The INDEPENDENT

WEDNESDAY 8 MAY 2024 WWW.INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

CHINA 'STOLE BANK DETAILS' OF UK MILITARY PERSONNEL IN HUGE HACK

Katie Edwards Why Kim Kardashian's most shocking look yet gives me the shivers

Harry arrives in UK without Meghan... and says King is too busy to see him

The Duke of Sussex meets pikemen and musketeers in London, where he is marking 10 years of the Invictus Games

GAZA CONFLICT

Rafah faces 'fire of hell' as Israeli tanks close in

Civilians scrambling to evacuate say 'missiles fell like rain' as Israel carries out 'targeted' strikes and rejects ceasefire deal agreed by Hamas – while UN warns of 'darkest days' with vital aid choked off

BEL TREW AND NEDAL HAMDOUNA

Gaza has entered the "darkest days of a seven-month nightmare", UN officials said yesterday, warning that vital aid is being "choked off" after Israeli tanks seized control of the main aid crossing in Rafah. Civilians in the southern city, which is sheltering more than 1.4 million people, likened the bombardment to "the fire of hell" as "missiles fell like rain" while they scrambled to follow evacuation orders from the Israeli military. Despite pleas from its closest allies to hold off, Israel moved its tanks in. Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu called it an "important step" towards dismantling Hamas.

Editorials

If Rafah is attacked, Israel will have nothing to show for its unwinnable war

It is said that Benjamin Netanyahu is in something of a dilemma regarding his planned attack on Rafah. On the one side is the intense pressure on him exerted by President Biden; Israel's remaining friends and potential allies in the region; the EU and the UK; the rest of the international community; the judges at the International Court of Justice; the Pope; much of Israeli public opinion desperate for a hostage deal; and, for what it is worth to him, the Palestinian people who happen to co-habit that part of the Middle East.

This global coalition, without exception, is begging the Israeli government not to go ahead, with the inevitable loss of life among civilians, including children, and ever-deepening humanitarian crisis. That, according to the aid agencies, includes the spread of disease and a man-made famine. As ever, there lurks the possibility of renewed direct confrontation with Iran, not to mention Hezbollah, Houthi rebels and other members of the "axis of resistance".

On the other side, we find Mr Netanyahu's hardline Israeli nationalist political allies, their supporters, a minority in the country, and the prime minister's short-term political future. It is his own awkward political partners who can summarily remove Mr Netanyahu from office; not even the United States can do that. The abandonment of his coalition allies is a risk to his career that Mr Netanyahu cannot take.

His working assumption, and best chance of survival, he thinks, is to flatten the remainder of Gaza, claim that Hamas has been defeated (which no terrorist group really can be), declare victory and appeal to the Israeli electorate for support.

At the moment, with the hostages still firmly in Hamas's hands, he is too unpopular for even he, the great survivor, to avoid political disaster. He needs a nominal victory, no matter how pyrrhic.

An angry Joe Biden could scale back US financial and military support, but that wouldn't make much immediate difference on the ground; and, as Mr Biden himself acknowledges, when push comes to shove, the US will always have Israel's back.

Abandonment of such an ally is not an option. Mr Netanyahu knows that, and ruthlessly abuses US faithfulness. What role, if any, Mr Netanyahu's conscience plays in such calculations cannot be speculated.

And so Mr Netanyahu presses on. He has reacted cooly to the latest Egyptian ceasefire proposal, accepted by Hamas, which would see the return of hostages and open up the possibility of a more sustained peace – but would not necessarily give him the opportunity to "win" his war. His aims and intentions have long been clear, albeit somewhat postponed during the period of Ramadan.

Israeli tanks are already in situ at the Rafah border, with all that entails, symbolically and practically. Aid will now find it even more difficult to get through – and refugees have an even greater struggle to get out. Predictably, the Israeli Defence Forces have advised (ie, ordered) civilians to relocate yet again, either to a stretch of land on the coast, or to the already destroyed town of Khan Younis. Well over a million people are in the firing line of a renewed Israeli air bombardment and land assault with heavy armour.

Thus there is a depressing sense of inevitability about events, even though a ceasefire could prove a turning point – and not just in this war, but in the quest for peace to which all parties must one day return. Eventually, the fighting will end and the demolition of Gaza will stop, if only because there is nothing left to destroy.

At that point, we may be reliably sure of three things. First, there is no guarantee that Hamas, or some similar group, will not launch another terrorist atrocity like the one on 7 October. Second, we know that relations between Israel and powerful neighbours such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, the necessary context for regional stability, will remain difficult.

Third, and most pertinent to Mr Netanyahu, more innocent hostages (a variety of nationalities) will lose their lives, including from aerial bombings by the IDF. Almost entirely counterproductive, Mr Netanyahu will have little to show for the way he has conducted this unwinnable war.

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Gaza aid is 'choked off' as Israel seizes Rafah crossing

'Fire of hell' rains down on civilians scrambling to evacuate

Israeli tanks gather yesterday at an undisclosed location near the border (EPA)

BEL TREW
NEDAL HAMDOUNA

Gaza has entered the "darkest days of a seven-month nightmare" UN officials have said, warning that vital aid is being "choked off" after Israeli forces and tanks seized control of the main aid crossing in Rafah.

Civilians in the border city, which is sheltering more than 1.4 million mostly displaced families, likened the bombardment to "the fire of hell" as "missiles fell like rain" while they scrambled to evacuate following orders from the Israeli military.

Despite pleas from its closest allies to hold off, Israel moved its tanks into east Rafah and captured the border crossing early yesterday morning, in what it called a "limited" operation meant to kill fighters and dismantle infrastructure used by Hamas militants. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu called it an "important step" toward dismantling Hamas.

The move by Israel came hours after Hamas announced it had accepted an Egyptian-Qatari mediated ceasefire and hostage proposal. Mr Netanyahu said that the proposal fell far short of Israel's "essential" demands. Negotiations for a truce in Cairo are ongoing – with Israel saying it had sent officials to the Egyptian capital – but on a knife edge.

In Gaza, the UN warned that a full-scale assault on the area and continued closure of Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings would have a "catastrophic" impact on hundreds of thousands of people mostly living in the tents there.

The UN's Palestinian refugee agency, UNRWA, warned it had less than a day's worth of fuel, needed to power trucks, the remaining hospitals, as well as water and sewage pumps. Jens Laerke, the spokesperson for the UN's humanitarian office, said the closures were the most effective way to put the aid response "in its grave".

"Rafah and Kerem Shalom are main arteries of the humanitarian operation for not only Rafah but the entire Gaza strip, and have been currently choked off completely. That is catastrophic," he told *The Independent*. "There are very little in terms of stockpiles inside Gaza. There were still vastly inadequate amounts of aid coming into Gaza. The aid comes in and is distributed pretty much immediately."

A Palestinian family flee Rafah yesterday (AFP/Getty)

He said the start of the ground assault in Rafah was devastating for civilians who had nowhere to go as most of the strip had been "bombed into moonscapes" and was littered with unexploded ordinances. "This is one of the worst mornings of this seven-month nightmare. [On Monday], we saw pictures of people celebrating [and] dancing in the streets. There was a glimmer of hope that finally we have a ceasefire, then just a few hours later, no. It's soul-crushing. These are very dark days."

Civilians in Rafah told *The Independent* they experienced "the most difficult night" of bombing since the war erupted seven months ago. "It was like the fire of hell. I saw missiles fall like rain. Rockets with a very terrifying sound. Their bodies were still lying in the streets. There was continuous artillery shelling and airstrikes," said Abu Yahya Zoroub, 37, who was near the crossing when Israel forces pushed in. He said people were calling for help but it was near impossible for ambulances and first responders to reach the areas.

Food prices, meanwhile, have more than doubled, and families scrambled to evacuate – some walking, some using donkey carts and some in the backs of trucks. "There will be a famine here," Mr Zoroub added.

Israel has launched its most ferocious ever bombardment of Gaza and imposed a crippling siege in retaliation for Hamas's bloody 7 October attack on southern Israel. Around 1,200

people were killed in the Hamas attack, while another 250 were taken hostage, including toddlers.

The Palestinian health ministry says Israel's bombing has killed nearly 35,000 people, the majority of them women and children. The UN says restrictions on aid have created a "man-made famine" with half the 2.3 million strong population of the strip at catastrophic levels of hunger. That is only expected to worsen if Israel escalates its ground offensive in Rafah, which Mr Netanyahu said is the last holdout for Hamas militants and an essential part of their battle for "victory".

The Israeli military said its ground troops on Monday night "began a precise counterterrorism operation" based on intelligence that indicated Hamas was using Rafah for "terrorist purposes".

The UN's secretary general, Antonio Guterres, appealed to Israel and Hamas to spare no effort to get a truce deal and warned Israel that a full assault on Rafah would "be a strategic mistake, a political calamity, and a humanitarian nightmare".

"It would be tragic if weeks of intense diplomatic activity for peace in Gaza, yield no ceasefire. No release of hostages. And a devastating offensive in Rafah," he said.

On Tuesday, the Palestinian Authority called on the United States to "intervene immediately" to prevent Israel from invading Rafah, the official Palestinian Wafa news agency said.

Palestinians inspect damage from Israeli bombs in Rafah's Tal al-Sultan district in the Gaza Strip (AFP/Getty)

Talks were also continuing in Cairo for a ceasefire and hostage deal that could see in the first phase at least 33 Israeli hostages released in exchange for the release of hundreds Palestinian prisoners. Sources close to the negotiations told *The Independent* that they had "cautious optimism" that a deal would eventually be signed, as the current proposal Hamas agreed to on Monday was based on a previous proposal drafted by Israel in late April. Some sticking points including the use of the word "ceasefire" in the document had been resolved.

But others were still being battled out in the Egyptian capital – including the duration of the first phase and the fact that the deal would see female soldiers released too late in the process. Pressure is mounting from Israel's closest ally, the US. *The Independent* understands that president Joe Biden had a tough call with Mr Netanyahu where Washington made it clear the Rafah offensive had to end and a hostage deal be signed.

A State Department spokesperson said in an email yesterday: "We continue to believe that a hostage deal is in the best interest of the Israeli and the Palestinian people; it would bring an immediate ceasefire and allow increased humanitarian assistance into Gaza."

In the interim, Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings remain closed, crippling the humanitarian response. Tamara al-Rifae, spokesperson for UNRWA, said that the agency's most immediate concern was fuel for the delivery of aid, for hospitals, and for the water supply.

"As of yesterday, we had one day's worth of operations with the fuel that we had. Because of the scarcity, the trickle of aid that's been going in, we do not have stockpiles of emergency aid supplies ready to be deployed as a contingency." She added: "We are talking about aid into Gaza being strangled."

A World Health Organization spokesperson said that the Rafah border crossing was also closed for the evacuation of sick and injured patients. Palestinian health officials said yesterday that

140 wounded and sick people were supposed to cross from Gaza into Egypt today but were barred from doing so.

Mahmoud Gaith, 50, who fled eastern Rafah overnight, said there were "intense belts of fire" – when multiple bombs are dropped at the same time – as well as hundreds of artillery and air raids.

"Last night was one of the most difficult nights we have had since 7 October. They did not give people a chance to evacuate," he said as he fled northwest. "Now I do not know where my family will go. There is no safe place to move to. All areas are vulnerable to danger; even safe places do not have the necessities to live in; otherwise, they are full of displaced people."

There is also growing concern among the families of the remaining 130 hostages, who are still believed to be in the besieged strip. On Monday night, families of the hostages gathered outside the Israeli military headquarters in Tel Aviv demanding a ceasefire and the immediate return of their loved ones. "This is the time to exert your influence on the Israeli government and all other parties concerned to ensure that the agreement comes through which will finally bring all our loved ones home," they said in a statement.

Gil Dickmann, whose cousin Carmel, 39, is among the dozens of hostages still held in Gaza, told *The Independent* that families were sending a clear message to the Israeli war cabinet. "The ball is in your court. Sign the deal and bring them home now," he said.

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

How far will hardliners get Netanyahu to go in Rafah?

Benjamin Netanyahu will have to choose between right-wingers in his coalition, who want Hamas to be crushed, and President Biden, who wants a truce (Reuters)

KIM SENGUPTA
WORLD AFFAIRS EDITOR

Speaking recently in Tel Aviv, a close ally of Benjamin Netanyahu declared it would be "unthinkable" not to carry out a military offensive in Rafah to crush Hamas even if further hostage releases take place. This is what appears to be unfolding on the ground now.

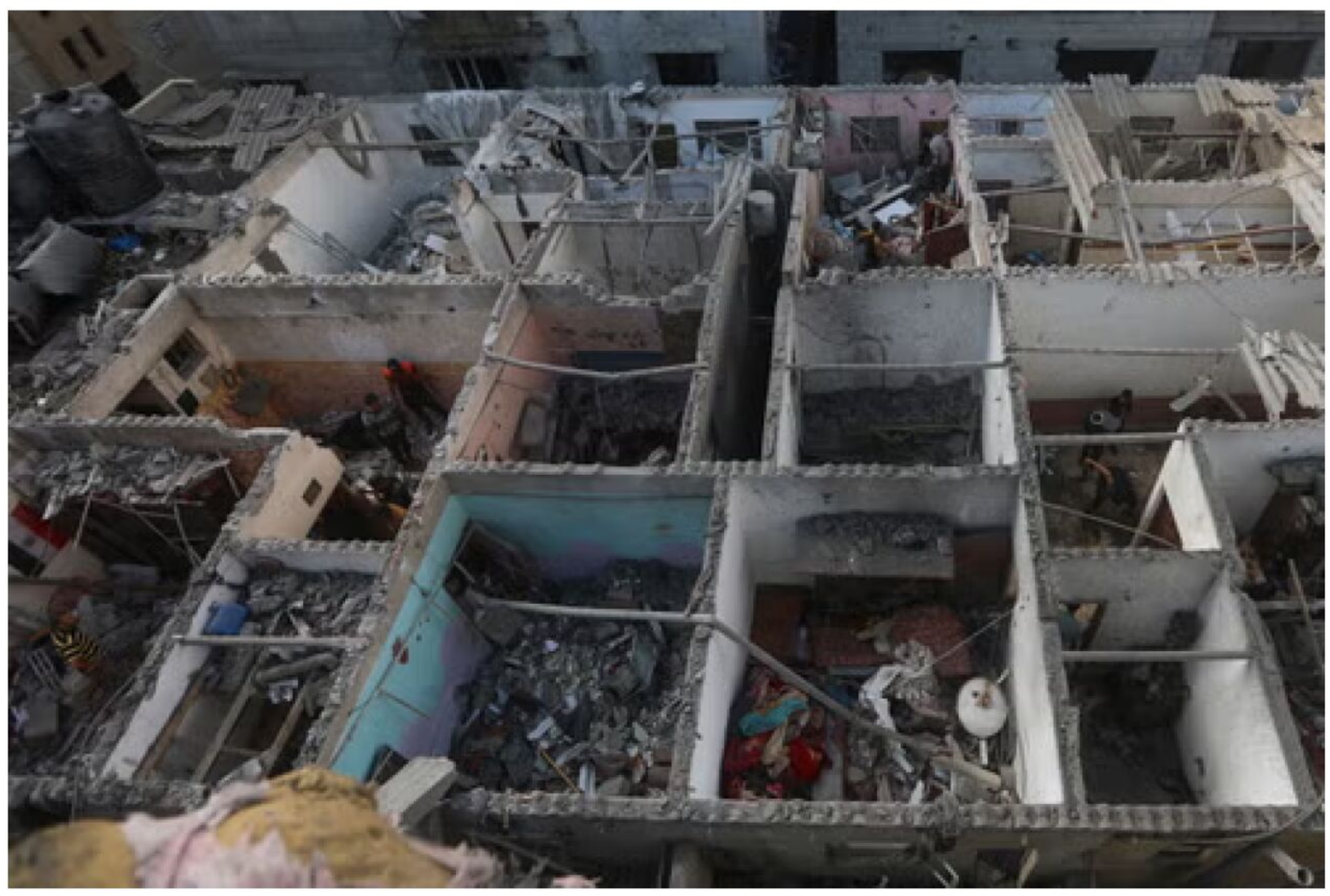
An imperative for moving into Rafah, said the very senior official, was the suspicion that Hamas was using tunnels in the area to smuggle weapons into Gaza with senior commanders directing the conflict from the city.

Yesterday morning, 12 hours after sealing off the border to Egypt with an armoured column, the Israeli military announced that it had already located three such tunnels, and expected to find more of them. A hunt, they continued, was underway to track down Yahya Sinwar and Mohammed Deif, the two Hamas chiefs who are yet to be killed or captured seven months into the war.

Israel has faced insistent demands from the US and other Western countries including the UK, Sunni Arab states with which it wants to build relations, as well as the UN and aid agencies to stop an offensive into Rafah – an attack which could lead to a humanitarian catastrophe to add to the terrible suffering in Gaza, where the death toll has risen to almost 35,000.

Netanyahu's government has steadfastly rejected the calls to desist. It has, at the same time, attended the interminable ceasefire negotiations in Doha and now Cairo. Time has been an important factor in this. The latest round, in the Egyptian capital, was expected to go on for some while, scope enough for the Rafah mission to get underway.

Netanyahu's announcement that the Rafah offensive would go ahead even if there was a truce made the chances of an agreement seem distant, as did a rocket attack on Rafah on the same day by Hamas which killed four Israeli soldiers, followed by Israeli air strikes in which 19 Palestinians died.



Rafah has already suffered significant destruction (AP)

Hamas, it was believed, would be unable to agree to the terms on offer. All this was turned on its head on Monday when Hamas announced that it had accepted the deal and the ball was now very much in Israel's court. There was an immediate call from Arab states for Israel to follow suit. The Biden administration expressed cautious approval, saying it was waiting for further details.

The devil was in the detail, and the details themselves were uncertain. What exactly had Hamas agreed to?

According to one account, the militant group accepted an initial month-long ceasefire during which 33 Israeli hostages in Gaza would be freed in return for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, including those serving life sentences after being convicted of terrorism and murder. A second phase in which talks would focus on ending the war and Israeli withdrawal from Gaza; and a final one where the subjects would be reconstruction and return of civilians to their home areas.

The reaction by the Israeli government showed it was unprepared for the Hamas statement. One senior official said it was being scrutinised to see if Hamas " was serious" about a deal. But this was followed by a statement from Netanyahu saying it did nothing to address core Israeli concerns.

He went on to state later that, "ending the war and leaving Hamas intact – the State of Israel cannot accept that. We are not

prepared to accept a situation in which the Hamas brigades come out of their bunkers, take control of Gaza again, rebuild their military infrastructure, and return to threatening the citizens of Israel."

The Netanyahu government is sending a delegation to the talks in Cairo. But, as an Israeli official told Reuters "this delegation is made up of mid-level envoys. Were there a credible deal in the offing, the principals would be heading the delegation."

Hard-right ministers in Netanyahu's right-wing governing coalition condemned the despatch to the talks. Bezalel Smotrich, the finance minister, said: "Sending the delegation to Cairo is a mistake and falls into the manipulative trap set by Hamas together with Qatar and Egypt. This is the time to press more and more on the neck of Yahya Sinwar and Hamas until they are destroyed. You must not give in to international pressure and you must not stop until victory and the submission of the enemy."

Netanyahu, as has been mentioned often, depends on the support of people like Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, the security minister, for his government's survival. But how far does he go to placate them?

Dennis Ross, a former US Middle East envoy, pointed out that others in the government may leave if Netanyahu continues to block a deal. "That doesn't bring the government down the way Smotrich and Ben-Gvir would, but it may set in motion a set of events in Israel that I think could put the government at risk. At a certain point, he needs to choose Biden over Ben-Gvir, he needs to choose the hostages over Smotrich," he said.

Some Israeli officials hold that the US was aware of the proposals that Egypt and Qatar had put forward to Hamas, but had failed to brief Israel before the Palestinian group accepted them. They further claim that the Americans had encouraged Hamas to believe that a hostage deal will lead to the end of the war.

The State Department denied this. It said in a statement: "We continue to believe that a hostage deal is in the best interest of

the Israeli and the Palestinian people; it would bring an immediate ceasefire and allow increased humanitarian assistance into Gaza."

Families of hostages have been holding protest marches and pressing the government to accept a ceasefire in return for the captives being freed.

Sharone Lifschitz, whose 83-year-old father Oded is among those being held, said: "If it doesn't happen now, it is going to take very long. We know some of them are dead, we know that they are in harm's way every day and every hour. We need to find a way to negotiate long-term deals to provide the security of citizens of Israel and Palestine. I urge the government to do all it can to bring back our people."

It seems unlikely for now that pressure, external or internal, will stop Benjamin Netanyahu's government from embarking on the Rafah offensive unless there is a sudden breakthrough in the talks. But, as the last 24 hours have shown, hopes of peace breaking out can be dashed just as suddenly.

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

News

Labour questions arms sales to Israel amid Rafah crisis

David Lammy made it clear to Tory deputy foreign secretary Andrew Mitchell that a ban should now be on the table (PA)

DAVID MADDOX
POLITICAL EDITOR

David Lammy moved Labour closer to calling for an outright ban on arms sales to Israel as the row over the Middle East crisis exploded in the House of Commons. With Labour under pressure from its own MPs and activists to take a harder line

against Israel on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Mr Lammy used an urgent question to ratchet up his party's position.

It follows concerns in the party leadership that Muslims and others are not voting Labour because of its position on the conflict. But with Israeli tanks moving on Rafah, Mr Lammy made it clear to Tory deputy foreign secretary Andrew Mitchell that banning arms sales to Israel should now be on the table.

He said: "The French government said the forced displacement of any civilian population is a war crime. Does the minister agree? Hamas is a terrorist organisation, its cowardly tactics are reprehensible but that does not stop Israel's obligation to follow the rules of war or the government's obligation on arms exports.

"Can the minister say why he thinks an attack on Rafah does not present a clear risk of a serious breach of international humanitarian law? Can he confirm whether he has received any assessment that the threshold has already been met."

Mitchell voiced concerns about the current situation in Gaza (PA)

The shadow foreign secretary had condemned Hamas's terrorism as well as the military action of Israel, including bombing tightly populated areas. But an intense session in the Commons saw anger on both sides with the left of the Labour Party pressurising for a ban on arms sales but the right of the Tories demanding that the government supports Israel's attempts to "eliminate Hamas".

Rightwing former home secretary Suella Braverman drew cries of anger when she intervened demanding full support for Israel's hardline actions. She said: "Yesterday I met with survivors of the Nova festival massacre. I met with people who fought single-handedly for hours against brutal Hamas terrorists.

"We all want peace but sometimes countries must fight for peace. Israel has a right to defend herself and a duty to protect her people from the brutal terrorism cult of Hamas. Will you confirm that the British government will maintain its steadfast and resolute support for Israel as she finishes the job to eliminate Hamas from Gaza?"

The Conservative MP for Bracknell James Sunderland said: "Given the increasing compression of that population in Rafah in a much, much smaller geographical area, the need for precision, restraint and proportionality from the Israelis is ever more acute." He added that "everything possible to convince the Israelis of the need to preserve the sanctity of human life" should be done.

Rochdale MP George Galloway, who recently won a by-election on the Gaza issue, said the government is not doing all it can over the Gaza conflict and called for an export ban on weapons to Israel. The Workers Party of Britain MP said: "The situation has escalated, but the government's response remains the same."

An Israeli tank near the border with the Gaza Strip (AP)

He continued: “There are 600,000 child hostages in Rafah alone. There is no proof of life from them, but millions of our people are watching on their phone today the proof of death and mutilation of many of them. The government say they are doing everything they can but they are not because you could now stop sending weapons to the people who are raining down this death and misery. And the Labour Party could actually ask you too, but didn’t.”

Mr Mitchell said: “The policies we are pursuing are long term and they are designed to tackle the evils that have been so clearly set out this afternoon in the House.” He added that the UK has been helping children in Gaza through medical aid, including through its field hospital near the city.

Jess Phillips, Labour MP for Birmingham, Yardley, told the Commons: “What he is saying, between the lines, is that Israel has currently breached the rule that the UK has set. And I don’t think he wants to say it here, but that is what I am hearing, so if there is no credible plan to move those people, and the attack is ongoing, when can we expect if not today an update on the UK’s position towards Israel, arms sales, and other things that have been mentioned today from this despatch box?”

Mr Mitchell replied: “I have given her the update from the despatch box insofar as there is an update to give. We have not seen a credible plan for military action in Rafah so far, and therefore we are not able to judge whether or not it will be in accordance with international humanitarian law.”

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

News

Protect Jewish students at Gaza protests, urges No 10

Rishi Sunak opened yesterday's cabinet meeting by saying there had been an 'unacceptable rise in antisemitism on our university campuses' (Getty)

TARA COBHAM

Universities must take "robust action" to ensure Jewish students are not harassed, Downing Street has urged amid ongoing protests on campuses against the war in Gaza.

The prime minister has summoned university leaders to a meeting this week to discuss antisemitism on campuses and

ensure Jewish students are safe. The meeting comes as students at Cambridge and Oxford universities are among the latest protesters to set up encampments to demonstrate against the war in Gaza on campuses.

Rishi Sunak opened yesterday's cabinet meeting by saying there had been an "unacceptable rise in antisemitism on our university campuses" and vice-chancellors would be meeting to discuss "the need for our universities to be safe for our Jewish students", the prime minister's official spokesperson said.

He added: "Our university campuses should be places of rigorous debate but they should also be tolerant places where people of all communities, particularly Jewish students at this time, are treated with respect."

Students march to deliver their demands to Cambridge University as they protest against the war in Gaza (PA)

Protesters have set up tents outside universities across the UK, including Manchester, Sheffield and Newcastle, after unrest at similar sites in the US. Asked what the prime minister's message was to students involved in the protests, the spokesperson said: "The right to free speech does not include the right to harass people or incite violence.

"We expect university leaders to take robust action in dealing with that kind of behaviour and that will be the subject of the conversation in No 10 later this week to ensure a zero-tolerance approach to this sort of behaviour is adopted on all campuses."

Pressed on whether police should be called in to clear protest camps, the spokesperson said: “We want to see university leaders taking a robust approach to unacceptable behaviour.”

More than 100 people attended a demonstration outside King’s College, Cambridge yesterday – where a protester with a megaphone by the encampment led a chant of “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free”. Protesters with Palestine flags and placards marched from the encampment to deliver their demands to the University of Cambridge.

A student works on their laptop during a tent protest in support of Palestine at King’s College Cambridge (AFP via Getty)

A Cambridge student, who did not wish to be named, described herself as “part of a global collective which is a struggle for Palestinian liberation”. The student said the protesters were demanding that the university “disclose all of its research collaborations and financial ties with companies and institutions complicit in Israel’s genocide and then to divest from these”. We will be staying here until our demands are met,” she said.

Police cleared a pro-Palestinian tent encampment at the University of Chicago yesterday amid tensions on US campuses over the war in Gaza. A University and College Union spokesperson said: “It has been shocking to witness militarised police forces invited onto campuses in the United States to violently shut down peaceful dissent.

Demonstrators clash at an encampment at the University of California, Los Angeles, earlier in May (AP)

"As peaceful encampments and occupations spread across Britain, we call on vice-chancellors to take a different approach. We are clear that antisemitism and Islamophobia have no place on our campuses or in our society, but freedom of speech and freedom of assembly within the law are fundamental human rights and civil liberties which must be upheld."

A University of Cambridge spokesperson said: "The university is fully committed to academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law and we acknowledge the right to protest. We ask everyone in our community to treat each other with understanding and empathy. Our priority is the safety of all staff and students. We will not tolerate antisemitism, Islamophobia and any other form of racial or religious hatred, or other unlawful activity."

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

China hack exposes details of 270,000 forces personnel

The missing information includes identities and bank details of serving personnel, reservists and veterans (Photos PA)

KIM SENGUPTA

A hacking attack on the British military by China was massive in scale, with 270,000 serving personnel, as well as reservists and veterans, from all three services affected.

The Special Forces have not been caught up in the breach, as they use a different, more secure system, but it remains unclear

whether members of the Intelligence Corps, part of the army, are among those whose personal details may have been taken.

It is believed the hacking operation has been going on for around three weeks but was discovered last week after investigators started tracking “a pattern of unusual activity”.

The missing information includes identities and bank details and in a few thousand cases, addresses and national insurance numbers. There is no evidence, at present, that the data had been exploited, but service personnel will be offered advice on monitoring their accounts.

“There are indications that a malign actor has compromised the armed forces payment network,” prime minister Rishi Sunak told reporters during a visit to a football academy in London yesterday.

“I do want to reassure people that the Ministry of Defence has already taken the action of removing the network offline and making sure that people affected are supported in the right way,” he added.

Rishi Sunak said a ‘malign actor’ has probably compromised the UK armed forces’ payments system

The trail so far goes back to hacking groups. And although they have acted on behalf of the Beijing regime, security officials point out that it could take months to establish a direct link.

Tobias Ellwood, the Conservative MP and former soldier, told Sky News, that China “was probably looking at the financially

vulnerable with a view that they may be coerced in exchange for cash".

Labour's shadow defence secretary, John Healey, said there are "so many serious questions for the defence secretary on this, especially from forces personnel whose details were targeted… Any such hostile action is utterly unacceptable."

Sir Iain Duncan Smith, the former Conservative leader, who has been sanctioned by China, said: "This is yet another example of why the UK government must admit that China poses a systemic threat to the UK and change the integrated review to reflect that. No more pretence, it is a malign actor, supporting Russia with money and military equipment, working with Iran and North Korea in a new axis of totalitarian states."

A spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in London said: "China has always upheld the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs. China has neither the interest nor the need to meddle in the internal affairs of the UK. We urge the relevant parties in the UK to stop spreading false information, stop fabricating so-called China threat narratives, and stop their anti-China political farce."

The defence breach came just weeks after ministers accused Beijing of being behind an attack on the UK's voting registers, which gave China access to the names and addresses of millions of people.

Mr Sunak subsequently called China "the greatest state-based challenge to our national security" and an "epoch-defining challenge".

Last year, the government published an updated version of its long-term defence strategy which said the use of "commercial spyware, ransomware and offensive cyber capabilities by state and non-state actors has proliferated".

In December 2023, the National Cyber Security Agency said that Russia was responsible for "malicious cyber activity attempting to interfere in UK politics and democratic processes".

Public institutions and private firms have also been targeted by hackers demanding ransoms.

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Can Reeves tell Britain the truth about the economy?

Rachel Reeves delivers her speech in the City of London yesterday (Getty)

SEAN O'GRADY

Rachel Reeves, the shadow chancellor, has caused a bit of a stir by accusing the government of "gaslighting" Britain over the economy. She told an audience in the City: "They say we've turned a corner. But try telling that to the 6.4 million households across England and Wales that last year saw their rent increase or had to remortgage. Or the 950,000 families

whose mortgage deal is due to expire between now and January. They say 'the plan is working'. Is this the same plan that has meant this is forecast to be the first parliament on record with living standards actually lower at its end than at the start?"

In fairness, much of her speech was the usual knocking copy on the government's record, as opposed to a detailed plan for a parliamentary term, let alone the "decade of renewal" she and Keir Starmer are hoping for.

Is Rachel Reeves right about the economy?

Broadly, yes. One of the many presentational weaknesses of recent Conservative administrations has been to overstate Britain's economic success, and in such a way that it creates unhelpful dissonance between people's day-to-day experiences and whatever the government fancifully claims on social media and in speeches and interviews. At least Sunak isn't as mindlessly boosterish as Boris Johnson.

The difference between a country in mild recession, crawling out of such a recession, or experiencing minimal, anaemic growth is imperceptible to the average person, so claims about growth are bound to be viewed sceptically.

Perhaps the most glaring is inflation, where ministers sometimes seem to suggest prices are actually falling, whereas they are still going up albeit at a slower rate. Or the continual boasts about "tax cuts" (ie reductions in national insurance), which are starkly at odds with what people see in their pay packets given the long-term freeze on tax thresholds, and substantial hikes in council tax and poor public services. As Reeves says: "I love a graph as much as the next person, I spent the early part of my career looking at them obsessively. But in the end, what success looks like is how people feel."

That said, a professional economist such as Reeves would have to concede that sometimes economies can be quietly improving their underlying health, for example by diverting consumption into investment, keeping taxes high to pay off debt, or with high mortgage rates to choke off inflation, even though households feel worse off in the short term.

Will she strike a chord with voters with this line of attack?

One suspects nothing Labour says or does hasn't somehow been tested for how it will resonate with the public, and voters tend to like politicians who appear to be "in touch" with them and understand how pricey their car insurance is these days and who know how much a loaf of bread costs. That goes a long way to enhance credibility, and having a "cabinet of millionaires" and a prime minister whose family are near enough billionaires doesn't help to convince voters they understand "the problems of people like me" as market researchers put it. Reeves sounds more like she's on their level, at least.

What difference would Rachel Reeves make in government?

In macroeconomic terms, not very much – and voters probably sense this by now. All the talk about "iron clad" discipline, ditching the infamous £28bn green energy scheme, the caution about plans having to be fully costed and fully funded… none of it suggests the next Labour government will be profligate, or "hard-left maniacs" as Suella Braverman recently claimed. Reeves has committed to abide by existing fiscal rules, and to reinforce them by strengthening the Office for Budget Responsibility (to avoid more disastrous Truss-style experiments). The fact that Jeremy Hunt's projections for debt are based on wildly unrealistic plans for public spending seems not to trouble Reeves or her colleagues.

Shadow ministers for major spending departments such as health (Wes Streeting), work and pensions (Liz Kendall) and education (Bridget Phillipson) stress reform and limit their pledges to relatively modest specific projects linked to specific tax measures or (though yet to be defined) savings elsewhere. Of course, monetary policy and control of inflation will remain firmly with the Bank of England. An aversion to re-opening Brexit also means that that particular brake on trade, investment and labour supply will remain a drag on growth. The constraints on the putative new chancellor will be familiar.

So how will they achieve growth?

There will apparently be some borrowing to invest but because it will have to be within an overall fiscal envelope, it might amount to very little. The solution is to try to leverage private money and relax planning rules to get things moving. As with the present government, there will be schemes to boost AI and similar techniques. It won't be transformative, though; big improvements in wages will deliver higher productivity and that depends on commensurately higher levels of investment, both public and private.

Will Labour raise taxes?

We won't really know much more until the manifesto comes out, and the full story won't emerge until the first budget. Despite all the complaints about this government, Reeves doesn't seem in a hurry to raise income tax thresholds or reverse national insurance cuts.

She has stated an ambition to reduce taxes for those in work, and to abolish most of the non-dom tax perks but the rest is frankly vague. The assumption must be that she'll find a way to trim the few remaining middle class tax perks, raise capital gains tax, and impose more taxes on "unearned" income – landlords can expect to be clobbered. One particular problem is how she'll manage local authorities struggling with their rising debt and facing bankruptcy.

Are workers going to be better off?

Probably, but by how much more is difficult to say. Aside from trends in real wages, which will not see spectacular growth, there are rumours that Labour's New Deal for Workers will be subject to "consultations". This New Deal was Angela Rayner's signature political achievement but this, too, seems to be subject to the approval of the shadow chancellor. This may or may not be good news for business investment and economic growth, but in the short term it will mean the planned expansion of collective bargaining rights, reversal of Tory laws on minimum service obligations, reform of zero-hours contracts, and other similar measures will be less ambitious than previously

expected. To take a small example, Reeves has already suggested some zero-hours contracts may remain.

Making public sector strikes easier and more damaging would prove a bit of a vote-loser at the election, so expect some hedging on those workers' rights too (indeed, given Streeting's aggressive talk of reform, we might even see more strikes in the NHS). What might be more useful would be if an incoming government implemented the Taylor review of employment status and clarified the present tangle of differential treatment for "employees", "workers" and "freelance" or "self-employed" people, both for tax and employment law purposes.

Can Labour achieve its mission of a decade of renewal?

For the majority of the population, the Britain of Starmer and Reeves won't feel that different to that promised by Sunak and Hunt. Even if Labour had more radical plans, it would take years for them to work through the system; but some critics do yearn for something more substantial and rapid to show for a term of Labour government than simply "SIR" – Stability, Investment and Reform.

Reeves's present emphasis on those basics and general caution will make it easier for Labour to win an election, and will give her chancellorship some principles to guide her work; but whether it will help the party win the following election, due in about 2028, is uncertain. Instead, Labour may have to fall back on exaggerating a somewhat mediocre performance. Therefore, we shall soon enough see whether Labour in power is more or less inclined to "gaslight" Britain than the present Conservatives.

If anyone is gaslighting us on the economy then it's Reeves

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Border Force e-gates glitch causes chaos at UK airports

Long queues formed at Heathrow with many passengers missing connecting flights (Jane Arnold)

ALEXANDER BUTLER
SIMON CALDER

Airports across the UK have seen long queues and delays after the country's Border Force passport e-gates were hit by a nationwide glitch.

Pictures on social media showed enormous queues in front of the gates at Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Luton, Edinburgh and Manchester last night as thousands waited for their passports to be checked.

Passenger Harmeet Singh, who arrived at Stansted yesterday evening, described the delays as "complete madness" with no one in charge.

He told *The Independent*: "We noticed huge lawless queues with no one in charge. My wife has a back muscle injury and I asked staff three times for a chair but they were unhelpful.

"More and more passengers arrived, the walkways to the toilets were blocked, 10-15 disabled passengers were waiting and unhappy. It was complete madness."

Another passenger said he landed at Manchester Airport and faced "huge queues" for passport control and was told the terminal's e-gates were down.

Mariella, a British Airways passenger from Athens, touched down on BA637 at 8.30pm. She eventually emerged from International Arrivals at Heathrow Terminal 5 shortly before 11pm, and told *The Independent*: "They announced that everything was shut down, all the passports, whilst we were on the plane.

"The told us the transit [which shuttles passengers from remote satellites to the main building] was also not working.

"Everything was just stuck. We were 'snailing' like a helix. They were just sending us all the way back, and all the way back, and it was just crazy for two-and-a-half hours."

When Mariella, who has an EU passport, reached the officer, she was asked the purpose of her visit.

"That felt quite strange because it's normally something that you are asked at the US border so that's a first. Everybody queueing up was in good spirits, though, because we knew we were stuck. They were handing water to people."

"People lost their connection flights and had to go to the hotels to sleep for the night."

Simon Calder, *The Independent's* travel correspondent, said: "The e-gates are a critical component of the UK Border Force operation at London Heathrow and all major airports – as well as the Eurostar terminal at Paris Gare du Nord.

"A large majority of inbound passengers are able to use them: adults from the UK, the European Union, North America, Australasia, Singapore, South Korea and Japan.

"Because most arriving travellers are processed automatically, it allows officers to focus on individuals from other parts of the world who need visas.

"All the staffing arrangements are made on the assumption that e-gates will be taking care of most passengers. As we saw almost a year ago – over the late May bank holiday weekend in 2023 – when they fail nationwide things unravel very quickly."

Paul Curievici, from Haslemere in Surrey, landed at Gatwick Airport at around 7.30pm on a flight from Lyon and waited in line for almost an hour at passport control.

The 41-year-old said: "I was a little bit resigned at what initially looked like another British infrastructure failing, and (I had) quite a lot of sympathy for the poor buggers furrowing their brows and trying not to look embarrassed."

A London Gatwick spokesperson said: "Some passengers may experience delays at immigration due to a nationwide issue with UK Border Force e-gates.

"Our staff are working with UK Border Force – who operate passport control including the e-gates – to provide assistance to passengers where necessary."

A Heathrow spokesperson said: "Border Force is currently experiencing a nationwide issue which is impacting passengers being processed through the border.

"Our teams are supporting Border Force with their contingency plans to help resolve the problem as quickly as possible and are

on hand to provide passenger welfare. We apologise for any impact this is having to passenger journeys."

Manchester Airport's statement read: "We are aware of an issue with UK Border Force's systems across the country, affecting a significant number of airports.

"Our resilience team and customer services colleagues are supporting passengers while UK Border Force and the Home Office fix the issue."

London Stansted and Edinburgh airports also said they had been affected by the issue.

A Home Office spokesperson said: "We are aware of a technical issue affecting e-gates across the country. We are working closely with Border Force and affected airports to resolve the issue as soon as possible and apologise to all passengers for the inconvenience caused."

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

The Tardis is in safe hands with this debonair Doctor

Ncuti Gatwa anchors two slightly dodgy 'Doctor Who' episodes with his charm and style, writes **Ed Power**

The 15th Doctor's first two trips find him making sense of talking babies and tuneless Beatles (BBC Studios/Bad Wolf/James Pardon)

★★★★☆

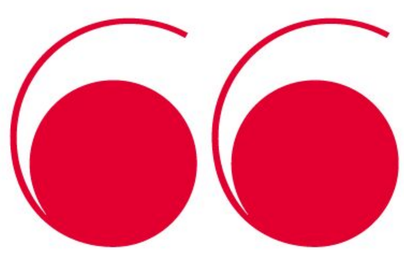
Fittingly for a series about adventures across space and time, the latest season of *Doctor Who* features an interstellar lead performance by Ncuti Gatwa. He's a natural as the new custodian of the Tardis, both mischievous and mysterious, and is

by far the best thing about the BBC's biggest franchise as former showrunner Russell T Davies takes up the reins once again. In fact, Gatwa's charm proves essential in two wildly uneven opening episodes, which suggest that Davies hasn't quite got back into the galaxy-hopping groove yet.

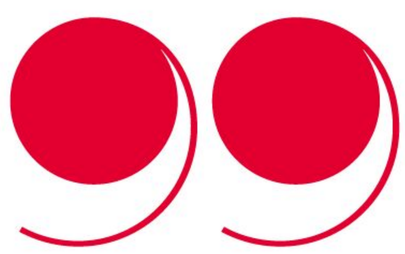
Gatwa's Doctor feels like a greatest hits of Time Lords past. He has inherited immediate predecessor Jodie Whittaker's humanity and empathy. But he also has an air of fervent eccentricity that recalls the best of David Tennant and Peter Capaldi (and, if we're doing a deep dive, Fifth Doctor Peter Davison).

The 15th Doctor also has wonderful chemistry with his assistant Ruby Sunday (Millie Gibson). No matter how ludicrous the storylines are (they are pretty ludicrous in these instalments), they gel fantastically. Whovians will hope they continue to do so following the arrival of a second companion in the next series, to be played by *Jurassic World Dominion*'s Varada Sethu.

Above all, Gatwa has the crucial Doctor quality of being deeply enigmatic. You never know what he's going to do next. Nor does Sunday. She is surprised to be whisked off to the age of the dinosaurs as she and the Doctor begin their adventures, having first met in last year's excellent Christmas special.



Some Time Lords are a work in progress. He's the finished article right from the jump – quirky, nattily attired and brimming with megawatt charm



It's good, giddy fun and will go down well both at home and internationally, where Disney+ is handling distribution. Still, the two instalments that launch the new run aren't perfect. The first, "Space Babies", is a promising idea that never entirely comes to life on screen. Having zipped around space and time on a lark, the Doctor and Ruby end up in a high orbit station populated by babies who can talk (don't worry, the script sort of explains it). But the station is also stalked by a "bogeyman" monster in the basement, which gives even the Doctor the heebie-jeebies.

The show has never hidden its influences, and "Space Babies" hits like a homage to Ridley Scott's *Alien* mixed with one of those disposable nappy ads where the babies have the power of speech. Super ancient viewers may be furthermore reminded of the old Bruce Willis chatty-baby franchise *Look Who's Talking*.

More successful by far is the second episode, "The Devil's Chord", where the Doctor and Ruby travel back to 1963 and Abbey Road Studios to see the Beatles lay down their earliest tracks. Alas, someone has stolen the power of music from the world, and the Beatles are literally tuneless. The idea of a universe without music is obviously horrible – though on the upside, it would mean no more Ed Sheeran albums – and Davies has great fun setting our heroes against gluttonous baddie Maestro (Jinkx Monsoon).

The BBC's pre-eminent sci-fi saga has always held up a mirror to its times (whether by design or accident). With this new season, Davies sticks with that tradition by applying some pointed commentary on current affairs. In "Space Babies", we learn that the infants' home planet is obsessed with bringing the children to gestation yet couldn't care less what happens to them after that – a clear nod towards the abortion debate in the United States.

The big takeaway, however, is that Gatwa is already perfect as the Doctor. Some Time Lords are a work in progress. He's the finished article right from the jump – quirky, nattily attired (though his vintage wardrobe never overshadows the performance) and brimming with megawatt charm. The stories

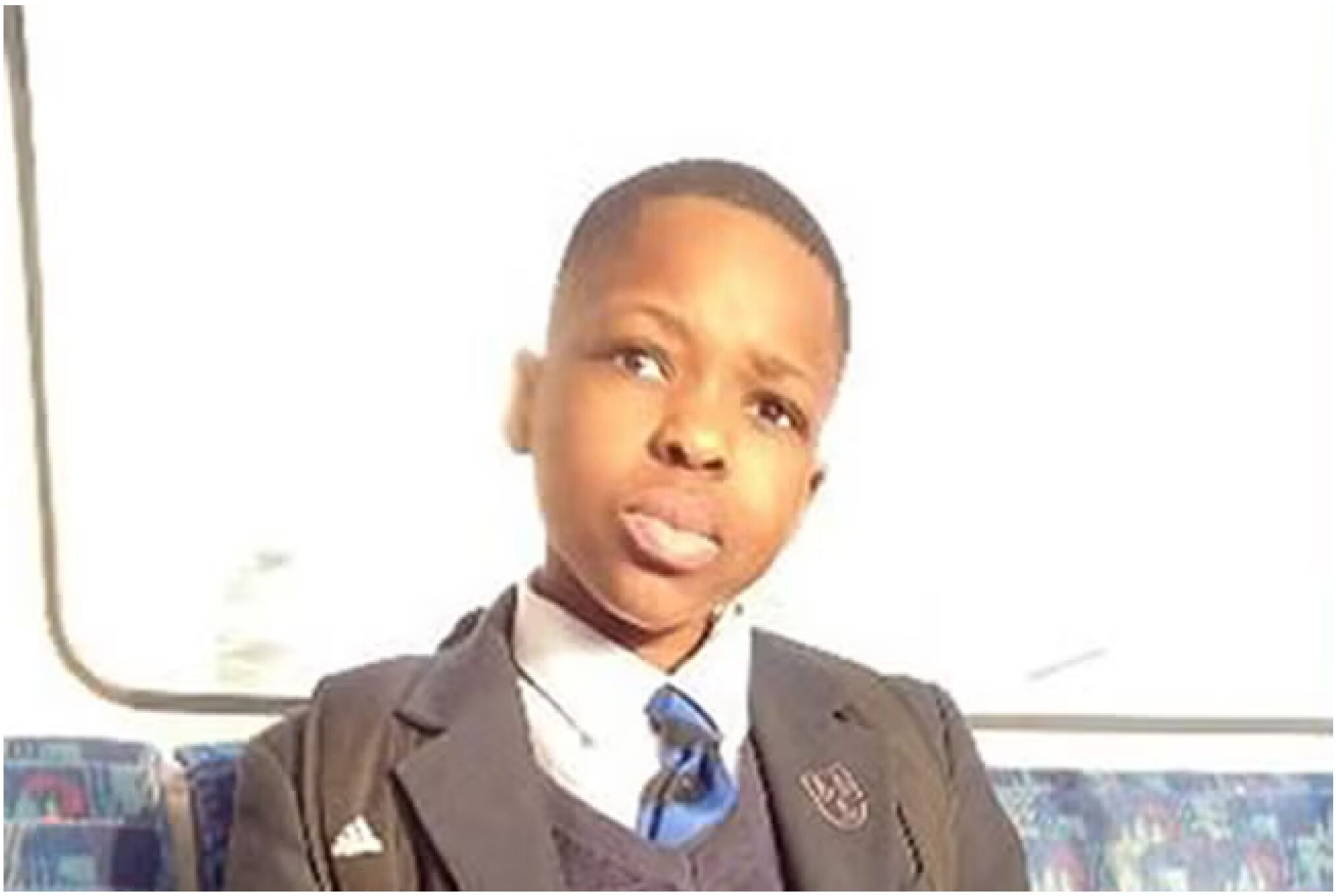
aren't entirely there yet but with Gatwa at the controls, it comes as a huge relief to report that the Tardis is in safe hands.

The first two episodes of the new 'Doctor Who' series air Saturday from 6.20pm on BBC One

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Teen sword victim attacked from behind, court is told



Daniel Anjourin, 14, was slashed in the neck and died from his wounds (Photos PA)

HOLLY EVANS

An alleged sword attacker has appeared at the Old Bailey charged with murdering a teenage boy, who was attacked from behind and slashed in the neck while walking to school.

Marcus Arduini Monzo, 36, is also accused of attacking four others, including two police officers, during a 20-minute rampage in Hainault, northeast London, last Tuesday.

The court heard that the attack unfolded shortly before 7am, after Monzo allegedly crashed a van into a fence in Laing Close, hitting a member of the public. The court was told that he then got out of the van, said that he would kill the man and slashed him in the neck.

Shortly afterwards, he is accused of attacking 14-year-old Daniel Anjourin from behind, causing fatal injuries after slashing him in the neck. A post-mortem examination found the cause of death was “sharp force trauma to the head”.

Floral tributes at the end of Laing Close near the scene in Hainault, northeast London

After an ambulance arrived, he allegedly approached paramedics with the weapon and prevented them from coming to assist, before he was chased by police officers. He subsequently attacked a female police officer, PC Yasmin Margaret Mechem-Whitfield, causing significant injuries while she lay on the ground.

After running through gardens, he entered a property and allegedly attacked a couple as they slept, with their young daughter also present. The child’s father, Henry De Los Rios Polania, was left with injuries to his neck and arm and has been described as a “hero” for protecting his family against the attack.

More than 300 people gathered to pay tribute to Daniel and the other injured victims

After leaving the property, officers apprehended the suspect by using Tasers, with one officer suffering an arterial bleed after being stabbed with the weapon. The court heard that none of the victims had known their attacker. In the days following, floral tributes, handwritten notes and teddies have been left at the scene in memory of Daniel, who was described as “amazing” by his heartbroken family. Staff and pupils at the independent Bancroft’s School, where Daniel was a pupil, said they have been left in “profound shock and sorrow” at his death.

In a statement issued by the Metropolitan Police on Saturday, his family said: “We as a family are devastated by the loss of our beloved son Daniel. “It is difficult for us at this time to process what has happened to him and that he will never come home. Daniel had left the house for school and then he was gone. Our children have lost their loving and precious brother and we have lost the most loved and amazing son. We would like to send our best wishes to the other victims of this unthinkable incident.”

Fans hold up a banner on the 14th minute during Arsenal's match against Bournemouth in memory of Daniel

Arsenal led tributes to Daniel, who was a fan of the London club, ahead of their Premier League match against Bournemouth on Saturday. During the match there was also a moment of applause throughout the Emirates Stadium in the 14th minute, with a banner reading "RIP Daniel" among the crowd.

Dressed in a grey tracksuit, Monzo, a dual Spanish-Brazilian national living in Newham, east London, confirmed his name and date of birth as he stood in the dock. A three-week trial has been provisionally set for 3 February 2025.

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

King is too busy to see me, says Harry while in the UK

Meghan 'chose to skip' the trip celebrating Invictus Games

Prince Harry was all smiles at the Invictus anniversary in London yesterday (Getty Images for The Invictus Games)

EMMA GUINNESS

Prince Harry landed back on UK soil yesterday ahead of a special Invictus Games event – but hopes for seeing King Charles were dashed.

The Duke of Sussex said he “hopes” to see his father “soon” after the King’s “full programme” meant a reunion was not possible during a UK trip to celebrate the 10th anniversary of his Paralympic-style tournament for wounded veterans.

The pair last met soon after the King announced his cancer diagnosis in February and his son, who now lives with his family in California, rushed from America to see his father.

A spokesperson for the duke said: “In response to the many inquiries and continued speculation on whether or not the duke will meet with his father while in the UK this week, it unfortunately will not be possible due to His Majesty’s full programme. The duke of course is understanding of his father’s diary of commitments and various other priorities and hopes to see him soon.”

The Duchess of Sussex has not been in the country since 2022 when she attended the late Queen Elizabeth’s funeral (PA)

Harry, 39, travelled solo leaving Meghan and their two children in LA. According to reports, the prince will not be staying at Buckingham Palace. but at a London hotel. He lost Frogmore Cottage when he stepped down as a working royal in 2020. Harry founded the sporting event in 2014 to give wounded, injured and sick service people the opportunity to showcase their talents.

He is expected to give a speech today at a service in St Paul’s Cathedral in London, which a spokesperson has confirmed will

not be attended by any members of his immediate family. The event is one of a series planned in both the UK and overseas.

The prince is expected to spend just three days in his home country before flying to Nigeria to continue the celebrations. There, he will be joined by his wife who reportedly chose to skip the UK events. The Duchess of Sussex has not been in the country since 2022 when she attended the late Queen Elizabeth's funeral.

The visit is Harry's first time on British soil since February when he met with his father for a reported 45 minutes following the Monarch's cancer diagnosis. There are no reports that Harry will be meeting with his brother Prince William or sister-in-law Kate Middleton on the trip.

Harry appeared to be in good spirits when he was photographed yesterday at Invictus-related events. On the Nigerian leg of the celebrations, both Harry and Meghan are expected to give talks about the games. It is not known whether they will be accompanied by their children, Archie and Lilibet, but Meghan is expected to fly directly to Nigeria from California in the coming days.

Harry wrote ahead of this week's events: "It has been an honour to watch the Invictus Games Foundation grow over the years; what began as a vision to pay tribute to the courage and resilience of wounded, injured and sick service personnel and veterans has flourished into an international organisation built on hope, strength and unity."

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Pictures of the Day

Oh, a deer!

A deer pokes its head out above deep grass in Wehrheim near Frankfurt, Germany. *AP*

Light relief

A girl rides a makeshift swing in the yard of a school run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East at the Shati camp, west of Gaza City. *AFP*

Exchanging blows

Indigenous men play pipes and dance before taking part in Tinku, a Quechua form of ritual combat, in Kona Kona, Bolivia. *Reuters*

Basket plaices?

Fishermen unload and sort their catches at a fish auction in Lampulo, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. *EPA*

Canvassing their opinion

A protester looks out of a tent outside the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, as students occupy parts of British university campuses in support of Palestinians in Gaza. *Reuters*

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Home news in brief

Holly LeGresley shared 22 images and 132 videos of animal cruelty (PA)

Woman admits sharing monkey torture videos

A British woman has pleaded guilty to uploading content of monkeys being tortured to a global network of online chat groups. Holly LeGresley, 37, from Kidderminster, was charged following an investigation by the BBC into the torture of monkeys overseas. She uploaded 22 images and 132 videos of animal cruelty to online chat groups.

She was told that “all options” would be available at her sentencing hearing at Worcester Crown Court next month after

she pleaded guilty to separate charges of publishing obscene articles and intentionally encouraging animal cruelty.

Prosecutor Angla Hallan told Worcester Magistrates' Court: "The Crown submit that due to the unusual legal, procedural and factual complexity of this particular case, that the matter would not be suitable to be dealt with in these courts." Although she did not open detailed facts of the case, Ms Hallan said it fell into the category of "sadism and high harm".

A second defendant, Adriana Orme, 55, of Ryall, near Upton upon Severn, did not indicate any plea to similar charges.

Garrick Club votes to accept women members

London's private Garrick Club has voted in favour of accepting women members for the first time in its 193-year history. Sixty per cent of the club's 1,500 members reportedly answered in favour of the change following a two-hour debate at a venue in Covent Garden. Speakers in favour of the change included Stephen Fry, James Naughtie, Jonathan Sumption and Nigel Havers, according to *The Telegraph*.

Women were previously only allowed to enter the club if invited and accompanied by a man.

The decision comes after *The Guardian* published the gentleman club's membership list earlier this year, which included the King, deputy prime minister Oliver Dowden and Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gov as well as entertainment figures including Sting, Benedict Cumberbatch and the actor Brian Cox.

Baby dies after 'neglect incident' at Legoland Windsor

A five-month-old boy has died after suffering cardiac arrest at Legoland Windsor in a suspected case of neglect, police have said. The baby died on Sunday after being rushed to hospital in critical condition after the incident around noon on Thursday.

A 27-year-old woman from Witham, Essex, was arrested on Thursday on suspicion of neglecting a child to cause unnecessary injury. She has been released on police bail until 26 July.

Detective Constable Zoe Eele said: “We are working closely with the team at Legoland Windsor Resort but would like to speak to anyone who may have information about this incident, specifically anyone who was queueing for the Coastguard HQ boat ride between around 11.30am and 12.45pm.”

Witnesses can call 101 or contact police via their website, quoting reference number INC-20240502-0977.

Helpline unable to remove thousands of revenge porn images

Tens of thousands of revenge porn images and footage cannot be removed from the internet due to a “loophole” in the law, a new study by the Revenge Porn Helpline has found. Their research found the internet currently has 30,000 websites containing intimate image abuse material that they can’t take down.

Campaigners called for ministers to urgently overhaul the law as tech platforms can refuse to remove content because they’re not legally obliged to do so. Sophie Mortimer, a manager at the helpline, said: “Sharing intimate images without consent is illegal, but the content itself is not illegal, so some platforms simply don’t cooperate with our request to remove imagery and footage.”

She explained the majority of platforms, including social media and prominent adult sites, are very cooperative but others ignore their requests. Some of these platforms’ business models are centred on sharing and resharing intimate image-based abuse and are hosted in countries where there is little regulation, such as Russia, parts of Asia and South America.

Beachgoers risk £1,000 fine for taking seashells in Cumbria

Visitors to Cumbria's beaches have been warned not to pick up pebbles or risk receiving a £1,000 fine. Cumberland Council said the aim is to protect the environment and land from coastal erosion as part of a new climate and nature strategy. Beachgoers who pick up pebbles and seashells on Cumbrian shorelines could be hit with a fine based on the Coast Protection Act, 1949.

Councillor Bob Kelly, the Cumberland policy and regulatory services spokesperson, said: "I understand people's reluctance to follow this guidance, as I have been a collector of shells myself. But taking a pebble or a shell from a beach can in fact damage the environment. We are asking people to leave the pebbles, shells and sand as we all want to ensure that our beaches remain vibrant and intact for future generations."

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

INDEPENDENT
PREMIUM | EVENT

Is NHS psychiatric care on the brink of collapse?

Inside the crisis deepening in NHS mental health services

Thursday 23 May,
6.30pm - 7.30pm

To book your place today:

1. Log in to independent.co.uk
2. Click on the 'More' tab
3. Select 'My Independent Premium' to view the event
4. Click the 'Book tickets' button to reserve your place

Navalny's widow says Putin is a liar, thief and murderer

Rallying cry as Russian president sworn in for his fifth term

The opposition leader Yulia Navalnaya made the comments in a video calling for support (@NavalnyRu/YouTube)

MATT MATHERS

Yulia Navalnaya branded Vladimir Putin "a liar, a thief and a murderer" just hours before the Russian president was sworn in for his fifth term in office following sham elections.

Ms Navalnaya, the wife of the late opposition leader Alexei Navalny, urged her supporters to continue the "fight" against Putin's "corrupt" regime. The Russian president was inaugurated for a fresh six-year stint in office yesterday morning at a Kremlin ceremony boycotted by several Western states – including the UK.

"With each of his terms, everything only gets worse, and it's frightening to imagine what else will happen while Putin remains in power," Ms Navalnaya, now the opposition leader who is exiled from Russia in an unknown location, told her supporters in a video message before the ceremony. "The foundation of the Putin regime is lies and corruption."

Putin after being sworn in yesterday (Getty)

Ms Navalnaya's husband Alexei, who was poisoned with novichok in a suspected assassination attempt by Russia, died in an Arctic prison in February after he was jailed for several offences including terrorism, which his supporters said were politically motivated.

"Huge sums of money are stolen from us every day to fund bombings of peaceful cities, riot police beating people with batons, propagandists spreading lies," his widower added. "And

also for their own palaces, yachts and private jets. And as long as this continues, we can't stop the fight."

Putin, in power as either president or prime minister since 1999, begins his new mandate more than two years after he sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine, where Russian forces have regained the initiative after a series of reversals and are seeking to advance further in the east.

At 71, Putin dominates the domestic political landscape. On the international stage, he is locked in a confrontation with Western countries he accuses of using Ukraine as a vehicle to try to defeat and dismember Russia. He won a landslide victory in a tightly controlled election from which two anti-war candidates were barred on technical grounds.

Britain, Canada and most European Union nations also decided to boycott the swearing-in, but France said it would send its ambassador. Ukraine said the event sought to create "the illusion of legality for the nearly lifelong stay in power of a person who has turned the Russian Federation into an aggressor state and the ruling regime into a dictatorship".

"Russia's assault on Ukraine is an unprovoked, premeditated and barbaric attack against a sovereign democratic state," a UK Foreign Office spokesperson said. "The UK condemns the Russian government's reprehensible actions, which are an egregious violation of international law and the UN Charter."

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Putin plot to kidnap and kill Zelensky foiled, says Kyiv

Russian ‘saboteurs’ being arrested by the Ukrainian SBU (Supplied)

BARNEY DAVIS

Ukrainian intelligence agents say they have foiled a Russian plot to assassinate Volodymyr Zelensky.

Ukraine’s SBU state security service said it had caught Russian agents within the Ukrainian state guard plotting the kidnap and assassination of the president and other senior governmental officials.

The head of the SBU, Vasyl Malyuk, said the failed assassination was supposed to be a “gift” to Vladimir Putin ahead of his inauguration yesterday. The force said they arrested the two suspected “moles” who they believe had been recruited by Russia before its invasion.

Russian saboteurs are confronted in the woods by the Ukrainian SBU (Supplied)

The SBU claimed on Telegram that a Russian secret agent had passed on coordinates of a safe house ahead of a planned rocket attack. The force added Russia had planned to destroy all traces of the drone used to target the president with another missile.

Without providing evidence, they wrote: “The enemy was actively developing plans to eliminate president Volodymyr Zelensky. One of the tasks of the FSB intelligence network was to search for executors among the military close to the protection of the president, who could take the head of state hostage and later kill him.

“In addition to Volodymyr Zelensky, the enemy planned to eliminate the head of the Security Service of Ukraine, Vasyl Malyuk, the head of the state administration of Ukraine, Kyryll Budanov and other high-ranking officials.”

Volodymyr Zelensky was the primary target, claim the SBU (AP)

Mr Malyuk said: “A limited number of people knew about our special operation, and I personally monitored its progress. The terrorist attack, which was supposed to be a gift to Putin before the inauguration, was actually a failure of the Russian special services. But we must not forget, the enemy is strong and experienced, he cannot be underestimated. We will continue to work ahead of time, so that every traitor receives the well-deserved court sentences.”

The SBU claimed a search of the “intruders” found the “relevant means of destruction” and other evidence of criminal activity. They said the two officers were arrested on suspicion of treason committed under martial law and preparation for a terrorist act. Both offences carry a life sentence, the statement read.

Russia’s defence ministry did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Ukrainian claims of Russian efforts to kill Mr Zelensky are not new. Mr Zelensky said in 2022 there had been at least 10 attempts to assassinate him. Also, prosecutors in Poland said last month a Polish man had been arrested on allegations of being ready to spy on behalf of Russia’s military intelligence in an alleged plot to assassinate Mr Zelensky.

It's vital that Russians know we could send in UK troops

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

World

Adult star testifies Trump likened her to his daughter

The former president pictured with Stormy Daniels at a golf tournament in 2006 (Sourced)

KELLY RISSMAN
ALEX WOODWARD

Before they had sex in a hotel room in 2006, Donald Trump told Stormy Daniels that she reminded him of his daughter Ivanka Trump, according to testimony from the adult film star during the former president's hush money trial in New York yesterday. Ms Daniels would later receive $130,000 from Mr Trump's then-attorney Michael Cohen to ensure she would not speak about the encounter while Mr Trump was running for the presidency in 2016.

Their encounter in July 2006, one year after Mr Trump married Melania Trump, followed their meeting at a charity golf tournament in Lake Tahoe. Ms Daniels said she had hoped to land an appearance on Mr Trump's hit NBC reality series *The Apprentice* but doubted her business talent. "You remind me of my daughter," Mr Trump told her in the hotel room, according to Ms Daniels. "Smart, blond and beautiful. And people underestimate her as well."

After meeting at the golf tournament, Mr Trump, then 60 years old, had invited the then-27-year-old adult entertainer to dinner. "F no," Ms Daniels remembers thinking. "No, with an expletive in front of it."

A friend ultimately convinced her to go, she testified. Ms Daniels remembered her friend ominously telling her: "It'll make a great story, he's a business guy. What could possibly go wrong?" She later wound up at Mr Trump's penthouse room at Harrah's, Ms Daniels recalled. Mr Trump's suite "was three times the size of my apartment", she said.

Trump in the Manhattan courtroom yesterday as Daniels gave testimony about their alleged time together (Getty)

Mr Trump would later reimburse Cohen for his payment to Ms Daniels in a series of monthly checks throughout 2017, while Mr Trump was president. Those checks were labelled as legal expenses across Trump Organization accounting documents, what Manhattan prosecutors argue is a cover-up to conceal what

were instead payments intended to influence the outcome of the 2016 election. Mr Trump is charged with 34 counts of falsifying business records. He has pleaded not guilty.

Karen McDougal, a former *Playboy* model who was also paid so-called hush money payments after having an affair with the former president, has previously discussed being compared to Ivanka by Mr Trump. Speaking on *Anderson Cooper 360,* she said, "He's very proud of Ivanka, as he should be. I mean, she's a brilliant woman. She's beautiful."

"He said I was beautiful like her and, you know, you're a smart girl. And there wasn't a lot of comparing, but there was some, yes. I heard a lot about her," she said. Ms Daniels' testimony echoes what she told *60 Minutes* in 2018.

In that interview, she recounted her encounter with Mr Trump: "He was like, 'Wow, you – you are special. You remind me of my daughter.' You know – he was like, 'You're smart and beautiful, and a woman to be reckoned with, and I like you. I like you."

During her testimony yesterday, Ms Daniels recalled being annoyed by Mr Trump's "arrogance" and his tendency to "one-up" everything she was saying, she said. She recalled telling him: "Are you always this rude? You don't even know how to have a conversation?" Ms Daniels told the court. "He seemed to be taken aback by that." The adult film star then said she swatted him "right on the butt" with a rolled-up magazine. After that, he was "much more polite", she said on the stand.

Mr Trump and Ms Daniels never ended up having dinner, she said. As she left the restroom at one point during their meeting, Mr Trump appeared in boxers and a T-shirt. "At first I was just startled, like a jumpscare," she testified yesterday. "I felt the blood leave my hands and my feet, almost like standing up too fast. ... I just thought, 'Oh my God, What did I misread to get here?' The intention was pretty clear."

While testifying, Ms Daniels also posed to show what Mr Trump looked like horizontally on the bed, showing jurors that he had one hand on her head and one hand on her hip. Mr Trump did

not wear a condom, she said. Afterwards, he reportedly said: "That was great. Let's get together, honeybunch."

She said she took a taxi back to her hotel. "I told very few people that we had actually had sex," she said in her testimony. "I felt ashamed that I didn't stop it, that I didn't say no."

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

German kebab prices could be capped in ‘donerflation’

The dish is a staple of many in the country, especially those on a lower income (Getty)

TOM WATLING

German politicians are calling for a price cap on the doner kebab, with chancellor Olaf Scholz admitting that the question of “donerflation” is one he gets asked “wherever I go”.

The far-left Die Linke party has put forward a proposal for the introduction of a doner kebab price cap similar to that introduced in some parts of the country to high rents.

Millions of kebabs are consumed in Germany every day – including 400,00 daily doners in Berlin – in an industry that is estimated to be worth more than €7bn (£6bn). But faced with a cost of living crisis, Germans are being forced to pay up to €10 for a kebab that cost just €4 two years ago.

Die Linke has proposed installing a €4.90 price cap for the kebab, as well as €2.90 cap for young people, especially those from lower-income backgrounds, for whom it claims the dish is a daily staple. Donerflation, or the rapidly rising cost of doner kebabs, has become one of Germany's most arresting problems – and it is one that has incensed the younger members of the country.

The dish, which is made up of a folded flatbread stuffed with thinly sliced meat topped with vegetables and garlic or chili sauce, was introduced to Germany by Turkish immigrants, who adapted it for local tastes.

After Mr Scholz posted on social media to explain that donerflation was due to rising wage and energy costs, a result of weaning off Russian gas following Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, a young German Turk responded by demanding Mr Scholz "speak to Putin [because] I want to pay €4".

Mr Scholz said it was "quite striking" that everywhere he went, he was being asked about a price brake for the doner.

Even Hanna Steinmuller, an MP for the Greens, a party that usually appeals to people to give up meat, felt the need to address this issue in parliament. "For young people right now it is an issue as important as where they will move when they leave home," she said. "I know it's not an everyday issue for many people here and that … it's also something that might be ridiculed, but I think as voter representatives we are obliged to highlight these different perspectives."

Some young people have called for the return of Angela Merkel, the former chancellor of Germany, arguing that Mr Scholz's predecessor "had the doner under control". But doner sellers remain sceptical that prices could ever be fixed. Deniz, a seller at a kiosk near Berlin's Friedrichstrasse station, told *The*

Guardian: “People talk to us all the time about donerflation, as if we were diddling them, but it’s completely out of our control.”

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

World news in brief

Erin Patterson speaks to the media outside her home in Leongatha, Victoria (Reuters)

Australian woman pleads not guilty to mushroom murders

An Australian woman who is charged with killing her in-laws with a poisonous mushroom dish pleaded not guilty to murder yesterday.

Erin Patterson, 49, was charged with three counts of murder and five counts of attempted murder after her ex-husband Simon Patterson's parents and one other relative died after eating a beef Wellington in July last year. She was charged with three counts of attempted murder of Mr Patterson.

Ms Patterson appeared in the courtroom via a video link from the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, in Deer Park, Victoria, where she is being held on remand. “Not guilty your honour,” she repeated as the magistrate read the charges in a brief hearing at Latrobe Valley magistrates court in Morwell.

The court also heard that Ms Patterson had elected to “fast-track” her case, which meant that it would be directly heard in the Supreme Court, skipping a committal hearing.

Modi votes in bitter Indian election as he seeks third term

India’s prime minister, Narendra Modi, voted yesterday in the third phase of the country’s election, which has been marred by inflammatory campaign speeches attacking the Muslim minority and growing acrimony among rival parties.

Voters went to the polls across 11 states, including Mr Modi’s home state of Gujarat. After a decade in power, he is seeking a rare third straight term and faces a weakened coalition of the main opposition Congress party and its regional allies.

The election, which sees seven phases of voting spread over six weeks, is meant to elect 543 members of the lower house of India’s parliament called the Lok Sabha. A party or coalition needs a simple majority of 272 seats to form the government. In the previous election in 2019, Mr Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party took 303 seats.

He has been accused of changing his campaign strategy to make more fiery and polarising speeches due to a lower turnout in the first phase of voting.

Chinese warplane ‘fired flares’ near Australian helicopter

Australia has protested over a Chinese warplane’s “unprofessional and unacceptable” use of flares near one of its helicopters flying a United Nations mission to enforce sanctions against North Korea in international waters.

Australia's defence department said the pilot of the MH-60R Seahawk was forced to take evasive action after a People's Liberation Army fighter jet ejected flares in its flight path over the Yellow Sea on Saturday.

Anthony Albanese, the Australian prime minister, said he had made "very strong representations at every level to China".

China had not commented on Australia's allegations by last night.

Rescuers search for buried builders

Rescue teams trying to find dozens of construction workers missing after an apartment complex collapsed in South Africa have made contact with 11 people buried beneath the wreckage, authorities said yesterday.

One man called his wife from underneath the rubble of the five-storey building that had been under construction when it collapsed on Monday, the head of the rescue operation said.

Six workers have been confirmed dead and there are fears that the death count could rise sharply. There was no news on 37 other people unaccounted for after huge slabs of concrete and metal scaffolding came crashing down in the coastal city of George, about 250 miles east of Cape Town.

Twenty-one other workers were rescued from the site and taken to hospital, with at least 11 of them suffering severe injuries, the George municipality said. *AP*

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

It's vital that Russians know we could send in UK troops

David Cameron meeting Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on Friday (PA)

KEIR GILES

David Cameron has given the strongest confirmation yet that Ukraine is free to use weapons supplied by Britain to strike into Russia. During his recent visit to Kyiv, the foreign secretary stated clearly that it was Ukraine's decision how to use those weapons, and Kyiv "absolutely has the right to strike back at Russia".

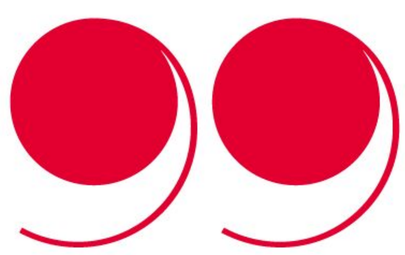
That's in sharp contrast to the position taken by the United States, which has consistently forbidden Ukraine from using the weapons it supplies to hit targets in Russia itself, and even discouraged Kyiv from doing so using its own home-grown capabilities.

It's another example of Britain demonstrating that US and German fears over the consequences of supporting Ukraine too enthusiastically are unfounded. It follows Britain repeatedly taking the lead in supplying weapons systems such as long-range missiles or main battle tanks, and showing that the fear of "escalation" that so constrains Washington and Berlin stems from a highly successful Russian con trick.

But that moral authority has been shaken over recent months by Britain's reluctance to re-equip its own armed forces in the way it is urging other European states to do – and the way grand announcements of defence investment turn out on closer inspection to be both inadequate and deceptive.

This limits the direct military aid the UK can provide. Cameron suggested Britain's long-term commitment to supporting Ukraine would now be largely financial, since, "We've just really emptied all we can in terms of giving equipment." And sadly, he immediately undermined the effect even of that commitment by once again ruling out the presence of Western troops in Ukraine.

Moral authority has been shaken over recent months by Britain's reluctance to re-equip its armed forces in the way it is urging other European states to do



French president Emmanuel Macron has repeatedly warned that European troops could be forced to intervene if Ukraine alone is unable to halt Russia's aggression. It's vital that Russia understands that, since the last thing Moscow wants is to be involved in a direct military clash with Nato countries.

And yet, other European leaders have reacted with horror to the suggestion. "I don't think it is right to have Nato soldiers killing Russian soldiers," Cameron said at the end of his visit to Ukraine. That may be true today, but it's good to remember that the whole purpose of Nato is to stop Russian soldiers being where they have no right to be – if necessary, through the use of armed force.

In any case, publicly ruling out a Western troop presence in Ukraine makes no more sense now than it has ever done. Whether or not it's a realistic proposition for individual Nato countries, just the possibility is one of the Kremlin's greatest fears. So when Cameron and others publicly bar that option, all it does is reassure Putin that his worst case scenario is off the table; that way, he can continue the war with much less concern for the possible consequences.

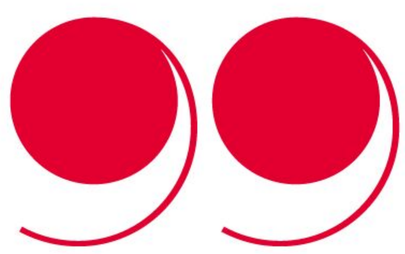
It's like facing a bruiser in a boxing ring and reassuring him that you're going to fight with one hand behind your back. Instead, more European leaders – and the UK – should follow Macron's

lead, and preserve what defence analysts call “strategic ambiguity” (to the rest of us, simply not telling your adversary what you’re not going to do).

British planners will have given careful thought to whether Cameron’s go-ahead for Ukraine might bring reprisals against the UK, over and above the inevitable threats and rhetorical froth from the Kremlin’s blow-hard mouthpieces.

Over the course of the last two weeks, Europe as a whole has woken up to the campaign of sabotage and disruption that Russia has been waging across the continent. There’s no doubt Russia could step this up still further. Moscow’s war on the West is now barely hidden, and for as long as the West does not respond, there are few downsides for Russia in waging it. Using an extended network of proxies means the Kremlin’s intelligence chiefs won’t be too concerned if they are caught in the act; since the crooks and patsies it recruits abroad will be considered even more disposable than its own personnel. And since Russia is already overtly acting as a rogue state, there’s no damage to reputation or relationships to be concerned about.

Europe as a whole has woken up to the campaign of sabotage and disruption that Russia has been waging across the continent



We should expect proxy attacks against the UK and across Europe to continue. As well as their direct effect on hampering support to Ukraine, they have another useful purpose for Moscow: whether or not they succeed, they’re useful for

gathering information on a country's will and capacity to prevent more serious sabotage and respond to it.

There's one traditional way of hurting the West that Russia may not yet have employed. Throughout the Cold War and even beforehand in tsarist times, Moscow poured effort and resources into sponsoring and equipping terrorist groups to carry out attacks against European cities. That would be a more random campaign of violence than the targeting of European logistics and supporters of Ukraine that we see now, and have much greater impact.

And the fragmented and diverse societies in today's European cities, with both substantial immigrant populations and widespread sympathy for anti-Western causes, would provide far more fertile ground for recruitment than Moscow found during the Cold War.

But Europe need not be just a passive victim. At the beginning of this year, I wrote about the West's underused ability to influence Russia's choices. The UK had made its deliveries of Storm Shadow an explicit consequence of specific Russian actions; now, it seems, the US has done the same with its long-awaited supply of longer-range ATACMs missiles. And to nobody's surprise except perhaps in the White House, the sky has not fallen.

Britain's explicit endorsement of strikes into Russia could also have been presented as a consequence for Russia's attacks against Europe, and with a promise that more would follow. What's more, explicitly allowing Ukraine to strike in Russia with British weapons as well as its own opens up other possibilities for targeting Russia's ability to wage war.

Ukraine has already carried out strikes at Russian locations that build and store the drones and missiles used to kill its innocent civilians, and at the energy infrastructure that helps Moscow pay for them. But further attacks could see Ukraine helping Europe, instead of the other way round. European countries can do little about the Russian electronic warfare installations that have been sowing havoc with European air and maritime traffic. But for

Ukraine, no holds should be barred and it's in everybody's interest that the jamming should be deterred or disrupted.

When considering how far the West should go in working with Kyiv, the fundamental question is still the same: whether Europe wishes to stop Russia in Ukraine, or allow Moscow's war of reconquest to claim more victims further West. Both simple morality and practical common sense have always argued for the maximum possible support for Ukraine so it can continue to form the front line of Europe's defence. Britain's endorsement of Ukraine's right to defend itself is a long overdue step in the right direction.

Keir Giles works with the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House. His next book will be 'Who Will Defend Europe?' (October 2024)

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

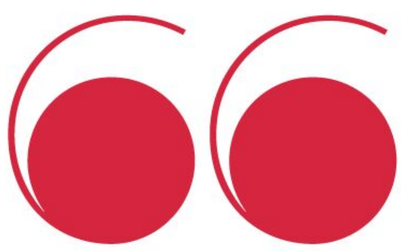
BACK TO TOP ^

Voices

If anyone is gaslighting us on the economy then it's Reeves

The savvy shadow chancellor wants to make the public doubt good economic news when they hear it in the next few months (Labour Party)

JOHN RENTOUL
CHIEF POLITICAL COMMENTATOR



Rachel Reeves wants to make people doubt good economic news when they hear it in the next few months. In that sense, she is more guilty of "gaslighting" the British public than the government is, as she alleged in her speech yesterday.

But it will work because the British people are feeling the pinch, and are unwilling to give Rishi Sunak and Jeremy Hunt the

benefit of the doubt if there are signs of a slight easing in the cost of living crisis.

Reeves is a highly political shadow chancellor who has learned from Gordon Brown. His genius was to offer stability and reassurance while drawing dividing lines between New Labour and a Conservative Party that was extreme, incompetent and out of touch.

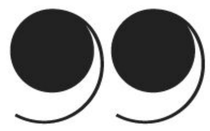
There wasn't much to her speech yesterday, but what there was was shrewd. First, the location, in the City of London – the very place where the markets took fright at Liz Truss's unfunded tax cuts. Reeves mentioned Truss only once in the speech but once was enough.

She tied Sunak and Hunt to Truss: "It's party first, country second. Chaos over stability. Recklessness over responsibility. Decline over prosperity." Sunak and Hunt might protest that they rescued the economy from Truss's wrong turn, but that isn't how the voters see it. They see the Tories as responsible for everything in the past 14 years, and Reeves deftly reinforced that perception.

Second, her warm-up act: she was introduced by Nick Boles, the former Conservative minister who is now a Labour supporter. An embodiment of the human tide that is flowing in Labour's direction.

But the main point of her speech was to anticipate the positive news on the economy on which Sunak and Hunt are banking. Inflation will fall to its target of 2 per cent; interest rates might come down again; growth might resume, albeit feebly.

It is jiu-jitsu politics, using the weight of existing disapproval of the Tories to keep Sunak and Hunt pinned down



So Reeves announced: “Today, I want to take head on the claims we can expect to hear from Rishi Sunak and Jeremy Hunt in the weeks ahead.” The prime minister is already claiming that the economy has “turned a corner”. She knows that most people don’t believe it, and again, she wants to reinforce that perception.

“No, we won’t have turned a corner until working people feel they are better off,” she said. “If Jeremy Hunt wants to call it a ‘technical’ recession, then I assume he’s comfortable calling it a ‘technical’ recovery.” It is not a recovery for families “struggling” with higher mortgage payments, she said.

Because the election is now no more than seven months away, she can rely on the lag between official statistics and the perception that things are getting better.

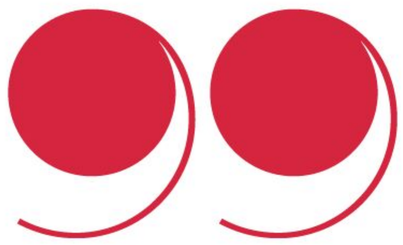
It is jiu-jitsu politics, using the weight of existing disapproval of the Tories to keep Sunak and Hunt pinned down. I have heard Labour voices in Westminster muttering that Reeves is “too cautious”, and that she lacks the “utter ruthlessness” shown by George Osborne when he was shadow chancellor, but I disagree.

She may not be such a risk-taker, but she is quietly ruthless. Just as Osborne never let up on accusing the Labour government of having crashed the economy, which was untrue but which fitted with the perception of many voters, Reeves says of the Tories: “They’ve crashed the car and left it by the side of the road.”

That is what most voters think. They don’t give Sunak credit for putting right Truss’s mistakes; they blame him for everything done in the Tory party’s name. And they won’t give Sunak much credit if a small part of the biggest fall in living standards in generations is recovered by the end of this year.

Reeves sticks to her messages with iron discipline. She offers warm words about “change” and the “huge potential” that is waiting to be unleashed by a Labour government, but nothing too specific. Indeed, she has redefined change as keeping things the same: “After years of political chaos and short-term thinking, at this election, stability is change.”

How very like Gordon Brown – and how likely to be as successful as Brown was in the early years of New Labour. In fact, she is better than Brown because she is not constantly trying to undermine the Labour leader.



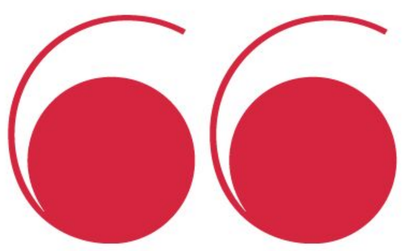
Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Kim Kardashian's Met Gala dress sets a terrible example

Kardashian looked as if she might pass out at any moment in her John Galliano corset-style dress (AFP via Getty)

KATIE EDWARDS



"Your waist is crazy!" shouted one of the photographers during the melee that accompanied Kim Kardashian's appearance on

the red carpet of this year's Met Gala. I think that spoke for most of us.

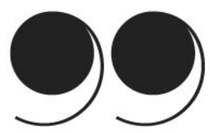
But should we be so surprised? Perhaps the sight of Kardashian, 43, barely able to walk up the stairs – let alone breathe – at the glittering A-list event is altogether expected, considering she is a billionaire whose brand is based around a distortion of ideal femininity, verging on the grotesque. She's certainly pushed boundaries at previous events.

To my mind, though, this is her most shocking look yet. Only... not in the way she might have hoped. In a silver John Galliano corset-style dress that cinched her waist to an impossible degree, Kardashian took fashion to the extreme – and then pushed it (and herself) right over the edge. I found it painful to watch the footage of her struggling to smile – it looked like she might pass out at any moment.

It's not her first rodeo – for more than a decade, Kardashian has served up controversial looks; many of which appear anatomically impossible. You might remember that back in 2019, the Skims shapewear founder brought designer Thierry Mugler out of retirement to create the rib-crackingly restrictive "wet dress" outfit, which she later said had left temporary marks on her body and admitted: "I have never felt pain like that in my life."

The nude latex dress, inspired by Raquel Welch's see-through shirt in the 1957 film *Boy On A Dolphin*, once again featured a barely there waist and carved Kardashian's body into a spectacular (and spectacularly unnatural) hourglass shape. The outfit became the most talked about costume of the evening. But what is it doing for women?

Her waist has been pulled in so tight that her vital organs look like they have been displaced. In some clips from the evening, she looks genuinely ill



I would argue that Kardashian has a responsibility, here. Yes, she shows grit, daring and tenacity – she's clearly not averse to suffering for fashion or publicity (she had to be trained to sit in the Mugler dress and was unable to go to the toilet) – but what message is this sending to other women and young girls? It's 2024 – should we really be showing off waists small enough to fit your hand around; women reduced to grimacing, gurning versions of themselves who can't eat, speak or do anything but stand there and be admired? Isn't a body "ideal" as small as this, in fact, dangerous?

Recordings of her red carpet appearance show Kardashian looking distinctly uncomfortable. The still shots from the evening may be glamorous, but the reality looks painful. Her waist has been pulled in so tight that her vital organs look like they have been displaced. In some clips from the evening, she looks genuinely ill. Kardashian's body must have felt like raw meat after last night's event. Never has a hoodie and joggers seemed so appealing.

Now, I'm not being puritanical; like many women, I've sacrificed comfort for fashion on a night out and felt a surge of delicious relief at the end of the event when I remove the outfit and tend to my sore, blistered feet.

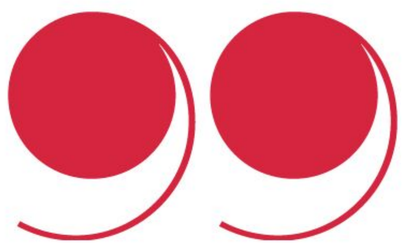
But a deep dive into the outfit she wore gives me the kind of shivers I don't get from the memories of a pair of uncomfortable stilettos. In the "making of" photographs of the corset dress, which was a custom creation from Mansion Margiela Artisanal, Galliano's moodboards show the bruises left on models' flesh by the lacing.

I could only think of those photos when I watched two assistants help Kardashian hobble up the red carpet stairs. She might be one of the world's most famous, most photographed and most influential women, but she looked frail and vulnerable. Her extreme wealth may have bought her an extreme waist – but to what end? Whose interests are being served when the most successful women on the planet still have to starve themselves of food – and oxygen – to get the most flattering shot?

And what does the choice of a corset say to women today? It's an outdated and complex cultural symbol of idealised femininity, prone to simplified analyses of "emancipation" vs "oppression"; arguably, a little like Kardashian herself.

Like her corset, you could argue the reality TV star represents both empowerment and control: she's constructing her own version of femininity, yes – but she's also constructing feminine ideals for the rest of us. When Kardashian refashions her body, she also refashions ours. Her impossible proportions, inevitably, dictate society's.

In some ways, Kardashian's Met Gala 2024 outfit was a perfect representation of the event's theme: "The Garden of Time." Inspired by JG Ballard's 1962 short story by the same name, it tells of the rich hiding in opulence, vainly attempting to halt the relentless approach of the poor who riot outside. The wealthy couple in Ballard's bleak tale manage to slow the clock, but they can't stop it. And so, they stay static, in one place, barely able to breathe.



Garden-themed Met Gala is literally a breath of fresh air

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Get ready for six months of Sunak simply treading water

So what exactly is the "plan to deliver on the priorities of the people" of which Rishi Sunak speaks? His party has mismanaged its years in power with a succession of threadbare plans over austerity, our exit from the EU, social care, NHS waiting lists, immigration and housing. All that has done nothing for the majority while prioritising the interests of a wealthy minority.

It is clear that Labour does have credible plans for addressing the nation's economic, social and international problems. The impediment to their successful implementation will be a further running down of resources and time by a government that continues to prioritise its own survival over any action that is in the national interest.

I fear that we are in for six months of treading water as Sunak and his disunited party stage a culture war based on misinformation and innuendo, all while we wait for a general election. It is to be hoped, eventually, that Labour will be given the substantial majority that it needs and that it can make the changes that the electorate so desperately needs.

Graham Powell *Cirencester, Gloucestershire*

Illusion of democracy

In the wake of the local elections, I find it incredulous that neither of the two main parties has understood the contempt in which they are held. This is shown by how many people choose not to vote in the recent local elections. No longer can this be put down to voter apathy. Our politicians must realise voters are completely disillusioned, with nothing ever changing in regard to the UK's current inequality.

It is long overdue that both main parties started seeing themselves as public servants as opposed to political celebrities. It is also high time we had some MPs with imagination, creativity and innovative ideas, instead of those constantly reverting to past policies that weren't successful in their time.

Richard Whiteside *Halifax*

How politicians can find a home in our hearts

Housing stands as a pivotal issue in the election fray, given its correlation with economic stability. Recent upticks in house prices and mortgage approvals hint at recovery, yet the persistent housing shortage threatens a prolonged recession.

The UK faces a crisis of affordability due to insufficient homes for rent and sale, negatively impacting GDP.

Decades of social strain persist with little resolution in sight. We need each party to present a radical yet credible long-term plan to assuage market concerns. Four primary factors underpin our current crisis: over-reliance on major housebuilders, politicised planning discouraging development, net loss of social housing, and post-Brexit labour shortages.

Addressing these root problems is imperative to alleviate the affordability crisis. Boosting skilled labour domestically and reforming the planning system is crucial. Independent decision-making and private-sector assistance can expedite approvals and reduce costs, while prioritising social housing and incentivising brownfield developments are essential steps toward sustainable growth.

Despite potential temporary unpopularity, a steadfast commitment to a pro-growth agenda is necessary. The unique challenges facing the UK demand decisive action, and politicians should embrace this opportunity to steer us toward a better future.

Daniel Austin *London*

Is it a boy or a girl? Who cares...

It's hard to tell which is worse, gender-reveal parties or an attempt to ban them (It's my gender reveal party and I'll dye if I want to..., Indy Life, yesterday). Strangely for such a modern approach, there seem to only be pink or blue versions, whereas nowadays we know there are a number of other ways people identify themselves.

In saner times, a doctor or nurse would say what the baby was and word would spread swiftly amongst the community. Now, as YouTube will verify, there are numerous approaches, seemingly for social media views. Not all of them are safe, much less sensible.

The ever-informative internet tells of numerous fires and even a few deaths from gender reveal parties. Surely just telling granny would be a faster, more effective, and less dangerous method? But banning people from doing stupid things, especially if they get likes, is virtually impossible.

Dennis Fitzgerald *Melbourne*

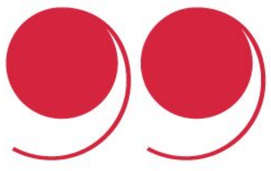
The monarchy can always abdicate

Millions of people get cancer without receiving all the fuss, sympathy and media attention. What are those millions? Inferior, or just not born with a silver spoon? Apart from no media attention, do they get equal medical attention?

If the monarchy doesn't want to be under media scrutiny, they can always abdicate. They might then find life just as tough as the majority of people. I wonder if *they* have ever struggled to pay their fuel bills. At least Harry and Meghan have the

gumption to give it a go and break away from relying on the taxpayer.

Graham Cooper *Address supplied*



Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

LIQUID GOLD

Climate change has caused lower olive yields and soaring olive oil prices in recent years. **Katie Rosseinsky** reports on the plight of the industry and looks at cheaper alternatives

Oil shock: own-brand olive oil is over 40 per cent more expensive than a year ago (Photos Getty)

The last time I headed down the aisles of my local supermarket to replenish supplies of olive oil, I did an almost cartoonish double-take: I could practically feel my eyes jumping out on stalks as I saw prices in double figures. What was once a relatively affordable cooking essential now has a price tag more befitting, say, a bottle of wine. I'm not talking about high-end

brands here, either, the ones with vaguely European names, couched in artisan-esque glass bottles.

In mid-April, *The Grocer* found that the average price of one litre of own-label olive oil in the UK's major supermarkets was £7.38 – that's 42 per cent higher than one year ago. It's enough to make you start second-guessing yourself every time you pour a dash of it into a pan or drizzle some onto a salad, prompting furious and depressing calculations about the cost per pour.

The product has even acquired a new nickname to reflect its exorbitant cost: "liquid gold". And the situation is only going to get worse. It's estimated that UK customers will soon have to pay more than £16 for a 2l bottle of extra virgin olive oil, the healthiest, least processed and therefore priciest member of the olive oil family. Miguel Angel Guzman, the chief sales officer at leading olive oil producer Deoleo, recently told *CNBC* that they are "facing one of the most difficult moments in the history of the sector".

But why is the industry in such dire straits? Unlike other supermarket price hikes, the olive oil crisis can't simply be blamed on inflation. Producers are grappling with major supply and demand issues. This year, the International Olive Council expects that just under 2.3 million tonnes of olives will be produced – slightly down from last year's yield of 2.5 million tonnes, and significantly lower than the 3.4 million tonnes produced in 2022. This significant decrease is largely thanks to climate change.

Slippery business: olive oil is now one of the most shoplifted items in Spain

A few consecutive years of high temperatures and droughts in Spain, the country responsible for producing 40 per cent of the world's olives, have drastically curtailed the quantity and the quality of the harvest. Unusually warm stretches of weather in winter are bad for olive trees: the higher temperatures can prompt them to start flowering and if the mercury subsequently drops to a more normal level, these premature blooms might die off. Spring heatwaves, like the one Spain experienced last May, can be damaging too. "If the weather doesn't change, olive oil prices will continue to rise," Juan Vilar, the CEO of agricultural consultancy Vilcon, told industry bible *Olive Oil Times* in February.

Last year, olives from Greece and Turkey were used to make up the shortfall, but now their trees need to recover from this bumper harvest: production in the former country is expected to drop by as much as 60 per cent in 2024. And as for Italy, another major player in the olive oil game? For the past decade, trees in Puglia (the heart of the country's olive production) and beyond have been ravaged by the Xylella fastidiosa bacterium. This clogs up the vessels that transport water from the roots to the leaves and essentially chokes plants to death.

All in all, then, the outlook across the Mediterranean – where olive oil is famously a dietary mainstay – is pretty bleak. In fact, the situation has become so bad in Europe that it has sparked a

super-specific crime wave. Bottles of olive oil are now one of the most popular items nicked by Spanish shoplifters. A survey by the Spanish security company STC found that this was the most stolen item in supermarkets across eight of the country's 17 regions.

Apparently, though, it's not cash-strapped customers who are driving this thieving spree. Instead, it's reportedly the work of organised gangs, who then try to sell diluted versions on the black market (a story that will presumably soon come to a true crime podcast or Netflix documentary near you). In Greece and Italy, robbers have reportedly been targeting olive groves too, sometimes sawing entire branches off trees. "It's like the Wild West," claimed Gennaro Sicolo, the president of national olive growers consortium, Italia Olivicola.

In Spain, temperatures for the coming summer are forecast to be more regular, and recent rainy weather has been encouraging too. But this won't be enough to stop price rises any time soon. It's yet another stark reminder that climate change isn't some far-off, theoretical thing – it's already impacting the way we shop and eat.

Better offer: some consumers are opting for alternative cooking oils

As olive oil prices rise, what are some more affordable alternatives?

Rapeseed oil

Thanks to its simple flavour profile and a high smoke point (which means it can reach high temperatures without burning), rapeseed oil is a versatile addition to your kitchen cupboards. Plus, it's high in unsaturated fatty acids (the healthier kind), as well as vitamin E.

Sunflower oil

Sunflower oil also has a relatively neutral taste, so it's a good option when you're not too fussed about imparting a specific flavour into your food – if you're baking or frying, for example. It's also high in linoleic acid, an essential fatty acid.

Vegetable oil

This is among the cheapest of the cooking oils you're likely to see stocked in your local supermarket, but it is also one of the most highly processed. That's because it is made by blending various types of plant fats, like seeds, grains, soybeans and canola (olive oil, in contrast, just comes from pressed olives).

Sesame oil

The nutty flavour profile of sesame oil lends itself well to stir-fries: the raw version is best for cooking, thanks to its high smoke point, whereas toasted sesame oil should be your go-to for dressings. It's rich in antioxidants and is thought to have anti-inflammatory properties.

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

A heavy croissant to bear

As huge social media-friendly patisserie continue to trend in Paris, **Helen Coffey** regrets the triumph of style over taste

Supersize moi! Plus-size pastries are all the rage in the French capital (Photos Getty/iStock)

Paris has always had a certain… reputation. Particularly when it comes to food. Projecting a mildly disdainful air of "I *think* we know best", waiters are as poised and terrifying when assessing your ordering choices as Anna Wintour casting a withering eye over a hastily thrown together outfit. We've all heard stories of that friend of a friend who dared to ask for their steak well done

with a side of ketchup; in one such anecdote shared with me, the tourist in question was simply told "no" and brought the "correct" iteration of the dish instead.

How, then, has the City of Light fallen prey to the latest TikTok food fad? Was all that gourmet discernment merely bluster and bravado?

I am speaking, of course, of the oversized croissant. If you're on certain social media platforms, this giant variant of the world's favourite continental breakfast item seems all but inescapable. Acclaimed French pastry chef Philippe Conticini kicked off the craze last year when he launched them in his Paris bakery, showing a knack for predicting exactly the kind of shallow gimmick that people lap up when their priority is "making content" rather than "eating something delicious".

Cupcakes were one of the first foodstuffs to get the Insta treatment

The 1kg, pimp-my-pastry version of the French staple – known as the croissant XXL – proved so popular that a whole legion of chefs followed in Conticini's gargantuan footsteps: Christophe Michalak developed "le big pain aux raisins", weighing in at 350g; Yannick Delpech has "la chocolatine XXL" at his Toulouse bakery; and Parisian department store Galeries Lafayette has started selling the 320g "big pain au chocolat". Conticini's original is such a hit that he's even flogging them on this side of the Channel at his London store.

It isn't just pâtisserie that's getting the XXL treatment, either. Earlier this year, travel TikToker Baochi shared a video in which she spent the entire day eating larger-than-life food in Paris. She started off with – mais, bien sûr – a big croissant, this one a pistachio variation courtesy of Chez Meunier. She followed it up with a bowl of massive noodles – a fact she demonstrates by displaying a fat, seemingly never-ending one dangling unappetisingly from the end of her fork – and finished the day with a colossal filled baguette "half the size of [her] body". Baochi is, at least, fairly honest about the lacklustre experience of shovelling down food made on a needlessly mammoth scale. The noodles are so big they are "hard to eat"; the sandwich was "a bit dry". And, in all cases, the portion size was simply "way too big to finish" – she manages to eat the equivalent of a regular croissant or baguette, before being defeated, forced to save the rest as leftovers.

Mermaid toast, anyone?

The featured dishes are also far more expensive than buying the normal-sized alternative, with the croissant priced at just under €20 (£17). Perhaps this is now considered "good value" next to Conticini's monster, which retails at €32. But compare it to the fact that a regular breakfast pastry will set you back around €1.50 – and will, by all accounts, likely taste considerably better – and I struggle to understand the appeal of going supersize. After all, a normal croissant from pretty much any French boulangerie is already one of the tastiest treats in existence. That rich, buttery

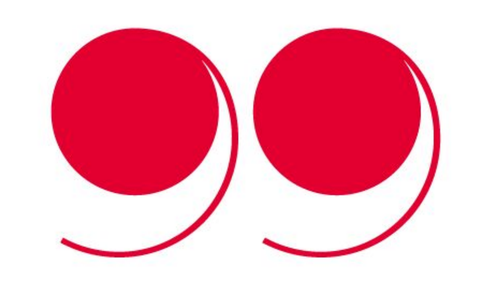
taste; that soft, flaky texture. Why blow it up to swap perfection for an unholy mess in which the quantity has often increased in direct proportion to the quality being diminished?

I can't help but feel a wave of despair at the whole thing. For if Paris, unofficial capital of dining snobbery, isn't immune to the curse of the viral culinary trend, there seems little hope for the rest of the world.

"Oversized" is just the tip of the iceberg – one sub-genre within the overall TikTokification of food that has seen style over substance become the order of the day. Colour is a key trend – popping as it will on that oh-so-crucial Instagram post – with cupcakes, brunch plates and salad bowls all getting the rainbow treatment to attract the smartphone generation. New inventions have been created specifically for the Insta-effect – from pastel-toned "mermaid toast" to charcoal ice cream – while objectively gross-tasting items have had a much-needed popularity boost based purely on optics. (No one can convince me that they truly enjoy a matcha latte – but please, go ahead and pretend to enjoy drinking your cup of lawn.)

Then there's the trend of excess: hot chocolate where the cup itself is slathered in the stuff; dessert-topped milkshakes where the sauce dribbles down the side of the glass; bubble waffle cones pouring forth with fillings; burgers, tall beyond all sense, dripping with sauce and cheese so that they're impossible to eat without getting covered in crap.

If Paris, unofficial capital of dining snobbery, isn't immune to the curse of the viral culinary trend, there seems little hope for the rest of the world



For someone for whom food is one of life's greatest pleasures – a source of simple, uncomplicated joy – it seems like a descent into madness. All of the above is designed to look good in a photo or video – not to be easy or enjoyable to eat. All of the above is designed to be consumed via social media – not to be consumed by a real-life human. I know they say we "eat with our eyes", but surely there's a limit?

I'm not the only one who thinks so: a number of French traditionalists have had their feathers ruffled by the latest craze. "Some of the new generation of pastry chefs and bakers come up with creations with the foremost obsession being the impact of novelty of social media," Christophe Felder, a pastry chef from Alsace, opined in newspaper *Le Figaro*. "It's now become a diktat that you have to create an event for Instagram or TikTok," said the Conticini chain's own marketing director. "Alas, that often takes precedence over taste."

I might have no truck with it, but it looks like the TikTokification of food is here to stay. In the meantime, I suspect France's savvy pastry chefs are laughing all the way to la banque.

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

ON THIS DAY

A van load of beer is driven through Piccadilly Circus on VE Day, 8 May 1945 (Getty)

1701: Captain Kidd went on trial at the Old Bailey for piracy. He was hanged on 23 May.

1828: Jean Henri Dunant, philanthropist and founder of the International Red Cross, was born in Geneva.

1902: Mount Pelee erupted on the island of Martinique, destroying the town of St Pierre and killing more than 30,000 people in just three minutes.

1945: VE Day. The Second World War in Europe officially ended at one minute past midnight.

1961: George Blake, a former British diplomat, was jailed for 42 years for spying for Russia. He escaped from Wormwood Scrubs in 1966.

1970: The Beatles' final album, *Let It Be*, was released.

1980: The World Health Organization announced that smallpox had been eradicated.

1984: The Thames Barrier at Woolwich was officially opened.

1989: Paul McCartney released a remake of "Ferry Cross the Mersey" in aid of those affected by the Hillsborough disaster, which claimed the lives of 97 Liverpool fans.

2008: Vladimir Putin was appointed Russian prime minister.

2013: Sir Alex Ferguson announced his retirement as Manchester United's manager after 27 years in charge at the club.

On this day last year: As coronation celebrations continued, around 6 million people took part in the Big Help Out by joining volunteering projects in their communities.

Birthdays

Sir David Attenborough, naturalist, 98; **Norman Lamont**, former chancellor of the Exchequer, 82; **Melissa Gilbert**, actor, 60; **Enrique Iglesias**, singer, 49; **Ian "H" Watkins**, actor and singer (Steps), 48; **Michelle McManus**, former *Pop Idol* winner/singer, 44; **Matt Willis**, singer (Busted)/TV presenter, 41.

PA

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Garden-themed Met Gala is literally a breath of fresh air

Celebrities from Zendaya to Wisdom Kaye shone at the annual fashion fundraiser for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Their looks formed a vibrant procession compared to last year's black-and-white spectacle, writes **Kaleigh Werner**

Euphoric: Zendaya in her custom piece from John Galliano (Getty)

Under the wash of fluorescent lighting, and between winding vines, a green and white carpet formed a pathway for stars at the

2024 Met Gala, “Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion”. And while the direction inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art was straightforward (literally), the concept prompted a myriad of responses from attendees.

This year, the Costume Institute sought to evoke a sensory experience like no other by reviving 250 garments from their permanent collection, categorising them under three main sections – earth, air, and water – and using cutting-edge technology to allow the fibres of the garments to consume the space in more ways than one. Conversations of environmental conservation were fused with fashion preservation, concluding that the rebirth of designs, even those that can never be worn on the body again, is the pinnacle of sustainability.

Bad Bunny wowed in Galliano from Maison Margiela (Getty)

The dress code, “The Garden of Time”, built upon the theme, driving attention to the juxtaposition of natural beauty with innovation. Based on the 1962 JG Ballard story about a crystalline garden with time-reversing powers, the theme invited attendees to take an organic approach or find inspiration in archival forms. And from the vibrant, nuanced parade of actors, entertainers, artists, and influencers that walked the

steps, it seemed most understood the assignment – except the few who were impossibly boring.

Zendaya stunned in two separate gowns (Getty)

Let's start with the mundane. You'd think there'd be a requirement for a co-chair to be on the theme. If there is, Chris Hemsworth's look wasn't properly checked. The actor showed up in an unbuttoned ivory suit (no other description or detail to be told). His unbuttoned button-down and matching vest might've suited him well but didn't draw any connection to the concept. If nothing else, Hemsworth could've added a stitched rosette or scalloped texture, playing with biotic textiles as Alexander McQueen's former creative director, Sarah Burton, would. All I can say is, thank God for his counterparts.

Florals, for spring? Groundbreaking: Kim Kardashian embraced the theme (Getty for The Met Museum)

Bad Bunny tapped John Galliano from Maison Margiela to craft an ensemble that perfectly meshed the brand's emblem inside-out and Tabi hoof code with the silhouette and accessories akin to Count Axel in the Ballard tale. Meanwhile, Zendaya seemed to have the same idea, collaborating with Galliano to create a custom piece and enliven his design for Givenchy from the year she was born: 1997. The "Euphoria" star killed two birds (concepts) with one stone (one designer), coming out in an underwater nursery-like spiralled gown with marine grape vines and being reborn into what might've been her past life with a black corset, ballooned sleeves, voluminous train, and a bouquet headpiece.

Florals, as expected, flooded the carpet. Multiples of long-stemmed greenery and rose capitulum were beaded, embroidered, and fastened into garments. In Kim Kardashian's case, a kind of metal lace was linked by Galliano, forming a map of silver flowers. Reece Feldman, Ashley Graham, Morgan Spector, and Usher, all might've subtly, and lightly, incorporated the land-ridden element compared to Kelsea Ballerini, Ayo Edebiri, and Jordan Roth, but at least they made the effort.

Ayo Edebiri also also chose florals for the theme (AFP via Getty)

The sea and sky were touched by many donning ocean blue hues, overlapping sequin, scalloped fringe, and mermaid gold. Then, Wisdom Kaye burned bright on the steps in a burnt-red coat with an elongated tail, resembling an everlasting ember that wouldn't fade.

Wisdom Kaye burned bright on the steps in a burnt-red coat with an elongated tail (Getty for The Met Museum)

With a kaleidoscope of colours, textures, and shapes, from an outside perspective, the concept could be interpreted as convoluted – even Sarah Jessica Parker in a sculpture-esque Richard Quinn ensemble said it was, while figures like Kylie Jenner, Matt Damon, Donald Glover, Jamie Dornan, and Da'Vine Joy Randolph all showed up in simple looks that inadvertently contributed to the confusion. However, though multi-faceted, guests found direction in this year's Met Gala theme, catalysing a much more dynamic procession than what was seen from the 2023 affair celebrating long-time Chanel designer, Karl Lagerfeld.

What was previously a two-tone, clear-cut catalog of odes to the achromatic, tweed-loving designer was replaced this year with a splatter of colour similar to that of a Jackson Pollock but with the novelty of Alexander McQueen, the glamour of Dior, the singularity of Galliano, the adaptive paradigm of Thom Browne, and so much more.

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

CHUNNEL VISION

In its 30 years of operations, the tunnel connecting the UK to mainland Europe has been superseded by cheap air travel. However, **Simon Calder** says there are ways it can improve

Breakthrough moment: tunnelers from France and England meet in 1990 (Groupe Eurotunnel)

Three decades ago Queen Elizabeth II and French president Francois Mitterand officially opened the Channel Tunnel between Folkestone in Kent and Calais in northern France. So

how much has the link transformed travel? Unfortunately, it's been a tale of broken promises so far in terms of direct services between the UK and continental Europe.

The problem for proponents of terrestrial transport is that there has been a revolution in travel over the past 30 years, but it's been the transformation of aviation. Eurotunnel is the company that owns the infrastructure and runs LeShuttle car- and coach-carrying service from Folkestone to Calais. It takes about 20 million people a year through the tunnel in these vehicles, as well as on Eurostar trains from London to Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam.

Yet that is a tiny proportion of the number of people who fly to and from the UK. The only prospect of making good on proper transcontinental connectivity from the UK: cutting costs and opening up to new budget operators.

What was the original plan?

When Eurostar was first envisaged the idea was to have trains from Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff and Plymouth direct to Paris and Brussels.

One-third of a billion pounds was sunk into improving infrastructure and buying the trains. For years a depot outside Manchester Piccadilly stood empty, even though it had a sign reading *"Le Eurostar habite ici"* – Eurostar lives here.

The Regional Eurostar rolling stock was built, but not a single train ever ran to Europe from anywhere other than London.

Even on the routes from the capital, the number of destinations has shrunk in recent years. While Rotterdam and Amsterdam have been added, Lyon, Aix-en-Provence, Marseille and Disneyland Paris have been taken away – and the two stations in Kent remain closed with no plans to reopen them.

At present there are up to 12 trains per hour each way through the Channel Tunnel, a mix of Eurostar, Eurotunnel car-carrying shuttles and freight services (PA)

What's the problem?

Budget aviation is very cheap (I have just paid £15 to fly from Manchester to Vienna) and the charges for running passenger trains through the Channel Tunnel are very expensive. The fare on Ryanair wouldn't even meet the payment that train firms have to make to Eurotunnel for less than half an hour in the Channel Tunnel.

The company earns around £17 for each passenger on every Eurostar train, as well as a small additional amount to cover the cost of electricity. For a rail revolution, the fee needs to be cut so that the Channel Tunnel can be opened up to low-cost operators. The airlines show that where there's competition, everyone wins.

At present, if you book late you'll pay around £200 one way on Eurostar between London and Paris. That's typically three times the cost on a budget airline, buying a day ahead.

Wouldn't Eurostar be damaged by competition?

No, all the evidence from aviation is that the firm would actually be improved by competition and that its passenger numbers would grow. The firm was severely hit by the Covid pandemic, but since then it has been thriving by dominating the market on its key links from London to Brussels and Paris.

What does Eurotunnel say?

The company wants to dramatically expand the range of routes – including direct trains to Germany. In December 2023, Yann Leriche, chief executive of the Channel Tunnel firm, said he was keen to see direct links from London to a range of German and Swiss cities, including Cologne, Frankfurt and Geneva.

Is there room for them?

Yes. At present there are up to 12 trains per hour each way through the Channel Tunnel, a mix of Eurostar, Eurotunnel car-carrying shuttles and freight services. That could increase to 16, theoretically allowing extra trains every 15 minutes to run from London into Germany, Switzerland and deeper into France. High Speed 1, the line from London to the Channel Tunnel in Kent has even more capacity – it could triple the number of trains and still have room for more. But it all depends on new entrants coming in.

There's been talk about a new Spanish company competing between London and Paris, but so far only rumours. So until further notice, Eurostar will have the link to itself, passengers will pay a fortune and more of us will end up flying.

Today there are more than 50 flights between the London airports and Frankfurt alone, and zero direct trains. With a connection in Brussels, the journey takes six-and-a-half hours. Direct trains would take that down to five hours. But you may be waiting quite some time…

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Where can I find all these really cheap flights, please?

Want a bargain? Search 'UK to everywhere' on Skyscanner on a specific date (Getty)

Q You wrote in your article about the Channel Tunnel that there's a charge of £17 for each passenger who goes through the tunnel, and that many flights to Europe are available for less than that. This is nonsense. I got a quote for three people to go to Seville at the end of May for £1,700 for a three-day return. Where can I find those cheap tickets, please?

Dave R

A "Load factor active, yield passive" – that is the mantra that has helped Ryanair become by far the most successful budget airline in Europe. What it means is the airline will do all it can to fill

every flight. And the main mechanism to do that is price. The Irish carrier will set fares as high as the market can stand. Over school half-terms (the reason for your sky-high quote to Seville) fares will soar, but at off-peak times the market often won't stand for very much.

"We're happy to fill flights at loss-making airfares," Ryanair chief executive Michael O'Leary confirmed to me earlier this year. And he is true to his word. Last Thursday, I flew from Manchester to Vienna (a similar distance to London-Seville) for £14.99. A week today, among the many offers available are Edinburgh to "Dusseldorf" (actually, Weeze, a former air base near the Dutch border) for £13, and a choice of flights from London Stansted to some lovely French towns (Beziers, La Rochelle, Nantes …) for about the same. To see what is available (and check my deductions), I suggest you search "UK to Everywhere" on Skyscanner for a specific date.

Of course, the airline expects to be able to upsell to all but the stingiest passengers (of whom I am one). Seat selection, fast-track security, baggage charges, onboard delicacies: Ryanair did not get to be formidably profitable by selling at a loss. Overall this year the airline expects to make an average profit of more than £9 per passenger.

As I also observed in the article about the Channel Tunnel, many of these extras are simply bundled in with the Eurostar ticket price. But my argument remains the same: for a terrestrial travel revolution, we need competition and lower costs on trains between the UK and Europe.

Email your question to s@hols.tv or tweet @SimonCalder

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

SPOTLESS SUMMER

Fani Mari finds which acne-prone sun creams rise to the top

You've probably heard it a million times before but we should all be wearing sunscreen daily. Not only can it help guard skin against harmful UV rays, pollution and skin cancer, but it's also a proven anti-ageing product.

If you have acne-prone skin, however, sunscreen can be a minefield. You may find the formulas too thick, too oily, too matte or not matte enough. While you should still be using a broad-spectrum sunscreen 365 days a year, finding the right

product that won't cause breakouts may require some trial and error.

Consultant dermatologist Dr Anastasia Therianou says: "Some products may clog the pores more, which, in turn, will aggravate the inflammatory response that causes spots. The easiest choice is an oil-free formula, which is usually non-comedogenic, meaning non-pore-blocking."

In terms of UV filters, some say mineral options (with zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide) may be better for acne-prone and sensitive skin, versus chemical options but, ultimately, it's down to the formula. Generally, though, zinc is a great ingredient for promoting healthy skin.

Also look out for sunscreens with added anti-inflammatory ingredients, such as niacinamide and azelaic acid, says aesthetic doctor David Jack. If your skin is on the dry side, the addition of hyaluronic acid or other hydrating ingredients may be helpful, too. "Beyond ingredients, consider the formulation (gel, lotion or fluid) that works best with your skin type," Dr Jack says.

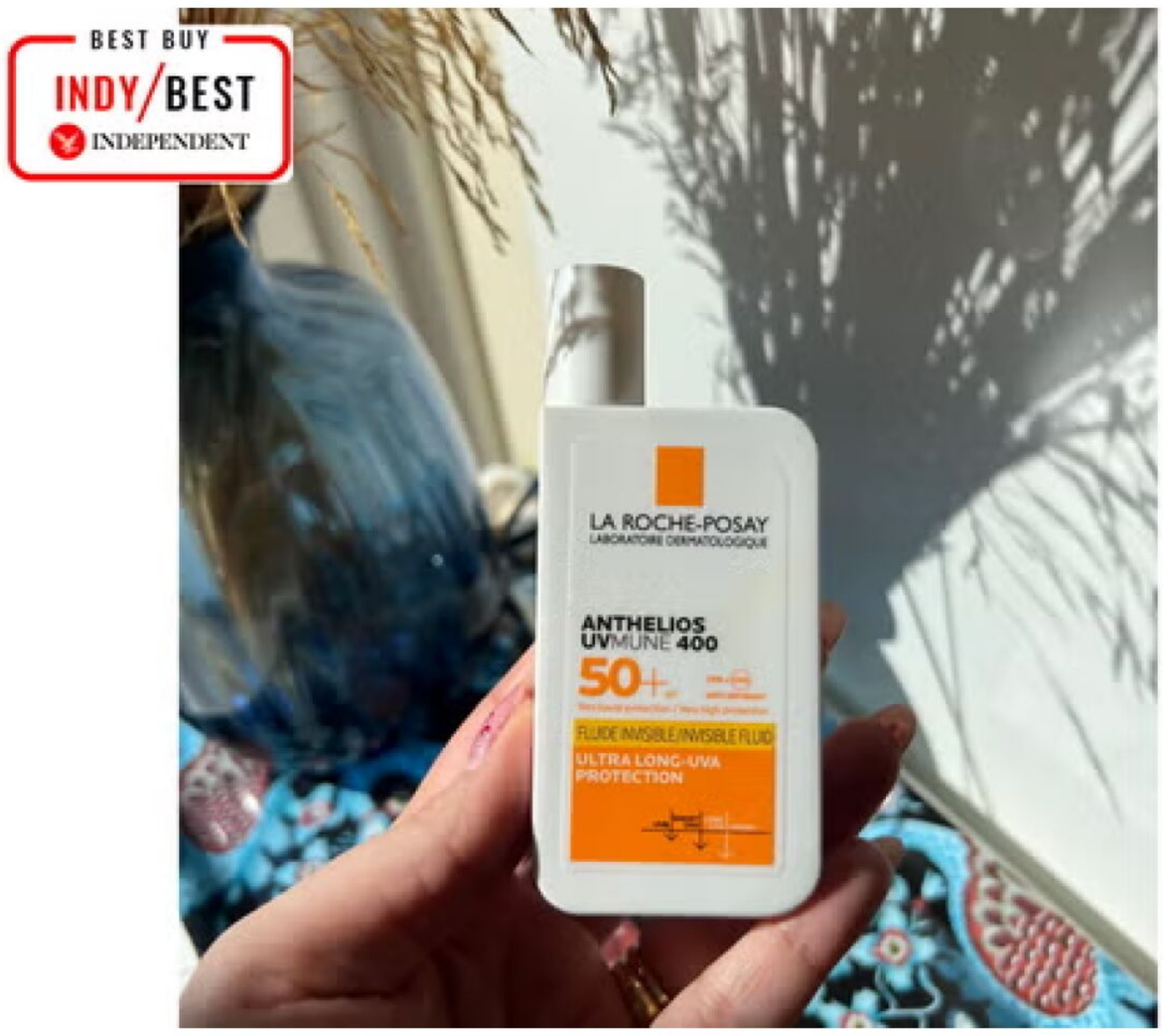
Remember, sunscreen acts as a film on the skin, to provide adequate protection, so "cleansing is important, even if you aren't wearing makeup", Dr Therianou explains. With all this in mind, we tested a range of sunscreens, to find out which ones worked best for our dry, acne-prone skin.

How we tested

Our tester in action with a haul of leading products (Fani Mari)

We tried and tested a selection of sunscreens, with different consistencies, over a few weeks. The texture of the sunscreens was considered, along with how well they worked on skin prone to bouts of acne.

Following the advice of the doctors we spoke to, the first step was to perform a patch test in an area prone to breakouts, to see whether or not the formula would aggravate our acne. For each sunscreen, we patch tested around the chin area for a few days, before proceeding to apply the sunscreen across the whole face. We took a break of one or two days in between using each product and kept an eye out for any breakouts. While everyone has different skin types and various levels of being prone to acne, these are the products that performed best for us.



La Roche Posay UVMUNE anthelios 400 invisible fluid, SPF 50+: £16, Lookfantastic

We've been in love with this sunscreen for a long time – in fact, it was still called "shaka fluid" when we first started using it. Since then, this product has only gotten better, with the addition of new UV filters to protect against photo ageing (when the sun prematurely ages skin).

Neither too oily nor too matte, the formula is very lightweight as well as being easy to apply – it's incredibly fluid and simply disappears on the skin. It's a great all-rounder, and topping up during the day couldn't be easier.

Buy now

Garnier BHA + niacinamide daily UV fluid, SPF 50: £12, Amazon

Garnier sunscreens have always been great budget-friendly options but, this year, there are a few new versions to try, including this BHA and niacinamide option. On paper, this is perfect for acne-prone skin. It treats while protecting the skin, so it's a good hybrid product – not all sunscreens boast such amazing acne-fighting ingredients.

The texture is very fluid, making it easy to apply and blend in, and it dries quickly. The finish is on the matte side, so, this would be great if your skin is oily. However, if you have dry skin, this may feel a bit too matte for daily use.

Buy now

Vichy capital soleil UV-age daily SPF50+: £18, Lookfantastic

This is one of the most fluid and easy-to-blend-in products we tested. This product is on the dewy side and feels a little bit oily on the skin, which is something to keep in mind if you prefer a matte finish. However, it also comes in a matte version.

The fluid texture means topping up during the day will be very easy, too, even over makeup. We love the luminous finish, which works well on dry skin – it looks great on the skin on its own or under makeup.

Buy now

Ultra Violette queen screen SPF50+: £38, Cult Beauty

When this product arrived in the UK, our reviewer screamed with joy at being able to finally try such a cult, Aussie favourite. Australia has very strict sunscreen rules, so, you know you will be properly protected when purchasing a product approved for use there.

This formula works well under makeup, and it's ideal for those who prefer a velvet-to-dewy finish (the brand has quite a few different formulas to pick from, depending on the finish you'd like).

The fluid serum formula comes with a pipette, for easier application – we apply one pipette at a time, to ensure proper blending. Keep in mind this formula is scented, which won't be to everyone's taste.

Buy now

Naked Sundays SPF50+ collagen glow: £28, Sephora

This product has many positive reviews online, so, we were curious to see how the 100 per cent mineral formula would fare, as this style of sunscreen can often be chalky on the skin and tricky to blend in.

We needn't have worried, however – in fact, we were surprised by just how easy it is to apply this product. It doesn't feel chalky, there is no white cast and the finish is normal to luminous.

The formula is quite moisturising, with a finish that's on the glowy side at first but looks more matte as the day goes on. It doesn't feel too heavy on the skin, either, considering it's a 100 per cent mineral formula.

Buy now

Supergoop! mineral sheerscreen sunscreen, SPF30: £29.94, Amazon

The whole Supergoop! range is very popular, and rightfully so. We found this product doesn't feel chalky like some mineral formulas do. It feels quite hydrating on the skin and the finish is slightly luminous.

It blends in smoothly but this may take a little longer than some other formulas – you have to let it sit for five minutes after applying, as, at first, there is a slight white cast before it becomes one with the skin.

Buy now

Skin+Me daily defence oil-free sunscreen: £19.99, Skin+Me

One of the first non-prescription products developed by Skin+Me, this sunscreen was created for everyone. It has a lightweight formula and boasts a variety of skin-loving and antioxidant ingredients, while also being fragrance and oil-free.

It has a nice, creamy texture that doesn't feel heavy on the skin. It feels moisturising, dries clear and will work well year-round. The finish is natural – not too matte, not too dewy.

Buy now

Evy Technology daily defence face mousse, SPF50: £27, Amazon

With a unique technology formulated as a mousse texture, Evy is the first brand we have seen to create such a product. This daily sunscreen offers a lot of hydration and nourishment – if you have oily skin, you could even skip your moisturiser on warm days.

To apply, shake the bottle well and dispense a golf-ball-sized amount. It takes a while to get the hang of the application and blending process but the finish is non-sticky and luminous. It's slightly matte, but not too much so, and is said to be suitable for all skin types. The formula is available in a few different versions, so pick the one most suitable to your concerns.

Buy now

RMS supernatural radiance tinted serum, SPF30: £51, Space NK

It's great to have a makeup/skincare hybrid on hand for those days when you don't feel like applying makeup. The finish of this leans towards the matte side but there are reflective particles that provide some shine and luminosity to the skin.

The formula includes skincare ingredients such as niacinamide, quinoa seed extract and more, to nourish the skin while protecting it from the sun. Despite the variety of oils included in the formula, the product doesn't feel oily on the skin, which is probably thanks to its mineral formula. This particular shade (medium aura) was too warm for our reviewer but the product comes in a lighter and darker shade, too.

Buy now

Alpha-H dawn to dusk SPF50+ serum: £36.99, Lookfantastic

We love Alpha-H, as it has great formulas and ingredients. It's an Australian brand, so, we expect nothing less than very high UVA/UVB protection and SPF 50+, which this serum delivers.

The formula is quite fluid and comes with a pipette applicator. It's easy to apply to the skin, and we were able to blend in the appropriate amount in less than two minutes. The finish is on the luminous side, while the sunscreen feels moisturising on the skin. It may not be suitable for very oily skin types, however, depending on how dewy you like your sunscreens.

This type of product also provides a great base for makeup – just leave time for your sunscreen to dry properly before applying anything else on top.

Buy now

What should acne sufferers look out for when picking a sunscreen?

When selecting a sunscreen (chemical or mineral) suitable for acne-prone skin, some ingredients should be avoided, as they are highly comedogenic, such as coconut oil, palm oil and mineral oil. You may also want to pick a fragrance-free product, to avoid any skin sensitivity. "Benzoyl alcohol can dry out and irritate the skin," says Dr Jack, so should also be avoided. Meanwhile, "silicones, while not necessarily bad for acne-prone skin, can trap debris in the pores if not thoroughly washed off, so, removal is key", adds Dr Jack.

"Labels like 'non-comedogenic', 'oil-free', and 'suits acne-prone skin' are not fail-safe ways of checking if [products] are good but may indicate a product has been designed for acne sufferers," Dr Jack concludes.

The verdict

Finding a sunscreen to suit your skin is now easier than ever – we are really spoiled for choice, across budget and high-end options. How dewy or matte you like the formula to be is a personal preference and will often depend on how oily or dry your skin is. If you want a great all-rounder, pick the fragrance-free La Roche Posay anthelios 400 invisible fluid or the Vichy capital soleil UV-age daily, if you're fine with fragrance.

For the best acne-prone ingredients with a matte finish and a great price tag, check out the Garnier BHA + niacinamide daily UV fluid. If you want something more illuminating, pick up the Ultra Violette queen screen. Finally, if you are a fan of mineral formulas, Naked Sundays collagen glow is the one to know.

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Oldman's repulsive spook lets Slow Horses run free

Gary Oldman's belching, boozing spy maestro Jackson Lamb has made the Apple TV+ show a triumph, writes **Nick Hilton**

TV burp: 'Slow Horses' is a Best Drama Series contender at the Baftas (Apple TV+)

"It's great to not give a fuck," Gary Oldman has said of his role in *Slow Horses*, the spy drama that's up for the top gong, Best Drama Series, at the Baftas this weekend. In the meticulously groomed, refined world of screen acting, Oldman's performance as Jackson Lamb – the sublimely repulsive leader of a group of

outcast MI5 agents – has been just that. A decoupling from the customary fucks of the industry.

The story of *Slow Horses*, which has become a cult hit for Apple TV+, begins and ends with Oldman. His performance as the perpetually half-soaked, foul-mouthed espionage maestro has elevated the show from the vast mire of British spy thrillers. Funny – the show's creator, Will Smith, is a veteran of *The Thick of It* – and irreverent, it's tempting to see it as a breath of fresh air. But with Lamb around, it's more likely to be an acrid fog of cigarette smoke and vodka burps.

"Everybody wants to work with Gary," casting director Nina Gold told *Spotlight*. "When he said yes, we were absolutely thrilled. Then we took it from there." The casting of Oldman – fresh off the back of his Best Actor Oscar for *The Darkest Hour* – was a huge coup for the show's producers, and the streamer. Oldman is a classic "film actor" who has largely eschewed the small screen. Before stepping into Slough House, an outpost of MI5 inhabited by people who have irreparably screwed up their careers, his last TV appearances were in the early Noughties: playing himself in short-lived adult puppet comedy *Greg the Bunny*, and making a guest appearance as a foppish actor in *Friends*.

But times have changed since then (even if the flip phones and gel pens are back in fashion). "There was always that sort of snobbery of 'I'm a film actor'," he told *Newsweek*, back in 2022. "That really doesn't happen anymore. You will see some of the best writing and acting and cinematography and set design in your home, on your TV." With top-drawer thespians such as Meryl Streep, Cate Blanchett and Matthew McConaughey migrating to the format, TV has become an increasingly starry proposition. And in Apple and Amazon – two of the leading players in the streaming revolution – the world's most valuable companies are now bringing the financial clout of Big Tech to the high-status, but low-margin, world of television.

After *The Darkest Hour*, in which Oldman played Winston Churchill through a thick mask of prosthetics, the idea of him as a quirky, but eminently fanciable, character actor evolved. Roles

like dreadlocked pimp Drexl in *True Romance*, or *Leon*'s maniacal villain Norman Stansfield, had demonstrated Oldman's willingness to push into unsavoury territory – but with Lamb he goes full grotesque. The role has been described as "Falstaffian" and "flatulent" (the latter is undeniable); the sort of showy role that most actors avoid, for fear of ruining their chances of getting cast as some spandexed superhero.

Spies like us: Oldman alongside the Bafta-nominated Jack Lowden, who plays the preening River Cartwright (Apple TV+)

But Lamb is a superhero of another kind. The grotesquery – he farts and belches, and appears greasy-haired and unshaven, his pit stains colouring his unwashed shirts – is coupled with a manic charisma. "Tell her she best interrogate me in a room with a window," he announced in the show's first season. "I had lamb bhuna earlier that's gonna make its presence felt." From "arse-timing" the Pope to Paraguayan prostitutes and paper condoms, all of the show's best lines are gifted to Lamb.

And yet, unlike Falstaff – the bumbling Shakespearean braggart who appears in *Henry IV Parts 1* and *2* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* – Lamb is not boastful or vain. In point of fact, compared to those around him – not least the icy Diana Taverner (Kristin Scott Thomas) or the preening River Cartwright (Jack Lowden, up for a Bafta for his performance) – Lamb is a devastatingly consistent agent. It's a very British

contradiction: he wears the glasses and trench coat of a sex offender but has the operational brilliance of James Bond.

Far from being unassuming, he is all-assuming. A voodoo doll channelling all the negative associations and assumptions of the viewing public. "He's become unstoppable," Mick Herron, author of the Lamb novels on which the show is based, told *The Guardian* on the eve of the show's premiere. "I can't have him suddenly becoming nice, or showing that he has a heart of gold." Quite right too: in a world of perma-tanned, six-packed leading men, whose jawlines look like they've been chiselled by Bernini himself, Lamb is a welcome antidote.

The success or failure of *Slow Horses* is not predicated on the result of the Best Drama Series Bafta this weekend (which will likely go to *Happy Valley*, anyway). Seasons four and five of the show have already been announced, and, unlike other prestige dramas, the series has a good, and distinctly un-British, track record of on-time delivery. Since we've been waiting for a second chapter of fellow Apple TV+ drama *Severance*, which began in February 2022, *Slow Horses* has released three excellent series, with another coming this year. In a world where hit shows feel licensed to tantalise their viewers, *Slow Horses* serves up the sort of feast Lamb would be found slurping back at the New Empire Chinese restaurant.

The show's long-term success may, instead, be contingent upon Apple TV+ broadening its audience. Estimates put the service at around 2 million subscribers in the UK, significantly behind both Netflix and Amazon, which have broken the 10 million figure, and Disney+, which is pushing at that door. For all the critical acclaim and the riches of the bods in Cupertino, broadcasting on Apple still involves an exile from the commercial mainstream. But for the disgraced denizens of Slough House, maybe that's precisely where they want to be.

The Bafta TV awards air at 7pm on BBC One on Sunday

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Tech firms must keep toxic content away from children

Ofcom orders changes to ‘aggressive’ social media algorithms

The Online Safety Act makes platforms legally responsible for protecting people using social media (Photos PA)

HOLLY BANCROFT
TARA COBHAM

Social media firms must stop pushing harmful content to children online with “aggressive” algorithms, the online regulator has demanded.

Ofcom has published a new set of guidelines for tech companies to ensure that children are better protected online. The suggestions include more robust age checks for young users and changes to social media algorithms to stop the promotion of harmful material.

The online safety campaign group Internet Matters has revealed that one in seven teens under 16 has experienced image-based sexual abuse online. The new guidance from Ofcom has been written to help companies comply with their duties in the Online Safety Act, which makes platforms legally responsible for keeping people safe online.

Under the rules, online media companies will need to assess whether children are likely to access their service and then complete a risk assessment to identify the risks that their products pose to children.

Esther Ghey, mother of murdered teenager Brianna Ghey, has called for more regulation of social media firms

Ofcom has also said that firms must prevent children from seeing the most harmful content relating to suicide, self-harm, eating disorders and pornography. They should also minimise a child's exposure to serious harms such as violent, hateful or abusive material and bullying content.

Ofcom has set out a number of things they suggest firms do to meet their legal obligations under the Online Safety Act, such as tracking unusual increases in harmful content on their platforms

and using a “highly effective age assurance” to make sure children are old enough to use their apps.

Social media firms don’t have to follow the recommendations completely, but if they choose not to they will have to show how they’ve met their legal duties in another way.

Other proposals from the regulator include making sure that children are not recommended increasingly harmful or violent content on their social media feeds. Ofcom said that social media companies use algorithms to determine how content is shown to users based on their characteristics, inferred interests and behaviour. This is the key way that children come across content about suicide, self-harm or eating disorders, the report said.

Ofcom wants social media companies to ensure that this type of content is not shown to children. They also want the rules to make it easier for children to report content while online. Children should be able to accept or decline an invitation to a group chat, disable comments on their own posts, and block or mute other people, Ofcom suggested.

Tech firms also need to get better at moderating content on their platforms and removing it faster when it is flagged as age-inappropriate, Ofcom said. Research from Internet Matters showed that 14 per cent of teenagers aged 16 and under said that they had experienced image-based sexual abuse. The findings come from a survey of 1,000 children aged 9-16.

Technology secretary Michelle Donelan called on tech platforms to change their algorithms to keep children safe

The National Crime Agency recently issued a rare warning to schools about the rising dangers of criminals targetting children on social media and coercing them into sharing nude images. The fraudsters then threaten to share the photos unless money is paid.

Dame Melanie Dawes, Ofcom chief executive, said that for "too long" children's experiences online "have been blighted by seriously harmful content which they can't avoid or control".

Referring to the new code of conduct, Dame Melanie said tech firms "will need to tame aggressive algorithms that push harmful content to children in their personalised feeds and introduce age-checks so children get an experience that's right for their age". She said, once the guidelines are in force, "we won't hesitate to use our full range of enforcement powers to hold platforms to account".

Technology secretary Michelle Donelan said that the Ofcom rules were "clear", adding: "Platforms must introduce the kinds of age-checks young people experience in the real world and address algorithms which too readily mean they come across harmful material online."

Sir Peter Wanless, CEO at the NSPCC, said the draft codes set "high standards" for tech companies to keep children safe.

Children's commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza said she hoped that the Ofcom guidelines, along with other protections in the Online Safety Act, "will mark a significant step forward in the ongoing effort to safeguard children online".

This is the first draft of an online code to protect children that Ofcom has produced. It will now be consulted on and a final proposal will be published in spring 2025.

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Business news in brief

P&O boss Peter Hebblethwaite has admitted to paying the firm's workers as little as £4.87 per hour despite having earned £508,000 himself last year (AFP via Getty)

P&O boss admits paying workers less than £5 per hour

The boss of P&O Ferries has admitted paying the firm's workers as little as £4.87 per hour, nearly two years on from a scandal that saw it branded "pirates" for laying off hundreds of staff without notice. Peter Hebblethwaite repeatedly told MPs on the Business and Trade Committee that P&O's workers were not being exploited while resisting calls for an independent investigation into the company's employment practices.

The chief executive, who admitted he could not live on £4.87 per hour, also revealed he earned £508,000 including a bonus of £183,000 last year. Mr Hebblethwaite said: "We are paying

considerably ahead of the international minimum standard. We believe that it is right that as an international business operating in international waters, we should be governed by international law."

BP profits miss forecasts as it plans £1.6bn cost-cutting

Lower-than-expected profits have been revealed by BP in the face of lower energy prices and weaker refining margins than this time last year. The London-listed energy giant also revealed plans to deliver £1.6bn extra in cost savings by 2026. BP said underlying replacement cost profit, its preferred measure, was £2.2bn in the first quarter, down from £3.9bn a year earlier.

Lower profits were blamed on lower oil and gas prices, the impact of an outage at its Whiting refinery and weaker fuel margins. Alice Harrison, head of fossil fuel campaigns at Global Witness, said: "Instead of helping to rebuild Ukraine, ease the burden of high bills or support countries suffering from the climate crisis, BP is making the rich richer. And this will continue to be the case until we make the urgent switch to a clean energy system."

Octopus Energy valuation soars to more than £7bn

The valuation of Octopus Energy has jumped to $9bn (£7.2bn) after two of its biggest investors increased their stakes in the business. Generation Investment Management and Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, already major investors, took even bigger shares in the energy and technology group.

Generation, which focuses on sustainable investments, upped its stake to 13 per cent after getting new backing from pension funds in the US and Australia. CPP Investments increased its stake to 12 per cent. Octopus has been expanding abroad and now has a presence in 18 countries. It is pushing its energy software platform, Kraken, in North America.

Company secures £800m in funding to build self-driving AI

British firm Wayve has secured £837m in funding to build AI products used to power self-driving cars, the biggest investment ever in a UK AI firm. Wayve is known as a pioneer in so-called embodied AI for autonomous driving – effectively, foundation models on which autonomous vehicles are built, enabling them to learn from and interact with a real-world environment.

The funding is being led by Japanese tech giant Softbank, with Nvidia and existing investor Microsoft also backing the firm. Co-founder and chief executive Alex Kendall said: "Our vision is to develop autonomous technology that not only becomes a reality in millions of vehicles but also earns people's trust by seamlessly integrating into their everyday lives."

PA

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Dortmund reach Wembley as 'yellow wall' holds firm

PSG	0
Borussia Dortmund Hummels (50); Dortmund win 2-0 on aggregate	1

Jubilant: Borussia Dortmund's fairytale run has taken them to the Champions League final (Reuters)

RICHARD JOLLY

This wasn't supposed to happen. Not in a Champions League dominated by the same familiar faces, by the superpowers and the Premier League's moneyed elite. Not for the club who sold Jude Bellingham and Erling Haaland or the team many expected to perish in the group of death or the side who blew the Bundesliga on the final day of last season. Not for Edin Terzic, the nice-guy manager who has spent parts of his reign seemingly in danger of being replaced.

But Borussia Dortmund are in the Champions League final. Perceived as the weakest side in the last eight, seen as the outsiders in the semi-finals, they will now be underdogs at Wembley on 1 June. They have got there against the odds – financial and footballing – but with an ethos that makes them look an outlier in the 21st century. This was a triumph for the people's club against the Qatari project as well as yet another missed opportunity for Paris Saint-Germain, who find new ways to not win the Champions League.

The heartwarming stories instead belonged to the visitors. To the boyhood supporter Terzic, who joins Ottmar Hitzfeld and Jurgen Klopp in taking Dortmund to a Champions League final. To the match-winner Mats Hummels, a survivor of the 2013 final, a player who admitted he thought his last chance of reaching another had gone. To the departing Marco Reus, whose final game for Dortmund will be the biggest of his life. To Jadon Sancho, too, whose season involved four months training with the Under-18s at Manchester United and could end with the most prestigious medal of all.

Veteran German star Mats Hummels heads in the solitary goal in Paris (Getty)

So much for the supposed predictability of the Champions League. Kylian Mbappe will have to go to Real Madrid to try and win it. There will be no fairytale farewell in the colours of his hometown club. Mbappe and co were denied a goal by Dortmund, though they may long wonder how.

Fortune scarcely favoured them. They struck the woodwork six times across the tie, four of them in Paris. They had 45 shots over the two legs, 30 of them in France. After a host of misses in Germany last week, there were further cases of poor finishing. Yet there were even more instances of wonderful defending. PSG encountered a yellow wall: not the huge bank of fans in the Signal Iduna Park but a defence in which Hummels and Nico Schlotterbeck were outstanding.

Terzic got his tactics right, too. When PSG mounted an onslaught midway through the second half, he brought on Niklas Sule as a third centre-back. Part of the plan at the start involved doubling up on the flanks: Sancho was charged with helping Julian Ryerson against Mbappe, for instance.

Nearly man: Kylian Mbappe will never win the Champions League in PSG colours (Getty)

And while Dortmund were long known for their heavy-metal football, they instead had a defensive structure behind the ball. This was about patience more than pressing. It required a rearguard action, bodies in the box blocking shots. But Dortmund were willing. There is a resilience and a resolve to a team with a lone defeat in their last 11 Champions League games. This was an epic triumph of teamwork.

Ultimately, PSG could rue their ineffectiveness before the break when the brightest opening came Dortmund's way: Karim Adeyemi, with Mbappe-esque speed, embarked on an electric burst, scything through the hosts' defence before Gianluigi Donnarumma blocked his shot.

The goalkeeper was helpless, though, when Dortmund struck five minutes after the interval. An unmarked Hummels headed in Julian Brandt's corner. Only one footballer has ever made more appearances for Dortmund than Hummels. Now few have scored a more important goal.

Unfancied and unflustered, Dortmund showed that unity and belief can prevail against mega-star rivals (Reuters)

It gave PSG an added reason to regret a miss: just before the climactic moment, Warren Zaire-Emery hit the outside of the upright from close range after Goncalo Ramos had somehow hooked the ball in his direction. The teenager probably should have scored, the same upright was then rattled in rather different fashion, when Nuno Mendes drove a 25-yard shot against the post.

Having hit the post twice, PSG had another unwanted double when they were twice denied by the bar. Once again, the first effort was more wasteful, the second struck cleaner. Mbappe miscued an effort that Gregor Kobel did wonderfully well to tip onto the woodwork. Vitinha unleashed a ferocious effort from long range but with the same outcome.

PSG could reflect on the moment when Ramos skied a shot after an hour. He was soon substituted as Luis Enrique reshaped his attack. Kobel saved from Mbappe. In injury time, he claimed a penalty. But his European career with PSG only had minutes to run.

Dortmund, exhausted but ecstatic, saw their unexpected run carry them to the Champions League final and perhaps to a glory that would be all the greater because it really wasn't supposed to happen.

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Cracks had begun to appear for Moyes after Prague high

David Moyes's West Ham side have suffered in the league since Christmas (Photos Getty)

RICHARD JOLLY
SENIOR FOOTBALL CORRESPONDENT

David Moyes will always have Prague. A quarter of a century into his managerial career, the Scot dad danced in the dressing room to the Proclaimers after winning his first major trophy and West Ham's first piece of silverware for 43 years.

Eleven months on, Moyes's departure had come to feel football's worst-kept secret, and if all clubs have to engage in succession planning, it reflected doubly badly on them when Sporting Lisbon's Ruben Amorim felt the need to apologise for meeting the reigning Europa Conference League champions. And while Julen Lopetegui will instead prove Moyes' successor, part of his legacy is that a club who were in danger of dropping into the Championship when they sent an SOS to the Scot in 2019 now have a continental honour.

It is a reason, though far from the only one, why Moyes leaves West Ham as their best manager since John Lyall, probably their third finest ever. A recent record of just four wins in 2024, a distinctly unMoyesian defensive record that shows 70 goals conceded and a propensity to get thrashed that is out of character with the Scot's usually resilient and organised sides suggest it is time to go. So too a climate where it felt that every defeat brought dissent against Moyes from the stands. That would not have been a basis to start next season.

And yet, even among West Ham's recent struggles, it is worth noting that they are ninth, behind eight clubs with bigger budgets. If stylistic issues – low on possession, high on goals conceded – also form part of the picture, it is not underachievement. Beat Luton on Saturday and Moyes may get a 13th top-nine finish of his Premier League career; arguably only one – at Manchester United – was actually underperforming.

That forms part of the grounds to celebrate his reign; or reigns, really, given that West Ham should not have dispensed with his services in 2018. In two half-seasons, he twice saved them from relegation. He then secured the first back-to-back top-seven finishes in their top-flight history before winning silverware.

Happy Hammers: West Ham defeated Fiorentina to win the Europa Conference League in Prague in June of last year

It is particularly noteworthy because Moyes walked into a club with a tradition of inconsistency. Slaven Bilic, Sam Allardyce, Gianfranco Zola, Alan Pardew and Glenn Roeder all had one fine season in the Premier League. None mustered a second. Unglamorous but unrelenting, Moyes was a manager out of keeping with West Ham's past. He would sign flair players – Mohammed Kudus and Lucas Paqueta the best – but the rest of the team sought few points for artistic merit.

West Ham did not try and play the same brand of football as the elite. And yet a way in which he gave them a status was that they secured a healthy number of wins over their superiors: Arsenal were beaten twice this season, Manchester United, Tottenham and Chelsea once apiece. Much as West Ham became fixtures in Europe again, they became a team who could compete in England.

If some of that was because of Declan Rice, and after Sunday's 5-0 thrashing at Chelsea Moyes attributed some of their problems this season to the loss of the £105m man, the transformation of others, from Jarrod Bowen to Michail Antonio via Craig Dawson and Tomas Soucek, showed Moyes's capacity to improve players who shared his own humbler origins further down the footballing pyramid.

On the debit side, Bowen and Antonio were required to score amid the failings of some of the other forward signings, whether

Gianluca Scamacca or Danny Ings, Maxwel Cornet or Nikola Vlasic, or the men Manuel Pellegrini left, in Felipe Anderson and Sebastien Haller. Perhaps it reflected the wider struggle to play better football.

With the oddity of a recruitment team where he and director of football Tim Steidten wanted very different targets but, in Kudus, Edson Alvarez and James Ward-Prowse, excellent players were nevertheless signed, Moyes still leaves arguably West Ham's strongest squad for two decades, despite a couple of missteps this season.

Choosing Kurt Zouma as captain seems one, amid the disastrous defensive record and capitulations. Allowing Pablo Fornals and Said Benrahma to go in January, reducing the attacking options, and instead signing Kalvin Phillips, whose loan in London has been calamitous, was another. If Phillips brought a case of West Ham regressing when they wanted to kick on, there were illustrations of it in the days before Moyes, too.

And so it will be Lopetegui, another European trophy winner, a man whose stint at Real Madrid was briefer than Moyes's time at United, a manager whose rescue job at Wolves was arguably still more impressive than the Scot's firefighting jobs with West Ham.

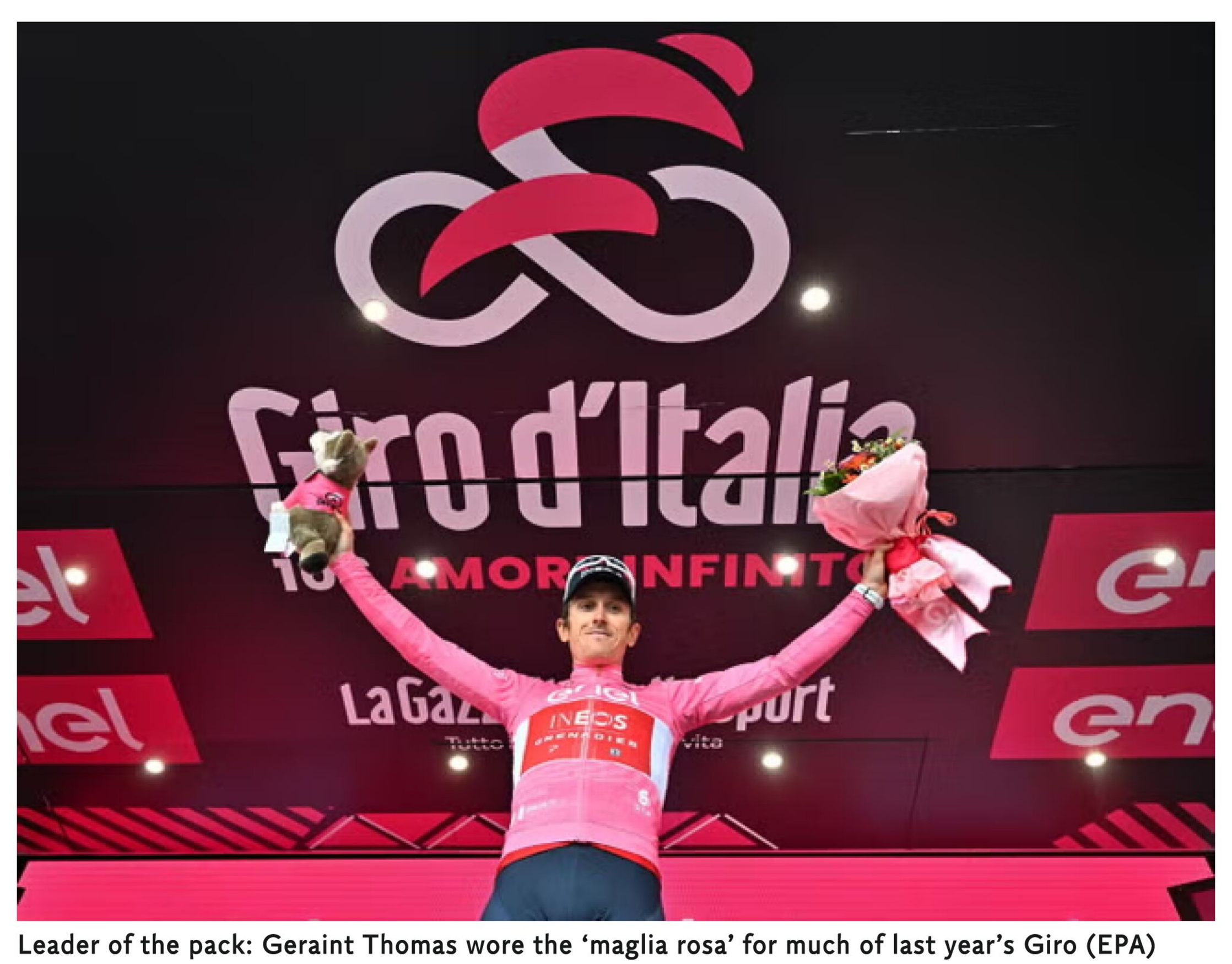
A gifted coach should arrive with one major concern. Lopetegui's petulant exit at Molineux came when, after spending £75m, he agitated for further signings. Wolves sold instead because they had to in order to pass Financial Fair Play. Had he got his way, they would have faced a points deduction.

West Ham nevertheless sense an upgrade on Moyes. But if Pellegrini's troubled time in London does not mean that history is guaranteed to repeat itself, West Ham's past should show the Moyes years represent a high point. And for him, Prague may forever represent the highest.

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Thomas plans to finish in the pink at the Giro d'Italia



Leader of the pack: Geraint Thomas wore the 'maglia rosa' for much of last year's Giro (EPA)

HARRY LATHAM-COYLE

The message from Geraint Thomas expressed the sentiment shared by the rest of the peloton. "Alright son, you've had your fun," Thomas quipped in a post on social media after the third

stage of the Giro d'Italia. "Let's just have a nice quiet day tomorrow?"

It was a comment aimed at Tadej Pogacar, Thomas having spent the final couple of kilometres of stage three clinging to the coattails of the pink phenom. It had been a sprinters' day from the minute the route was unveiled, a first stage favouring the fast men after a gruelling start to the Italian adventure, but Pogacar – as is often the case – wished to rip up the roadbook.

His audacious attack ultimately fell short but it was further proof that he means business having taken the pink jersey a day earlier. It felt instructive that it was Thomas who was able to go with him. This is not a competitive field of general classification contenders on paper, the best of the peloton largely held back for a French battle royale in July, leaving the Welshman as Pogacar's likeliest rival for a place at the top of the podium in Rome.

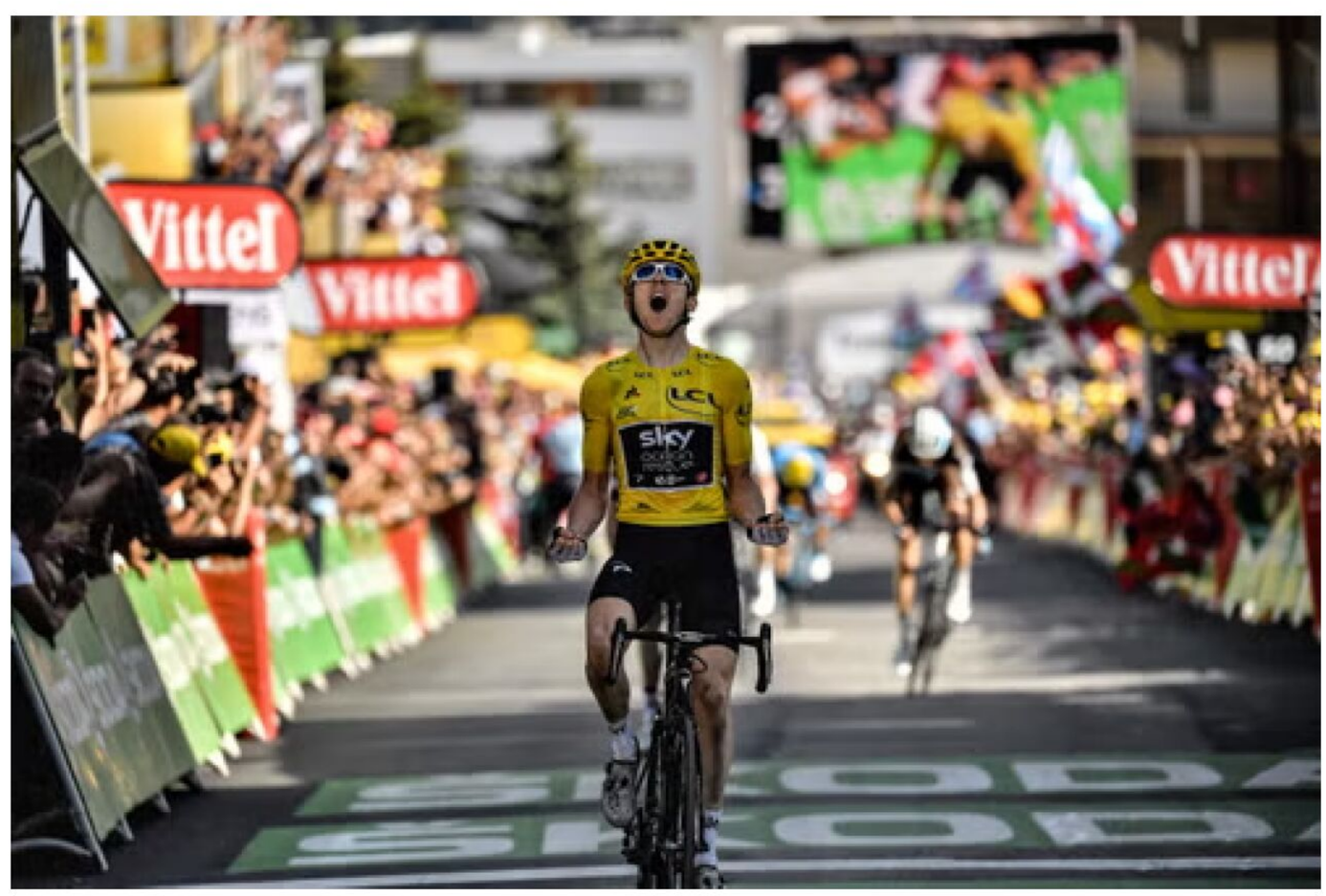
Slovenian superstar: Thomas must topple Tadej Pogacar (pictured) to win in Italy (AP)

"He is the massive favourite, but stranger things have happened," Thomas told *The Guardian* ahead of the Giro. "It's three weeks – it's different to any other race. Anyone can have a bad day. I'm not one to play mind games. I'll be doing my thing – try to stay consistent, good and strong all the way through."

Such is his superiority that it may be that the Slovenian canters clear to take his first *maglia rosa*, but he is unlikely to find

Thomas simple to shake off. If the Welshman has proved anything over a road career now in its 18th year, it is that he knows how to stick around and survive. Even amid the misfortune and mishaps that characterised his career for so long, he always carried that Cardiff charm, the sense of a rider content with his lot.

It will be six years this summer since his breakthrough Tour de France yellow jersey but Thomas is still slugging it out at the top of the general classification standings; an anachronism, in a way, among a generation of do-everything freaks who have transformed the sport. His emergence as a Grand Tour winner came just before the arrival of Pogacar and Jonas Vingegaard and there is something strangely heartening about the way Thomas has continued to compete, a Welsh terrier nipping at the heels of the pure breeds.



Tour de force: Thomas famously triumphed on the Champs-Elysees in 2018 (Getty)

Three more Grand Tour podiums have followed that 2018 Tour triumph. Last year's Italian near miss after Primoz Roglic's time-trial surge is still reasonably fresh in the memory. If it was a cruel ending, it did show that another victory is not beyond Thomas's reach – even if the presence of Pogacar is a complicating factor.

It seems that Thomas is sanguine enough to recognise that second behind the Slovenian would be a fair achievement at this stage of a career beginning to wind down. Great mate Luke

Rowe will bow out at the end of 2024 and their popularity as joint podcast *Watts Occurring* suggests Thomas has a promising second chapter in the media ahead. But he is contracted through to the end of next year, seeking to further goals both personal and collective for an Ineos team in the grips of something of an identity crisis.

When he does finally call time, though, Thomas will look back with pride. Two Olympic golds and a Tour de France win would be achievement enough but a final day looking pretty in pink would only enhance the rosy reflection.

"I can see the end now, and it's pretty close," Thomas admitted to BBC Sport Wales last week. "I've done 18 years and only got one and a half left. When I was a kid this is what I dreamed of doing, being in the biggest races and competing right at the death of them. So to be here now and in one of the strongest teams, being one of the guys with a real chance of succeeding, it's crazy really.

Primoz Roglic (right) took over from Geraint Thomas in the penultimate stage at the 2023 Giro d'Italia (AP)

"Last year, with all the sort of challenges before the start – this infection that kept coming back, stop-starting the training and things – I was still competitive. To be wearing the [leader's] jersey for half the race and to lose it on the last day obviously wasn't ideal. But I feel like Primoz won that rather than me losing the race.

“It’d still be nice to win, obviously, but I’ve done 18 years professionally now, racing. I’ve achieved what I have, and it kind of feels a bit more like a bonus round almost, rather than feeling like I have to prove something.”

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^

Sport news in brief

Bukayo Saka was sent racist abuse on social media after missing a penalty in the defeat to Italy in the Euro 2020 final (Getty)

Online racist abuse during Euros to be met with prosecutions

England players have been reassured by police that anyone who racially abuses them online at Euro 2024 will be prosecuted. Bukayo Saka, Marcus Rashford and Jadon Sancho were sent racist abuse online after missing penalties in the defeat to Italy in the Euro 2020 final at Wembley in July 2021. Police made 11 arrests following the final, with one individual sentenced to 10 weeks in prison.

While Gareth Southgate's squad have been made aware of all the relevant steps and tools on social media such as filters, they have

also been talked through the reporting process and shown examples of how people have been prosecuted under the Malicious Communications Act. The clear message is that online abusers won't be able to "hide behind keyboards" – even if abroad.

National Police Chief Constable Mark Roberts said they have developed a good relationship with social media companies on the issue, including Twitter/X, which brings prompt responses. A man was jailed in 2021 after live-streaming himself on Facebook racially abusing three England players after the Euro 2020 final.

Wolff reveals Verstappen stance amid Mercedes rumours

Toto Wolff has refused to rule out a meeting with Max Verstappen as the Mercedes boss revealed he is in "observation mode" as he waits to sign a replacement for Lewis Hamilton. Wolff is looking for a new teammate for George Russell next year with seven-time world champion Hamilton leaving for Ferrari.

The Mercedes team principal is keen to land Verstappen, who has a contract with Red Bull until 2028 and insists he is happy at the world champions "at the moment". He is on course for a fourth-straight drivers' title this year. While Wolff dismissed speculation that he was set to meet with Verstappen's representatives in Miami on Monday, he admitted that talks could take place in the future as he continues to bide his time ahead of finding a second driver for 2025.

"There's always plenty of meetings, I can't really say about the second driver," Wolff said. "I think we've talked about the possibilities. I want to be fair to these guys and not make it look like we are playing chess with humans because we are not doing that. I think we want to take our time, see where Max's thinking goes, and at the same time monitor the other drivers."

Forest penalty points upheld in Premier League survival blow

Nottingham Forest's four-point deduction for breaching the Premier League's profitability and sustainability rules (PSR) has been upheld following an unsuccessful appeal, leaving the club facing the threat of relegation this season. Forest admitted breaching the Premier League's PSR rules by £34.5m over a three-year period but argued the independent commission had not taken into consideration the "unique circumstances of the club and its mitigation" to stay under the limit.

An independent appeal board has dismissed the club's protest, however, which leaves Nuno Espirito Santo's side three points clear of Luton Town and the relegation zone with two games of the season remaining. Forest boosted their hopes of staying up with a 3-1 win over already relegated Sheffield United on Saturday and have fixtures against Chelsea and Burnley, who are 19th and trail Forest by five points, still to play.

PSR regulations allow clubs maximum losses of £105m over a three-year assessment, but that is reduced by £22m per season for any season within the period spent in the Championship. Forest were "extremely disappointed" with the commission's original decision and said PSR rules threatened to "undermine the integrity and competitiveness of the Premier League".

Kipchoge condemns trolling linking him to Kiptum death

Eliud Kipchoge has revealed he feared for the lives of his family following a campaign of online abuse and conspiracy theories wrongly linking the two-time Olympic champion and marathon great to the tragic death of rising star Kelvin Kiptum. Kiptum was killed in a car crash in February at the age of just 24, only months after the Kenyan broke compatriot Kipchoge's world record in Chicago. Kiptum looked set to lower further records and challenge Kipchoge's dominance over the sport.

Kipchoge, 39, led the tributes after Kiptum's death, mourning the loss of an athlete who had a "whole life ahead of him to achieve incredible greatness". Kiptum's coach, Rwanda's Gervais Hakizimana, was also killed when Kiptum lost control of their car and crashed into a tree. Kipchoge said online trolls

threatened to burn down his house after he was linked with Kiptum's death on social media, revealing he also lost "90 per cent" of his friends as a result of the malicious rumours which spread as far as his elderly mother.

"I was shocked that people on social media platforms are saying, 'Eliud is involved in the death of this boy'," Kipchoge told BBC Sport Africa. "That was my worst news ever in my life. I received a lot of bad things; that they will burn the (training) camp, they will burn my investments in town, they will burn my house, they will burn my family. It did not happen but that is how the world is."

Daley ready to shine at Paris Olympics after retirement U-turn

Noah Williams insists diving partner Tom Daley is in a class of his own after bouncing back from the brink of retirement to reach a fifth Olympic Games. The 29-year-old has been named among Team GB's first eight divers for Paris this summer just a year after announcing a retirement U-turn.

Daley said he was inspired by his son Robbie to go full pelt for Paris 2024, despite not competing in the two years since he finally won Olympic gold in the 10-metre synchro event with now-injured Matty Lee in Tokyo. But he will team up with new partner Williams to defend his title – and the pair are among the medal favourites. They qualified for the Games with silver at the World Championships in Doha earlier in the year, and are one of four formidable pairs that will represent Team GB at the Olympic Aquatics Centre.

Williams, who is set for his second Olympics after competing in the individual 10m event in Tokyo, said: "I don't think people realise how good Tom is. There is no one else in the world who could have two years out and then come back and be a world medallist and world champion in the team event. He's insanely hard-working and talented, he's miles above everyone else. Anything can happen on the day, we've done really well this year and I hope I can help Tom out."

Want your views to be included in *The Independent Daily Edition* letters page? Email us by tapping here letters@independent.co.uk. Please include your address

BACK TO TOP ^