able to officiate at the funeral; Kate sheepishly asks Alan, who says he'd be honoured. Lilian and Tom make plans for the wake. Peggy's funeral is emotional for the whole family. Afterwards, at The Bull, Phoebe shows Kate a scan photo, saying she'll be a grandmother herself soon. Helen tells Tom she has another date with Dane. At the rewilding, Phoebe is gobsmacked by the change in Justin's attitude as he extols the project's virtues; Kirsty agrees and wonders what he'll do next.

Country houses for less than £1m



▲ **Cumbria:** Hoff Lodge, Hoff. An Arts & Crafts house set in approx. 5.5 acres between the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales. 6 beds, 3 baths, kitchen, 4 receps, garden, coach house, garage. OIEO £950,000; Fine & Country (01228-583109).

▼ **Northumberland:** High Mote, Elsdon. A traditional stone farmhouse with fine rural views. 4 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, 2 receps, gardens of approx. 3.37 acres, parking. £800,000; Finest Properties (0330-111 2266).



▼ **Devon:** Valley View, Churchill. Handsome house with impressive views located in the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. 5 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, 3 receps, gardens of approx. 1.5 acres, outbuilding, garage. £795,000; Symonds & Sampson (01297-33122).



► **Isle of Wight:** Wydcombe Manor West, Whitwell. A 17th century house with Victorian alterations set in rolling parkland. 5 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, 3 receps, garden. £750,000; Spence Willard (01983-200880).





◀ **Lincolnshire:** Commandant's House, Sutton Bridge. Once part of RAF Sutton, this elegant property was built in the 1930s in a tranquil rural setting. Main suite, 5 further beds, family bath, 2 showers, kitchen/living/dining room, 2 receps, study, garden, garage. £700,000; Fine & Country (01780-750200).

▼ **Suffolk:** Tawny's, Aspoll Green. A Grade II Elizabethan farmhouse set in approx. 3.2 acres. 3 beds, 2 baths, kitchen/dining room, 2 receps, self-contained annexe, tennis court, large Elizabethan "party" barn, garden, parking. £975,000; Bedfords (01284-769999).



◀ **Cornwall:** Wooda, Warleggan. A striking Grade II former farmhouse overlooking an unspoilt wooded valley on the edge of Bodmin Moor. 4 beds (1 en suite), family bath, kitchen/breakfast room, 3 receps, garden, paddocks, garage. OIRO £975,000; Lillicrap Chilcott (01872-273473).

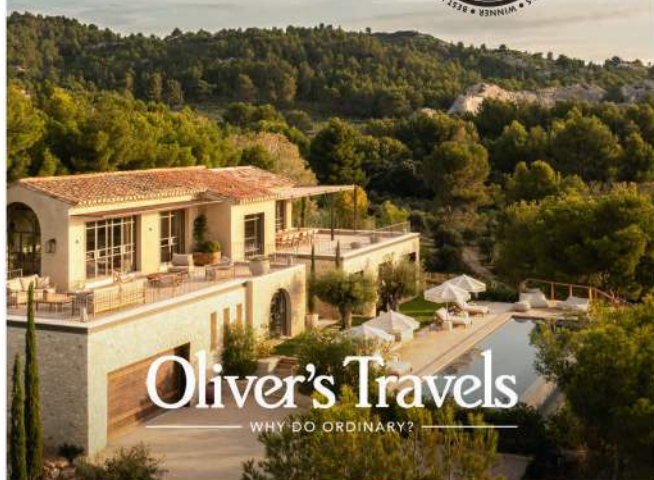


▲ **Wiltshire:** Medbourne House, Liddington. This late 17th century Grade II farmhouse is set in mature gardens, which include a vegetable garden and lily pond. 4 beds, family bath, kitchen, 3 receps, study, garden, garages. £950,000; Carter Jonas (01672-519701).

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France's "anti-crisis" restaurants

It has become one of Paris's most popular restaurants, serving as many as 300 customers a day, says Adam Sage in *The Times*. Yet 6.90, in the 18th arrondissement, is far from your typical Parisian eatery. For a start, there are no waiters: diners collect their meals on trays, and are expected to clear their own tables. The menu offers only two main courses: sausages and mash, and vegetarian lasagna. And both cost just €6.90 – "hence the name". 6.90 is one of a "small but growing number of restaurants in France" that have responded to the cost-of-living crisis by offering cut-price menus. The Bellevue, near Limoges, is another example: it recently opened a "second-class" dining room, offering a three-course weekday lunch, including a glass of wine and a tea or coffee, for just €10. That too is doing brisk business. The arrival of these so-called "anti-crisis" menus has provoked "intense debate" in France. Proponents say that they are "luring back" customers who'd stopped eating out because of inflation, which drove up the average cost of a restaurant meal by nearly a quarter between 2022 and 2024. But their critics worry that if diners get used to their low prices, they will refuse to pay more elsewhere – driving more mainstream restaurants out of business.

The old-school Ritz gets its due

John Williams, the long-time head chef at The Ritz, is an unashamed "champion of



The Ritz's John Williams: "ecstatic"

haute cuisine", said Hannah Twigg in *The Independent*. At his restaurant, dishes are brought to the table "under silver cloches" by waiters dressed in tail-coats. The menu is full of French "classics", including pigeon à la presse, turbot véronique, and crêpes suzette prepared table-side. Now, four months after being given a second Michelin star (an award that many considered long overdue), Williams "and his brigade" have earned first place in Restaurant magazine's annual poll of the top UK 100 restaurants. The 67-year-old, who grew up in South Shields on the North Sea coast, proclaimed himself "absolutely amazed, ecstatic". With its "cartoonishly grand" interior,

and elaborate service, The Ritz may not be to everyone's taste, said David Ellis in *The London Standard*. But what its kitchen produces "confounds and dumbfounds"; it is cooking that "leaves me fog-headed with pleasure". I have routinely named it as London's best restaurant – so I'm not surprised that it is now officially Britain's best.

The trend for flavoured butters

In the past couple of years, some "highly enticing flavoured butters" have started appearing on supermarket shelves, says Silvana Franco in *The Daily Telegraph*. Waitrose, Sainsbury's and Asda all stock Thomas Straker's "eye-catchingly packaged" All Things Butter range (flavours include Garlic & Herb and Cinnamon Bun). Meanwhile, M&S has launched its own "top-tier" line, which includes a "truly delicious" Parmigiano Reggiano & Truffle butter. Such products are certainly appealing, but they are quite expensive: M&S's truffle butter, for example, costs £3.75 for 100g. So you might do better to make them yourself. It is not difficult: it's really just a question of mixing room-temperature unsalted butter with whatever flavourings you like, either by hand or in a food processor. Try chilli and miso (to which I also add a garlic clove and a dash of soy sauce and maple syrup), or capers, garlic and herb. Once mixed, the flavoured butters will last a few days in the fridge, or will freeze "brilliantly" for up to two months.

Recipe of the week: grilled radicchio with caper and anchovy sauce

I was on holiday on the Sicilian island of Pantelleria a few years ago, says Jesse Jenkins, when I was tasked with making lunch for a group of friends, most of whom were fantastic cooks. I had forgotten to add the radicchio to an already dressed salad, so I quickly grilled it in a ripping-hot pan and made a sauce by blending a whole jar of capers and a tin of anchovies. It ended up getting a lot of appreciation and became one of my favourite things to eat. The lesson is: sometimes stress-cooking pays off.

Serves 4 as a side

100g tin anchovy fillets in oil 30g capers, drained 1 lemon, halved
4 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra to coat the radicchio 1 head purple radicchio salt and pepper
handful of parsley, roughly chopped, to serve

- First, make the sauce. Put the anchovies and their oil, capers, the juice of half a lemon, and the olive oil in a blender and blend until smooth. If it's too thick, add a little water to loosen it.
- Trim the radicchio stem, keeping the core intact, and remove any beaten-up outer leaves. Cut the radicchio into four pieces, then put it in a bowl with some olive oil to coat, add a good pinch of salt and mix well.
- Get a griddle pan or frying pan smoking hot over a high heat, then



add the radicchio, cut side down, pressing it down firmly with your hand.

- Cook for 2 minutes, or until the radicchio is deeply charred.
- Turn the pieces and char them on the other cut side, then transfer to a plate. Squeeze the other half lemon over them while they steam.
- You can put the sauce on the plate with the radicchio on top or spoon it over the radicchio. Finish with the chopped parsley and a little fresh cracked black pepper.

*Taken from Cooking with Vegetables by Jesse Jenkins, published by Bluebird at £28. Photography by Jesse Jenkins.
To buy from The Week Bookshop for £24.99 (incl. p&p), call 020-3176 3835 or visit theweekbookshop.co.uk.*

New cars: what the critics say

**Renault 4**

Price: from £26,995

Top Gear Magazine

A “staggering” eight million of the original 1961 model of the Renault 4 were sold. It’s changed a lot since then, and this new small electric crossover is closely related to the “wonderful” new Renault 5, but its longer wheelbase gives it more room in the back. All versions get a 52kWh battery, 150bhp motor for a 250-mile WLTP range, and the basic Evolution spec includes 18-inch alloy wheels and a heat pump.

Car Magazine

“It’s another slam dunk Renault EV” – like a 5, but “even better”: “longer, taller and family friendly”. It takes a “brisk” 8.2 secs to get from 0-62mph, and you can top up from 16-80% in 30 minutes from a 100kW charger, while a 7kW home charger takes just under eight hours to full. The ride is a bit firm, but it’s good to drive on the whole, with precise, well-weighted steering and little lean.

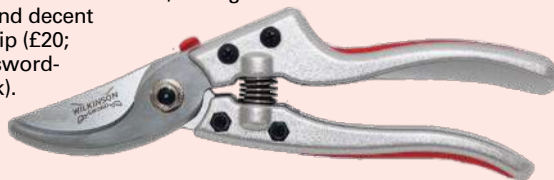
What Car?

A great-value small electric SUV, the Renault 4 combines a comfy ride with a pleasant, modern interior. Like the 5, there are two screens: a driver’s display (7-inch at base level, 10.3-inch in Techno and Iconic trims) and a 10.1-inch touchscreen, which is responsive and intuitive. There are easy-to-use physical buttons for the air-con, and the cabin has a mix of plush materials for a classy feel.

The best... secateurs



► **Razorcut Comfort Medium Bypass Pruner** A budget choice, these 216g Wilkinson Sword pruning secateurs come with a ten-year guarantee. They have reasonably good Japanese steel blades, strong cast-aluminium handles, and decent enough grip (£20; wilkinsonsword-tools.co.uk).



▼ **Okatsune 103 Bypass Secateurs** The blades of these razor-sharp 225g secateurs are forged from the finest Japanese steel, for a clean, efficient cut. They can be slippery in the rain, but the red and white colours make them easy to find if you drop them (£50; okatsune.co.uk).

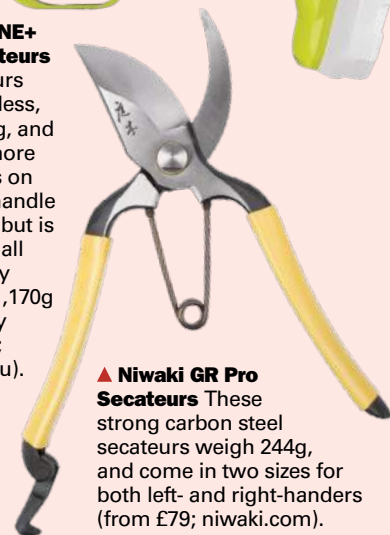


◀ **Felco Model 2 Original Secateurs** Best for larger hands, this 240g pair has cushioned handles. With a bypass action (like scissors), they are good for thicker branches, and have replaceable blades and a lifetime guarantee (£60; worldoffelco.co.uk).



▲ **Ryobi 18V ONE+ Cordless Secateurs**

Electric secateurs make for effortless, precise pruning, and these can do more than 2,000 cuts on a charge. The handle is easy to grip, but is a bit big for small hands, and they weigh a hefty 1,170g with the battery (£115 tool only; uk.ryobitools.eu).



▲ **Niwaki GR Pro Secateurs**

These strong carbon steel secateurs weigh 244g, and come in two sizes for both left- and right-handers (from £79; niwaki.com).

SOURCE: THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Tips of the week... car insurance for new drivers

- Get a car in a low insurance group with a smaller engine, such as a VW Up!, Suzuki Alto or Fiat 500. Second-hand cars are cheaper too, if they’re in good nick with a FSH. Modifications can hike up the price.
- Compare quotes three or four weeks before your policy is due to start, to find the best deal. Shop around; and if renewing, don’t just accept your renewal quote. Paying annually is nearly always cheaper.
- Adding an experienced driver with a clean licence who sometimes drives the car can help lower premiums. Don’t pretend they’re the main driver; that would be illegal.
- Black boxes or telematics can help reduce costs over time – provided you drive carefully and stick to the speed limits.
- Having off-street parking should bring the premium down. Adding a steering wheel lock, immobiliser or dashcam can also help.
- If you feel you can afford to, consider increasing the voluntary excess, as it should lower your premium.

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN

And for those who have everything...



Inspired by *ikebana* – the Japanese art of flower arranging – this Fritz Hansen glass vase has a brass insert with asymmetrical holes, to help you create artful displays.
£199; nordicnest.com

SOURCE: THE TIMES

Where to find... kitchen gardens to experience

Gravetye Manor, in West Sussex, now a hotel with a Michelin-starred restaurant, has an elliptical kitchen garden with quirky crops, including unusual tomato varieties. There are garden tours for guests from April to October (gravetyemanor.co.uk).

Every dish at **Pythouse Kitchen Garden** has at least one ingredient from the three-acre, 18th century, walled kitchen garden. There are kitchen garden and foraging workshops, plus a shepherd’s hut, sauna and glamping site (pythousekitchengarden.co.uk).

The walled kitchen garden at **Gordon Castle**, close to the River Spey and Moray coast, has more than 200 varieties of vegetable grown from seed every year, from pumpkins to kale. There’s a relaxed café, a shop and cottages to stay in (gordoncastle.co.uk).

An organic family farm near Truro, **Nancarrow** offers workshops, and seasonal feasts with food from the farm, the kitchen gardens and the hedgerows. Stay in the old farm buildings (nancarrowfarm.co.uk).

SOURCE: THE SUNDAY TIMES

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This week's dream: Malaysia's delicious food and glorious beaches

It might not get as much attention as neighbouring Thailand, but Malaysia offers all the white-sand beaches, rainforests and delicious food you could want in a tropical holiday, says Hannah Summers in *The Times* – and plenty of cultural interest too. Having fallen in love with it as a backpacker 20 years ago, I returned this year looking for a more luxurious experience, and was not only impressed by its hotels and resorts, but found them considerably more affordable than their Thai counterparts. My husband, our toddler and I flew directly from London to Kuala Lumpur with British Airways, and immediately sought out some of the local cuisine I had relished two decades ago.

In Kuala Lumpur, we avoided “fancy restaurants” in favour of the city’s “hole-in-the-wall” spots, which serve “curries and claypot bowls of rice” with flavours influenced by Malaysia’s “mishmash of cultures” – Malay, Indian, Chinese. There was more delectable food to enjoy in the next place we visited, George



The Kek Lok Si Temple in “colourful” George Town

slightly larger than the Isle of Wight, but much of its jungled interior is strictly protected, so construction is “clustered” around a few towns. There’s plenty to do, and the island is home to some “ludicrously” lavish resorts. The “swishest” is The Datai, but we adored the more modest Bon Ton, where guests stay in wooden Malay houses that are roughly a century old.

Town, the state capital of Penang. Founded by the British in 1786, this Unesco-listed port city is remarkably handsome, with its twisting alleyways and “colourful” old Chinese shophouses. In the evenings, we strolled between its night markets and hawker stalls, sampling *char kway teow* – a wonderful noodle dish with prawn and egg – and sweet nutmeg juice, a local speciality. Breakfasts were great too, including *roti canai* (a “flaky” flatbread) and a “surprisingly toddler-friendly” dal.

There are beaches near George Town, but those on the island of Langkawi, where we spent the last part of our trip, are more lovely. Langkawi is

Getting the flavour of...



A small-ship journey around Greece

I’ve never been tempted by the thought of a holiday on a towering, 3,000-passenger cruise ship. But I loved the idea of exploring Greece by sea and a trip with the new “boutique” company Elixir proved the ideal way to do it, says Katie Gatens in *The Sunday Times*. Our ship, *The Elysium*, carried a maximum of 48 passengers, and felt a bit like a “private yacht”, with its “breezy” wood-panelled cabins and “young and relaxed” vibe. Days aboard were lovely – the 8.30am yoga; the regular stops for swimming; the visits to the onboard spa; the light, fresh meals often served on deck. And though strong winds prevented us from exploring the Cyclades, I was not disappointed by the alternative itinerary – a voyage around the mountainous Peloponnese peninsula, with trips to ancient sites such as Delphi, and islands including Hydra and Ithaca. A seven-night cruise costs from £2,178pp, half-board (elixir.cruises).

An artists’ town in New Mexico

A century has passed since the likes of Georgia O’Keeffe, D.H. Lawrence and Martha Graham were first drawn to Taos. This little town in New Mexico is now an artists’ colony and a “counterculture mecca”, yet it’s still “unassuming” and relatively unspoiled, says Sara Clemence in *The New York Times*, with galleries that are part of artists’ “live-work” spaces rather than places “to serve champagne”. The town’s setting is entrancing – the desert light, the mountains and “sage-blanketed” plains, the cottonwood groves and the rift valley of the Rio Grande – and there are some wonderful places to visit (such as the Harwood Museum of Art and the Stagecoach Hot Springs). But its “real heart” is Taos Pueblo, a multistorey adobe structure (pictured) that has been inhabited by the region’s indigenous people for a thousand years.

Back to nature on Devon’s coast

Most of the UK’s bothies are to be found in the Scottish Highlands, but since 2015, the National Trust has opened a “scattering” of these bookable “camps with walls” in southwest England, says Sarah Baxter in *The Guardian*. They offer “wild-feeling” accommodation, without the need to wrestle with tents, and cost from just £15 a night for exclusive use. This spring, a new one opened in West Challacombe, completing a well-spaced trio along 18 miles of Devon’s “spectacular” Exmoor coast. You could walk between them along the South West Coast Path in a long weekend (including an ascent of England’s highest sea cliff, the Great Hangman, and a stop at the “idyllic” Lee Abbey Tea Cottage), or add another day of hiking inland to complete a circuit. See nationaltrust.co.uk for further information.

Hotel of the week



Dunas de Formentera Formentera, Spain

Back in the day, this “bare-bones beach motel” on the little island of Formentera was the kind of place “in-the-know creatives” from nearby Ibiza escaped to in mid-summer. Lately, tourist numbers have increased and it has smartened up its act, says Maya Boyd in *Condé Nast Traveller* – and yet it retains its “pared-back vibes”, with “capacious” bedrooms decorated in pale colours, terraces edged with lavender and banana palms, and a crescent-shaped “slip” of a swimming pool. Best of all, however, is the setting – the “scrubby” sand dunes, the starry skies, the “crash of waves” close by – all quite unchanged by time.

Doubles from £358;
dunasdeformentera.com.

The brilliant songwriter behind The Beach Boys

Brian Wilson
1942-2025

In the early 1960s, Brian Wilson, who has died aged 82, wrote or co-wrote a string of “exquisite pop songs” with “sublime harmonies” that helped cement a vision of southern California as a blue-skied paradise, said *The Times* – a hedonistic yet innocent place where “the sun always shone, the surf was up and there were ‘two girls for every boy’”. He extended that vision across more than two dozen top-30 hits in the US and the UK, ranging from *Fun, Fun, Fun* and *California Girls* to the more melancholic *Wouldn’t It Be Nice* and *God Only Knows*. When the last of those songs was released, Paul McCartney promptly declared it one of the greatest he had ever heard. He said that the whole of the album – *Pet Sounds* – had blown him “out of the water”. Then Wilson came up with *Good Vibrations*, often described as the most perfect pop song ever crafted. “Brian Wilson is The Beach Boys,” his brother Dennis once said. “He is the band. He’s all of it. We’re nothing. He’s everything.”

Yet for all the sunshine in his music, Wilson was a deeply troubled man, said *The Guardian*: “even when the waves were at their most inviting”, some of his songs betrayed “an undertow of knowledge that the good times of youth come to an end: ‘Won’t last forever’ went the insistent background chorus to *When I Grow Up (To Be a Man)*, a hit for The Beach Boys in 1964, when its composer was only 22.” He had his first breakdown that same year, and struggled with severe mental illness for most of his adult life.

Brian Wilson was born in Inglewood, California, in 1942. His father Murry was a salesman and frustrated songwriter; his mother, Audree, was a housewife who also played the piano. When Brian was two, they moved to a town nearer the coast, and had two more sons, Carl and Dennis. Early in childhood, Brian lost the hearing in his right ear – which he often attributed to having been hit by his father, who sought to use his sons to fulfil his own thwarted musical ambitions. Brian would claim that his father’s rages had a severe effect on him. “By the time I started elementary school, I was nervous and high-strung, withdrawn and frightened of almost everything,” he revealed in his ghostwritten 1991 autobiography. “I expected everyone to yell at me or threaten me.”

Brian learnt the piano as a child and the accordion; he loved the music of Chuck Berry (and lifted from it so heavily in his song *Surfin’ USA* that Berry won a co-writer credit) but also the close harmonies of a group called The Four Freshmen. At high school, he excelled at sports, but he never surfed: the ocean scared him. Brian was round-faced, heavy-set and emotionally delicate; Dennis was the lithe young surfer; Carl was regarded as the sweet one, the mediator. The brothers formed a group in 1961, joined by a school friend, Al Jardine, and Mike Love, their cousin. Inspired by Dennis’s passion they released a single called *Surfin’*, and to promote it, an industry executive advised them to call themselves The Beach Boys. On the back of its success they won a contract with Capitol Records, and they soon had two chart hits: *Surfin’ Safari* and *Surfin’ USA*. Murry Wilson had appointed himself as their manager. He was a harsh taskmaster and they fired him in 1964, when they had their first number one – *I Get*



Wilson in 1968: wrote songs in a sandbox

Around – but he appropriated their song rights, and in 1969, sold them for \$700,000. Brian Wilson didn’t get a penny. His first wife Marilyn, whom he married when he was 22 and she was 17, would recall that this “nearly killed him”. (In 1992, he reached an out-of-court settlement with the company that had bought them, for \$10m; they were by then worth many times that much.)

As The Beach Boys became stars, Wilson found the pressures of fame increasingly hard to handle, and by 1964, his stage fright had become so intense he gave up performing. Instead, he confined himself to writing and producing, spending weeks in the recording studio, devising ever-more complex and sophisticated arrangements. His work rate was extraordinary: he was 23 when *Pet Sounds* came out; it was The Beach Boys’ 11th studio album. He’d been motivated by the maturity of The Beatles’ *Rubber Soul* to move away from girls, fast cars and surf, and instead, write more

complex songs about existential angst and the loss of innocence. Making use of timpani and strings, as well as playful sounds such as bicycle bells, *Pet Sounds* was highly experimental, said *The New York Times* – and inspired The Beatles to create *Sgt. Pepper*.

He was hailed as a genius, and in an effort to earn that label, he started to work on a yet more ambitious album, *Smile*. He wanted, he said, to produce a “teenage symphony to God”. But by then, he was using LSD to boost his creativity; years later, he admitted that the drug

had “fucked with my brain”. He became paranoid and erratic. Famously, he put his grand piano in a huge box of sand, so that he could compose at home with a feeling of being on the beach. He wrote one of his most acclaimed tracks, *Surf’s Up*, in the sandbox, but *Smile* would remain unfinished for nearly 40 years.

Eventually, Marilyn entrusted him to the care of celebrity psychotherapist Dr Eugene Landy, who diagnosed him as a paranoid schizophrenic, put him into a 24-hour therapy programme and took over his life – keeping him away from his family (he and Marilyn divorced in 1979) and making himself Wilson’s business partner. It was Landy who set up Wilson’s first date with Melinda Ledbetter, who’d become his second wife. She recalled that Landy told Wilson when to put his arm around her, and when to kiss her. When they became close, Landy ordered Wilson to sever his ties with her; in response, she urged Wilson’s family to prise him away from Landy – a legal battle that took years to resolve. He and Melinda married in 1995; they adopted five children, and he was reconciled with his daughters from his first marriage (who found musical success as part of Wilson Phillips). He was well enough to play at Queen Elizabeth II’s Golden Jubilee in 2002 (“Hi, Queen,” he greeted Her Majesty). He completed *Smile* in 2004, and joined The Beach Boys on tour in 2012. But he remained fragile (and was later diagnosed with dementia). Interviewers would find him sometimes talkative, sometimes silent – but always gentle, with a distinctive erect posture, and a childlike aura. “The Beach Boys have always been a part of the 1960s spectrum,” he said in one of his final interviews. “They did quite well as a singing group, and I finished a lot of good records and I’m very proud of them.” Dennis drowned in 1983, aged 39; Carl died of lung cancer in 1998, aged 51. Melinda died last year. His children survive him.

“Brian Wilson is The Beach Boys,” his brother Dennis said. “He is the band. He’s all of it. We’re nothing. He’s everything”

Companies in the news ...and how they were assessed

Boeing: blow to revival

"Can Boeing be fixed?" asked The Wall Street Journal in January. Last week's tragedy in Ahmedabad won't make the job facing CEO Kelly Ortberg any easier as he battles "years of reputational damage" from previous fatal crashes involving Boeing's narrow-body 737 Max 8, said The Economist. The cause of the catastrophe is still unknown, but this is "the first fatal crash" involving a Boeing 787 Dreamliner – the most modern wide-body jet produced by the US plane-maker. The market's "relatively muted" response suggests investors believe the crash wasn't "due to a fundamental design flaw", said Oliver Gill in The Sunday Times. "It's a logical conclusion." The Max had been flying for little more than a year before its first disaster in 2018, whereas the Dreamliner has been "going for 15 years without a major incident". Nonetheless, nerves have been rattled, said Anthony France in The London Standard. This week, a British Airways flight out of London Heathrow was forced to turn back after a "mid-air technical issue"; hours later, a New Delhi-bound Air India Dreamliner returned to Hong Kong as "a precautionary measure". The Indian government is conducting "extended surveillance of Boeing 787 planes" while investigations into the crash continue, said Gill. "The outcome will be pivotal to Boeing's hopes of revival." So far, investors have given the plane-maker the benefit of the doubt. "Should it be found culpable, they may not be so forgiving."

Poundland: yours for a quid

There is doubtless some symbolism in Poundland, the former posterchild of UK discount retailing, being sold to the US investment group, Gordon Brothers, for a token £1 – albeit with the promise of up to £80m in new funding. But there's likely to be a big human cost too, said Sarah Butler in The Guardian. More than 2,000 jobs are at risk as the new owner begins restructuring. The group, which employs 16,000 and has more than 800 outlets across the UK and Ireland, is to shut two distribution centres and 68 stores, and "aims to close at least 80 more". It is also taking an axe to the online operation and ditching its "Perks" loyalty app. The seller, the Polish group Pepco, feels compelled to point out that the sale "marks an important milestone in our strategic plan to move away from FMCG" – fast-moving consumer goods – said Ben Marlow in The Daily Telegraph. What a mess it has left in the form of "a trail of unpaid debt", largely business rate payments, and court actions by creditors. The bigger question is what Poundland says about UK retail. If a business "flogging everyday household products for a quid, during a time of prolonged financial hardship" can't survive, "then perhaps the high street's decline is irreversible".

Trump Organisation: Maga gold phones

President Trump's net worth "more than doubled" in the year to March, according to Forbes. Now there's news of another potential money-spinner, said Alistair Osborne in The Times. The latest "bit of grift" from the Trump Organisation – the outfit run by the president's sons – is a new mobile service, starring a \$499 gold-coloured phone "proudly designed and built in the United States". Experts question whether that is entirely possible. The ethics of launching a new mobile "just when dad is beating up Apple" are also somewhat questionable. "The only surprise, given Trump's endless flip-flopping, is that it isn't a foldable handset."

Seven days in the Square Mile

UK headline inflation held steady in May at 3.4%, well above the Bank of England's 2% target, strengthening expectations that the Monetary Policy Committee would keep rates on hold at 4.25% this week. The US Federal Reserve was also thought likely to hold rates steady in June – despite protests from President Trump. The inflation outlook for both central banks has been further complicated by the intensifying conflict in the Middle East, which risks pushing oil prices higher. Insurance prices for ships travelling through the Strait of Hormuz have jumped more than 60% since the start of the war.

Make UK, the industrial employers' lobby group, reported that – despite ongoing trade negotiations – exporters are turning their backs on the US, which has now fallen out of the top three British overseas markets.

The Japanese firm Nippon Steel completed its controversial \$14.9bn purchase of the smaller US Steel to create one of the world's largest steelmakers – after agreeing to yield unusual control to the US government. President Trump extended the TikTok ban deadline for a third time. AstraZeneca struck a \$5bn strategic collaboration with China's CSPC Pharma, to use its AI to develop oral drugs for chronic diseases. Aardman Animation, the company behind Wallace and Gromit, became the latest creative company to complain about the free use of copyrighted material to train AI models.

TSB/Metro Bank: British banks on the block

A decade after TSB was acquired by the Spanish banking group Sabadell, the fate of the lender, and its five million UK customers, is once more up in the air – thanks to a drawn-out takeover saga in Spain, said Macarena Munoz Montijano on Bloomberg. Sabadell is "fighting to remain independent" from its larger rival BBVA and views offloading TSB, which it bought from Lloyds Banking Group for around £1.7bn in 2015, as a defensive measure. With several UK banks reportedly sniffing around (NatWest is seen as a likely "suitor"), TSB could fetch up to £2bn.

Returning some of that cash to Sabadell shareholders, noted the FT, "could help keep them inside" as the Catalan bank battles BBVA's €11bn hostile approach.

The putative sale of TSB adds to the "wave of dealmaking" currently rushing through the European and British banking



Ripe for a private equity takeover?

sectors, said Louis Goss in The Daily Telegraph. Santander last month rejected an £11bn offer from NatWest for its UK retail business. Meanwhile, shares in Metro Bank surged by some 18% on reports of an offer from Pollen Street Capital – the British private equity firm that part-owns Shawbrook Bank.

Metro became Britain's first new high street lender in more than a century when it launched 15 years ago, said Ben Martin in The Times. But "two financial crises" and a "near-death experience" have curtailed its ambitions. No amount of "free

dog biscuits" and other gimmicks can make up for a "wild ride" that saw shares plunge from a high of £40 in 2018 to a "painful recapitalisation at just 30p in 2023", said Nils Pratley in The Guardian. The sad lesson from Metro is that "some departures from the shrinking London stock market hurt more than others".

Issue of the week: the US/UK trade accord

The pact's latest iteration offers relief for some, but could wipe out one UK industry

Keir Starmer “landed an important diplomatic victory” when President Trump finally confirmed the implementation of the UK-US trade accord at the G7 meeting in Canada this week, said David Maddox in *The Independent*. The pact, initially agreed last month, is the first the White House has struck since imposing wide-ranging global tariffs on “liberation day” in April. The deal provides for “zero tariffs on aerospace”, and reduces potential 25% tariffs on UK car exports to 10% on 100,000 vehicles annually – a move cheered by the British Society of Motor Manufacturers as “a huge reassurance”. “The UK is very well protected. You know why? Because I like them,” said the president. However, the aim of getting zero tariffs on steel and aluminium remains “a work in progress”, and most other UK goods will continue to face a 10% levy.

The signing wasn’t without incident, said Ben Riley-Smith and Rob Crilly in *The Daily Telegraph*. Trump mistakenly referred to a “trade agreement with the European Union” as he stood next to Starmer, then dropped the document, leaving the PM scrambling to retrieve the pages. But while the agreement “ends weeks of uncertainty” for some sectors, it is not “a fully blown trade deal” – indeed, it largely focuses on reducing tariffs that Trump put in



Starmer retrieving dropped documents

place earlier this year, rather than addressing long-standing issues such as the UK digital services tax paid by US companies which remains a “bugbear of the Trump team”. Perhaps a better way of looking at this accord is as “the latest iteration” of an ongoing process, said Brendan Scott on Bloomberg. The sight of Starmer, stooping to recover the document was “an awkward symbol” of the current shape of negotiations. “The deal must continually be dealt with. And the British prime minister will have to do most of the bending.”

“Cars-for-agriculture” was always going to be an important component of the deal, said the FT. Beef and other US exports will get increased access. Even so, “killing off” the UK’s domestic bioethanol industry is an unfortunate by-product of this deal, said Alistair Osborne in *The Times*. “Making fuel from wheat and corn is not everyone’s idea of a green energy nirvana”, but “the last-minute concession” to cut tariffs on 1.4 billion litres of US ethanol (or roughly the UK’s entire annual consumption) from 19% to zero, risks shutting down Britain’s two biggest players: ABF’s Vivergo Fuels and Ensus. There’s confusion in the British camp on the how the provision got through. But whether a sop or a cock-up, causing companies to collapse as a result of “landmark” US deal “is not a good look” for the PM.

War and markets: what the experts think

● A great shrug off

Stock markets were briefly rattled by the outbreak of conflict in the Middle East, but are now “settling into a familiar pattern”, said DealBook in *The New York Times*. “Stocks tumble when geopolitical crises erupt – and then rebound as investors’ appetite for risk returns.” When LPL Financial analysed 25 major episodes, dating back to Japan’s 1941 attack on Pearl Harbour, it found that “full recoveries” take “only a few weeks to a couple of months”, even after the sharpest falls. Nonetheless, the war has thrown the US Fed “a curveball”. Markets will be watching closely to see whether the Fed views conflict in the Middle East, and higher oil prices, as “a new inflation risk” that will force it to keep interest rates higher for longer.



The Strait of Hormuz: a vital chokepoint

barrages won’t cause major disruption to global energy markets. “The spectre of an Israeli attack on oil producer Iran has haunted crude markets for decades,” said Grant Smith on Bloomberg. “Now that it’s finally arrived, prices seem oddly subdued.” This insouciance partly reflects “the perceived improbability” that Iran will force a closure of the critical Strait of Hormuz, through which some 30% of the world’s seaborne oil is transported. But it’s also indicative of the oil market’s wider shift to “an era of surplus”, which – barring a complete disaster – is set to “persist for the rest of this decade”.

● And the new gold is...

The onset of war saw the price of gold, a safe haven in times of turmoil, climb closer to the record high of \$3,500.05 set in April, said Leslie Hook and Ian Smith in the FT. This further fuelled a rally that has seen the price gain 30% gain this year. Gold has now replaced the euro as the number two reserve asset in the global financial system. “People often say bitcoin is the new gold,” said Harvard professor and former IMF chief economist Kenneth Rogoff. “I say, ‘No, gold is the new gold.’”

Non-dom U-turn?

The Government’s crackdown on non-doms is “one of our most popular policies”, notes a senior Labour official. Yet following “a spate of departures by wealthy people”, and some heavy City lobbying, the Chancellor is reportedly reconsidering some of the more punitive measures, said the FT. In particular, the issue apparently “causing most heartburn” in the non-dom community is the exposure of foreign assets to 40% UK inheritance tax. The Chancellor must tread carefully. IHT on business assets is a vexed issue for locals as well as non-doms; and the last thing she needs following the winter fuel debacle is another U-turn. According to one senior financier, the Treasury is trying to find a way of “backtracking without backtracking”.

However it’s presented, Rachel Reeves must act, said *The Times*. “Squeezing the international rich may please the crowd”, but it is harming the economy. Fresh analysis by Bloomberg suggests that more than 4,400 company directors have quit the UK in the past year, chiefly in the finance, insurance and property sectors – all popular non-dom professions. Reeves’s changes were touted as raising some £2.7bn annually for the Exchequer. Yet that misses the salient point that these individuals can vote with their feet. Oxford Economics estimates that non-doms, on average, invest £118m in the UK. Without reform, “the chances are high that this could be taken elsewhere”.

Reeves's figures obscure the real challenge

Chris Giles

Financial Times

Watching Rachel Reeves deliver her Spending Review, I felt a sense of déjà vu, says Chris Giles. The “blizzard of figures” delivered by the Chancellor “bore all the hallmarks” of her Labour predecessor, Gordon Brown. “Some were presented in cash terms, others adjusted for inflation, a few expressed as a proportion of GDP...” and so on. It was baffling. The speech, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies observed, “did not appear to be a serious effort to provide any useful information to anyone”. Cutting through the thicket, the numbers do tell a clear story: there will be no austerity, but public-service funding will only rise at a similar pace to that of recent Tory governments, though more focused on health, net zero and defence. The key point is that, although the money spent will add to economy activity, it “won’t enhance” productivity, and therefore growth, much – particularly now that “value for money” has been deprioritised in official project appraisals. Without “a rapid and persistent improvement in Britain’s economic performance”, no government will have the resources to satisfy all our demands in the years ahead. “Labour has its work cut out.”

Prepare for a raid on state pensions

Madeleine Ross

The Daily Telegraph



Rachel Reeves’s about-turn on the winter fuel payment has “opened a whole new can of worms for pensioners”, says Madeleine Ross. If they can be means-tested for that, why not the state pension too? “It would be a radical move that no British chancellor has dared attempt before. But Labour is desperate for cash and has shown it is not afraid to anger older voters.” And the country’s spending on pensioners is predicted to reach a whopping £180bn annually by 2029. Several other countries – including Canada, Chile and Australia – already operate means-testing. Yet there was an outcry in Britain in January when the Tory leader, Kemi Badenoch, suggested exploring the policy. Means-testing, it is true, would completely upend the cornerstone principle established in 1909: that if you have “paid in” via national insurance, you should get the full amount out – irrespective of income. But Labour advisers, think tanks and academics have all voiced support for the plan; and the U-turn on winter fuel will go some way towards setting up the necessary apparatus. Like it or not, the universal state pension is on borrowed time.

Pisces: a fish that may not fly

Patrick Hosking

The Times

Imagine a new generation of mini stock exchanges where exciting private companies can arrange the occasional sales and purchases of their shares – “enabling investors to back promising ventures at a much earlier stage”. That’s the thinking, says Patrick Hosking, behind the “Pisces” (private intermittent securities and capital exchange systems) rules recently issued by the Financial Conduct Authority. The idea is that new platforms will create “a stepping stone towards flotation for whizzy enterprises too immature for a full listing”, and also “blow a raspberry at the gloomsters moaning about Britain’s failure to nurture a new generation of world-beaters”. Ministers and City folk have seized on Pisces as “a life raft”. But the new rules could shipwreck investors, whose “protections are kept to a minimum” while “all the cards are held by the listing companies”. Regulators are relying on “buyer beware” warnings and the “grown-ups-only rule” that “no one should complain too much if they lose their shirts”. All it will take is a few big frauds or flops for Pisces to “rot like a fish”.

Time to make America French again?

Schumpeter

The Economist

Last weekend, Constitution Avenue in Washington turned “into the Champs-Élysées for a day”, as Donald Trump staged a military display apparently inspired by Paris’s annual Bastille Day parade. It isn’t the only recent French import, says The Economist. The Oval Office has had a “Versailles-style gilded makeover”. And, even as they penalise French goods, Trump and his officials are “turning into avid consumers of French ideas” – notably a heavy dose of “*dirigisme*”. The Trump administration has touted not just tariffs but also national champions, price controls and state ownership. True, Trump has yet to “channel his inner François Mitterrand” by seizing private assets, but “Maga-whisperer” Steve Bannon has suggested nationalising Elon Musk’s SpaceX. The bosses of industries that could benefit have cheered parts of this agenda. “However, for most American CEOs it all seems about as appealing as a corked Pétrus.” Given the recent dismal record of corporate France, US bosses are right to be “on alert” for “more soupçons of Mr Trump’s unlikely Francophilia”.

City profiles

Brian Cox

The *Succession* star returns to his native Scotland this summer to play the economist Adam Smith in *Make It Happen* – a new satirical play by James Graham about the Royal Bank of Scotland’s role in the 2008 crash. Cox plays Smith to Sandy Grierson’s Fred “The Shred” Goodwin, and he is relishing the prospect. “Adam Smith comes back as a spirit and lays into them a bit,” he told Prospect. Famed for playing a Murdoch-esque patriarch, Cox has a jaundiced view of capitalism. “I’ve got great sympathy for Logan Roy. He’s a self-made man” who “built this empire up” – yet his entitled children “are only prepared to take. That’s where the capitalist society goes wrong.” What would Smith, the father of laissez-faire economics, make of it all? He’d be “absolutely appalled”.

Emma Bridgewater



The “queen of pottery” made a “Three Cheers for King Charles” mug for the coronation. Now the King has repaid the compliment, said The Daily Telegraph. Bridgewater, 63, was among several businesswomen to be appointed dames in the King’s birthday honours – including Nationwide’s Debbie Crosbie and Microsoft’s Clare Barclay. She stands out, though, as the only entrepreneur. Having founded her ceramics business in 1985, she now runs two factories in Stoke-on-Trent, which employ 440 and generated sales of £36m in 2023. Bridgewater has emerged as a standard bearer for “Stokies” and British manufacturing generally, said the Stoke Sentinel. She described her 40 years in the Potteries as “a marvellous and unlikely adventure”.

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Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

IG Group*The Times*

Heightened volatility has been a boon for IG, which offers trading through derivatives and contracts-for-difference (CfDs) on everything from shares to forex. Expanding and returning cash via buybacks and divs. Buy. £10.70.

James Halstead*The Mail on Sunday*

Prospects are improving for this resilient flooring maker – which majors on floors used in schools and hospitals – as the Government promises to up spending on affordable homes and military accommodation. Target: 300p. Buy. 158p.

Johnson Service Group*The Mail on Sunday*

The laundry specialist services the hospitality industry, and special events from Royal Ascot to Wembley Stadium, with workwear, table and bed linen. Profits are up 23%. Set to gain as it moves to the main market. Buy. 144p.

Marks & Spencer Group*The Daily Telegraph*

M&S's earnings are forecast to surge 29% next year, given solid fundamentals and improving margins. Current underperformance due to the cyberattack, and an attractive valuation, provide a buying opportunity. Buy. 370.8p.

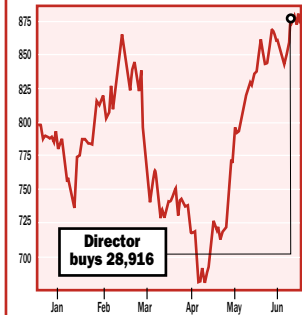
National Grid*The Daily Telegraph*

The “highly defensive” utility is on track to deliver earnings per share growth of 6-8%. Expanding via investment, while bolstering its focus on electricity amid the drive to lower carbon emissions. Yields 4.5%. Buy. £10.41.

Vp*The Mail on Sunday*

Prospects look bright for Vp – which rents and installs equipment for infrastructure projects – as planned spending on rail, water, power and homes picks up. The divi has been hiked and shares should recover as sales rise. Buy. 605p.

Directors' dealings



Despite soft demand, the kitchen-maker has grown market share and widened its margin by vertically integrating ops. New CFO Jackie Callaway spent £250,000 on shares. Howden's pay policy requires her to build a holding of at least £1.5m over time.

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

...and some to hold, avoid or sell

Bango*Investors' Chronicle*

Cost-cutting should underpin further profits at the mobile payments company, amid falling debt. A “digital vending machine” service, which helps customers manage subscription payments, is driving a strong sales pipeline. Hold. 84.5p.

Crest Nicholson Holdings*The Times*

After a “difficult few years” fixing defects, the housebuilder is at the start of a turnaround. The new boss, an industry veteran, aims to restore margins and up completions. Cheap, but no guarantee for a quick fix. Hold. 196.9p.

Dr Martens*Investors' Chronicle*

A relief rally has boosted the bootmaker as the new CEO sets out a fresh strategy and ambitious targets. Broadening the product range and forecasting higher profits, despite looming tariff threats. Hold. 74p.

Fuller, Smith & Turner*Investors' Chronicle*

The pub and hotels group has used cash from disposals to pay down debt, refinance and buy Lovely Pubs (an estate of seven country pubs) and the White Swan in Twickenham. Profits are up. Hold. 632p.

JD Sports Fashion*The Times*

The market-leading sportswear retailer has been hit by cooling demand. Yet capex on logistics, IT upgrades and M&A is slowing and it remains a “solid business” with a strong balance sheet. Opening 150 new stores. Hold. 81.94p

Wizz Air*Investors' Chronicle*

Annual profits at the low-cost airline fell 42% after a fifth of its planes were grounded due to engine issues. Non-fuel costs have jumped and operating expenses are up. Leverage is rising. Sell. £12.29.

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip**H&T Group**

Investors' Chronicle
up 61.62% to 640p

Worst tip**Legal & General Group**

The Mail on Sunday
up 4.24% to 253.3p

Market view

“If Powell signals the Fed is going to keep playing the ‘wait-and-see’ game before cutting rates... stocks will likely sell off. His tone is crucial. Trade wars. Geopolitics. Growth. No one knows how this will all play out.”

Dennis Dick, Triple D Trading.
Quoted on Bloomberg

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

	17 June 2025	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	8834.03	8853.08	-0.22%
FTSE All-share UK	4795.32	4817.46	-0.46%
Dow Jones	42439.64	42783.93	-0.80%
NASDAQ	19634.81	19641.85	-0.04%
Nikkei 225	38536.74	38211.51	0.85%
Hang Seng	23980.30	24162.87	-0.76%
Gold	3397.60	3319.30	2.36%
Brent Crude Oil	74.79	67.80	10.31%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	3.37%	3.36%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	4.63	4.61	
US 10-year Treasuries	4.41	4.47	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	3.4% (May)	3.5% (Apr)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	4.3% (May)	4.5% (Apr)	
Halifax house price (yoy)	2.5% (May)	3.2% (Apr)	
£1 STERLING:	\$1.347 €1.170 ¥195.208		Bitcoin \$105,045.00

Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS

RISES	Price	% change
Entain	837.60	+11.10
Fresnillo	1433.00	+6.90
BT	188.20	+6.70
Ashtead	4564.00	+5.10
Endeavour Mining	2320.00	+4.40

FALLS

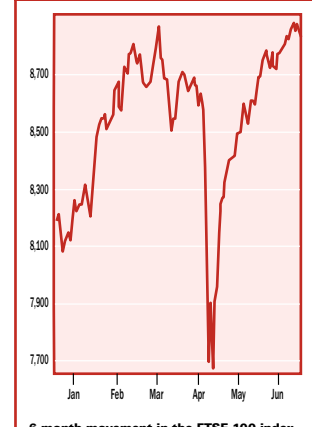
JD Sports Fashion	74.56	-9.00
Easyjet	535.80	-8.80
Int. Cons. Airlines Gp.	313.00	-8.30
Antofagasta	1772.50	-5.90
Intermediate Capital	1937.00	-4.90

FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER

Morgan Sindall	4400.00	+15.60
lbstock	157.00	-18.70

Source: FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 17 June (pm)

Following the Footsie





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Inside knowledge: confessions of a female prison officer

Over her decade as a prison officer, Alex South worked with some extraordinary colleagues, and saw what prisons at their best are like. She also saw the bad side – illicit affairs, violence, squalid conditions – getting gradually worse

I was 22 years old when a male prison officer first suggested I find another job. “No offence,” he said, “but I don’t think women should work here.”

We were sitting in the education department of a high-security men’s prison, watching as inmates filed into the classrooms around us. I had only been in the job a few months, and was far from settled. The bars and barbed wire, the smells of sweat and stale smoke and cheap coffee, the sounds of shouting and running and alarm bells, the enormous alsatians patrolling the perimeter wall – all were a constant reminder of where I was. And, for some officers at least, where I wasn’t meant to be.

Then: click, click, click. One by one, the classroom doors closed, leaving us seated in the corridor outside. This is standard in prisons. Officers don’t tend to sit in classrooms with inmates; that area belongs to the teachers. Similarly, officers tend not to be in treatment rooms when prisoners are seen by GPs, nurses and therapists. This meant it was possible, though certainly not common, for sexual relationships to take place between non-disciplinary staff and inmates. Not long after I joined, a female teacher was found in the cleaning cupboard with a prisoner serving over 30 years for multiple murder. They weren’t cleaning. But such incidents were rare. It was rarer still for uniformed staff to engage in sexual relationships with prisoners.

That was back in 2012. Today, rates of corruption have increased, and so have reports of inappropriate relationships between inmates and officers. In just one week last month, three female prison officers were found guilty of engaging in sexual relationships with male prisoners. In April, a female governor was found guilty of misconduct, after starting a relationship with a convicted drug trafficker. On the face of it, this uptick is surprising. Prisons are hardly sexually charged environments. They are places where autonomy is removed, control imposed, and the tiniest of decisions taken away. But beneath the surface, something has shifted – and the consequences are only just beginning to show.

Becoming a prison officer was not an obvious career choice. After dropping out of university and spending the next couple of years working in a bar, I wasn’t sure what to do next. So when a friend showed me a volunteering opportunity at a Young Offender Institute, I applied. It turned out to be a formative decision. Right from the start, I was struck by the stories I heard. They didn’t match the narrative so often perpetuated in the media. The jail wasn’t full of evil killers, but young men from poor estates with



Alex South: being a prison officer was “not an obvious career choice”

no fathers and not much besides. The officers were not punitive idiots, but men and women with integrity, humour and acute emotional intelligence.

It quickly became clear that prisons and the people inside are not separate from the outside world, but the very opposite. They are a microcosm of society – reflecting the challenges facing our communities, and offering solutions too. Being a part of that felt like a privilege to me. So I applied to be a prison officer. After being accepted in 2012, I was assigned to HMP Whitemoor in Cambridgeshire, and then HMP Wormwood Scrubs in London. I went on to serve the last five years of my career at HMP Belmarsh.

Many of the prisoners I worked with came from challenging backgrounds. There was the young offender

whose uncle took him on his first armed robbery at 12; the four brothers whose mother introduced them to cocaine at the kitchen table after school; the murderer who met his father for the first time on the wing. They did not always know what it meant to be a good man. Nor did they have a template for healthy relationships between men and women. Prison offers an opportunity to challenge those patterns. To teach men how to interact healthily with women and develop respectful relationships.

“In 2012, it would have been inconceivable for a female officer to have sex with a prisoner without her colleagues noticing her absence”

When I started, I was supported by a team of experienced staff with decades in the job. They saw things I didn’t even know to look for: furtive glances exchanged at the wrong time,

a shift in mood, a prisoner suddenly changing his routine. Those officers taught me when to ask questions, when to listen and when to act. But today’s prison system is different.

Despite warnings from the Prison Officers’ Association, in 2013 the coalition government implemented a Voluntary Early Departure scheme encouraging experienced prison officers to retire early. These officers were on high salaries and so, in the short term, the move was a money-saver. In the long term, however, it has been catastrophic.

Within three years, the Prison Service lost more than 7,000 front-line officers. That experience has been impossible to regain. Today, the entire recruitment process is conducted online. It doesn’t always even include a face-to-face interview.

None of this is to say that there wasn’t corruption when I joined. I encountered several cases. I’m thinking of the rabbi who smuggled

in over £200,000 worth of street drugs; the teacher who hid cocaine in his textbooks; the male nurse who brought in prescription opioids for addicted inmates; the officer who filled his vape with liquid spice to sell on; the male governor jailed for sexual relationships with a female prisoner.

In 2012, however, it would have been inconceivable for a female officer to have sex with a prisoner in his cell without her colleagues noticing her absence. But that was when prisons were better staffed. If there's only one officer working on the landing, there's no one to notice when the other is gone – there is no one to spot the difference between a door that has been almost closed and one that is being held shut from the inside.

During my first six months in the job, I asked my custodial manager about how a young woman was supposed to protect herself in a male-dominated environment with challenging individuals. His advice was simple: "Be early for every shift. Iron your shirts and iron them again. Polish your boots every evening." He was both my manager and my mentor. He had over 20 years of experience. And he was right.

To an exploitative prisoner, who seems an easier target? The officer with immaculate uniform or the officer with an untucked shirt, scuffed boots and messy hair? Obviously presentation isn't everything, but it sends a clear message about the standards we uphold and expectations we set. The same applies to the Prison Service itself, where staff are often now required to wear second-hand uniforms in rat-infested buildings. The current resignation rates – nearly half of prison officers leave after less than three years – suggest that that message has been heard loud and clear.

Corruption cannot be eradicated entirely, but it is far from inevitable. Instead of producing an efficient and cost-effective system, cuts to the Prison Service have created the conditions for misbehaviour to flourish. And these have been further exacerbated by an overcrowding crisis that has seen our jails running at 99% capacity. It's simple maths: more prisoners supervised by fewer staff equals a dangerous and volatile environment.

Consider the young female officer I searched while working in the security department of HMP Belmarsh in 2020. I asked her if she had anything unauthorised on her, knowing full well that she did. I'd spent the past hour scrutinising CCTV. Unsurprisingly, she said no. I asked her again. Only when I put on my gloves to begin the search did she produce three mobile phones and a sizeable quantity of cocaine.

At one time, I would have felt disgusted by her actions. But after nine years in the service, I saw the nuance to her situation. She had minimal training, little supervision and almost no support. She was working on a wing of more than 200 men with officers who had little more than two years' experience. She had been groomed, pressured, threatened and blackmailed. And so we all suffered. Not least her children, who spent their first Christmas without her because she was in jail herself. After a decade in the job, I'd had enough. It wasn't just how dangerous prisons had become, but also that I knew how good they could be. The first jail I worked in was a high-security Category A men's establishment. The men inside were serving life sentences for murder, terrorism and organised crime. And yet, during the three



HMP Wormwood Scrubs: where South spent part of her career

years I spent there, I saw only a handful of serious violent incidents. The reasons are simple. The prison benefitted from a low staff turnover; officers were valued and listened to, and so stayed in the job. They came to know the men in their care and were invested in their success. The prisoners themselves had access to a variety of activities, such as Open University courses, sports competitions and carpentry workshops. They spent a minimum of eight hours a day out of

their cells, all of which were single occupancy.

But that wasn't to last. Years later, when I moved to Belmarsh, I was guarding prisoners housed three men to a cell. If they were lucky, they were allowed to leave it for one hour a day, and when staffing was bad, once every three days. This was a system I no longer wanted any part in. If there is good inside everyone, being locked in a room for 23 hours is no way to nurture it.

Still, I have no doubt that prisons are still a place where women should work. After all, of the nearly 88,000 prisoners in England and Wales, fewer than 70 are serving natural life. The rest have a release date – and they are released not to some faraway place, but to the towns, cities and villages we call home. Where women are mothers, teachers and working members of society. Where women run laps of the park, push prams down the street, and drink pints in the pub. Where women stand in the Post Office queue, serve at the checkout, and patrol the streets as police officers. If prisons are intended to prepare people for the real world, then they must reflect it.

Moreover, while I could tell several more stories about female officers being led astray, I could tell far more of the incredible women I have worked alongside. Take the officer who knew the men on her wing so well that she could immediately translate the restless atmosphere in the exercise yard. Her split-second decision to search an inmate resulted in her finding a prison shank consisting of three razor blades melted into a toothbrush handle. Or consider the officer who faced down a man with a pool ball in one hand, shank in the other and blade in his teeth. She saw more than just the rage that reddened his face.

Behind his anger was a man struggling with what to do next, because he hated that place and the way it kept him from his kids, hated that he had to roll up towels to block the mice scuttling under his door. The officer – who had once helped him write a letter to his mum, who had snuck him an extra packet of tobacco on a bad day – knew all this. He was a man drowning in his own desperation. So, she dropped her baton first to let him know that this isn't how it ends, calmly took his weapons, and carried on with her shift.

These are the women who don't make the headlines. But they are the ones who represent the majority of our female prison officers. Back in 2012, I didn't feel I could tell my colleague why I disagreed with him. But now I've left that world, so let me be explicit. Women should work in prisons for one simple reason – we will all be worse off if they don't.

This article first appeared in The Dispatch © 2025 Muckraker Ltd. Alex South's book, Behind These Doors (Hodder & Stoughton £10.99), is out now. To buy from The Week Bookshop for £9.99, call 020-3176 3835 or visit theweekbookshop.co.uk



This week's winner will receive Week-branded items, as well as two Connell Guides (connellguides.com).

THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1470

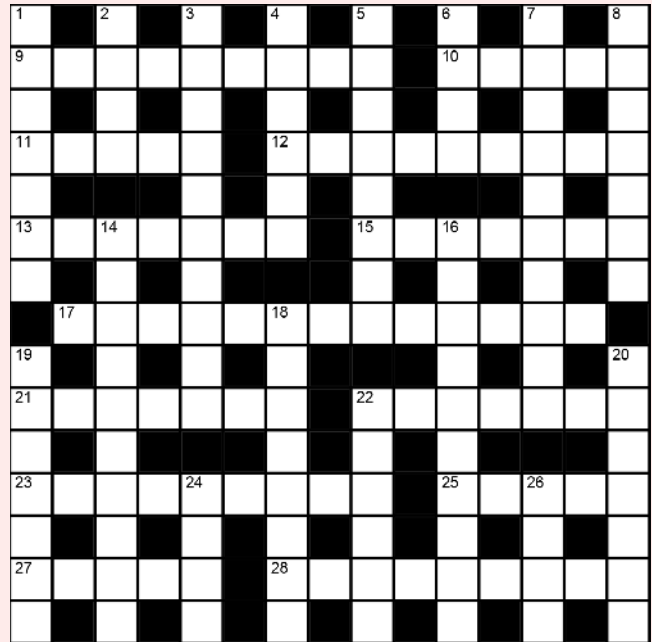
Two Connell Guides and three Week-branded items will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 30 June. Send it to The Week Crossword 1470, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. By Paul McKenna

ACROSS

- 9 Concern as I am helping around island college (9)
 10 Snow leopard is bound to lose power (5)
 11 Verify American's draft (5)
 12 Act from commercial traveller told to go again (9)
 13 Piebald possibly raced around too much (7)
 15 What holds up laciest pants? (7)
 17 Harmless drudge who orders what's in books? (13)
 21 Vital getting into long problem for peepers (7)
 22 Spelling ceremonies for mischievous imps (7)
 23 Show off blemish in Morgan Roadster, e.g. (6,3)
 25 Top beer barrel, one cooper's opening (5)
 27 Takeaway? Ring for one in roadside restaurant (5)
 28 TV show weirdly appears to be about two ducks (4,5)

DOWN

- 1 Talk about throwing event with son (7)
 2 Primate taking in second church's recess (4)
 3 Open excitedly let in last of these – one shouldn't be crossed (6,4)
 4 Frantic and free city (6)
 5 Cut fruit come again (8)
 6 Contend with priest's cloak (4)
 7 Money put aside in opening to save STEM changing (10)
 8 Nutty cutlet and English salad leaves (7)
 14 New canoe in action is capable of crossing the Pacific, say (5-5)
 16 Hope such as 'Arriet doesn't 'ave (10)
 18 It's cloudy where the flies are (8)
 19 Is boring lyric poem one of a series? (7)
 20 Spy group in Laos otherwise unwilling to mix (7)
 22 In odd places super demand for expansion (6)
 24 Go off aptitude to spin (4)
 26 Want some genuine Edam (4)



Name _____

Address _____

_____ Tel no _____

Clue of the week answer: _____

Clue of the week: Steps taken by royalty and a bishop in quitting protests (10) *Brendan, The Guardian*

Solution to Crossword 1468

ACROSS: 8 Curate 9 Olive oil 10 Tenement 11 Amazed 12 Panama 13 Sobriety 14 Weepies 16 Brigade 20 Escalate 23 Swatch 25 Desist 26 Learning 27 Trousers 28 Chives

DOWN: 1 Fuselage 2 Camera 3 Beverage 4 Contest 5 Bicarb 6 Regaling 7 Silent 15 Platinum 17 Research 18 Decanter 19 Legless 21 Sherry 22 Antler 24 Auntie

Clue of the week: Hull resident ran cable haphazardly? (8)

Solution: BARNACLE (anagram)

The winner of 1468 is Gopal Rao from Walsall

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Sudoku 1,012 (medium)

Fill in all the squares so that each row, column and each of the 3x3 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9

Solution to Sudoku 1,011

8	9	5	2	1	3	4	6	7
7	3	6	4	5	8	1	2	9
1	4	2	9	6	7	8	5	3
4	2	1	7	9	5	6	3	8
5	8	9	3	4	6	2	7	1
3	6	7	8	2	1	5	9	4
9	5	8	1	3	2	7	4	6
6	1	3	5	7	4	9	8	2
2	7	4	6	8	9	3	1	5

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Charity of the week



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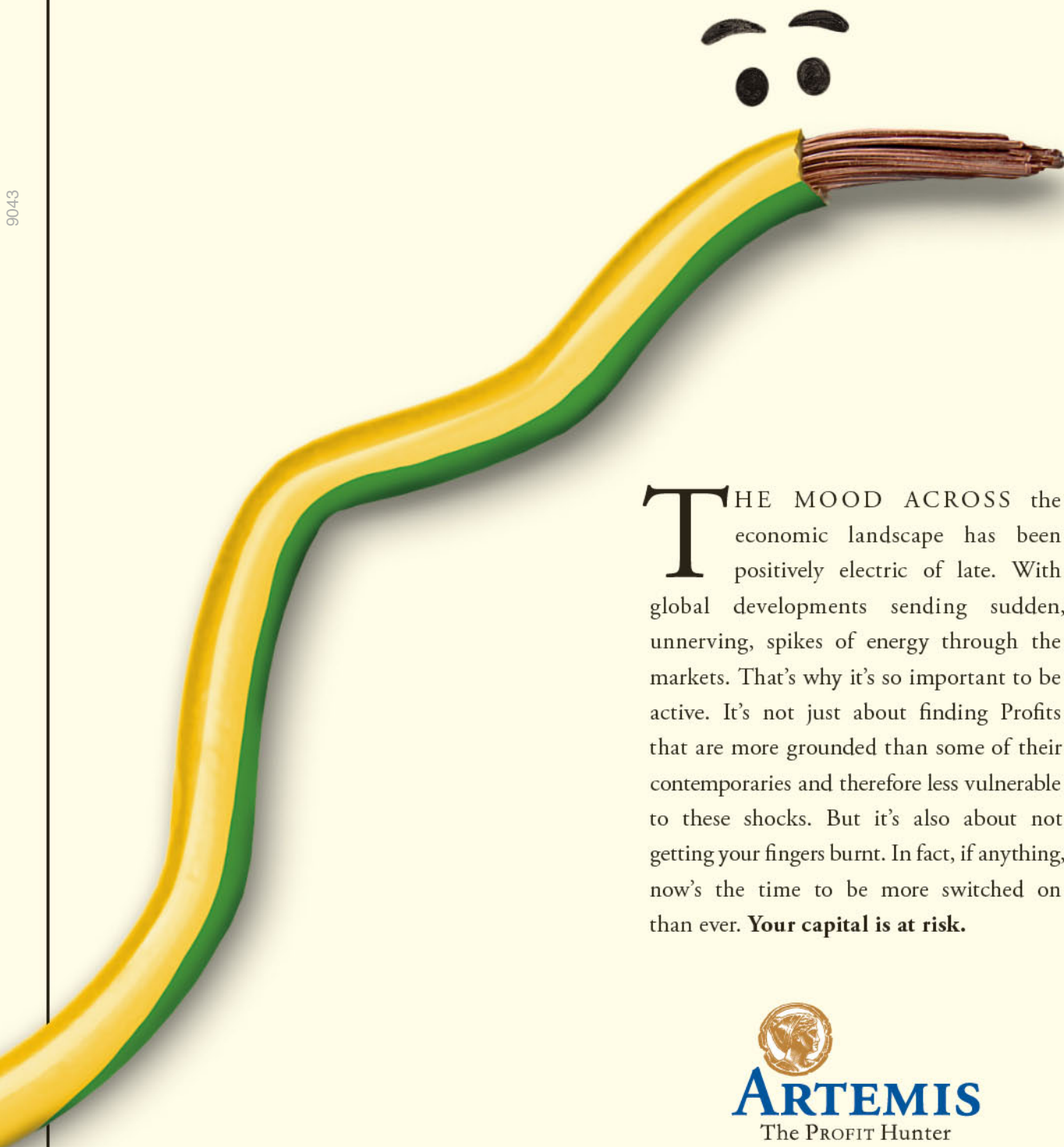


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