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THE WEEK

27 APRIL 2024 | ISSUE 1485

THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Ready for take-off?

The Rwanda bill finally passes

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The main stories…

What happened

The Rwanda bill passes

After a protracted round of parliamentary "ping pong", peers finally approved the Government's Rwanda bill on Monday night, clearing the way for it to become law. The legislation instructs judges to treat Rwanda as a safe country for asylum seekers. This will prevent migrants from challenging their deportation on the basis of general claims about Rwanda's safety, although they will still be able to appeal on the grounds that there is "compelling evidence" that the country is unsafe for them owing to their individual circumstances.



Thousands have crossed this year

Rishi Sunak hailed the bill as a "game-changer" for tackling irregular migration, and said nothing would now prevent the Government from getting deportation flights to Rwanda off the ground by the end of July. So far this year, more than 6,000 people have crossed the Channel in small boats. On Tuesday, five people, including a seven-year-old girl, died while attempting to do so. The PM said the tragedy underscored the need for his plan, which he claims will destroy the business model of the criminal gangs who traffic migrants. Labour branded the scheme an "extortionately expensive gimmick".

What the editorials said

"The planes have been chartered, an airfield is ready, border staff are standing by, and the first deportees have been identified," said The Daily Telegraph. Pending legal challenges, the Rwanda plan can at last be put into action. It's about time. The public's patience with Channel crossings is wearing thin. It has taken two years, four home secretaries and three acts of parliament to get here, said The Independent. Yet even if the Rwanda flights do now go ahead, there's little prospect of them providing the promised "systemic deterrent". If desperate people are willing to risk their lives on overcrowded boats, they're hardly going to be put off by the very remote chance they'll end up in Rwanda.

This is an "egregious" piece of legislation, said the FT. In addition to being cruel and unlikely to deliver the desired effect, it sets a "pernicious precedent for British democracy". The bill declares that Rwanda is safe and that judges must simply accept this fact, despite the Supreme Court having previously found otherwise. "Britain's political settlement has long rested on the premise that Parliament is sovereign but accepts the courts' role in holding it to account – and does not attempt to usurp that function. The Rwanda bill undermines that settlement."

What happened

Israel's retaliation

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) fired missiles at Iran last Friday, in retaliation for the barrage of 300 missiles and drones that Tehran had aimed at Israel six days earlier. The strikes targeted an air base near the central city of Isfahan, where a missile-production complex and facilities for Iran's nuclear programme are located. Iranian officials played down the attack, and said the explosions heard near Isfahan were the result of "air defence firing at suspicious objects". It said these had caused no damage, and made no mention of any plans for further strikes. Israel didn't officially comment on the strikes.



Netanyahu: a measured response

Analysts said that the limited scope of Israel's attack showed that it had listened to its allies' pleas for restraint. However, it drew the ire of some of the hardliners in Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition. "Feeble!" was the one-word response of the national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, on X/Twitter.

What the editorials said

The world had waited with bated breath for Israel's response to Iran's unprecedented missile and drone barrage, said the FT. When it came, there was a "collective sigh of relief". Netanyahu seemed to have listened to President Biden – who had urged Israel to "take the win" of having thwarted Iran's assault – and authorised an attack designed to avoid further escalation. Tehran, in turn, didn't directly blame the attack on Israel. The result is that "a full-blown regional conflict has, for now, been avoided". Israel's response was sensibly muted, agreed the Daily Mail. It was limited to military sites and seemingly caused no casualties. But its message would have been clear to the mullahs: "Israel could, if provoked, inflict huge damage."

The danger hasn't passed, said The Independent. These "tit-for-tat" strikes have set a precedent and may yet be repeated, given the regional tensions caused by the war in Gaza, the associated activity by Iranian proxies such as Hezbollah, and Israel's "existential fear" of Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon. The risk of "full-scale" war between these "historic enemies" therefore remains all too real.

It wasn't all bad

A Nigerian chess champion has broken the record for the longest chess marathon by playing non-stop for 58 hours. Tunde Onakoya, 29, raised more than $120,000 for charity by taking on a rotating cast of challengers in Times Square in New York. "I can't process a lot of the emotions I feel right now," he said. "But I know we did something truly remarkable." Onakoya credits chess with saving him from the poverty he faced while growing up in slums in Lagos.



A 33-year-old from Belfast has become the UK's first qualified astronaut in more than a decade. Rosemary Coogan, who has a PhD in astronomy, was selected from a pool of 22,500 applicants in 2022 to become one of the European Space Agency's "career astronauts". She has since been subjected to a series of rigorous tests, including survival training in the Pyrenees. This week, having completed a year of basic astronaut training, Coogan graduated from the ESA along with five others. She will now take part in operational tasks within the agency, until she is assigned to a mission.

Nasa is back in touch with Earth's most distant spacecraft, after months in which it transmitted only gibberish. Forty-seven years on from its launch, in 1977, the probe is now 15 billion miles away. So Nasa's engineers were alarmed when, in November last year, it started sending back a loop of indecipherable code. Now, after a race to work out the source of the fault, they have fiddled with chips in the probe's computers – and coherency has been restored. "Vroom vroom," said the space agency on X/Twitter. "So glad to be back in contact!"

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COVER CARTOON: HOWARD MCWILLIAM

What the commentators said

Getting this bill on the books will be a "big moment" for Sunak, said Kate McCann in The i Paper. For the Tory leadership, it has come to be seen as the answer to all of the party's electoral woes. It isn't. Voters do care about immigration, but this isn't a policy that they'll "feel in their everyday lives – important if you want to take credit for it come election day". Voters will be worried about the high cost of the policy, and will likely be sceptical about its effectiveness. The irony is that Sunak reportedly felt exactly the same way about this policy when Boris Johnson launched it two years ago. If only he'd followed his instincts. This "victory" won't do much good for Sunak's standing with either voters or his own MPs, agreed Rachel Cunliffe in The New Statesman. "It may well be a symbolic win. But it's just not clear what it's symbolic of."

Few think that the Rwanda scheme will work, said Patrick O'Flynn in The Spectator. Nigel Farage predicted this week that nobody will ever be deported under it. That has set Sunak "a very low bar for proving him wrong". By repeatedly announcing its intention to abolish the scheme, whether or not it's working, Labour has also given the PM a handy get-out, said Tom Harris in The Daily Telegraph. If the policy fails to reduce the number of attempted Channel crossings, he will, "with some justification, be able to place at least some of the blame on Labour for fatally undermining the scheme's purpose".

Labour needs to tread carefully when it comes to this issue, said Anne McElvoy in The i Paper. Finding faults with Government plans is part of the Opposition's job, but as the next general election draws closer, more attention will inevitably turn to the question of how Keir Starmer's party would deal with illegal Channel crossings. Labour's standard answer is that it would tackle the problem "upstream" by ensuring more coastguards, better intelligence and liaison with Interpol, but this has the "ring of wishful thinking". There's a reason why Germany, Italy and Austria are also seeking third-country solutions to the problem of irregular immigration. "The Rwanda plan legacy will haunt the next government, not just the one that dreamt it up."

What next?

The Government is expected to begin detaining migrants in removal centres in the coming days, reports The Times. Officials have identified 150 people who are considered "legally watertight cases". Sunak said 25 courtrooms and 150 judges had been earmarked to deal with expected legal challenges. The civil service union FDA is likely to launch a judicial review next week, arguing that ministers' new power to disregard interim rulings from the European Court of Human Rights would mean telling civil servants to break international law.

The UK hopes to replicate the Rwanda plan elsewhere. Talks are said to be under way with Armenia, Botswana and Ivory Coast.

What the commentators said

Iran's ayatollahs have been profoundly humiliated, said Richard Kemp in The Daily Telegraph. Last week, they said that "even the slightest Israeli strike" would lead to a "punishing retaliation". Now, they "seem to be saying they will do nothing". Israel's choice of target was significant, said Peter Beaumont in The Guardian. Isfahan is home to Iran's fleet of US-made F-14 Tomcat fighter jets (acquired before the 1979 revolution) and a hub for the production of weapons, including Shahab 3 missiles that can reach Israel. It's also near the Natanz uranium enrichment plant, a vital nuclear facility. By striking there, Israel signalled that it could target Iran's nuclear programme if it chose to. But was this response sufficient, asked Jake Wallis Simons in The Daily Telegraph. Intercepting Iran's barrage cost Israel $1bn. "If the price for such a major assault is one 'limited' jab at an air base, then that is extremely favourable to Iran."

Netanyahu has spent decades advocating tougher action against Iran, said Anshel Pfeffer in The Times. But he wasn't convinced by his generals' calls for a major response to its attack. Polls indicated that – exhausted by the fights against Hamas in Gaza and Lebanon-based Hezbollah – the Israeli public had little appetite for a conflict on another front; and Netanyahu was loath to jeopardise the emergence of a strategically valuable coalition in the region. That Jordan, and reportedly the UAE and Saudi Arabia, helped thwart Iran's attack is "a big deal", said Jonathan Freedland in The Guardian. It suggests that an unofficial alliance between Israel and Sunni states that fear Iran is stepping "into the light", and gives Israel a chance to gain what it has never had: "an accepted place in the Middle East". To grasp that prize, Israel would have to offer Palestinians a route to statehood. That would be politically fraught, but the potential reward is huge: an "entirely new future" in which Iran is hemmed in by nations that are united in a resolve to stop it "wreaking regional havoc via the militias and regimes it controls".

What next?

With tensions between Iran and Israel appearing to have eased, attention is now turning back to the war in Gaza, says Paul Rogers on Open Democracy. The Strip's Hamas-run health ministry reported last week that the Palestinian death toll has now surpassed 34,000. But negotiations between Israel and Hamas over a ceasefire are on hold. The mediator Qatar is "increasingly dubious about prospects for progress", and the IDF is intensifying its strikes on the southern Gazan city of Rafah, while also stepping up its operations in the West Bank. A swift end to the conflict doesn't look likely.

THE WEEK

In the 1960s, the Canary Islands attracted 300,000 visitors a year; by the 2010s, the figure was nine million. Last year, it was 16 million. Locals are up in arms about the impact of this *(see page 5)*. And they're by no means the only ones in despair about "overtourism". Visitors to Málaga are arriving at Airbnbs to find stickers on the door saying "I used to live here"; and "tourists F**k off". In Austria last year, residents of the tiny village of Hallstatt erected a fence to stop hordes of Instagrammers taking selfies of its celebrated Alpine view. Closer to home, in the pretty town of Dartmouth, many are aghast about a plan to allow vast cruise ships to dock in the harbour. Writing about this in the Telegraph, Jemima Lewis, a regular visitor to that part of Devon, says that "tourist economies always end up eating themselves". Tourists are attracted to a seaside town by its peace and local character. Businesses open to cater to them, and so more visitors follow. Eventually, residents start to be priced out, leaving too few to sustain a year-round economy. Soon, she says, all the town has left is shops selling fudge and wetsuits, and the original tourists drift away because the place has lost the magic that drew them there in the first place. But what is the solution? The average Briton now takes 3.4 holidays a year. Globally, the number of foreign holidays taken has doubled in 25 years. We may all worry about it, and grieve when our own favourite spots are overrun, but we're all part of it. As they say to drivers, you're not stuck in traffic, you *are* the traffic.

Caroline Law

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Controversy of the week

Policing the protests



Falter: just trying to cross the road?

For months, Jewish groups have been warning that pro-Palestinian marches have made parts of Britain's cities "no-go zones" for Jewish people. The truth of the claim was vividly demonstrated by video footage that emerged last week, said The Daily Telegraph. It shows Gideon Falter, the head of the Campaign Against Antisemitism, being stopped by Metropolitan Police officers at a march for Gaza in central London on 13 April. Falter, who is wearing a *kippah* (or skullcap), tries to cross the road through the marchers. A police sergeant stops him, saying: "You are quite openly Jewish. This is a pro-Palestine march... I am worried about the reaction to your presence." When Falter insists, the police threaten him with arrest. "What is this country coming to," asked the Daily Mail, "when a Jewish man trying to cross the street in his home city is prevented from doing so for fear of upsetting a mob?" Shouldn't the police be arresting the people who might attack him? Just imagine the outrage if any other minority had been involved, said Ike Ijeh and David Spencer in The Critic. "You're quite openly Muslim. This is an EDL march... I am worried about the reaction to your presence."

Obviously, the sergeant's words were clumsy and "unacceptable", said Hugo Rifkind in The Times. But Falter's story was distinctly fishy. He claimed that he was just going about his normal business. "I went for a walk, as I do most Saturdays", after the synagogue, he wrote later. In fact, he was there – with a videographer – to make a point. In a longer version of the conversation released by Sky News, the policeman offers to escort him to a quieter stretch of road, which he refuses. "Mr Falter deliberately provoked a headline-grabbing confrontation with a police officer who was simply trying to keep him safe," said Simon Kelner in The i Paper. Most people wouldn't see this as "a fundamental abrogation of Falter's human rights". Is it much different from "policing at, say, a football ground where opposing fans are kept apart for their own safety"? The policeman was trying to tread a difficult line. "All nuance has been lost", and the Met have been turned "into villains".

Falter, too, has been "monstered", by people accusing him of seeking out the march to prove a point, said Madeline Grant in The Daily Telegraph. But "this isn't quite the winning argument his critics imagine". If Falter was trying to prove the point "that Jews' safety cannot be guaranteed" near these marches, then "he has succeeded". If being "openly Jewish" is seen as a provocation, then "perhaps these marches aren't so peaceful after all; perhaps – dare I say it – it isn't just 'Zionism' they are objecting to". The Met has certainly had a difficult job policing protests since the 7 October attacks, said Ed West on Substack. The worry is that it seems "geared towards appeasing the numerically strongest and most threatening group", rather than enforcing the law "without fear or favour".

SNP scraps green target
The future of the power-sharing deal between the SNP and the Scottish Green Party was thrown into doubt last week when the Scottish government scrapped its pledge to cut the country's greenhouse gas emissions by 75% by 2030. The move followed a damning report last month from the UK Climate Change Committee, which found that the target was "no longer credible". Scottish Green co-leader Patrick Harvie said that a vote on the future of the deal (the Bute House Agreement) would be held "in due course". In a further blow to the SNP, the party's former chief executive, Peter Murrell, who is married to ex-SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon, was re-arrested and charged last week in connection with the embezzlement of party funds.

Defence spending to rise
Rishi Sunak has pledged that the UK will increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2030, up from about 2.3% now. In a speech in Poland, the PM claimed the additional funding would put the defence industry on a "war footing" at a time of increased global threats. Ministers have confirmed that the extra money – around £75bn over six years – will be raised not by increasing borrowing, but by cuts to the civil service.

Spirit of the age

A growing number of firms are now offering teenagers "virtual work experience", stints that are done entirely from home on a phone or computer, The Daily Telegraph reports. The placements, offered via a firm called Springpod, are said to provide teenagers with "relevant skills" to help them on the path to careers in construction, midwifery, nursing and engineering, as well as in the hospitality industry. Heathrow Airport's course involves "fun quizzes and thought-provoking activities"; while Pret A Manger's is billed as an "immersive journey into product development".

A quarter of three- and four-year-olds in the UK now own a smartphone, according to Ofcom. Nearly 40% of five- to seven-year-olds use social media.

Good week for:

News Group, after Hugh Grant agreed to settle his phone hacking case against The Sun's owner. The actor said he'd wanted to have his day in court, but had he done so, and been awarded even a penny less than the "enormous" settlement offer, he'd have been liable for News Group's nearly £10m in costs.

The Black Dog, a pub in Vauxhall, south London, which was inundated after it was mentioned in an eponymous song on Taylor Swift's new album *(see page 26)*. Thousands of Swifties made a pilgrimage to the pub last weekend, amid speculation that the singer had visited it with actor Joe Alwyn, her ex-boyfriend.

Bad week for:

Italy's culinary pride, which suffered a blow when two Italian food historians claimed that pizza as we know it – with tomato sauce – was invented in America. The pair argue that pizza in Italy amounted to bits of focaccia topped with a range of ingredients, until Italian Americans discovered the potential of tomato sauce.

Huw Edwards, who resigned from the BBC, nine months after he was suspended over allegations that he had paid a young person tens of thousands of pounds for explicit images.

The Welsh government, which admitted that it was "refining and finessing" its 20mph speed limit in built-up areas. Officials said that hundreds of roads were likely to be returned to 30mph.

Sarah Benn, a retired GP, who was suspended from the medical register owing to her participation in peaceful Just Stop Oil protests at an oil terminal in 2022. A tribunal found that her conviction for breaking a civil injunction amounted to misconduct.

Poll watch

Only **19%** of British adults say they would vote Conservative in a general election, the lowest proportion ever recorded by the polling group Ipsos. **44%** say they would vote Labour.

40% of voters think that the row about where Labour's Angela Rayner lived when she sold her house "sounds like a smear campaign", as do more than half of Labour voters. *Savanta/Labour List*

About **25%** of parents with £250k in liquid assets say they plan to remove their children from private school if VAT is added to fees. **50%** say that they would keep their children in private education but would have to make changes, such as sending their child to a less expensive school. *Censuswide/The Times*

© CAMPAIGN FOR ANTISEMITISM

Europe at a glance



Viry-Châtillon, France

Tough love: The French prime minister, Gabriel Attal, has declared a crackdown on teenage violence in schools, as the government seeks to reclaim the lead on security issues from the far-right ahead of European elections in June. Speaking in Viry-Châtillon, where a 15-year-old died following an attack by other youths this month, Attal said some teenagers were "addicted to violence" and cited Islamist influence as of particular concern. His controversial proposals included sending disruptive children to boarding schools, expanding middle-school hours to 6pm, and treating some offenders aged under 18 as adults in the legal system.

Paris

"Olympic" evictions: Police have evicted as many as 450 people from a squat in the Paris suburb of Vitry-sur-Seine, in what activists say is an ongoing push to clear homeless people from the capital as it prepares to host the Olympics in July. Charities working with marginalised communities accuse the government of "social cleansing": most of those living in the abandoned bus company headquarters, they say, had refugee status or were asylum seekers with legal documentation; many had jobs. There were also 20 children, at least ten of whom attended local schools. The squat's residents were taken in buses to other cities, but no plans have been revealed about their future housing, employment or education. Earlier this month, police removed about 50 migrants, including families with young children, from the forecourt of Paris City Hall.

Bayreuth, Germany

Spy arrests: Two suspected Russian agents have been arrested in Bayreuth, Germany, accused of planning to sabotage US military bases and weapons deliveries to Ukraine. Dieter S and Alexander J are said to be German-Russian citizens and members of the Donetsk People's Republic, a pro-Russian group based in eastern Ukraine. Police say they found evidence of military surveillance in their homes, including videos of Grafenwöhr, a Bavarian base where US personnel train Ukrainian troops. The men are charged with "conspiring to cause an explosive attack and arson". In recent months, Germany has been hit by a series of spy scandals. Former intelligence chief Gerhard Schindler said the latest incident was "the tip of the iceberg" of Russian secret service activities in the country. Opposition politicians called it a "wake-up call", and accused Olaf Scholz's government of naivety and complacency.

Moscow

Toll of war: More than 50,000 Russian troops have now died in the war against Ukraine, according to analysis by the BBC and Mediazona, an independent media group. Their analysis shows the number of fatalities increased by 25% in the second year of the conflict, as the "meat grinder" tactics employed by Moscow's generals – in which waves of Russian troops are sent over the front line in huge numbers – exacted an increasingly heavy toll. Eight times higher than any official death toll from the Kremlin, that figure was pieced together from graves, official reports, press and social media. The BBC said the true toll may be even higher. Ukraine said in February it had lost 31,000 soldiers; here, too, the real figure is likely to be far higher.



Canary Islands, Spain

Tourism protests: Between 20,000 and 50,000 people joined protests across the Canary Islands to demand a freeze on visitor numbers and stricter limits on tourism development. Last year, 16 million people visited the islands, where the population is 2.2 million. Tourism accounts for 35% of the Canaries' GDP, but it also scars the environment, exacerbates water shortages and prices locals out of the rental market. The protests, backed by Greenpeace and WWF, are organised by a local collective, *Canarias se Agota* (Canaries Sold Out), which is calling for a tourist tax and limits on second homes and short-term rentals. Earlier this month, 11 members went on hunger strike (one reportedly hospitalised this week), to protest two new luxury developments in unspoiled parts of southern Tenerife.



Milan, Italy

No gelato: Milan's city council has introduced plans to ban the sale of ice cream after midnight – part of a controversial package intended to reduce noise pollution in Navigli and 11 other lively nightlife districts. It was the furious complaints from residents that led to the proposed ban, which also covers the sale of takeaway drinks and food. But the idea has proved divisive: trade groups and right-wing newspapers have denounced it as representing an attack on "Italian culture". If approved, the ban would come into force on 7 May and continue until November.

Istanbul, Turkey

Hamas talks: Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan has held hours-long talks in Istanbul with Hamas's political chief, Ismail Haniyeh, their first meeting since war broke out between Hamas and Israel in October. Officials said the two leaders discussed efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza, and the challenge of reaching a lasting peace in the region. Erdogan reportedly stressed that tensions between Iran and Israel should not distract attention from Gaza, or enable Israel to "gain ground" there. The Turkish president, who in the past has called Hamas a "liberation movement", recently described Israel as a "terrorist state" owing to its offensive in the occupied territory. He is rumoured to be seeking a role as a mediator in the conflict, as Qatar has said it is reassessing its role hosting talks. But analysts said Israel would be unlikely to welcome him in such a role.

The world at a glance



New York

Campus protests: Scores of students at elite universities across the US have been arrested in the past week while taking part in pro-Palestinian protests on campus. The current outbreak of tensions began at Columbia University in New York, when protesters set up a tented encampment on the college's main lawn, and said that they would not leave until the college had divested itself from companies with ties to Israel. After a 30-hour "occupation", police swarmed the camp and arrested more than 100 of them.

Columbia's president, Minouche Shafik – who had just attended a fraught hearing in congress about antisemitism on campuses – said she had requested police assistance to ensure the "safety and functioning of our university": there had been reports of Jewish students being harassed and intimidated. But many faculty members described the crackdown as an attack on free speech, and walked out in protest. With tensions still high on Monday, the campus gates were locked to those without an ID, and in-person classes were suspended. Meanwhile, students at several other leading universities – including Yale, New York University, Berkeley, Tufts, Emerson College and MIT – staged rallies in solidarity, and set up their own protest encampments, leading to many more arrests.

Washington DC

Boeing warning: A Boeing engineer turned whistleblower has told senators that an entire class of the manufacturer's jets should be grounded for safety inspections. Appearing last week before a senate subcommittee, Sam Salehpour, who has worked at Boeing for 17 years, claimed that senior managers had repeatedly ignored his warnings about there being "gaps" in the fuselage of its 787 Dreamliner plane, caused by sections made in different factories by different manufacturers not aligning. This, he said, could lead to "premature fatigue failure over time". He also said that he and other employees who raised safety concerns at Boeing were "ignored, marginalised, threatened, sidelined and worse". Boeing, which has been under intense pressure since January, when a 737's door plug blew out mid-flight, described Salehpour's report as "inaccurate" and said the 787s showed no signs of fatigue.

San José Independencia, Mexico

A bloody election: Two mayoral candidates were found dead on a single day in Mexico last week, as the cartel-related violence that has blighted the run-up to June's presidential, congressional and local elections continued. The killings of Alberto Antonio García and Noé Ramos Ferretiz bring the total number of candidates killed so far to 17, putting the election on track to become Mexico's bloodiest ever. Separately, the presidential frontrunner, Claudia Sheinbaum, of the ruling Morena party, played down an incident in which her car was stopped by masked men in the southern state of Chiapas. The men urged her to do more to save the area from the cartels, before letting her drive on; they were apparently wearing masks to avoid being identified by the gangs.



Quito

Yes vote: Ecuadoreans have voted decisively in favour of giving their president, Daniel Noboa (pictured), a raft of new powers to crack down on the country's powerful criminal gangs. Noboa introduced a state of emergency in January, in response to a surge in violent crime, and brought in the military to patrol the streets. The Yes vote in the referendum allows him to extend the military presence, and impose harsher sentences on violent criminals. Rights groups have warned that Noboa's crackdown has led to arbitrary detentions, but many Ecuadoreans say they feel much safer now.

New York

Trump trial: Donald Trump "orchestrated a criminal scheme to corrupt" the 2016 presidential election, a New York court heard on the opening day of the former president's criminal trial this week. Prosecutors told the jury that Trump had lied "over and over" to prevent claims of an affair he'd had with the porn actress Stormy Daniels from becoming public during the run-up to the vote. The following day, David Pecker, the former publisher of the tabloid newspaper the National Enquirer, testified that he'd had an unofficial arrangement with Trump, in which Trump fed the magazine useful information and, in exchange, it published positive stories about him, and negative ones about his rivals. Pecker said he also acted as Trump's "eyes and ears": notifying Trump's fixer, Michael Cohen, about any salacious stories being peddled about Trump, so that he could try to suppress them. The trial continues.



Washington DC

Aid bill: Republican infighting has intensified since the House of Representatives passed a $95bn aid and foreign policy package that had been bitterly opposed by the party's right wing. The package, which has also been passed by the senate and is now due to be signed by President Biden, contains $61bn in military aid for Ukraine *(see page 19)* and $26bn for Israel. It also includes a bill that could lead to TikTok being banned in the US if the app's Chinese owner doesn't sell its stake within nine months *(see page 41)*. Its passage ends months of deadlock in congress, where hardline Republicans had baulked at sending more aid to Ukraine; some threatened to oust Speaker Mike Johnson for striking a deal to get the package through.

The world at a glance

Jerusalem, Israel

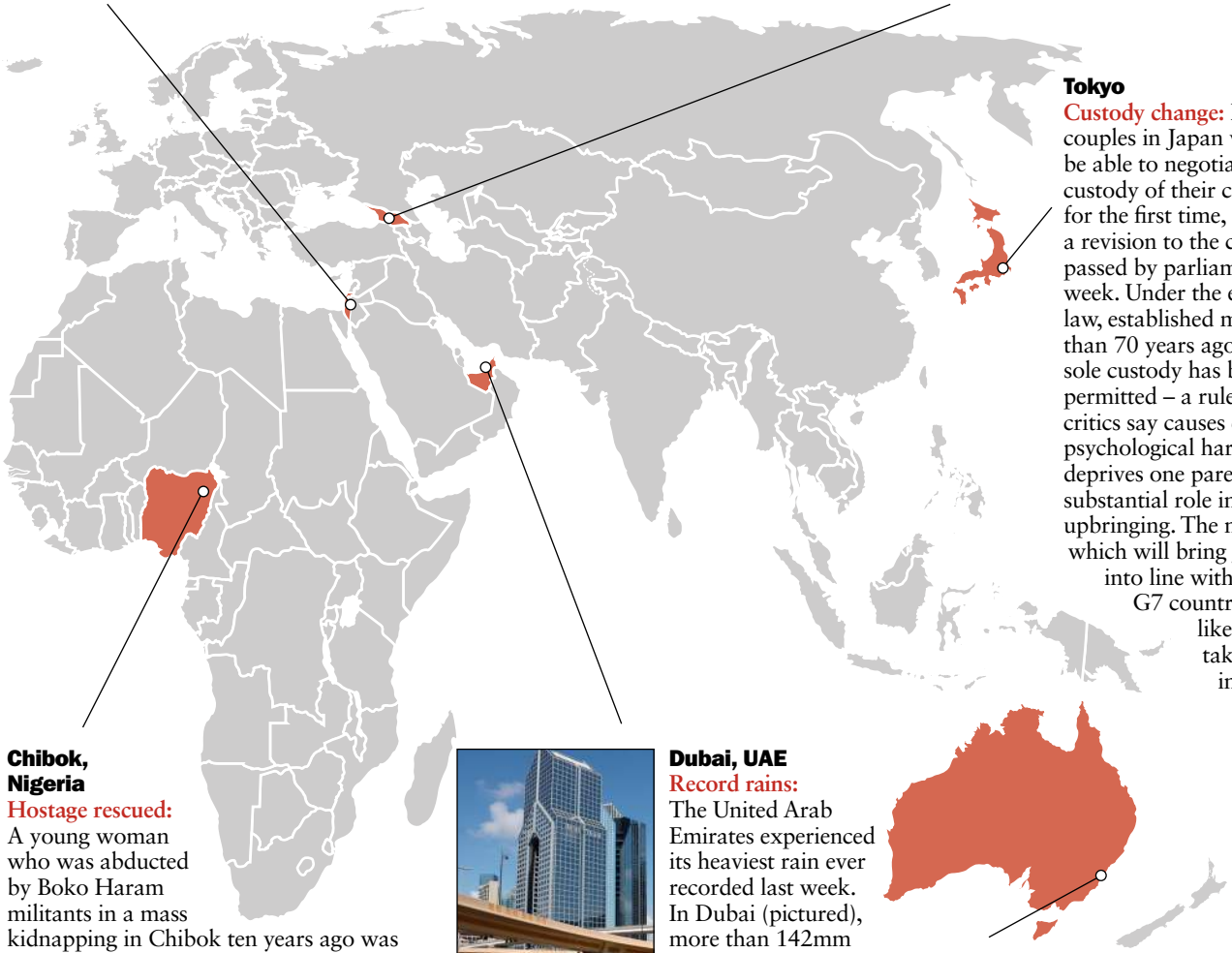


General quits: The head of Israeli military intelligence has resigned, citing the intelligence failures that preceded the Hamas attack of 7 October, when militants breached Israel's border defences and rampaged through the area for hours, killing 1,200 people in total, most of them civilians. In his resignation letter, Maj Gen Aharon Haliva (pictured) – the first senior military official to stand down over the attacks – called for a state commission to investigate "all the factors and circumstances that led to the tragic events". PM Benjamin Netanyahu has resisted calls for an inquiry, saying it should wait until the war in Gaza is over.

Last week, the EU and US imposed new sanctions against individual Israeli settlers and organisations accused of involvement in attacks on Palestinian residents of the West Bank, which have spiralled since 7 October. Among those targeted are Bentzi Gopstein, leader of the far-right Levaha group and allegedly an adviser to the security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir; and Elisha Yered, a leader of the extremist group Hilltop Youth, which is alleged to have engaged in systematic "harassment, beatings, murder and demolition of property" in the West Bank.

Tbilisi

Mass protests: Thousands of protesters gathered outside parliament in the Georgian capital Tbilisi last week to protest against a controversial "foreign influence" bill. Closely resembling a law in Russia that Vladimir Putin has used to stifle dissent, the bill would require any media organisation or NGO that receives more than 20% of its funding from abroad to register as a foreign agent. The EU has warned that if it becomes law, it will scupper Georgia's bid to join the bloc. The country was granted candidate status last year; and polls show that about 80% of Georgians favour membership. The country's president, Salome Zourabichvili, has warned that the ruling Georgian Dream party may have succumbed to Russian influence, as Moscow seeks the "re-Sovietisation" of the Caucasus region.



Tokyo

Custody change: Divorced couples in Japan will soon be able to negotiate joint custody of their children for the first time, owing to a revision to the civil code passed by parliament last week. Under the existing law, established more than 70 years ago, only sole custody has been permitted – a rule that critics say causes children psychological harm and deprives one parent of a substantial role in their upbringing. The new law, which will bring Japan into line with other G7 countries, is likely to take effect in 2026.

Chibok, Nigeria

Hostage rescued: A young woman who was abducted by Boko Haram militants in a mass kidnapping in Chibok ten years ago was rescued last week by Nigerian troops, along with her children. Lydia Simon was among 276 girls taken by the Islamists from her school in northern Nigeria on 14 April 2014 – a crime that sparked global outrage and a celebrity-led campaign for their release. She was found with her three children – all of whom were born in captivity – in an area about 95 miles east of Chibok. More than 180 of the kidnapped girls have escaped or been rescued over the years, but about 90 are still missing. Activists have suggested that they are a forgotten cause, both by the Nigerian authorities and their supporters abroad.

© IDF

Dubai, UAE

Record rains: The United Arab Emirates experienced its heaviest rain ever recorded last week. In Dubai (pictured), more than 142mm fell in 24 hours, more than usually falls in 18 months. Roads turned to rivers and many houses (which are not built to withstand heavy rain) were inundated. Experts denied speculation that "cloud seeding" was to blame, and pointed the finger at climate change. With such events likely to become more common, there have been calls to upgrade the normally arid city's drainage system and other infrastructure. In neighbouring Oman, 19 people died in flash floods.

Sydney, Australia

Christian clerics stabbed: A 16-year-old boy suspected of stabbing an Iraq-born Christian bishop at the altar of an Assyrian Orthodox church in Sydney last week has been charged with terrorism offences. Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel – whose sermons are widely disseminated on social media – was leading the service when the attacker stabbed him multiple times and accused him of insulting Islam. A second cleric, Rev'd Isaac Royel, was also injured. Graphic videos of the attack then appeared on X/Twitter, drawing an angry crowd that erupted into rioting.

People

Salman Rushdie's recovery
Twenty months ago, Salman Rushdie was taking part in an event in upstate New York when a man ran onto the stage and stabbed him repeatedly in a frenzied attack that lasted 27 seconds. There was "quite a stunning amount of blood", he told Mick Brown in The Daily Telegraph; and he thought he'd had it. "But it was very matter-of-fact. It wasn't fear of [death]; just, this is what's happening, how things are. I'm about to die. Mainly the feeling was of loneliness, the sadness of dying far away from the people you love." But he didn't die. He was rushed to hospital where he had eight hours of surgery. A doctor told him he'd been unlucky and lucky. "I said, what's the lucky part? He said, the lucky part is the man who attacked you had no idea how to kill a man with a knife." His recovery has been good, but he's now blind in one eye, and is seeing a therapist to help him cope with the trauma of the attack. It has helped, he says; as has writing a book *(see page 25)*. It was his agent, Andrew Wylie, who suggested it. "I said, I really don't want to write about it. And he said, no, you'll write about it. I said, no I won't. He said, yes, you will. And it turns out he was right." For a time, he couldn't write anything, he explains. "But there was a point at which I realised there's no way I can write about anything else."

Jackie Kay on adoption
The poet Jackie Kay (pictured) was seven when it struck her that she was a different colour from her mother, says Lisa Allardice in The Guardian. Her parents, Helen and John Kay – who are both now dead – explained to her that they had adopted her as a baby. "My mum always told me not to be grateful. She'd say: '*We're* the ones who are grateful.'" Communist activists, living in a suburb of Glasgow, they provided her with such a happy childhood, the poet Lemn Sissay, who spent his early years in a series of appalling care homes, once admitted to Kay that he had resented her for it for years. Still, it was not all plain sailing for her. She was regularly called a "darkie"; she was teased at school for being "a lezzie" (she recalls a teacher asking her: "Well, are you, Jacqueline? Are you a lez-bee-ann?"); and in a memoir, she wrote that, for all the love she had from her parents, there was still "a windy place right at the core of my heart". Is it there still? "There is something ghostly about being adopted," she says. "It is like another presence, because you are brought up with a lack of substance and a set of tiny details and not much to make into a whole person."



Rebecca Hall's mistake
Rebecca Hall comes from an artistic family: her mother was the opera singer Maria Ewing; her father the theatre director Peter Hall. And in the early part of her acting career, she set her sights on "interesting" work, and scolded her agent for trying to get her parts in popcorn movies. "I wrote a letter to my agent at the time saying, 'I'm not a conventional movie star, and how dare you.' I mean, I was probably nicer than that. I'm more polite. But the gist of it was: 'I wish for you to conceive of me as something other than what you're conceiving me.'" Her younger self would be appalled by her new film – the monster movie *Godzilla vs. Kong*, said Thessaly La Force in The New York Times. But Hall has come to see that her younger self was wrong. "As cool and righteous as it was, I think it was an error. The more of those big jobs that I would've done in my 20s, the more access I would've had to other work. It was also incredibly arrogant to assume that all those films were unworthy... I didn't know what I was talking about."



The producer and screenwriter Shonda Rhimes has been behind some of the biggest TV shows of the past two decades, from *Grey's Anatomy* to the Netflix megahit *Bridgerton*. But her original ambition, she told Decca Aitkenhead in The Sunday Times, was to write novels. Growing up in a suburb of Chicago, Rhimes was the daughter of successful parents, who drilled their six children to believe that the world was theirs for the taking. Her father, a university administrator, "was very serious that, for girls of colour, the possibilities were limitless"; and she recalls that when a school counsellor told her not to apply to Ivy League universities, she rang her mother, an academic – who turned up ten minutes later to tell the school that she'd apply to whatever college she wanted. Rhimes duly went to Dartmouth, but after majoring in English literature, she decided that she "couldn't be Nobel Prize-winning author Toni Morrison because Toni Morrison already had that job" – so she went into scriptwriting. Today, she is a fixture on Forbes's list of America's 100 most powerful women; she is worth around $250m; and she has lost none of her self belief. "People often say they feel like they're an impostor, and someone's going to find them out. But it doesn't make sense to me. I belong in every room I'm in. If I got in the room then I belong in that room. I am there, aren't I?"

Viewpoint:
Freedom by date of birth

"The Government's gradual elimination of smoking by date of birth *(see page 19)* sets an interesting precedent. How about setting a 'best before' date for lots of our freedoms in this way, thus consoling the old while protecting the young from being triggered by the threat of liberty? As a journalist born in the 1950s, I, for instance, could be allowed to eke out my twilight years attacking, say, mass immigration or gender-neutral lavatories, but those starting out in media would be banned from taking such incorrect positions. Come to think of it, that is pretty much what is happening already."
Charles Moore in The Spectator

Farewell

Terry Anderson, journalist held for six years by Hezbollah in Lebanon, died 21 April, aged 76.

Sir Andrew Davis, one of Britain's greatest conductors, died 20 April, aged 80.

Daniel Dennett, cognitive scientist and philosopher, died 19 April, aged 82.

Diana Edwards-Jones, ITN director and pioneer in male-dominated TV news, died 14 April, aged 91.

Lord (Frank) Field of Birkenhead, long-time Labour MP and minister, died 23 April, aged 81.

Desert Island Discs returns later on in the spring

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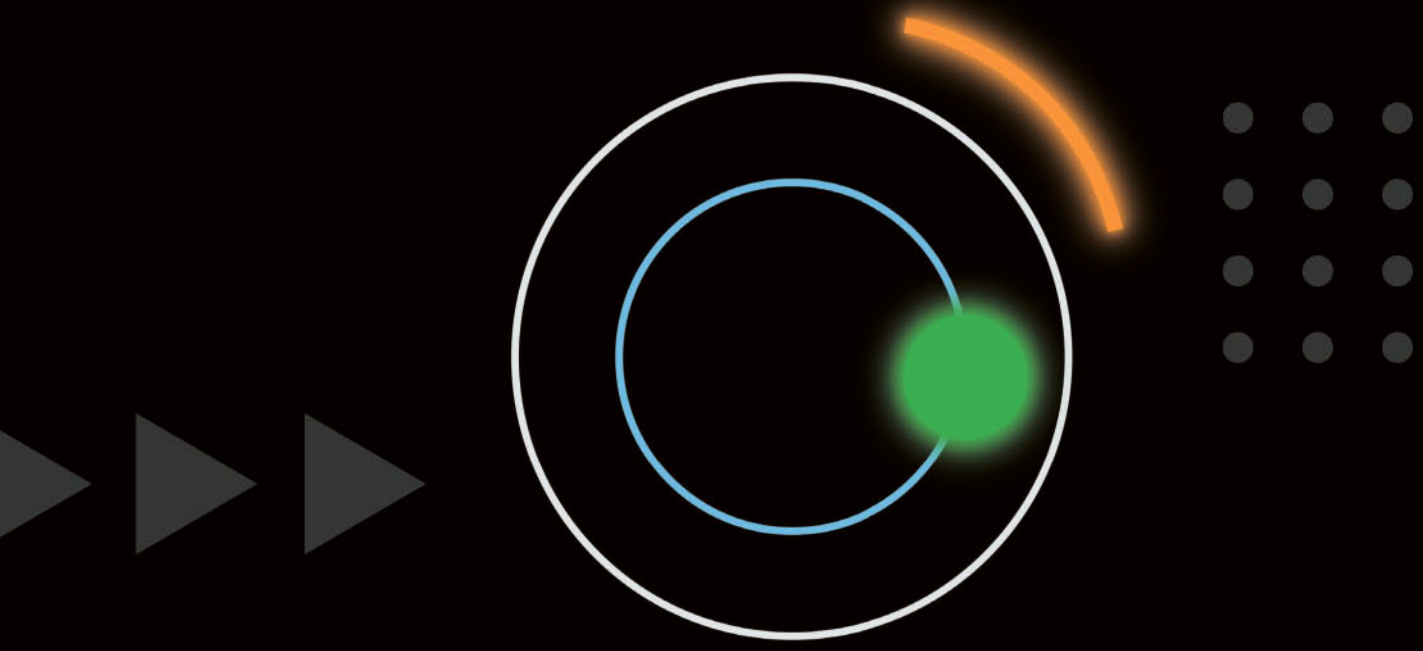
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The Church of England's legacy of slavery

Should the CofE offer financial redress for its involvement in the transatlantic slave trade?

Who is proposing compensation?
The Church of England itself. The Church's interest in the issue dates back many years. In 2006, it apologised for the role that clergymen had played in the transatlantic slave trade. In 2019, the Audit and Risk Committee of the Church Commissioners (the body that administers its assets) raised questions about possible reputational damage arising from its past links to slavery, and commissioned a report by historians and forensic accountants. This, published in 2023, found that the Church had received funds linked to African enslavement worth as much as £1bn in today's money. The Church Commissioners responded by setting aside £100m, about 10% of its total endowment, to "address past wrongs". An oversight committee was also appointed to examine how to spend the money. In March this year, it recommended that the Church raise up to £1bn for a new fund. The £100m set aside was "not enough", it said.



Holy Trinity Clapham's William Wilberforce window

What were these "past wrongs"?
The most significant is an investment scheme called Queen Anne's Bounty. It was set up in 1704, when certain ecclesiastical taxes that had previously been paid to the Crown were diverted to supplement the income of poor clergy. Funds received were invested in the South Sea Company, a government venture that had a monopoly on the trade of enslaved Africans to the Spanish-held colonies in the Americas. Between 1715 and 1739, the South Sea Company transported 34,000 enslaved people over the course of at least 96 transatlantic voyages; it also transported slaves from Caribbean islands to Spanish-held ports in mainland America. By 1739, when the South Sea Company stopped engaging in slave trading, the scheme had accumulated investments in it worth £204,000, or £443m in today's terms. Money from that fund flowed into a larger fund that is currently worth £10.3bn.

Were there other links to slavery?
Many. The fund also received cash and land donations from people with links to slave labour, including Edward Colston, the merchant and slave trader whose statue was toppled by Black Lives Matter protesters in Bristol in 2020. That same year, a database held by University College London found that 96 CofE clergymen had sought compensation paid to slave owners when the trade was abolished in the British empire in 1833. The Church received nearly £9,000, an estimated £900,000 in today's money, for the loss of slave labour on its Codrington Plantations in Barbados (these were owned by its missionary organisation, The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, and slaves were branded across the chest with the word "Society"). The Bishop of Exeter and his business associates received even more in compensation.

How would the money be used?
The Church has not yet decided how to allocate the £100m it has so far committed to, but the bulk of the money is expected to be used to establish a new "social impact investment fund". This fund would give grants aimed at supporting black-led businesses and black entrepreneurs who find it harder to access capital. The Church said that the fund would enable grants to be made available for projects focused on "improving opportunities" for communities affected by the slave trade, and help pay for further research into the history of slavery. It would also be used to ensure that "best practice" can be shared with other organisations seeking to reconcile their historic links to slavery.

Are these plans controversial?
Very. The reparations movement (see box) has long attracted criticism in the US. A welter of objections have been raised, both practical and on grounds of principle: that everyone directly involved in slavery, both beneficiaries and victims, is long dead; that it is unfair to penalise people today for the wrongs of their ancestors; that loss and benefit are impossible to calculate at such historic distance; that in any case choosing people to compensate is an impossible task. In the specific case of the Church of England, it has been pointed out that, as well as profiting from the slave trade, the Church played a vital role in ending it. William Wilberforce was moved by his Anglican faith to lead the abolition movement. As Saint Paul put it in *Galatians 3:28*, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

How does the Church of England defend these plans?
In his Easter sermon last year, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby defended the fund, which he described as not an expression of "wokery" or "postcolonial guilt", but of Christian values and Christian love. A recent report from the Church's Anti-Racism Taskforce stated that there was a clear theological case for the "reconciliation" and "redemption", and a practical one too. It noted that the CofE's "contested heritage is at odds with the Christian mission and the Church's desire to reach diverse nationalities"; more than half of the worldwide Anglican communion is now based in Africa. It does not use the term "reparations", because the scheme will not offer compensation to individuals.

What will happen next?
The Church welcomed the report by the Commissioners in March, but has not committed to raising the existing fund to £1bn, and the £100m fund promised a year ago is still not operational; channelling money to effect social change is not an easy task. And arguably it needs money to discharge its primary function; Church of England attendance has fallen by half in the past 40 years, and by a fifth since the start of the pandemic. "After decades of telling us there is no money to fund churches and ministers who keep the Church alive on the front line, suddenly they have found £100m behind the back of the sofa," complained Rev'd Marcus Walker of the group Save the Parish.

The reparations movement

The question of reparations for slavery has rumbled on in the US since the Civil War, when General Sherman ordered that freed slaves should be given plots of land ("40 acres and a mule"). In all but a handful of cases, they did not get it. The debate was revived by African-American radicals such as Malcolm X and the Black Panthers in the 1960s, and again by activists in the past decade. A 2014 essay by Ta-Nehisi Coates in The Atlantic argued that only reparations could ameliorate profound racial inequalities, rooted not just in slavery and the South's Jim Crow laws, but in systematic legal discrimination which, for instance, made it difficult for black families to take out mortgages as late as the 1970s. The movement was then turbocharged by the murder of George Floyd in 2020, and the global protests that followed. Cities including Los Angeles and New York are contemplating reparations; in Evanston, Illinois, payments have already begun, in the form of vouchers for housing and mortgages.

In the UK last year, Lloyd's of London pledged £40m to development projects, in recognition of its slavery links, while The Guardian apologised after discovering it was founded with the profits of slave-picked cotton, and set up a £10m "restorative justice" fund.

Best articles: Britain

Put not your faith in faith schools

Emma Duncan

The Times

It was good to hear a judge last week upholding headteacher Katharine Birbalsingh's right to ban prayer rituals at her school, says Emma Duncan. But I'd go further and ban all state-funded schools from selecting pupils on a faith basis. The proportion of people who believe in God in this country is below 50%, yet faith schools have proliferated and now make up 37% of primaries and 18% of secondaries. It's claimed they get better exam results, but that's only because their selective admission policies mean they take in fewer poorer children. So there's no educational upside to set against a glaring societal downside: they divide communities. And that applies not just to the few Jewish schools that Ofsted has found to discriminate against girls, or the Muslim ones found to render pupils "vulnerable to extremist influences", but to the vast majority that do a decent job. Rejecting pupils on religious grounds cuts against a crucial role of schooling, which is to foster unity in our shared beliefs – "in democracy, freedom of speech, tolerance and patriotism". The path to a more tolerant, socially cohesive society has to be worked for: faith schools undermine it.

The woman the Tories are fixated on...

Andrew Rawnsley

The Observer

The Tories are playing a risky game with their pursuit of Angela Rayner, says Andrew Rawnsley. The endless speculation about the Labour deputy leader's housing arrangements, and whether she dodged paying capital gains tax, is certainly causing her grief and diverting her party's energies from the local elections. But the "whiff of misogyny and snobbery" to some of the attacks is not reflecting well on her opponents. Nor is the unmistakable smell of hypocrisy, Tory ministers being no strangers to tax rows. Nor is it clear how their prospects will be "enhanced by making the conduct of politicians the primary electoral battlefield", given the spate of "mind-boggling" scandals attaching to their own MPs. The dream Tory scenario is for the police to find Rayner guilty of a criminal offence, forcing her to stand down and so trigger a Labour power struggle. But if, instead, the police conclude their initial decision not to investigate was justified, the Tories will get pasted for wasting police resources in pursuit of a desperate, nasty attempt to smear an opponent, and the dream will become a nightmare.

...and the two men on whom they should be

Sebastian Payne

The i Paper

Although Britain is often decried as the most centralised nation in the Western world, says Sebastian Payne, it has made huge strides in recent years in bringing power closer to people. Ten years ago, only London had an elected mayor: now almost all of our cities do. And few have made a bigger impact than Andy Street in the West Midlands and Ben Houchen in the Tees Valley, two Tory mayors whose election victories in 2017 kickstarted their party's "post-Brexit realignment". Street, the former MD of John Lewis, won over Labour voters with his "pragmatic business persona"; the plain-speaking, charismatic Houchen prevailed in "even deeper red territory". And after impressive records in office, both were re-elected in 2021 with thumping majorities. Yet despite facing "bland, generic" Labour candidates in next week's local elections, polls suggest they may lose. These are two of this country's most important politicians, representing some four million people: how they fare will be key to the future not just of the Tory Party, but of decentralised power in Britain. But such is the relentlessly centralised focus of our media, we seldom get to hear of them.

The toxic wave that lands on our beaches

John Naish

Daily Mail

Scientific inventions often come with a long-delayed, hefty price tag, says John Naish. Eighty-odd years ago, an industrial scientist called Ray McIntyre was experimenting with electrical insulators when he accidentally discovered the polystyrene Styrofoam. It was ideally suited for transportation and insulation, and we've been inundated with it ever since. The world produces more than 15 million tonnes of "expanded polystyrene" a year, enough to gird the equator in one-tonne blocks. Each of us generates some 40kg-50kg of polystyrene waste a year, which can take at least 500 years to break down. True, single-use polystyrene cups are banned in England, but 16,000 polystyrene bodyboards still end up on UK beaches every year. Polystyrene also poses a health threat: studies suggest that tiny particles, when ingested, can cause inflammation of the organs. Thankfully, businesses are developing new types of biodegradable packaging and scientists are hoping to cultivate bacteria able to digest plastic waste – new inventions to save the world from the toxic wave caused by an old one.

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

A Brazilian woman has been charged with attempted theft and the violation of a corpse, after wheeling her dead uncle into a Rio de Janeiro bank and trying to take out a $3,300 loan in his name. In footage of the incident, Érika Nunes, 42, can be seen asking Paulo Braga, 68, who had died hours before: "Uncle, are you listening? You need to sign." When a suspicious bank employee pointed out that Braga "doesn't look well at all", Nunes replied: "He doesn't say anything. He's like that," – then tried to force a pen into his hand.



A nine-year-old has become the first British winner of a European seagull impression championship. Cooper Wallace, from Derbyshire, scored 92 out of 100 in the junior category at the EC Gull Screeching contest last week in Belgium. Dressed in a gull costume, Cooper expressed a range of emotions, and lunged at a cone of chips made from foam. He was inspired to begin imitating the birds, he said, after being nipped by one while eating a tuna sandwich on holiday. The contest's organiser told him afterwards: "Your life will never be the same."

A coffee shop in London is selling what is believed to be Britain's most expensive cup of coffee, at £265 per cup. The drink, available at Shot in Mayfair, is made from beans grown on the Japanese island of Okinawa, famed for its beauty and the long lives enjoyed by its inhabitants. "A nice cup of coffee by anyone's standards," said Tony Turnbull in The Times, "but 75 times better than my standard £3.50 order? I think we all know the answer to that."

The Stormy Daniels case: Trump in the dock

Would Donald Trump have lost the 2016 presidential election if voters had heard about his alleged sexual encounter with the porn actress Stormy Daniels? New York state prosecutors suspect so, said Eric Lach in The New Yorker, and the question is at the heart of the trial that opened in Manhattan this week – the first-ever criminal trial of a former US president. The case centres on the $130,000 hush money payment that Trump's lawyer, Michael Cohen, made to Daniels shortly before the 2016 election, in exchange for her not going public with her story. Of the four criminal indictments brought against Trump, this is the least significant, but it's the only case likely to reach a verdict before November's election; the other cases have all been delayed. It's on this trial, which is expected to last for six to eight weeks, that "the trajectory of American history may now turn".



A "jarring new reality" for the former president

Calling it the "hush money" case is misleading, said Norman Eisen on CNN. The key issue isn't the payments – buying people's silence in this way is not, in itself, illegal – but "why Trump made them". Trump repaid Cohen for the money he gave to Daniels. New York's district attorney, Alvin Bragg, intends to prove that he falsified documents by logging it as "legal fees", when it was effectively a campaign expenditure designed to influence the election. That, says Bragg, violated campaign finance laws. Trump and Cohen, the prosecution contends, were "buying salacious stories and then burying them" in order to deprive voters of information that could have influenced their choice. That was "election interference".

It's a shame that this is the first of Trump's criminal indictments to come to trial, said Ruth Marcus in The Washington Post, because it's much the weakest. While there could in theory be federal crimes involved, Bragg has had to employ very creative reasoning to claim jurisdiction. Under New York law, misreporting business expenses is usually a misdemeanour. "It's not hard to imagine that jurors could baulk – it just takes one to produce a hung jury – at shoehorning Trump's payments to Daniels, however odious, into the tangential crime of falsifying business records." The case is blatantly unfair, said Richard Porter on RealClearPolitics. A Democratic prosecutor is trying Trump before a Democrat-appointed judge in a city where 78% of people voted for Joe Biden. The closest precedent is Anne Boleyn's trial for adultery in 1536. "It was about sex, the trial was in a hostile jurisdiction controlled by the accuser, and the whole point of the exercise was to lop off the head of someone who stood in the way of the regime's continuity."

Whatever the outcome, the trial will be tough for Trump, said Jackie Calmes in the Los Angeles Times. For perhaps two months, he's going to have to spend much of his time in a drab county courtroom – "mostly silenced, diminished and at the mercy of a judge" ("I won't tolerate that," Judge Juan Merchan admonished him last week after Trump muttered about a prospective juror). Courtroom artists have shown Trump napping, prompting mockery: "If you call your opponent Sleepy Joe, you have one job," quipped MSNBC host Chris Hayes. Trump had to ask permission to attend his son Barron's high school graduation, said Kyle Cheney on Politico. Merchan said he'd get back to him. It must be a "jarring new reality" for a man so accustomed to setting the agenda. But if he's convicted, these impositions will "seem trifling compared to the constraints on his liberty" that the judge might yet impose: "a jail term".

How "Star Wars" saved Israel

Daniel Henninger

The Wall Street Journal

The people of Israel owe Ronald Reagan a debt of gratitude, says Daniel Henninger. For he was the ultimate originator of the missile-defence systems that protected them from Iran's recent missile barrage. In 1983, Reagan proposed what he called the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), an ambitious plan to create systems, some of them potentially space-based, that could shoot down nuclear-armed ballistic missiles. Critics mocked the scheme, nicknaming it "Star Wars", and warned that it could provoke a response from the Soviets. Then-senator Joe Biden said that Reagan's pursuit of the plan constituted "one of the most reckless and irresponsible acts in the history of modern statecraft". But Israel quickly recognised the value of missile-defence technology and signed a deal to help the US deliver it. The "fruits of that four-decade partnership" were on full display the other night. It's ironic that "ardent SDI foe" Biden pocketed political benefit from it. If we've learnt anything over the past three years, it's that Biden is "saturated in the don't-provoke-a-response school of foreign policy". He urged Israel not to hit back against Iran in case doing so provoked a wider war. He has consistently "slow-walked" sending vital military technology to Ukraine for fear of provoking Vladimir Putin. It's fortunate for Israel that Reagan was more proactive.

Does the US need a poly-presidency?

A.J. Jacobs

Los Angeles Times

At the Constitutional Convention in 1787, one of America's founding fathers, James Wilson, made a radical proposal. He suggested that the executive branch of government should be headed by a single person: a president. Several delegates objected. This was the "foetus of monarchy", said Edmund Randolph. The US had just fought a war to rid itself of a king. It didn't need another. Better to have a council of three presidents, or, as Benjamin Franklin had once proposed, a group of 12 executives. Randolph lost that argument, says A.J. Jacobs, but perhaps we need to revive his idea. The founders would be "aghast" at the power wielded by modern presidents. George Washington issued only eight executive orders in his eight years in office, compared with Barack Obama's 276. Donald Trump issued 220 in just four years. The concept of a "poly-presidency" is not so absurd. The Roman republic was ruled for 500 years by two consuls who shared power. Switzerland today is ruled by an executive council of seven politicians, each from a different region; the rotating leadership role is mostly ceremonial. Would it slow down executive decisions in the US? Perhaps, but that would be no bad thing. "The problem now is that congress has too many speed bumps and the president too few."

Best articles: International

Sudan's year of civil war: "the world has turned its back"



Almost a fifth of the population has been displaced

"Exactly a year ago, Sudan's ruinous collapse began," said Ishaan Tharoor in The Washington Post. On 15 April 2023, tensions between the nation's two most powerful factions – the Sudanese armed forces, headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), headed by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as "Hemedti" – "exploded into open war". Air strikes hit cities; militiamen and vigilantes set up checkpoints and looted neighbourhoods. "The capital, Khartoum, transformed into a sprawling battlefield." A year on, the Sudanese state has "essentially collapsed" in much of the country. Hospitals, health services and schools barely function. "The situation is astonishingly grim." At least 16,000 people have been killed. A large number of war crimes – massacres, sexual violence – have been reportedly committed by both sides. Almost a fifth of Sudan's population of 50 million has been displaced. Nearly a third of its people are acutely "food insecure", according to the UN. An estimated three million children are malnourished.

Sudan had until recently appeared to be transitioning to democracy, said Areesha Lodhi on Al Jazeera (Doha). In 2019, Sudan's dictator for nearly 30 years, President Omar al-Bashir, was toppled by a popular uprising. Yet "a fragile transition to civilian-led democracy was blown apart" when Burhan and Hemedti staged a coup in 2021. The two sides were at the time long-term allies. The armed forces are Sudan's traditional rulers (its leaders have, like Bashir, mostly been army officers); the RSF emerged out of the Janjaweed, an ethnic Arab militia from Darfur that the armed forces deployed to put down a long rebellion in the region, and which has been accused of war crimes and ethnic cleansing. But they fell out last year because "each side feared ceding too much control to the other in a new political order": the RSF was meant to be integrated into the army, and the army was supposed to divest itself of its lucrative domination of large sectors of the economy.

When the war started, it looked like a relatively "clear-cut fight" between the Sudanese armed forces and the RSF, said The Economist. "Instead the conflict has metastasised into a nationwide conflagration so vast and anarchic it could yet destabilise several of Sudan's neighbours." Neither side has managed to land a knock-out blow – the country is roughly split now between the west, where the RSF is more powerful, and the east, where Burhan's forces are in the ascendant – but both sides are now beginning to "splinter". Across the nation there is "a mosaic of competing militias and rebel movements, each with its own interests and agendas. Arms and mercenaries are pouring over the border from Chad, Libya and the Central African Republic, and across the Red Sea"; the UAE has supplied arms to the RSF, and Iran likewise to the army.

The world has turned its back on Sudan, said Martin Griffiths in Le Monde (Paris). Two decades ago, the international community failed to stop atrocities in Darfur. Once again, we are looking the other way. "Let us be clear, our inattention has emboldened the parties to this conflict to flout the basic rules of war." Children are being killed. "Women raped. Hospitals targeted." Sudan remains "almost completely absent from the global conversation consumed by the wars in Gaza and Ukraine", said Mohammed Alamin and Simon Marks on Bloomberg. International donors have committed nearly 1,000 times as much aid to Kyiv as they have to Khartoum.

Despite the grim outlook, "at least some of the ingredients for a firm and concerted international push for a ceasefire are coming into place", said the International Crisis Group (Brussels). The war looks "unwinnable", and the nations with most influence – the US, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE – are pushing hard for negotiations. "Resistance from both strongmen to entreaties for peace remains formidable." The alternative, though, is ever-spreading war, chaos and "mass starvation".

ARGENTINA

How populists turn the past on its head

Agência Pública (São Paulo)

Rewriting history is the party trick far-right populists love to use to revive "old-fashioned, religious, patriarchal values" and persuade voters that "before was better", says Natalia Viana. They talk of the benefits brought by colonialism; they even "relativise the evils of slavery". No surprise, then, that in Argentina, on the anniversary of the infamous 1976 military coup, its new populist president Javier Milei should have released a video glorifying the junta that seized power and went on to commit hideous human rights abuses. (Almost 1,200 people were later convicted of crimes against humanity.) This caused a storm of protest, but Milei didn't care. He has learnt from the likes of Donald Trump and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro that "attacking and being attacked" is the best strategy for getting talked about. He has also learnt, from the Brazilian army officers who recently filmed themselves toasting the soldiers who destroyed Brazil's democracy in 1964, that defending dictatorships is no longer taboo. Instead, across the continent, it's being exploited as a cause to unite the Right.

GERMANY

Why do we let Beijing make fools of us?

Der Spiegel (Hamburg)

There's none so naive as German leaders when it comes to dealing with China, says Georg Fahrion. Chancellor Scholz was in Beijing last week hoping to persuade President Xi to stem the flood of cheap electric cars about to inundate Europe and to moderate his support for Vladimir Putin. (Trade between China and Russia has soared by $100bn since the invasion of Ukraine.) Yet Xi has shown absolutely no inclination to make concessions on either matter. Why would he? German politicians and business chiefs can't seem to grasp that China thinks in purely "Machiavellian terms" of power and national interest; they keep making the same basic error of assuming we can get what we want from China, as long as "we have morality on our side" and do the right thing by them. Before the trip, Scholz, hoping for a reciprocal gesture, insisted he was against blocking Chinese car imports. All this succeeded in doing was to throw away a powerful bargaining chip and get nothing in return. For all the big talk about "de-risking" the relationship with China, our big car and chemical firms remain as reliant as ever on its markets. Chinese state media is now gloating that the relationship is just as China-friendly as it was in Angela Merkel's time. I fear this stupidity will cost us dearly.

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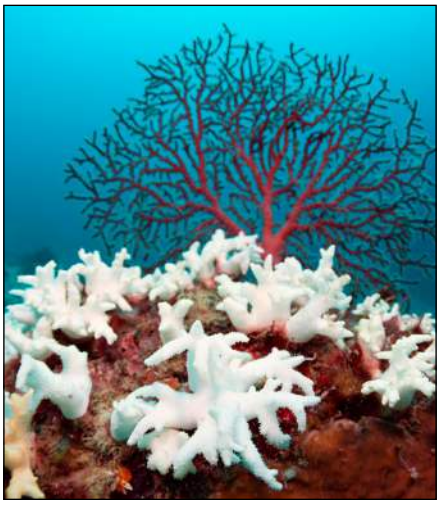
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What the scientists are saying…

Coral reefs are in crisis

Record ocean temperatures over the past few months have triggered the fourth global mass coral bleaching event, scientists have warned, and it could be the worst yet. Coral reefs provide a home to a quarter of all marine life, protect coastlines from storms and – by supporting the fishing and tourism industries – help keep millions of people in work. But if the waters around them become too warm, the coral will expel the microscopic symbiotic algae that live in their tissues – turning them completely white. Corals can survive bleaching if it is not too prolonged, but may struggle then to grow and will be left more vulnerable to disease. Owing to global warming and the El Niño weather phenomenon, a series of ocean temperature records have been toppled in the past year, and more than half of the waters containing reefs have warmed enough to cause bleaching, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "In many places the heat stress this past year is so extreme that corals didn't have time to bleach – they just cooked," said Prof Terry Hughes, of James Cook University, Australia. The heat stress experienced by corals in Florida, the Caribbean and the Great Barrier Reef is "off the charts", he added.



Bleached coral in West Papua, Indonesia

A gene that prevents Alzheimer's

The mystery of why some people remain free of Alzheimer's, despite having a gene variant that has been associated with an increased risk of the disease, may have been solved, in a breakthrough that could lead to new treatments. For the study, researchers in the US sequenced the DNA of hundreds of people over the age of 70 for APOEe4, a variant that is carried by 40 to 65% of Alzheimer's patients and is thought to increase the risk of developing it up to tenfold. This revealed that many of the participants who hadn't developed Alzheimer's carried a separate gene that appeared to be shielding them from the disease. This variant, which is related to the functioning of the blood-brain barrier, seems to reduce the odds of getting Alzheimer's by up to 70%, by making it possible for amyloid – the toxic protein that builds up in the brains of Alzheimer's patients – to leave the brain. A drug that reduces amyloid build-up in the same way could provide protection for those with or without APOEe4, and so be a "significant step forwards in the fight against this debilitating condition", said the team from Columbia University.

Bonobos are not "hippy chimps"

Famous for their enthusiasm for sex and their seemingly peaceable natures, bonobos have sometimes been referred to as "hippy chimps" – because they "make love not war". But it turns out that the apes are rather less mellow than was previously assumed. For a new study, anthropologists followed 12 male bonobos in DR Congo and 14 male chimps in Tanzania over their every waking hour, and recorded each violent incident. To their surprise, they found that although the bonobos did not kill each other, in the way chimps sometimes do, they were about three times as likely as the chimps to engage in hitting, kicking, biting and chasing. The males mainly fought one-to-one with other males. By contrast, male chimps often ganged up to defeat their rivals or bully females. The researchers say that it could be this difference that makes bonobos more likely to be aggressive: they can pick a fight with relatively minor consequences, whereas chimps risk being seriously wounded or killed by a group.

Ways to cut breast cancer rates

Each year around 55,000 British women are diagnosed with breast cancer. Some of these cases will be caused by factors that are outside our control – but one in four are due to "easily modifiable risk factors", a report has found. The Lancet Health Commission says alcohol is responsible for one in ten cases of the disease in the UK, and suggests more should be done to alert consumers to this. It notes that breastfeeding for 12 months is associated with a 4% reduced risk of the disease, and calls for "bold policy actions" to make it easier for mothers to breastfeed. (Currently, only about half of babies are breastfed beyond six weeks.) It also highlights the importance of exercise and tackling obesity. It says that eight to 13% of cases are due to obesity; in the UK, one in four women are classed as obese.

The sea monster unearthed in Somerset



A teenage fossil hunter from Somerset has helped palaeontologists identify a new species of marine reptile – a 25-metre-long lizard fish that may have been the largest marine reptile that has ever lived. The monster has been named *Ichthyotitan severnensis*, after the Severn Estuary where its remains were found.

In 2016, fossil hunter Paul de la Salle unearthed part of a jawbone on a beach in Somerset. He took it to Dr Dean Lomax, at Manchester University, who confirmed that it seemed to belong to a huge, previously undescribed *ichthyosaur* (or lizard fish). They published their findings in 2018 – and hoped that more evidence would emerge to substantiate them. Then, in 2020, Ruby Reynolds, then 11, and her father Justin found part of a second jawbone a few miles down the coast. They alerted de la Salle, who rushed to the beach, where more jawbone fragments were unearthed, enabling Lomax to make more precise calculations about the size of the creature. In a paper citing Ruby as a co-author, he dates the remains to 200 million years ago, shortly before an extinction event wiped out many giant *ichthyosaurs*. "They are quite literally the last giants," he says. "No *ichthyosaurs* got anywhere near this size again."

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Migraine pill on the NHS

A once-a-day pill that has been found to prevent both chronic and episodic migraines has been approved for use in the NHS in England. Some 170,000 patients who experience the severe head pain could benefit from atogepant (brand name Aquipta), which was approved by regulators in Scotland last year. The pill works by blocking the receptor of a protein in the sensory nerves of the head and neck called calcitonin gene-related peptide (CGRP). CGRP makes blood vessels dilate, which can lead to inflammation and migraine. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has advised that it be offered to patients who have migraines on four or more days a month and who've tried at least three other treatments. "We now need to ensure access is swift, so that migraine patients can benefit as quickly as possible," said Rob Music, of The Migraine Trust.

Talking points

Pick of the week's *Gossip*

Nicola Peltz Beckham – daughter of the American billionaire Nelson Peltz and daughter-in-law of David and Victoria Beckham – has been accused of being the ultimate "nepo baby" for writing, co-directing and starring in her own film. Critics say that *Lola*, in which she plays a stripper, exploits every working-class stereotype, and amounts to "poverty porn". She told The Hollywood Reporter that she'd poured her "heart and soul" into it, but had to cut a cameo by her husband, Brooklyn. "He had one line – 'Hi.' But he kept saying it in a British accent and he was staring directly into the camera. I was like, oh God, we have to move on."



Jonathan Van-Tam has been able to let his hair down since he resigned as England's deputy chief medical officer. Last week, he was spotted at a Boston United game dressed in a nun's habit. He was, he explained, "a proud Pilgrims fan" who takes part in "all the traditions" – including wearing fancy dress for the last away game of the season.

The Spectator's theatre critic Lloyd Evans has caused an outcry by admitting in a column that he'd become so aroused during a lecture by a blonde academic with "hair spilling over her shoulders", that he'd visited a brothel afterwards. Finding that the services of a prostitute cost the same as his hotel room, he wangled a £20 discount. "Advice for scholars," wrote the lecturer, political theorist Lea Ypi, on X/Twitter. "Make sure your hair is neatly tied and that you're not blonde. Or else your research impact will be on The Spectator's libido section."

Mark Menzies: another Tory scandal

"The Conservatives seem set on turning 2024 into a record-breaking year," said The Independent – "but not in a good way". The endless stream of scandals felling their MPs has surpassed, "in both quality and quantity", even those in the dying days of John Major's premiership. The latest involves Mark Menzies, who represents Fylde in Lancashire. The Times claimed last week that the MP rang his 78-year-old former campaign manager at 3:15am one morning in December begging for £5,000 to pay off "bad people" who were holding him against his will. The sum, which rose to £6,500, was allegedly paid the next day by Menzies' office manager, who was reimbursed from campaign funds, which Menzies had previously raided to pay £14,000 of "medical bills". The 52-year-old MP, who denies any wrongdoing, has quit the Tory Party and is standing down at the election.



Menzies: stepping down

It's not the first time Menzies has run into trouble, said Andrew Pierce in the Daily Mail. Ten years ago, he resigned as a ministerial aide after a tabloid accused him of attempting to procure drugs from a Brazilian male escort. In 2017, he was questioned by police over bizarre claims that he had got a friend's dog drunk and become embroiled in a fight when challenged about it. Last year, he was accused of "kicking chairs" and "poking people" at a *Last Night of the Proms* event in his constituency. Even his friends conceded that he had been "drinking too much" that evening, but he insisted that any pokes he had delivered while waving his Union flag had been unintentional. It's an extraordinary catalogue of incidents, said the Daily Mirror. How can someone like this even be an MP?

Politics has always attracted odd characters, said Matthew Parris in The Times. The unique rigours and insecurity of a career in Westminster make it attractive to people with a sense of destiny, a need for attention, and a "stunted appreciation of risk" – a combination that often leads to imprudent actions. It was ever thus, but the tendency has become more prominent owing to the seemingly larger number of young, male risk-takers in recent parliaments, especially on the Tory benches. There are fewer steady old-timers today, and more ambitious, "often ideological", new MPs. A proportion of the latter are destined to bring disaster on themselves, but in most cases they'll do no lasting wider harm. "So perhaps we should celebrate the very miscellany of modern parliaments, gasp at the crashes, enjoy the aeronautics, and treat the whole thing more as music hall than morality play."

Sick-note culture: Sunak sounds the alarm

Once, Britain was known as the "sick man of Europe" because of its failing economy, said the Daily Mail. These days, with 2.8 million people of working age on long-term benefits for reasons of ill-health or disability, and 11 million sick notes issued last year, that title can be taken more literally. As Rishi Sunak noted in a speech last week, there is a moral and economic imperative to address this. Work can be a source of purpose and pride; the Treasury needs the tax receipts workers provide; and the benefits bill is a massive drain. Last year, disability benefits for working-age people cost £69bn in total – more than the UK's schools budget. To keep more people in work, Sunak wants to remove the right to issue sick notes from doctors (who, he says, find it hard to say no to their patients), and hand it to specialists linked to the benefits system who will have more time to consider a person's fitness. And he wants to redesign Personal Independence Payments (Pip), the main disability benefit. He notes that half of claimants now cite mental health problems; and a growing proportion of them are under 25 – which, he says, suggests that we are "over-medicalising" everyday challenges.

Here we go, said Frances Ryan in The Guardian. Time and again, when the Tories are in trouble, they sound the alarm about skivers, the workshy – or "sick-note culture". Sunak's plan for sick notes is a "classic piece of Conservative welfare thinking". If too many workers are falling sick, and claiming sick pay, don't address the cause, just get someone who is not a doctor to declare that they're not sick after all. As for his plan to reform Pip, by giving claimants with mental health issues therapy instead of cash, how will that work? One reason so many are off work is that 1.9 million people in England are waiting for mental health services. Britain does not have a "sick-note culture". What it has is record NHS waiting lists, substandard housing, low-paid insecure jobs and poor long-Covid support.

Talk of cutting benefits to the vulnerable will always cause outrage, said Sean O'Grady in The Independent. And Sunak's plan is flawed. For instance, experience tells us that bringing in third parties to assess people's health can lead to "terrible injustices"; and even if he is right that mental illness is being over-diagnosed, cutting Pip risks causing hardship if long-term illness is only rising because the nation is getting sicker. On the other hand, the bill for Pip is vast, and is forecast to increase 50% in four years; and the UK's economic growth depends on getting people back to work to fill post-Brexit labour shortages. Labour is also worrying about all this, so one way or another, social security reforms are coming, "and, sadly, there will be losers".

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Aid to Ukraine: too little, too late?



Ukrainian soldiers fighting near Bakhmut

"Just one week ago, hope looked fanciful," said The Economist. Since October last year, President Biden's proposal to spend $61bn on aid for Ukraine (and smaller amounts for Israel and Taiwan) had "languished in congress". The military consequences for Ukraine, which is facing desperate shortages of artillery ammunition and air defence missiles, were dire. The CIA director William Burns warned last month of "a very real risk that the Ukrainians could lose on the battlefield by the end of 2024". But opposition to further US support from the isolationist wing of the Republican Party seemed insuperable. The new Republican speaker of the House of Representatives, Mike Johnson, is himself a sceptic on Ukraine, and colleagues on the right of his party had threatened to unseat him if he tabled the bill. Yet last Saturday, under Johnson's leadership, the House "met the moment", passing the bill through extraordinary parliamentary manoeuvring: a majority of his own party voted against additional aid, but the Democrats were unanimous in support. As a result, $61bn of aid is on the way to Ukraine. "It should have an almost instant effect."

Pentagon officials have indicated that US artillery shells stockpiled in Europe could be shipped to Ukraine within weeks, said Diane Francis in The Kyiv Independent. With US missile systems likely to arrive before the expected Russian offensive in early summer, Ukraine's eastern front should soon be stabilised. And Europe's governments and military industries are now finally mobilising in support; F-16 jets are expected in June. Russia's campaign has suffered a severe setback, said Anne Applebaum in The Atlantic. This aid package alone won't turn the tide. But "suddenly the Russian military and Russian society are once again faced with the prospect of a very long war".

For many ordinary Ukrainians, "the aid is too little, too late", said Owen Matthews in The Spectator. In the past few months, they have lost lives, land and infrastructure because of Western dithering. They know "that their security is dependent on the political whims of their allies and could once again evaporate": Donald Trump could be elected in November, and has claimed that he would end the war in "one day". The vote was "historic", said The Washington Post. But it was more "an inflection point than a conclusion". The rise of a "selfish, simplistic America First ideology" in the Republican Party puts Europe's security "at risk". US support for Ukraine is guaranteed for the next few months. "Beyond that, the outlook is cloudier."

The smoking ban: is "nanny" right?



Will smoking die out?

Liz Truss thinks it's "profoundly un-Conservative". Boris Johnson calls the idea "nuts". But if Rishi Sunak gets his way, and Parliament passes his Tobacco and Vapes Bill, he will "for ever be remembered" as the man who stopped Britain smoking, said Camilla Tominey in The Daily Telegraph. Under the legislation, the legal age for buying cigarettes will rise by one year, every year, from 2027. That means that today's 14- to 15-year-olds will never be able to buy tobacco legally, and smoking will, in theory, gradually die out. The bill passed its first hurdle last week, with Labour support. But more than 100 Tories abstained or were absent, and 57 voted against, including the favourite to succeed Sunak as leader, Business Secretary Kemi Badenoch. There could yet be trouble ahead.

"No pleasure is worth giving up for the sake of two more years in a geriatric home in Weston-super-Mare." That was Kingsley Amis's view, said Tom Utley in the Daily Mail – and I agree entirely. Tobacco has given pleasure to millions for centuries, and we should not allow the nanny state to stop future generations from enjoying it.

Smoking is slowly dying out anyway (only 13% of adults smoke, compared to 46% 50 years ago) without the need for illiberal and hard-to-enforce legislation, said Kate Andrews in The Spectator. "The right to offend, to drink, to get fat, to smoke" – all these must be defended in a free society. It's painful to watch a Tory administration assaulting "the principles of personal liberty".

"The 'right' to smoke is a fake freedom," said The Times – a "cynical fiction" promoted by the tobacco industry. Addiction to smoking takes away your choice, and it disables and kills: some 80,000 people die from it in the UK each year. This law does represent a departure, said Jack Kessler in the Evening Standard – it doesn't just impose age limits, it gives people born a day apart different rights for ever. Even so, I guess it will be widely accepted in time. Think back to the ban on smoking in public places (2007), the seatbelt law (1983), or drink-driving limits (1967). In all these cases, there was a short-term "cacophony" of resistance. But today, people "can't believe" that such evident harms "were ever allowed".

Wit & Wisdom

"If you can't explain something in simple terms, you don't understand it."
Richard Feynman, quoted in The Times

"There ain't any answer, there ain't going to be any answer, there never has been any answer, that's the answer."
Gertrude Stein, quoted in The New York Times

"When one subtracts from life infancy (which is vegetation) – sleep, eating, and swilling – buttoning and unbuttoning – how much remains of downright existence? The summer of a dormouse."
Lord Byron, quoted in The Washington Post

"Politics is the art of the possible, the attainable – the art of the next best."
Otto von Bismarck, quoted in The Sunday Times

"The two most powerful warriors are patience and time."
Leo Tolstoy, quoted on Lexology

"It is impossible to live without brains, either one's own or borrowed."
Baltasar Gracián, quoted in Forbes

"To understand just one life, you have to swallow the world."
Salman Rushdie, quoted in Asia Times

"The essence of war is violence, and moderation in war is imbecility."
British statesman Lord Macaulay, quoted in the Financial Times

Statistics of the week

69% of the nearly 2,500 dairy farms in England that were inspected by the Environment Agency between 2020 and 2023 were found to be in breach of environmental regulations, as were 80% of those in Wales. Most of the breaches related to discharges of effluent.
River Action UK/ The Guardian

Sport

Football: United earn "hollow" victory in Cup tie for the ages

"They keep telling us the FA Cup doesn't matter" as "piece by piece they try to strip it bare", most recently by scrapping replays from the first round onwards. But then it goes and gives us a contest like Sunday's semi-final between Manchester United and Coventry City: a match of "impossible, unrepeatable drama", which was among "the greatest and most remarkable" I've ever witnessed, said Ian Ladyman in the Daily Mail. United made all the early running, and were 3-0 up after 58 minutes. But then came a magnificent comeback from the Championship side, who levelled the scores with three late goals – including a penalty in the 95th minute. In extra time, Coventry continued to have the upper hand, said Jonathan Liew in The Guardian. First, Ellis Simms struck the bar; then, with a minute remaining, Victor Torp poked Haji Wright's low cross into the net. For "90 seconds of unimaginable bliss", the Coventry fans who had packed into Wembley Stadium believed their team had made it to the final. Alas, it was not to be. VAR, which isn't even used in the Championship, showed that Torp had been a fraction offside. With cruel inevitability, United won the ensuing penalty shoot-out.



Torp scores: "unimaginable bliss"

And so, having survived by the "skin of their teeth", Erik ten Hag's team will have a chance to avenge last year's defeat to Manchester City in the FA Cup final, said James Gheerbrant in The Times. Yet what a "hollow and unflattering" victory it was. Although United started the match impressively, by the end they were simply "clinging on". Overall, this performance confirmed them as a side that simply "cannot control football games". Afterwards, recognising their good fortune, most of the United squad barely celebrated, said Jason Burt in The Daily Telegraph. The exception was Antony, their Brazilian winger, who "cupped his ears to goad the Coventry City players left desolate on the halfway line". Having himself contributed "nothing of note", it was a spectacular failure on his part to "read the room".

Not since 1991 has a team from England's second tier defeated one from the league above in a Wembley Cup tie, said Martin Samuel in The Times. United may have avoided that fate, but the club's 71-year-old co-owner, Jim Ratcliffe – who'd made it to Wembley for the game's second half having run the London Marathon in the morning – can't have been pleased by what he saw. As a businessman and sports investor, Ratcliffe prizes precision. United currently are the exact opposite: they are specialists in chaos. With it seeming likely that Ratcliffe will want a coach who "can restore some semblance of order", ten Hag's future looks precarious – and will doubtless remain so even if his team defy the odds and triumph over City on 25 May.

Athletics: the women's world record falls at the London Marathon

Since 2021, World Athletics has recognised two types of world record in the women's marathon. One, known as the women's-only record, applies to races where only women take part. The other, known as the "mixed" or "overall" record, applies to races where men and women run together, and where male pacemakers are permitted. The London Marathon is a women's-only race, because the elite women set off 35 minutes before the men, and so effectively run the course on their own, said Rick Broadbent in The Times. In this year's marathon, which took place on Sunday, Peres Jepchirchir of Kenya set a new women's-only record with a time of 2hr 16min 16sec. The 30-year-old shaved more than 40 seconds off the previous best, set by Mary Keitany in 2017.



Jepchirchir: cat and mouse

In truth, it was "no surprise to see Keitany's time fall, given how loaded this field was", said Sean Ingle in The Guardian. Jepchirchir is the current Olympic champion. Alongside her was Tigst Assefa, of Ethiopia – who last year "smashed" the overall record when she won the Berlin Marathon in 2:11:38 – as well as several other world-class runners. The race proved to be the "longest game of cat and mouse in the 43-year history of the London Marathon": for all but the final 600 metres, there was nothing to choose between Jepchirchir, Assefa, and two other competitors – 2021 winner Joyciline Jepkosgei, and last year's runner-up, Megertu Alemu. But with a brilliant sprint down the Mall, Jepchirchir moved clear of all three. Assefa could only finish second, seven seconds off the lead.

The men's race was run by Kenyan debutant Alexander Munyao, in 2:04:01, said Jim White in The Daily Telegraph. Yorkshireman Emile Cairess finished third, to become the "first Briton to stand on the finishing podium in 31 years".

The "Crucible curse" strikes again

They call it the "Crucible curse", said Mark Staniforth in The Daily Telegraph – the repeated failure of first-time winners of the World Snooker Championship to defend their title the following year. Since the event moved to the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield, in 1977, there have been 19 new winners of the event. And though several of these have gone on to win it multiple times, not a single one has claimed the title a year after their debut victory. In the first round of this year's championship, last year's surprise champion – the Belgian player Luca Brecel – became the latest to fall victim to the curse. The 29-year-old was dramatically beaten by qualifier David Gilbert, who "reeled off the final four frames to claim a stunning 10-9 win".



Brecel: too much high living?

Brecel's early exit from this year's championship wasn't, in truth, any sort of shock, said Glenn Ebrey in The Times. Since beating Mark Selby in the 2023 final, he has dedicated himself to fast living. Days after that victory, which earned him £500,000, he "splashed out on a Ferrari, followed by two more new vehicles and a sports car for his girlfriend". Basking in the glory of his "breakthrough triumph", he "flew around the world, playing in lucrative exhibitions as far afield as Dubai and Las Vegas". Not surprisingly, his form has plummeted, with just one ranking quarter-final to his name in the past 12 months. "It was a good year," he said after his defeat. "But I look forward to not being a world champion again."

Sporting headlines

Formula 1 British driver Lando Norris achieved his 15th F1 podium finish (without a win; a record), as he came second to Max Verstappen in the China GP.

Football Jude Bellingham scored a late winner as Real Madrid beat Barcelona 3-2 to all but secure the La Liga title.

Tennis Emma Raducanu lost 7-6, 6-3 to world No. 1 Iga Świątek in the quarter-finals of the Stuttgart Open.

Golf Nelly Korda won her second major title – and her fifth straight tournament win – with victory at the Chevron Championship in Texas.

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Pick of the week's correspondence

How to unsettle Putin

To The Times

I agree with Matthew Syed's condemnation of the Government for its capitulation over Russian participation in the Olympics. We need only recall how Hitler used the 1936 Games to legitimise the Nazi regime. As an ex-South African, I can testify to the effects of sports boycotts in Apartheid South Africa.

During Apartheid, everything else could be explained away as being the effect of something else, similar to the way that the effects of Brexit are being explained to the British public.

But the effects of the sports boycott could not be explained away in South Africa: it was the most visible condemnation of Apartheid, a festering sore that was apparent to everyone in the country, and which could not be "pretended away" – the Apartheid government could do nothing about it.

Patrick Kuun, Southampton

Managing our decline

To the Financial Times

First South Korea, now Japan is worrying about a falling birth rate. Surely a declining population is not only no reason to panic, but should be encouraged and planned for by governments around the world.

Human beings are the fundamental cause of climate change. In my lifetime, the number of people has more than trebled, while the annual rate of CO_2 emissions has increased sevenfold.

In the same period, there has been a massive increase in automation, reducing the need for labour, and if some of the promoters of AI are right, even the professional classes will soon become redundant. Meanwhile, in poor countries climate change is causing food shortages, and increasing numbers of people are trying to survive by migrating.

Surely it is time for governments to plan their numbers so as to help both rich and poor countries.

Giles Dixon, Chelwood Gate, East Sussex

The road to state riches

To The Daily Telegraph

Readers wondering why so little is being done about spiralling UK car insurance prices should not forget that the Government has a stake in the process via the insurance premium tax, which is added to all premiums. It started at 2.5% in 1994 but is now 12% and raises more than £7bn a year – about the same as is raised by inheritance tax.

Bernard Kerrison, US

A clumsy prohibition...

To The Guardian

I read Prof Chris Whitty's article about the smoking ban with interest. I am a former smoker who started young. I do not oppose legislation to bring about behavioural change, in general. But the prospect in 30 years' time of a 50-year-old having to buy cigarettes for a 44-year-old is a practical nonsense. Either ban smoking, or don't.

We know already from the war on drugs that the end result of prohibition is a black market. What I fear is that we will end up with a black market selling cigarettes that are not subject to quality control and will cause more deaths in the long run, both directly and indirectly, as police time that could be better used is instead focused on tackling a problem of our own creation.

Torran Turner, Littleborough, Greater Manchester

...that will save lives

To The Guardian

Simon Jenkins says that the New Zealand smoking ban legislation was withdrawn owing to unpopularity and a change of government. It was, in fact, vastly popular with the public, and repealing it was not in the National Party's election manifesto. The U-turn was brought about by pressure from lobby groups backed by the tobacco industry, and the insistence of the coalition partner New Zealand First.

Jenkins also plays down the ongoing impact of cigarettes in the UK. Although there has been a decline since the 1970s, we recently heard how rates are rising among some groups. This ban would protect future generations from one of the leading causes of preventable death and illness. Concerns about authoritarianism are scaremongering.

Richard Thorley, Exeter

Exchange of the week

Schools, faith and secularism

To The Guardian

I was disappointed by the court ruling on the Michaela School's prayer ban, and shocked to see the jubilant reaction from prominent politicians. Children praying in school is not disruptive or threatening, and for Kemi Badenoch to suggest that these pupils are attempting to "impose their views on an entire school community" screams of xenophobia. With this ruling, it's the other way around. The prayer ban tells Muslim children that their religious and cultural practices are foreign and undesirable, and in doing so forces conformity to a homogeneous British identity.

I attended a Catholic school in Glasgow with a large number of Muslim students. In a school system where religious education was taught out of a textbook by old white men, having the opportunity to learn about other cultures through discussions with my peers and exposure to their lifestyles and practices was an enriching experience. Surely this environment of diversity, acceptance and understanding is one that our educators and politicians wish to cultivate?

Oliver Eastwood, Glasgow

To The Guardian

Nadeine Asbali refers to "young people learning how to get along with people different from themselves". That is a sentiment I'm sure most of us would fully support. She also takes the view that "an obstinate, French-style secularism is creeping into our classrooms". Rather than "creeping", secularism should be actively encouraged in the education system, if we are to avoid segregation of communities along religious, racial and economic lines. We learn to accept and get along with others by spending time with people who come from a background different to our own. Faith schools can discriminate against those who do not share the religion of the school. This is at odds with the objective of a cohesive society.

The old adage "Schools are for teaching, not preaching" is more relevant today than at any time in our history.

Tony Hicks, Nottingham

It's we who are weird

To The Economist

Two articles in the 6 April edition, "The white-collar mafiosi of Naples" and "Meet the political nepo babies", are similar in that they report on cultures that place an emphasis on looking after their own. But according to Joseph Henrich, neither the Italian Mafia nor Asian nepotism is that peculiar.

In *The WEIRDest People in the World*, Henrich showed that it is the citizens of WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialised, rich, democratic) societies that seem weird to everyone else. WEIRDos keep riches for themselves, rather than sharing with their clan, and snitch on friends for the sake of upholding the law.

Johann Wirsing, Germany

The wrong beat?

To The Daily Telegraph

Is it acceptable that a "dozen-strong" police team is investigating Angela Rayner's affairs? When contacting police about a break-in in Salford last week, we were told that police would not visit the property. Could Ms Rayner lend us one of her 12?

Sara Dickinson, Tadworth, Surrey



"We've been playing for 27 hours and none of us has been able to afford a house yet"

© PRIVATE EYE

● Letters have been edited

"This is the only way I can give back and help someone I love"

This year Andi Bennett, 41, is embarking on a series of monthly challenges to raise funds for The National Brain Appeal in support of her stepfather, John, who was diagnosed with a rare dementia in his mid 60s.

John, now 74, has been a source of inspiration to Andi since he moved to her home town, Leigh-on-Sea, when she was 10 years old.

"He was the first person I'd ever met that had lived abroad and welcomed living with different cultures and people," says Andi who later set off on her own trip around the world, settling in Australia where she married, had a family and lived for 20 years.

In Andi's absence, John and her mother, Linda, became a couple and came out to visit her multiple times. Sadly, on their final visit to see Andi and her young family, John had a stroke, which was followed, some months later by problems with his eyesight and depth perception.



Andi Bennett



Andi's stepfather John and mother Linda

Eventually, he was diagnosed with Posterior Cortical Atrophy (PCA) at The National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery. This is a rare form of dementia that mainly affects the parts of the brain that process visual and spatial information.

The news came just a short time after John and Linda's retirement, shattering their plans to sail around the world in a boat they had bought together.

"Every time that you think this disease can't get any worse, it gets worse," says Andi. "The only way I can give back and help someone I really love is by raising awareness and money."

Big challenges

This year, each month she will take on a new challenge including running the Paris marathon and a cycling event at the local school, before the ultimate endurance event of swimming the English Channel in September.

In order to acclimatise to the English waters, Andi has had a daily ice bath since 1 January and in May she is promoting the National Ice Bath challenge starting 1 May.

Teaming up with Lumi Therapy, you can support Andi by taking part in the Ice Bath Challenge, by arranging a one-off ice dip or a daily cold shower. As a new customer, Lumi therapy is offering 15% off its products for participants: just quote 'ICEBATH CHALLENGE15' at checkout. Scan the QR code, bottom right) to sign up today.*

Andi is taking on these challenges to raise funds for The National Brain Appeal, the dedicated charity for The National Hospital, a world-leading centre of neurological expertise where John was diagnosed.

She was inspired by reading about the charity's campaign to build the world's first Rare Dementia Support Centre. "People living with dementia are such a vulnerable set of people and having a place to go would take away months of pain, research and ambiguity after diagnosis. It's a massive opportunity to create a positive experience so that people become part of a community at the very beginning. That would be a huge step forward."

Show your support by sponsoring Andi's challenges. Simply scan the QR code, top right.

*Ice bath therapy is recommended for 18+



The National Brain Appeal is raising funds for the world's first Rare Dementia Support Centre in central London

The National Brain Appeal
Funding advances in neurology and neurosurgery

NEURO MUSCULAR BRAIN INJURY STROKE FAMILY DEMENTIA HOPE PARKINSON'S MACHINE SPINAL MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

nationalbrainappeal.org

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

Registered Charity no.290173

Scan to donate on Andi's fundraising page

justgiving.com/page/andi-baker-swim-the-channel

Scan to sign up for the Ice Bath Challenge – select 'Join team'

justgiving.com/team/icebathchallenge2024

Review of reviews: Books

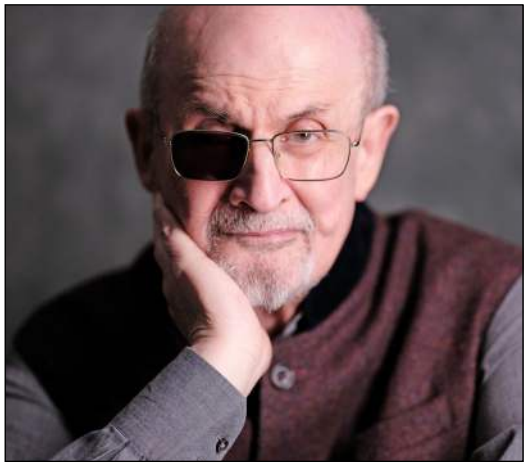
Book of the week

Knife

by Salman Rushdie

Jonathan Cape 224pp £20

The Week Bookshop **£15.99**



When Salman Rushdie attended a literary event in upstate New York on the morning of 12 August 2022, it had been 33 years since the Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa for his novel *The Satanic Verses*. He writes in his new book that his first thought when he saw a masked man in black clothes running fast towards him was: "So it's you. Here you are." His second thought was: "Really? It's been so long. Why now, after all these years?" The attacker – a 24-year-old extremist named Hadi Matar who had read just two pages of *The Satanic Verses* – managed to stab him about 15 times before being wrestled to the floor. The attack left Rushdie with a severed right optic nerve, a paralysed left hand and a dozen other serious injuries, said Boyd Tonkin in the Financial Times. Doctors initially believed he wouldn't survive. But he did, and has now written this "fizzing, galloping memoir" about the ordeal. *Knife* is "not just a candid and fearless book but – against all odds – a defiantly witty one". Despite all Rushdie has endured – the decade spent in hiding from 1989, now this frenzied assault – he has survived, with his sense of humour intact.

Rushdie, now 76, recounts his recovery in "graphic detail", said Erica Wagner in The Daily Telegraph. After the attack, his ruined right eye hung down his face "like a large soft-boiled egg". "Dear reader," he writes, "if you have never had a catheter inserted into your genital organ, do your very best to keep that record intact." Through it all, he was buoyed by his wife, the writer Rachel Eliza Griffiths, whom he had married in 2021, said Blake Morrison in The Guardian. In the hospital, "she took charge, staying with him 24/7 and recording his recovery on a phone and camera". Doctors were amazed at his speedy progress – "a kind of magic realism, a miraculous return from Hades". This book is "scary but heartwarming, a story of hatred defeated by love".

Terrible as Rushdie's ordeal was, I found *Knife* "meandering and frequently trite", said Becca Rothfeld in The Washington Post. His writing can "veer into cliché", and there are frequent "hectoring lectures" of tangential relevance. In one "mortifying sequence", the blade becomes the narrator: "Here I am, you bastard... I'm plunging my assassin sharpness into your neck." Well, I think the book is a triumph, said Johanna Thomas-Corr in The Sunday Times. Along with "hair-raising descriptions of hard-won survival", there are "beautiful, philosophical passages about art, freedom and resilience". We should "rejoice in this mesmeric memoir", and be thankful for whatever Rushdie "has left to give".

The Rising Down

by Alexandra Harris

Faber 512pp £25

The Week Bookshop **£19.99**



"As far as English counties go, Sussex is not usually viewed as a cultural heavy-hitter," said Kathryn Hughes in The Guardian. It doesn't have its own Thomas Hardy; "Wordsworth never took time off from striding the northern Lakelands to stroll across the South Downs"; and nor, with a couple of exceptions – Eric Ravilious (whose 1935 work *Chalk Paths* is pictured) and Paul Nash – are there that many "Sussex" painters. But in this "wonderful book", the cultural historian Alexandra Harris returns to her native soil – she grew up in West Sussex in the 1980s – and discovers "the multitudes that lie within". Harris confines herself to the patch of Sussex she knows best, said Sara Wheeler in Literary Review: a roughly 20-square-mile area taking in the "Arun Valley and the contiguous South Downs". Drawing on a range of sources – documents, paintings, overheard snippets of conversation – she brings this area's past to life. "We learn about 17th century cider making"; the craftmanship of Andy Goldsworthy (who, for his 2002 installation *Chalk Stones*, distributed 14 large chalk balls across the landscape); and even Jomo Kenyatta, former president of Kenya, who "pops up tending Sussex tomatoes in the Second World War".

The Rising Down is perhaps most fascinating when considering how those linked to other parts of Britain responded to the Sussex landscape, said John Walsh in The Sunday Times. William Blake was so taken with the coast on a visit in 1800 that it inspired his famous line: "To see a world in a grain of sand". But when Blake's fellow poet William Cowper visited eight years earlier, he had found it increased his "natural melancholy". Harris's research is "remarkable", and the result is a thought-provoking book that is "stuffed with stories of nature's transcendent power to move, comfort and inspire".

Novel of the week

Tell

by Jonathan Buckley

Fitzcarraldo 200pp £12.99

The Week Bookshop **£9.99**

Stories about the super-rich "tend to focus on their subjects' dysfunction", said Benjamin Markovits in The Daily Telegraph. Not so Jonathan Buckley's 12th novel, which is "just as interested in the virtues and habits" that have enabled its hero – retail tycoon Curtis Doyle – to succeed. The novel is framed as a series of interviews with Doyle's gardener, who is telling a mysterious interlocutor about Doyle's life, in the wake of his disappearance from his "palace" in Scotland. The format "yields great rewards": the gardener is free to jump from episode to episode, "without the structural impositions of a conventional plot". Packed with "wonderful" anecdotes and character sketches, this is "one of the best new novels I've read in a while".

Over his 25-year career, Buckley has consistently eschewed traditional narrative, said George Cochrane in the FT. His readership may have remained small as a result, but that's no reflection of the quality of his novels. *Tell* is another hugely "satisfying" work, said David Annand in the TLS: a "fascinating exploration of what it means to tell stories about our lives".

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Drama & Music

Theatre: Love's Labour's Lost

Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon (01789-331111). Until 18 May *Running time: 2hrs 45mins* ★★★★



"High-spirited and oozing sparky chemistry"

A new era has dawned at the Royal Shakespeare Company, and if the "first production is anything to go by, it's going to be a bright one", said Fiona Mountford in The i Paper. To launch their tenure, the RSC's new artistic directors, Daniel Evans and Tamara Harvey, have chosen *Love's Labour's Lost*. This infrequently revived comedy is a "quietly audacious choice for an opening salvo" – and it pays off handsomely. Directed by Emily Burns, the production is set in the modern day, in a luxury wellness retreat in the Polynesian Islands, said Holly O'Mahony in The Stage – which proves an ideal location for Shakespeare's tale of attempted abstinence and lovelorn longings. "High-spirited and oozing sparky chemistry", this is a "laugh-a-minute delight".

Love's Labour's Lost, about four young aristocrats who swear off women, is a tricky play to pull off, said Arifa Akbar in The Guardian, with its strained wordplay, convoluted subplots and "too inevitable" resolution. But with a fizzing cast led by *Bridgerton*'s Luke Thompson and some terrific physical comedy, this production is an "air-punching" joy, said Sarah Crompton on What's on Stage. Burns brings an extra contemporary twist by making the four friends "tech-bro billionaires"; there are strong *White Lotus* vibes to Joanna Scotcher's gorgeous set; and the text has been nicely trimmed, and given some modern interpolations, to create a "relaxed, fast-talking vibe". But the "real pleasure comes from the way the production mines Shakespeare's language to discover new resonance and humour". In this "wonderfully calibrated" staging, each moment lands "with thoughtful precision".

It's superbly cast, too, said Dominic Cavendish in The Daily Telegraph. Thompson "oozes charm" as Berowne, Ioanna Kimbook compels as the aloof, amused Rosaline, and there are cracking comic performances everywhere you look – notably Jack Bardoe's "strutting hoot of a Spaniard Don Armado", and Tony Gardner's mania-tinged pedant Holofernes. What a great start; keep it up.

The week's other opening

Machinal *The Old Vic, London SE1 (0344-871 7628). Until 1 June*

This exceptional revival of Sophie Treadwell's 1928 drama, based on the true story of a woman who was executed for killing her husband, features an astounding lead performance from Rosie Sheehy as a young woman "at the end of her tether" (Telegraph).

Albums of the week: three new releases

Taylor Swift: The Tortured Poets Department
Republic
£15



"Who would be a former boyfriend of Taylor Swift?" The world's biggest music star has written a number of songs inspired by her past relationships, said Will Hodgkinson in The Times. Now she's back with a whole 16-track album's worth, plus a surprise helping of 15 bonus *Anthology* tracks. *TTPD* is an "ultra-confident, ballad-heavy, poetic yet grounded reflection on love in all its forms: destructive, blissful, fantastical, embittered and idealised". The terrific main album takes in synth pop, 1980s power ballads and Stevie Nicks-style "emotional AOR", while the (more variable) bonus material harks back to Swift's pop country roots.

In this "imperial era of her long reign", Swift clearly believes that "more is more", said Lindsay Zoladz in The New York Times. But while there are certainly great moments here (the pulsing opener *Fortnight*; the wrenching *So Long, London*), this sprawling collection, with its familiar themes and sonic backdrops, generates diminishing returns. "Great poets know how to condense, or at least how to edit."

Britten: Violin Concerto & Chamber Works (Isabelle Faust)
Harmonia Mundi
£15



Written in 1938-1939, Britten's "hauntingly poignant" violin concerto has perhaps the most "captivating end" of any piece of its kind, said Richard Fairman in the FT. In the final ten minutes, the music "hangs in the air, gazing out nervously", as the world is "poised anxiously on the threshold of an uncertain future". The work is popular with violinists seeking to extend their repertoire, and on this terrific recording, the German virtuoso Isabelle Faust allows herself ample "breathing space"; while there is "no lack of aggressive attack when required, the lyrical passages sing with a heart-rending pathos".

It's an "impassioned and intense" account, said Erica Jeal in The Guardian, which is paired with three Britten chamber works. For the *Suite for Violin and Piano, Op. 6*, and the "beguiling" *Reveille*, Faust is joined by pianist Alexander Melnikov. Then, for *Two Pieces for Violin, Viola and Piano* (1929), they are joined on viola by Faust's brother, Boris. The musicians "honour Britten's exuberant works with vigour and determination" on a recording marked by its "bravura and brilliance".

English Teacher: This Could Be Texas
Island
£8



The year is still young, said Andrew Trendell in NME, but already 2024 has seen the release of a crop of "stellar" debut albums by young British and Irish bands (the likes of NewDad, Sprints, Whitelands and Lime Garden). Now, staking their claim to future greatness, we have English Teacher, a four-piece outfit from Leeds. *This Could Be Texas* is "everything you want from a debut". Melding post-punk, indie rock and witty pop, it's a "truly original effort from start to finish, an adventure in sound and words, and a landmark statement".

This beautifully judged debut is "striking in its lyrical and sonic ambition", agreed Poppie Platt in The Daily Telegraph. Frontwoman Lily Fontaine has a real knack for "witty, whimsical lyrics that still manage to *say something*: about politics, race, regional inequality, the climate crisis, you name it". It's harder than ever now for new acts to break out and earn a living. Here's an impressive bunch of musicians who are "choosing to take risks when the far easier route to radioplay and chart success would be to churn out filler. Good on them."

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



Sometimes I Think About Dying

1hr 34mins (12A)

Daisy Ridley romcom

★★★★

"As sales pitches go", this film's title is "far from a winner", said Robbie Collin in The Daily Telegraph: please could I have a ticket "for an hour-and-a-half of suicidal ideation", and a raspberry and blackcurrant Tango Ice Blast? But *Sometimes I Think About Dying* "turns out to be something of a mis-sell", for beneath its "mousy indie stylings" beats a "proudly mushy romantic-comedy heart". Daisy Ridley stars as Fran, a cripplingly shy office worker in a "soggy Oregon port town" who spends her days "twiddling with spreadsheets" – and compulsively picturing herself meeting "sticky ends". While gazing out of a window at a crane, for instance, "she imagines her own body being winched up"; later, she sees herself dead in a forest. Her drab and dismal existence is turned on its head, however, by the arrival of Robert (Dave Merheje), an affable new colleague who decides to woo her. Their courtship is "exhilaratingly normal" – a trip to the cinema, a boozy wink-murder evening with friends – but for Fran, it proves something far more thrilling, as she is coaxed towards a "warm, shared world into which she wouldn't have previously dared intrude".

It's annoying to find yet another beautiful actress playing a non-beautiful woman, said Deborah Ross in The Spectator; still, Ridley is "excellent" in this "understated little gem" of a film. "Crucially, she always allows you to feel for a character who, in other hands, might have appeared plain cold or closed down." Adapted from a 2013 play by Kevin Armento, this likeable film "has a slyly beguiling charm" and displays "a genuinely affecting tenderness" for its characters, said Michael O'Sullivan in The Washington Post. "It's kind of a downer, yes, but also stimulating as hell."



The Book of Clarence

2hrs 9mins (15)

Biblical comedy about a false messiah

★★

"*The Book of Clarence* is one of the weirder releases this spring," said Tom Shone in The Sunday Times: a comedy set in biblical times with a mainly black cast about a pot dealer named Clarence (LaKeith Stanfield) "who, finding himself short of a few shekels to pay off a gangster, establishes himself as the 13th apostle". The film is "expensively staged and impressively cast" – James McAvoy and Benedict Cumberbatch turn up in cameos; there are chariot races and "pot-smoking scenes in which everyone floats around weightlessly"; plus soul tracks recorded by the director Jeymes Samuel (whose older brother is Seal). Yet the film is "a tedious misfire". Laboriously executed and poorly edited, it requires "as much weed for the audience as for its characters to find it funny".

At first glance, *The Book of Clarence* "looks like a black American version of Monty Python's *Life of Brian*", said Matthew Bond in The Mail on Sunday. "True, nobody sings *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life*" or tells the hero he's a "very naughty boy" – but it "flirts with blasphemy", and its title character is a man with money problems who eventually becomes a false messiah, "just as Brian of Nazareth did all those years ago". But the similarities end there, as *The Book of Clarence* has a "wistful, almost mournful atmosphere" never sought by the Monty Python team, and it strives to make you think as well as laugh. I found it an overstuffed "mess", said Kyle Smith in The Wall Street Journal. Dragging on "for well over two hours", it lurches from "impish heresy to weepy melodrama", pausing at one point for a pointless "group dance scene". Stanfield is, to be sure, a "gifted performer. Thanks to an amateurish script, however, Clarence is a lifeless Brian."



Jeanne du Barry

1hr 57mins (15)

French period drama with Johnny Depp and Maïwenn

★★

"If you'd like to know what vanity projects look like over in France", said Clarisse Loughrey in The Independent, try *Jeanne du Barry*, about "the life of King Louis XV's chief mistress". The film is written, directed and produced by the mononymous artiste Maïwenn, who, of course, has also taken the title role. The illegitimate daughter of a seamstress, Jeanne was an outsider in the French court who "weaponised her beauty" to gain influence. But Maïwenn, who has been critical of feminism and the #MeToo movement, shows no interest "in the relationship between power and sex", and instead portrays Jeanne as a "free spirit" in a court full of harpies. The king himself, meanwhile, is played by a "listless" Johnny Depp. It doesn't work as an "extravagant costume drama", because the gowns are oddly ahistorical (many were provided by Chanel); nor is it quite a farce. Its message boils down to: "well, some women are born sexy, so what can they do but serve men?"

"Fuelled by sexual misadventures, grand scandals and gossip, feuds and aristocratic treachery", this film could at least have been a "robustly disreputable romp", said Wendy Ide in The Observer. "But it's a curiously inert affair: constrained, corseted, passionless and saddled with a lumpen, Depp-shaped dead weight where there should be a pulse-racing core of power and desire." Depp does a "passable job with the lingo", and the film splendidly sends up the "silly manners" of Versailles, said Brian Viner in the Daily Mail. However, we're required to believe in Maïwenn as a "head-turning beauty, radiating sexual magnetism. Well, I hate to seem ungallant," but I just didn't manage to.

Feud: Capote vs. The Swans – Tom Hollander plays Truman Capote

"Bold. Super stylish. Intelligent. Luxuriously made and unhurried." It's hard to watch Disney+'s *Feud: Capote vs. The Swans* "without reaching for hyperbole", said Anna van Praagh in the Evening Standard. "In an age of algorithm-inspired" TV, "this eight-part, eight-hour series feels like one from a bygone Hollywood era".

Based on real events, and directed (mostly) by Gus Van Sant, the drama tells the story of Truman Capote (Tom Hollander) and his bevy of "swans": the New York socialites who welcomed the writer into their inner circle, and then iced him out when he exposed their secrets in a 1975 magazine piece. He'd assumed that they wouldn't recognise themselves in a thinly veiled fictional account of their lives (an extract from a novel he never published); but they did – and it precipitated his social downfall. Hollander embodies Capote with "total mastery", and he is nicely supported by a cast that includes Calista Flockhart, Demi Moore and Chloë Sevigny.



Hollander: "total mastery"

Hollander is a fine actor, and he vividly captures the tragedy of Capote's decline, said Ed Power in The Irish Times. But the drama assumes you're already invested in the writer; if you are not, it can be hard to care what happens to him. With its cast and fabulous story, this should have been a surefire hit, said Lucy Mangan in The Guardian. So how did star producer Ryan Murphy create such a dry, lifeless dud? There are enough good lines scattered about to keep you hoping that the Murphy magic will arrive. "But it never does."

Exhibition of the week **Yinka Shonibare CBE: Suspended States**

Serpentine South Galley, London W2 (020-7402 6075). Until 1 September

In the 1990s, the British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare had an "epiphany", said Ben Luke in the Evening Standard. He discovered that the colourful batik fabrics sold in Brixton Market, which he had always associated with West Africa, were in fact the product of complicated historical exchanges. They were based on Indonesian textiles shipped to Europe and thence "industrially produced" in Holland: they only arrived in Africa through colonial commerce. Ever since, he has used this material to create work that explores the complexities of imperial history, and to question notions of "cultural authenticity". He has wrapped effigies of figures from British history in batik, and used the fabric to create "wind sculptures" – sails which evoke the principal motor of the slave trade. His trick, however, is to make it all look bright and joyous. This new show at the Serpentine brings together a number of recent installations and sculptures, all using his "signature fabric". It touches on everything from slavery and colonialism to global warming and the refugee crisis. It's "classic Yinka" – a show marrying "immediate visual allure" to "disquieting meaning".



Decolonised Structures (2022-2023): "visual allure" meets "disquieting meaning"

Shonibare's work is always "beautifully distinct", said Laura Cumming in The Observer. Even if he hasn't literally made these pieces himself (he has been disabled since adolescence), they are unmistakably his creations. It's a blessing and a curse, however. A work entitled *The War Library* sees 5,000-plus volumes on conflicts past and present bound in Shonibare's trademark textiles and exhibited in a huge bookshelf. "Stunning" as it is, he has made very similar pieces before. And it works in terms of rather obvious generalisations: the artist is "against colonialism, racism, imperialism, war". Elsewhere, he has made fibreglass copies of statues depicting figures from British imperial history, including Queen Victoria and Churchill, in his "gorgeously recognisable" batik patterns – again, a tactic he has deployed before. You're left feeling that he has been doing exactly the same thing for 30 years, and that "nothing – and I mean nothing – has changed".

Perhaps that's because it's still so relevant, said Jonathan Jones in The Guardian. By turning "patriotic statues" into objects that would be unimaginable to the people they commemorate, he has created "a witty, weirdly beautiful conclusion" to the furious debate around public sculpture that has raged since 2020. The conclusion to the show, *Sanctuary City*, is especially "moving". Scale models of Aleppo Cathedral, the UN headquarters and the *Bibby Stockholm* barge, among others, are lit from within to reveal interiors patterned with his trademark fabrics. All these sanctuaries are at best ambiguous symbols – yet they "glow with the idea of protecting vulnerable people". We should be thankful for Shonibare – a gentle artist who "encourages us to think a bit".

Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Iris Schomaker

at Huxley-Parlour

It's difficult not to like the drawings of German artist Iris Schomaker (b.1973). Created on panel and on paper, they are at once spiky and angular, and weirdly endearing. Schomaker aims to exploit the hazy gap at which figuration meets abstraction: hardly a revolutionary objective, and thus a challenging point of focus for even a skilled hand. Her pictures in *Watching the Perseids* veer towards the representational, but embellish it with gorgeously rendered passages of abstraction. A faceless boy on a horse thus finds himself submerged in a river of cubist planes, while a monochrome of two figures at a chessboard (a reference to obsessive but apparently inept chessman Marcel Duchamp?)



Detail from Untitled (Chess), 2024

uses the very blankness of the white background to suggest an uncertain depth of field. More explicit nods to 20th century avant-gardism – the lollipop trees of *Untitled (Night Forest)*, for instance – are less interesting, but that is a relative judgement. Prices range from c. £4,700 to c. £15,000.

45 Maddox Street, London W1 (020-7434 4319). Until 25 May

Churchill, at an angle



"An intimate study" of Winston Churchill that has been in private hands for 70 years has gone on show in the room at Blenheim Palace where the wartime PM was born, says Harriet Sherwood in The Guardian. It was painted by Graham Sutherland, one of the most highly regarded artists of his time, who was commissioned to paint Churchill by the Houses of Parliament to mark his 80th birthday in November 1954. The final portrait was famously not to the great man's liking; he declared it, derisively, a "remarkable example of modern art". Instead of being hung in Parliament, it was taken to Chartwell, Churchill's home in Kent, where it was destroyed in a bonfire. The oil study was painted by Sutherland at Chartwell as he prepared to paint the portrait; it depicts Churchill at an angle, "looking pensive". Sutherland later gave the study to Alfred Hecht, an art dealer. Hecht kept it for the rest of his life, and bequeathed it to the present owner, who is auctioning it in June.

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Best books... Jojo Moyes



The novelist picks her favourites. Her most recent book, Someone Else's Shoes *(Penguin £9.99), was a Sunday Times No. 1 bestseller. She will be appearing at the Stratford Literary Festival on 5 May. Visit stratlitfest.co.uk*

Three Women by Lisa Taddeo, 2019 (Bloomsbury £10.99). This book has become a kind of litmus test for me: I've given it to more friends than I can remember. A journalistic deep dive into female desire and the lies we tell ourselves, it provokes visceral reactions. After I read it, I tracked Lisa down and insisted we become friends. She's a one-off.

The Sun Also Rises by Ernest Hemingway, 1926 (Everyman £12.99). It's fashionable not to like Ernest Hemingway, especially for his misogyny, but he also wrote scathingly about men's treatment of women. Lady Brett Ashley is one of the great female characters in literature. "Yes... Isn't it pretty to think so?" is a devastating last line to a love story.

Small Things Like These by Claire Keegan, 2021 (Faber £8.99). Claire Keegan's novels, while short, waste not a single word. I loved this not just because of the surgical precision of the descriptions, and the haunting, narrow focus of the story. I loved it because it was essentially about a rarity in modern fiction: a good man.

Standard Deviation by Katherine Heiny, 2017 (Fourth Estate £9.99). When I read this book, it made me laugh so much in public that my family disowned me. It was also the first time I had felt unnervingly "seen" in print. I still wonder whether Heiny actually scooped out the contents of my head to create Audra.

The Black Stallion by Walter Farley, 1941 (Houghton Mifflin £6.99). An American children's classic, this book, with its tales of survival, loyalty and childhood courage, has somehow worked its way under my skin and stayed with me my whole life.

Nobody's Perfect by Anthony Lane, 2002 (Picador, available used). Anthony Lane's film reviews are written in perfect prose. Funny, astute, and often surprising, they are always a pleasure to dip into, even if you have zero interest in the films he is writing about.

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 boy-meets-girl musical **Two Strangers (Carry a Cake Across New York)** was a hit for the Kiln last year, and is now transferring to the West End. Until 14 July, Criterion Theatre, London W1 (twostrangersthemusical.com).

The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula has been sent from Naples to London for **The Last Caravaggio**, a free exhibition dedicated to what is believed to be the painter's final work, "a violent, intimate drama of death" (FT). Until 21 July, National Gallery, London WC2 (nationalgallery.org.uk).

Book now

The pandemic forced its early closure at the V&A in London, but now **Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk** comes to Dundee, tracing the evolution of the garment from the Japanese imperial court to modern interpretations by Issey Miyake and Alexander McQueen. 4 May-5 January 2025, V&A, Dundee (vam.ac.uk).

Line of Duty's Adrian Dunbar swaps bent coppers for Cole Porter in a new production of **Kiss Me Kate**, which will also feature the Tony Award-winning Broadway star Stephanie J. Block. 4 June-14 September, Barbican, London EC1 (kissmekatemusical.com).



Dujonna Gift and Sam Tutty in Two Strangers...

The 75th **Aldeburgh Festival** presents an "adventurous repertoire" that includes performances by the London Philharmonic and Britten Sinfonia, plus talks and exhibitions (Times). 7-23 June, Britten Pears Arts, Snape Maltings, Suffolk (brittenpearsarts.org).

The Archers: what happened last week

Alice flares up as Kate and Lilian try to talk to her about their concerns. Hannah saves the day in the cricket match against Darrington; afterwards, Chris suggests they go for that drink – as friends. GP Azra warns Alice to be careful about helping others with addiction and to look after herself. Chelsea decides to go for jobs at the Tea Room and The Bull, with plans to play them off each other. Lying about why, Alice asks Chris to look after Martha so she can accompany Harry to his first meeting, forcing Chris to cancel his drink with Hannah. Afterwards, Harry says he'll support himself from now on. There's embarrassment at Grey Gables as Fallon and Harrison's bag, complete with saucy costumes, gets mixed up with the Lord Mayor of Felpersham's. Mick goes for a security job at Grey Gables as a surprise for Joy. Chelsea smashes both her interviews, but Kenton and Natasha figure out what she's up to. On discovering Harry's been drinking, Alice rushes to him, telling more lies to Kate and Lilian. He thanks her for being his lifeline, but Alice can't do it any more.

Television

Programmes

Dopesick This powerful and disturbing drama about America's opioid crisis made its debut on Disney+ and is now showing on the BBC. Michael Keaton stars as the doctor in a poor mining community unwittingly prescribing OxyContin, while the Sackler family ruthlessly markets its wonder drug, and the DEA investigates. Sun 28 Apr, BBC2 22:00 and 23:00 (60mins each).

Stalking: State of Fear Investigation into the stalking of women, highlighting the experience of victims who feel abandoned by a system meant to protect them. Tue 30 Apr, ITV1 21:00 (60mins).

Boxing, Belief and Me Uplifting documentary about the Midland Langar Seva Society Boxing Academy in Walsall, and coach "Pops", who helps run the community project. Wed 1 May, BBC1 22:40 (60mins).

Films

The Shop Around the Corner (1940) Two rival workers in a Budapest factory (James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan) don't realise they're each other's lonely hearts correspondent. Sat 27 Apr, BBC2 14:00 (95mins).

The History Boys (2006) Alan Bennett's adaptation of his own play, set in a 1980s Yorkshire school, stars the original theatrical cast, including a young James Corden. Thur 2 May, BBC4 22:00 (110mins).

Kursk: The Last Mission (2018) Colin Firth and Matthias Schoenaerts star in this tense drama based on the real-life disaster that befell the crew of the Russian submarine. Fri 3 May, BBC2 23:55 (110mins).

Coming up for sale

The Affordable Art Fair returns to Hampstead with wallet-friendly work from more than 100 galleries from the UK and overseas. Beyond the main displays, there's an installation by the Belgian artist Jules Wittock and, for the first time, a rooftop bar overlooking the Heath. 8-12 May, Hampstead Heath, London NW3 (affordableartfair.com).

© CLAUDIA JANKE; MARC BRENNER

Lovely cottages for less than £500,000



◀ **Suffolk:** Moat Cottage, Cockfield. A quintessential thatched Suffolk cottage dating back to the 17th century. 2 beds, family bath, kitchen/breakfast room, 3 receps, study, summer house, garden, parking. £449,950; Carter Jonas (01787-540973).



▼ **Yorkshire:** Crayke House, Castle Bolton, Leyburn. This 17th century stone cottage has stunning views across the Dales. 2 beds, family bath, kitchen, 2 receps, 2 outbuildings, garden, parking. £480,000; Savills (01904-617820).



▲ **Norfolk:** Rock Cottage, East Rudham. An attractive brick and flint semi-detatched period cottage in a conservation area. 2 beds, family bath, shower, kitchen, 2 receps, garden, parking. £350,000; Bedfords (01328-730500).





◀ **Hampshire:** Crown Lane, Old Basing. Characterful Grade II timber-framed cottage full of period details. 3 beds, family bath, shower, kitchen, beamed dining room, 1 further recep, garden. £400,000; Knight Frank (01256-630978).

▶ **Argyll & Bute:** Hawthorn House, Lismore. This handsome cottage is in a picturesque setting on the popular Isle of Lismore. 3 beds, 2 baths, shower, kitchen/dining room, recep, garden, parking. OIEO £420,000; Bell Ingram (01631-566122).







▲ **Cornwall:** Langdon, Launceston. An enchanting newly thatched cottage dating back to the 17th century. 2 beds, family bath, kitchen, 2 receps, conservatory, garden, workshop, garage. £295,000; Stags (01566-774999).

◀ **Inverness:** Mo Dhachaidh, Tomatin. Traditional highland cottage in a spectacular setting close to the Cairngorms National Park. 2 beds, family bath, kitchen, 2 receps, conservatory, garden, outbuildings, parking. OIEO £345,000; Savills (01738-477525).







▲ **Devon:** Homebush Cottage, Shute, Axminster. This ruined but full-of-potential 17th century Grade II cottage is set in more than 11.5 acres of woodland. £250,000; Symonds & Sampson (01297-33122).

▶ **Oxfordshire:** The Square, Aynho. Delightful thatched cottage in a peaceful village. 3 beds, family bath, kitchen, recep, garden, garage. £450,000; Hamptons (01869-866304).

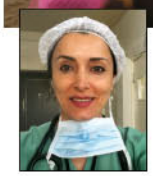


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A man carries a wounded child into the MSF-run clinic at Rafah Indonesian Field Hospital in southern Gaza, 27 December 2023. Photograph © MSF

DR BIRSEN GASKELL IS AN ANAESTHETIST RECENTLY RETURNED FROM GAZA.

"We arrived in Gaza and were immediately confronted by huge numbers of people crammed into the streets. You can hear the bombing and you can see the fear in people's faces.

We immediately got to work at the hospital. We treated a large number of patients for burns and trauma injuries, mostly people who'd been injured in explosions. There were a lot of children. I'd never seen so many burns patients in one place.

Some children were malnourished and it was clear many were not eating properly. With post-operative care, it's vital that patients have a good diet to assist with tissue healing, but due to food shortages that just wasn't happening.

We were seeing around 180 patients every day. We didn't have the capacity to take everybody into the operating theatres – some procedures had to be carried out on the ward.

As an anaesthetist, one of my roles was to improve pain management. Due to shortages of medical supplies, there have been a lot of incidents during this conflict when people have been operated on without anaesthetics. It's inconceivable that this has happened, but it has.

Some patients stick in your mind. There was a nine-year-old girl who'd been injured when her home was bombed and lost part of her jaw. She and her mother were the only survivors from their family. I changed her dressing every few days and gave her antibiotic treatment. One day, she gave me a hug and asked if she'd ever look normal. I didn't have an answer for her. Reconstructive surgery would really help her, but nothing like that is on offer in Gaza.

The situation in Gaza is getting worse and people's medical needs are growing. The fact that there are people there who have had to undergo medical procedures without anaesthesia is barbaric. It's an inhumane situation.

Yet, despite the carnage and the horror, the MSF hospital was an oasis of calm. I was so impressed by the Gazan staff, by their resilience. Many had lost family members and were living in tents, but they were still there every day, helping people.

The work MSF is doing in Gaza is needed now more than ever."

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The "Pie King" hits Paris

British cooking has "rarely got its due in France", said Lindsey Tramuta in The New York Times. But now an English chef nicknamed the "Pie King" is hoping to overcome French scepticism. Known for the "artistically latticed savoury pies" he created as head chef at the Holborn Dining Room in London, Calum Franklin opened his Parisian venture last month. Located in the Opéra district, Public House combines the "brasserie format" with the "relaxed spirit of a British pub". The menu features a selection of his signature pies – beef and bone marrow, chicken and wild mushroom – alongside Scotch eggs and sausage rolls. It's common for British chefs to work in France, but not many have opened restaurants there, said Ed Cumming in The Daily Telegraph. And fewer still have opened British ones. Yet perhaps the idea of trying to sell British food to Parisian diners is no longer such a "joke". French tourists in London have been "surprised" by the food there; and the French are less sniffy than they used to be about other cuisines. Franklin describes seeing "brutally authentic Thai restaurants" in Paris with queues down the street. There is, he says, a "hunger for authenticity" now that made him feel more secure about his project.

A guide to buying kitchen knives

When selecting a chef's knife, it's important to remember that "you need a knife that matches the cook you actually are rather than the one you aspire to be",



Franklin: feeding a "hunger for authenticity"

says Yotam Ottolenghi in The Guardian. It's easy to be seduced by Japanese knives, with their thin steel blades and beautiful wooden handles. And in the right hands, they're "amazing" – certainly the best for "precision cutting". But they're expensive, need careful maintenance (you'll need a whetstone to keep the blade sharp without damaging it) and are not straightforward to use. You might do better to consider knives from cheaper, but still high-quality, brands such as Global or Victorinox: "many professional chefs swear by them and feel more confident with them than with thinner Japanese blades". If you can, buy in person rather than online, as only by handling a few knives will you discover which best "fits" your hand. And "however many knives you end up buying, buy them individually", not in a set. A set may "look compelling sitting together in a bespoke knife block", but some of the knives will never get used. "Better to spend more on less." Finally, never put a knife in the dishwasher, as the jets will "dull the blade" and ruin any wooden handle.

How to make the most of oily fish

Many studies have shown that "cheap, oily fish" is good for us, says Giulia Crouch in The Times. The latest, from researchers in Japan and Australia, suggests 750,000 lives could be saved globally each year if people replaced the red meat in their diets with sardines, herrings and anchovies. Yet many people don't buy oily fish because they don't really know what to do with it. Fortunately, leading chefs have plenty of ideas. For Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, an HMB (hot mackerel bap) makes a delicious alternative to a BLT. He elevates his with a "cheaty" tartare sauce. Matthew Ryle, head chef of Maison François in central London, makes a ragu similar to a bolognese, but with fresh and smoked sardines instead of beef mince. Mike Davies, of The Camberwell Arms in London, is especially keen on herring. He suggests getting a fishmonger to butterfly it, and then panfrying it on the skin side in lots of good butter. "Baste the flesh with the hot butter to finish the cooking and serve it on toast with the pan juices poured over, some fresh horseradish, chopped dill and a squeeze of lemon."

Recipe of the week: *skordostoumbi* pasta

Skordostoumbi is a dish found in the Ionian Islands, says Georgina Hayden. It consists of layers of aubergine and tomato, and is heavy on the garlic: its name means garlic cloves. It is traditionally a vegan dish, but here I've roasted it in the oven, with the vegetables surrounding a block of feta. It's super simple but looks impressive, and makes an excellent sauce for pasta. If you want to keep it plant based, just leave out the feta – it'll still be delicious.

Serves 4

1 aubergine 6 garlic cloves 400g cherry tomatoes 1 tsp caster sugar 1 tsp Aleppo pepper (or ½ tsp dried red chilli flakes) 1 tsp dried oregano sea salt and freshly ground black pepper 5 tbsp olive oil 2 tbsp red-wine vinegar 1 × 200g block of feta 350g spaghetti or linguine (gluten-free, if needed) ½ bunch of basil

- Preheat your oven to 200°C/180°C fan/gas 6.
- Trim the aubergine and peel off most of the skin — I use a peeler to remove it in strips. Cut the flesh into 2cm cubes and place in a large roasting tray.
- Crush the garlic cloves with the side of your knife, leaving them in their skins. Add to the tray with the cherry tomatoes, caster sugar, Aleppo pepper and most of the dried oregano. Season everything generously and drizzle with four tablespoons of the olive oil and all the red-wine vinegar. Really massage in the flavours.
- Nestle the feta in the middle of all the ingredients, drizzle with the remaining olive oil, scatter over the rest of the dried oregano and pop the tray into the oven. Roast for 40-45 minutes, until the vegetables



are nicely charred and blistered and the feta is golden around the edges.

- When the vegetables are almost ready, bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil. Cook the pasta according to the packet instructions. Pick and roughly tear or chop the basil leaves.
- When the pasta is nearly done, remove the tray from the oven. Scoop out about 200ml of the starchy pasta water and mix with the veg and feta in the tray, really crushing in the garlic (removing the skins) and breaking up the feta. Drain the pasta, reserving the water. Toss the pasta through the tray, adding a further 100-150ml of the pasta water, until the juices are creamy and oozy. Finish with the torn basil leaves and serve straight away.

Taken from Greekish: Everyday Recipes with Greek Roots *by Georgina Hayden (Bloomsbury Publishing at £26). Photography by Laura Edwards. To buy from The Week Bookshop for £20.99 (incl. p&p), call 020-3176 3835 or visit theweekbookshop.co.uk.*

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Consumer

New cars: what the critics say



Porsche Cayenne S
Price: from £84,400

The Daily Telegraph
Bucking the trends towards electrification and fuel economy, Porsche has upgraded the 3.0-litre twin-turbocharged V6 engine in the Cayenne S to a "tremendous" 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8. This brings it up to 468bhp and adds 6mph to give it a top speed of 170mph, but at a cost to you and to the environment: even the most frugal Cayenne emits almost half a kilogram of CO_2 for every mile driven.

PistonHeads
The new S looks a bit of an outlier in the range, with no hybrid assistance. It's framed as a no-frills Porsche SUV, and it does a lot "very well": it's "pretty majestic at motorway speeds"; steering is "spot on" in terms of weight, speed and response; the brakes are better than many sports cars; and the eight-speed automatic gearbox is near faultless. "It's a supreme car for maintaining momentum."

Top Gear Magazine
With a fresh upgrade, the third-generation Cayenne has a sharper face, better suspension and more screens, including one for the passenger – which feels unnecessary, and could make them feel sick. The glossy central panel looks smart, but is prone to dust, fingerprints and glare. There's plenty of space in the back and overall the cabin is well put together, though it lacks the vitality and glamour of rivals.

The best... noise-cancelling headphones



▶ **Bowers & Wilkins Px8** These "classy" leather headphones have serious engineering behind them, with a new carbon-fibre cone which gives more controlled sound. Noise cancelling is relatively subtle, but they're extremely comfortable and music sounds "startlingly detailed and crisp", with big, bold bass. Battery life is 30 hours, and charging time two hours (£599; bowerswilkins.com).



▶ **Beats Studio3 Wireless** Beats headphones is now owned by Apple, so these are great for iPhone users as they pair automatically, but Android users won't have trouble pairing them via the app. Noise cancelling is powerful, but not as sophisticated as other options here; music sounds big and bold with a hefty bassline, but lacks nuance. Battery life is up to 22 hours and a full charge takes two hours (£300; argos.co.uk).



◀ **Sony WH1000XM4** The perfect mix of performance and price, these have "stunning" noise cancellation and the app lets you adjust it to take into account things such as the shape of your face and if you wear glasses. Battery life is 30 hours; a full charge takes three hours (£229; sony.co.uk).



◀ **JBL Tune 760NC** "A great budget choice", these headphones offer "perfectly decent sound", including decent bass, "and functional noise cancelling". They feel a bit plasticky, and the functions are basic, but no more than you'd expect for the price. Battery life is up to 35 hours, and they charge in two (£55; uk.jbl.com).



◀ **Bose 700 UC** If noise cancelling is your priority, these are an excellent option. The level can be adjusted via the app, and they have great voice pickup. They are well made, comfortable, and have superb sound. The battery lasts for 20 hours (£390; bose.co.uk).

SOURCE: THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Tips... how to avoid common travel scams

- Be wary of cheap deals for flights or accommodation. Scour reviews, ask questions and be on the alert for clone websites (poor grammar and spelling are red flags). It is not unknown for people to turn up at a holiday let and find they have no booking and another family is in residence.
- Never pay by bank transfer; if you use a credit card you will have protection from £100 up to £30,000.
- Scammers may use fake Atol numbers. You can check if it's genuine at atol.org/check-for-atol. Abta logos should also be checked at abta.com/abta-member-search.
- If you have booked accommodation via a site such as Booking.com, pay through the site and be very cautious of any emails or calls asking you for more money. Contact customer service or the hotel if unsure.
- There are a lot of cowboys operating at airports. If you are booking valet parking, look for one with official accreditation (e.g. Park Mark), good reviews, full contact details, and a Companies House number.

SOURCE: THE TIMES

And for those who have everything...



Created by independent designer George Sowden, these elegant PL1 wireless portable table lamps are made from soft silicone, which diffuses light and is easy to clean. They are dimmable and charge via USB. A full charge delivers at least four hours of light.
£72; scp.co.uk

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN

Where to find... the best video doorbells

Most smart doorbells have a single lens, but the **Eufy Video Doorbell Dual** has two – one aimed straight ahead, the other downwards, to spot parcels left on the doorstep, or small children. It records 2,000p HDR pictures and has 16GB of storage (£229; uk.eufy.com).

Great value, the Alexa-compatible **Blink Video Doorbell** has 1,080p picture, with infrared night vision, plus two-way audio. Like the Eufy, it offers a cloud service, but you don't need it (£39; amazon.co.uk).

Arlo Essential Wireless Video Doorbell Camera has a 180-degree field of view and a 1,080p HDR picture with night vision. It video calls your phone when pressed, and you get live view, motion alerts and two-way audio without a subscription. It is waterproof, wireless and rechargeable (£100; arlo.com).

Aosu Video Doorbell Pro will work for 180 days from a single charge, and provides sharp images even in low light. It has triple motion detection and records in real time to the 8G built-in memory (£78; aosulife.com).

SOURCE: EVENING STANDARD

This week's dream: looking for narwhal in Arctic Canada

In the Middle Ages, their tusks were mistaken for unicorn horns and were deemed so magical that Ivan the Terrible called for one on his deathbed – and even today, narwhal still retain a little of their ancient mystique. Among the deepest divers of all marine mammals, these whales are elusive, and little understood by science, says Phoebe Smith in Wanderlust – but they are not endangered, and if you time it right, in parts of Arctic Canada your chances of seeing one are not bad. The best bet is Eclipse Sound on Baffin Island, where narwhal frequent the edge of the sea ice (the floe edge) in early summer. I had no luck on my week-long trip there with the tour operator Arctic Kingdom – but the adventure was worth it even so.



Baffin Island: a worthwhile adventure even without a narwhal sighting

Set between mainland Canada and Greenland, Baffin Island is more than twice the size of Great Britain. From Iqaluit, in the far south, Arctic Kingdom's guests fly to Pond Inlet, a small town in the north, from which they travel by *qamutiik* – a traditional wooden sled, pulled by a snowmobile – to base camp. It's a further two hours to the floe edge. (The ice now melts so quickly and unpredictably, owing to climate change, that it's no longer safe to set up tents any closer.) Most of the company's guides are members of the Inuit community, which still hunts narwhal, according to strict quotas. They are a good source of local lore, and are very knowledgeable about the region's wildlife.

On a misty day, we spent the afternoon wandering past icebergs like "frozen sculptures". On other days, we went kayaking, and I tried snorkelling in the –2°C water, wearing a black drysuit and "lobster-shaped" gloves. One day, a "huge" male polar bear passed right in front of us, and I saw plenty of other marvellous wildlife besides, including little auks, terns, skuas, a "curious" Arctic fox ("whose cheeks looked as though they had been painted with blusher"), and ringed seals "of every shape and size" leaping in and out of ice holes. *The week-long trip costs about £1,600. Visit arctickingdom.com for details.*

Getting the flavour of…



An island of your own off Anglesey

A tiny private island with two holiday homes off the coast of Anglesey, Ynys Faelog offers an Enid Blyton-ish air of adventure – and "more than a dash of 21st century luxury" too, says Pamela Goodman in The Times. It sits in the Menai Strait, near the 19th century suspension bridge linking Anglesey and the Welsh mainland, and can be reached by car, across a causeway at low tide, and on foot, over a walkway at high tide. There are 11 double bedrooms – five in one house, and six in the other, which also has a hot tub, a barbecue, a fire pit and a tennis court. Both command "sensational" views from terraces and picture windows. The only "niggle" is the lack of safe swimming, due to the currents in the straits – but Anglesey itself is ringed by beautiful beaches. *The larger house costs from £2,546 per week (ynysfaelog.co.uk).*

Perfect peace on Alicudi

With strict limits on development, Sicily's seven Aeolian islands are "still largely off the beaten tourist path", says Rebecca Winke in The Daily Telegraph. All are beautiful, and "characterful" in their own ways, from "bustling" Lipari and verdant Salina to Stromboli, one of the world's most active volcanoes, with its "simmering pools of molten lava". For a particularly peaceful break, head for Filicudi – or Alicudi, which is even more remote, and "a haven for those seeking nature, solitude and a brief escape from the modern world". With only 100 year-round inhabitants, it has no streets – only steps and mule paths – and is steep-sided enough to offer some tough hiking, despite being only a mile-and-a-half wide. Hire a boat to reach its beaches (mainly stony inlets) or catch a ride with a local fisherman "for a few euros".

A visit to buzzing Bangalore

Known as India's Silicon Valley, Bangalore (pictured) is one of the country's most energetic and "forward-thinking" cities. It is also wonderfully "liveable" (if you can cope with the air pollution), and thus "very visitable" too, says Cathy Adams in The Sunday Times. There are few "big-ticket sights" (the 18th century summer palace of Tipu Sultan is worth a look, as is the 19th century Bangalore Palace, which was modelled on Windsor Castle). But the city also has great nightlife and a dynamic cultural scene (including good theatres and art galleries), and – at 920 metres above sea level – it is wonderfully cool, with "gorgeous" parks. All in all, it makes for an "authentic" introduction to India, and is a "handy gateway" to the country's south, with nearby destinations including Nagarahole National Park (for tiger-spotting) and the hill station of Coorg (a "chilled-out" escape favoured by Bangalore's "smart set").

Hotel of the week



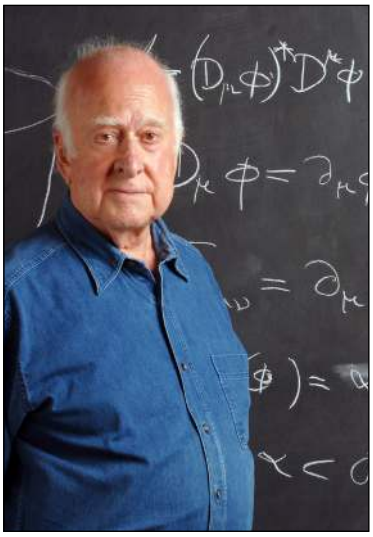
The Siam *Bangkok*

It only opened a decade ago, but with its superb interior design and "lush" riverside setting, The Siam feels like "a portal to a bygone Bangkok", says Chris Schalkx in Condé Nast Traveller. Mid-century heirlooms – vintage Pan Am posters, "tattered" travel trunks – share its marble-floored hallways with a fine collection of older antiques. Recent refurbishment has kept the suites and private villas with pools looking fresh, and the Thai restaurant – which occupies three "ancient teakwood houses" – offers good food and "classic Thai hospitality". The hotel is not ideally located for the city's "postcard sights", but for peace and "timeless beauty", it is unrivalled. *Doubles from £600 b&b; thesiamhotel.com.*

Nobel Prize-winning physicist who predicted the God particle

Peter Higgs 1929-2024

Peter Higgs was walking in the Scottish Highlands in 1964 when he came up with a theory for how particles acquire their mass. As he would often point out, two other groups of physicists had proposed the same idea at almost exactly the same time (one just before him, one just after). What distinguished his contribution, said Harald Fox on The Conversation, was that he predicted the existence of a massive subatomic particle (a form of boson) left behind by this process. In the following decades, theoretical physicists joined in an almost obsessive quest to detect this particle. But the Higgs boson proved so elusive that the physicist Leon Lederman dubbed it the "Goddamn particle" – which was then shortened to the "God particle".



Higgs: did not enjoy publicity

Higgs, who was an atheist, felt that this nickname was inappropriate and misleading; but it did encapsulate the importance of what he proposed. Without the God particle, said The Daily Telegraph, "the entire framework of the Standard Model of Particles and Fields, the theory that has been used to explain fundamental physics since the 1970s, fell down". The name also helped attract popular interest in the subject – and conveying what it all meant in layman's terms became a pastime in itself for scientists in the field. In 1993 the then-science minister, William Waldegrave, offered a bottle of vintage champagne to anyone who could explain the Higgs boson on a single side of A4, to help him get funding for the search. "With a great deal of creative flair, the competition entrants turned to analogy, poetry, rhyming verse and limericks." But most people were still left scratching their heads.

By the mid-1960s, the Standard Model contained a "particle zoo" populated by electrons, protons, bosons and various quarks that form the building blocks of nature, said Space.com. But one particular question remained unanswered – why do some particles have mass? This question was vitally important, as without that mass there would be no atomic elements, no stars, no us. The solution that emerged in the 1960s (the Brout-Englert-Higgs mechanism) was that fundamental particles acquire mass via interactions with a quantum field, the Higgs field, that permeates space. In Waldegrave's competition, the winning entry likened the field to a cocktail party at the Tory conference, and Mrs Thatcher walking through it, gathering hangers-on.

Higgs suggested that the introduction of this theoretical wave meant that a previously unknown particle with no intrinsic spin would sometimes appear: the Higgs boson was that particle, and detecting it would prove the theory and complete the Standard Model. This, however, was not easy. With a lifetime of less than a billionth of a billionth of a second, the particle could not be observed in nature. Instead, scientists had to try to create it by replicating the high-energy conditions of the early universe – and detect its traces. Vast sums were spent building particle accelerators, culminating in the Large Hadron Collider at Cern, and billions of collisions between protons accelerated to light speed were analysed. Finally, 48 years after Higgs wrote his paper, scientists hit pay dirt on 4 July 2012. Arriving at Cern to hear the news, Higgs received a standing ovation and, on a webcam broadcast around the world, could be seen wiping away a tear. Then this modest man, who detested publicity and who didn't even own a TV, flew straight home. The next year, he and François Englert (the surviving author of the paper that came out just before his) were awarded the Nobel Prize in physics. Typically, Higgs made sure to be out that day, to avoid the media fuss.

Peter Higgs was born in 1929, and grew up in Bristol, where his father worked as a BBC sound engineer. He became interested in quantum mechanics at Cotham Grammar School when he noticed that one of its alumnae was one of the field's pioneers, Paul Dirac. He studied physics at King's College, obtained his PhD, and then in 1960 took up a position at the University of Edinburgh. He also joined CND, and fell in love with fellow anti-nuclear activist Jody Williamson, an expert in linguistics. They married and had two sons; and although they later separated, they remained close until her death in 2008. As media interest in Cern and the God particle intensified, Higgs became famous – and practically an Edinburgh tourist attraction in his own right. He hated that, said Nature, but he was proud of the work that brought him fame.

Perma-tanned Italian designer with a taste for excess

Roberto Cavalli 1940-2024

Known as the "king of bling", Roberto Cavalli made his name designing maximalist outfits in the 1970s that were worn by the likes of Sophia Loren and Brigitte Bardot; and he kept the faith when other designers embraced a more severe, pared-back style. Minimalism (or "meeen-imal-eeez-mo", as he put it) was "anathema to him", said The Daily Telegraph, and "gravity-defying dresses", distressed denim, and animal print remained his stock in trade, a look summed up by The Independent as "*molto* sexy, *molto* animal print and *molto*, *molto Italiano*". A perma-tanned hedonist, Cavalli claimed to be the only straight man in fashion (he once helped Hugh Hefner revamp his Playboy Bunny outfits) and he lived a jet-set life of "unabashed extravagance".



Cavalli: molto sexy, molto Italiano

Roberto Cavalli was born in Tuscany in 1940. Four years later, his father – a surveyor – was lined up against a wall by the Nazis and shot, in reprisal for partisan attacks. A shy child, he inherited his artistic flair from his mother, a seamstress whose father was an impressionist painter. He studied textile design at the Istituto d'Arte in Florence, and later came up with his own technique for printing on fabrics. His early designs were floral, but then "I started to appreciate that even fish have a fantastic coloured 'dress'", he told Vogue. "I start to understand that God is really the best designer, so I started to copy God."

He opened his first shop, in St Tropez, in 1972. He almost went bankrupt in the 1980s, when power dressing was in fashion, but experienced a major revival in the 1990s, thanks in part to his pioneering use of stretch denim (with Lycra) and sandblasted denim. Madonna, Lenny Kravitz and Britney Spears were among those who wore his designs. Meanwhile, his animal prints appeared on diffusion lines; in clubs that bore his name; and even on luxury cars. He designed his own *Batman*-inspired superyacht, and kept a menagerie of exotic animals at his home in Tuscany. "Excess is success," he liked to say. Twice divorced, he is survived by his six children.

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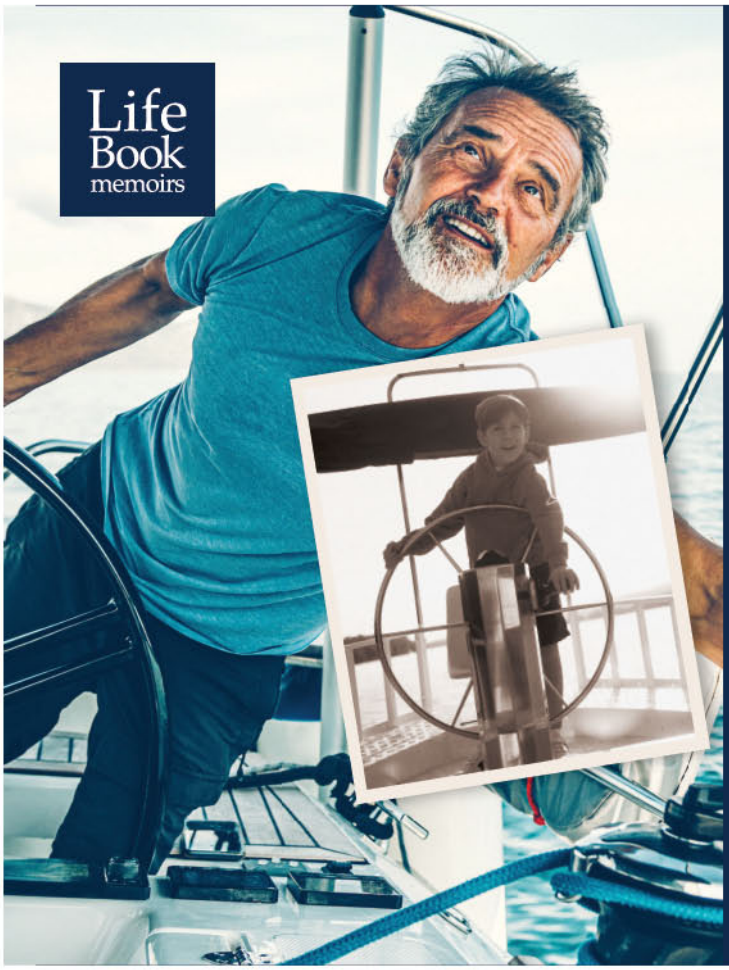
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Companies in the news

...and how they were assessed

Thames Water: Project Timber

Water companies in England and Wales have "paid £2.5bn in dividends" and "added £8.2bn to their net debt" in the two financial years since 2021, said the FT. The news will only add to the pressure on the industry. Not a good moment, then, to demand yet more cash from bill payers, said Luke Barr and Ben Marlow in The Daily Telegraph. But Thames Water has done just that. The utility, which serves 16 million households and is drowning in £18bn of debt, is plotting a 45% rise in annual bills to an average £627 by 2030. Assuming, of course, that it's still around by then. Thames is causing such "deep concern" that the Government has reportedly drawn up "a blueprint" for effective renationalisation, said David Lynch in The Independent. Dubbed Project Timber, it would place Thames in "special administration" should its parent company, Kemble, fail. The plan – which ministers and regulator Ofwat are apparently "optimistic" they won't have to implement – would break it up into two separate companies, serving London and the Thames Valley; Thames's bondholders "could lose more than a third of their investment". That won't go down well, said Lex in the FT. "But a period of national stewardship no longer looks the worst outcome" for Thames Water. Given that its "toxicity" is starting to pollute other water companies, "a swift demise is better than a slow one".

Tesla: no-man's land

Tesla is facing "its toughest stretch in years", said DealBook in The New York Times. "In an event-filled week", the carmaker announced it is laying off 10% of its workforce to cut costs – even as it asks shareholders to approve "a multibillion-dollar payout" for founder Elon Musk that a Delaware judge had previously "voided". Meanwhile, the company has been forced to recall nearly 4,000 of its "ballyhooed" Cybertrucks due to a faulty accelerator pedal, and has slashed the prices of other models in a bid to reverse a sales slump. "It's all apparently keeping Musk so busy that he cancelled a trip to India", where he was expected to meet PM Narendra Modi and announce plans to build a factory there. It was hardly the most felicitous run-up to this week's earnings report, said Bloomberg. After a near 43% rout this year, "the stock is now in no-man's land", according to strategist Todd Sohn of Strategas Securities. Tesla's valuation lead over Toyota, which once stood at $939bn, is "almost gone" (Toyota, perhaps sensibly, stuck to selling hybrids). Tesla "diehards" are keeping faith with the stock despite its disastrous year, said Liz Webber on WSJ.com. Individual investors have poured in a net $5.9bn so far in 2024 – "more than any other of the Big Tech stocks in the Magnificent Seven".

LVMH: it beats cheese and wine...

They're popping the Moët at LVMH again, said Adrienne Klasa in the FT. Data released last week to coincide with its annual general meeting showed that the Paris-based purveyor of "handbags and perfumes" now claims "a larger share of France's exports than all of the camembert and wine produced by the country's famed agricultural sector". The study, by consultancy Asterès, shows that LVMH – formed by Bernard Arnault, the world's richest man, in 1987 – accounted for 4% (or €23.5bn) of exports, beating the agriculture industry's 3.5%. LVMH is keen to "trumpet its contribution to the French economy as it undergoes changes to leadership at the family-controlled company".



Seven days in the Square Mile

Uncertainty over when, and by how much, the Bank of England will cut interest rates continued to unsettle the mortgage market. HSBC, NatWest, Barclays and Leeds Building Society all raised rates of some fixed-term loans. Financial markets have revised down predictions made at the start of the year for six quarter-point cuts, to just one or two. In the ongoing confusion, new products were reported to be popping up and vanishing daily. Moneyfacts reported that the average two-year fixed mortgage rate rose to 5.83% on Tuesday.

The FTSE 100 notched up successive record highs in the course of a six-day rally – its best run since last August. The Bank of England warned that UK banks are risking "severe, unexpected losses" by failing to properly measure how exposed they are to the $8trn private equity industry. The Government delayed implementing health and safety border checks on EU imports for fear of border delays; business leaders said the system was in "complete disarray".

Tesla shares rose 11%, despite a big fall in quarterly revenues, on news it will add a cheaper model to its range next year. The US approved a bill that could see TikTok banned over national security fears *(see page 41)*. French luxury giant Kering, whose brands include Gucci, warned of a 45% profit drop for the first half of the year. Germany's accounting watchdog ruled EY made "grave" and "repeated" violations of public duty in its audits of the defunct fintech Wirecard.

Royal Mail: unwanted predator

Daniel Křetínský – the billionaire known as the "Czech Sphinx" on account of his inscrutability – "has come knocking for the Royal Mail", said Tracey Boles in The Times. Earlier this month, Royal Mail's parent company, International Distributions Services (IDS), rebuffed a 320p per share (£3.1bn) bid from the tycoon's sprawling EP Group, saying that it "significantly undervalues" the business. But Křetínský is reportedly determined to press on. He has quite a track record as a dealmaker, but the deal is bound to be "emotive"; Royal Mail's history stretches back 500 years. Not only is IDS opposed to the deal, so too are unions and many politicians – and opposition is growing.



Kretínský: determined

Křetínský, who began building a stake in Royal Mail four years ago, made his fortune from investments in coal power stations across Europe, said The Guardian. Since then, he has gained "increasing prominence" by buying stakes in Le Monde newspaper, Sainsbury's supermarket and West Ham football club. It had been assumed that he planned "to carve out" the profitable GLS parcels arm from the loss-making Royal Mail, which was privatised in 2013. Křetínský has denied this – meaning that he would have to comply with Royal Mail's onerous "universal service obligations" (USOs).

IDS has taken an interesting line of defence against this "unwanted" predator, said Alex Brummer in the Daily Mail – calling on regulator Ofcom to speed up "delivery reforms" that would dilute the USO. But wouldn't that make the group "an even more attractive bid target"? The Government needs to make it known: "mail not for sale". Whatever the outcome, Křetínský looks set to profit handsomely from a bump to his 27.5% holding of Royal Mail's "bombed-out" shares, said Jim Armitage in The Sunday Times. "It's Czech mate."

Talking points

Issue of the week: monetising the music business

Taylor Swift's new album epitomises music's bankability. But not all experiments succeed

Taylor Swift's latest studio album, *The Tortured Poets Department*, has "smashed records" since its release, said Anna Nicolaou in the FT. It is on track to become "one of the highest-selling music releases" since Nielsen's Luminate data group began tracking album sales in 1991. The new collection of songs – described by Rolling Stone as probably Swift's "most personal album yet" – was streamed 300 million times on Spotify on its first day, marking "easily the biggest debut on the platform". Equally impressive is how well it has done in "traditional formats" (vinyl, CDs and cassettes) shifting 1.4 million US units in a day. Swift, 34, is "the biggest star the music business has seen in several decades" and a major asset of Universal Music. Her market power confers huge clout. Earlier this month, she "defied" Universal – which has been boycotting TikTok in a months-long battle over royalty payments – and put her music back on the platform. There wasn't much the record label's suits could do about it.



Swift: 300 million Spotify streams in a day

Meanwhile, in London, Hipgnosis – the FTSE 250-listed songs fund founded by Chic guitarist and producer Nile Rodgers, and Elton John's former manager, Merck Mercuriadis – is at the centre of a takeover battle. Having reached a £1.1bn agreement last week to be taken private by the US music company Concord, the deal has been gatecrashed by Blackstone. The giant US alternative assets manager, which is offering £1.2bn, said Louis Goss on MarketWatch. "Shares surged 10%" on the news – pennies from heaven for long-suffering investors who have lost more than 40% of their cash since Hipgnosis debuted in 2018.

The premise of the fund, which bought rights to songs by artists including Blondie, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Beyoncé and Neil Young, seemed solid, said John Stepek on Bloomberg. It tapped the burgeoning market in streaming royalties to generate reliable long-term returns for investors. Red Hot Chili Peppers "may not be Taylor Swift, but there's a reliable income there". In practice, it was a disaster. It has been rocked by "disputes over the methodology used for valuing the songs portfolio, and a scrapped dividend, among other dramas". Suspending dividends was "unforgivable for a fund designed to turn royalties into income", said Nils Pratley in The Guardian. But the longer-term point demonstrated by Hipgnosis's chequered stock exchange history is this type of illiquid "alternative" asset is "ill-suited to public markets". As soon as interest rates started to rise, the share price wobbled. Hipgnosis was an appealing idea and may well flourish in private hands. But "there should be no rush to replay" this "noisy stock market experiment".

The FTSE 100's high: what the experts think

Limping home

It has been a long time coming, but the FTSE, that "laggard", has finally hit a new all-time high, said Ian King on Sky.com. On Monday, the FTSE 100 climbed above the "dizzying heights" of 8,047.06, which was last achieved in February 2023. (It hit another high on Tuesday.) Is this a reflection of Britain's improving economic prospects? "Emphatically not." The index is "chock-full of companies" that "have little or nothing to do with the UK". And many of its "British" constituents make most of their money internationally. Of the 20 biggest companies in the index, only Lloyds Banking Group can be said to make most of its income in the UK. The better gauge of how "corporate Britain" is faring is the FTSE 250, which is up by 0.6% this year – and still a whisker lower than it was five years ago.



The Stock Exchange: "dizzying heights"

Fake high?

What has been fuelling the FTSE 100's "broad rally"? The trading switch from "high-flying" tech stocks "into commodities" (a Footsie speciality) has helped, said Stephanie Stacey in the FT. But the real driver has been currency movements – reflecting the diverging paths of US and UK interest rate cuts this year. Thanks to sticky US inflation, markets are "increasingly betting" that the US Fed will keep interest rates "higher for longer", while the Bank of England is expected to start cutting in August. "It's very much about rate differentials," said Barclays strategist Emmanuel Cau. The upshot is a strengthened dollar and weaker sterling: good news for FTSE companies that make their profits in dollars, but report them in sterling.

Boring argument

Despite the FTSE's fresh high, "in a global context, performance remains disappointing", Frédérique Carrier of RBC Wealth Management told the FT. Indeed, UK stock valuations remain close to a record discount relative to their US peers. "A more uplifting thought", said Nils Pratley in The Guardian, is that many shares are probably still a bargain. The UK market deserves its discount, "if you believe an overweight exposure to oil companies, miners and banks is just too boring or too Jurassic". But there's a decent "argument that dullness can be a relative virtue when the geopolitical temperature is high".

Stockholm syndrome

Sweden's "highly successful" stock market is defying the "gloom" engulfing other European capital markets. What's the secret, asks Nikou Asgari in the Financial Times:

Market ecosystem The Stockholm stock exchange has recognised that you need a broad investment "ecosystem" – and to encourage it at every step of the way.

Look after the minnows Although some big local names, such as Spotify and Oatly, have headed for the US, Sweden has been adept "at encouraging smaller domestic businesses" to raise funds locally. Around 90% of listings are valued at less than $1bn.

Establish cornerstones The involvement of "rock solid" local pension funds and insurers increases confidence. By contrast, domestic equity holdings by UK pension funds have fallen to 4%.

Retail investors There's a vibrant retail investment "culture". Financial literacy is high and Swedish households hold among the highest proportion of their investments in listed companies and among the lowest in bank deposits.

Virtuous circle Stockholm's main index has gained over 85% in a decade, compared with a 49% rise for the Euro Stoxx 600, and just 17% for the FTSE 100. That persuades more to stay put. "Why cross the river to get water, as we say in Sweden," says one local banker.

Markets are in denial about Iran and Israel

Mohamed El-Erian

Financial Times

Traders are behaving like "the frog in boiling water" over the Middle East, says Mohamed El-Erian. Unlike national security experts, they don't seem to have fathomed that "multiple lines have been crossed" by Iran and Israel. For the first time in history, the two have attacked each other directly rather than through the use of proxies and targets in third countries. Yet the markets' reaction to the risk of a major escalation has been "relatively tame and contained". Even oil – "by far the most sensitive international price" – isn't signalling alarm. The global economy might cope with "a transitory bump". But it is "already too fragile to handle a large new economic shock" that would push up goods inflation when services inflation is still too high, and "impose demands on fiscal and monetary authorities that have already used up much of their policy flexibility". The latest round of hostilities has "raised the geopolitical temperature" and created an "unpredictable and unstable disequilibrium". Yet markets seem "comforted by the fact that we are yet to reach the boiling point". Given the heightened chance of a conflagration, that seems dangerously complacent.

Britain's economic overlords

Will Dunn

The New Statesman

Britain likes to think it has a "special relationship" with America, says Will Dunn. It is special, in a way. We're a "vassal state", as the economist Angus Hanton puts it in his new book. No nation in the world has proved more susceptible to US "economic dominance". In 2019, US firms made an (aggregated) profit of £2,500 from every UK household. In 2020, according to US tax data, they earned $707bn in UK revenue – "more than ten times the amount made in the entire continent of Africa". This isn't just because our high streets – and mobile phones and computers – are dominated by American companies. US private equity has bought up many firms we still fondly view as British, from Waterstones to Majestic Wine. Tens of billions of dollars annually are "transferred across the Atlantic" in the form of dividends, on the proceeds of British work. And US companies avoid tax on a massive scale: HMRC estimates that they underpaid by £5.6bn last year. We need to wise up, rethink the tax system, regulate takeovers and start "aggressively supporting" home-grown businesses. The alternative is a permanent role as Orwell's "Airstrip One".

So TikTok's evil? Show us how

Dave Lee

Bloomberg

The bill to ban TikTok – or to force its Chinese owner, ByteDance, to sell the wildly popular video app – has passed through congress, and the clock is ticking, says Dave Lee. The move has much bigger implications than "merely upsetting the app's 170 million US users". Although supporters point to similar acts by China, which last week forced Apple to block Meta's apps, America surely ought to "hold itself to a higher standard of free speech and trade". This legislation, in a country that has long campaigned against "repressive" online regimes, looks hypocritical. It's bound to be used "to justify more draconian measures" elsewhere. Proponents say this protectionist measure is warranted because TikTok is "a coiled spring" – a platform that can be harnessed by Beijing to influence America's impressionable young. But the public hasn't been told "the precise details of the security briefings". The message is: "trust us". If congress wants Americans to support this "murky" ban, "it's time to bring out the receipts". Show us precisely why TikTok is so dangerous.

Nigel Farage's message to Sid: give it a miss

Alistair Osborne

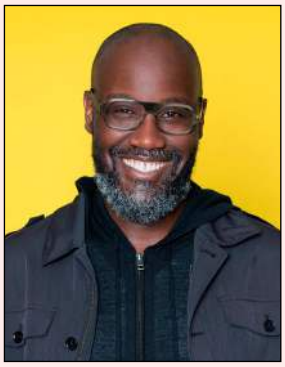
The Times

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt is hoping to flog the Government's remaining stake in NatWest (formerly RBS) in a "Tell Sid"-style retail share sale this summer. But Nigel Farage is doing his best to poop the party, says Alistair Osborne. The former Brexit Party leader – who NatWest attempted to "de-bank" because, in his words, his "views did not align with those at the woke corporate bank" – has urged the public to boycott the sale. He argues that the investigation into the debanking episode is a "whitewash", and he's advising the "great British public" to give the sale a miss. It's true that "the shares hardly look compelling". NatWest is in better shape under its new management: the new chief executive Paul Thwaite and chairman Rick Haythornthwaite look like a better bet than their predecessors. But Hunt's sale announcement has helped ramp up the price so effectively that "unless he offers a pre-election discount", the "accident-prone lender" hardly looks cheap. Sometimes you don't need "a disingenuous grifter", as NatWest dubbed Farage, to warn you off a bad deal.

City profile

Ije Nwokorie

When Ije Nwokorie joined Dr. Martens as its first brand officer in February, he was tasked with making the bootmaker's marketing communication with customers "the cleanest it's ever been", said Grace Gollasch in Marketing Week. Two months on, his remit has been extended to a full clean-up job. Elevated to the top role last week (he'll take over as CEO a year from now), Nwokorie inherits a 77-year-old brand in crisis – Dr. Martens has lost 85% of its market value since its 2021 float, and is now fighting to retain its status as a standalone company.



The company's chair, Paul Mason, says Nwokorie is that rare thing: "a brand visionary, with great marketing skills" and "a really commercial brain", too. No one doubts the former, said the Financial Times: having risen to the top of brand consultant Wolff Olins, he become a senior director at Apple Retail. But there's some concern among analysts that he lacks fashion retail experience and hasn't run a public company. No matter, says the Dr. Martens board, which is banking on its incoming finance chief, Giles Wilson, "to lead the turnaround" of the down-at-heel outfit. Nwokorie's mandate, insiders say, is "to drum up demand for boots" after a distracting detour into shoes and sandals. Born in the US, where his university lecturer father had taken up a position in Pennsylvania, he grew up in Nigeria, in the "war-torn southeastern state of Umuahia". Creativity was "fundamental to everyday life" there, he later observed. "If you wanted a kite, you got some old newspaper." He will need all of his creativity to get "sceptical investors onside".

Shares

Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

Costain Group
The Sunday Times
After supply-chain disruption, high material prices and labour shortages, the construction sector is set for recovery. This "vastly improved" housebuilder has tentacles in many sectors and a strong pipeline. Buy. 75p.

JPMorgan Global Growth & Income
The Daily Telegraph
This investment trust majors on US-listed equities, with large holdings in Microsoft, Nvidia and Amazon. An "attractive track record" and a "likely beneficiary" of upcoming US rate cuts. Buy. 546p.

J Sainsbury
Sharecast
Worries about the supermarket group's "excess capex burden" have been dismissed as "overstated" by Jefferies. Set to capitalise from a multi-pronged approach to an emerging "supportive competitive backdrop". Target 300p. Buy. 268.4p.

Marks & Spencer Group
The Daily Telegraph
An improving economy will benefit this "quality retailer", whose shares offer "excellent value". Improving sales and cost-saving modernisation of its supply chain add to the appeal. Buy. 247p.

Mitie Group
The Mail on Sunday
Mitie is focusing on "facilities transformation" – helping clients hit net-zero targets, improve productivity, reduce costs and upgrade workplaces. Earnings-boosting acquisitions and buybacks could boost value. Buy. 116p.

Next 15 Group
The Times
The marketing and data specialist has reported record revenues, with profits up 6%. A well-supported balance sheet is reassuring, and it's buying back shares. Inexpensive, given recent new client wins. Buy. 880p.

...and some to hold, avoid or sell

AJ Bell
The Times
The investment broker has seen customer numbers and assets rise yet, haunted by the City regulator's new "consumer duty" rules, still trades below Covid levels. An improved pension offering should boost demand. Hold. 300p.

Asos
Investors' Chronicle
"Heavy discounting" is finally helping the fast fashion group run down stock levels, but this has led to falling margins. Cash generation is improving, but top-line growth is "well out of reach". Sell. 343p.

Ceres Power Holdings
The Mail on Sunday
Ceres develops fuel cells that turn hydrogen and oxygen into electricity, and has a technology to produce hydrogen from steam. Still loss-making, but shares should start to recover as partnerships begin to bear fruit. Hold. 135.4p.

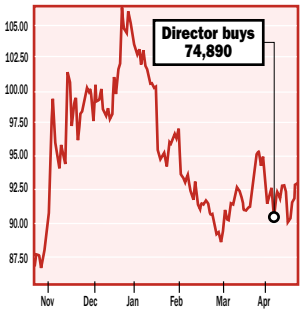
Deliveroo
Sharecast
The food delivery platform's transaction values have improved. But order numbers have been flat, compared with growth at rival Just Eat. Shore Capital believes continued market-share loss implies better value elsewhere. Sell. 128.8p.

Savills
The Times
Falling commercial property values have hit the agent: profits have more than halved. But there are "some green shoots" – it has outperformed peers and retained its workforce ready for a market upswing. Hold. £10.52.

Team17 Group
The Times
The video games developer is far off its pandemic-era high and struggling with a poor acquisition. Profits are down amid rising costs. Still, sales are up thanks to new releases, and older games provide a steady cash stream. Hold. 255p.

Directors' dealings

Primary Health Properties



PHP boss Harry Hyman has snapped up £69,000 of shares in the primary care developer ahead of retiring. Profits have halved due to falling property valuations, yet net rent income is up thanks to contracted rises for NHS tenants. A rare "dividend aristocrat".

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip
H&T Group
Investors' Chronicle
up 22.51% to 419p

Worst tip
Spectris
The Daily Telegraph
down 6.95% to £32.80

Market view

"If the data continues to disappoint, then I think the Fed will have to start re-engaging on hikes."
Pimco's Richard Clarida on the growing chance of another US interest rate rise. Quoted in the FT

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

	23 Apr 2024	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	8044.81	7820.36	2.87%
FTSE All-share UK	4378.75	4260.41	2.78%
Dow Jones	38420.39	37875.21	1.44%
NASDAQ	15657.69	15878.67	−1.39%
Nikkei 225	37552.16	38471.20	−2.39%
Hang Seng	16828.93	16248.97	3.57%
Gold	2334.95	2344.20	−0.39%
Brent Crude Oil	87.61	90.15	−2.82%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	3.65%	3.75%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	4.34	4.40	
US 10-year Treasuries	4.59	4.66	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	3.2% (Mar)	3.4% (Feb)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	4.3% (Mar)	4.5% (Feb)	
Halifax house price (yoy)	0.3% (Mar)	1.7% (Feb)	

£1 STERLING: $1.243 €1.163 ¥192.577 Bitcoin $66,708.00

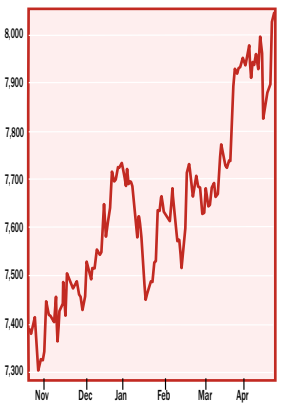
Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS

RISES	Price	% change
Associated Brit. Foods	2731.00	+15.30
Intl. Cons. Airl. Gp.	175.95	+11.50
St. James's Place	444.20	+10.50
Ocado	377.80	+10.20
Mondi	1500.00	+9.00
FALLS		
Smith (DS)	349.80	-11.10
Rentokil Initial	425.00	-3.90
Antofagasta	2155.00	-2.40
Intermediate Capital	2000.00	-2.00
London Stock Exchange	8998.00	-1.70
FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER		
Hipgnosis Songs Fund	101.00	+43.10
Dunelm	969.50	-9.30

Source: FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 23 Apr (pm)

Following the Footsie



6-month movement in the FTSE 100 index

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Flips, kicks and accidents: what it takes to become a stunt double

British "stunties" – men and women who perform stunts on film – are in high demand, as films get grittier and the UK's studios continue to thrive. Simon Usborne reports on what the job entails

In a sheltered life based largely at a desk, I have managed to avoid any sort of scenario in which head-butting seemed like a good move. Now I'm being asked to do it with conviction, and it feels so weird that I'm struggling not to laugh. To be fair, the stakes are high. I've been taken hostage by captors unknown and am being frogmarched towards an uncertain fate. As a menacing man approaches, I kick him in the stomach. And so begins the "choreo" (fight choreography) that I've been trying to memorise. I turn to the baddie to my left and – WHAM! – toss her to the floor. Now I turn to the right and – BOSH! – I swing my head at Nikita Mitchell, a 34-year-old former dancer who was Margot Robbie's stunt double in *Barbie*. But, being taller than her and lacking physical finesse, I feel like one of those fighting giraffes on David Attenborough's *Africa* series.



Ryan Gosling in The Fall Guy: a big-budget love letter to the craft

"Cut!" Ian Pead pauses the melee to offer some head-butting advice. He knows his stuff; the wiry, 46-year-old former martial artist has worked as a stunt performer and coordinator for more than 20 years. He wants me to move my whole body into the head-butt rather than just thrashing my head. I should also angle my face towards the camera. I manage a slightly more composed head-butt before I take on more assailants. None of the blows connect, but when the camera position is right, the viewer sees no gap between fist and face. With each hit, stunties, as they call themselves, fall away, grunting and groaning with total commitment to the scene.

> *"None of the blows connect, but when the camera position is right, the viewer sees no gap between fist and face"*

I have come to a studio space at the back of a theatre in Harlow, Essex, at a critical time for a profession and tradition that is as old as celluloid. As demand grows for ever more dramatic and gritty action scenes, so the pressure builds for the stunt people who put their necks on the line without, as they see it, proper recognition. Pead is here with a dozen members of the British Stunt Register (BSR), a directory of 450 coordinators and performers first issued in 1973. Members must pass rigorous tests in six disciplines, from fighting to driving, horse riding, scuba diving, swimming, rock climbing and gymnastics. And they're in demand as Hollywood studios and TV streamers exploit Britain's talent, tax breaks and infrastructure, including studios at Pinewood and Leavesden.

"Not long ago you'd have performers who might work a handful of times a year and do something else on the side," says James Cox, 39, a member of the BSR committee who has doubled for Daniel Craig. "Now people join the register and they're working the next day." At the same time, a close-knit fraternity that has operated in the shadows is karate-kicking its way into the limelight. "Back in the day, stunt people were almost these kind of mythical figures, but now people are more intrigued about what we do," says Bobby Holland Hanton, 39, a British stuntie and one of the most in-demand doubles in the business. The former gymnast posts frequent behind-the-scenes snippets to his social media, where he has almost 800,000 followers. (With his stacked body and square jaw, it helps that he looks more like a movie star than many movie stars.)

A week before Pead teaches me to fight, Ryan Gosling and Emily Blunt introduce a tribute montage to Hollywood's "unsung heroes" at the Academy Awards. Gosling and Blunt are the stars of *The Fall Guy*, a big-budget love letter to the stuntie community that comes out next week. Its director, David Leitch, is a former stuntman and a producer of the *John Wick* films.

The Oscars moment seemed heartfelt enough, but landed as an empty gesture for some in the business, after decades of campaigning for an awards category for stunts. "I didn't even watch it because I'm boycotting the Oscars until they give us an award," says Eunice Huthart, 57, a leading British stunt coordinator who has doubled for Angelina Jolie. Bafta, too, has no stunt category in its film awards, despite honouring make-up and hair; a casting Oscar will be introduced in 2026. Last month, a stunt performer was nominated at the Bafta Television Awards, but for a documentary about an accident that left him paralysed on the set of *Harry Potter* in 2009. David Holmes, who co-produced the film, was rehearsing for his final outing as Daniel Radcliffe's stunt double when he was yanked too hard by a wire while pretending to be struck by a giant snake.

Greg Powell, the cigar-chomping, plain-speaking stunt coordinator for all the *Potter* films, is still haunted by the accident. He sees a cruel irony in Holmes's nomination. "If David has to break his neck to get a Bafta, then you can poke that up your arse, because he should have got one for his work in the films," says Powell, 69, an old-school titan in the profession. "Studios are making millions out of action movies, but I think people still don't understand what goes into it."

In Harlow, Pead is now conducting a reactions demonstration. "One of the biggest things for us is learning to die well," he says.

Two by two, the stunties run forwards before Pead shouts "Bang!", at which point they must die. They flop, they roll, they slam on their faces. Pead says the *Band of Brothers* series (2001) required so much of this kind of death that war films often still call for "*Band of Brothers*" reactions. "We also like to say, 'Cut the strings,' as if you're a puppet," he adds. Tom Rodgers, a fight specialist, shows me what is known as a "Motorola", after the old folding flip phones; when he's shot while running, his legs come forwards as he folds himself in half in the air and lands flat on his back. I feel winded just watching him. Yet performers rarely have the luxury of the foot-thick crash mats that they're dying on today. They sometimes do the same stunts on concrete with hidden pads and back protectors. They must also often consider their resting place. "If you're locked into continuity, you might need to be a dead body on the floor for three days," Pead explains.



Ben-Hur: a 78-horse set-up and a year's planning

Joining the British register requires investment; it can cost around £10,000 to train for the driving test alone. But the rewards can be big; most BSR members are part of the Equity union, which sets a minimum day rate for stunt performers of £500 for TV and about £650 for film. Specialists can command much more. Doubles for major actors can earn tens of thousands of pounds a week. "You can certainly live a very affluent life, but you've got to think about how high the standards are, and about the risks," Cox says.

The first audited stunts involved fees of $5 during the filming of the 1908 silent picture *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In one scene, an unnamed man was asked to swim out to sea and disappear underwater. When he stayed under longer than expected, the director was reportedly more concerned about his $20 wig than the performer himself. In the 1930s, Yakima Canutt, a rodeo star, worked with John Wayne to develop the first fighting techniques, many of which are still in use. Later, during the postwar craze for "swords and sandals" epics, Canutt staged the chariot race in *Ben-Hur* (1959), a 78-horse spectacular that took a year to plan.

> *"A fight specialist shows me the 'Motorola' – when he's shot while running, he folds himself in half in the air and lands flat on his back"*

Greg Powell, whose father and uncle were stuntmen, started working in the 1970s, a golden era for the profession as the rise of martial arts movies and more sophisticated technology pushed boundaries. Meanwhile, the *Bond* movies were cementing the UK's reputation for derring-do. "We were a different breed," Powell says. "Even before you train as a stuntman, you've got to want to jump off that building, crash that car or get set on fire."

From the early days of Hollywood, accidents have been the price of action. David Holmes was 17 when he started work on the *Potter* films and remains a close friend to Daniel Radcliffe. The stunt that went wrong is known as a "jerk-back", in which harnessed performers are yanked backwards on a wire to simulate the effects of a big blow or explosion. The jerk-back left Holmes hanging like a rag doll. "I knew I'd broken my neck straight away and within a week I knew my career was over," he says.

In 2015, Olivia Jackson, a South African stunt double based in the UK, was struck by a camera crane while she rode a motorbike at 43mph on the set of a *Resident Evil* film. She lay in a coma for days and lost an arm. In 2017, John Bernecker, an American, died a day after falling onto concrete while filming the *Walking Dead* TV series. A month after that, Joi Harris, also American, was killed in a motorbike crash on the set of *Deadpool 2*. Powell is characteristically phlegmatic about such dangers. "Every stunt is a risk, big or small, it's the name of the game," he says. But he supports the push by the profession for better safety protocols and accountability.

A few days later, I arrive at a disused RAF airfield in Rutland. Drivetac, which occupies a couple of buildings next to the old runway, is a precision driving academy that the BSR uses to train and test stunties. "Faster. Faster. Faster... Pull!" Ailís Smith, a 28-year-old rookie stunt performer, is in the passenger seat as I speed rather too conservatively towards a human-sized plastic barrel. My job is the easiest in the business – stopping on a mark. I need to slam on the brakes at 40mph and stop within three inches of the barrel. The first time I do it, I stop way short of the barrel. The second time, I send it flying halfway to Peterborough. I improve, but don't manage the three-inch gap. "On set, you've got to get it right ten out of ten times," says Lloyd Bass, 55, a grizzled stunt driver and coordinator from Kent who's been watching us.

Next, I slalom through cones as Smith coaches me to steer way more aggressively than I would even in a dodgem. It's the kind of driving that might be needed in a chase scene. She then teaches me how to do handbrake turns through 90 and 180 degrees (180 is way easier, it turns out) and how to drift and skid.

Car sequences are a good example of a recent drive towards greater realism in cinema, after decades in which many big-budget movies got carried away with the early promise of computer-generated imagery (CGI). "These days it's all about trying to blend the stunt performer and the talent seamlessly," says Bass, who has driven for dozens of stars, and wore a wig to double for Helen Mirren in the 2021 instalment of the *Fast & Furious* franchise ("I also had a shave that day," he adds). Stars with genuine stunt chops, such as Tom Cruise, have helped define this new realism, but the trend's flipside, some stunties say, is a tendency among other actors not to credit stunt performers, or to imply that they are doing their own stunts. George Cottle, 46, a leading British stunt coordinator, says he enjoys seeing stunties calling out actors on social media who decline to acknowledge their contributions. "They're saying, er, yes you do have a stunt double, it was me," he says.

Ryan Gosling relied on multiple doubles in *The Fall Guy*, which includes several nods to classic stunts. In one scene, Logan Holladay, Gosling's American driving double, crashes a car on a beach. It was a reference to the first "cannon roll", which featured in the 1974 John Wayne thriller *McQ*. In these stunts, the driver triggers a pneumatic ram hidden on one side of the chassis. It strikes the ground while the car moves at speed, initiating a roll. Holladay rolled eight-and-a-half times, a new world record. In another act of solidarity, Gosling presented Holladay with his Guinness World Records certificate at a screening of *The Fall Guy* last March. "The lack of recognition, the contribution that they make to cinema, to some of the best moments in film in general… that ends here," the actor said, while standing next to his double.

It's a sentiment that David Holmes shares. He now lives with carers in an adapted house in Leigh-on-Sea financed by an insurance settlement. Apart from anything, the performer – who hopes one day to open a stunt school – believes recognition from Bafta and the Oscars would also help in the push for safer sets. "Somehow stunt people aren't seen to be as credible as make-up artists," he says. "I risked my body for the sake of storytelling."

A longer version of this article appeared in The Daily Telegraph
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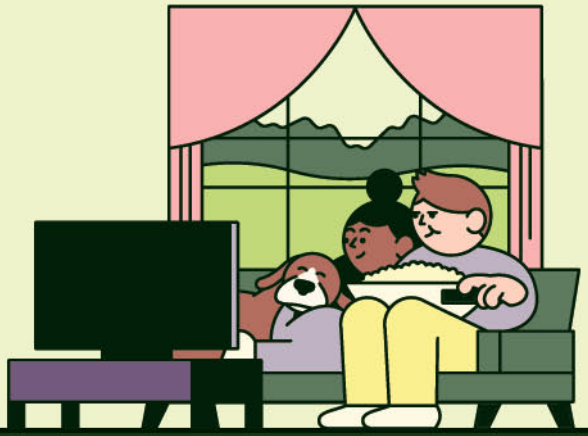
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THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1411

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 6 May. Send it to The Week Crossword 1411, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. Tim Moorey (timmoorey.com)



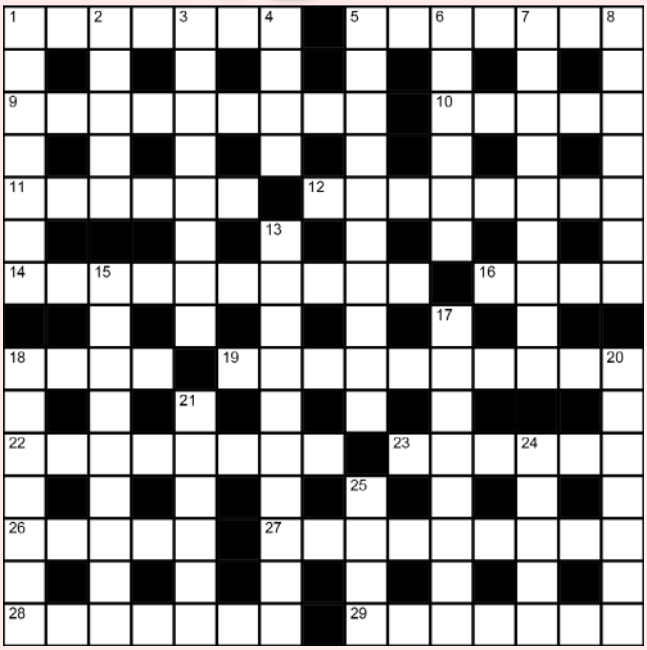
This week's winner will receive Week-branded items including a notebook, coffee mug and tote bag, as well as two Connell Guides (connellguides.com).

ACROSS

1 Stays in Scotland near the Borders (7)
5 Reading players disheartened about holding United (7)
9 What in music could be represented as sliding? (9)
10 Oscar's excellent last letter (5)
11 Toy gun seen behind bandit's back (6)
12 Vocal pieces fare well together in headphones (8)
14 New revenue cut – Post Office work is loony (10)
16 Shock comes from having rear-end chopped off in daring display (4)
18 It's time to get behind Prince William? (4)
19 A consumer out to lunch eats one? (4,6)
22 Green tea brewed for youngster (8)
23 US is unwanted in troubled Austrian capital (6)
26 Caught try by forward finally (5)
27 After one disembarked, coaches left in entrance (9)
28 We hear tango dance has authority (4,3)
29 Like the main cocaine supply (7)

DOWN

1 English resort needing no introduction? Exactly (5-2)
2 Literary genre coming up in terrific scenes (3-2)
3 Detective has an unhealthy colour in bar (8)
4 Southern staff except Charlie all there (4)
5 Pair one rock star with diva? (5,5)
6 Settles down south in American novel (6)
7 Observer magazine (9)
8 How unruly dogs need to be taken for tricks (5,2)
13 On the face of it, play's about keeping mum? (10)
15 Little time to go, fancy Tate Modern or a cathedral? (5,4)
17 House paper for stock in great demand (3,5)
18 Chambers stifling random criticism (7)
20 Millions put out, climate's changing? That's flexible (7)
21 Criticise the German patrol cars (6)
24 Trouble on navy deck (5)
25 One's heard an order for starter is a pudding (4)



Clue of the week: Patronise all the locals turning up to fight outside clubs (3,5 first letters P, C) *Filbert, The Independent*

Name .....

Address .....

.....Tel no .....

Clue of the week answer: .....

Solution to Crossword 1409

ACROSS: 1 Scarecrow **9** Adamant **10** Snubbed **11** Granite **12** Piecemeal **14** Beta test **15** Townie **17** Marshal **20** Peking **23** Carolina **25** Olfactory **26** Salerno **27** Pesetas **28** Eternal **29** Ecstasies

DOWN: 2 Centimo **3** Rubicon **4** Cream tea **5** Wangle **6** Palatable **7** Cabinet **8** Attesting **13** Abysmal **15** Towcester **16** Imploring **18** Apparent **19** Trolley **21** Kittens **22** Narrate **24** Noodle

Clue of the week: The crime that doesn't pay? (11, first letter S)
Solution: SHOPLIFTING

The winner of 1409 is Chris Holland from Ruislip

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Sudoku 953 (difficult)

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

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

Solution to Sudoku 952

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

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Charity of the week

SolarAid

SolarAid is a charity that distributes solar lights in sub-Saharan Africa, where, when the Sun sets, the day ends for millions of people living without electricity. For many, the only option is to ignite kerosene lamps and paraffin candles, which emit toxic fumes into people's lungs and the Earth's atmosphere. With the power of solar and the flick of a switch, you can change the story. When you help get one of SolarAid's solar lights into the hands of a farmer, they can sort through their crops after the Sun sets. For a child, they can now do their homework and get ahead in school. And for a midwife, they can deliver babies safely through the night. Every time someone switches on a solar powered light, it's an instant win for people and the planet. Join us. Let's make light work. **To find out more, visit solar-aid.org.**

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