

The YouTuber
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LAST WORD P40



A landmark
vote in the
Commons

POLITICS P6



Hollywood's
happiest
A-lister

PEOPLE P10



THE WEEK

28 JUNE 2025 | ISSUE 1546

THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

The peacemaker

Will Trump's strikes pay off?

Page 4



ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS

theweek.com



Marisa Abela - Danielle Marsh



my little secret



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OMEGA

Trump's strikes on Iran: a "spectacular success"?

"He came, he bombed, he ended the war." That's how Donald Trump would sum up the events of the past week, said *The Economist*, but the reality was a little more complicated. Last Saturday, 48 hours after giving Iran a two-week deadline, the US president launched the largest-ever strike by B-2 stealth bombers. Seven of the planes undertook a 37-hour surprise mission during which they dropped 14 bunker-buster bombs on Iran's nuclear facilities. Trump hailed the operation as a "spectacular military success", saying the bombs had "totally obliterated" the sites. The next day, in what was seen as a token response, Iran fired 14 missiles at a US base in Qatar. All but one of the missiles were intercepted and there were no casualties. Hours later, Trump announced the end of what he called the "12-day war" between Iran and Israel. He subsequently rounded on both sides for continuing to fight, raging that "they don't know what the fuck they're doing", after which the fragile ceasefire appeared to hold.



The president: rounding on both sides

Trump has made many terrible decisions during his time as president, said Eliot A. Cohen in *The Atlantic*, but he made the right call in bombing Iran. The regime simply can't be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon. Tehran is the world's leading sponsor of terrorism, and it might very well use such a weapon on Israel, which, as a former Iranian president repeatedly crowed, is "a one-bomb country". Neutralising this problem, even if only temporarily, is a positive result. Iran's recent weak position created an opening for a strike on its nuclear facilities and the moment needed to be seized, agreed *The Wall Street Journal*. The risks were acceptable. Sure, Iran could try to close the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil supply passes, but only if it's willing to lose its main source of revenue and run the risk of the US sinking its entire navy. Trump has called Iran's bluff and helped create a "rare opportunity for a more peaceful Middle East".

If the ceasefire holds, it will mean that "this harrowing episode has concluded without triggering World War III, as some feared", said Michelle Goldberg in *The New York Times*. But the conflict hasn't actually achieved the desired result of ending Iran's nuclear programme. If anything, it may have increased that threat. Leaked US intelligence reports have

suggested that America's bunker-buster bombs didn't knock out all of the centrifuges in the buried Fordow plant, and may have only set back Iran's nuclear programme by a few months. Until recently, Iran was at least partly cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency. After Trump's reckless intervention, it will be even more determined to push secretly for a bomb. Iran still has a stockpile of 400kg of 60% enriched uranium, which even in its present state could be used as a crude radiological weapon, said David Ignatius in *The Washington Post*. US and Israeli sources say they know where it is, and we must hope they can find it and make it safe. "Otherwise, the fuse on the Iranian bomb is still lit."

It's quite possible that Iran could pick up the pieces and develop a bomb over the next couple of years, said Ilan Goldenberg in *Foreign Affairs*. US and Israeli intelligence will need to keep a close eye on it whatever happens. The dream scenario now is that Iranian reformists win a power struggle with the hardliners, and opt to ditch the country's nuclear ambitions for the sake of an easier life. But given how well entrenched the regime is, we're more likely to end up with a situation akin to the one in Iraq after the first Gulf War – in which Iran is left with a weakened, but "more radicalised", regime.

The only thing keeping Iran's despised theocrats in power, said Karim Sadjadpour in *The New York Times*, is the fact that they control a repressive apparatus that's "willing to kill en masse", whereas their more numerous opponents are "unarmed, unorganised and unwilling to die en masse". But that balance may change over the months ahead as the country comes to terms with recent events. Military humiliations "expose the brittleness" of ageing regimes. Witness the Soviet Union after its Afghan invasion, or Argentina's junta after the Falklands War. In the absence of regime change – "or a definitive shift in mentality" – we can expect a return to conflict, said Gideon Rachman in the *FT*. With his talk of a "12-day war", Trump was suggesting that this could be "a reordering moment for the Middle East" akin to the Six-Day War of 1967, in which Israel defeated Egypt, Syria and Jordan. It's worth remembering, though, that six years after that conflict, "Israel was once again at war with Egypt and Syria"

"Military humiliations such as this expose the brittleness of ageing regimes"

It wasn't all bad

The world's biggest digital camera telescope has started to capture extraordinary images of the cosmos, including of new stars forming in clouds of gas thousands of light years away. These images were the result of ten hours of test runs. Over the next ten years, the telescope, at the Vera C. Rubin Observatory in Chile, will repeatedly scan the entire southern sky, to create – with its 3,200 megapixel camera – an Ultra HD film of the universe called the *Legacy Survey of Space and Time*.

Hundreds of turtle doves are being released across the country this summer in an effort to save the species from extinction in England, reports *The Guardian*. Owing partly to habitat loss, numbers of the birds, which mate for life, have plummeted 98% since the 1970s. In an effort to combat this, the Turtle Dove Trust is breeding the doves in Suffolk, then taking them to wildlife-friendly farms and estates – including Sandringham – where they are kept in aviaries until they are ready to be released. Some have trackers, so that their migrations can be monitored.



More than £100m in fines levied against water companies for sewage dumps and other environmental infractions will be invested in projects to clean up England's rivers, lakes and seas, the Government has announced. Previously, this money went to the Treasury. The new fund will be capitalised with the £100m in fines recently imposed on Thames Water, says *The Times*; it will also receive the proceeds of any penalties that result from the record 81 criminal investigations launched against England's water companies in the past year.

America First?

"We will measure our success not only by the battles we win but also by the wars we end – and perhaps most importantly, the wars we never get into." So declared Donald Trump in his inaugural address in January, said Jonathan Derbyshire in the FT. Yet on Saturday night, Americans were digesting the news that he had launched a major attack on Iran with the potential to drag the US into exactly the kind of "foreign entanglement" he'd "insisted would be a thing of the past". So what changed? Trump had concluded in March that Iran was "intent on building an atomic weapon", said David Charter in The Times – despite his intelligence services saying otherwise. He then sent a "private letter" to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, giving him a 60-day deadline to agree to curb Iran's uranium enrichment programme. However, Khamenei didn't reply. On day 61, preparations for strikes on Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan began. Trump then made a last-ditch offer to meet for face-to-face talks in Turkey last week. When that went unanswered (reportedly because Khamenei could not be reached in his bunker), Trump authorised "Operation Midnight Hammer".

It was an extremely bold move – not least because it was strongly opposed by many in his Maga base, said Jon Sopel in The Independent. It is one of the "foundational beliefs of the Maga movement" that America "should not be the world's policeman"; that if "America First" means anything, it means



B-2 bombers: "foreign entanglements"

staying out of "other people's wars". Many of Trump's most vocal supporters had watched in alarm as the president flirted with US intervention in Iran, said Gerard Baker in The Times. Tucker Carlson, the former Fox News host, and Steve Bannon, an ex-White House adviser, were among those to note that Trump's success was built on the wisdom of resisting the "siren calls" of "hawks" and "neocons". Marjorie Taylor Greene, the Georgia congresswoman and Trump loyalist, even warned that anyone "slobbering" for the US to strike "is not America First/Maga". Trump, however, was unmoved. "I'm the one that developed 'America First'", he said, so "I'm the one that decides" what it means.

Talk of a "Maga schism" is overblown, said Marc A. Thiessen in The Washington Post. Polls suggest that the Maga base view a nuclear-armed Iran as a threat to America, and want the US to stand with Israel. What we saw last week was just the whining of a "tiny cabal" of isolationists. The Maga coalition has mainly stayed loyal to its leader, agreed Walter Russell Mead in The Wall Street Journal. And though it's impossible to know what he will do, Trump is far less likely than many of his predecessors to be dragged into a "forever war". Lyndon B. Johnson felt unable to walk away from Vietnam, even as it split the Democratic Party; George W. Bush's "sense of duty" compelled him to press on in Iraq long after the war became a "political liability". Trump, by contrast, would surely escape from an unpopular foreign conflict "as rapidly and unscrupulously as his political interests required".

Tehran's isolation

As bombs rained down on Iran last week, said Denis Staunton in The Irish Times, one question hung in the air: where were the regime's "powerful friends"? China and Russia are meant to be Tehran's close allies. Both have bilateral agreements in place with the Islamic Republic. Moscow's contains provision for "joint military exercises and intelligence sharing"; and Beijing's includes a promise to invest \$400bn in Iran's economy over 25 years. But for all that, neither of those allies was anywhere to be seen as Iran was battered by the brutal force of the American and Israeli militaries.

Russia and Iran never were "truly allies", said Mark Galeotti in The Spectator – more like "frenemies", with overlapping interests and shared antagonists. For almost a decade, they worked together to prop up the Assad regime in Syria; and when Russia invaded Ukraine, Iran supplied Moscow with thousands of drones. Vladimir Putin hosted Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, at the Kremlin on Monday, and we've heard "fiery



Putin with Araghchi in Moscow

words" from Russia's ex-president, Dmitry Medvedev, who suggested that Iran's allies could supply it with nuclear warheads. But Putin isn't about to divert military resources away from Ukraine. He has never wanted to see a nuclear-armed Iran anyway. Still, his words of support are not "entirely hollow", said Richard Spencer in The Times. He's betting the Iranian regime will survive; if a pro-American candidate were to emerge as a genuine challenger to the mullahs, he might well intervene to stop Iran becoming US-aligned.

As for Beijing, it won't want this war to escalate, said Jianli Yang in The Diplomat. China is heavily dependent on oil from the Middle East and it accounts for around 90% of Iran's oil exports. If shipping were to be disrupted along the Strait of Hormuz, its energy security would suffer a "catastrophic blow". President Xi isn't about to "fight America to save the ayatollahs", agreed David Blair in The Daily Telegraph. With Iran's regional proxies defanged, and its most powerful overseas allies reluctant to get involved, it "really is alone".

THE WEEK

do it justice. When the project was approved in 2012, the price tag was £33bn for a line connecting London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, which would open by 2026. Since then it has had both its northern limbs cut off. It will run from a new, inconveniently placed station in Birmingham to Old Oak Common, a middle-of-nowhere zone in west London; work on the final section to Euston Station has been "paused" since 2023. We now know that there is no chance that HS2 will meet its latest target start date of 2033. And new estimates put the cost at about £100bn – £100bn! – getting on for a billion a mile, perhaps not surprising when £100m was spent on a "bat tunnel" and £20,000 on a model station made out of Lego. The latest in a series of reports into the debacle, issued last week, blames "evolving political aims", a misplaced determination to build the "best and fastest railway in the world", and a "deficit in capability and skills" at HS2 Ltd and the Department of Transport. It also highlights "cost-plus" contracts, which allowed contractors to overrun on costs and still take their profits. The Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander says this Government will "draw a line in the sand", "sort out" the mess, and "get the job done" – proving that Britain can actually "deliver big infrastructure projects". Are you reassured? Perhaps not entirely.

Theo Tait

"An appalling mess." "A litany of failure." "The ultimate white elephant." "A gravy train to nowhere." These were just a few of the epithets flung at HS2 in the past week, but they all somehow fail to

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Controversy of the week

The assisted dying bill

"It is done," said The Times. "In perhaps the most consequential legislation so far this century, the relationship between the state and the individual has now been fundamentally altered." The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, which will allow doctors to administer fatal drugs on request to adults with a terminal diagnosis of six months or less, passed the Commons by 314 to 291 votes last Friday. Introduced by Labour MP Kim Leadbeater, it is a "flawed and dangerous" bill that is hazy in principle – terminal diagnoses are often proved wrong – and lacks necessary safeguards: an amendment refusing the "service" to those who fear being "a burden" was rejected. Britain is "a less civilised country today", said The Daily Telegraph. When the law takes effect in 2029, doctors will be obliged to offer assisted suicide as if it were just another form of care. "Many people will rightly feel a sense of dread at the prospect of death on the NHS." This private members' bill, cobbled together and passed in haste, will have a "lasting impact on the relationship between the public and the medical profession". "The only hope of mitigating its worst aspects now lies with the House of Lords."



Leadbeater: legislating in haste?

"This is a difficult subject," said The Independent. And as with many steps towards a more liberal society – abolition of the death penalty, decriminalisation of homosexuality – there will be those "who object that the change breaches a fundamental moral principle". But in the final analysis, people should be allowed "to make their own decisions about their lives and how to end them". Terminally ill people who want to die should not be prosecuted, and neither should those who help them. And despite the scaremongering, the bill is careful, and its protections are sound. First, two doctors, then a panel of a lawyer, a social worker and a psychiatrist, will have to approve the decision. "At last," said Melanie Reid in The Observer. "People will now have the right not to suffer needlessly." They will have the option to "choose a good death". The majority has long been shown to be in favour of assisted dying. Parliament, with its "ancient, creaky, slow-grinding wheels", has finally caught up.

Public backing is "tempered by serious concerns", said The Guardian. At present, too many people do not receive adequate end-of-life care. If this is not improved, and funding not increased, then for many, assisted dying "could feel less like a choice and more like a pressure". The bill will also need "further refinement in the Lords" – ensuring, for instance, that vulnerable people are not coerced. "A large number of opponents are lying in wait" in the Lords, said David Maddox in The Independent. It seems unlikely that they will vote it down. But – emboldened by the fact that it passed by a tiny majority of 23, and that, as a private members' bill, it is not covered by the convention which stops peers blocking manifesto policies – the Lords may "delay and prevaricate" enough to "kill the bill".

Maternity services review

Maternity and neonatal services in England will be subject to a rapid national investigation. The Health Secretary Wes Streeting announced that investigators would scrutinise ten of the worst-performing maternity units in detail, and give a "system-wide" review of the failings in the sector. The announcement followed a number of maternity scandals at hospitals across the country, which have uncovered deaths and injuries of both babies and their mothers due to failures in their care. The review will begin this summer, with a report due back in December.

Funding local councils

Councils in more deprived areas of England are set to receive a greater share of government funding, under a planned overhaul announced by Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner. Councils get around half their funding from central government, calculated according to a complex formula that ministers believe does not properly reflect higher demand for council services in poorer areas, and their weaker council tax income due to lower property values. Illustrations of what this will mean for each area will be published in the autumn. The Tory MP Greg Smith accused Labour of waging "class war".

Spirit of the age

British adults now spend more time on their mobile phones than watching TV. The gap between the two had been steadily decreasing for years, but according to The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, watching telly had retained the edge until this year. Its survey revealed that adults use their phones for three hours and 21 minutes a day, on average, up from 1 hour and 17 minutes ten years ago. They watch TV for three hours and 16 minutes a day – seven minutes less than in 2015.

Supermarkets are reporting soaring sales of "functional" health drinks, as younger consumers swap alcohol and caffeine for matcha tea, kefir, mushroom "shots" and kombucha. Ocado says its sales of such drinks are up 54% year on year.

Good week for:

Norman Foster, who won the contest to create a national memorial to Queen Elizabeth II in St James's Park, in central London. The Foster + Partners' draft proposal includes a translucent glass "unity bridge", inspired by the tiara she wore on her wedding day; a statue of the Queen on horseback; and a second one of her walking alongside Prince Philip.

Bad week for:

The Uffizi Gallery, after a visitor posing for a photo tore a hole in a 17th century painting of a Medici prince. The Italian man wanted to create an amusing image of himself striking the same pose as the prince; but as he stepped back, he stumbled over a low barrier and put his hand through the canvas. Uffizi director Simone Verde said that tourists coming to the gallery in Florence to create social media content were a growing "problem".

Shoot-'em-up video games, with news that the most popular game on the Roblox platform, with 17 million active players globally, is about gardening. Subscribers to *Grow a Garden* buy seeds and watch them grow on a little virtual plot of previously barren land. About a third of players are believed to be under 13.

Oxford and Cambridge, which have slid down the QS World University Rankings for the second year in a row. They each dropped one place, to rank fourth and sixth respectively. MIT came first, and Imperial College London came second in the list of over 1,500 institutions. In total, 54 UK universities slipped down the rankings and 24 improved their positions, including Sheffield and Nottingham, which both made it back into the global top 100.

Poll watch

Only **19%** of British adults are satisfied with the job that Keir Starmer is doing as PM, while **73%** are dissatisfied. In nearly half a century of Ipsos polling, no other PM has been so unpopular at this stage in their first term. **46%** of people who voted Labour at the last election say they would not do so now. **52%** of Tory voters say the same. Reform UK now has **34%** of the vote share. Labour has **25%**. The Conservatives fall a distant third on **15%**. *Ipsos/The Daily Telegraph*

82% of Jewish Israelis support the mass "forced expulsion" of Palestinians from Gaza, according to a poll of 1,005 taken in March; **54%** strongly support it. **56%** back the expulsion of Arabs from Israel. *Geocartography Knowledge Group/Haaretz*

Reims, France

Champagne shame: The conditions endured by grape pickers in the Champagne region of France have been put under the spotlight by a human-trafficking trial that began in Reims last week. Svetlana Goumina, the Kyrgyz owner of a recruitment agency, is accused of luring 57 West African migrants, most reportedly undocumented, to the region from Paris, on the promise of well-paid work. On arrival, they were housed in cramped, unsanitary sheds, fed starvation rations, threatened with knives when they complained, and made to work for ten hours a day for little or no pay. An inspector who visited, in response to a local's tip-off, described the conditions as a "serious breach" of the workers' "health, safety and dignity". Goumina is on trial alongside two associates and a French subcontractor that sells grapes to at least 14 champagne houses. Unions have warned that the exploitation of migrant workers is rife in the industry.



freed, along with 13 other political prisoners. He has since been transferred to Lithuania, where he was reunited with his wife, Svetlana Tikhonovskaya. A political novice, she took over the opposition cause following his arrest, and ran in his place, before being driven into exile with their children. The release of the prisoners coincided with a visit to Minsk by the US special envoy Keith Kellogg for talks with Lukashenko.

Minsk

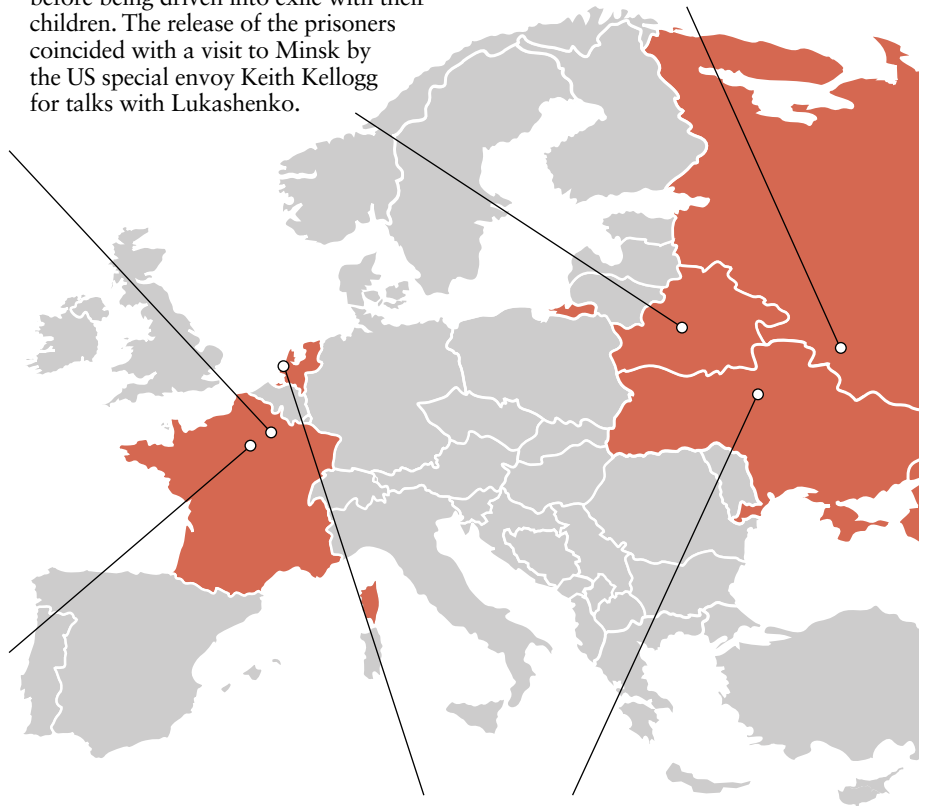
Dissidents freed: Sergei Tikhonovskiy – the Belarusian political activist and blogger who was jailed five years ago, after declaring his intention to run against President Lukashenko in the 2020 election – has been unexpectedly

Kursk, Russia

North Korean aid: Some 6,000 more North Korean "military construction workers" and engineers will be sent to Russia to help de-mine and rebuild its war-torn Kursk region, the Kremlin announced this week. The arrangement reflects the deepening military cooperation between the two nations, which signed a "comprehensive strategic partnership" last year. Since 2022, North Korea has sent extensive military supplies to Russia, in defiance of UN sanctions, and since last October, it has also sent an estimated 14,000 troops. In return, Russia has supplied the North with oil and advanced missiles. At a recent banquet to celebrate the anniversary of their partnership, the two sides hailed an "invincible alliance".

Paris

Wild oats: Pavel Durov, the Russian-born billionaire owner of the Telegram messaging app, has said that the more than 100 children he conceived as an anonymous sperm donor will be provided for in his will, on the same terms as the six children he fathered with his partners. "They are all my children and will all have the same rights," he told the magazine *Le Point*. However, he said that none of them would be able to claim their share of his estimated £10bn fortune for 30 years – so that they learnt to live "like normal people". There has been speculation that Durov shares the "pronatalist" views of other tech moguls including Elon Musk, but in the interview he said he had become a donor "to help a friend". He also reiterated that he is not guilty of the serious charges he is facing in France relating to his alleged failure to clamp down on illicit activity on Telegram.



The Hague

Nato summit: Donald Trump flew into The Hague this week to attend his first Nato summit since he returned to the White House. There had been fears that he would skip the event, and great efforts had been made to make him comfortable: he was accommodated in a royal palace, and in advance of his arrival, Mark Rutte, the Nato secretary-general, sent Trump a message in which he praised him for making Europe pay for defence "in a BIG way" – something, Rutte added, that no other recent US president had managed to "get done". Ahead of the meeting, most Nato members (with the notable exception of Spain) had indicated that they would commit to increasing their defence spending to 5% of GDP, with 3.5% on core defence, and the rest on defence-related areas such as cybersecurity. Keir Starmer said that the UK would reach that target in 2035, and that it would be purchasing from the US 12 nuclear capable F-35A fighter jets. He also confirmed that Trump's second state visit to the UK would take place this autumn.

Nato members including the US reaffirmed their "ironclad commitment to collective defence as enshrined in Article 5". However, the summit declaration released on Wednesday only contained a commitment to supporting Ukraine; unlike previous such declarations, this one made no mention of Russia's aggression.



Kyiv

Airborne terror: At least nine people were killed in a Russian strike on Kyiv this week, as Moscow's intensified campaign of missile and drone attacks continued. As in the deadliest strike of last week – in which 28 people were killed in the capital – the fatalities appear to have been concentrated in a single apartment block. The barrage came as President Zelenskyy visited the UK to press for more support for Ukraine. He held meetings with the King, the Prime Minister and the Speakers of both houses of Parliament. Russia's redoubled air campaign has reinforced the conviction among many Ukrainians that Moscow is not interested in a ceasefire – an impression further strengthened this week by President Putin telling business leaders in St Petersburg that he considered the Russian and Ukrainian people to be "one nation", and that "in this sense, all of Ukraine is ours".

Boca Chica, Texas

SpaceX fireball: Elon Musk's hopes of sending an unmanned mission to Mars next year took a further blow last week when a prototype Starship blew up before launch. The explosion was reportedly the result of a "major anomaly" in a high-pressure gaseous nitrogen tank – known as a composite overwrapped pressure vessel (COPV) – which is used to store and deliver propellant to the engines. The ship was almost fully fuelled with 1,200 tonnes of liquid oxygen and liquid methane when it exploded, and part of SpaceX's Starbase complex in Texas was damaged in the resulting fireball. The distance between Earth and Mars varies from 34 million to as much as 250 million miles, making launches very time-sensitive. The next "transfer window" falls in late 2026, and it's now unlikely that SpaceX will be able to hit that deadline. Musk described this failure as "just a scratch".

Silicon Valley, California

AI gold rush: OpenAI's chief executive Sam Altman has claimed that Meta is trying to lure his staff with \$100m (£74.3m) signing bonuses. High-profile hires are seen as a means of boosting investor confidence and stock prices (see page 35). Meta's recent \$14.3bn investment in the startup Scale AI was seen as an "acqui-hire" of its 28-year-old co-founder Alexandr Wang, and Mark Zuckerberg is reported to be looking to spend \$1bn on two other AI geniuses to work with him. Fuelling this drive is the race to create artificial general intelligence – capable of matching or surpassing humans at any cognitive task; some believe that this is now not far off, and will bring unimaginable profits for the firms who lead the field.

**Jena, Louisiana**

Activist released: The pro-Palestinian student activist Mahmoud Khalil has been freed on bail, after 104 days in an immigration detention centre in Louisiana. Khalil, 30, was being held on the basis of a law allowing the secretary of state to deport non-citizens whose activities are deemed detrimental to US foreign-policy interests. But last week, a judge in New Jersey agreed that the administration may have been seeking to punish him for his role in protests

at Columbia University, which would be unconstitutional.

Changuinola, Panama

State of emergency: Panama's right-wing president, José Raúl Mulino, declared a state of emergency in Bocas del Toro, the country's main banana-producing region, last Friday, after weeks of anti-government protests turned violent. In the region's largest city, Changuinola, crowds looted businesses and set fire to a sports stadium with police officers inside. Police reported that "vandals" had also overrun the airport, stolen rental cars, and looted premises belonging to Chiquita, the foreign-owned banana company that had recently sacked thousands of striking workers. The state of emergency bans public gatherings, restricts movement and gives the police greater powers of arrest. The government said it was needed to "rescue" the province from "radical groups".

Micay Canyon, Colombia

Mass kidnapping: Colombia's army has reported that 57 of its soldiers were kidnapped last weekend by civilians acting under the orders of the EMC – a powerful, dissident offshoot of the now disbanded Farc rebel group that did not sign up to the 2016 peace deal. Thirty-one of the soldiers were seized on Saturday, in the mountainous Micay Canyon, in the country's southwest; the rest were taken on Sunday. This area has long been a major centre for cocaine production and trafficking, and the EMC is heavily involved in the drugs trade, and also in illegal mining. Colombia has experienced a significant rise in political and criminal violence this year, involving criminal groups as well as dissidents from Farc and the National Liberation Army (the ELN, the country's other main Leftist rebel group).

**New York City**

Victory for progressive wing: A 33-year-old democratic socialist was declared the presumptive winner of the Democratic primary for New York mayor this week. Early counts gave Zohran Mamdani – whose campaign had focused on making New York more affordable for its less well-off residents – 43.5% of first-ranked votes, putting him about seven points ahead of Andrew Cuomo, 67, the former state governor, who was seen as representing the Democrat mainstream, and had been the favourite. If he is elected mayor in November, Mamdani (pictured) will be New York's first Muslim leader.

**Buenos Aires****Russian "spy network":**

Argentina's secretariat of intelligence has uncovered and broken up a Russian spy network tasked with promoting Moscow's interests in the country via disinformation campaigns, according to the government. A spokesman for President Milei said the operation was led by a husband-and-wife team, Lev Konstantinovich Andriashvili and Irina Yakovenko – both Russian citizens based in Argentina – who were responsible for "financing the network and for establishing connections with local collaborators". Officials confirmed that a number of arrests had been made in connection with the investigation into the alleged network, but declined to elaborate on their identity.

Gaza Strip, Palestinian Territories

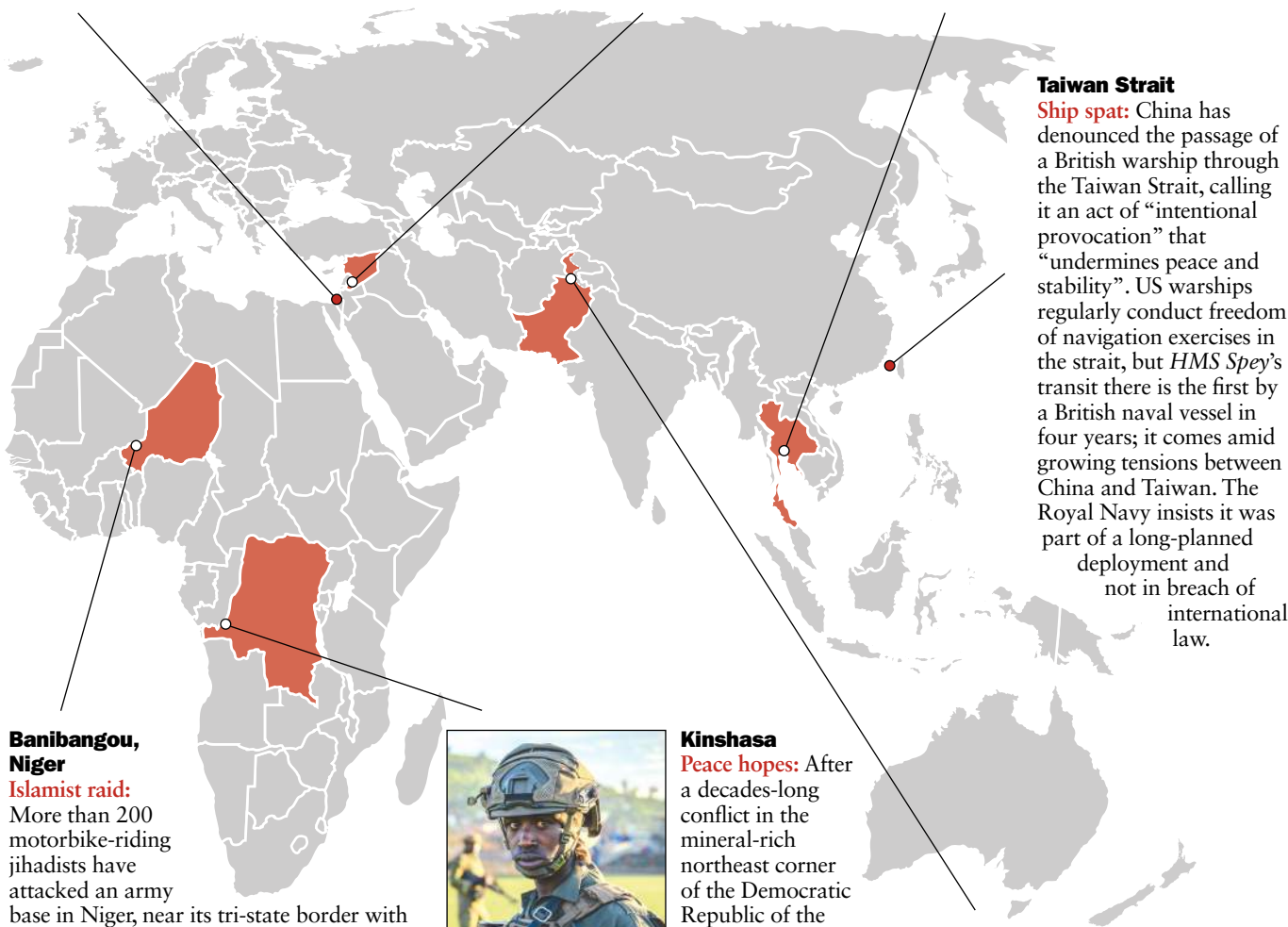
Aid crisis: Fifteen human rights groups have called on the food delivery agency tasked with delivering aid to Gaza to cease operations or face legal action. The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) – which is backed by the US – was commissioned by Israel last month to bypass the existing UN-backed aid distribution system in Gaza, from which Israel said Hamas was siphoning off supplies. But the UN and other aid groups say the GHF breaches the humanitarian principle of neutrality, and is not up to the job of feeding Gaza's 2.1 million people. UN officials have called its four aid distribution centres “death traps”, as Israeli forces have regularly opened fire on hungry Palestinians seeking to gain access. Israel says its troops have only fired in self-defence. This week, at least 77 more people reportedly died in similar incidents.



Damascus Church attack: At least 25 people have been killed in an Islamic State (IS) suicide bomb attack at a Greek Orthodox church in Damascus – the first major IS operation in Syria since the fall of the Assad regime in December. Some 350 people were attending mass when a gunman opened fire, then detonated an explosive vest. The transitional government has vowed to protect the rights of Christians and other minorities, but in parts of Syria, President Ahmed al-Sharaa has struggled to assert control. A resurgence of IS is widely feared.

Bangkok

Border crisis: Thailand closed its contested border with Cambodia this week, as a result of a bitter dispute that began in May when armed clashes at the border resulted in the death of a Cambodian soldier. Tourists will no longer be able to cross into Cambodia to gamble at its casinos; there will also be a block on the export of goods that could be used by cybercrime networks that operate in Cambodia. Cambodia had earlier banned a range of imports, from fresh produce to Thai films, as a result of the dispute. The Thai government was last week plunged into crisis, owing to the leak of a call between its PM, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, and Cambodia's former PM Hun Sen, a family friend. On the recording, she is heard calling him “uncle” and urging him to ignore the threats of a Thai general who, she said, “just wanted to look cool”.



Banibangou, Niger

Islamist raid: More than 200 motorbike-riding jihadists have attacked an army base in Niger, near its tri-state border with Mali and Burkina Faso, leaving at least 34 soldiers dead and 14 others wounded. Dozens of the attackers were also killed. For more than a decade, all three nations have been battling an insurgency by jihadist groups, some allied with al-Qa'eda and the Islamic State; and all three have had military coups in the past few years. Their new ruling juntas have expelled French and US forces, relying instead on Russia and Turkey for their security, and on a new joint military partnership – the Alliance of Sahel States. Despite this, all three have suffered increasing numbers of jihadist attacks and civilian deaths.



Kinshasa Peace hopes: After a decades-long conflict in the mineral-rich northeast corner of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – large parts of which were seized earlier this year by the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels (pictured) – DRC and Rwanda have announced they are about to sign a peace deal. The breakthrough was mediated by the US and Qatar: Kinshasa had appealed to the US for help, reportedly offering it access to the region's minerals. Precisely how militias are to be disarmed and whether Rwanda will withdraw its own troops are just two of the issues likely to make any deal difficult to implement.

Islamabad

Nobel move: Pakistan says it will put Donald Trump forward for the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in resolving its recent conflict with India over Kashmir. The four-day face-off in May ended with the US president's surprise announcement of a ceasefire between the nuclear-armed neighbours. Trump has since claimed his personal diplomatic efforts averted nuclear war, and Islamabad this week agreed he'd demonstrated “stellar statesmanship” to de-escalate a “deteriorating situation”. But India insists the ceasefire was a bilateral agreement in which the US played no role.

Taiwan Strait

Ship spat: China has denounced the passage of a British warship through the Taiwan Strait, calling it an act of “intentional provocation” that “undermines peace and stability”. US warships regularly conduct freedom of navigation exercises in the strait, but *HMS Spey*'s transit there is the first by a British naval vessel in four years; it comes amid growing tensions between China and Taiwan. The Royal Navy insists it was part of a long-planned deployment and not in breach of international law.

My role in *Jaws*

This month marks the 50th anniversary of the release of *Jaws*. Since then, a lot of attention has been focused on Bruce – the mechanical shark that was used during the film's troubled production. But *Jaws* also contained remarkable footage of real great whites – thanks to two underwater documentary filmmakers from Sydney. Valerie Taylor and her husband Ron filmed the sequences in South Australia. It went well at first. “We baited the sharks and had three great whites swimming around,” she told Laura Rutkowski in the *Radio Times*. These, however, were not big enough to satisfy the producers, so they had to use a half-size shark cage, a small boat and a small, ex-jockey stuntman (under five feet tall) to make them look bigger; then, at the last minute, the stuntman was so “terrified” he didn't get into the cage – which proved a wise move, as a shark attacked it and broke it up. “His reluctance saved his life,” she says. Still, it all worked out: the footage was so dramatic, the cage attack was written into the film, and the producers were so pleased with it, they flew the couple to Martha's Vineyard for the main shoot. Steven Spielberg, she recalls, was a “very nice young man. Roy Scheider was the most curious – he never got tired of asking us about sharks.” As for the film, “it was better than I expected, but I was horrified how the people in the movie theatre screamed. It demonised sharks because

people seemed to think it was real – the general public were a bit stupid! We did every talk show, trying to tell people sharks don't really behave like that. It's a movie. You don't go to New York expecting to see King Kong on the Empire State Building!”

Living with Parkinson's

At 89, Alan Alda is busier than ever, says Simon Hattenstone in *The Guardian*. The former *M*A*S*H* star has a podcast, heads the Alan Alda Centre for Communicative Science at New York's Stony Brook University, and still acts and produces – despite having been diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2015. A decade on, his shakes are pronounced; but he's learnt to adapt to life with the disease: “I just have to plan for the fact that everything takes three times longer to do or more. Getting your clothes on, taking your pills. I have to type every email three times before I stop saying rude things. I write emails to women I don't know, and unless I check, before my signature there are six Xs.” At best, it must make life tiresome. Yet he says that he rarely gets upset about it. “I fell into this way of thinking that if a button takes too long to button, I have to find other ways to do it. And eventually if I land on a way that makes the button go through the buttonhole ... I feel like a million bucks.” He pauses. “It sounds like something I read in a self-help book, but it isn't. It's just the way I found myself reacting, and I'm very glad that I did.”



Arnold Schwarzenegger might well be the happiest person I've ever interviewed, says Decca Aitkenhead in *The Sunday Times* – “or possibly ever met”. The bodybuilder-turned-actor-turned-politician finds “literally nothing” to complain about during our four hours together; he passes the time cheerily feeding cookies to his pet pig Schnelly, and tending to his dogs, including a tiny geriatric Yorkshire terrier and an 11-stone Alaskan malamute. He has a pool and a gym at his mansion in LA, but he usually works out at Gold's Gym, a rough-and-ready public place – and he charms the fans who stop him for selfies. Many celebrities see their fame as the unwelcome price of success; yet he seems open to these interactions. He nods. People crave attention, he says – the feeling “that someone knows them, is aware of them, that they're somebody. And so they go to a shrink. They lie on the couch and someone is listening to them. But I go out anywhere to a crowd and they all listen. And they love to listen to my shit, right? I'm having 50,000 shrinks sitting out there, and I don't pay a f**king penny. I get paid! So how can I complain about that?” Sure, people sometimes ask him for a selfie while he's having dinner. “But I can walk into this restaurant at any time, I can sit at any table I want, I make no reservation. For that I take a picture with someone. It takes three minutes. So why would I complain?”

Castaway of the week

This week's edition of Radio 4's Desert Island Discs featured the documentary filmmaker Norma Percy

- 1 *Be Prepared*, written and performed by Tom Lehrer
- 2 *Waltz in C-sharp minor, Op. 62 No. 2* by Chopin, performed by Khatia Buniatishvili
- 3 *Well, Did You Evah?* by Cole Porter, performed by Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra
- 4 *A Hard Day's Night* by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, performed by The Beatles
- 5 *Never Say No* by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt, performed by *The Fantasticks* New Off-Broadway Cast
- 6 *Swan Lake, Op. 20, Act IV: No. 28 Scène. Allegro agitato* by Tchaikovsky, performed by the National Philharmonic Orchestra (cond. Richard Bonynghe)
- 7* *It Ain't Me Babe* by Bob Dylan, performed by Joan Baez
- 8 *Short People*, written and performed by Randy Newman

* Choice if allowed only one record

Book: *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust

Luxury: a hot shower, a fluffy towelling robe and sun cream

Viewpoint:**The real world**

“My friends and I increasingly find ourselves reminiscing about our pre-smartphone childhoods, like refugees remembering a country left long ago. We recall the endless waiting and the various means we used to pass the time. We examined paving stones. We peered into cracks and picked satisfying paint flakes from the walls. In the car, we misted the glass with our breath and raced the raindrops. We chewed paper, bit our forearms, spent hours face-down studying lawns. If you'd asked us back then, we would have said we were bored to death. But we lived in constant communion not with a touchscreen but with the real world, and in retrospect it was sort of wonderful.”
Mary Wakefield in The Spectator

Farewell

Sir Francis Graham-Smith, astronomer whose work indicated that the universe had a beginning, died 20 June, aged 102.

Barbara Holdridge, audiobook pioneer, died 9 June, aged 95.

Léon Krier, architect and Poundbury planner, died 17 June, aged 79.

David “Syd” Lawrence, fearsome fast bowler, died 21 June, aged 61.

Mark Peploe, Oscar-winning co-writer of *The Last Emperor*, died 18 June, aged 82.

People can be a happy place.

Jo's four children are his. His world is never bigger than with them. Out on a hike. Everyone together. It's when Perthshire is at its most beautiful.

But his favourite bit? When the walk is finally over and the whole family sits down for a proper cup of tea and ever-so-slightly overdone fruit cake.

It's what made his late wife, Sue, happiest. The brood of kids all around her. Stomachs and hearts full. And it's the part he now cherishes most.

That's why he left a gift to Cancer Research UK in his Will.

So more families
can have
more time
together.



For **Daniel**, it's been twelve more years with his loved ones – and counting. His Hodgkin Lymphoma diagnosis at just twenty-three was a huge shock. He felt lost, but never alone. His boyfriend Adam holding his hand every step of the way.

After four rounds of chemotherapy and two weeks of radiotherapy, which CRUK pioneered, he was given the all clear.

In 2023, he and Adam celebrated their first anniversary as husband and hubby. Cherishing every anniversary since.

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The drone wars

From Ukraine to Iran, it has become clear that unmanned aircraft are rapidly revolutionising modern warfare

Why is this in the news now?

Primarily because of the astonishing impact that drones are having on the war in Ukraine. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) have transformed the conflict. According to Ukrainian commanders, drones have been responsible for 80% of Russian combat casualties this year, and a similar proportion of damage to equipment; Ukraine says that drones destroyed 89,000 Russian targets in May alone. In early June, the Ukrainians used AI-guided “quadcopter” drones to mount a devastating attack on dozens of Russian aircraft at bases deep inside enemy territory. Israel’s surprise attack on Iran this month also relied heavily on drones. Increasingly, analysts agree that cheap, easily adaptable drones will revolutionise modern warfare – and could pose a threat to even the world’s most advanced militaries.



An armed fibre-optic FPV drone in Ukraine

What type of drones are we talking about?

Unmanned remote-controlled aircraft have been used by US forces for reconnaissance since Vietnam. The first armed drone strike is usually dated to 2001: US fixed-wing UAVs such as Predators and Reapers, which fire missiles, hit hundreds of Taliban and al-Qa’eda targets during the War on Terror. Similar drones have been used in Ukraine, such as the Turkish-built Bayraktar. The Russians have fired thousands of Iranian-designed Shahed drones (known as “mopeds” because of the sound of their petrol engines) into Ukraine, while the Ukrainians have built their own long-range drones, which can attack targets over 1,000km away. But the real revolution is in smaller, battery powered UAVs, with four to eight rotors, many of which are “FPV” (first-person view), transmitting a video feed to the operator’s goggles in real time. These are used for reconnaissance, directing artillery attacks, and resupplying troops. Most importantly, they can be armed with explosives, allowing pilots either to drop bombs, or to fly into a target, kamikaze-style.

How have they changed the conflict?

Firstly, they’ve made it more dangerous: thanks to drones, the third year of the Ukraine War is estimated to have been deadlier than the first two years combined. Mechanised assaults have become practically impossible: a \$400 drone can quickly take out a \$2m tank. The battlefield has become “transparent”, making it hard for either side to mass troops and vehicles. Russian assaults are now made in small groups, on foot or on motorbikes. Because UAVs make it harder to get troops to and from front-line positions and to supply them, some Ukrainian infantry spend months in foxholes, surviving on food deliveries made by drone. Drones have “gamified” the war: Ukrainian troops now win “points” if they hit targets with drones, which they can trade in for even more effective weapons – a scheme intended to direct equipment to the most effective units. A comparable transformation has occurred at sea. Successful Ukrainian marine drone attacks have forced Russia’s fleet to withdraw from the western Black Sea.

How can you defend against drones?

At the moment, with difficulty. You can shoot them down, but anti-drone missiles are prohibitively expensive. Both sides are testing laser weapons, but it’s early days for the technology. On the front line, soldiers carry shotguns, but they require quick reactions at perilously close range. You can also shelter from drones: soldiers erect fishing nets over crucial supply routes, and, less successfully, put steel grids known as “cope cages” on their tanks. The most successful defence so far has been electronic warfare: most UAVs are operated by radio signals, and can be knocked out by jamming those signals. By the end of last year, up to 75% of drone frequencies were being blocked by jamming. In response, fibre-optic drones were created.

What are fibre-optic drones?

They are controlled by a fishing line-style fibre-optic filament, which unspools as it flies and links the UAV to an operator. This confers two major advantages: the drones cannot be knocked out by jamming; and the images they send back are crystal clear. They were used to great effect to destroy Ukraine’s supply lines into Russia’s Kursk region, from which most Ukrainian forces were ejected in March; videos showed fields strewn with fibre-optic cables. Russia and Ukraine are now both racing to source cable: prospective buyers from both sides are said to have bumped into each other in Chinese factories. The downside is that their range is limited by cable length (up to 20km); they’re heavy; and the cables can become tangled in trees or electricity lines.

Which side is winning the drone war?

For a while, it seemed to be Ukraine. The country claims to have manufactured 2.2 million drones in 2024, and aims to produce 4.5 million in 2025. It is now considered a “drone superpower”, and has used the weapons to strike many targets deep inside Russia. But Russia – reportedly with help from China – is catching up. Ukraine produces about 100 long-range drones a day; Russia makes 300. Moscow is thought to be ahead both in electronic warfare and fibre optics.

Operation Spiderweb: a wake-up call

Ukraine’s “Operation Spiderweb” earlier this month was a stunning success. Drones were smuggled into Russia in “sheds”, loaded onto lorry containers. The lorries were parked near five air bases spread across Russia; the containers’ roofs retracted simultaneously to release drone swarms, destroying or damaging at least 20 crucial aircraft, some of which were irreplaceable. The operation was also, according to many analysts, a wake-up call for Western armed forces. If the Ukrainians were able to smuggle drones into an authoritarian state like Russia (and Israel was able to mount a similar operation in Iran), wouldn’t Nato countries be vulnerable to China or Russia in the same way? In particular, there are worries that drones could be brought into the US aboard Chinese container ships. In *The Atlantic* magazine, the military analyst Phillips Payson O’Brien noted that Chinese interests have been buying up farmland next to important US military bases for years. “They could be growing soybeans, but they could also be staging grounds for drone swarms that would make the Ukrainian attacks look minuscule.” Recent unexplained drone overflights near military bases and airports in Denmark, Germany and the UK, meanwhile, have also caused alarm.

What is the long-term outlook?

Drones – cheap, ubiquitous and disposable – threaten the supremacy of the ultra-expensive “weapon platforms” that have dominated advanced militaries for decades, such as tanks, jets and aircraft carriers. No doubt counter-measures will be developed, as with earlier technological breakthroughs such as the plane and the tank. But with defence departments investing heavily in drone warfare, drones are likely to evolve too. Russians and Ukrainians are already testing swarm AI – of the kind that produces coordinated drone lightshows – on the battlefield. A particular area of concern is that China dominates production of all the main components for FPV-type quadcopters, such as lithium-ion batteries, fibre optics and the rare-earth magnets used in electric motors.

Politicians love to ride white elephants

George Monbiot

The Guardian

Will it carry prestige? Will ministers be able to pose beside it in hard hats? Will it provide lucrative contracts for big corporations? These are the criteria that guide infrastructure spending, says George Monbiot. Consider the Lower Thames Crossing, a scheme expected to cost as much as £10.2bn by the time it's finished and to which the Government quietly allotted another £590m last week. All that for a 14-mile stretch of road that will just shift congestion to the next pinch point. The scheme's benefit-cost ratio (BCR) was initially estimated by National Highways at a "shocking" 0.48 – meaning for every £1 spent, just 48p would be returned to the economy. By throwing in some vaguely defined "wider economic benefits", it has been able to push that figure up to 1.22, but that's still pathetic compared to the BCR of smaller, less flashy schemes: fixing potholes and maintaining local roads, for example, has a BCR of 7. In short, spending the state's capital on multiple small projects, be they potholes, parks or swimming pools, would give us a far better return. But of course it wouldn't bring the prestige.

How the police got it right in Manchester

Dominic Lawson

Daily Mail

To have any hope of restoring the public's crumbling faith in government, Labour needs to do one thing above all else, says Dominic Lawson: reverse the huge loss of public confidence in the police. Security is the state's most fundamental task, yet in last year's ONS Crime Survey, less than half of respondents said their local force was doing a good job; ten years ago, almost two-thirds did. Defeatists say the police are overwhelmed and improvements are impossible without a vast increase in funding. Tell that to Stephen Watson: when he took over Greater Manchester Police in 2021, the force was in special measures, with the worst 999 response times in England. It's now among the best-performing forces, beating the Met on every key measure: theft down 28.2%, residential burglaries down 11.3%, vehicle offences down 18.5%. His secret? Watson stepped up the number of "stop and searches" and arrests, booted out more than 100 officers regarded as corrupt or incompetent, and brought in smart new uniforms. Call it old-fashioned policing if you will, but if confidence in the police is to be retrieved, every force should be copying the Watson playbook.

Slow down. We have enough stuff already

Stephen Bleach

The Sunday Times

Are you worried about Britain's sluggish growth rate? Apparently, it's a very bad thing and our future happiness depends on us stepping up our production of goods and services pronto. But think about it, says Stephen Bleach: haven't we got "too much stuff already"? Seriously. There are 1.6 billion items of unworn clothing in British wardrobes. Each year, we buy eight million new TVs and chuck away ten million tonnes of food. Must we really keep buying ever more throwaway clothes, gadgets and vitamin supplements to buoy up our economy? Must we consume ever more services – more financial advice, more pizza deliveries, more streaming platforms? I don't want a return to the deprivations of the pre-industrial age, but there must be a happy medium between that and our present consumerist excess – a place where we've enough, but not too much, to eat; where we don't buy for the sake of it, and can get products that have been built to last; where we can "embrace useful innovations" without constantly being pestered to "upgrade". We probably hit that sweet spot for a fleeting moment around 1991. Would that we could recapture it.

The folly of saying goodbye to billionaires

Chris Blackhurst

The Independent

Get ready for another Labour U-turn, says Chris Blackhurst. Spooked by reports of an exodus of wealthy foreigners, Rachel Reeves is apparently thinking of reversing her recent move to make non-doms' worldwide assets liable to inheritance tax (IHT). A study of Companies House data by Bloomberg has found that more than 4,400 corporate directors left the UK last year, and that departures in April, when the tax changes took effect, were up 75% on the previous April. In another survey, 60% of tax advisers said they expected more than 40% of their non-dom clients to leave within two years – people like Magda Wierzycka, the Polish-South African billionaire venture capitalist. She'd prefer to stay, she says, but foreign exchange controls mean her estate might find it hard to pay the whopping IHT bill. Amazing that ministers never considered what huge sums the Treasury would be deprived of by driving the mobile rich away. Or were they so in thrall to political ideology that they simply didn't care? Either way, they're going to have a hard time now trying to lure the non-doms back.

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

A Taiwanese couple hired two pole dancers to perform outside their son's secondary school to mark his graduation. The show took place outside Taichung Municipal Wanhe Junior High School in mid-June, just after the ceremony. The boy stood looking embarrassed as the two women danced around him. His mother, who was not named, said she wanted to give "an unforgettable graduation gift" to her son, but the school asked parents "to celebrate graduations in a more rational manner".



A "swan whisperer" has been banned from Hyde Park after kissing the birds and assaulting two people. Anders Fernstedt, a homeless man, "stroked, cuddled and kissed" swans in the central London park in March 2023. He then attacked a volunteer who told him to stop interfering with the birds, and a local resident who filmed him. David Etherington KC, the recorder, told Fernstedt: "I find you to be an eccentric man, but not suffering from an underlying mental illness." He imposed a restraining order banning him from the relevant part of the park.

Police in South Carolina chased a man driving a stolen digger down a highway at 3mph for more than an hour. They saw Johnny Mesa Jr, 53, driving the metal-treaded construction vehicle down US 78 in North Charleston at around 3am on a Sunday morning; several patrol cars, sirens on and lights flashing, trailed the clanking vehicle at walking pace. The thief ignored orders to halt for 72 minutes, but the slow-speed chase finally ended when he drove into a fairground and got stuck. Mesa tried to run but was arrested.

Our trillion-dollar climate problem

Kate Aronoff

The New Republic

How about this for a scary statistic, says Kate Aronoff: in the year to 1 May, the US's climate-related costs reached nearly \$1trn. The figure is from a new Bloomberg analysis that takes into account federal spending on disaster recovery, post-disaster repairs, and the escalating insurance costs faced by millions – largely because of the growing frequency of extreme-weather events. Home insurance premiums have risen by an average of 40% in the US over the past six years. While Florida and California get most of the attention, the biggest rate rises have been in Midwestern states, which are hit by tornadoes and hailstorms. Rates in Nebraska have jumped by 72%. Through the 1990s, the state experienced just four weather-related disasters that cost more than \$1bn; in the past five years, it has endured 22. Republicans prefer not to acknowledge this problem. The administration has cancelled many climate research projects, and plans to shut down the Federal Emergency Management Agency after this hurricane season so that state and local governments can take on more of the burden. But the price for climate disasters will keep rising. "Ignoring those costs, making other people pay for them, and opting not to keep track of the damages won't make them go away."

California's disastrous governor

S.E. Cupp

Chicago Sun-Times

One person is certainly enjoying America's immigration protests, says S.E. Cupp: California's self-promoting governor, Gavin Newsom. "Long considered – by himself, anyway – a front-runner for the Democratic nomination for president", Newsom is making the most of his clash with Trump over the unrest in Los Angeles. It handily distracts people from the fact that California has "become the poster child for everything that's failing in America". The state has the most homelessness, highest healthcare costs, worst pollution and the highest top rate of tax. Last year, it was ranked the worst state to move to, owing to its low scores in education, health, quality of life and safety. California's government has ballooned under Newsom; his own office has more than doubled in size from 150 employees in 2018 to 381 in 2024. Democrats would be crazy to conclude that this "far-left, big government" politician represented their "best shot at beating Republicans".



Newsom with the Trumps earlier this year

Barack Obama is not coming to save you

Karen Attiah

The Washington Post

In difficult times, people yearn for authority figures, says Karen Attiah. So it's perhaps not surprising that some Americans are now calling on Barack Obama to speak out more. But quite "what sort of hopey-changey answer to our omni-crisis" they want to hear is a mystery. Expecting Obama to go into battle against the "brutal deportation practices" currently roiling America seems particularly perverse given that, as president, he advanced those very systems. People have forgotten that Obama was once dubbed the "deporter in chief". He removed up to five million people from the US – and they weren't all convicted criminals. Between 2014 and 2016, nearly 40,000 cases involving families with children went through the "rocket docket" fast track, 70% of them processed without legal representation. Many children were forced to represent themselves in court. The administration was sued for detaining families to deter other would-be migrants. The current White House border tsar, Tom Homan, who in March said "I don't care what the judges think"? He owes his job to Obama, who made him head of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency. Condemn Trump all you like, but it was "bipartisan bricklaying that paved the path" to today's cruel deportation policies.

The Minnesota assassinations: an eruption of political violence

Like school shootings, acts of political violence are becoming "almost routine" in America, said Lisa Lerer in *The New York Times*. In the past three months alone, we've seen arson attacks on the Pennsylvania governor's residence and the Republican Party headquarters in New Mexico; two Israeli embassy staff members gunned down outside an event in Washington; and protesters set on fire in Boulder, Colorado. So perhaps it was not "really so surprising" that, a fortnight ago, a man dressed as a police officer went on a house-to-house shooting spree in Minnesota – killing one state representative, Melissa Hortman, and her husband, and badly injuring another lawmaker and his wife. The suspect, Vance Luther Boelter, who was later captured, visited the houses of at least two other officials who weren't at home; police said he had a "kill list" of nearly 70 targets, most of them Democratic lawmakers and abortion-rights advocates.

It seems Boelter wasn't just a "political assassin" but a "Christian assassin", said David French in the same paper. He has links to radical charismatic movements that regard Trump as "divinely destined to save America from the godless Left and its political party, the 'demoncrats'". There is always going to be the odd "deranged zealot" out there, said Brian Klaas in *The Atlantic*, but Trump has done a lot to magnify the risk. He has

called opponents "human scum" and incited violence against them; he made light of the 2022 assassination attempt against Nancy Pelosi, then speaker of the House; cynically fuelled conspiracy theories such as QAnon; and pardoned far-right rioters. All of this has helped "normalise and absolve acts of political violence".

Trump himself has narrowly escaped assassination at least twice, said Gerard Baker in *The Wall Street Journal*, which goes to show that the problem of political violence extends beyond him. The reality is that Left and Right alike are using it "as part of their ever more apocalyptic campaigns to win at all costs". Both are inclined to condone violence by their own supporters – be they "stop the steal" rioters, or people throwing rocks at police detaining illegal aliens – while wildly exaggerating the villainy of those on the other side. "If you call your opponent a fascist or a fifth columnist for an invading enemy power, why wouldn't people take command of their otherwise dire fate by eliminating them?" We need to dial down the rhetoric on all sides. If political leaders don't stop peddling alarmist threats about their opponents, and breathless pundits don't stop fantasising about civil war, "the fire that's coming will consume us all".

The tourist flood in the Mediterranean: can it be stemmed?

“Here we go again,” said Alessia Noto in **TTG Italia (Rimini)**. Just as they did last June, the residents of tourist hot-spots across southern Europe are taking to the streets to protest against the hordes of summer visitors swamping their towns. “Tourism steals our bread, our roof, and our future,” read the placards of protesters in Barcelona, a city of 1.7 million people that hosted 15.5 million visitors last year. “Everywhere you look all you see is tourists,” chanted protesters in Palma, Mallorca, some firing water pistols at the holiday-makers. In Venice, where every luxury hotel is booked out for “the wedding of the century” – the nuptials of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and Lauren Sánchez – activists unfurled a banner over the Rialto bridge with the message “No space for Bezos!”.



Activists on the Rialto bridge in Venice this month

The anger is understandable, said Hans-Christian Rößler in **Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung**. Cities such as Lisbon and Barcelona have become unaffordable. Rents are soaring; their cafés and bistros are being replaced by souvenir shops, burger joints and “bubble tea” spots. And one organisation in particular gets the blame: Airbnb. Last month, Madrid ordered the online platform to delist nearly 66,000 rental properties held to be breaking local rules; Airbnb’s appeal against that order

was rejected by a Spanish court last week. Meanwhile, Barcelona has decided not to renew the licences of 10,000 holiday homes set to expire by the end of 2028. Unwilling to be made the scapegoat, Airbnb has come up with a report claiming that overtourism is “driven by hotels”, says Alessia Conzonato in **Corriere della Sera (Milan)**. In Barcelona, as in other tourist towns, nearly 75% of overnight stays in 2023 were in hotels, whereas regulations have caused the number of rentals to shrink by 50% in three years.

In the end, though, the supply of places to stay is driven by demand, said Juan Cierco in **El Periódico (Barcelona)**, as is the supply of places on cruise ships (passenger numbers to Barcelona and Lisbon increased by 50% between 2022 and 2023), and of cheap flights (Ryanair has exceeded 200 million passengers for the first time in a single year). Spain closed 2024 as the world’s second-most visited nation, with 94 million tourists. And as tourism represents more than 12% of Spain’s GDP, the government must be wary of choking off demand with taxes and regulations. But it’s not governments who have to square up to the problem of overtourism, said Chris Christou on his *The End of Tourism* podcast: it’s us. “When it comes to travel and tourism, if you love a place, leave it be. Don’t go there.”

ARGENTINA

House arrest or photo opportunity?

La Nación
(Buenos Aires)

Has the concept of house arrest ever been so abused, asks *La Nación*. Our former president, the Peronist left-winger Cristina Kirchner, who was convicted of corruptly giving public works contracts to cronies, has just started a six-year jail sentence recently upheld by the supreme court, after she had exhausted every appeal. Being over 70, she’s allowed to serve it at her home in Buenos Aires. Fine; but she has no right to exploit that situation to whip up her supporters, thousands of whom gather daily to pay homage outside her flat. And that’s exactly what she’s doing, turning her sentence into “a political spectacle”. First, she sent the crowd a recorded message claiming, once again, to be a victim of political persecution. Now she has been allowed to go onto her balcony to greet them, which will fire them up even more. She is making her neighbours’ lives a misery: the crowds shout day and night, and make a mess with their makeshift kitchens; many even pee in the street. Imprisonment is supposed to be a penalty, not an opportunity to make propaganda or disturb the peace. Kirchner was found guilty of serious crimes in a fair trial. She should have the decency to serve her sentence quietly.

RUSSIA

Why Putin tolerates critical patriots

Holod
(Kyiv)

When Ukraine’s Operation Spiderweb attacked airbases deep inside Russia on 1 June, it touched a nerve, says Ivan Filippov. Russian bloggers linked to the military – “Z-bloggers” – seethed at the sight of bombers turned into “ash”. For these ultra-nationalists, it was just the latest sign of state incompetence, and they haven’t pulled their punches: one called the situation “a fucking disgrace”. In Russia, it’s a crime to “discredit the armed forces”, so how do they get away with it? While the mainstream media barely mentions such calamities, the Z-bloggers have long been writing “the bitter truth” about the war. And yet only a few of these outspoken figures, Igor Girkin to name one, have been imprisoned. Why? It’s because the army relies on them to help supply it with materials it needs. When the bloggers put out a call, civilian volunteer groups across the country spring into action, collecting drones, generators, vehicles, tents and medicines etc. This network represents the nearest thing Russia has to a civil society; and some members are now openly musing about a postwar future where those responsible for military failures are punished. Vladimir Putin won’t tolerate this when he no longer has to. When the war ends, these “passionate patriots” will be savagely repressed.

SPAIN

Prepare for in-flight torture

La Vanguardia
(Barcelona)

“It all started with olives,” says Susana Quadrado. In 1987, American Airlines CEO Robert Crandall saved \$40,000 by removing olives from the salads served on his planes. That kicked off an industry-wide push to squeeze every penny out of the “proletarianised economy class”. First they took our “peanuts, crackers and newspapers”. Next, they crammed us in with “less space between seats”. The headrest – and “in some airlines, the bathroom” – shrank in the “scramble for savings”. And now EU transport ministers are debating whether to allow European airlines to charge for carry-on baggage, and have already agreed to lengthen the time a flight can be delayed before passengers must be compensated. Today it’s three hours; soon it could be six. How far can airlines go in this race to the bottom? A few years ago, industry insiders proposed packing in more passengers by putting them nearly vertical, propped up on a little bicycle seat, their legs dangling straight down. After all, you can fit a few more rows of passengers that way. Dismissed at the time, the “Skyrider” idea is now creating buzz again. Is the day coming when we will have to travel strapped into “such a torture rack”? Now that “we’ve normalised the abuse” of economy passengers, anything is possible.

What the scientists are saying...

The prince that became *T. rex*

When two partial dinosaur skeletons were found in Mongolia in the early 1970s, they were deemed to belong to a known species and placed in a museum drawer, where they remained for the next 50 years. Now, the 86-million-year-old bones have been re-examined, and found to belong to a new species, which is the closest-known ancestor of *T. rex*, though it was a lot smaller than that monster. *Khankhualuu mongoliensis*, or Dragon Prince of Mongolia, as it has been named, weighed around 750kg – similar to a horse and an eighth of the weight of an adult *T. rex*. But while its body was slender and gangly, the predator's skull had features that would, over the course of 20 million years, evolve to give *T. rex* its fearsomely powerful jaws. The new species is thought to be the missing link in the tyrannosaur family tree, bridging the gap between smaller, earlier forms and the famous large apex predator, reports the journal *Nature*. "This discovery shows us that, before tyrannosaurs became the kings, they were princes," said study co-author Professor Darla Zelenitsky.

Large cars are "a clear threat"

Big cars with high bonnets are becoming increasingly popular in the UK – although they pose a "clear and growing threat to public safety, especially for children", the think tank Transport & Environment (T&E) has warned. Using data from safety ratings programmes, it has worked out that the average bonnet height for new cars in Europe has risen nearly 7cm since 2010, to 83.8cm; T&E also found that a disproportionately large number of the tallest cars, such as Range Rovers – which typically have a bonnet height of more than 100cm – are sold in the UK. Cars with flat fronts and high bonnets are more



Big cars can have significant blind spots

likely to strike an adult pedestrian's vital organs and a child's head; and they are more likely to knock people down in front of the car, rather than flinging them more safely to one side or onto the bonnet. A Belgian study found that raising the bonnet of a car to 90cm from 80cm increases the risk of a pedestrian or cyclist dying after a collision by 27%. High-bonneted cars can also have significant blind spots. Research at Loughborough University has shown that the driver of some of the highest-fronted vehicles would not be able to see a child of nine standing directly in front of the car. T&E is calling for a legal limit on the height of bonnets of around 85cm.

A painless alternative to biopsies

Millions of patients have biopsies each year, to remove tissue which can then be examined under a microscope for signs of disease, including cancer. But while the process tends to produce reliable results,

it is often painful. Moreover, there is a limit to how much tissue can be removed from organs such as the brain. Now, a team at King's College, London, is working on an alternative: a tiny patch studded with nano-needles, 1,000 times thinner than a human hair, which can extract biochemical data from living cells. The patch is pressed against the tissue but leaves it intact, so the process is painless. Mass spectrometry and AI are then used to explore whether cancer is present, and how it is progressing. In tests on brain tumour samples, it produced results in as little as 20 minutes, making it fast enough to influence decisions made during surgery. The test could also be used repeatedly, to track how patients are responding to treatment.

The risk posed by "mirror life"

Scientists are seeking to raise awareness of a new threat to life on Earth: "mirror microbes". Most biological molecules exist in two forms that are the mirror image of each other, a property called chirality (handedness). Living organisms do not use both "hands": for instance, DNA is only made from "right-handed" nucleotides. But in recent years, scientists have started to explore the possibility of creating "mirror life" by synthesising microbes from the mirror versions. It is hoped that this could lead to more effective drugs, but the concern is that within a generation, they may be able to create complete mirror bacteria, which could evade animal and plant immune defence systems – with potentially appalling consequences. At a conference in Paris this month, scientists reiterated calls for a pause on research into the creation of "mirror life" – warning that given the scope for error or misuse, there is no way of guaranteeing that any synthetic pathogens would be safely contained.

A face from the Stone Age

In 1988, the remains of dozens of Stone Age women were found in a cave in the Meuse Valley in southern Belgium. Now, decades of study later, researchers have been able to reconstruct the face of one of these women, who lived around 10,500 years ago – five millennia before Stonehenge was built. Analysis of DNA extracted from her skull showed that, like Britain's Cheddar Man, her fellow Mesolithic hunter-gatherer, she had dark hair and blue eyes. Her skin, however, was lighter than his. "That's striking; until now most finds from that time indicated a darker skin," said lead researcher Professor Isabelle De Groote of Ghent University. Such differences, she added, are likely due to variations in climate, diet and migratory patterns.



DNA was used to reconstruct her face

She was between 35 and 60 years old; she had a nose with a high nasal bridge – similar to Cheddar Man, and "strong brow ridges, despite being female". The bodies in the grave had been sprinkled with ochre, perhaps as part of a burial ritual, and the cave was used for many centuries, suggesting such sites were "places of memory" that these hunter-gatherers kept returning to, despite their nomadic lifestyles.

Alzheimer's drugs rejected

The first two drugs to have been shown to slow the progress of Alzheimer's will not be available on the NHS. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has ruled that the benefits of donanemab and lecanemab are too modest to justify their cost. The drugs work by clearing the toxic protein amyloid from the brain, and have been found to delay the transition from mild to moderate dementia, potentially giving patients four to six extra months in which they could live without daily care. But some scientists have doubted if the benefits would be noticeable in a real-world setting. The cost of treating the 70,000 or so eligible NHS patients has been estimated at £1.5bn a year for the drugs alone; once other costs – including regular scans to check for dangerous side effects – were factored in, the total might have been twice that, or more than £42,000 per patient.

Pick of the week's Gossip

Benjamin Netanyahu is a "big gangster" now, says his former bodyguard, but he has always been "a little thief". In *The New Statesman*, Ami Dror recalls escorting the Israeli PM and his wife Sara to smart restaurants in the late 1990s. "The first time they left without paying the bill, the owners usually didn't mind," Dror says. "The second time they were puzzled. By the third time the Netanyahuhs left without paying, they were angry, literally chasing them in some cases out of the restaurant."



Keira Knightley is no slouch in the looks department – but even she can start to feel uncomfortable among the fashion elite. "All of a sudden, I am aware of my arms, and how they move, and they don't seem to be moving correctly," she reported from *Milan Fashion Week*. "Yesterday at home I had perfectly normal arms, but [here] they don't fit at all." It was the same with her red trainers. I've turned into "Ronald McDonald – some clownish freak with strange long arms and horrific red shoes".

Jeff Bezos and his fiancée **Lauren Sánchez** have reportedly changed the location of their wedding party in Venice, owing to protesters threatening to block the surrounding canal with inflatable crocodiles and other items. The couple had planned to have their reception at the 16th century *Scuola Grande Della Misericordia*, until the No Space for Bezos group forced a rethink. The couple are believed to have invited 200 guests, who will arrive in 95 private jets.

Welfare reform: Labour MPs rebel

"It normally takes much more than just a year in power for a prime minister to face a full rebellion," said David Maddox in *The Independent*. But Keir Starmer is already "staring down the barrel of a defeat" in a crucial vote in the Commons. Well over 100 Labour MPs are threatening to vote down the Government's flagship welfare reform bill, when it comes to the Commons next week. It's not just the usual suspects, either: there are ten Labour select committee chairs on the list. Last week, Vicky Foxcroft, a whip, resigned in protest, saying she would not be able to vote for the cuts to disability payments. It's possible that ministerial resignations may follow. For the Government, the stakes are high: reforming welfare is such a crucial issue that some have even suggested defeat might "be a confidence issue ... that could bring it down".

Starmer and his lieutenants still have a number of cards they can play before the vote, said Stephen Bush in the FT. But their real problem is that, while Labour MPs support most of the welfare reforms, many don't think "there is any justification" for one important measure: the changes to personal independence payments, or Pip. The bill would raise the minimum threshold for eligibility, said John Harris in *The Guardian*. This would mean that someone with serious



Vicky Foxcroft: resigned in protest

disabilities – who, say, needs assistance to cut up food, wash their body below the waist, use the toilet and dress themselves – might not receive any Pip money at all. Along with other changes, this would result in "huge losses of income for hundreds of thousands of households". Some of them, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates, would be as much as £12,000 per year worse off. Many Labour MPs, who did not go into politics to impoverish disabled people, are absolutely furious.

Well, something has to be done about the welfare system, said Tom Harris in *The Daily Telegraph*. The cost of Pip is on course to more than double, from £15bn in 2019-20 to £34bn by the end of the parliament, in large part thanks to a surge in mental health conditions since Covid. One in four working-aged Britons are now classed as disabled. "That is a staggering, unbelievable (literally) level of incapacity," Starmer is "stuck between a rock and a hard place", said James Heale in *The Spectator*. "Politically, it is hard to see how the Government can proceed as planned. Fiscally, it is hard to see how they cannot." Welfare spending is projected to reach £100bn by 2029; the cuts in the reform would have only saved £4.8bn. The only possible alternative – which now looks a certainty – is big tax rises.

Decriminalising abortion: a step too far?

If a mother kills her newborn infant, she risks being sent to jail, said Bel Mooney in the *Daily Mail*. But if she takes a pill to poison her unborn child at full term, she will face no sanctions. It makes no sense to me, but last week, MPs voted for that to become the law. In the free vote, 379 to 137 supported the Labour MP Tonia Antoniazzi's amendment to the Crime and Policing Bill to decriminalise abortion in England and Wales. This would make it lawful for a woman to terminate her own pregnancy, by any means, at any point up to birth. In the late 1960s, I supported the campaign that led to abortion becoming legal in some circumstances. I believe in a woman's right to choose. But I am shattered that MPs should have voted for viable foetuses to be stripped of all rights. Where was the lengthy debate about a radical reform that was not in the Labour manifesto? What of the arguments about the potential for coercion – and the risk more women will come to harm, having late abortions at home? The debate in the Commons lasted two hours, said *The Sunday Times*, and fewer than 100 MPs sat through it.

It is ironic, said Sarah Vine in the *Daily Mail*, that this has come about not because abortion is hard to access here, but because it has got easier. Since Covid, women have been able to obtain abortion pills over the phone, with no face-to-

face consultation. These pills are only legal for use up to ten weeks, but the system is open to abuse. As a result, the number of convictions for illegal abortions has risen. Between 1861, when abortion was criminalised, and 2022, there were three. Since 2022, there have been seven.

The numbers are still very small, said Frances Ryan in *The Guardian*. But this welcome reform is also about the scores of women who've faced traumatic police inquiries after suffering from miscarriages or stillbirths. As for the few who have late abortions, many will be vulnerable – victims of sex trafficking, for instance. They deserve support, not punishment. What good does it do to prosecute them? This reform does not allow abortion on demand: it will remain illegal for doctors to carry out abortions after 24 weeks (except where a woman's life is at risk). Nevertheless, it sends an important message that abortion is a healthcare issue, not a criminal one. But I'm not sure the public is ready for that message, said Hadley Freeman in *The Sunday Times*. In the UK, there is strong support for the right to abortion – but only up to six months. Pushing for the right "to abort a fully gestated healthy baby" is "progressive overreach", and risks galvanising the anti-abortion movement. With this vote, Labour has "kicked a hornets' nest", and it is women who will "be stung".

Palestine Action: protesters or terrorists?

In the early hours of last Friday, two activists from Palestine Action climbed over a fence into RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire, said Dominic Adler on UnHerd. They then filmed themselves riding unimpeded on scooters across the vast airbase – “a critical part of Britain’s defence infrastructure” – and vandalising two Voyager air-to-air refuelling tankers. Reportedly, they smashed the aircraft with crowbars and sprayed paint into their engines. Their aim, they said, was to “disrupt British military support for Israel”. But their



A rally in support of the group this week

main achievement was to provoke the normally “glacial” Home Office into rapid action. By Friday evening, Yvette Cooper, the Home Secretary, had let it be known that she planned to proscribe Palestine Action under the Terrorism Act; on Monday, she confirmed that it would be put to a vote in the Commons next week.

In a statement, Cooper said this “disgraceful” attack was just the latest in the long history of Palestine Action’s “unacceptable criminal damage”. And it’s true that the group’s tactics have become quite extreme, said Sian Bradley and Charlie Parker in *The Times*. It was set up in 2020 to take direct action against Elbit Systems, a weapons manufacturer it claims “profits from Israel’s war crimes”. Back then, its members

limited themselves to scaling rooftops and vandalising factories. But since the start of Israel’s offensive in Gaza, they have ramped up their actions. Last year, they were accused of assaulting two police officers at Elbit’s Bristol site and causing millions of pounds worth of damage. These extremists are not just hurling soup at paintings, said Tom Harris in *The Daily Telegraph*. They are sabotaging RAF aircraft and potentially undermining Britain’s defence capability. If proscribing the group allows police to deal with this menace more effectively, “so much the better”.

It’s a drastic step, though, said Karl Hansen in *Tribune*. It would place Palestine Action “in the same legal category as Isis, al-Qa’eda and neo-Nazi gangs”, and criminalise anyone who belongs to the group, funds it, or publicly expresses support for it. Cooper is setting a “dangerous precedent”, said *The Guardian*. If the state can define a non-violent campaign “it disapproves of as terrorism, the boundary between civil disobedience and extremism becomes whatever a minister says it is”. Palestine Action has caused a lot of damage, but its tactics do not include “threats to life”. The Labour peer Shami Chakrabarti was right to ask: “When did criminal damage become terrorism?”

Nigel Farage: playing “Robin Hood”

Reform UK suffers from the “curse of populist parties everywhere”, said Eliot Wilson in *The i Paper*. By which I mean: it’s better at expressing generalised discontent than explaining how exactly it would go about changing things. Nigel Farage went some way to addressing that shortfall this week by unveiling a specific policy to lure wealthy non-doms back to the country. Under his scheme, people whose permanent home for tax purposes is outside the UK would be able to pay a one-off entry fee of £250,000 for a “Britannia Card”, which would exempt all their offshore income and assets from UK taxation for at least a decade. Reform reckons the policy would raise between £1.5bn and £2.5bn a year. This money would be redistributed to the lowest 10% of earners, making 2.5 million people between £600 and £1,000 better off a year.

At least one party is willing to celebrate enterprise and acknowledge the wealth-generating role played by non-doms, said Matthew Lynn in *The Daily Telegraph*. Labour and the Tories have a dire record in this regard. But the details of Farage’s plan – which depends



A new plan for non-doms

on an inept HMRC directing yet more handouts to select taxpayers – leave a lot to be desired. The tax expert Dan Neidle believes the scheme is badly flawed, said Chris Smyth in *The Times*. It would depend on individuals being able to afford the upfront £250,000 fee, he notes, and trusting that the rules wouldn’t change again before the ten years was up. He also calculates that the reform would lead to a net loss of £34bn in tax revenue over five years. Farage rejected that as “completely off-the-wall nonsense”, scoffing that he was “not clever enough” to respond to criticism from tax experts.

Farage knows that “nuanced economic argument” doesn’t count for much in our current “age of soundbites”, said Faiza Shaheen in *The Guardian*. It’s the headline that matters, and the headline here is “money from the rich, for the poor”. Many voters will have liked the sound of contributions from wealthy non-doms being transferred directly into the pockets of struggling workers. The sums may not add up, but Farage’s Robin Hood policy certainly works as a piece of “political theatre”.

Wit & Wisdom

“To err is human. To blame someone else is politics.”

Hubert Humphrey, quoted in *The Hill*

“Be nice to America – or we’ll bring you democracy.” US bumper sticker popular after the invasion of Iraq, quoted on *The Knowledge*

“The surest way to work up a crusade in favour of some good cause is to promise people that they will have a chance of maltreating someone.” Aldous Huxley, quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*

“When history is written as it ought to be written, it is the moderation and long patience of the masses at which men will wonder, not their ferocity.”

C.L.R. James, quoted in *The Spectator*

“Strategy requires thought, tactics require observation.” Chess grandmaster Max Euwe, quoted on *UnHerd*

“Power does not corrupt: it reveals.” Adage, quoted in *The Times*

“War hath no fury like a non-combatant.” Charles Edward Montague, quoted in *Forbes*

“Music is the space between notes.” Claude Debussy, quoted in *WNC Magazine*

“I’ve just been on a once-in-a-lifetime holiday. I’ll tell you what, never again.” Tim Vine, quoted in *Time Out*

“In an absurd world, manners require one to be graceful.” Alfred Brendel, quoted in *The Times*

Statistic of the week

Nearly 60% of the top 5% of achievers at GCSE level living outside of London move away from their place of birth by the age of 32. Almost a third of those who move go to London.

Institute for Fiscal Studies/
The Times

Cricket: England's miracle victory at Headingley

Since Ben Stokes took over as England's Test captain, he and his fellow Bazballers "have given their fans plenty to cheer about and a few reasons to moan", said Lawrence Booth in the Daily Mail. For much of its duration, the first Test against India at Headingley looked as if it might fall into the latter category. On a "sunny first morning", Stokes put India in to bat – a decision for which he was heavily criticised. He then watched, helplessly, as India's top order piled on the runs: three of their batters scored centuries, and at one point they were 430 for three. Conventional wisdom would have dictated that a draw was now "the height of England's ambitions". But a draw is the one result that "Stokes despises". And so, displaying the never-say-die attitude that "courses through this team", England set about the task of turning the match round.



Duckett: a "blazing" reverse sweep

And at 6.28pm on the final afternoon, that effort came to glorious fruition, said Mike Atherton in The Times. "Jamie Smith clobbered Ravindra Jadeja over the leg side" to bring up a remarkable five-wicket victory. England had been set 371 to win in their second innings – making this their "second-highest run-chase of all time". Their star performer was opener Ben Duckett, who scored a "brilliant" 149, and put on as "fine an exhibition of reverse sweeping as has ever been seen by an England player" against India's left-arm spinner, Jadeja. But others contributed to the cause. As he put on 188 for the first wicket with Duckett, Zak Crawley "played with as much composure as he ever has in an England shirt". And Joe Root, the "hometown hero", carried his team over the line with a "nerveless" unbeaten half-century.

If Jonny Bairstow was the "original spirit animal of Bazball, then Duckett has slipped into the role" since returning to the England Test fold two years ago, said Ali Martin in The Guardian. The

small, pugnacious left-hander has an "innate up-and-at-'em attitude", but is also a "far more seasoned, intelligent cricketer" than he is usually given credit for. This he proved on Tuesday, as he made a "conscious decision" to see off the threat of India's outstanding bowler, Jasprit Bumrah – who went wicketless in the fourth innings – and instead "target the relief bowlers". His innings was studded with blazing shots, the pick of which came on 137, when, with one of his reverse sweeps, he sent the ball "soaring into the crowd".

India, for their part, "were a shambles", said Nick Hoult in The Daily Telegraph. Despite the recent retirement of two of their biggest stars, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, they remain a "talented crop". Yet it is clear that under new captain Shubman Gill, they're a side that needs "time to click". Twice they collapsed disastrously, losing seven for 41 in the first innings – when 600 seemed certain – and six for 31 in the second innings, after KL Rahul and Rishabh Pant had both hit centuries. They dropped six crucial catches, and Bumrah often seemed a "one-man band with the ball". They ended the match with an ignominious record to their name: never before has a side seen five individual hundreds and still managed to lose a Test.

As for England, this was one of their most improbable victories, even for a team that makes a habit of producing them, said Simon Wilde in The Times. As ever, it was Stokes who "created the dynamics by which the game proceeded at such speed that an outright result was possible". Across the five days, 1,673 runs were scored – the third-highest aggregate for a Test match in England. And once again, Headingley proved to be a venue that simply "doesn't do draws", said Richard Gibson in the Daily Mail. Of the past 23 Tests there, 22 have produced results. How odd, then, that the ECB has decided not to schedule a Test there during the 2027 Ashes – a decision that simply "does not feel right".

Rugby union: a chastening warm-up to the Lions tour

The British and Irish Lions' game against Argentina last Friday – which took place at Dublin's Aviva Stadium – was "supposed to be a launch party for the 2025 tour" and a "chance to make a statement ahead of their arrival in Australia", said Chris Foy in the Daily Mail. But the "best-laid plans" have a habit of not panning out; and instead, Andy Farrell's squad will have touched down "in inquest mode" after suffering a chastening 28-24 defeat. Argentina, it's true, put in a spirited performance, and scored three superb tries from long distance (their opponents managed two). But in defence, the Lions were "carved open time and again", while their attack "lacked cohesion and precision". This was a "ragged" performance, which leaves Farrell with much to ponder.



Freeman: "seriously promising"

Twenty years ago, when the Lions were "held to a draw by Argentina in Cardiff", it foreshadowed a "disastrous tour" of New Zealand, said Gavin Mairs in The Daily Telegraph. Yet Friday's defeat, while undoubtedly "agonising", also offered "enough glimpses" to suggest that this could yet turn out to be a successful tour. Fin Smith impressed as fly-half, and Marcus Smith grew in "attacking impact" as the match wore on. There were also some "seriously promising" performances on the wings, with Tommy Freeman the stand-out player there, said Charlie Morgan in the same paper. Best of all, the scrum was a "resounding success", even given that the Pumas are weak in that area. The two Lions props, Ellis Genge and Finlay Bealham,

took their opposite numbers "to the cleaners" as they "laid down statement performances".

It must be remembered, too, that this is a "new team" that only came together for the first time a few weeks ago, said Alex Lowe in The Times. The difficulty is that a Lions tour "moves fast", leaving little time to iron out weaknesses. And since Farrell favours an "attacking structure", which requires "pin-point accuracy", he has a massive challenge if he is to get his team into the groove before the first Test takes place on 19 July. Lions tours are notoriously unpredictable, said Robert Kitson in The Guardian. After all the "months of planning", you never quite know how players from the four home nations will take to playing with each other. Thankfully, the Lions have, in Farrell, a coach who has proved during his time in charge of Ireland that he "relishes such pressure environments".

Sporting headlines

Tennis Carlos Alcaraz won his second title at Queen's, beating Jiří Lehečka in three sets in the final. Jack Draper reached the semi-finals, guaranteeing he'll be fourth seed at Wimbledon.

Football Manchester City secured a place in the knock-out stage of the FIFA Club World Cup with a 6-0 victory over Al Ain.

Royal Ascot William Buick rode Trawlerman to victory in the Gold Cup, with the fastest-ever run in the race.

Pick of the week's correspondence

Victorian values

To the Financial Times

Thomas Aubrey argues that we should return to Victorian funding models for infrastructure. And he cites London's sewage system, constructed by my great-great-grandfather. Sir Joseph Bazalgette essentially borrowed against future municipal tax revenues. In fact, his scheme did have one similarity with today's great works: overspend. Benjamin Disraeli as chancellor let him borrow £3m. Then Sir Joe deliberately "over-specified" the project, designing it for a future London population of 4.5 million when, in 1858, it was just above two million. He not only understood that the capital would grow, but also that cleansing the city would allow it to grow.

The result was that he had to go back to the chancellor in 1862 (William Gladstone) and get another £1.5m authorised. Well worth it, too.

But it shows how Crossrail, Sizewell C and HS2 are part of a noble tradition. Others can debate whether this is down to optimism or sleight of hand.
Sir Peter Bazalgette, London

NHS GPs: an overload...

To The Economist

A digital transformation of the NHS is yet another distraction from improving the efficiency of the service, especially of medical staff. IT initiatives have resulted in doctors undertaking the duties of secretaries, ward clerks and clinic coordinators, and added extra time to simple tasks such as requesting tests and writing prescriptions. This overload is a big reason for medical staff leaving the profession. In my own 40-year experience in the NHS, I have witnessed a 50% reduction in the number of patients who can be seen in a clinic because of these time-consuming IT interventions.

The focus of digitisation of the NHS has been to relieve the workload of the administrative staff. Until it relieves the workload of the medical staff, no progress will be made.
Dr Richard Motley, Cardiff

...and a shortage

To The Times

Your leading article suggests that the tight restriction on the

Exchange of the week

The roots of Israel vs. Iran

To The Daily Telegraph

Israel has been on the front line fighting Islamist tyranny for almost 50 years. Western calls for "de-escalation" in Israel's understandable offensive against that tyranny are misplaced. Never forget that the ayatollahs of Iran have spent almost five decades trying to murder the Jewish people of Israel. By contrast, the Israelis seek only to destroy Iran's genocidal regime, and hope then to live in peace with the Iranian people, as they did until the Islamists overthrew the Shah in 1979.

William Shawcross, London

To The Guardian

As Simon Tisdall writes: "The roots of major conflicts often reach back decades" – and this is true of the Israel-Iran vendetta, which dates back to the 1950s, when Israel built its nuclear facility in Dimona and Charles de Gaulle decided to end French support unless Israel joined the non-proliferation treaty (NPT).

After John F. Kennedy's ultimatum for safeguards, Israel accepted six inspections, until Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger condoned its nuclear status outside the NPT, provided Israel maintained nuclear ambiguity. Israel concealed its nuclear status, refused to adhere to the NPT as contrary to its national security interest, and adopted the "Begin Doctrine" of counter-proliferation, envisaging preventive strikes against Middle Eastern countries installing nuclear reactors that might produce nuclear weapons. Accordingly, it destroyed Iraq's and Syria's nuclear reactors and, in cooperation with the US, damaged the Iranian nuclear facilities with the Stuxnet malware.

Ambiguity allowed Israel to avoid legal restrictions on US military and economic support towards nuclear-armed states (except NPT members). The current crisis arises because Donald Trump trashed the previous nuclear agreement (which Tehran had respected) and fell into Netanyahu's trap. If, eventually, a nuclear showdown is to be avoided in the Middle East, all countries must have the right to develop nuclear energy for civil purposes and the duty to submit to NPT rules. Unless Israel joins the NPT, Iran will eventually have the bomb. In Western media there is a conspiracy of silence on this.

Corrado Pirzio-Biroli, Belgium

number of those enrolling in medical schools should be eased. In reality, there has been an increase in medical student places, but not in the number of foundation-year doctor posts when they graduate. For those fortunate enough to be trained in the first couple of years, the next bottleneck occurs where there are insufficient GP and psychiatry training posts because a significant number of these go to overseas applications. Finally, for those who do become fully trained, such as GPs, there is a significant shortage in jobs, because GP partnerships prefer (cheaper) physician associates over (more expensive) salaried GPs; consequently, NHS-trained doctors are obliged to seek work elsewhere.

The training in our universities and the NHS is

first-rate. However, if, in the event, doctors' jobs are simply to be filled by those trained overseas, then we need to consider whether we can afford the luxury of training skilled doctors whom we do not ultimately employ.
Dr Peter Joseph, GP, London

Wrong sort of prison

To The Spectator

Prue Leith makes many good points about prisons and charities, but she doesn't make the key one: that two-thirds of prisoners shouldn't be in the sort of prisons they are.

Of Britain's 90,000 inmates, about 30,000 are extremely dangerous and should be kept away from the public. About 30,000 are mentally inadequate and should probably be

under lock and key – but don't need to be in Category A, B or C prisons where they are bullied and learn nothing, not least because most of them can't read. The remaining third are addicts, and should be in rehabilitation centres where they might be cured.

Instead of building more high-security prisons at vast expense, we should build lock-up centres and rehab centres, both of which would cost less.
David Astor, Milton-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire

A stark contrast

To The Guardian

On the eighth anniversary of the Grenfell tragedy (14 June), I read that a new front door for the House of Lords has cost £9.6m; the budget in 2013 for the Grenfell refurbishment was £9.7m. Notwithstanding inflation, that sums up for me the state of governance in 21st century Britain.

Bill Wolmuth, London

Freedom of choice

To The Daily Telegraph

Miriam Gosling finds it peculiar that, while none of us chose to be born into this world, many of us feel we should be able to decide how we leave it. I rather think that the lack of choice I had at the beginning of my life strengthens my case for having some say over the end of it.

Mike Jones, London

Food for thought

To The Guardian

"When did cooks start pan-frying rather than just frying?" asks Dr Mary Oldham. About the same time that they started oven roasting.

Henry Malt, Bythorn, Cambridgeshire



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Book of the week

Lost Boys

by James Bloodworth

Atlantic 320pp £14.99

The Week Bookshop £12.99

With the “crisis of masculinity” much in the news, the publication of this book could hardly be more timely, said Thomas Peermohamed Lambert in *The Sunday Times*. In it, James Bloodworth, previously the author of an undercover study of the gig economy, sets out on a “personal journey through the manosphere”, aimed at understanding why so many young men are “disappearing into a swamp of video games, pornography, fast food and despair”. To this end, he interviews “leading lights” of the movement – a “veritable rogues’ gallery of cranks and hucksters”, many of whom are raking in vast sums by cynically inflaming masculine discontent. In London, he meets Derek Moneyberg, creator of a guide for “aspiring high-value males”. In Dubai, he meets the “dating guru” Michael Sartain (pictured with friends), who claims men will attract more female attention online if they make themselves look like “a scumbag”. While Bloodworth doesn’t quite get to the bottom of “what is causing this global efflorescence of misogyny”, he certainly “evokes it as well as anyone”. His book, apart from anything else, is an “impressive feat of research”.



In an “excellent” first chapter, Bloodworth recalls how, as a “callow 23-year-old”, he “forked out a couple of grand to take a course in seduction”, said Thomas W. Hodgkinson in *The Guardian*. “This was the era of Neil Strauss’s 2005 bestseller *The Game*” – and Bloodworth charts how that “noughties pickup culture gave rise to the manosphere proper, as men who absorbed the lessons of Strauss’s book found they still weren’t having any luck, and got angry about it”. *Lost Boys* becomes “more generic” as it progresses – largely because the material gets less personal – but it is “sobering all the same”. We learn about groups such as the Red Pill brigade, who claim the world is secretly run by women, and the toxic influencer Andrew Tate, who by 2023 was more recognisable to teenage boys than Britain’s PM Rishi Sunak. Bloodworth also helpfully busts some of the manosphere’s “pernicious myths”, said Richard Reeves in *Literary Review*. These include the false claim that women often wrongly accuse men of sexual assault, and the idea – common among incels, or involuntary celibates – that a “minority of men are getting all the women”. Occasionally, Bloodworth “goes astray” with his facts – as when, in a discussion of rates of male violence against women, he “omits to mention that these have been trending downwards”. But overall, this is a “vivid” and absorbing look at one of contemporary society’s most disturbing trends.

The Big Hop

by David Rooney

Chatto & Windus 336pp £22

The Week Bookshop £19.99

In May 1919, a competition took place to see who could “fly the first nonstop flight across the Atlantic”, said Julia Flynn Siler in *The Wall Street Journal*. Four British teams sailed with their disassembled planes to Newfoundland, then a British colony. Their aim was to cross the ocean (taking advantage of the prevailing westerly wind) and touch down on the west coast of Ireland. As David Rooney points out in his splendid account of the “Big Hop”, most of those taking part had fought in the First World War. And all were “stereotypically decent chaps”, said Neil Armstrong in the *Daily Mail*. “Ripping”, one pilot responded upon being invited to take part. “Machine absolutely top-hole”, another cabled to London after a successful test flight.



The immediate motivation of these men was a prize, posted by the *Daily Mail*, of £10,000 (about £660,000 in today’s money), said Gerard DeGroot in *The Times*. But they were also “driven by the purest form of heroic adventure” – what one journalist called “sublime insanity”. Their open-cockpit planes were rickety affairs, and the take-off area was far from ideal, being “littered with bogs, ditches, rocks and fences”. One plane crashed on take-off; a second flight was swiftly aborted; and a third was forced to ditch in the water, halfway across the Atlantic (miraculously, not a single pilot died). But a fourth plane – a Vickers Vimy biplane flown by John Alcock and Arthur Brown – completed the crossing, despite contending with a “cornucopia of disaster”, including an exploding exhaust pipe and a “spiralling dive through dense fog”. Alcock and Brown’s triumph has “faded from memory”, overshadowed by the later exploits of Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart. Rooney’s book, a “delectable serving of escapist nostalgia”, does a superb job of correcting this “neglect”.

Novel of the week

Love Forms

by Claire Adam

Faber 304pp £16.99

The Week Bookshop £14.99



Claire Adam’s 2019 debut novel, *Golden Child*, was a “propulsive” story about a child being kidnapped in Trinidad, said Alex Peake-Tomkinson in *The Spectator*. Her “ostensibly quieter” follow-up is a sensitive exploration of love and motherhood. Dawn is a divorced white Trinidadian who lives in London and works for an estate agent, having abandoned a medical career. Four decades earlier, aged 16, she gave up a baby girl for adoption, after a brief fling with a tourist in Trinidad. Now bitterly regretting this, she has spent years trying to find her daughter.

This novel could easily have been a straightforward story of “will-she-won’t-she find her long-lost child”, said Julie Myerson in *The Guardian*. But thanks to the “subtlety and finesse” of the telling, it turns into something both “more mundane and more unsettling”. Adam is brilliant at evoking the “unsaid, the half-said, and the way feelings will unravel and morph over the years”. And as her story builds to its climax, it proves just “as gripping as any thriller”. *Golden Child* was an astounding debut; this new work is “every bit as alive”.

THE WEEK Bookshop

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Opening times: Monday to Saturday 9am-5.30pm and Sunday 10am-4pm

Musical: Lovestuck

Theatre Royal Stratford East, London E15 (020-8534 0310). Until 12 July Running time: 2hrs 20mins ★★★★★

“Readers of a sensitive disposition” might want to look away now, said Clive Davis in *The Times*, because it is not possible to describe this new musical at Stratford East without “wading through a vast expanse of very British toilet humour”. Created by the team behind the hit comedy podcast *My Dad Wrote a Porno*, *Lovestuck* is based a story – which went viral online in 2017 – about a young woman who produced an unflushable poo while on a first date. Her solution to this embarrassment was to wrap it up and throw it out of her date’s bathroom window. Alas, it became wedged between two panes of glass, and she then became stuck upside down as she tried to retrieve it. “There’s a hell of a lot of poo chat, but if you can get on board the toilet train, you’re sure to leave laughing,” said Anya Ryan in *The Guardian*. *Lovestuck* is funny and sweet, and boasts a “powerhouse score” in which “every number is a hit”.



“If you can get on board the toilet train, you’re sure to leave laughing”

date Peter, “possesses a nervy, self-deprecating charisma that makes you root for this bumbling charmer”, said Alun Hood on *What’s on Stage*. Both convey the “rapture” of making a romantic connection, and the “gut-wrenching insecurities” that come with it. There are some great secondary characters; the songs are witty as well as catchy; and the script “unerringly finds the middle ground between snarl and sweetness”.

Well, I’m afraid I couldn’t get on board, said Nick Curtis in *The London Standard*. I like

a “scatological gag” as much as the next person, but the characterisation here feels “toilet-paper thin”. Still, “honesty compels me to say that I was humming the closing number, *Everybody’s Got Their Shit*, on the long cycle ride home”.

The week’s other opening

The Ministry of Lesbian Affairs

Kiln Theatre, London NW6 (020-7328 1000). Until 12 July Iman Qureshi’s “exuberant” musical play about a lesbian choir starts as a “good, old-fashioned underdog story before exploring sexuality, homophobia and trans identity”. It is “genuinely heart-warming, and utterly winning with it” (*Guardian*).

“I confidently predict a big future for this warm-hearted piece,” agreed Fiona Mountford in *The i Paper*. Ambra Caserotti, drafted in at the last minute after the original lead was injured, delivered a terrifically polished press-night performance as the nerdy, self-critical Lucy. And Shane O’Riordan, who plays her equally nerdy

Podcasts... on future wars, current crises, and ageing

Is Britain as prepared for war as it should be? Some would argue that successive governments have allowed our military capacities to wither, leaving us at risk, said Fiona Sturges in the *FT*. Now, Deborah Haynes, the security and defence editor at Sky News, has come up with a terrific way of illuminating the implications of this: a podcast that simulates a national emergency in which Russia attacks the UK – based on the kinds of exercises that take place in Whitehall. **The Wargame** boasts an impressive cast of participants. Jack Straw reprises his role as foreign secretary; Amber Rudd returns as home secretary; former defence secretary Ben Wallace takes on the part of PM. They’re joined by “assorted ex-bigwigs in law, defence and national security”. The podcast is “very talky”, and it can be hard to keep track of who’s who. “But as a piece of propaganda for increased defence spending in the UK”, it is “smart, effective, and chilling to boot. One can only hope Vladimir Putin isn’t listening.”

I found *The Wargame* “marvellously compelling” and “frighteningly plausible”, said James Marriott in *The Times*. I was also impressed by **The Crisis Room**, a current-affairs show from Global that’s “refreshingly serious” and “seriously good” – and which also features Rudd. On this one, she is joined by Mark Urban, the historian, journalist and defence expert who



Katherine Ryan hosts frank discussions about getting older

was diplomatic editor of *Newsnight* until 2024, and former senior CIA operations officer Marc Polymeropoulos. Highly decorated, he was at the agency for 26 years, and specialised in counterterrorism. Their brief is to discuss “the biggest crises shaping the UK and the world”. Alas, it is a long agenda, but these three clearly know their stuff. “I suspect when fresh disasters hit, the politician, the journalist and the intelligence officer will be the team we turn to” from now on.

One of the best podcasts of the year so far is **What’s My Age Again? with Katherine Ryan**, said *The Guardian*. In each episode, she interviews a celebrity guest about their age, their attitude to ageing and its impact on their personal or professional lives. She also gets them to take a “nifty test”, which involves taking a blood sample to analyse their biological age (which, depending on how well your body is faring, can differ significantly from your chronological age). The results are then discussed with biologist Dr Nichola Conlon, who also sheds light on the science of longevity. Guests so far have included former professional footballer Jill Scott, pop star Sophie Ellis-Bextor and comedian Romesh Ranganathan. “It feels low-stakes enough for casual listening, but – like most things Ryan is involved with – that initial breeziness belies its frankness”, as guests open up about adoption, addiction and more.

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



28 Years Later

1hr 55mins (15)

Danny Boyle-directed sequel to 28 Days Later

★★★

It's more than 20 years since director Danny Boyle and writer Alex Garland "stunned the world" with their dystopian "masterpiece" *28 Days Later* (2002), said George Simpson in the Daily Express. A follow-up, in 2007, did not set the world alight; yet now they are back, with the first in a new trilogy of sequels – and I reckon it is "easily the best" film of the year so far. As the title suggests, it is now 28 years since a "Rage" virus rapidly spread through the UK, turning its inhabitants into blood-thirsty monsters. Britain has been abandoned to its fate by the rest of the world, which has imposed a strict maritime exclusion zone around it. However, a small community has managed to isolate itself from the plague on the island of Lindisfarne, where they subsist as though in the Middle Ages.

Our hero is 12-year-old Spike, who is taken by his father (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) on an "ultra-violent rite-of-passage" trip to the mainland where he must learn how to destroy the infected humans, said Phil de Semlyen in Time Out. These have changed since 2002, and now range from relatively easy-to-kill variants who crawl on all fours to terrifyingly large and powerful "alphas". The scenes in which father and son hunt and are hunted are visceral and "thrilling"; but the film takes a more contemplative turn when, about halfway through, Ralph Fiennes appears as a former doctor, with – perhaps – the ability to cure Spike's ailing mother (Jodie Comer). Shot in part on iPhone cameras, the film is never boring, said Stephanie Zacharek in Time, and Fiennes in particular is "terrific". But the ending, involving a Jimmy Savile-worshipping cult, is "dumb". The movie contains all the elements that made the original "great", yet somehow "adds up to less".



F1: The Movie

2hrs 35mins (12A)

Brad Pitt stars as a racing driver in this fun but formulaic corporate tie-in

★★

You can't fault the logic behind *F1*, said Clarisse Loughrey in The Independent. Strapping an ageing A-lister into a fighter jet for *Top Gun: Maverick* translated into megabucks at the box office, so why not hire the team behind that film, including director Joseph Kosinski, and get them to pull off another summer blockbuster, this time involving fast cars. Alas, anyone expecting the same kind of thrills will be disappointed: *F1* offers "the spiritually bone-dry, abrasive inverse to all" of that earlier film's "giddy pleasures". In place of Tom Cruise's Maverick, our hero is Brad Pitt's Sonny, a former 1990s champion who is all washed up – until his former F1 comrade Ruben (Javier Bardem) gets in touch, and begs him to come to the aid of the failing team he now manages.

You can guess what follows, said Robbie Collin in The Daily Telegraph. Sonny's "unorthodox" strategies pay dividends, and the team moves up "from the back of the grid at Silverstone to jockeying for pole position at Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina". So the film is certainly formulaic, but Pitt is "puppyishly charming", even if he does not achieve Cruise levels of magnetism; Britain's Damson Idris provides good support as an "impulsive" rookie; and though *F1* suffers for being a "corporate tie-in", it's well made and offers plenty of thrills, even for those who are not F1 fans. Yes, it is terrifically shot and edited, said Nicholas Barber on BBC Culture. But the story makes little sense – our hero is so relaxed, cocky and brilliant, you wonder why his career was ever on the skids; and the film's attitude to F1 is so "fawning", it has the feel of a glossy promotional video. Indeed, it is so intent on being positive about Formula 1 and its milieu, there isn't even a "proper antagonist".



Red Path

1hr 41mins (15)

Harrowing drama about an Islamic State atrocity

★★★

Made by the Tunisian director Lotfi Achour, and inspired by real events, *Red Path* forces its audiences to confront the "kind of shocking political violence many would rather ignore", said Chris Shields in Sight and Sound. The story concerns two boys – Nizar (Yassine Samouni) and his younger cousin Achraf (Ali Helali) – who walk into the mountains near their home in central Tunisia to savour their beauty, and to find water for Nizar's goats to drink. There, they stumble on an Islamic State camp: the terrorists accuse Nizar of being an army spy, and (off camera) behead him. Achraf is then ordered to take his cousin's head home, to serve as a "warning" to the village.

Initially, Achraf cannot bring himself to reveal the appalling truth to Nizar's loving family, said Kevin Maher in The Times, so he carries the head around in a duffel bag and behaves as though nothing has happened. When he finally comes clean, Nizar's father makes space for his son's skull in the family freezer, waiting for such a time when it can be reunited with the rest of his body. Achraf then becomes close to the girl with whom his dead cousin was in love, and starts to communicate with Nizar's ghost. Undoubtedly, the film has powerful moments – but none of this really coheres "as a single storytelling vision", and all that is left is the horror. Not everything in *Red Path* works, agreed Peter Bradshaw in The Guardian. But it is "well acted" and strives to communicate the family's "unbearable grief" as they are hounded by the press and ignored by the authorities. Overall, it's a sensitive portrayal of a deeply harrowing event.

Outrageous: glossy drama based on the lives of the Mitford sisters

Although it is based on Mary S. Lovell's biography of the Mitford family, this new drama "could easily be mistaken for a work of fiction", said Megan Bull in the Radio Times. The aristocratic Mitford sisters (Nancy, Diana, Decca, Pamela, Deborah and Unity) were almost implausibly "outrageous", and their antics – political and romantic – enthralled the public in the 1930s. Narrated by Nancy (Bessie Carter), the series traces the family's fortunes from the Wall Street crash to the eve of the Second World War, by which point Diana (Joanna Vanderham) had eloped with Oswald Mosley, while Unity (Shannon Watson) had become a devotee of Adolf Hitler. The series is full of "fun, fashion and froth", but it also poses a serious question: "Could you stand by your family, no matter what?"



Bessie Carter as Nancy

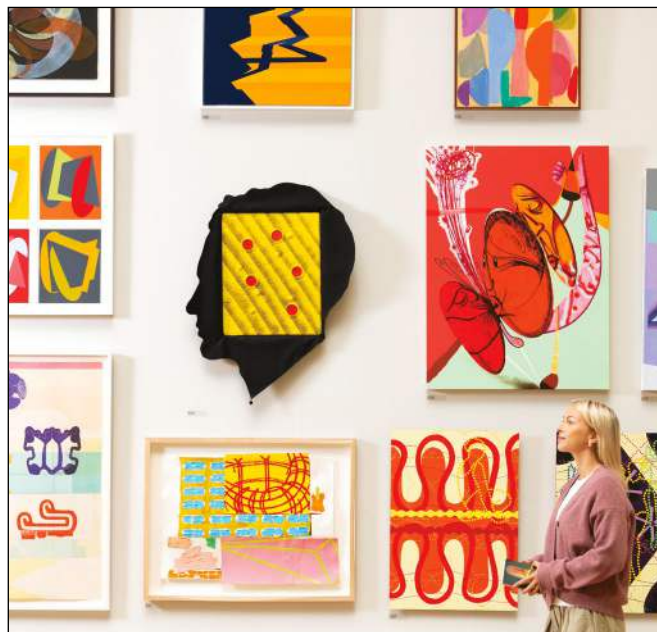
It's pretty watchable, said Ben Dowell in The Times. Through Nancy's eyes, we observe the sisters' "absurdities", while getting a sense of the "warmth and love" that existed between them. And while we're not expected to sympathise with Diana or Unity, we do get insights into what drew them to fascism. I'm afraid I found it "cartoony", said Rachel Cooke in The New Statesman. The acting is deft, and if you like looking at clothes and country houses, you'll find it a feast. But it all flies by so fast, context is lost, and neither Nancy's cleverness, nor Decca's turn to communism, are properly explored. If you're interested in the Mitfords, you won't need this primer; if you're not, you may just be baffled by this soapish confection. Available to watch on Freeview

Exhibition of the week **Royal Academy Summer Exhibition**

Royal Academy, Piccadilly, London W1 (020-7300 8090, royalacademy.org.uk). Until 17 August

The Royal Academy's annual Summer Exhibition "can be an overwhelming experience", said Nancy Durrant in *The Times*. Now in its 257th year, it is the world's largest open-submission exhibition; efforts sent in by the general public are mixed in with works by world-famous artists. This latest iteration contains no fewer than 1,729 individual pieces – and by rights, it should be a mess. But its co-ordinator, architect and Royal Academician Farshid Moussavi, has initiated an improvement so "vast" that it should become a staple in years to come. Moussavi has broken with convention and done away with the Summer Exhibition's traditionally "crammed" architecture gallery, scattering offerings from architects around the Academy's rooms and thus integrating them with "the paintings, prints, drawings and sculptures" that make up the rest of this teeming "jamboree". The rethink means that everything has "room to breathe", while Moussavi's "cool architect's eye" means that the whole show "flows easily" and feels "fresh, open, bright".

Better still, said Jonathan Jones in *The Guardian*, the standard of the art on display is far superior to the Summer Exhibition's norm. The masterful German painter Georg Baselitz, for instance, fields a picture of an "upside-down stag". The Turner Prize-winning conceptualist Cornelia Parker has installed a number of convex mirrors on one gallery's ceiling, "reflecting you and the



This year's summer "jamboree" feels "fresh, open, bright"

floor in radical foreshortening". In the same room, Tamara Kostianovsky suspends a menagerie of "eviscerated animal carcasses" made of textiles and hung on chains. Best of all is Tracey Emin, who has provided a shockingly dark painting of the crucifixion: hung on the cross, Jesus "moves towards you like a shark". With clear echoes of the "intense, macabre" art of renaissance painter Lucas Cranach, this extraordinary work is "the greatest" British painting since the death of Lucian Freud.

But there's a lot of dross, too, said Evgenia Siokos in *The Daily Telegraph*. A case in point is to be found in the RA's courtyard, where artist Ryan Gander has installed a set of monumental rubber balls emblazoned with "banal questions": "What do animals dream of?", for example, or "Will time tell?". "The only question I could ask myself is, if I managed to unchain one of these giant balls and roll it in front of a bus on Piccadilly, how loud a POP would it make?". I don't think Moussavi's decision to intersperse art and architecture really works, said Mary Richardson in *Building Design*: the quieter, more technical architectural models and sketches are drowned out by "the more immediately emotionally and aesthetically engaging artworks". Still, there's "a decent amount of not bad art" here, and some "beautiful" architectural drawings, courtesy of big names including David Chipperfield and Material Cultures. Overall, it's "a good year to visit the summer show".

Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

David Hockney

at Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert

We celebrate David Hockney for the bizarre blend of modern mannerism he produced in Californian exile: his deathless portrait of Ossie Clark and Celia Birtwell, for instance, or his glorious pool paintings. But his juvenilia, produced when he was just out of college in a gloomy London where homosexuality had yet to be decriminalised, is just as impressive. This show brings together a rapturous selection of works from the early 1960s, ranging from a reimagining of Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress*, here transposed to Manhattan, to murky (but frequently funny) semi-abstract canvases dotted with slogans and the distinct iconography (love hearts, vaguely phallic shapes) that peppered the painter's work of the period. It's an embarrassment of riches that



Two Friends (in a Cul-de-Sac), 1963, detail

testifies to Hockney's uncanny ability to shift register – from caricature to faithful copies of Renaissance drawings, say – in a single passage. You'll get more from this than anything he's shown in Paris or London of late. Prices likely high.

38 Bury Street, London SW1 (020-7839 7600). Until 18 July

Mona Lisa: pay per view

Visitors wanting to see the *Mona Lisa* can expect to pay a supplement in addition to the basic entrance fee for the Louvre, when it reopens after its renovation, says Simon Calder in *The Independent*. Work on the "Louvre New Renaissance" will begin next year, with some parts of the €800m renovation continuing until 2031. The Louvre's director, Laurence des Cars, recently confirmed that da Vinci's painting is set to get its own 3,000sq m "Mona Lisa trail" situated beneath the main courtyard. Other proposed changes include the addition of a new entrance for visitors. General entrance fees will cost €30 (£25.50) for non-EU citizens, while European visitors will visit at a discounted rate of €22 (£19). It is not known how much the additional *Mona Lisa* fee will be. In a separate development, the Louvre was forced to close last Monday, said *The Art Newspaper*, when staff walked out in protest against overcrowded galleries and "worsening visiting conditions".





Best books... Axel Scheffler

The award-winning illustrator of *The Gruffalo* and *Zog* chooses five favourites. His new picture book, *Welcome* (Alison Green Books £12.99), is out now, with a donation to the non-profit *Three Peas* for every copy sold

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble

by William Steig, 1969 (Puffin £7.99). New Yorker cartoonist William Steig's picture books are all wonderfully told and often deal with transformations: such as what do you do if you find yourself being turned into a pebble. I love the expressions Steig puts into his creatures with simple, perfect lines, and how animals stand in for humans. My hero!

The Shrinking of Treehorn

by Florence Parry Heide and Edward Gorey, 1971 (out of print). This story perfectly portrays the feeling of powerlessness in childhood. Little Treehorn finds himself shrinking – no magic potions

involved – and nobody cares... least of all his parents. Still, it's a humorous story with exquisite drawings by Gorey.

The Member of the Wedding

by Carson McCullers, 1946 (Penguin £9.99). My number one coming-of-age story. I still have my 1974 German edition. Frankie is a 12-year-old girl in the American south and McCullers beautifully describes the pains, dreams and feeling of exclusion that can come with growing up. There are very sad moments, but it ends with "an instant shock of happiness". I wonder what kind of adult Frankie might have become – hopefully one with a happier life than her creator.

Hitler, Stalin, Mum and Dad

by Daniel Finkelstein, 2023 (William Collins £10.99). I'm deeply worried by the lack of knowledge of the horrors of the 20th century and shocked by the rise of antisemitism. Finkelstein's grandparents experienced both at first hand. This is their story and everybody should read it.

Map: Collected and Last Poems

by Wisława Szymborska, 2015 (HarperCollins £12.99). My favourite poet and the worthy winner of a Nobel Prize. This wise Polish woman covers the spectrum of all things human, and her poems are full of wonder. Probably a good book to have on a desert island.

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

Game of Thrones star Rose Leslie takes the title role in a new version of Somerset Maugham's sharp-witted comedy **The Constant Wife**, adapted by playwright Laura Wade with music by Jamie Cullum. Until 2 August, RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon (rsc.org.uk).

If you see one art show this summer, make it this one, says The Daily Telegraph of **Jenny Saville: The Anatomy of Painting**, a "stunning" retrospective of the British artist's portraits, from the monumental female nudes of her early career to new work. Until 7 September, National Portrait Gallery, London WC2 (npg.org.uk).

Book now

Olivia Chaney singing Henry Purcell and the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra's tribute to Abba are just some of the highlights of this year's **Summer at Snape** programme. 26 July-31 August, Snape Maltings, Suffolk (brittenpearsarts.org).

With speakers ranging from comedian Stewart Lee to Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop



Jenny Saville's *Reverse* (2002/03)

of Canterbury, the **Idler Festival** promises to be every bit as eclectic as the magazine that hosts it. 11-13 July, Fenton House and Garden, London NW6 (idler.co.uk).

Don't miss James Graham's "state-of-the-nation masterpiece" **Punch** – based on the true story of a teenager's life-changing act of violence – when it returns to the West End (Daily Telegraph). 22 September-29 November, Apollo Theatre, London W1 (punchtheplay.com).

Television

Programmes

Albert Speer: Hitler's Architect of Lies

German historian Heike B. Görtemaker introduces a never-before-broadcast 1971 interview with Hitler's architect. Mon 30 Jun, BBC4 21:00 (90mins).

Scrublands

Season two of the Australian crime drama. Hoping for a quiet holiday, Martin is perplexed by a call from a childhood friend. Mon 30 Jun and Tue 1 Jul, BBC2 21:00 (45mins and 50mins respectively).

Storyville: The Srebrenica Tape

Documentary about the return of a young Bosnian woman to the town of her birth to learn more about her father, who was killed in the 1995 massacre. Tue 1 Jul, BBC4 22:00 (90mins).

Mary Earps: Queen of Stops

Profile of the Lionesses' goalkeeper, with family, teammates and Earps talking about her rise to the top. Wed 2 Jul, BBC1 22:45 (45mins).

Films

North by Northwest

(1959) Cary Grant stars as the ad-man on the run after a case of mistaken identity in Hitchcock's classic thriller. Sun 29 Jun, BBC2 13:50 (130mins).

Past Lives

(2023) In the Canadian director Celine Song's critically acclaimed drama, two friends who met as children in South Korea are reunited after many years apart. Sun 29 Jun, BBC2 22:00 (100mins).

The Quiet Girl

(2022) Adaptation of Clare Keegan's poignant novella *Foster*, about a young girl sent to stay with relatives in rural Ireland. Tue 1 Jul, Film4 23:20 (110mins).

New to streaming TV

Sally Documentary about Nasa astronaut Sally Ride, who faced down sexism and intense media scrutiny to become the first American woman in space. On Disney+.

Serena Williams: In the Arena

This eight-part series tells Williams's story through the crucial tournaments of her career, and is a "perfect prelude to Wimbledon" (FT). On BBC iPlayer.

The Archers: what happened last week

Suspecting Brian of infidelity because of recent secretive behaviour, Miranda says she wants to end things. When he confesses he's been taking bridge lessons with Martyn, Miranda challenges him to a tournament. As Pip and Stella plan a picnic, the school calls to say that Rosie has upset another child – Pip doesn't believe it. Kate is excited about becoming a grandmother; Jakob tells her he doesn't want to go on Peggy's family holiday. With Fallon off and a stock order missing, it's chaos at The Bull, but the village shop saves the day. At the bridge tournament, Brian is sure that Justin is up to something. The evening goes well for Brian and Miranda, and they admit they love one another. Stella tries to talk sense into Justin about rewilding Borchester Land; she feels she must tell Brian – Justin says he'll wait until after the board meeting to announce his plan. There's anger when Justin unveils his rewilding plans at the meeting – Brian is appalled that Stella knew and didn't tell him. Stella tells Justin that his shock announcement may have threatened her job.

Houses in the east of England



▲ **Norfolk:** Willow House, Holme Lane. A striking country house with attractively landscaped gardens and an impressive lake, set within grounds of approx. 10 acres. Main suite, 4 further beds (1 en suite), shower room, kitchen, 3 receps, study, garden room, cart lodge, outbuildings, double garage. OIRO £1.75m; Sowerbys (01603-761441).



◀ **Norfolk:** The Paddocks, Little Dunham. An attractive Georgian house with two cottages and outbuildings in grounds of 5 acres. It is on the market for the first time since 1970. 5 beds, family bath, kitchen/dining room, 2 receps, 1-bed annexe, 1-bed cottage, garages, stables, workshop, gardens, natural pond. £995,000; Bedfords (01328-730500).



▲ **Cambridgeshire:** The Emplins, Sandy. This enchanting Grade II* former hall house has been restored to preserve its architectural heritage. 5 beds (2 en suite), 2 baths, kitchen, 3 receps, gardens. £699,950; Knight Frank (01223-972911).

▶ **Norfolk:** Brandiston Hall, Norwich. Grade II country house with 17th century origins. 6 beds (1 en suite), 3 baths, kitchen, 3 receps, 8 acres of gardens and grounds, outbuildings, double garage. £1.7m; Savills (01603-229229).





◀ **Suffolk:** The West Front, Bury St Edmunds. An impressive Grade I property within the remains of the Abbey of St Edmund, constructed during the 12th century. 4 beds (1 en suite), family bath, kitchen/breakfast room, 2 receps, communal garden and courtyard. £825,000; Bedfords (01284-769999).

▼ **Essex:** Watts Folly, Arkesden. An enchanting Grade II cottage in a prominent position within a sought-after village. 3 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, 4 receps, laundry room, garage, landscaped garden, greenhouse. £750,000; Cheffins (01799-523656).



◀ **Norfolk:** The Clock Tower, Old Hunstanton. Grand Victorian coach house within the historic grounds of Old Hunstanton Hall, in approx. 2.4 acres. 5 beds, 4 baths, 4 receps, kitchen/dining room, outbuildings, gardens, moat. £1.7m; Sowerbys (01485-533666).



▲ **Norfolk:** Chapel House, Botesdale. Originally founded as a grammar school, the property is steeped in history, character and charm. 7 beds (1 en suite), 2 baths, kitchen, 3 receps, cellar, 1-bed annexe, gardens. £1.25m; Sowerbys (01603-761441).

LEISURE

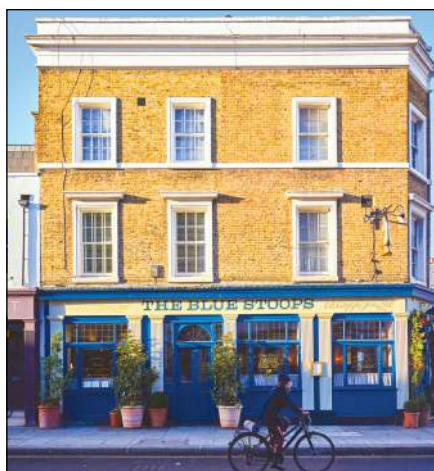
Food & Drink

Ragù Unit 25, Cargo 2, Museum Street, Wapping Wharf, Bristol (0117-911 0218)

Bristol's Wapping Wharf, with its many shops and restaurants, has become a "true independent food destination", says Grace Dent in *The Guardian*. Its newest addition is Ragù, a "cool, minimal, romantic ode to Italian cooking" housed in a converted shipping container. Owned by Mark and Karen Chapman (who also run nearby Cor), it offers what could be "some of the most skilful cooking anywhere in Britain right now". Our meal began with crisp, lightly battered artichoke fritters, served with "punchy aioli". Then came *crespelle* (a type of cheese-smothered pancake) in tomato *brodo* – a dish that isn't as humble as its sounds. It was the "richest, most drinkable-by-the-bucket tomato *brodo* I've ever tasted". Of the mains, the "star of the show" was Ashton Court venison, "cooked rare but as soft as butter", accompanied by "pungent gorgonzola with bone marrow butter". The puds here are excellent too, and service is "fantastically prompt". It's only summer, but Ragù might well be "my favourite new restaurant of 2025". *About £40 a head, plus drinks and service.*

Royal Nawaab Pyramid Kings Valley, Stockport (0161-566 1710)

This "vast" Indian-Pakistani restaurant on the outskirts of Manchester is a place that "laughs in the face of the challenges facing hospitality", says Jay Rayner in the FT. This "steel-blue glass cathedral" was previously an office of the



The Blue Stoops: "comfort in spades"

Co-operative Bank, which has been converted into a restaurant and banqueting hall at a "reputed" cost of £15m. Upstairs are three banqueting suites that, collectively, can accommodate 1,250 people, while the ground-floor restaurant seats more than 400. Like the two Royal Nawaabs in London (one in Perivale, the other in Ilford), this is a buffet restaurant – though "that meagre word doesn't do justice to the gargantuan offering". For £29.99 a head, excluding drinks (all of which are non-alcoholic), diners can choose between more than 100 dishes: "a parade of pakoras and tikkas, birianis, masalas and the rest". Many are "crowd-pleasers", but there are less familiar dishes

too, including lamb *paya* (lamb trotters in an "intensely restorative soup-like broth) and *haleem* ("an extraordinary concoction of lamb in lentils flavoured with ginger, green chillies and lemon, cooked down for so long that it has turned into a paste-like soup"). Overall, the quality is excellent; I can understand why the place is packed. I have to admit that while I have "sneered at the idea of buffets in the past", this place is a "classy rebuttal".

The Blue Stoops 127-129 Kensington Church Street, London W8 (07715-834474)

With its "nooks and crannies", dark wood panelling and "handsome blue-tiled bar", this corner pub in London's Notting Hill offers "comfort in spades", says William Sitwell in *The Daily Telegraph*. And it has a menu to match, based around English classics. On our visit, devilled eggs, their fillings "cleverly topped with orange fish roe to mimic the yolk", made for a "gentle starter". Rabbit croquettes were "crisp to bite into, warming and gamey within". For his main course, my son had a "very fine ham hock pie", while I enjoyed the "lunch of champions": soft and earthy braised lamb, covered in a herb-laden green sauce. Deeply sumptuous and comforting, it was "like a magic potion for happiness". A slab of "nicely stinky" blue cheese, and a shared pud of meringue, vanilla ice cream and chocolate sauce, completed a delicious lunch. *Three-course lunch for two: £113, excl. drinks and service.*

Recipe of the week: Thai fish pie with crispy turmeric potatoes

This Lancashire hotpot-meets-fish-pie, by way of Chiang Mai, is one of my favourite things to make for a crowd, says Gudreep Loyal. It celebrates the affinity of Thai green paste for seafood – a symbiotic marriage of deliciousness that never fails to delight – with a golden-yellow crispy crust that is sure to impress

Serves 4

50g desiccated (dried) coconut 30g lemongrass 30g fresh galangal or ginger root zest of 1 and juice of 2 limes
3 tbsp Thai green paste 1 tsp fish sauce 350g uncooked fish pie mix, in bite-sized pieces 150g uncooked peeled prawns (shrimp)
2 large celery sticks, finely diced 50g floury potatoes 300ml coconut milk 2 tbsp cornflour (cornstarch) pinch of caster sugar
handful of Thai basil leaves, chopped 50g butter 1 tsp ground turmeric 1 tsp nigella seeds fine sea salt

- Dry-toast the coconut in a frying pan over a medium-low heat for 2-3mins until it turns golden brown but not burnt, then tip onto a plate to cool.
- Next, make a paste in a small blender or grinder by whizzing together the lemongrass, galangal, lime juice and zest, and 1½ tsp of salt – add a splash of water if needed. Pour the paste into a bowl, then whisk through the Thai green paste and fish sauce.
- Add the fish pie mix, prawns, coconut and diced celery. Stir well, then pour into the base of a deep-sided 18x22cm pie dish. Preheat the oven to 180°C fan.
- Meanwhile, use a mandoline or very sharp knife to slice the potatoes into very thin round discs 1.5-2mm thick, then set aside.



- Next, whisk together the coconut milk, cornflour and a pinch of sugar, until fully combined. Pour over the fish and prawns, then scatter the chopped basil on top. Layer the potato on top, overlapping into a spiral design to cover the filling completely.
- Melt the butter in a saucepan with the turmeric, nigella seeds and a pinch of salt, whisking well, then brush over the top of the potatoes.
- Place the fish pie on a baking tray to catch any spillage and bake for 35-40mins, until cooked through and crispy golden on top. Cover with foil if the top is browning too quickly and, if you like it extra-crispy, finish under a hot grill for 3-5mins.
- Remove the pie from the oven and allow to rest for 10mins before diving in. Serve with a green salad.

Taken from Flavour Heroes: 15 Modern Pantry Ingredients to Amplify Your Cooking by Gudreep Loyal (Quadrille £27). Photography by Patricia Niven. To buy from The Week Bookshop for £23.99 (incl. p&p), call 020-3176 3835 or visit theweekbookshop.co.uk.

Some of the best... garden seating



▲ **Habitat x Scion Folding Director Chair** Crafted from durable FSC-certified eucalyptus, with a comfortable canvas sling, this seat folds up for easy storage (£50; habitat.co.uk).

▼ **Take-a-Break Lounge Chair with Footstool** Put your feet up with this quirky lounge chair with matching footstool. It has a steel frame with rope, and comes in four colours (£145; perchandparrow.com).



► **Groove Arm Chair** British designer Tom Dixon's first outdoor collection includes this example, made from weatherproof and corrosion-resistant aluminium (sale price £206; tomdixon.net).



► **Risholmen Wing Chair** Made from easy-care plastic rattan with a powder-coated steel frame, this wing chair is a "woven work of art", and thanks to its high back and arms, it is supportive and comfortable (£229; ikea.com).



► **Eos Outdoor Side Chair** Part of the Eos outdoor furniture collection by designer Matthew Hilton, this lightweight stackable chair is made from powder-coated aluminium (sale price £196; heals.com).



▲ **Cali Metal Sun Lounger** This yellow lounger has a textilene seat and a powder-coated steel frame with five reclining positions (£45; habitat.co.uk).



► **High Tech Chair** Designed by Swedish architect Nisse Strinning, this modern chair is made of powder-coated steel. Durable and practical, the chairs can be stacked together for easy storage (from £213; grythyttan stal mobler.com).



▲ **Turquoise Bench** This mango wood, Indian-painted three-seater bench will brighten up a shady spot. It is 157cm long and 48cm wide (£900; rajtentclubshop.com).

Tips of the week... on in-store clothes shopping

- Dress to make it quick in the changing room: slip-on shoes, say, and shirts without fiddly buttons. If you're after a dress, wear one; otherwise wear loose separates.
- Shop early as stores will be less crowded, rails better stocked and staff less tired.
- Always pick up the item you want to try in two sizes: the one you think/hope you are and one size up from that.
- It's easy to end up with too many party outfits or boring basics. Look for pieces you can wear every day to make you feel special. Interesting, but not dramatic.
- Don't assume certain things won't suit you. Give novel styles a try. But avoid colours you never wear. If in doubt, stick to navy or white – timeless neutrals.
- Ask: when will I wear this? And what will I wear it with? If a new dress requires new shoes and a new coat, maybe think again.
- Be cautious of the sale rail; it isn't a bargain unless you love it.

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN

And for those who have everything...



Turn on this mini AI voice recorder and it will capture and transcribe your conversations. The Plaud NotePin is less than 5cm long and can be worn as a necklace or wristband; it can also be clipped or pinned to clothing. Audio is transcribed and summarised on the Plaud app. **£150; uk.plaud.ai**

SOURCE: STUFF

Apps... the best free apps for learning a language

Duolingo offers relatively easy lessons in more than 40 languages. It can be quite addictive, and has a "streak" feature to keep you motivated. There's no limit to how many languages you can learn for free, but the quantity of material varies by language. The paid version has lots of bonus content.

Busuu has courses in 13 languages with well-structured, culturally relevant lessons, using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It also has paid options.

Quizlet enables you to make digital flash cards and browse those made by other people. It has a special feature for grammar and vocab learning. You have to pay to access quite a lot of it.

With a colourful layout and lots of images, **Drops** is good for visual learners and those learning a language with a new alphabet. It offers 50 different languages, but non-paying users have to wait ten hours between lessons.

SOURCES: PC MAG/CNET

This week's dream: a tall ship adventure in the Mediterranean

There's something "magical" about sailing tall ships, says Amy Bell in the *Financial Times*. It lies partly in the majesty of the vessels themselves, partly in a sense of their long history, and partly in more immediate realities: the absorbing nature of the sailing itself; the bonding moments of joint endeavour; and the sheer pleasure of being out at sea beneath the Sun and stars, in fair weather and foul. For my first voyage, I booked a berth on *Blue Clipper*, a three-masted gaff rig schooner aboard which guests – including complete beginners like me – are encouraged, but by no means obliged, to help out. Built in Sweden in 1991 for the cognac house Hennessy, the ship is now owned by Maybe Sailing, a not-for-profit organisation that provides youth sail training on its sister ship *T.S. Maybe*.

Blue Clipper spends winters in the Caribbean and summers in Scotland, but I chose a ten-day springtime voyage from Portimão in southern Portugal, along Spain's south coast and up to Monaco. There were 20 people – guests and crew – aboard,



The Blue Clipper's guests are encouraged, but not obliged, to get involved

including a chef who prepared all the meals. The ship has a pleasant "wood-furnished" interior, a "comfortable" saloon, and en-suite guest cabins. The crew took care to show me the ropes, and I was surprised by how quickly I came to feel as though I was part of the team, helping to keep watch at night, "where you spend hours talking under the stars", and taking turns at the helm. We were lucky with the weather, but I was warned that things on board can sometimes get "as rough as dogs" – the ship has no stabilisers, unlike a "modern-day superyacht". It was wondrous to sail up the mountainous coast of Ibiza under a full Moon, and to drop anchor off Mallorca below "rugged green cliffs and a blue sky brushed with soft pink". But most spirit-soaring was the moment a pod of dolphins appeared alongside, leaping and splashing about. It is the kind of "wild" happening you might miss if you weren't "actively involved in the sailing of a ship". *The trip costs from £2,200pp with VentureSail (venturesailholidays.com).*

Getting the flavour of...



A pilgrimage in Northumberland

A king of Northumbria in the seventh century, St Oswald was among the first Anglo-Saxon monarchs to convert to Christianity. His memory is still strong in the Northeast of England, says Oliver Smith in *The Times*, where one of England's loveliest pilgrimage trails was created in his honour 20 years ago, and opened to the public a year later. From the tidal island of Lindisfarne (the site of the monastery whose foundation he requested), St Oswald's Way runs south along the Northumberland coast and then inland to Hadrian's Wall and the battle site of Heavenfield. Along the way are "vast" beaches, "rolling" moorland, and castles such as Bamburgh, from which Oswald once ruled. And at Heavenfield itself, a "tiny" church stands where he vanquished an invading Welsh army and raised the first wooden cross on English soil. *Mac's Adventure offers a self-guided, four-night trip from £485 b&b (macsadventure.com).*

Wuppertal's "steampunk" railway

The city of Wuppertal in northwest Germany has a superb concert hall, a good art museum and a "vast" botanical garden. But its most distinctive treasure is the Schwebebahn, says Mary Novakovich in *The Guardian* – the world's oldest suspended railway (pictured). The authorities originally wanted a U-bahn, but the city's steep topography wouldn't allow it; instead, the engineer Eugen Langen proposed building giant iron arches over the city's streets and hanging trains from tracks suspended between them. Langen's original carriages (in which Kaiser Wilhelm II took a test ride 125 years ago) have been replaced – but the railway remains a "steampunk" marvel, liable to awaken the "geek" in us all. If you go, make sure to sample the long section where the railway follows the "serpentine" course of the Wupper tributary, with carriages swaying over the water.

Rafting to paradise in Costa Rica

Set in rainforest high above Costa Rica's Caribbean coast, Pacuare Lodge offers a great introduction to the country's "natural wonders", and it is quite a thrill to get to, says Oliver Berry in *The Times*. The lodge sits beside Costa Rica's "most celebrated stretch of whitewater", the Rio Pacuare, so most visitors opt to arrive by raft – an hour-long ride that has some "roller-coaster" moments. On arrival, the property shouldn't be an anticlimax: it has "trimmed" lawns and a "swanky" infinity pool, and on walks from it, you might spot everything from toucans and spider monkeys to all six of Costa Rica's native wild cats, including jaguar. It is owned by the luxury Costa Rican operator Böena, which has four other excellent lodges: you might visit one or two more as part of a longer tour.

Hotel of the week



Jnane Rumi Marrakech

Recently opened as an 11-bedroom hotel, this 1960s villa sits in "oasis-like" gardens a mere five minutes' drive from Marrakech's medina. Few other properties in the city offer such a perfect combination of peace and convenience, says Arta Ghanbari in *House & Garden*, and its interiors are lovely too. Sensitively restored, they combine traditional tiled floors, handmade textiles and local antiques with "bold splashes" of deep colour, and an exceptional collection of modern North African art. The "Moroccan-meets-modern-French" cuisine is good, and there's a hammam, and a long outdoor pool.

Doubles from £500 b&b; jnanerumi.com.

Great pianist who was self-taught from the age of 16

Alfred Brendel
1931-2025

One of the greatest pianists of the postwar era, Alfred Brendel, who has died aged 94, was the first person to record Beethoven's complete works for solo piano, said The Daily Telegraph. His interpretations of Schubert's later piano sonatas "added to their growing recognition as masterpieces of Western music"; and audiences flocked to hear him play Haydn, Mozart and Bach. More surprisingly, he championed Liszt's piano works – which were then regarded as showy and superficial – and did much to rehabilitate their reputation. He also played Schoenberg, and admired Harrison Birtwistle.

Some critics, in the US in particular, found Brendel's playing too austere, didactic and dry. He was certainly intellectual: living in Hampstead, he counted Isaiah Berlin among his friends; and with his tweed jackets, thick-rimmed spectacles, wayward hair and bandaged fingers (testament to the dedication with which he practised), he also looked the part. But his many admirers took issue with the idea that his music lacked warmth, as did he. "I don't feel guilty about being 'intellectual' if that means thinking about the structure and character and humour in a piece of music," he told The Guardian in 2010. "But I'm not talking about dry analysis, which is relatively easy if you know how. I do the opposite. I familiarise myself with a piece and wait for it to tell me what it's about, and what makes it a masterpiece. That's what fascinates."

His style at the piano was unusual – he grimaced as he played and leant away from the instrument, as though it smelled. But



Brendel: talented artist

little about him was typical of a great pianist. He was born in Moravia, in what is now the Czech Republic, in 1931, into a family that was loving but not musical. And though he started playing the piano aged six (at his own instigation), he was not a prodigy. He was not, he said, a good sight reader, nor did he have a "phenomenal memory". The family moved to Zagreb, where his father ran a cinema, and then to Graz, in Austria. Brendel studied at the local conservatory, but he had no regular lessons after the age of 16. Instead, he taught himself by listening to other pianists and by recording and listening back to his own playing. At that point, he wasn't even set on a career in music: he was also a talented painter. His first public recital, at the age of 17 – entitled *The Fugue in Piano Literature* – coincided with his first one-man show of watercolour paintings. His career path was decided, however, in 1949, when he came fourth in the Busoni competition, in Italy.

As a young man, he decided that he wanted to be a pianist of stature by the time he was in his 50s. It seemed an achievable aim, said The Times. Embarking on a concert career, he began to get noticed in the 1950s; and in 1959, he started his recording of Beethoven's 32 sonatas, for Vox. He gave his final performance in Vienna in 2008. He said that, in retirement, he planned to pursue a more literary life. He wrote several books on music, gave lectures and masterclasses, and wrote poetry. One poem that came to him on a flight back from Japan was about a pianist who develops an extra finger, so that he can point at and thus "expose an obstinate cougher in the hall", and also beckon "to the lady in the third row". Twice divorced, he is survived by his four children.

Bestselling thriller writer and former courier for MI6

Frederick Forsyth
1938-2025

Frederick Forsyth, who has died aged 86, wrote a series of bestselling spy thrillers – many of which drew on his own life. A former fighter pilot, he worked as a foreign correspondent in Paris during the de Gaulle years, and in the 1960s, he travelled to Nigeria to cover the brutal civil war in Biafra. There, he claimed to have been recruited as an informant for British secret services. He worked as a courier for MI6 and was nearly caught by the KGB while fetching a package from a Russian mob in east Germany. He would imply that, compared to this, writing was quite dull. He said he had only "bashed out" his first novel, 1971's *The Day of the Jackal*, because he was out of work and needed to make some money.

Born in Ashford, Kent, in 1938, he was the son of two shopkeepers, Frederick and Phyllis, who sold furs and dresses. At Tonbridge School, he excelled at languages – he was fluent in French, German, Spanish and Russian – but had no interest in academics. His father's advice, he recalled, was that if you want "an interesting life, bloody well go out and get one" – so, "I did". Having left school at 16, he trained to be a bullfighter in Spain and joined the RAF. Flying Vampire jets, he was the youngest pilot in the service – but when he wasn't posted to a front-line squadron, he resigned to seek excitement by other means. He started work on a local paper in 1958; then, thanks to his languages, he got a job with Reuters in Paris – where a group of right-wing ex-army men angered by Charles de Gaulle's decision to grant independence to Algeria were believed to be plotting to kill the president.



Forsyth: excelled at languages

From Paris, he was sent to Berlin, where he reported on the Wall going up. In Biafra for the BBC, he detested the way he was expected to accept Foreign Office briefs on the war: in his reporting, he put the secessionist's side, and drew attention to the war's devastating impact on the civilian population. When his bosses objected, he went freelance. Back in London, his career was in pieces – so he wrote his first novel, a political thriller about a hired assassin preparing to kill de Gaulle. Publishers were sceptical about *The Day of the Jackal*; since de Gaulle had not been assassinated, they were not convinced readers would buy in to the plot. But it proved an instant bestseller. He followed it up with *The Odessa File* (1972), about a reporter's quest to find a notorious ex-Nazi who is being protected by a shadowy group of former SS men; and *The Dogs of War* (1974), which was reportedly inspired by his experience of backing a coup attempt in Equatorial Guinea. All three were turned into films.

In the mid-1970s, he and his first wife, Carole Cunningham, moved with their sons to Ireland, for tax reasons; they returned in 1980, when the Tories were back in power. Latterly, Forsyth had become known as a political pundit, expressing right-wing, pro-Brexit views. His politics were one thing that set him apart from his fellow spy writer John le Carré; another was his lack of any pretension to be a literary novelist; a third was his loyalty to his wives. His work had been "harum-scarum" and sometimes risky, he said; in his domestic life, he was "conventional", monogamous. He and Carole divorced amicably in 1988. His second wife, Sandy Molloy, whose primary carer he had become, died last year.

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



Seven days in the Square Mile

The **oil price**, which had shot up on fears of a supply shock after the US strike on Iran, fell sharply after President Trump announced a “complete and total ceasefire” between Israel and Iran. But the US Fed chair, Jerome Powell, pushed back on calls to cut **interest rates** as soon as July, arguing that tariffs could yet push up prices. The Bank of England held rates steady at 4.25% at its latest meeting, but indicated that they are likely to continue their downward path, albeit cautiously. A spike in grocery price inflation to 4.7% – the highest in 16 months – is a cause for concern.

On the ninth anniversary of the vote to leave the EU, a study by John Springford of the Centre for European Reform found that the OBR’s estimate of a 4% loss in the UK’s long-run productivity had been borne out. It translates into an approximate £40bn tax loss for the exchequer between 2019 and 2024, during which time the government raised taxes by £100bn.

Shares in the UK defence contractor **Babcock** jumped by 13% after it raised its profit targets and dividend, cementing its position as this year’s FTSE 100 best performer. Germany announced plans to sell an additional €19bn of government debt to fund spending on infrastructure and defence. **Google** is set to face more scrutiny from UK regulators over its online search and advertising business. **Amazon** said it would invest £40bn in the UK, on new fulfilment centres and an upgrade to its Berkshire film studios.

Revolut: Musk-style pay deal

Is Revolut’s founder Nikolay Storonsky on Elon Musk’s level? He’d certainly like to be paid in similar style, said Patrick Hosking in *The Times*. Under “an incentive deal” – struck years ago, but leaked last week – he stands to gain a “shares jackpot” worth billions, if he manages “to treble the valuation” of the London-based digital bank from the present \$45bn to \$150bn. Storonsky already owns 25% of the business he founded in 2015; this deal means he could be handed an additional 10% stake. Share payouts like this are controversial because “they significantly dilute other shareholders” – one reason why a Delaware court declared a planned \$56bn payout to Musk by Tesla “null and void” last year. But unlike Tesla, Revolut is still privately held, and a \$150bn valuation “would generate potentially huge profits for early-stage backers”. Given the role played by “bonus structures based on short-term results” in the 2008 crisis, convincing bank regulators might be harder. The real question is whether a \$150bn valuation – similar to that of Citigroup – is actually “attainable”, said Lex in the FT. To achieve it, Revolut would have to increase net profit by around 1,100%. The bank’s backers are betting on Storonsky’s long-held dream of creating a financial “superapp”. In that respect, the Musk comparison is apt. “Tesla’s valuation is as much about Musk’s moonshot plans, and investors’ continuing belief in his ability to execute them”, as its actual business.

OpenAI/Microsoft/Meta: growing pains

In 2018, Sam Altman ran into Microsoft boss Satya Nadella on the stairs at a conference and, in five minutes, pitched him OpenAI. That moment led to a multibillion-dollar investment and what Altman would call “the best partnership in tech”, said *The Observer*. “Now, it’s unravelling.” As the ChatGPT-maker grows, it wants Microsoft to give up its part in “a complex profit-sharing agreement” in return for a direct stake in the business (reportedly between 20% and 49%). “Microsoft won’t budge.” Talks have become so strained that OpenAI is considering the “nuclear option” of “accusing its biggest backer of anticompetitive behaviour”. Altman appears to have a similar beef against another established big boy, said *The Economist* – Mark Zuckerberg’s Meta. Earlier this month, he accused Zuckerberg and co of dangling “signing bonuses of \$100m to poach his staff” as the AI arms race heats up. Throwing “fistfuls of cash” to secure new tech expertise is, of course, nothing new to Meta. And in the scheme of things, a \$100m hire is cheap. In what may be the world’s most expensive “acqui-hire”, the company has just paid \$14.3bn to buy 49% of Scale AI, which helps businesses build AI applications. The firm’s “main asset” is its 28-year-old founder, Alexandr Wang.

Novo Nordisk/Hims & Hers: fat fight

The Danish pharma behind the Wegovy anti-obesity jab has already lost its market crown to US rival Eli Lilly. Now, it faces more trouble in the crucial US market, said Bloomberg. Just two months into a partnership with “telehealth” firm Hims & Hers, Novo Nordisk has called off the deal, accusing its partner of illegally selling cheap Wegovy knock-offs. Shares in Hims & Hers slumped by nearly 35% after analysts said the withdrawal would leave it “without an attractive obesity profit stream”. Novo suffered a further 5% slide. The one winner in this fat fight was Eli Lilly – its shares rose.

Labour’s industrial strategy: worth the wait?

The PM and the Chancellor travelled to Nuneaton this week to launch the Government’s long-awaited “industrial strategy” – the first since 2017 – describing it as “a clear break from the short-termism and sticking plasters of the past”. The ten-year plan aims “to take the brakes off” the “high growth” sectors deemed likeliest to propel the economy forward, said James Moore in *The Independent*. “The lucky eight” – dubbed the “IS8” – are clean energy, advanced manufacturing, the creative industries, defence, digital and tech, financial services, life sciences and business services. The scheme looks “bold, well-resourced and refreshingly focused” – a change from “the half-measures of the past” and perhaps a turning point for the UK economy.



The Chancellor and PM in Nuneaton

In fact, the 160-page strategy is very similar to previous versions, said Nils Pratley in *The Guardian* – right down to the “whizzy light

beams” denoting “national ambition”. The one big difference is the new “emphasis on reducing the sky-high cost of electricity” – a major factor in every recent “deindustrialisation story” from Port Talbot to Grangemouth. Still, the tally of 7,000 firms who’ll (eventually) see their bills slashed by (up to) 25% under the scheme isn’t huge in the context of around 140,000 UK manufacturers. And only 500 firms (in sectors such as steel, chemicals and glass) will benefit from the “supercharger” scheme promising bigger, speedier discounts.

The plan comes with “scant new money”, said the FT. Yet its main flaw is that it “does nothing for the wider economy”. Among the glaring omissions are the retail and hospitality sectors – still reeling from the Budget tax reforms – and crucial industries such as the food sector. Industrial strategies are all about picking “winners”, but bread and butter is important, too.

Issue of the week: are markets too complacent?

Investors now judge the risk of a wider Middle East conflict to be minimal. Are they right?

The ceasefire brokered by Donald Trump to end the Middle East war might be “shaky”, but investors are already persuaded that the pathway to the sunlit uplands is now clear, said Bloomberg. US stocks are again “within reach of records” and the price of Brent crude – which briefly spiked to a high of \$80/barrel during the worst of the uncertainty on Monday – has tumbled to around \$65 and, with it, the threat of inflation. “The past couple of weeks have illustrated, yet again, the pitfalls of reacting too quickly to geopolitical happenings.” Indeed, many in the market see the ceasefire as “a clearing event, removing an obstacle to further gains”. A best-case scenario now, according to Peter Tchir, a macro strategist at Academy Securities, would be if “tariffs are delayed further, interspersed with a trade deal or two”. Meanwhile, attention is once again focused on Jerome Powell, chair of the Federal Reserve, who is under increasing pressure from the president to cut interest rates. With the uncertainty of war removed, traders are “boosting bets” that the Fed could ease policy as early as next month.

“Sometimes markets are a terrible gauge of geopolitical risk,” said Robert Armstrong on FT.com. “In this case, we hope they are exactly right.” Still, the whipsawing oil market was “not



“Geopolitical risk”: a burning oil refinery in Tehran

necessarily responding to fundamentals” so much as “technical dynamics”. Oil prices are not closely correlated to inventories (the world consumes 100 million barrels per day, but the market trades at least six billion barrels daily). Rather, they are “highly correlated to the positions of money managers and hedge funds”, whose futures positions tend to exacerbate “movements in the market” as prices fluctuate.

With the exception of the Yom Kippur War in 1973, “when Western economies were rocked by oil-induced inflation and recessions for a decade”, none of the other dozen conflicts involving Israel and its neighbours has had a

lasting impact on oil prices, agreed Mehreen Khan in The Times. Nonetheless, there’s a risk of under-egging the situation. “The Iran episode is one of a litany of conflicts and potential supply shocks in a global economy where old certainties about trade, disinflation and economic cooperation are falling away.” This is what Neil Shearing of Capital Economics calls the era of “radical uncertainty... where the future is unknown and probabilities cannot be meaningfully assigned”. Like the belief expressed in the “Taco trade” – that Trump always chickens out – “the idea that the bombing of Iran will be a contained episode with limited repercussions looks dangerously complacent”.

Pensions investment: what the experts think

● Black widow?

Call it the London riddle. The FTSE 100 hit an all-time high of 8,884.92 earlier this month, yet amid a continuing exodus of companies and a dearth of IPOs, sentiment around the future of the London Stock Exchange has rarely been so bleak. In



The London Stock Exchange: hard times

a fresh blow, pension provider Scottish Widows – which is owned by Lloyds Banking Group and has “total assets under administration of £230bn” – has decided to reduce the allocation to London-listed shares in its “highest growth portfolio” from 12% to 3%, said John-Paul Ford Rojas on This is Money. The company is still investing “more than a fifth” of the £165bn it has in “discretionary funds” in the UK. Nonetheless, the move is a defiant gesture to the Government, which is battling “to encourage pension schemes to invest more in British assets”.

● Mansion House meddling

Analysts are divided about the move, said Simon Hunt in City AM. For Neil Wilson of Saxo Markets, it’s at best unsupportive. “UK pension funds are down from 50% [exposure to] UK equities, to 4% in 25 years,” he noted. “How can we expect to generate economic growth and prosperity

when our capital markets are not doing what they’re supposed to do and supporting UK companies?” But others maintain that government meddling may have forced Scottish Widows’ hand. The pension provider refused to sign up to the Chancellor’s Mansion House Accord, which

“pushes/strong-arms UK pension flows into private assets over the next five years”, said Simon French of Panmure Liberum. But Rachel Reeves hasn’t ruled out mandating it – and Scottish Widows may be selling down UK stock holdings “to compensate for the increased spend on UK private assets”, to keep its “overall exposure” to the country unchanged. If so, others may follow suit.

● Tax weapon

The interventions may not end there, said Alistair Osborne in The Times. London Stock Exchange Group boss David Schwimmer is “calling for tax changes” to increase pension fund investment in UK markets. As pension funds get £50bn a year in tax benefits, insisting on minimum allocations is a “common-sense solution”, he argues. The alternative is “what we have now”: the UK taxpayer “subsidising the cost of capital of the S&P 500”.

Summer books

Capitalism and Its Critics by John Cassidy, 2025 (Allen Lane £35). The New Yorker’s star economic journalist views capitalism through the lenses of critics down the centuries: from the Luddites and Thomas Carlyle, to Joseph Stiglitz and Thomas Piketty. His conclusion, says Martin Wolf in the FT, is that it’s “the worst possible system except for all the others that have been tried”.

Careless People by Sarah Wynn-Williams, 2025 (Pan Macmillan £22). As a senior adviser at Facebook, the author saw how its leaders operated at close quarters, says The Guardian. Meta called her memoir “false and defamatory”. It’s certainly “a riveting corporate kiss-and-tell”, says The Economist – portraying Mark Zuckerberg as “unfeeling and shallow”.

The Art of Uncertainty by David Spiegelhalter, 2024 (Pelican £22). “Using some intuitive assumptions and (very) simple algebra”, this is “an invaluable guide to thinking about uncertainty”, says The Economist. It will appeal to many more than just aspiring mathematicians.

The Chairman’s Lounge by Joe Aston, 2025 (Scribner Australia £14.99). A cautionary tale detailing the fall of Australia’s national flag carrier, Qantas, from cherished corporate icon to “national pariah” during the pandemic, says Andrew Hill in the FT. It tells how an attempt to turn a crisis into an opportunity backfired spectacularly.

Farage sets his sights on the Bank

Tom Rees

Bloomberg

In the nearly three decades since Gordon Brown handed control of interest rates to the BoE, the move has been broadly viewed as very successful in helping to keep inflation under control, says Tom Rees. That consensus is now breaking down – and the catalyst is the surge of Nigel Farage's Reform UK party. In its 2024 manifesto, Reform "vowed to revamp the BoE's bond operations" – claiming £35bn a year could be saved by ceasing to pay banks interest on bonds held at the BoE as part of its £895bn QE operation. Now, in an echo of Donald Trump, the party is "challenging" the Bank's independence – with Farage privately discussing the possibility of taking back control of interest rates, and his deputy, Richard Tice, hinting at placing "one or two" Treasury representatives on the Monetary Policy Committee. Some economists have "long called for tweaks" to the Bank's bond operations, but eroding its independence is a bridge too far for most. Markets would also take a dim view of returning to an era when politicians could fiddle with interest rates "for electoral gain". Would those objections stop Farage? It's an open question.

Britain's AI copyright wars

Martin Wolf

Financial Times

One of the many issues surfacing as a result of the rise of AI is copyright protection – now being "fiercely debated" in Parliament, says Martin Wolf. On one side are those who claim that giving tech groups the unrestricted right to "scrape" online data when training their models, without payment, amounts to "fair use". On the other are those who see it as akin to stealing. Starmer's Government says it is open-minded, but hasn't rejected a "strip-mine whatever you wish" option – doubtless, in the name of growth. It should think hard before it goes down that route. The Government estimates that the UK's creative industries generated £126bn in gross added value to the economy in 2022 (5% of GDP) while employing 2.4 million people. It's questionable that "the value added of the AI industry will ever be of a comparable scale". Moreover, these industries represent much of what is best about the UK and, indeed, humanity. The idea of handing over their output for free is "abhorrent". If a compromise is struck it needs to be fair, and watertight. A "forced marriage, on slave terms", as the campaigner Beeban Kidron puts it, is a bad idea.

Consolidation – banking's friend or foe?

Martin Vander Weyer

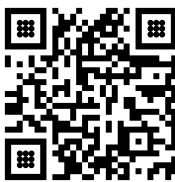
The Spectator

"Bank M&A fever is in the air" across Europe. It's certainly rife in Britain, where Metro Bank is being stalked by a private equity outfit called Pollen Street Capital, and TSB is once again up for sale, says Martin Vander Weyer. The big question for the industry, and investors, is whether this flurry of activity is "evidence of rude health – or a cyclical warning of troubles ahead"? The optimistic argument is "a growing belief" among banks "that expansion by takeover might now be a better use of surplus capital than share buybacks" – not least because it could deliver economies of scale "in a sector that would benefit from consolidation to fight digital disruptors". The counter-argument is that all banking mergers, especially across borders, are "fraught with management conflicts and incompatible IT systems" (as TSB's Spanish seller, Sabadell, discovered). Ambitious bidders, who claim they're building regional or global champions, are also too often tempted to overpay. It's a case of "*caveat emptor* – and let's hope the regulators stay ahead of the new game".

A solution to WhatsApp overload

Editorial

The Times



Few things raise the blood pressure more than that ping on the phone, followed by the dreaded words: "you were added", says The Times. The message signifies you've been recruited into yet another WhatsApp group, "almost certainly without your say so". The options are: quit immediately and offend all the other members; or take part grudgingly. Being added to a new group for work poses a particular challenge when it is on a personal phone, because it blurs "the boundary between downtime and work". This has become a sufficiently pressing problem for the British Medical Association to pass a motion demanding free phones for doctors that can be switched off away from work. This seems like "an expensive and convoluted solution": after all, "the only thing more irritating than one phone buzzing with WhatsApp alerts is two". A better answer to "WhatsApp overload" would be for its owner, Meta, to modify the app to seek a user's permission before they are added to a group. "WhatsApp can be a wonderful online party, but sometimes users simply want to stay at home."

City profile

Luca de Meo

The "surprise hit" of the European car market this year is the revival of the classic Renault 5, which has been storming sales in France and turning heads abroad, said The Economist. "The remodelled R5 neatly combines retro chic and original styling" (there's an optional "baguette-holder") with "state-of-the-art EV touches". Fans say this reinterpretation of a classic bears all the hallmarks of Luca de Meo – an auto industry "turnaround star" who, in his five years at the wheel, has steered Renault "out of a powerslide into irrelevance". It also marks his swansong. De Meo has "stunned the automotive world" by swapping his oily rags for handbags and glad rags. After more than 30 years in the car business, he's off to take charge of Gucci's parent, the luxury conglomerate Kering.



For Kering's billionaire heir, François-Henri Pinault, the hire is "a gamble at a precarious moment", said The Wall Street Journal. Once a leader in European luxury, the group – whose labels also include Saint Laurent and Balenciaga – has stumbled badly, losing some 70% of market value in three years. Investors welcomed the news: Kering shares rose 12% in Paris, while Renault stock fell. Yet de Meo, 58, faces "a titanic challenge", and there are clearly reservations about whether he can cut the mustard in luxury. Known for his taste for "sharp suits and Swiss watches", the Milan-born executive certainly looks the part, said the FT. De Meo's "ego" is said to have caused friction at times, and much depends on the relationship he builds with Pinault. Nonetheless, this could prove an inspired pick.

Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

Amaroq Minerals*The Mail on Sunday*

Greenland-based Amaroq owns mining rights to gold and rare-earth minerals that are crucial for wind turbines, EVs, smartphones and military kit. Profits from ramped-up gold production should accelerate exploration. Buy. 80p.

Empire Metals*The Mail on Sunday*

Titanium is vital for defence and renewable energy – and essential for paints, plastics and paper. Empire's vast mine of exceptionally pure titanium dioxide in Australia is state-backed. Still, not for the faint-hearted. Buy. 23p.

Fresnillo*The Times*

The Mexico-based precious-metals miner is benefitting from the advance of gold, which JPMorgan forecasts could rise to \$6,000/oz. Production is beating expectations, with costs set to fall. Buy. £14.47.

United Airlines Holdings*The Daily Telegraph*

One of the most profitable in the sector, the US airline is improving fleet efficiency and services to boost higher-margin premium travel. Problems at New York's Newark Airport are easing; fund managers are investing. Buy. \$74.27.

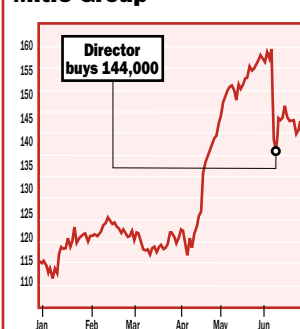
Vietnam Enterprise Investments*The Times*

The "banner fund" of Vietnam's largest private investor, Dragon Capital, majors in finance and property. Income last year jumped by \$17.1m to \$216.9m. A well-managed way into a fast-growing economy. Buy. 593p.

Vodafone Group*The Times*

The £16.5bn mega-merger with Three makes Vodafone by far the UK's largest operator – and scale should drive investment in speed and quality. Recovery in Germany is expected. Potential yield 5.1%. Buy. 74.94p.

Directors' dealings

Mitie Group

The outsourcer's shift towards tech-driven services – such as robotic cleaning and drone-based security – is boosting revenues and profits. Incoming chair Chris Rogers pounced on the dip after a buyback programme was ditched, buying shares worth £197,280.

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

...and some to hold, avoid or sell

Bellway*The Daily Telegraph*

Affordability, weak consumer confidence and sticky inflation remain concerns for housebuilders. Bellway now trades above historic NAV per share, and profits are unlikely to return to the late 2010s levels. Bank gains. Sell. £28.76.

Crest Nicholson Holdings*Investors' Chronicle*

This housebuilder is back in the black, thanks to its focus on open market homes in the mid-premium segment. Benefitting from improved inventory controls and working capital management. Hold. 191p.

PayPoint*Investors' Chronicle*

PayPoint rents terminals to retailers, enabling customers to pay bills, TV licences etc. It also has an e-commerce service and owns gift card firm Love2shop. Revenues are up. Launching a buyback programme. Hold. 793p.

RTW Biotech Opportunities*The Daily Telegraph*

This trust, with a "very good" long-term record, backs biotechs running Phase 3 trials. Recently hit by problems with one of its key holdings, Rocket Pharmaceuticals. Yet exposure to weight-loss pills, via Corxel, is promising. Hold. \$1.16.

RWS Holdings*Investors' Chronicle*

Another profit warning at the language service specialist has prompted an overhaul. Now shifting towards AI solutions and a software-as-a-service revenue model, but evidence that the strategy is working is needed. Sell. 91.8p.

Speedy Hire*Investors' Chronicle*

The equipment hire group is suffering from flat UK hire rates and delays on infrastructure projects. Closing eight depots to mitigate the impact of rising NI contributions. A debt overhang doesn't help. Hold. 25p.

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip**Wickes Group**

Investors' Chronicle
up 23.1% to 226.5p

Worst tip**Genmab**

The Daily Telegraph
down 2.13% to 1,335 DKK

Market view

"The stock market feels like it's a thatched house in a hot country with a fire hazard risk, and people aren't charging much to insure the house."

John Stopford of Ninety One.
Quoted on Reuters

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

	24 June 2025	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	8758.99	8834.03	-0.85%
FTSE All-share UK	4767.46	4795.32	-0.58%
Dow Jones	42886.99	42439.64	1.05%
NASDAQ	19831.94	19634.81	1.00%
Nikkei 225	38790.56	38536.74	0.66%
Hang Seng	24177.07	23980.30	0.82%
Gold	3380.55	3397.60	-0.50%
Brent Crude Oil	67.87	74.79	-9.25%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	3.38%	3.37%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	4.55	4.63	
US 10-year Treasuries	4.30	4.41	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	3.4% (May)	3.5% (Apr)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	4.3% (May)	4.5% (Apr)	
Halifax house price (yoy)	2.5% (May)	3.2% (Apr)	
£1 STERLING:	\$1.363 €1.173 ¥197.826		Bitcoin \$105,250.00

Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS

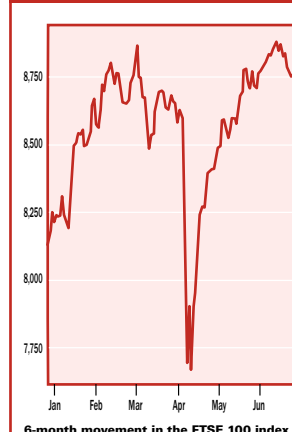
RISES	Price	% change
Melrose Industries	514.60	+8.50
Int. Cons. Airlines Gp.	327.50	+4.60
Bunzl	2328.00	+4.10
Barclays	333.50	+3.70
SSE	1879.00	+3.30
FALLS		
Berkeley Holdings	3902.00	-7.30
BAE Systems	1801.00	-6.10
BP	367.95	-5.00
GSK	1410.00	-4.70
Endeavour Mining	2212.00	-4.70

FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER

Spectris	3814.00	+15.20
NCC	142.00	-12.70

Source: FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 24 June (pm)

Following the Footsie





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**CAPITAL
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Funny games: why MrBeast is the world's biggest YouTube star

From filling homes with slime to randomly bestowing cash on strangers, MrBeast's videos take childish impulses to demented extremes. They're strangely charming, and addictive – but what does their success say about our culture? Mark O'Connell reports

Jimmy Donaldson, the online content creator known as MrBeast, is by any reasonable metric one of the world's most popular entertainers. His YouTube channel, to which he posts his increasingly elaborate and expensively produced videos, has 406 million subscribers – by far the most of any YouTuber, and equivalent to the total number of native English speakers alive today. He has close to twice as many subscribers as Elon Musk has followers on X, and over 120 million more than Taylor Swift has Instagram followers.

Online content isn't all that Donaldson, 27, produces. On the back of his success on YouTube, he has launched an array of subsidiary businesses, including the MrBeast Burger fast-food delivery concern, a widely derided range of ready-made kids' lunches, personal finance products, courses on YouTube content creation, and various philanthropic operations. Last year, he produced *Beast Games*, a reality competition show for Amazon Prime, in which 1,000 contestants competed for \$5m (£3.7m). It reportedly cost \$100m to produce, making it the most expensive unscripted show in history. At the risk of stating the obvious, Donaldson is an incredibly big deal.

So who is this Mozart of the attention economy? And what makes his videos so staggeringly popular? Donaldson is neither especially handsome nor particularly funny-looking. At 6ft 5in, and with the sparse reddish beard he nowadays sports, he has the charmingly awkward aspect of a teen who has recently put on a growth spurt and hasn't quite settled into himself. He's likeable, and is possessed of a glib and anarchic sense of humour.

A good deal of Donaldson's success stems from his ability to balance these traits with the obsessive grandeur of his schemes. His most effective videos exhibit a fanatical clarity of purpose, as though he had taken the form of the YouTube video and squeezed it for its essential oil of entertainment. Take *I Survived the 5 Deadliest Places on Earth*, a recent video in which he visits the five so-called deadliest places on Earth. We see him and his team of sidekicks 1) walking around Snake Island, off the coast of Brazil, which is infamous for its teeming population of venomous snakes; 2) scaling a sheer cliff wall of ice; 3) driving a terrifying Bolivian mountain pass known as "the Death Road"; 4) swimming with sharks; and 5) spending the night in the middle of an African savannah in a cage surrounded by fresh meat for the specific purpose of attracting hungry predators.



Donaldson's Beast Games is the most expensive unscripted TV show in history

All this is boiled down into 13 minutes, which does not leave much time for old-timey narrative conventions such as establishing a context, or making the viewer understand or care about why any of this is happening. And that's the thing with MrBeast: everything that happens is always just happening, and if you want a reason for it, it's no more or less than the fact that you yourself are watching. He is, and always has been, monomaniacally committed to a lethally pure conception of algorithmically determined entertainment.

The child of military parents who divorced when he was nine, Donaldson grew up in Greenville, North Carolina, and missed periods of school because of poor health (at 15, he was diagnosed with Crohn's disease). He became

obsessed with YouTube, and uploaded his first video to the platform when he was 13: it is of him playing *Minecraft* and chattering happily into a mic about the game. For the next two years, it's basically all *Minecraft*, though he released a handful of videos – *How Much Money Does PewDiePie Make?????*, *How Much Money Does Captain Sparkles Make?????* – that reveal a precocious interest in the monetisability of YouTube content.

In 2017, after five years of obscurity, he had his first viral hit, with a livestreamed video called *I Counted To 100,000!* Over 40 hours, Donaldson sits in his gaming chair, stares into his crappy webcam, and counts from one to 100,000. It clearly struck a chord with viewers, even if very few made it further than a few minutes in.

His channel began to grow pretty steeply after this, and he began to attract more and more lucrative sponsorship deals. Early sponsors included Quidd (a now defunct app for collecting "digital brand stickers"), Electronic Arts and Xbox. His content began to improve visually around 2019; the videos had higher production values, and multi-camera set-ups – clearly the result of an expanding operation, and a creator who was acquiring skills and resources. His stunts got notably more costly, though by no means less stupid (see, for instance, the awe-inspiringly dumb *I Filled My Brother's House With Slime & Bought Him A New One*), and he began to give away ever-larger sums of money. By 2021, according to *Forbes*, he was YouTube's highest earner, bringing in an estimated \$54m that year.

While Donaldson now heads a vast operation with hundreds of employees, his work has never lost its childlike aspect. Just as to

"He is, and always has been, monomaniacally committed to a lethally pure conception of algorithmically determined entertainment"

count to 100,000 is to pursue a supremely childish impulse with a demented determination, the more expensively produced content Donaldson has made in recent years arises out of a similarly childish curiosity. What would it be like to be buried alive? How weird would it be to eat the world's largest pizza slice? What would happen if you put a Lamborghini in a gigantic hydraulic press? Would you rather be trapped in the world's coldest room or the world's hottest room? If you have ever spent any time in the company of an 11-year-old boy, you will recognise the cast of mind that continually throws up such questions.



MrBeast's 5 Deadliest Places on Earth

At the level of form, he is no great innovator: he simply understands what works, and repeats it more and more successfully and expensively. But nor is the MrBeast formula easy to replicate. On YouTube, there are countless purveyors of the sort of elaborate and expensive stunts – turning houses into fish tanks, building theme parks inside houses – known in the biz as “junklord” content. But they all conspicuously lack both Donaldson's peculiar charm and his intricate mastery of form.

When you watch a MrBeast video, you are watching the result of a deep and meticulous engagement with YouTube's audience-retention data. “The cool thing about YouTube,” Donaldson has written, “is they give us super-detailed graphs for every video that show the exact second we lose a viewer.” The first minute is typically where the majority of viewer loss happens, and this is why, in the opening seconds of a MrBeast video, you feel as though someone has filled your skull with popping candy and is beating you about the head and face with a foam bat. There are no slow builds; everything you see in a MrBeast video is about preventing you from clicking away. His work reflects and intensifies what the internet has done to culture more generally, and to our brains.

Donaldson's forays into philanthropy – or philanthropy-themed YouTube content – have, in recent years, caused sporadic outbreaks of controversy. The earliest of these was called *Giving A Random Homeless Man \$10000*: a simple video in which Donaldson walks up to a homeless man in Greenville, and gives him an envelope containing \$10,000. The video was not a massive success by MrBeast standards, but it got a strong enough positive reaction to suggest that using the channel's earnings to give away large sums of money was a way of both doing something positive and producing more – and more lucrative – content.

There followed a series of videos in which Donaldson enacted vaguely absurdist forms of philanthropy – picking up an Uber customer in a brand new Lamborghini, say, and then just giving it to him. Despite the slightly troubling way in which they made a spectacle of entirely arbitrary largesse, the videos were hard to dislike, being driven by a childlike, ungainly benevolence.

In 2023, this run of philanthropic content culminated in a video entitled *1000 Blind People See For The First Time*, in which Donaldson paid for 1,000 individuals to be given a very straightforward medical treatment curing them of severe visual impairment. The video provoked heavy criticism, most of which centred on the way that the curing of 1,000 blind people was approached as raw material for light entertainment.

For me, what's most troubling about the video is the jarring opposition of its style and content. The whole thing is characterised by a manic, attention-hustling showmanship,

and a refusal to grant viewers a moment's respite in which we might contemplate the experience of the cured or the wider social implications. We learn almost nothing about any of the people whose blindness is cured, other than that they once were blind but now they see. We can be confident that they are poor, but we are left to intuit this. In most cases, we are not even given their names.

Of course, there are only so many formerly blind people you can watch being given the gift of sight before it starts getting a little samey. But Donaldson has anticipated this problem, and the video keeps your dopamine transmitters operating at full capacity. Moments after the bandages have been removed from one woman's face, the first sight she is met with is Donaldson standing before her in surgical scrubs, presenting her with an open briefcase containing \$10,000. Another patient, who we learn had to leave his job as a cashier because he couldn't see the money he was handling, has his bandages removed, and is told to read an eye chart; it says “YOU JUST WON \$10,000”.

At the bottom of the screen, there is a counter that flips upward with the rising number of cured. It is, essentially, a score counter, as though Donaldson were keeping track of the points in a video game. And this seems to me to gesture towards what is troubling about the *1000 Blind People...* video in particular, as well as Donaldson's project more generally: the way in which his content treats people – contestants in his competitions, beneficiaries of his philanthropy – as mere elements in a larger game, the object of which is maximum viewer-stimulation, maximum attention, maximum numbers.

As far as Donaldson has come from posting *Minecraft* playthroughs, consuming his work still feels, in some sense, like watching a guy play video games. Even in the videos in which he himself is not a central protagonist, where huge numbers of people compete against each other for even huger amounts of money, it's as though Donaldson is designing and playing some kind of strategy game. He constructs a world, and the rules to govern it; he populates it with semi-autonomous people – mostly anonymous and interchangeable – and watches the unfolding consequences of their moral and strategic choices.

Donaldson is not himself a political figure. He doesn't tend to weigh in on party-political questions, or express much interest in them. But there is a politics to his content. It reflects a world in which people are isolated and helpless, subjects of vast and inhuman economic mechanisms. People spending months alone in supermarkets; standing in large circles for as long as they can endure it; competing for private islands, houses, deliverance from their personal financial torments. People in states of gruelling seclusion; people in vast and impersonal crowds, pitted against one another in a Hobbesian game show of all against all.

Loneliness, survival, isolation, and the divine intervention of an unimaginably wealthy and famous man: there is a politics to all this, all right, and it is the politics of our time. In its themes and preoccupations, its insistent motifs of financial precarity and arbitrary deliverance – its Lamborghinis and its private islands and its vast pyramids of cash – the *oeuvre* of MrBeast is like nothing so much as the dream of an entire culture. Donaldson might not be the genius we need, or the genius we want, but he may be the genius we deserve.

A longer version of this article appeared in The Guardian
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This week's winner will receive Week-branded items, as well as two Connell Guides (connellguides.com).

THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1471

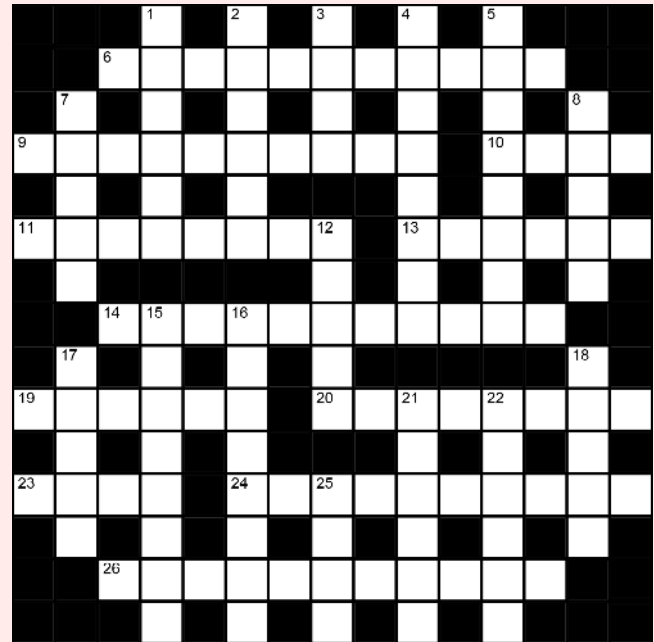
Two Connell Guides and three Week-branded items will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 7 July. Send it to The Week Crossword 1471, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. By **Tim Moorey (timmoorey.com)**

ACROSS

- 6 Do you get it with an attractive kipper? (6,5)
 9 Flying bats around one – they usually come out at night (5,5)
 10 Old boxer getting caught on bet (4)
 11 All these bat and bowl in a game (8)
 13 Act like an idiot and get lost (4,2)
 14 Hot tripe with cold meat pie has me coming out in rash (11)
 19 Stay behind on the sea (6)
 20 In which London tourists may have been for a ride (8)
 23 Beats LONDON and NEW YORK, say (4)
 24 Mistake in poor diets made someone very scared (10)
 26 No ketchup is ordered for mobile food stall (4,7)

DOWN

- 1 Hold heroic sailor (6)
 2 A release from the Beeb (6)
 3 Heard storyteller with a stringed instrument (4)
 4 Golf is part of what Mike's also involved in (8)
 5 Strong tendency to write song (7)
 7 English philosopher without personal transport going north? (5)
 8 Underlying principle of book: no change (5)
 12 Only one p for an evening meal? Great! (5)
 15 Doctor Who on Greek island reportedly gives a moving performance (4,4)
 16 War memorial building not cheap (8)
 17 Was brave about type of coffee (5)
 18 Brief appearance in movie? Turned up with Oscar! (5)
 21 Bow for very tall footballer (6)
 22 What you do in southern French winter? (6)
 25 Slow up in shower reported (4)



Name _____
 Address _____
 _____ Tel no _____
 Clue of the week answer: _____

Clue of the week: A friend, pure at heart, not seeking reward (7)
Raich, The Independent

Solution to Crossword 1469

- ACROSS:** 6 Stream 8 Imprison 10 Ground crew 11 Lulu 12 Freeload
 15 Rotate 16 Standing order 18 Crisis 19 Exit poll 21 Bier 22 Ameliorate
 25 Reverend 26 Shower
DOWN: 1 Star 2 Refuse 3 Tier 4 Violated 5 Collateral 7 Mad cow disease
 9 Power politics 13 Restrained 14 Dunce 17 Assorted 20 Pardon
 23 Eddy 24 Toed

Clue of the week: Straightforward argument for claimant (9)
Solution: PLAINTIFF (PLAIN [straightforward] + TIFF [argument])
The winner of 1469 is Toby Gould from Kew

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

Sudoku 1,013 (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

Solution to Sudoku 1,012

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

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Charity of the week

Care4Calais is a volunteer-run charity delivering essential aid and support to refugees living in the UK, northern France and Belgium. Our focus is to provide warm clothing, bedding, food and medical assistance to people in desperate need. We use our on-the-ground presence and relationship with the refugee community to provide the much-needed help that other organisations are not able to. We also work with research and media organisations to advocate for a welcoming and inclusive attitude towards refugees and asylum seekers. **Please visit care4calais.org for more.**

TRUST IN A STYLE TO LAST THROUGH THE AGES

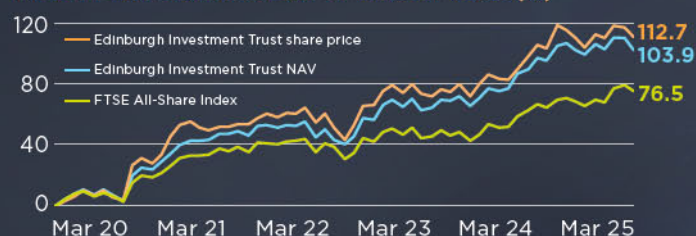


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TRUST PERFORMANCE AT 31 MARCH 2025 (%)



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	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-23	Mar-24	Mar-25
Edinburgh Investment Trust share price	46.4	10.6	8.4	8.9	11.3
Edinburgh Investment Trust NAV	34.8	14	7.9	13.4	8.3
FTSE All-Share Index	26.7	13	2.9	8.4	10.5



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