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Sunak begins election campaign by abandoning flagship policies

Bills on smoking ban and no-fault evictions likely to be dropped

Jessica Elgot
Eleni Courea
Rowena Mason

Rishi Sunak dropped flagship policies on deporting migrants to Rwanda and banning smoking for young people yesterday on the first full day of his election campaign, leaving his legacy increasingly threadbare.

Ministers confirmed that key pieces of legislation that could be rushed through by MPs before parliament is suspended were likely to be dropped, including plans for a football regulator and an end to no-fault evictions.

Keir Starmer, kicking off his campaign in the target seat of Gillingham, Kent, said it was time to "turn the page on Tory chaos", and Labour warned that the government's legislative programme was in tatters, with many proposed laws now "up in the air, or in the bin".

The prime minister's admission that migrants who crossed the Channel in small boats will not be flown to Rwanda before 4 July was met with despair by Tory rightwingers. Many of his MPs were already unhappy about the early election.

Under the £500m scheme, the cornerstone of his government's promise to "stop the 4



▲ *Rishi Sunak at Inverness airport yesterday during a whistlestop tour, the day after announcing the election will be on 4 July* PHOTOGRAPH: STEFAN ROUSSEAU/PA

Vennells blocked review of Post Office IT in 2013

Daniel Boffey
Chief reporter

The former Post Office boss Paula Vennells killed a review that would have exposed the Horizon IT scandal more than 10 years ago after being told it would make "front-page news", but insisted she was not part of a cover-up.

During a second day of giving evidence at the public inquiry into the scandal, Vennells, who led the Post Office for nine years, said a different decision could have avoided a "lost decade" for persecuted branch operators.

Vennells knew at the time of her decision in 2013 that Gareth Jenkins, an engineer at Fujitsu who designed the Horizon accounting system, had withheld information from the courts about bugs in the software and was regarded as an "unsafe witness".

Branch owner-operators continued to be prosecuted and hounded until 2015, leading to some taking their own lives, over apparent shortfalls at their branches caused by faults in Horizon. The Post Office did not stop fighting attempts to appeal against the convictions until 2019.

The latest revelations from the inquiry emerged from emails that followed Vennells' receipt of a limited but critical independent report by Second Sight, a fraud investigation firm, into the claims of branch owner-operators. She had asked a number of executives in an email why there should not be a full historical review of about 500 cases of post office operators accused of false accounting.

The Post Office's then director of communications, Mark Davies, messaged Vennells about his concerns that such a move would "fuel the story" beyond the "usual suspects" who 2

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ICJ set to rule on Israel's war in Gaza today

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Paula Vennells arrives at the inquiry yesterday for her second day of evidence
PHOTOGRAPH: THOMAS KRYCH/ZUMA/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

Vennells blocked IT review in 2013 to avoid bad headlines, inquiry told

Continued *from page 1*

were reporting on potentially unsafe convictions.

"If we say publicly that we will look at past cases ... whether from recent history or going further back, we will open this up very significantly into front-page news," Davies wrote. "In media terms it becomes mainstream, very high-profile."

Vennells responded: "You are right to call this out. And I will take your steer, no issue." She went on to write that the most urgent objective was to "manage the media".

Jason Beer KC, the lead counsel at the inquiry, asked Vennells: "It is a grossly improper perspective, isn't it?"

"It is, yes," she answered.

Beer asked Vennells whether she had stayed in contact with Davies after she left the Post Office in 2019. "I did," she answered.

"Did you exchange messages with Mr Davies about media statements you might make and the media lines you might take in the announcement of this inquiry?" Beer asked.

"I believe that the inquiry has texts that showed that," she responded.

"He [Davies] was still advising you in 2020 about the lines to take in your media statement?" asked Beer.

Vennells said: "I had kept in touch with Mr Davies for reasons which were very personal to him. I think he offered advice at one point in time."

Vennells denied her decision not to review the many miscarriages of justice had been led by her public relations adviser but apologised about a further email in which she had suggested Davies use "exception" in press releases as a "non-emotive word for computer bugs, glitches, defects".

After the Second Sight report, the Post Office dumped plans to review convictions and instead opened a "mediation scheme" through which complaints could be addressed. According to papers seen by the inquiry, the organisation judged that this would "take the sting out of the issue as a media story".

Vennells sent an email to senior executives in August 2013 concerned that this would lead to payouts to victims. "When we discussed this, the hope of mediation was to avoid or minimise compensation," she wrote. "You explained that there were steps in place to advise [post office operators] entering the process that this was a chance to be heard and not to expect compensation. How are we planning to manage these expectations. And where compensation may be offered, you mentioned small figures in the £3-5k band; can we give a range of costs?"

> ***'I don't recall that ... I would not cover anything up'***
> **Paula Vennells**
> *Addressing inquiry*

After an emotional first day of evidence on Wednesday, Vennells largely maintained her composure as Beer questioned her over the decision not to launch a full forensic investigation into claims of unsafe convictions that had emerged in some media, including Computer Weekly.

Vennells repeatedly told the inquiry that she could not recollect events, and denied any knowledge of a conversation recounted by the Post Office's then general legal counsel, Susan Crichton, on the eve of a board meeting in July 2013.

Crichton told the inquiry she had informed Vennells she believed there would be "many successful claims against the Post Office arising from past wrongful prosecutions". To groans from the inquiry audience, Vennells said: "I don't recall that." She added: "I would not cover anything up."

Crichton was criticised internally for commissioning Second Sight. Vennells wrote in a memo that she had "put her integrity as a lawyer above the interests of the business".

Five days after the email exchange between Vennells and Davies, the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) wrote to the Post Office's chief executive to request information about any knowledge the organisation had about faults in the Horizon system. Vennells said she had passed on the correspondence to Crichton and would not have requested for there to be any lack of disclosure.

Beer asked Vennells whether "the right and honest thing for the Post Office to have done" would have been to let the CCRC know immediately about the doubts over the evidence of Jenkins. Vennells said: "Yes it would."

Beer went on: "That didn't happen for years and years, did it?" She responded: "I understand that to be the case now."

Mallorca: at least four dead after building collapses

Nadeem Badshah

At least four people were killed and around 21 injured after a building collapsed on a beachfront in Mallorca last night, emergency services said.

Several people were believed still to be trapped after the two-storey Medusa Beach Club, collapsed in the island's capital, Palma de Mallorca, at about 8.30pm local time (19.30 BST).

The emergency services said on X that the injured had been taken to various hospitals in Palma. The roof of the building collapsed and psychologists had been called to the scene, they added.

A spokesperson for a regional emergency response coordination centre told the Mirror: "Four people have died and 21 have been injured in the collapse of a building in Cartago Street in Playa de Palma."

Earlier, a spokesperson for the centre said: "We have activated an emergency response as a result of the collapse of the ceiling of a two-storey building in Avenida Cartago in Playa de Palma, where people are trapped. Firefighters and local police are at the scene."

Spain's prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, said he was monitoring the situation closely and that his government would be ready to deploy "all the means and personnel necessary".

Marga Prohens, the president of the Balearic Islands, wrote on X: "All my affection and warmth to the families of the four people who lost their lives in this tragic incident and wishing the recovery of all the injured."

Last night it had not yet been disclosed whether the deceased or injured were restaurant workers or holidaymakers, but the Foreign Office confirmed there were no reports of British nationals being involved in the incident.

A spokeswoman said: "We are aware of an incident in Palma, and there are currently no reports of British nationals having been involved. We remain in contact with the Spanish authorities."

The exact cause of the structural failure is under investigation.

The local mayor, Jaime Martínez, and the deputy mayor, Javier Bonet, arrived at the scene to coordinate rescue efforts and provide support to the affected families, the TSC website reported.

Authorities have urged anyone with information related to the incident to come forward and assist in the investigation.

May is the beginning of the peak season in Palma de Mallorca, a popular tourist resort in the western Mediterranean.

Mallorca is one of Spain's Balearic Islands, which was visited by more than 14 million tourists last year, according to official figures.



Several people were still believed to be trapped in the two-storey Medusa Beach Club last night after its collapse
PHOTOGRAPH: ISAAC BUJ/AP





▶ *The vibrant star nursery, Messier 78. Left, the Euclid spacecraft is unveiled in Cannes in 2023. Below, NGC 6744, a large spiral galaxy*

PHOTOGRAPH: ESA/EUCLID/EUCLID CONSORTIUM/NASA

Euclid telescope spots young, rogue planets floating free in Milky Way

Ian Sample
Science editor

Astronomers have spotted dozens of rogue planets floating free from their stars after turning the Euclid space telescope to look at a distant region of the Milky Way.

The wandering worlds were seen deep inside the Orion nebula, a giant cloud of dust and gas 1,500 light years away, and described in the first scientific results announced by Euclid mission researchers.

The European Space Agency (Esa) launched the €1bn (£851m) observatory last summer on a six-year mission to create a 3D map of the cosmos. Armed with its images, scientists hope to understand more about the mysterious 95% of the universe that is unexplained.

According to astronomers' theories, most of the universe is made up of dark matter, an invisible substance that clings around galaxies and behaves like a cosmic glue, and dark energy, which is said to drive the accelerating expansion of the universe.

The first wave of scientific results come from only 24 hours of observations, which revealed 11m objects in visible light and 5m in infrared.

Along with the planets, the researchers describe new star clusters, dwarf galaxies and very distant, bright galaxies from the first billion years of the universe.

A flurry of new images from the same observations are the largest ever taken in space and demonstrate the stunning wide-field views that astronomers can expect from Euclid in the coming years.

Among those released on Thursday is a breathtaking image of Messier 78, a vibrant star nursery shrouded in interstellar dust, that reveals complex filaments of gas and dust in unprecedented detail.

"I've been absolutely amazed at the images I've seen," said Prof Mark Cropper, the lead scientist on Euclid's VIS camera at UCL. "These are not just pretty pictures, these images are packed with new information."

One of the newly released images shows Abell 2390, a giant conglomeration of more than 50,000 Milky Way-like galaxies. Such galaxy clusters contain up to 10 trillion times as much mass as the sun, much of which is believed to be elusive dark matter.

Another image of the Abell 2764 galaxy cluster reveals hundreds of galaxies orbiting within a halo of dark matter. Other images capture NGC 6744, one of the largest spiral galaxies in the nearby universe, and the Dorado group of galaxies, where evolving and merging galaxies produce shell-like structures and vast, curving tidal tails.

The rogue planets spotted by Euclid are about 3m years old, making them youngsters on the cosmic scale.

They are at least four times as big as Jupiter and were detected thanks to the warmth they emit.

Astronomers know they are free-floating because they are so far away from the nearest stars. The celestial strays are destined to drift through the galaxy unless they encounter a star that pulls them into orbit.

Christopher Conselice, a professor of extragalactic astronomy at the University of Manchester, said: "The fact that we've taken a few observations and seen these planets means that if we go deeper and look over larger areas, which we will, we'll see a plethora of planets and learn a lot more."

Rogue planets have been found before, but not on this scale. By studying them in numbers, astronomers hope to gain a clearer understanding of the mechanisms that can turf them out of early solar systems.

"This is just the very early days, there's a lot more to be done," Conselice added.

Two in three wine and beer servings 'don't measure up'

Sarah Marsh
Consumer affairs correspondent

More than two in three servings of beer and wine sold in pubs and bars are short-measured, costing the average consumer about £115 a year, new research suggests.

Trading standards officers who visited 77 UK venues found 96 short measures - an amount of drink less than that declared or paid for - out of 137 test purchases, meaning 70% were short.

John Herriman, chief executive of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI), said it was "the first time that we have been able to build a national picture" of how widespread the practice was, but added that more research was needed.

A short measure means the beer or wine the customer receives is less than the quantity required by the Weights and Measures (Intoxicating Liquor) Order 1988. The quantities vary depending on the drink, but include pints, half-pints for beer, and 175ml glasses for wine.

The fieldwork was carried out by eight local authorities including Aberdeenshire, Essex and Maidenhead, and Northern Ireland Trading Standards. Forty-one of the short measures- 29% of the drinks tested - were at least 5% below the advertised quantity .

Of the beer tested, 86% was short-measured, while the same was true for 43% of the wine.

The average deficit for beer was 4%, while for wine it was 5%. For the average beer drinker in Britain, this equates to a loss of £1.70 a week; wine drinkers are worse off to the tune of £2.20 a week.

The largest short measure was a deficit of 15%, found on a 175ml glass of wine in Walsall, costing £3.20.

Errors contributing to the deficits included measuring instruments not being used correctly, or the wrong ones being used, the CTSI said.

The average price of a bottle of red wine has risen by 8% over the last year, according to the Office for National Statistics, while the average cost of a pint of lager has increased by 5.6%.

Jess Phillips, a Labour MP and vice-president of the CTSI, said: "A short measure cheats us all, but affects those worst off the hardest."



96

Number of short measures recorded by trading standards officers from a total of 137 drinks

General election 2024

Bills for smoking ban and no-fault evictions in doubt as MPs break for election

Continued from page 1

boats", flights would not start landing in Kigali until "after the election", the prime minister said.

As Sunak set off on a whistlestop tour of the UK, heading for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland over 24 hours, he insisted the Rwanda plan would go ahead if he was re-elected as "the flights are booked for July … the airfields are on standby".

But Starmer said his decision to call an early election showed that Sunak "clearly does not believe in his own Rwanda plan". At Labour's campaign launch, the party leader said: "I don't think he's ever believed that plan is going to work, and so he has called an election early enough to have it not tested before the election."

Those opposing the scheme, including trade unions and refugee charities, celebrated the likelihood that the Rwanda plan will now probably never happen, as Labour are the clear favourites to win the election.

Sunak had previously agreed to a £1,000 bet with the broadcaster Piers Morgan that flights to Rwanda would take off before polling day. The journalist is now demanding that he pay up to a refugee charity.

Another key plank of Sunak's premiership, a promise to ban young people from ever smoking tobacco legally, was also left in doubt after it was not mentioned among the final business in the House of Commons. Sunak had promised in his campaign launch that the "next generation will grow up smoke-free".

The leader of the Commons, Penny Mordaunt, did not include the tobacco and vapes bill as she set out the legislation that could be voted through by MPs before parliament is prorogued today, during a period known as the "wash-up". Sources said it was not possible to pass legislation that was subject to a free vote during that time.

The government also appeared unlikely to pass Martyn's law, the legislation to tighten venue security named in honour of one of the victims of the Manchester Arena bombing. The mother of Martyn Hett, one of 22 killed in the attack, said she felt "misled" by Sunak after he "promised" to steer through the bill in her son's name before summer – hours before he called the election.

Figen Murray had met the prime minister at around 1pm on Wednesday – four hours before he announced the election for 4 July – after walking 200 miles to Downing Street on the seventh anniversary of the terror atrocity.

"He promised me and we shook hands on it and he said he would definitely present the legislation in parliament before summer recess.

"Obviously at that time he knew that he was going to call an election that day, but we didn't know that," she said.

"Although what he said was good, what isn't so good is that he can't commit to it being totally done and dusted by the next election – and then later that day he called the election."

Labour has indicated that it would introduce the bill "as soon as possible".

It was Sunak's acknowledgement that Rwanda flights would not leave before July that caused the most consternation in his own already divided party.

Pressed on whether any deportation flights would take off before voters go to the polls on 4 July, Sunak repeatedly said the scheme would be up and running only after the election. "If I am re-elected as prime minister on 5 July, these flights will go … We will get our Rwanda scheme up and running," he told the BBC.

Tories on the right of the party are frustrated and have said Sunak should have ensured that a plane would land in east Africa before any election date.

One former minister said: "If the PM truly believed in the plan, which ministers have spent so much time getting right, he would have seen it through, whatever it took. Instead, it will be difficult if not impossible to defend because it has not been shown to work."

Another Conservative suggested that Sunak did not want to take on the European court of human rights, which stopped the last deportation flight to Rwanda in 2022 by issuing an injunction. "The suspicion is that Sunak is worried that Strasbourg would attempt to stop the flights again and is unwilling to ignore their rulings," they said.

Refugee charities that have been fighting the plan said it was a "dead duck". Enver Solomon, the chief executive of the Refugee Council, said: "The Rwanda plan will go down in the history of British policymaking as an Alice in Wonderland adventure that was both absurd and inhumane."

Government lawyers had previously told the high court that the earliest date for flights would be the week beginning 24 June.

A government source confirmed that the aim was now for flights to take off in July, adding that the timetable and process for flights remained unchanged and that a "late June" date had only ever been the earliest possible date.

While the smoking ban and the Rwanda plan appear set to fall by the wayside, the government did promise yesterday that a bill would go ahead enabling compensation to be paid to the victims of the contaminated blood scandal. A bill to exonerate post office operators caught up in the Horizon IT scandal was passed late last night.

Missed targets
Laws derailed

Martyn's law
Sunak has been accused of misleading the mother of the Manchester bombing victim whom this legislation is named after, as he had promised to introduce the law to parliament by summer recess. It is unlikely to pass before the election. It would require venues to have training requirements against terror attacks.

Renters reform
This legislation would have finally scrapped no-fault evictions, something the Conservative government had promised to end in their 2019 manifesto.

Leasehold reform
The government's long-awaited leasehold reform bill, intended to stop sharp practices by freeholders, will not be passed before the election. The legislation would make it easier and cheaper to extend leases and buy the freehold, and to cap ground rents at 0.1% of the property value.

Football governance
Plans to create an independent regulator for football will not pass before the election. The legislation was too far from completion to be included.

NatWest share sale
The Treasury, which still owns 27% of NatWest after bailing out its parent company during the financial crisis, is expected to cancel plans to sell a chunk of its remaining shares to retail customers, as there will not be time before the election. The process, which chancellor Jeremy Hunt announced during the autumn statement, was due to launch this summer.

Anti-Slapp
A private members' bill designed to block lawsuits that intimidate and financially or psychologically exhaust journalists and other public watchdogs looks likely to be discarded. The government had backed the strategic litigation against public participation (Slapp) bill, but the legislation has not yet made it to the House of Lords for amendments.
Aletha Adu, Jane Croft, Julia Kollewe, Kalyeena Makortoff and Jim Waterson

▼ *Rishi Sunak visits a distribution centre in Ilkeston, Derbyshire, and poses for a selfie (below left)*
PHOTOGRAPHS: STEFAN ROUSSEAU/PA







And they're off Fired-up leaders hit campaign trail

Rowena Mason
Whitehall editor

Far from the bedraggled figure who announced an election outside No 10, Rishi Sunak positively bounced into a biscuit factory for his first stump speech of the election campaign.

The prime minister had given a tetchy performance on the broadcast round yesterday morning, bristling at those challenging his economic record and failure to carry out his Rwanda plan. But he had a spring in his step as he approached a large audience, most wearing hi-vis vests, to set out his stall in the marginal seat of Erewash in Derbyshire.

"I got our country through Covid, and that's because I was prepared to do some bold things and I was prepared to do some difficult things," he told the crowd, stressing his own record rather than that of the Conservatives.

Sunak may have been feeling extra confident because of the number of friendly faces in the audience. "Who's got some hands up? Brilliant, let's go!" he chirped.

Answering the questions, he gave a series of mini-lectures on his favoured topics – getting the Rwanda scheme off the ground to prevent "queue jumpers", slowing down the pace of reaching net zero emissions, and how he had brought down inflation. He then answered a query on how he likes to relax at times of stress, with a lengthy aside on why it is necessary to toughen disability benefits for people with mental health conditions.

Only later did it emerge that at least two of the questions had come from Conservative councillors, nestled among the warehouse





PHOTOGRAPH: JEFF J MITCHELL/GETTY



PHOTOGRAPH: HENRY NICHOLLS/AP

Tory plants? Sunak asked easy questions by councillors

Rowena Mason

Rishi Sunak took questions yesterday from two men dressed in hi-vis clothing at a warehouse in Derbyshire who turned out to be Tory councillors.

The prime minister was visiting a biscuit distribution centre in the marginal constituency of Erewash, where he gave a stump speech to people who appeared to be employees of the business.

He took unchallenging questions from two men who were later found to be Tory councillors, one of them from a different county. Ben Hall-Evans and Ross Hills were first identified by Byline Times, with Hills confirming to the outlet that he had been present.

The incident raised questions about whether the men were "plants" to ask Sunak questions on his preferred topics, and whether the Tories will pursue a controlling approach to the election campaign.

Later, Sunak appeared in Barry, south Wales, where he asked people in a brewery if "all the football" of the Euros would be good for revenue. It was quickly pointed out to him that Wales had not qualified for the tournament.

The gaffes occurred on Sunak's first full day on the campaign trail, after he appeared on Wednesday night at a campaign rally at the ExCel centre in east London with his cabinet and candidates. That event was overshadowed by security escorting a Sky News journalist, Darren McCaffrey, out of the building while live on air because he did not have permission from the party to film.

At the Derbyshire event, Sunak appeared to pick a questioner at random, first alighting on Hall-Evans, who asked what set the prime minister apart in terms of improving people's finances.

The third questioner, Hills, a Leicestershire councillor and part-time dentist, thanked the prime minister for attending when he was a "pretty busy man" and asked whether the Rwanda plan would "stop the boats".

The questions allowed Sunak to talk about his priority issues of the economy and immigration, telling the audience that he had cut inflation and had a plan to deport people who arrived in the UK illegally to Rwanda.

Sunak's event was at the William West & Sons distribution centre, where a circle of what appeared to be workers and managers were on the warehouse floor. Tory leaders have long used the tactic of holding campaign events at workplaces, where those present are there under instruction from their bosses.

The Tories were approached for comment on whether the councillors were planted in the audience.

A Conservative source said: "We do not control who asks questions - anyone can try and ask one."

▲ *Sunak with the Scottish Tories' leader, Douglas Ross, at Port of Nigg as he put the miles in during his first full day of campaigning*

workers wearing company-branded fluorescent jackets.

One question, at least, came from an employee at the distribution centre. That was Mick Shergold, 68, a supervisor. He had been waiting 12 weeks for a prostate test, and his wife three years for medical treatment, so what would the prime minister do to bring down waiting times? Sunak acknowledged this was an area where he felt he could have made "more progress" but he blamed the problem on the Covid pandemic and strikes by medical workers.

Despite his unhappiness about the NHS, Shergold later told reporters he would vote for Sunak as he liked what he had to say about immigration and the economy, adding: "I don't trust Keir Starmer."

Sunak had barely been in the room for half an hour before he was off for his next visit.

Meanwhile, at a football club in Gillingham in Kent, Starmer was also sounding fired up. In front of supporters waving union



PHOTOGRAPH: STEFAN ROUSSEAU/PA

▲ *Sunak meets Vale of Glamorgan Brewery workers (top) and sees beer being bottled in Barry, south Wales*

flag placards promoting Labour's "change" slogan, he hammered home his message that voting for his party was "a vote to stop the chaos". "The power of the vote means you can vote Labour to turn the page and to make the change this country so desperately, desperately needs," Starmer said. "Change is hard ... but all we ask now, humbly, is the opportunity to change our country and put it back in the service of working people."

He was met with whoops and cheers from Labour's supporters at this message - reflecting the dawning realisation within his party that victory after 14 years of Conservative-led government is in touching distance.

The theme of change was embraced by other opposition parties. Ed Davey, the Liberal Democrat leader, echoed Starmer with a refrain that the election was "our chance to win the change our country desperately needs".

"These Conservatives have got to go. And in so many parts of the country, we have shown that it is the Liberal Democrats who can get them out," he said at an event in Cheltenham, where the party is challenging the Tory justice secretary, Alex Chalk.

Sunak, for his part, was convinced his message of "sticking to the plan" would cut through with voters. Having flown by plane to south Wales, en route to Scotland then Northern Ireland, the prime minister was still sounding chipper as he visited a brewery in Barry.

Like his visit to Derbyshire, it was very short and heavily controlled by the party. Wales Online reported that invited Welsh media were not allowed their own photography and video, and were told there should be no questions on national issues.

But Sunak was tripped up by small talk, as he asked the staff if they were looking forward to "all the football".

It was swiftly pointed out that Wales had not qualified for the Euros. Luckily for the prime minister he was moving swiftly on.



▼ *Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner kicked off Labour's campaign at Gillingham football club in Kent*
PHOTOGRAPH: DAN KITWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

Labour ready to go with message of change after months of preparation

Eleni Courea
Pippa Crerar

For Rishi Sunak, one of the advantages of calling a summer election was the idea of catching Labour off-guard.

When the prime minister announced he was going to the country on 4 July, he caught almost everyone - Labour and Conservative - by surprise. Labour had just relaxed its restrictions on staff members taking holidays over the coming weeks as the prospect of an election before the autumn appeared to fade.

But behind the scenes the party had been putting plans in place for the prospect of a snap poll for several months, including lining up candidates in key seats, pulling together its manifesto and testing campaign messages. It also launched Keir Starmer's six core pledges - his first steps - last week.

It meant Starmer was ready to launch his campaign slogan hours after the election was called on Wednesday night, a single word that his strategists believe captures the mood of the country: "Change."

"The message is change - time to turn the page on 14 years of Tory chaos," a senior party source said. "Last week we launched our 'first steps' and that will be something we will be taking across the country ... We've always said we were ready for the election as soon as it came."

Labour, like the Conservative party, is scrambling to select candidates in 80 to 100 seats, some of which it is projected to win if it maintains its polling lead.

This has led to concerns that some candidates will be selected without proper vetting. But Labour insiders said the shortlisting process was completed in January by the party's national executive committee (NEC), after an intensified vetting process following the Rochdale byelection.

In February Labour had to withdraw support for its Rochdale candidate, Azhar Ali, after a leaked recording of remarks he had made about Israel and Jewish people.

A Labour source involved in the process of selecting candidates said: "The regional directors in every region know who their candidates are. Every single one of them will be announced by the end of the week.

"All of them have had very extensive due diligence - incredibly thorough searches of everything they have ever said or done. Rochdale has made us very focused on making sure that candidates haven't got any skeletons in their closets."

There are also a small number of Labour target seats and safe seats where MPs have announced they are retiring and where the party will now choose candidates. These decisions will be made by the NEC, which has the power to make speedy selections during election campaigns.

Among the seats still lacking a candidate is Islington North, where Jeremy Corbyn is preparing to stand as an independent. Labour will also have to make a decision on whether Diane Abbott, who has been suspended for more than a year, will be allowed to stand for the party in Hackney North and Stoke Newington.

Labour is holding a series of crunch meetings with MPs and staffers to thrash out its election plan over the next 48 hours.

Labour staff are being allocated to either stay at the party's headquarters in south London or join campaign buses and regional teams. "They'll basically fill HQ until people are piled on top of each other and the rest will go out on the road," an aide said.

Starmer is gathering his shadow cabinet for a meeting this afternoon. Labour MPs who are political leads in their regions were due to have a meeting last night to discuss their campaign plans.

Labour has leased its battlebus for the election campaign but has been keeping it under wraps in a garage. Angela Rayner, Labour's deputy leader, is planning to spend much of the six-week election campaign travelling around the country on it.

Labour insiders suggested the bus had been painted red but had yet to be emblazoned with the party's election slogan when the election was called. Up until Wednesday Labour had been using the slogan "Let's Get Britain's Future Back", but this was simplified after some critics suggested that it was too confusing.

Over the course of the campaign, Rayner is expected to make stops at dozens of marginal constituencies. She will be joined by Starmer for specific events.

The bus is said to be a luxury coach with an area at the back for campaign meetings and media interviews, acting as a temporary broadcast studio. Labour insiders did not confirm suggestions it could be used for karaoke.

Starmer, launching his campaign in Gillingham yesterday, pitched the election as a vote between "two different countries, two different futures" for the UK.

He told supporters: "This election is about a choice: two different countries, two different futures. Decline and chaos continuing under the Tories, or rebuilding our country under Labour. The power of the vote is with you. If you want change, you have to vote for it."



'I can't understand it'

Tories split on decision to call an early election

Pippa Crerar
Political editor

In the frenzied hours shortly after Rishi Sunak made his surprise election announcement on Wednesday, despairing Tory MPs could be spotted wandering around Westminster contemplating their fate.

One government minister was seen thrusting his official red folder towards his opposition number, whom he had happened to bump into. "You might as well have this now," he said.

In the tearooms and bars of parliament there was a palpable sense of resignation. One of the 70 Tory MPs who is standing down hugged a Labour colleague. "Good luck. This is all yours," they said, casting their arm around the room.

Sunak's decision to call a surprise election when the Conservatives are 20 points behind, the biggest gap for an incumbent party since polling began, has left many of his own MPs shocked, fearful and, in some cases, angry.

They had assumed the prime minister would go for an autumn poll, giving time for the economic recovery to filter through to the public, flights to Rwanda to take off and Labour to be subject to the white glare of scrutiny.

The plan to go in July had been a tightly guarded secret, with Sunak believed to have begun seriously weighing up the decision a month ago. Tory insiders say that he finally made his mind up after the local elections.

But the decision also split his advisers, with Isaac Levido, the election strategist who helped Boris Johnson deliver his massive 80-seat majority, recommending waiting until the autumn when they hoped the public would feel better off.

Others, led by the deputy prime minister Oliver Dowden, believed the prime minister couldn't afford to wait. They were already conscious the economic recovery wasn't happening as quickly as they had expected, and that when inflation did fall and interest rates were cut, the government was unlikely to get the credit.

Sunak was also understood to be concerned that he would look like he was clinging power and wanted to be able to call the election on his own terms.

His closest aides agreed, fearful that things would only get worse by the autumn, an irony not lost on some senior Tories as they watched the prime minister's rain-drenched speech being drowned out by the sound of the New Labour anthem, D:Ream's Things Can Only Get Better.

One Tory backbencher, asked after the announcement if the July election was a good idea, replied: "It's a disaster. I can't understand it." Another said simply: "No."

Not all Tory MPs were so defeatist. Even among those who think the summer election was a mistake, there are plenty determined to fight on, doing everything they can locally to encourage voters to back them, even if the national picture looks bleak.

One veteran MP in a marginal seat said: "Of course I'm going to fight it, I don't believe in just giving up like the prime minister has obviously decided to."

Another MP whose seat is on a knife-edge said they were prepared to embrace the call.

"I think there are colleagues who are more bound to lose than me who perhaps feel it is a little indelicate," they said, hinting that Sunak had thought little about the employment and financial prospects for his cast-out troops.

Others were more upbeat. One even welcomed the move, saying Sunak "might as well go for broke".

They said: "It looks bold, catches Labour off guard, and flights to Rwanda might happen during the campaign. The timing matters less than the actual fight, and there's a small advantage in going for it." Sunak has subsequently admitted that no flights will take off before the election.

Another suggested it was a "perfectly respectable aim" for the prime minister to try to minimise losses and deprive Labour of a big majority, although they laughed when it was suggested the Tories could still pull it back.

The combination of seats previously regarded as safe, now looking marginal, and the fall in ground troops willing to knock on doors, had even the most optimistic MPs worried.

One former minister warned that the party would struggle to encourage disillusioned activists, many of whom will have lost their council seats in the last two local elections, to turn out.

While some MPs have cancelled holidays to prepare for the election, more than one admitted they were sticking to their plans, though they would not be widely advertising their trips. Steve Baker, likely to lose his High Wycombe seat, said he had decided not to cancel any plans for half term. "I can tell you, I am going to keep to my plans."

Some frustration towards the prime minister was already evident before he set the date, with Tory whips suggesting they thought the number of no-confidence letters being sent in had been "getting close" to the threshold needed to trigger a vote. It was unclear whether that was a factor in Sunak's decision.

Either way, time ran out for the rebels, with one Tory backbencher admitting it was "too late. We could have a leadership contest, but that would mean nothing. The king has already consented to an election."



Rishi Sunak is believed to have begun seriously weighing up the decision to call a July general election a month ago

PHOTOGRAPH: ISABEL INFANTES/REUTERS

Betfair's general election odds on display yesterday. Rishi Sunak's surprise election call has left many of his MPs shocked

PHOTOGRAPH: IMAGEPLOTTER/ ALAMY LIVE NEWS

Sketch
John Crace



Rish!'s validation tour of the UK gets under way, disappointing even his most loyal plants

A psychotherapist would have a field day with Rishi Sunak. His pathology isn't quite as obvious as Boris Johnson's or Liz Truss's, but here is undoubtedly another suitable case for treatment. There's the overbearing sense of entitlement combined with the perpetual craving to be noticed. A man with so little self-worth, he's driven to seek constant validation from others.

There's his persistent tetchiness; the irritation at not being properly understood. He needs to be appreciated. Needs people to be grateful to him. To realise they exist only so that he can do them a favour. That is our sole purpose in life. Satellites to orbit Rish!.

But the real meat is to be found in his self-hatred. Forget the failing upwards. Forget the £750m in the family kitty. Why has the man who could have anything made it his life's ambition to do a job to which he is so obviously unsuited? One where his shortcomings are so publicly exposed? So first thing yesterday he was on the airwaves trying to find the best version of himself. Predictably enough, it all ended in tears as his irritation got the better of him. He couldn't bear it when Nick Robinson contradicted him. That he imagines he is going to win the TV debates is yet another manifestation of his delusion.

Still, there was always a ride in a private jet to cheer him up. The UK carbon footprint is going to get a heck of a boost from Sunak over the next six weeks. An hour or so later, Rish! found himself in a biscuit distribution centre in Ilkeston that had been in security lockdown since Monday in anticipation of his visit. Sunak's contribution to national productivity.

He needs to be appreciated. Needs people to be grateful to him. That is our sole purpose in life. Satellites to orbit Rish!

Nothing had been left to chance. Especially the audience. Alongside a few miserable-looking employees, Tory HQ had sneaked in a few ringers. Tory activists in hi-vis jackets meant to look like ordinary workers. Rish! went into default campaigning mode. That's to say, he started up the condescending, entitled nasal whine. He may be his very own mini-me, but he has yet to find someone he doesn't automatically patronise. It was like this. Right? OK? Are you listening, little people? Well, let me talk a little slower, because you're all probably a bit thick. You are from up north, after all.

"Do we want to go back to square one?" Er, no. That's why Labour are 21 points ahead in the polls. It was your lot that put us at square one.

"We need a bold future and I'm a bold kind of guy," he said. That's why he's come up with a Rwanda plan that doesn't work. It's hard to know which explanation is worse. That he believes this shit, in which case he needs urgent help, or that he's just utterly cynical.

Having delivered the standard stump speech he had given twice the day before, he just had time to take questions from the stooges. "I've brought in the smoking ban," he said. No, you haven't. The bill has fallen because you called the election.

Then it was back aboard the private jet to Glamorgan for more of the same. This time in a brewery. Piss-ups and all that. Mr Man of the People managed to alienate everyone by forgetting that Wales hadn't qualified for the Euros. Next stops were Scotland and Northern Ireland. Soon he will have hacked off the entire UK. Great start, Rish!.

Farage rules out standing for Reform as he eyes campaign in US

Kiran Stacey
Jessica Elgot
Ben Quinn

Nigel Farage has said he will not stand in the UK general election, dealing a blow to his Reform party on the first day of its election campaign.

Farage announced yesterday he would not stand for the party he once led, putting an end to weeks of speculation that he would make an eighth attempt to enter parliament.

The former Ukip leader made his announcement on X hours before the Reform leader, Richard Tice, launched the party's general election campaign at a press conference in London.

Farage tweeted: "I have thought long and hard as to whether I should stand in the upcoming general election. As honorary president of Reform UK I am fully supportive of Richard Tice's leadership and urge voters to put their trust in him and Lee Anderson [the party's sole MP]. I will do my bit to help in the campaign, but it is not the right time for me to go further than that."

He added that he wanted to be free to campaign in the US presidential election later this year. "Important though the general election is, the contest in the United States of America on November 5 has huge global significance."

Farage is the most popular politician in the UK, according to YouGov, and many in Reform had hoped he would turbocharge their campaign and sap further votes from the Conservatives by running for a seat.

One Reform activist told the Guardian: "He's basically kept people waiting for ages and now it just looks like he's hedging his bets for the future."

One of the party's candidates said: "Who knows what his true motivation is? All I know is that if Reform UK are to become a proper long-term force in UK politics, we can't be dependent on the charisma of one man."

Tice brushed off any suggestion he might be disappointed by Farage's decision, telling reporters at his campaign launch: "Nigel never said he was going to stand. I'm delighted that he's able to help us campaign over the next six weeks. That's the first time he's been able to do that, [I'm] thrilled about that."

Tice also confirmed Farage would stand aside from presenting his GB News show during the campaign.

Tice said yesterday that Reform was planning to run in 630 seats across England, Scotland and Wales, and it was now vetting about 130 candidates to make sure it could do so.

The party has had problems with its candidates in the past, having dropped several, mainly for espousing extreme views online. Tice said the party had improved its vetting processes but predicted there would still be further issues.

"Vetting is like an MOT," he said. "If you've got a car, an MOT is valid the day it works. But you know, if you have a crash the following day, it's no longer valid for the MOT."

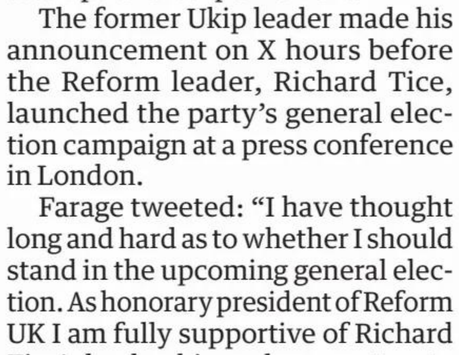
Reform is ultimately owned by Farage but electoral and corporate filings show it has been mainly bankrolled by Tice, who has contributed about 80% of its declared funding in loans and donations since he took over in 2021.

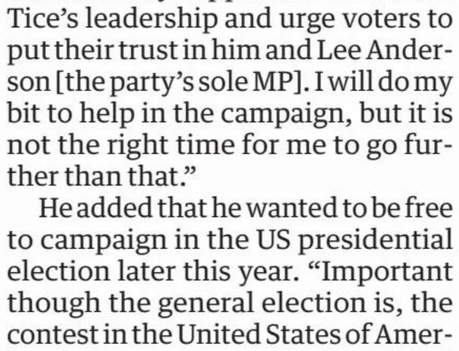
Tice told an audience this month that it would not be easy to run an effective ground campaign, saying Reform was spending "less than £1.5m a year", compared with the £35m allowed for each party nationally and likely to be spent by the Conservatives and Labour in the year up to the election.

Tice said he had so far picked about 450 candidates for the general election. Reform managed to contest only 323 seats in the most recent council elections.

Farage has unsuccessfully stood for parliament several times, most recently in 2015. In the 2019 general election, as the Brexit party leader he withdrew its candidates in Conservative-held seats, a move that is thought to have contributed to Boris Johnson's victory.

The Tory former cabinet minister Jacob Rees-Mogg said: "The fact that he's not a candidate for an opposition party is inevitably helpful for the Conservatives."





▲ *Nigel Farage, top, is the honorary president of Reform UK, formerly the Brexit party, led by Richard Tice*







Tories' legacy Five-act tragicomedy left Britain battered and baffled

Peter Walker
Senior political correspondent

The 14 years of Conservative rule will have seen five prime ministers, seven chancellors, eight foreign secretaries and no fewer than 16 housing ministers.

But the numbers that are most likely to resonate with a bruised electorate are more mundane ones. By some reckonings, the average Briton is about £10,000 a year worse off in real terms than in 2010, when the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition took over from Labour.

Similarly likely to shape future assessments of this era are the figures of 4.3 million children living in relative poverty and the NHS England waiting list of 7.5 million.

The Tories will argue that a lot of this is down to unexpected and destabilising events, particularly the Covid pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But when the social history books are compiled on this period, as well as the ushering in of Brexit, critics will point to what is arguably the policy that shaped the Tory stranglehold on politics more than anything else: austerity.

This was the defining mission of David Cameron's shiny 2010 administration, cheerfully waved through by his Lib Dem coalition partners: an unprecedented squeeze on public spending, particularly focused on everyday services delivered by councils.

Along with this came an effort to crack down on benefit spending, a continuous thread across the 14 years, from the George Osborne "strivers versus shirkers" narrative to the 2017 innovation of the two-child benefit cap, identified by some as one of the single biggest contributors to family poverty in British history.

If this was the broader theme of the past 14 years of Conservative government, it has been cloaked in what felt like a never-ending veneer of political drama.



At the dawn of the Cameron-Clegg coalition, joint government by compromise felt daringly novel and exciting for British politics. Little did we know, but it was a sleepy lull by comparison with what came next.

Cameron led his party to outright victory in 2015 pledging stability against "chaos with Ed Miliband", while also placating his right-leaning Eurosceptic MPs with the promise of an in/out







STEFAN ROUSSEAU/PA; DAVID HARTLEY/REX SHUTTERSTOCK; KOIS MIAH/GETTY IMAGES

Former Tory prime ministers David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson and Liz Truss (pictured with her chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng)

Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson's decision to hitch his political career to the leave cause. Cameron was humiliated.

The referendum result in June 2016 saw Cameron out of No 10 and very soon out of parliament. It marked the beginning of a second stage of the 14 years, one generally marked by political chaos.

Theresa May spent three years in Downing Street, and in that time enjoyed barely a single week without controversy – much of this down to Brexit. Her decision to promise Tory Brexiters the most robust of departures from the EU collided inevitably with the practical difficulties, plunging her party into near civil war.

Almost the definition of an unlucky prime minister, May made her own Cameron-style gamble, calling a snap election in 2017, and managed to lose her majority against a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour party that the Tories had not taken seriously.

Her eventual removal in the summer of 2019 brought in the third act of Tory rule, in which a party that has long viewed itself as the natural inhabitant of stable rule first won an 80-seat majority, in December 2019, and then managed to throw it all away.

Some blame must be placed on Tory MPs and members who first chose Johnson, despite years of indicators that he was a fundamentally unserious character, as would be seen in the tawdry controversy of lockdown-breaking parties that deposed him. Then came Liz Truss, who was unable to last more than 49 days in No 10.

We are now in what may be the final scene of the Conservatives' final act, with Sunak having managed to steady the ship while doing nothing to make the party appear more appealing to voters.

As the 14-year reign slips away in a fog of policies – some of which may feel more performative than meaningful, from the Rwanda deportation scheme to the decision to appoint a "minister for common sense" – what will the country make of this era?

For many, there will be relief. Most governments run out of steam after so long in office, and if any one thing propels Labour's Keir Starmer into power it will be that most irresistible of political sentiments: it's time for a change.

Others may feel almost a retrospective confusion. It is hard to think of another period of UK politics that summons up such a strong sense of "What the hell was that all about?"

But in everyday lives up and down the country, with about 2.5 million people using food banks, many public services running on fumes and a pervading sense of nothing really working any more, there could well be a feeling that, to borrow a phrase, things can only get better.

Can they? Labour will try its hardest. But as political inheritances go, it is hugely unpromising.

referendum on EU membership, one of the biggest political gambles in modern British history.

Cameron's curse was to believe himself to be an inherently lucky politician: PM by 43, he had already sought to settle two other seemingly intractable issues with referendums – the Lib Dems' demand for voting reform and Scottish independence. Both times he had won.

The third time went wrong. Before the Brexit vote, Cameron misjudged the anti-establishment mood, the campaigning genius of

Analysis
Heather Stewart



Believing in 'Change': Starmer hopes simple slogan will chime with an exasperated nation

"Change": it was emblazoned on the lectern as Keir Starmer responded to Rishi Sunak's rain-soaked speech on Wednesday and, lest there were any doubts about Labour's key campaign message, he said it eight times in his brief address.

A one word slogan has the merit of being simple and clear – and Labour believes that "change" will chime with the public's widespread sense of exasperation at the state of the country. In a recent YouGov poll, when asked about the prospect of a general election, 58% of respondents – including more than a third of those who voted Tory in 2019 – said it was "time for a change". Starmer clearly hopes to mirror that thought back at the electorate.

Pared-down slogans also have the benefit of letting voters project on to them their own meaning.

Barack Obama's run for the White House in 2008 became closely associated with the much-imitated red and blue poster, bearing his image and the single word "Hope". His campaign slogan was the equally upbeat (though equally vague) "Yes we can", and at times he also promised "Change we can believe in", or, simply, "Change".

Four years later, as he fought for re-election, Obama's slogan was, "Forward" – echoing a message from another candidate for re-election this side of the Atlantic, Tony Blair, who promised to take the UK "Forward, not back", as he sought a third term in 2005.

One word slogans fit more neatly into the binary framework of a referendum than the morass of issues at stake in a general election.

The pro-independence side in the Scottish poll in 2014 went simply for "Yes", though the majority of voters ultimately decided they were "Better together", as the No campaign called itself.

Two years later, Vote Leave's promise that, by choosing Brexit, voters could "take back control" appeared to resonate with voters' frustrations about the economic and political status quo.

The phrase still carries such weight that Labour has repurposed it, promising a "take back control" bill to devolve power to local areas.

Starmer pressed home the promise of change at his launch speech yesterday – urging disillusioned voters to "turn the page" and "end the chaos".

Standing as the "change candidate" is the default for opposition leaders hoping to unseat their opponents: David Cameron urged the public in 2010 to "vote for change" – and they did.

Five years earlier, Michael Howard had posed voters the cryptic question, "Are you thinking what we're thinking?" – the answer to which was, apparently, no.

In 2010, Cameron also hammered home relentlessly the idea that, in the wake of the global financial crisis, he and his chancellor George Osborne had a "long-term economic plan".

Sunak's approach seems to be that he has one of these, too (he has promised to take "bold action") – and Labour would trash it.

By contrast, Theresa May appeared to offer continuity in 2017, with her slogan promising "Strong and stable leadership".

In 2019, after some debate, Jeremy Corbyn's Brexit-battered team ended up with the slogan "Time for real change". Even some insiders were sceptical, fearing it lacked the ideological bite of 2017's "For the many, not the few".

Starmer's critics may feel the same about "Change" – that while it has the merit of simplicity, it is also content-free. But if Labour's poll lead is anything to go by, Starmer's slogan should fit neatly with the mood of an exasperated nation.

'Mild positive'
Markets greet idea of Labour win with calm

Hazel Sheffield

Five years ago, the prospect of a landslide Labour election victory might have been expected to prompt at least some anxiety in financial markets. In a sign of the success of Keir Starmer's campaign to woo the City and move his party's position to the centre, markets barely budged in response to news of a summer election.

The FTSE 100 opened flat yesterday, the pound pushed slightly higher and stock futures a touch lower as markets appeared relaxed about the likelihood of a Starmer win, having had more than a year of 15-point-plus poll leads to get used to the idea.

"A Labour government is not considered to be a risk scenario; in fact, investors seem sympathetic to the idea, said Roman Ziruk, senior market analyst at global financial services firm Ebury.

"Investors want stability, and we are now at a stage whereby a Labour majority, while heavily priced in, would probably be perceived by them as a mild positive for sterling, even if only due to the avoidance of a dreaded hung parliament."

Most investors are working on the assumption that Starmer will be the next PM. If that happens, many foresee a similar response to Tony Blair's landslide victory in 1997, in which traders were reassured by the expected outcome.

"Markets just rallied straight through," said Ben Laidler, global markets strategist at trading platform eToro.

Starmer's message may be "change", but he may turn out to be both unable and unwilling to enact significant economic policy shifts. A spending bonanza is unlikely, given recent memories of Liz Truss's unbalanced mini-budget in September 2022.

> ***'A Labour government is not considered to be a risk scenario'***
>
> **Roman Ziruk**
> *Market analyst at Ebury*

He may also have no choice but to increase taxes to meet spending commitments. A pledge to stick to the existing fiscal rules leaves him little room for manoeuvre. Under these rules, recent budgets have pencilled in a 1%-per-year real-terms increase in spending.

However, once spending pledges in areas such as health and defence are accounted for, that translates to a real-terms cut in unprotected departments, especially as higher inflation means hospitals, prisons, schools and councils are able to buy less with the same budget.

"There's a general sense that given the challenges in public services, these real-terms cuts will be difficult to achieve in practice and will require greater spending commitment. There's very limited room to address this without raising taxes," said James Smith, an economist at ING.

As for Rishi Sunak's chances, Philip Shaw, chief economist at the international wealth management group Investec, points out that he may have chosen his 4 July date in the hopes of getting a fillip from a possible interest rate cut by the Bank of England two weeks earlier.

However, on Wednesday it emerged that inflation fell by less than forecast in April, to 2.3%. Market bets for when the monetary policy committee will bring down the cost of borrowing have been worsening.

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Blue plaque commemorates birthplace of 'quiet Beatle'

Robyn Vinter

No 12 Arnold Grove looks like an ordinary red-brick terrace house in the Wavertree suburb of Liverpool. But from today, a blue plaque will mark the property as the former home of the "quiet" Beatle, George Harrison. Olivia Harrison, the widow of the guitarist, who died of cancer in 2001 aged 58, described the plaque as "a source of family pride".

Today she and the culture minister, Stephen Parkinson,will unveil the tribute at the Victorian house where Harrison lived until he was six.

In his memoir, I, Me, Mine, Harrison described the house as "OK", recalling it was "just like Coronation Street", with no garden and a "door straight on to the street".

He said: "It was OK, that house, very pleasant being little, and it was always sunny in summer."

Olivia, a film producer and author, said: "This recognition of George's birthplace is a source of family pride for all the Harrisons, and something none of us would ever have anticipated. He left a footprint on this world and on this street."



▲ *The house in Wavertree where George Harrison was born in 1943*

Harrison's parents were born and grew up in the Wavertree area and his mother's parents lived in an adjacent road. The family left the area in 1950.

Though his songwriting was overshadowed by John Lennon and Paul McCartney's work, Harrison wrote songs including Here Comes the Sun, While My Guitar Gently Weeps and Something.

Steve Rotheram, the mayor of Liverpool city region, said Harrison "never lost his love" for his home and would "always be regarded as one of Liverpool's greatest sons".

Tributes for 'happy, bubbly' girl killed in mudslide

Robyn Vinter
North of England correspondent

A 10-year-old killed in a mudslide while on a school trip in North Yorkshire has been described by her family as a "happy, bubbly, go-lucky little girl".

Tributes have been paid to Leah Harrison, a year 6 pupil at Mount Pleasant primary school in Darlington, who died at Carlton Bank on the edge of the North York Moors on Wednesday.

An operation involving 30 mountain rescuers was launched to try to save her amid heavy rain during a yellow weather warning

Leah's family said yesterday: "Leah Harrison, the happy, bubbly, go-lucky little girl. The beautiful smile, the giddy laugh, the silly jokes.

"You will never ever be forgotten, baby girl. You will achieve your dream and become a player for the Lionesses. Spread those wings. May you rest in paradise."

A spokesperson for the Health and Safety Executive said it would be carrying out a joint investigation with North Yorkshire police into the incident.

Leah died during an instructor-led walk at the council-run Carlton Adventure centre, which has suspended all its activities.



▲ *Leah Harrison, 10, died while on a school trip in North Yorkshire*

Nick Blackburn, the chief executive of Lingfield education trust, which runs Leah's school, said: "The full details are still emerging but this is clearly a heartbreaking tragedy.

"Leah was a much loved part of our school and our thoughts and prayers are with her family, friends, and the school staff. Counselling is being arranged within the school for pupils and staff.

"We are all in a state of shock and we would ask that the privacy of the family and the school community is respected while we try to come to terms with what has happened."

The emergency services were called to the scene at about 1.15pm on Wednesday.

A Cleveland mountain rescue team spokesperson said: "Nineteen Cleveland MRT members were deployed immediately, eventually rising to 30 at the scene during the course of the afternoon and working alongside their emergency service colleagues ...

"North Yorkshire police have since confirmed that one person sadly died. The thoughts of the mountain rescue volunteers are with the family and friends of the deceased during such a very sad time."

The area was cordoned off throughout the afternoon and the public were asked to stay away.

North Yorkshire police said Leah's family were being supported by specially trained officers and the force asked for them to be given space to grieve.

Denise McGuckin, managing director of Hartlepool borough council, which operates Carlton Adventure, said: "We can confirm that a tragic incident occurred during one of the centre's instructor-led outdoor education forest walks near to Carlton-in-Cleveland yesterday.

"We are utterly devastated and heartbroken, and our thoughts are with Leah's family and friends and all those affected.

"We are working closely with our partner agencies to carry out a full investigation and we are temporarily suspending all outdoor activities and residential breaks managed by the council.

"Whilst the investigation is being carried out it would be inappropriate for us to comment further."

Yellow warnings for rain continued into yesterday morning across large parts of Yorkshire, the north-east and north-west of England and across all of Scotland.

Warnings for rain continued to remain in place across southern parts of Scotland later yesterday and were expected to continue until today.

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Millions wait more than 14 days for GP appointment in England

Andrew Gregory
Health editor

More than 5 million patients a month in England are waiting longer than a fortnight for a GP appointment after ministers promised everyone would be able to get one within 14 days.

In September 2022, the government said patients would be able to see a family doctor within two weeks of booking a consultation. Thérèse Coffey, then health secretary, promised to prioritise the issue with a "laser-like focus".

But in 2023, almost 61m appointments took place more than two weeks after being requested, according to new figures from a House of Commons library analysis of NHS data.

Between January and December last year, 60,905,102 patients waited more than a fortnight for a GP appointment. The figure represents a 22% increase on the 49,862,465 figure for 2022, more than three times the rise in total appointments (6%).

The Liberal Democrats, who commissioned the analysis, said the figures were "unacceptable" and represented damning evidence the government had "brought the NHS to its knees".

Ed Davey, the Lib Dem leader, said: "Patients are bearing the brunt of this failure with millions forced to wait in pain for weeks just to get a GP appointment.

"It is an unacceptable situation and one that is only getting worse after years of Conservative chaos and neglect," he added. "This Conservative government has decimated local health services and brought the NHS to its knees."

In a pledge to voters ahead of the 4 July general election, the Lib Dems will today offer a right for patients to see a GP within a week, or within 24 hours if in urgent need.

They will say this can be achieved by increasing the number of GPs by 8,000, delivering an extra 65m appointments a year.

"The Liberal Democrats would give people a legal right to see a GP in a week or 24 hours if in urgent need, so people aren't ever left struggling to get an appointment," Davey said. "This is at the heart of our offer to voters at this election and our plan to fix the health and care crisis."

In 2023, the analysis found, almost 18m GP appointments involved waits of a month or more. That represents a 38% rise on the number of 28-day waits or longer in 2022.

61m
GP appointments in 2023 that took place more than two weeks after being requested, official data shows

18m
Number of GP appointments that involved waits of a month or more in 2023, a rise of 38% on 2022

The report analysed the length of time between GP appointments being booked and when they took place. Waits of more than two weeks may include some for which that is appropriate, the House of Commons library suggested. They could reflect patient preference as well as enforced waits.

In the Commons yesterday, Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary, accused Rishi Sunak of having "given up" on the NHS: "After 14 years of Conservative incompetence, neglect and vandalism the NHS has never been in a worse state.

"[Sunak] has called this election with no plan to cut waiting lists, no plan to end the strikes and no plans to reform the service. The Conservatives have taken the NHS to breaking point, if they are given five more years they will finish the job."

Responding, Victoria Atkins, the health secretary, raised the performance of the NHS in Labour-run Wales. "[Streeting] talks about the record of the Conservative party," she said. "We are very proud of it. I'm particularly proud of the fact that we have record funding under the government for mental and physical health. But I wonder whether [he] is quite so proud of the record in Wales?"

Bringing home the Bacon: Spanish police recover stolen €5m painting

Sam Jones
Madrid

Police in Madrid have recovered a portrait by Francis Bacon, valued at €5m (£4.3m), which was one of five works by the famously thirsty and hell-raising artist that were stolen from the home of the painting's subject almost a decade ago.

The pictures, whose total value has been put at €25m, disappeared in 2015 after a break-in at the Madrid home of José Capelo, a Spanish banker and close friend of Bacon who sat for the painter.

Three of the paintings were found in 2017, and the Policía Nacional announced yesterday that a fourth – Bacon's 1989 Study for Portrait of José Capelo – had been recovered.

"Our inquiries led to the arrest of two people in Madrid in February who had received stolen property – two of the stolen paintings," the force said in a statement. As a result of those arrests and other police actions, one of the missing paintings was found at a property in Madrid."

The Policía Nacional said 16 people had been arrested in connection with the theft, including those allegedly responsible for the burglary nine years ago. It also said it was focusing its inquiries on Spanish citizens with links to eastern European criminal groups.

"The investigation will remain open as we endeavour to recover the last painting and arrest those who have it," the statement added.

Bacon, who died in Madrid in 1992 at the age of 82, is one of the most highly regarded and sought-after artists of the 20th century. His visceral, violent pictures of popes, crucifixions and twisted, agonised faces and bodies, continue to fascinate and command huge sums at auction.

In 2008, his Triptych 1974-77 was sold to an anonymous buyer for £26.3m – then a European record for a postwar artist. Five years later, a triple portrait of Bacon's friend and peer Lucian Freud sold for $142m (£89m), far exceeding the $119m paid for Munch's Scream in 2012.

But the artist is equally famous for his drinking, gambling, his turbulent relationships, his famously chaotic studio, and for the mordant toast frequently attributed to him: "Champagne for my real friends, real pain for my sham friends."



▲ *The portrait of banker José Capelo was found in a property in Madrid*

Euro 2024 Own goal as dropped striker picked to model team formalwear

Lauren Cochrane

The provisional England squad for Euro 2024 was announced this week – and the omission of Marcus Rashford was a big talking point for England fans. But, if the Manchester United forward will not be travelling to Germany this summer, he did make another squad: he appears with Arsenal's Aaron Ramsdale and Chelsea Conor Gallagher in images of the Marks & Spencer formalwear that the team will be wearing when off the field at next month's tournament.

The trio of goalkeeper, midfielder and forward – who were presumably photographed before the England manager Gareth Southgate's announcement this week – model a range that includes overshirts, blouson jackets and straight-leg trousers, all in a colour palette of cream, beige and black.

The quarter zip knit sweater – which already has managerial endorsement and is worn by Southgate, Arsenal's manager, Mikel Arteta, and Manchester City's Pep Guardiola – is also featured.

Rashford is accustomed to modelling. He appeared on the cover of Vogue in 2020 and worked on an advertising campaign and youth project with Burberry in 2021. Last year, he attended the Louis Vuitton fashion show in Paris.

Until recently the clothing worn off the field by teams at international tournaments has been suits. For Euro 2020, the England team were photographed in navy blue suits while Armani designed collarless jackets for the Italian team. But ties and blazers have quickly begun to feel old-fashioned. Aligning with wider trends in menswear, a more casual look has evolved.

The German team went tie-less at the World Cup in 2018, wearing blazers and sweaters by Hugo Boss. The designs worn by England this year follow the lead of the World Cup 2022 outfits, which consisted of navy short trousers, casual jackets and cream knitwear, also designed by Marks & Spencer.

A photograph of the final 27-man squad for Euro 2024 wearing this year's designs will be released on 10 June, just before the tournament kicks off.

The collection, which features the Three Lions England crest on the inside of jackets and overshirts, is available for non-footballers to buy on the Marks & Spencer website. With the jackets and trousers made from performance fabric for easy movement, the retailer is clearly targeting sports fans who look to professional athletes for style inspiration.



▲ *Marcus Rashford, centre, Conor Gallagher, left, and Aaron Ramsdale model the England team's off-pitch clothing.*

Below, Rashford, in action for England at the last World Cup, has been left out of the Euro 2024 squad

PHOTOGRAPH:M&S



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Kellogg's recalls new chocolate cornflakes over choking fears

Zoe Wood

Kellogg's is recalling boxes of its new chocolate cornflakes due to concerns they contain "hard lumps" that could cause damage to teeth or be a choking hazard. The well-known cereal brand has asked people who bought the packs to dispose of them "as a precaution" after the problem was discovered.

Kellanova, the company that makes Kellogg's cereals in Europe, said the hard lumps "do not break down when eaten with milk".

"We have become aware of a very low level of small hard lumps forming in our new Kellogg's Corn Flakes chocolate flavour," it said in a recall notice. "These hard lumps of food could cause dental harm or be a choking hazard."

The Food Standards Agency website warned customers: "This product may contain small hard lumps of food which makes it unsafe to eat." It added: "If you have bought the above product do not eat it. Instead, dispose of the product and contact Kellogg's."

The product was launched at the start of this year and billed as bringing a "modern twist" to the 102-year-old brand. At the time the company said of the spin-off flavour: "We're sure it's something the whole family will enjoy."



Kellogg's chocolate flavour cornflakes

Kellanova said it believed that only a small proportion of boxes could contain the lumps and that there was "minimal risk" to consumers.

The recall relates only to 450g boxes bought over a four-month period. People have been urged to throw away packs with best before dates ranging from 6 December 2024 to 28 April 2025.

No 10 had 'worst ever governing' during pandemic

Peter Walker
Senior political correspondent

Simon Case, Britain's most senior civil servant, has described the chaos at the heart of Boris Johnson's Downing Street, saying he was not warned in advance about the Covid "eat out to help out" scheme.

In often damning testimony, the inquiry into the pandemic heard Case, the cabinet secretary, had said Johnson's No 10 had been involved in "the worst governing ever seen" in Britain. He also sought to defend Johnson's decision-making style, but described a sometimes toxic culture.

In another revelation, Case said he had accidentally deleted nine tranches of group WhatsApp messages while trying to transfer them from his phone. The inquiry obtained them from others in the group.

The inquiry had previously heard that eat out to help out, which subsidised people to dine at restaurants and cafes in summer 2020, and has been blamed for a renewed spread of the virus, was announced without the knowledge of the government's two main scientific experts.

Asked if he knew Patrick Vallance and Chris Whitty were unaware of the plan, Case replied: "I wasn't aware of eat out to help out until it was announced either." He was then the lead civil servant at No 10, in charge of Covid policy, and weeks away from becoming cabinet secretary.

Questioned by Hugo Keith KC, the inquiry counsel, about the sometimes chaotic nature of Johnson's No 10, Case, who had been due to give evidence in autumn before he took a leave of absence from his job due to illness, twice became emotional.


▲ *Simon Case: 'Good people were just being smashed to pieces'*

When Keith asked about Case's view in a witness statement and WhatsApp messages that "the government failed at a number of fundamental levels and contributed to the worst governing, to use your words, ever seen", Case was silent for some time. He said the messages were "not a roundly considered view", adding: "There were some dark days when it felt that we just couldn't get it right."

The hearing was also shown WhatsApp messages from April 2020 between Case and Helen MacNamara, then also a top official, in which Case complained that "we seem to be making everything complicated".

Case recounted to MacNamara "some minor tussle about who I reported to", saying: "That really shouldn't be important in the middle of a mega-crisis." He added: "Crisis + pygmies = toxic behaviour."

Case said reviewing his evidence "reminds me quite how difficult it was that good people were working incredibly hard in impossible circumstances, with choices where it seems there was never ... a right answer". This was made worse by the dysfunction: "Good people were just being smashed to pieces. That's what I saw."

Case was asked whether it was fair to describe a "culture of fear" around Johnson's chief adviser, Dominic Cummings, and "the chaos and the unwillingness of other people to work with him as a result". Case replied: "That's all true." The inquiry heard one unnamed person had declined to work in Downing Street, saying: "The setup in No 10 is too mad to touch."

Case also said polls showed Cummings' lockdown-breaching trip to Durham and Barnard Castle had damaged public confidence. That, and parties in and around Downing Street, "sort of feels like a terrible insult" to bereaved families, he added.

Messages from Case seen by the inquiry in the autumn showed him being damning about Johnson's Downing Street, saying some people were "mad" and "poisonous". Case said it dated from when he "barely" knew Johnson and "didn't really understand how he took decisions".

But Johnson was "very much wanting the debate to play out in front of him - competition for ideas and views. I think that is really how he made decisions," Case said.

However, the hearing also heard that at one point, Case messaged Johnson to urge him to stand up more to Sunak in meetings, saying: "It can't always be you agreeing with Rishi."



Selected stores. Subject to availability. Shows serving suggestion. Extra Special Gourmet Burger £3.75, 340g (£1.10 per 100g). Extra Special 6 Caramelised Red Onion Pork Sausages £2.95, 400g (74p per 100g). Asda Succulent Beef Fillet Steak £32 per kg. Extra Special Jumbo King Prawns £4.20, 150g (£2.80 per 100g). Asda 2 Delicate Sea Bass Fillets £2.89, 180g (£1.60 per 100g). Taste tests May - Dec 23. For detail & verification see ASDA.com/TasteMatch May exclude Asda Express and small stores, see ASDA.com/smallstores Minimum basket and delivery charge may apply, delivery and collection slots subject to availability.

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Daily Mail



The Piano

Theatre review A dark and deconstructed staging of star-crossed lovers' story

Romeo & Juliet
Duke of York's theatre, London
★★★☆☆

Arifa Akbar

It is not often that a celluloid superhero transforms into a tragic hero before our eyes. Tom Holland navigates the transition from Marvel's Spider-Man to Shakespeare's Romeo smoothly, his wan, sinewy lover instantly at home on stage.

Francesca Amewudah-Rivers' Juliet brings her own spiky charisma, all the more heroic given the racial abuse she has received. Holland and Amewudah-Rivers are perfectly cast, wired with an awkwardly cool teen energy – she a mix of innocence and streetwise steel; he jittering with sweaty-palmed earnestness.

The chemistry is there, even if it feels restrained in Jamie Lloyd's turbo-stylised production, which comes with alluring optics, dark glamour and atmosphere.

But it seems, at times, like a deconstructed Romeo and Juliet, refusing to give in to the ardour of the text. There is moody whispering and muffled sotto voce, bringing languorous intimacy but also stasis. Actors speak their lines – in a line – at the audience, a recurring tic in Lloyd's work, puzzling in its distancing, anti-dramatic effects, and too stalled in energy to let loose the passion. When scenes are traditionally acted out, they are tremendous.

A screen magnifies faces and moods, as in Lloyd's Sunset Boulevard, with cameras following characters outside and into the depths of the building; the Capulets' ball, for instance, takes place in the foyer's champagne bar. It is very clever, but to what end?



▲ *Roving cameras follow the cast and project images in Jamie Lloyd's production, which features Tom Holland and Francesca Amewudah-Rivers, below, in the title roles*

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARC BRENNER



Where the screen in Sunset Boulevard seemed to gesture towards the original film, it does not have a meaningful underpinning here. So many of the techniques are replicated from that show they carry a hint of a formula.

Alongside these frustrations there is clear virtuoso brilliance. The Queen Mab speech by Mercutio (Joshua-Alexander Williams) is quietly delivered and all the more creepy for it. Freema Agyeman's cockney Nurse brings so much loose comedy that she threatens to disrupt Lloyd's directorial restraint, and the balcony scene sees Romeo and Juliet sitting on the edge of the stage, their love fizzing in the electric stillness around them.

This Verona is a subterranean, man's world: Juliet and her nurse are the only two female characters, albeit both strong and unafraid. Juliet's father (Tomiwa Edun) is an unyielding patriarch.

The production excels in its presentation of gang culture too, full of contained alarm and menace. There is a fantastic, industrial look to Soutra Gilmour's set; we could be in Blade Runner territory or a smoky Sin City. The set's depths of black look like a manifestation of the fate that awaits the lovers while the edge of the stage is red – the violent deaths visually foretold.

Michael "Mikey J" Asante's electro compositions and Ben and Max Ringham's sound design bring deep thrumming notes, akin to a heartbeat. Jon Clark's lighting design captures a sense of violence. The dress adheres to a black-and-white colour code, so when the blood appears, it is a shock.

The deliberate underplaying of emotion ultimately leeches the play of its tragedy, with an end that leaves you in dry-eyed admiration. There is much to admire in this reconceptualisation – one that favours coolness in place of Shakespeare's heat.

Until 3 August



Twenty people in intensive care after Singapore flight turbulence

Agence France-Presse
Bangkok

Passengers and crew on a Singapore Airlines flight that hit extreme turbulence over Asia suffered skull, brain and spinal injuries, the head of a Bangkok hospital said yesterday.

Twenty people remain in intensive care in the Thai capital, where flight SQ321 made an emergency landing on Tuesday after the ordeal.

The Boeing 777-300ER hit what an airline official described as "sudden extreme turbulence" over Myanmar, sending passengers and crew flying and slamming some into the ceiling.

A 73-year-old British man died and 104 people were injured on the London to Singapore flight, which was carrying 211 passengers and 18 crew.

Adinun Kittiratanapaibool, the director of Bangkok's Samitivej Srinakarin hospital, said his staff were treating six people for skull and brain injuries, 22 for spinal injuries, and 13 for bone, muscle and other injuries.

He said: "We have never treated people with these kinds of injuries caused by turbulence." The injured range in age from two to 83, he added.

One passenger said people were thrown around the cabin so violently they put dents in the ceiling during the drama at 11,300 metres (37,000ft).



▲ *An injured Australian passenger arrives at hospital in Bangkok after flight SQ321's emergency landing*

Nine of the 16 Malaysians who were on the flight are being treated in hospital in Bangkok, said the country's ambassador to Thailand.

Jojie Samuel said: "Five of them are in ICU and under observation and one victim is in a normal ward. They are all in a stable condition.

"But one is in critical condition but stable. He has multiple injuries to his head, back and leg. He is one of the crew."

Scientists urge world to confront threat from superbugs

Nicola Davis
Science correspondent

Every year 750,000 deaths linked to drug-resistant superbugs could be prevented through better access to clean water and sanitation, infection control and childhood vaccinations, research suggests.

Antimicrobial resistance, or AMR, is a huge global challenge, with the evolution of drug-resistant superbugs, driven by factors including inappropriate and excessive antibiotic use, raising the prospect of a future where modern medicine fails.

Experts have warned that if the world does not prioritise action on AMR, there will be a steady increase in the death toll, with infants, elderly people and those with chronic illnesses or requiring surgical procedures at the highest risk.

"It kills more people than HIV, malaria and TB put together," said Prof Ramanan Laxminarayan, of Princeton University, adding that tackling AMR was crucial for meeting goals for newborn survival as well as healthy ageing.

Experts have also warned of a scenario where once trivial infections prove fatal, and crucial procedures in modern medicine, ranging from caesarean sections, to cancer treatments and organ transplants, become too risky to be feasible.

According to data for 2019, an estimated 4.95m deaths were associated with bacterial AMR, including 1.27m deaths directly caused by such resistance.

4.95m
Number of deaths globally that were associated with bacterial antimicrobial resistance in 2019

750,000
Number of deaths linked to AMR in low- and middle-income countries that could be prevented each year

Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) were disproportionately affected by AMR. Models created by Laxminarayan and colleagues have suggested AMR-associated deaths in LMICs could be cut by 18%, equivalent to about 750,000 a year, through three key steps.

The team suggests an estimated 247,800 deaths are preventable through universal access to clean water and improved sanitation and hygiene, while 337,000 deaths could be prevented through better infection prevention and control in healthcare settings.

Another 181,500 deaths are preventable by means of childhood vaccinations. This is not only by preventing infections that are resistant to current drugs, but by curtailing inappropriate consumption of antibiotics.

While the team notes that 95,400 deaths among under-15s could be directly avoided each year through the use of vaccines against four key bacterial infections, vaccinations against viral infections also matter.

"People get symptoms ... they cannot distinguish whether it's viral or bacterial and just to be safe they take the antibiotic. But in creating that safety they are creating drug resistance," said Laxminarayan, noting that influenza was the biggest driver of antibiotic consumption.

The study, published in the Lancet, is part of a series on AMR that proposes the creation of global targets, development of antibiotics, diagnostic tests and vaccines, and the establishment of an independent panel on antimicrobial access and resistance to gather evidence and inform guidelines.

The team stresses that time is of the essence. "The window of opportunity to ensure our ability to treat bacterial pathogens is shrinking," they write. Laxminarayan added: "Why wouldn't the world want to solve a big solvable problem?"

Prof Ben Cooper, of the University of Oxford, who was not involved in the research, said the estimate of 750,000 preventable deaths was based on careful and thorough analysis. "Achieving these reductions will require addressing the chronic global underinvestment in tackling antimicrobial resistance," he said.

Dr Danna Gifford, an expert in AMR at the University of Manchester, also said there would be challenges, with sustained commitment and collaboration on an unprecedented global scale needed to meet the proposed targets.

But, she said: "It's clear that reducing the global burden of resistance requires preventing the occurrence of infection, rather than simply relying on new antimicrobials."



Essex man, 64, charged with 'helping Russia'

Emine Sinmaz

A British man has been charged with assisting Russia's intelligence services after being arrested by British counter-terror police. Howard Michael Phillips, of Harlow in Essex, was yesterday charged with an offence contrary to section 3 of the National Security Act, the Metropolitan police said.

The 64-year-old appeared at Westminster magistrates court in London and spoke to confirm his address and date of birth. The prosecutor, Mark Luckett, said he had had contact with someone "he believed were foreign powers" and held "sensitive information in regards to an MP".

Judge Daniel Sternberg denied him bail and ordered him to appear at the Old Bailey on 14 June.

The Met said Phillips was arrested in London on 16 May and charged a week later, and that the country to which the charge related was Russia.

The Met said: "As part of the investigation, which is being led by officers from the Met's counter-terrorism command, officers also searched an address in the Hertfordshire area and an address in the Essex area.

"There is not believed to be any threat to the wider public in connection with this matter."





▲ *Raye last Saturday at the C6 Fest, Parque Ibirapuera, Sao Paulo. Her Ivor Novello comes on top of six Brits in March* PHOTOGRAPH: MAURICIO SANTANA/GETTY

Raye adds Ivor Novello songwriter of the year to her string of awards

Ben Beaumont-Thomas

Raye continued her string of successes over the last year by being named songwriter of the year at the Ivor Novello awards last night, given to the best in British and Irish songwriting and screen composition.

The accolade comes after the genre-straddling singer won in a record-breaking six categories at the Brit awards in March, including songwriter of the year. Her album My 21st Century Blues reached No 2 in the UK and produced a chart-topping single, Escapism, that also found huge US success.

She was nominated for the Mercury prize, and since My 21st Century Blues came out in February 2023 she has released a live version and co-written Riiverdance on Beyoncé's album Cowboy Carter. The Ivors judges described her as the "voice of a generation".

Raye was beaten to the best album award by the jazz drummer Yussef Dayes for Black Classical Music - arguably a surprising win given only four of 19 tracks feature lyrics. Judges celebrated "its narrative arc that propels the listener forward, using a modern lens to reframe the format of instrumental music".

Dayes has long been a celebrated figure in London's energetic jazz scene and capped the release of his album with a set at the Royal Albert Hall. He was also a Brit nominee this year in the alternative/rock category.



▲ *Speakers Corner Quartet with Kae Tempest (centre) at the awards*

The award for best song musically and lyrically was given to Victoria Canal and her track Black Swan, a piano-based lament whose lyrical metaphors and musical structure were praised by judges, prevailing over the likes of Blur and Sampha. It was the second win in a row for Canal, who last year was given the rising star award. That category was won this year by the versatile indie-popper Master Peace.

Speakers Corner Quartet, which evolved out of a spoken word event in Brixton, won best contemporary song for Geronimo Blues, featuring lyrics by Kae Tempest, who reflects on living amid the cruelty and ironies of contemporary interconnected life and politics.

Dave and Central Cee won the most performed work for Sprinter, though rap more broadly was shut out of the nominations in the main categories.

Jerskin Fendrix was unexpectedly launched from the corners of south London's alternative music scene to international success as the writer of the score for Yorgos Lanthimos's Poor Things. He was Oscar- and Bafta-nominated for it and has now won best original film score at the Ivors.

Star Wars Jedi: Survivor, composed by Stephen Barton and Gordy Haab, won the equivalent video game category, while Arthur Sharpe won best television soundtrack for The Following Events Are Based on a Pack of Lies.

Bruce Springsteen attended the London ceremony, where he was given an Ivors Academy fellowship, the first international artist to be handed that accolade.

Other awards acknowledging overall contributions to music went to Lana Del Rey, Skepta, KT Tunstall and Bernie Taupin.

The awards are voted for by the Ivors Academy, made up of songwriters and composers. Its chair, Tom Gray, said: "We know that because they are chosen by our peers, our awards are incredibly meaningful to their recipients."

London-born teenager who died at 15 will be first millennial saint

Nadeem Badshah

A London-born teenager who died of leukaemia aged 15 is to become the Catholic church's first millennial saint. Carlo Acutis was a computer whiz who helped to spread Roman Catholic teaching online before his death in 2006. Pope Francis yesterday decreed that a second posthumous miracle had been attributed to Carlo, qualifying the teenager for canonisation.

Carlo was born in London 1991 before moving to Milan with his Italian parents, Andrea Acutis and Antonia Salzano, as a child. Of the 912 people previously canonised by Pope Francis, the most recent birth date was 1926.

Carlo taught himself to code while still at primary school, before using his skills to create websites for Catholic organisations, as well as one that documented miracles around the world.

In Catholicism, people can pray to deceased people who they believe to be in heaven to request that they speak to God on their behalf, such as asking for a person to recover from an illness or injury. If the person in question then appears to undergo an unexpected recovery, it can be classed as a miracle by the Vatican.

If two miracles are attributed to a deceased person and approved by the pope, then they qualify for sainthood.

912

Number of people canonised by Pope Francis. The most recent birth date before Carlo was 1926

Pope Francis previously approved a miracle attributed to Carlo: a seven-year-old boy from Brazil recovered from a rare pancreatic disorder after coming into contact with one of Carlo's T-shirts.

The Catholic church's dedicated unit for looking into the validity of miracles has now investigated claims that a Costa Rican woman enjoyed a miraculous recovery after a bicycle accident in Florence in 2022. Her mother prayed for her daughter's recovery at Carlo's tomb in the Umbrian town of Assisi.



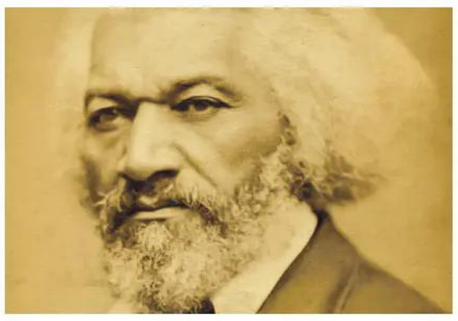
Free Church of Scotland fails to apologise for slavery funds

Severin Carrell
Scotland editor

The Free Church of Scotland has been accused of "shameful" behaviour after it refused to apologise for receiving money from slavery that would be the equivalent of millions of pounds today.

The Free Church is known to have accepted donations from plantation owners in the southern US states soon after its foundation in 1843 and then a significant bequest from a wealthy Glaswegian sugar baron 10 years later.

After coming under intense pressure to address its slavery inheritance, the Free Church issued a short statement on Wednesday night in which it said it "recognises and freely admits the historical sins of members of the denomination in relation to slavery".



▲ *Frederick Douglass called for the church to 'send back the money'*

It said "we acknowledge with sorrow" and "regret" and "grieve" that a delegation of its members took money from southern plantation owners on a fundraising visit in 1844, but stopped short of apologising.

To the dismay of some of its members, the church also said it was "unlikely" to still be the beneficiary of those funds because of property transfers over the past 180 years.

Its fundraising from southern slave owners was notorious at the time after the emancipated anti-slavery campaigner Frederick Douglass demanded it "send back the money" when he toured Scotland in 1846, addressing large crowds.

Andrea Baker, an opera singer recently based in Edinburgh whose forebears were enslaved in the US, and who has previously challenged church leaders over the donations, said the response was "a shameful prevarication".

Estimates of exactly how much the Free Church received vary. Different researchers put the sum donated by southern plantation owners in 1844 at either $3,000 or £3,000. The value of the Ewing bequest, however, is established. Inflation rates since 1853 make his £18,000 gift worth £1.9m today, while estimates based on wage growth since then suggest it is worth more than £16m.

Ex-SNP minister faces suspension over expense claim

Severin Carrell

Michael Matheson, Scotland's former health secretary, is expected to lose his salary for 54 days and be suspended as an MSP after wrongly claiming £11,000 in expenses.

Holyrood's standards committee said the sanctions - the most serious ever imposed on an MSP - were necessary because Matheson had breached a number of rules on expenses and parliamentary conduct.

It said yesterday that Matheson had not been "open, honest and accountable" after he claimed £10,940 in expenses for mobile data for his parliamentary iPad, run up largely because his sons had used the data to stream football matches during a holiday in Morocco.

But the Scottish National party leader, John Swinney, backed Matheson fully during first minister's questions and said he would not support the sanction.

Swinney said: "Michael Matheson has made mistakes. He resigned from the cabinet and paid the roaming costs in question. There was no cost to the public purse and as a consequence of the issues that have been raised here about the conduct of this process, I do not believe that this is a sanction that can be applied."

Douglas Ross, leader of the Scottish Conservatives, said Swinney was "defending the indefensible", and threatened to bring forward a motion next week calling for Matheson's resignation. Matheson refused to stand down and said it was for parliament to decide on the next steps.

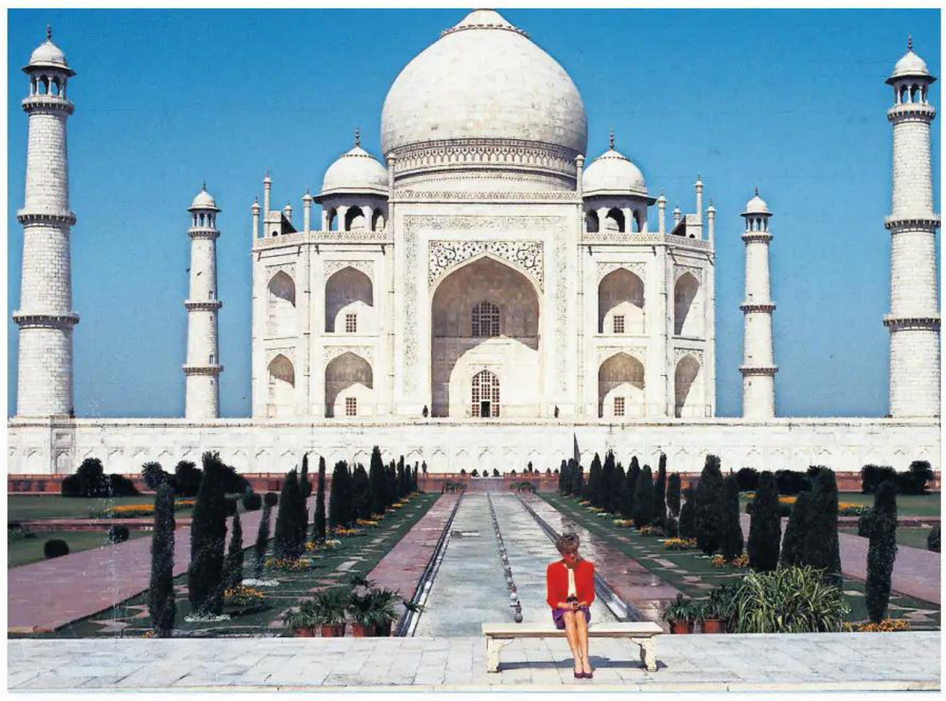
In a split decision opposed by SNP MSPs, the committee decided Matheson should be suspended from Holyrood for 27 days. However, members unanimously agreed he should lose his MSP salary for 54 days. Both sanctions must now be endorsed by a full parliamentary vote.

From Taj Mahal to a minefield: Diana's life in pictures

Caroline Davies

From her famous "revenge" dress to the lonely Taj Mahal pose, Diana, Princess of Wales knew the power of the photograph, and more often than not Anwar Hussein was there to help her harness it.

Now some of these instantly recognisable photographs, including images of her walking through an Angolan minefield and shaking hands with an Aids patient, form a new London exhibition by Hussein, 86, an accredited royal photographer for more than 50 years, and his two sons, Samir and Zak, who have carried on the tradition.





Diana, Princess of Wales in front of the Taj Mahal in February 1992, next to an image of her son Harry with his wife, Meghan, on their way to an awards evening in London in March 2020

PHOTOGRAPH: ANWAR HUSSEIN/GETTY; SAMIR HUSSEIN/WIREIMAGE

"She knew how to convey a message through a photograph," said Hussein, who began taking photographs of Diana once her relationship with Charles was made public and while she was still a nursery school assistant.

As an accredited royal photographer, Hussein would be given special access to royal engagements and accompanied the royals on tours. His sons have followed in his footsteps, officially photographing William and Harry, and their respective wives, Catherine and Meghan.

Together, the family has amassed a huge archive of royal pictures, with 75 life-size prints of Diana, her sons and daughter-in-laws, making up the walk-through exhibition, and the stories behind each image told on audio guide.

They include the "revenge" dress, said to have been purposefully worn by Diana to an engagement on the night Charles made his adultery admission on TV. There are images of her as mother-to-be, mother, fashion icon and humanitarian.

"Throughout my career in photographing Princess Diana, I often say this is history being made. It's never happened before. I'm here to photograph it," Hussein says in the exhibition's audio guide.

One striking image is of Diana at a hospital in Lahore, Pakistan, cradling a young boy with cancer, who later died. Hussein says: "Diana told me that out of so many pictures taken of her, this was her favourite photograph of all.

"Even though the boy was blind, and he was in a lot of pain from all of the surgical cuts and sores on his head and body, you can see he is looking lovingly at her, and it seems like he could feel the care she had for him.

"She actually held him for a very long time, like he was her own baby. She was very moved when she found out the boy passed away shortly after her visit."

The exhibition, which has already been held in Los Angeles and Melbourne, juxtaposes the image of Diana, alone in front of the Taj Mahal, with one taken years later of William and Catherine sitting in front of the same monument to love.

Another striking image, taken by Samir, is of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex in the rain on an engagement in London.

"There are so many memories of our two families connecting and creating a special relationship, which I am pleased to be able to display in such a unique way through the exhibition," said Hussein, who has also covered celebrity news during his long career.

Princess Diana: Accredited Access exhibition runs from tomorrow until 2 September at the Dockside Vaults, London



Representative Example	Duration of Device Plan	Upfront Cost	Monthly Device Payment	Credit Amount	Total Amount Payable for Device	Interest Rate	Representative APR	Cash Price	Lead airtime allowance	Airtime Plan	Airtime Plan April 2025 – March 2026	Airtime Plan April 2026 – March 2027
iPhone 15 Pro Max	36 months	£30	£29.69	£1,069.00	£1,099.00	0%	0%	£1,099.00	1GB	£17	£17 + RPI% announced in Feb 2025 = Price A	Price A + RPI% announced in Feb 2026

RPI rate is the Retail Price Index rate of inflation announced in February each year. £29.69 Device Plan for 36 months and £17 monthly rolling Airtime Plan. Lowest monthly price [ever] based on spreading Device Plan payment over 36 months and making an upfront payment of £30. £335 saving consists of £191 discount applied to device plan (total cost of device was £1,290 now £1,099) and further £144 saving achieve by £4 per month discount on the airtime plan over 36 months. Ends 3 July 2024. Data allowances must be used within the month and cannot be carried over. Subject to availability. **O2 Refresh custom plans:** Direct purchases only. Pay the cash price for your device or spread the cost over 3 to 36 months (excludes dongles). The device cost will be the same whatever you choose. There may be an upfront cost. You can pay off your Device Plan at any time and choose to keep your Airtime Plan, upgrade it, or leave. If you are in the first 24 months of your Device Plan and you cancel your Airtime Plan you will have to pay the remainder of your Device Plan in full. After 24 months you can keep your Airtime Plan, upgrade it, or end it without affecting your Device Plan. 0% APR. Finance subject to status and credit checks. 18+. Direct Debit. Credit provided by Telefónica UK Ltd, RG2 6UU. Telefónica UK is authorised and regulated by the FCA for consumer credit and insurance. Terms apply, see o2.co.uk/terms


Bilfinger
SM-22
WorldwideRENT

▼ Piazza Venezia, Rome
Building work for the main hub of the 16-mile Metro C subway line, with 29 stations, due to be ready by 2034 PHOTOGRAPH: DOMENICO STINELLIS/AP





Winner, winner ...

OFM's 20 best easy chicken recipes

From everyone's favourite roast dinner to classics with a twist, don't miss these easy, brilliant dishes, featuring contributions from top cooks, including the Observer's Nigel Slater, plus, Anna Haugh, Gill Meller and many more

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The Observer foodmonthly

'Time for our stories'

Erpenbeck's Berlin Wall love story wins International Booker

Lisa Allardice

'What is a 'no-brainer'?" the German novelist Jenny Erpenbeck asks translator Michael Hofmann. It is the morning after they have been awarded the International Booker prize, and Hofmann has used the expression to describe the decision to award this year's prize to Erpenbeck's latest novel, Kairos, which he translated.

But it wasn't such a no-brainer back home where, despite Erpenbeck being one of Germany's most celebrated novelists, Kairos didn't appear on the shortlists of either of the country's most prestigious literary prizes. Now Erpenbeck has become the first German author to win the International Booker since it was established nearly a decade ago, putting the German publishing world into a bit of a spin. "They are kind of panicking," she laughs.

The 57-year-old has written only four novels, beginning with her acclaimed debut Visitation in 2010 (all have been translated into English). Yet her name routinely comes up around the time of the Nobel, and the New York Times recently described her as "among the most sophisticated and powerful novelists we have".

Hofmann is similarly one of Germany's most influential literary figures: a poet and critic (known for his elegant hatchet jobs), as well as a translator. On first reading Kairos he found it "a completely amazing book, irresistible. Irresistible, and also unpredictable".

Kairos tells of an affair between 19-year-old Katherina and a married writer and radio presenter, Hans, 34 years her senior. Most of the slim novel is set in East Berlin between 1988 and 1992, though the story is bookended by contemporary scenes that explode everything in between. "On the one hand it is a love story, on the other hand it's a political story," Erpenbeck explains. "I tried to let them speak to each other, to interweave the historic events with a private problematic love story."

Set against the dying days of the German communist dream, the ardent affair descends into cruelty and surveillance as Hans becomes jealous and controlling. It is no surprise that the novel has been taken as an allegory of the demise of East Germany.

> ***'You try as a writer always to get out of sight ... reflection is a process, it's not done quickly'***
>
> **Jenny Erpenbeck**
> *Author of Kairos*



Jenny Erpenbeck and Michael Hofmann

Erpenbeck started writing the novel after the noise of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 had died down. "What you try as a writer is always to get out of sight, to have your peaceful writing," she says. "Reflection is a process, it's not done quickly. If you write about something, you look at things in a different way than when you are just experiencing them."

Erpenbeck's project, over a career spanning 25 years, has been to cast new light on the last century or so of German history. In Kairos, she wanted to give voice to the East German people whose country was lost. "In the English-speaking world people are very interested to get a deeper insight into the stories; a need to understand better what happened," she says. Hofmann agrees. "Even in Germany the East German stories are under-represented," he says. "There's a sort of feeling that we've done the East. The East isn't interesting."

Hans was a boy in the second world war, of an age to be part of the Hitler Youth, whereas Katherina is in her early 20s when the wall comes down. Like the author, born in 1967, Katherina grew up in a tower block a stone's throw from the wall, and shares other biographical details with Erpenbeck. While there has been speculation in Germany that the character of Hans is based on a real-life figure, Erpenbeck says he is a composite of men she read about during her research. "There were so many Stasi files revealed after the fall of the wall, you can take anyone," is all she will say now.

"The idea was to write about my experience of the time," the author says. "It was high time to tell my and my friends' stories. Many friends were relieved, they had the feeling they were seen in the book." She wanted to capture how things looked and felt, details such as how the streets of East Berlin "began to smell like Chanel No 5". Her stories may be intimate but her characters cannot escape their history.

Anyone who inhaled Milan Kundera's The Unbearable Lightness of Being as a teenager will be reminded of his Prague Spring classic. Hans is charismatic and looks sexy with a cigarette (this is the 80s). Katharina is young and beautiful. From the start, there are enough red flags to alert the modern reader, and that is before he gets the whips out. But as Erpenbeck points out, the balance of power shifts during the novel.

Hans represents history, while Katherina is the future. "She is starting out at the point when they meet. They fall in love and they are sharing a moment," she says. "But then it turns out that she's looking forward and he's looking backwards. In the end, the problem is that she is still growing. She's motion. And he's trying to fix things and to keep her as she was in the beginning. But of course he cannot keep her in the same state as when they met."

The intensity of the relationship is captured in highly charged prose, the story told in an urgent, immersive present tense from each perspective, their thoughts running together, often with barely a line break between them.

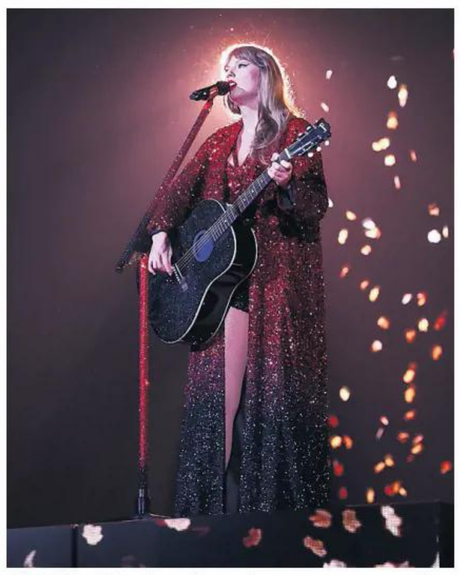
Kairos captures the trauma and ambivalence of reunification. "The book goes on after the party is over," as Hofmann puts it. One advantage she has as someone from East Germany "is that we know both worlds, a socialist one and a capitalist one", she says. "One aspect of the book is to have this comparison between two sides."

Erpenbeck herself spent the evening of 9 November 1989 drinking wine with her girlfriends in East Berlin. "And that was it. If we had gone out, perhaps we would have run into all the millions who came. But we didn't go out."

Kairos is published by Granta (£9.99). To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com



▶ *East and West German citizens celebrate on the Berlin Wall at the Brandenburg Gate in 1989*
PHOTOGRAPH: REUTERS



▲ *Live Nation faced uproar over the botched sale of Taylor Swift tickets*

US pushes for breakup of Ticketmaster 'monopoly'

Michael Sainato

The US Department of Justice is suing the owner of Ticketmaster, Live Nation, seeking a breakup of the concert promotion and ticketing giant. "It is time to break up Live Nation-Ticketmaster," said Merrick Garland, the US attorney general.

"Live Nation relies on unlawful, anticompetitive conduct to exercise its monopolistic control over the live events industry in the United States at the cost of fans, artists, smaller promoters and venue operators."

Yesterday's lawsuit follows years of scrutiny of Live Nation's domination of global ticket sales. Attorneys general from 29 states and Washington DC joined the lawsuit.

The company, which merged with Ticketmaster in 2010, faced a torrent of criticism in the wake of the botched sale of tickets for Taylor Swift's Eras tour in 2022. Officials are said to have started an antitrust investigation.

Live Nation has used a monopoly to suppress competition, the justice department and several states alleged in a court filing. Lawmakers have accused the company of sky-high fees, poor customer service and anticompetitive practices.

The suit alleges that Live Nation steered clients into signing exclusive agreements with Ticketmaster, that it acquired startups to stop competition and that it signs long-term exclusive agreements with venues.

"The live music industry is broken because Live Nation-Ticketmaster has an illegal monopoly," said Jonathan Kanter of the justice department's antitrust division. "Our lawsuit seeks to restore competition for the benefit of fans and artists."

Live Nation has repeatedly pushed back against claims that it is in effect a monopoly, arguing that it has "very little to do" with high ticket prices.

Lina Khan, the chair of the Federal Trade Commission, told the Wall Street Journal that the Taylor Swift fiasco "converted more gen Z-ers into anti-monopolists overnight than anything I could have done".

World

Whistleblowers describe harrowing treatment of Palestinians held by Israel

Lorenzo Tondo and Quique Kierszenbaum *Jerusalem*

Prisoners held at an Israeli detention camp in the Negev desert are being subjected to widespread physical and mental abuses, with at least one reported case of a man having a limb amputated as a result of injuries sustained from constant handcuffing, according to two whistleblowers who worked at the site.

They described harrowing treatment of detainees at the Israeli Sde Teiman camp, which holds Palestinians from Gaza and suspected Hamas militants, including inmates being kept shackled to hospital beds, blindfolded and forced to wear nappies.

According to the two sources, the facility, located about 18 miles from the Gaza border, consists of two distinct sections: an enclosure where up to 200 Palestinian detainees from Gaza are confined under severe physical restrictions in cages, and a field hospital where dozens of patients with war injuries are handcuffed to their beds, often with no pain relief.

One whistleblower who worked there as a prison guard said detainees were forced to stand for hours or sit on their knees. The source, who spoke out at risk of reprisals, said several detainees at the facility were beaten with truncheons and could not move their heads or speak.

"The prisoners are detained in sort of cages, all blindfolded and handcuffed," the source said. "If someone speaks or moves, they are immediately silenced or they are forced to stand with their hands raised above their head and handcuffed for up to one hour.

"If they are unable to keep their hands raised, the soldiers attach the handcuffs to the bars of the cage. Many of them had infected wounds that were not being properly treated."

He added: "The floor is very dirty, and it smells so bad that we were forced to wear face masks. You could hear sometimes the sound of beating and them screaming, and [a] banging sound like against the metal wall."

The whistleblower said the prisoners were given one cucumber, a few slices of bread and a cup of cheese, and that some of them were visibly malnourished.

The source claimed the military had no proof the detainees were all members of Hamas, with some inmates repeatedly asking why they were there. According to the whistleblower, most were considered suspects and some were subsequently released. "But they had not been formally charged. It was a kind of filtering camp, a provisional detention," he said.

A report by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), which demanded the closure of the camp, said: "Since the start of the war, all Gazan residents detained are classified as 'unlawful combatants', which deprives them of prisoner of war status, enabling Israel to prohibit lawyers' visits for prolonged periods, leading to a lack of critical oversight during a time of heightened risk of severe incarceration conditions and torture."

According to information obtained from the Israeli prison service dating from early April, 849 individuals classified as "unlawful combatants" were being held in its custody.

The source described the field hospital in the detention camp as consisting of tents with an emergency room where patients underwent surgery on a stretcher as there was no operating table. The patients were handcuffed to the beds, they all had nappies and were blindfolded.

He claimed he was told some patients had come from hospitals in Gaza. "These were patients who had been captured by the Israeli army while being treated in Gaza hospitals and brought here. They had infected wounds. They were moaning in pain," he said.

In one case, he said he had learned that a detainee's hand had been amputated "because the wrists had become gangrenous due to handcuffing wounds".

The PHR report detailed the case of Izz ad-Din al-Bana, a 34-year-old Gaza

> ***'The prisoners are in sort of cages, all blindfolded and handcuffed ... Many had infected wounds'***
>
> **Whistleblower who worked as a prison guard at Sde Teiman**

Court case

New ruling expected on conduct of war in Gaza

Peter Beaumont
Robert Tait *Washington*

The international court of justice (ICJ) is expected to issue a new ruling on Israel's conduct of its war in Gaza this afternoon, as the US expressed concern over Israel's growing diplomatic isolation among countries that have traditionally supported it.

Amid speculation that the ICJ could order a halt to Israel's offensive, a second top global court – the international criminal court – identified the three judges who will hear a request for arrest warrants against Hamas leaders, Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and its defence minister, Yoav Gallant.

Last week South Africa asked the ICJ, which is located in The Hague and also known as the world court, to order a halt to Israel's offensive in Gaza, and in Rafah in particular, saying this was necessary to ensure the survival of the Palestinian people.

ICJ decisions have in the past been ignored, as the top UN legal body has no way to enforce its decisions, but they carry international weight. A ruling against Israel could add to its political isolation after a series of setbacks this week. Israel suggested it would defy any order to stop fighting.

"No power on Earth will stop Israel from protecting its citizens and going after Hamas in Gaza," a spokesperson, Avi Hyman, told reporters yesterday.

The latest legal moves come as Israeli media reported that Israel Defense Forces had concluded that troops had "breached regulations" after they killed a UN staff member and wounded a second one last week in Gaza when a marked UN vehicle was shelled and hit with a drone-dropped grenade.

Israel has faced mounting problems on the international stage in recent days. On Wednesday, after Ireland, Norway and Spain said they would recognise Palestinian statehood, the US national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, expressed concern over Israel's isolation.

"As a country that stands strong in defence of Israel in international forums like the UN, we certainly have seen a growing chorus of voices, including voices that had previously been in support of Israel, drift in another direction.

"That is of concern to us because we do not believe that that contributes to Israel's long-term security or vitality. So that's something we have discussed with the Israeli government.

"President Biden has been on the record supporting a two-state solution. He has been equally emphatic on the record that that two-state solution should be brought about through direct negotiations through the parties, not through unilateral recognition."

Nevertheless, Sullivan criticised Israel's decision to respond by withholding funds from the Palestinian



China military drills

Mock strikes 'punish' Taiwan after election

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US supreme court

Row over 'far-right' flags at judge's homes

Page 29

resident who relied on a wheelchair before his arrest, and who died at another medical centre in February after being transferred from Sde Teiman to be treated for severe pressure ulcers. Other prisoners alleged that he had been complaining of pain for several days and had not received an appropriate response or treatment.

The prison guard's statements were corroborated by a second whistleblower who spoke to the Guardian and who was part of the medical staff in the field hospital in Sde Teiman. "There were about 15 patients in total, all handcuffed and blindfolded," he said. "They were naked, wearing diapers and were covered by blankets. Most of them appeared to have obvious war injuries, some had undergone amputations and others underwent major abdominal or chest surgery."

The member of the medical staff added: "I understand that it is difficult to treat a patient accused of heinous crimes, but it is the job we have chosen and as physicians we should recognise that every human being has a right to appropriate healthcare regardless of their backgrounds."

The source said he had witnessed a patient undergoing painful medical procedures without any painkillers.

Responding to the claims, the Israel Defense Forces said in a statement: "Among the detainees held at the Sde Teiman facility are skilled military operatives at a very high level of danger. Detainees are handcuffed according to their level of risk and their state of health.

"Routinely, procedures are carried out on handcuffing in order to make sure that the handcuffing is carried out in a manner that does not harm the detainees.

"Early in the war and after reports of handcuff injuries, the type of handcuffs in the facility was changed to reduce as much as possible harm as a result of the handcuffs."

It added that detainees were allowed regular access to toilets located in the prison complex and that nappies were used only for those who had undergone medical procedures for which their movement was limited, and were intended to maintain their hygiene.

The IDF said it treated detainees "appropriately and carefully" and "any allegation regarding misconduct by IDF soldiers is examined and dealt with accordingly. In appropriate cases, criminal investigations are opened by the military police."



A Palestinian boy stands in a destroyed house in Nuseirat, central Gaza, where fighting has intensified
PHOTOGRAPH: BASHAR TALEB/AFP

Authority, saying: "I think it's wrong on a strategic basis because withholding funds destabilises the West Bank. It undermines the search for security and prosperity for the Palestinian people, which is in Israel's interests. I think it's wrong to withhold funds that provide basic goods and services to innocent people."

Sullivan expanded on comments to the Senate foreign relations committee by the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, on Tuesday in which he said the administration was ready to work with Congress on enacting potential penalties against the ICC in response to its attempt to seek Netanyahu's arrest.

"We're in consultations on a bipartisan, bicameral basis with [Capitol] Hill on all of the options for how to respond to what the ICC has just done. We haven't made any determinations," Sullivan said.

Republicans in the Senate and House of Representatives have publicly mooted legislation against the ICC, of which the US is not a member, although it has supported some of its previous attempts at mounting prosecutions, notably against the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, over the invasion of Ukraine.

Israel launched devastating airstrikes on Gaza yesterday while also saying it was ready to resume stalled talks on a truce and hostage release deal with Hamas.

The Gaza Strip's civil defence agency said two predawn airstrikes had killed 26 people. There was no immediate comment from Israel.

Hostages

Families of five women release video of kidnaps in call for deal



The footage was compiled from videos recorded on body cameras worn by Hamas militants during the 7 October attacks. The IDF had earlier released a version with the most disturbing scenes removed
PHOTOGRAPH: REUTERS

Lorenzo Tondo
Jerusalem

An Israeli group representing the families of hostages held in Gaza has released footage showing the capture of five female soldiers from a military base during the 7 October Hamas attacks.

The three-minute video shows the women sitting on the ground, some bruised and bloodied with their hands tied, after their capture from the Nahal Oz base in southern Israel.

The footage, taken from a two-hour video filmed on body cameras by Hamas militants during the attack, was previously released by Hamas. The Hostages and Missing Families Forum obtained it months ago from the Israel Defense Forces, which had previously edited it to exclude the most disturbing scenes.

The forum said the families made the footage public in an attempt to pressure the government into reaching a ceasefire deal with Hamas that would free their loved ones.

"The footage reveals the violent, humiliating, and traumatising treatment the girls endured on the day of their abduction, their eyes filled with raw terror," the group said in statement. "Every new testimony about what happened to the hostages echoes the same tragic truth – we must bring them all back home, now. The Israeli government must not waste another moment."

Seven female soldiers who worked as lookouts on the border with Gaza were taken captive from Nahal Oz. All were aged 19 or 20. The army rescued one of the women early in the war in a ground operation and said a second was killed in Hamas captivity. The five women in the video are believed to still be held by Hamas.

"This video is a message to the international community in a time where we are seeing the US president, Joe Biden, threatening he is not going to supply weapons to Israel. We are seeing three European countries recognising the Palestinian state," Ashley Waxman Bakshi, a cousin of Agam Berger, one of the women in the video, told the Guardian.

"All of this is happening while our hostages are still in Gaza. That is sending a message to Hamas that they have no reason to negotiate a deal for their release. Why should they?

"The international community has focused only on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Nobody is talking about our humanitarian crisis, our hostages. Release the hostages and the situation will improve."



Thousands of Israelis have joined protests calling for a deal to bring home the hostages held by Hamas
PHOTOGRAPH: IMAGO/SAEEDQAQ/AVALON

In the video, the women try to converse with the militants. One says in English: "I have friends in Palestine." A militant yells back in English for them to be quiet.

At another point a man describes the women as *sabaya,* a term used by jihadists that means enslaved.

Thousands of Israelis have joined protests in recent weeks calling for a deal to bring home the hostages still held in Gaza by Hamas, early elections and the immediate resignation of the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

"This hostage crisis is not only a failure of the Israeli government, it is also a failure of the international community," said Waxman Bakshi.

In a statement, Hamas called the video "a manipulated excerpt" whose authenticity "cannot be verified". The group said the minor injuries and blood on the soldiers in the video "is to be expected in such operations" but denied physically assaulting the women.

The war was triggered by Hamas's attack in Israel in which 1,200 people, mainly civilians, died and about 250 others were taken hostage.

As a result of Israel's retaliatory offensive on the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, at least 35,386 Palestinians have been killed and 79,366 have been wounded, the Gaza health ministry said on Saturday.

About half of the approximately 250 people abducted on 7 October have since been freed, most in swaps for Israeli-held Palestinian prisoners during a weeklong ceasefire in November. According to Israeli authorities, about 30 are confirmed to have died.

On Saturday, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum released a statement saying one hostage, Ron Benjamin, had died and 128 others remained in captivity.

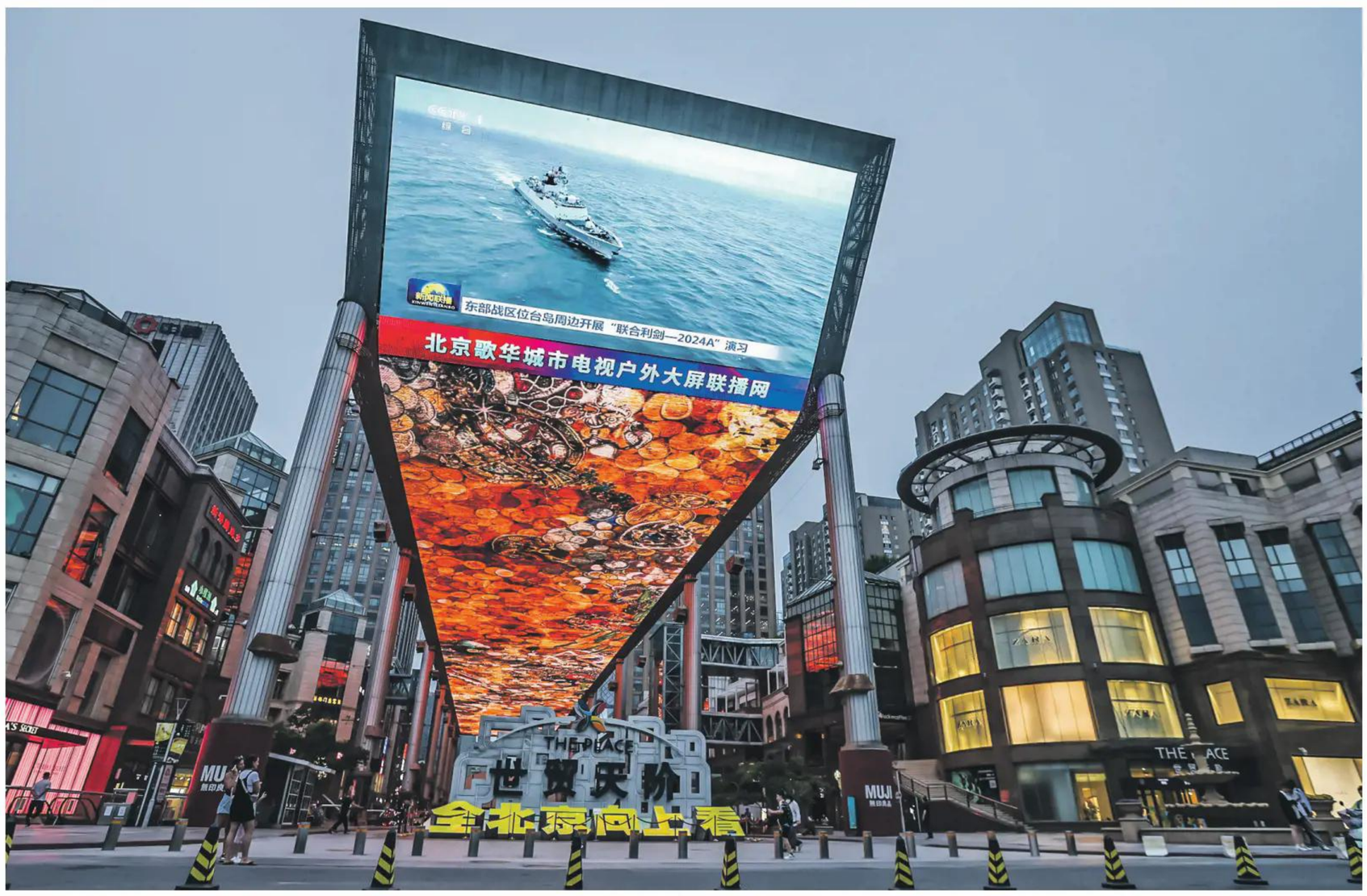
The Israeli military said it had retrieved from Gaza the bodies of three hostages kidnapped by Hamas, including the German-Israeli Shani Louk. The other two hostages were identified as Amit Buskila, 28, and Itzhak Gelerenter, 56, according to the IDF spokesperson R Adm Daniel Hagari, who said the three victims had been taken to Gaza after being killed by Hamas at the Nova music festival.

Footage of what appeared to be the body of Louk, 22, on the back of a pickup truck on the streets of Gaza was among the first images to surface after 7 October, as the scale of the attacks became clear.

250
People taken hostage by Hamas militants during the 7 October attack in which 1,200 were killed

128
Number of Israelis who remain in captivity, according to the Hostages and Missing Families Forum

Additional reporting
Associated Press



A giant video screen in Beijing carries a news report about the Chinese military's drills that were launched around Taiwan yesterday

PHOTOGRAPH: WU HAO/EPA

China launches two days of 'punishment' drills after Taiwanese president sworn in

Helen Davidson and Chi Hui Lin *Taipei*

Dozens of Chinese fighter jets carried out mock strikes against Taiwanese targets yesterday as "punishment" after Taiwan inaugurated a new president, China's military said.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) announced the two days of drills surrounding Taiwan and its islands near the Chinese border. It said the drills were in direct response to what it called "separatist acts" by Taiwan's government. On Monday Lai Ching-te was sworn in as Taiwan's president after winning democratic elections in January.

Chinese state media said jets loaded with missiles had successfully practised strikes against "high-value military targets" during the drills.

Taiwan's defence ministry said it had detected 15 PLA warships around the territory's perimeter, along with 16 marine police vessels and 49 warplanes, of which 35 crossed the median line, the de facto border between China and Taiwan. It said there were no live-fire exercises in the sea and Chinese authorities did not declare any no-fly zones. Chinese naval vessels came within 24 nautical miles of Taiwan's main island and remained there, it said.

"I have confidence in the military," Lai said at a military base yesterday. "I also ask all my compatriots to rest assured."

Taiwan's presidential office said the drills threatened Taiwan's freedom and democracy, and its defence ministry accused China of "irrational provocation and disruption of regional peace and stability".

The defence ministry said its forces had been put on alert, base security strengthened and air defence and missile forces ordered to monitor possible targets. It was also preparing for cognitive warfare operations.

"We seek no conflicts, but we will not shy away from one. We have the confidence to safeguard our national security," it said.

The drills are the first substantive response from China to the inauguration of Lai, who used his speech to affirm Taiwan's sovereignty, to promise to defend it, and urge China to cease hostilities. Lai and his predecessor, Tsai Ing-wen, are from the pro-sovereignty Democratic Progressive party, which Beijing considers separatist.

A PLA spokesperson, Li Xi, said the drills would "serve as a strong punishment for the separatist acts of Taiwan independence forces and a stern warning against the interference and provocation by external forces", the state media agency Xinhua reported. It said Lai's speech was "extremely harmful" and that the drills, which it called "countermeasures", were "legitimate, legal and necessary".

Beijing claims Taiwan is a province of China and has vowed to annex it, by force if necessary. Taiwan's government and people overwhelmingly reject the prospect of Chinese communist rule, and Taiwan's leaders have vowed to increase deterrence measures and boost defences, while urging China to cease its threats and return to dialogue.

In recent years China has heightened its pressure on Taiwan, with increased incursions into its air defence identification zone, economic coercion, and cognitive warfare designed to convince the Taiwanese people to accept a Chinese takeover without war.

Maps of the drill areas published yesterday morning showed them to be taking place in similar areas as in 2022, when China surrounded Taiwan with live-fire exercises in response to a visit to Taipei by the then US House speaker, Nancy Pelosi. However, analysts noted the addition of Taiwan's offshore islands, suggesting the PLA was practising new strategies.

In 2023, China again staged large-scale drills in response to a meeting in the US between Tsai and the then US House speaker, Kevin McCarthy. Those drills escalated the tactics displayed in 2022, simulating a blockade of Taiwan and pre-invasion attacks.

China's coastguard was also involved in yesterday's exercises, with the Fujian branch announcing law enforcement drills around Taiwan's offshore islands near China's mainland. This year Kinmen and Matsu, islands close to the Chinese mainland, have been increasingly targeted by Chinese coastguard patrols.

After a fatal collision between an illegal Chinese fishing boat and a Taiwanese coastguard vessel near Kinmen in February, China responded with increased patrols and an explicit rejection of maritime borders, which it had until then tacitly respected.

Patrols through Kinmen's restricted waters have since become more consistent, in what some analysts say is China's strategy of shrinking Taiwan's territorial space and normalising incursions.

'Normalisation of abnormal actions'

Exercises intended to send message to Taipei and its allies

How significant are the drills?

The drills are the most significant since similar exercises were launched against Taiwan in August 2022 and April 2023. But they appeared to be smaller in scope, and did not involve live fire near Taiwan on the first day. Military drills around Taiwan had been expected this week. After a relatively muted reaction to the election of Lai Ching-te as Taiwan's president in January, analysts were on the lookout for a Chinese show of force in response to his inauguration on 20 May.

The deputy commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, Lt Gen Stephen Sklenka, called the drills "concerning". "The normalisation of abnormal actions, that's what's happening," said Sklenka.

How big are they compared with previous military exercises?

Like the previous war games, yesterday's appeared to be practising blockade techniques. Chinese forces targeted five large areas of sea surrounding Taiwan, and several smaller ones over the Taiwanese islands next to the Chinese mainland. The 2022 drills did not include the small Taiwanese islands as targets.

So far, the drills appear to be of a lower intensity compared with 2022 and 2023. Taiwan's defence ministry said the People's Liberation Army (PLA) had stayed outside the 24 nautical mile limit of Taiwan's waters, and only carried out live fire exercises inland, not in the Taiwan Strait or at sea. It did not declare any no-fly zones.

The 2022 drills included the firing of ballistic missiles over Taiwan's main island into the sea, and analysts believed the 2023 drills showed an increased "war-like" capability, with marked improvement in the launching of fighter jets from aircraft carriers. This year the PLA navy began test sailing its third aircraft carrier, an addition that analysts say will greatly increase China's ability to maintain a strong presence across the Taiwan Strait, South China Sea and East China Sea.

Is Beijing planning a war?

China's leader, Xi Jinping, has made it clear that he sees resolving the "Taiwan question" as part of his legacy. Dates as soon as 2027 are mentioned by analysts and western intelligence agencies as a deadline by which the PLA has been instructed to be ready for a conflict.



Taiwan's president, Lai Ching-te (centre), at a military base yesterday

Zhang Chi, a PLA National Defence University lecturer, told state media the northern sites of this week's drills "sent a warning" to Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive party. Zhang, who was not speaking on behalf of the PLA, said the eastern areas cut off Taiwan's energy imports, support lines from the US and other allies, and "the escape route for Taiwan independence forces".

Zhang's comments were likely to have been aimed at sending a message to international parties that the PLA took the drills very seriously, and to reassure domestic audiences of China's control.

There is concern that rather than an all-out assault, Beijing will increase its less militaristic "greyzone" activities, which are harder for Taiwan and other interested parties to calculate a response to. These already include increased coastguard patrols around Taiwan's outlying islands of Kinmen and Matsu, the shifting of flightpaths to Taiwan's side of the median line, and the frequent deployment of weather balloons – which are civilian but can also gather granular microclimate data that can assist in bombardment attacks – into Taiwan's airspace.

Helen Davidson and Amy Hawkins

No pickles, no deli History of a beloved 'secular Jewish space' celebrated in US exhibition



▲ *Favourite foods include pastrami, matzo ball soup and cheesecakes*

David Smith
Washington

Cate Thurston remembers the moment her team settled on what to call an exhibition about Jewish delis in America. "We kind of just said it as a joke," the co-curator says. "It was a former colleague who said, 'You could call it this,' and we all had a laugh. And then we thought, wait, no, we could call it that!"

The title they chose: I'll Have What She's Having. Comedy fans will recognise it as the punchline from arguably the most famous deli scene in film history: Meg Ryan faking an orgasm in front of Billy Crystal. A woman, played by director Rob Reiner's mother, remarks to a waitress: "I'll have what she's having."

The clip plays at the exhibition, organised by the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, which opened this week at the Capital Jewish Museum, Washington. It is a celebration of the delicatessen – a German word that translates to "a place to find delicious things to eat" – as the vernacular of Ashkenazi Jewish life.

Thurston offered her own definition: "The classic deli is loud. We've now blended kosher and non-kosher traditions: you'll get a slice of cheesecake with your meat sandwich. But it has to have a counter, it has to have seating and it has to serve some traditional items – soups, sandwiches. There must be pickles. No pickles? No deli."

Staples include towering sandwiches, bowls of matzo ball soup and rich chopped liver spread on rye. Asked how to tell the difference between a deli and a diner, Thurston replied: "If there's a stack of pancakes, it's not a deli," adding, "Both will have lukewarm and probably middling coffee."

The show begins by describing the Jewish delicatessen as "fusion food" born of immigration that combined regional food traditions from across eastern and central Europe with newly available ingredients in the US. More than 2 million Jewish people moved to the US between 1880 and 1924.

The emergence of delis can be traced to an influx of immigrants from the Rhineland, part of present day Germany, to New York, followed by Jews from eastern Europe and the Russian empire. They began selling food to their communities, including pickles, knishes, gefilte fish, borscht, pastrami, smoked fish, bagels, babka and rugelach, available under one roof for the first time.

▶ *Katz's was founded in 1888 in New York and is the oldest continuously operating delicatessen in the US*

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER HORREE/ALAMY



▼ *Deli food was originally sold on the streets but by the mid-1930s there were about 5,000 outlets in New York City*

PHOTOGRAPH: EI KATSUMATA/ALAMY



Thurston said: "These foods were originally sold on the street, largely to other immigrants, which is a way of earning a living and selling food very familiar to people all over the world. You bring the skills you have with you to a new place, you bring your culture, and that's food."

The wave of immigration coincided with the development of industrialised meat production. "Prior to the civil war in the United States, most Americans ate pork that was grown pretty close to their house; after the civil war, you have beef readily available on tables. Well, let's eat a giant deli sandwich: ribbons and ribbons of beef."

> ***'You bring skills you have to a new place, you bring culture, and that's food'***
>
> **Cate Thurston**
> *Co-curator*

Katz's Delicatessen, founded in New York in 1888, was a bricks-and-mortar establishment at a time when most deli food was being sold from carts and barrels on the street, and is now the oldest continuously operating deli in the country. By the mid-1930s there were about 5,000 delis in New York City alone.

Others sprang up in cities such as Chicago, Cincinnati, Los Angeles and Phoenix and reflected their local surroundings. Delis provided a livelihood and sense of purpose for many of the 400,000 Holocaust survivors and refugees who came to the US after the second world war. They were owners, waiters, cooks and customers. The Holocaust survivor Abe Lebewohl, the owner of the Second Avenue Delicatessen in New York, refused to turn away customers unable to pay and gave free food to homeless people and striking workers.

The mid-20th century was the deli's golden age. Period menus from the Carnegie Delicatessen and Lindy's Restaurant in New York's theatre district are displayed in the exhibition. Many establishments are no more, though some landmark examples remain.

Delis often appear in film and on TV, as testified by clips from Curb Your Enthusiasm, Seinfeld, The Marvelous Mrs Maisel and When Harry Met Sally at the exhibition's – it has to be said – climax. Why? Thurston said: "One of the reasons we posit is because Hollywood and Broadway have had such a love affair with delis, you write what you know and so they end up in these creative pieces.

"Another is that for characters, delis are a secular Jewish space and if you need to demonstrate a character's Jewish identity, this is a place you could do that. But whether it's to convey something or just because folks like it, the deli appears again and again in media."

I'll Have What She's Having, which runs until 20 August, displays neon signs, menus, adverts, fixtures, historical footage and artefacts, often with a personal story. Thurston hopes it will prompt visitors to consider their own immigration stories. She said: "The things we consider uniquely American are often borne of the meetings of peoples and it's a celebration of that."

US Democrats: supreme court justice must recuse himself over flag row

Michael Sainato
Chris Stein

Leading US Democrats are demanding Samuel Alito recuse himself from election-related cases and face investigation after claims that flags now associated with the far right were seen flying above two of his homes.

Dick Durbin, the Senate judiciary chair, urged the US supreme court justice to step back from certain major cases and demanded John Roberts, the chief justice, implement an enforceable code of conduct, while Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said the US Senate must investigate.

Durbin said on Wednesday: "This incident is yet another example of apparent ethical misconduct by a sitting justice, and it adds to the court's ongoing ethical crisis. For the good of our country and the court, Justice Alito must recuse himself immediately from cases related to the 2020 election and the 6 January insurrection. And the chief justice must see how this is damaging the court and immediately enact an enforceable code of conduct."

Ocasio-Cortez told MSNBC host Chris Hayes late on Wednesday: "What we are seeing here is an extraordinary breach of not just the trust and the stature of the supreme court, but we are seeing a fundamental challenge to our democracy.

"Samuel Alito has identified himself with the same people who raided the Capitol on 6 January and is now going to be presiding over court cases that have deep implications over the participants of that rally."

The New York Times reported that an "appeal to heaven" pine tree flag, which has been adopted by Christian nationalists, was flown at Alito's summer home on Long Beach Island, New Jersey, last July and September. The flag was carried by some in the crowd during the far-right, violent insurrection at the US Capitol on 6 January 2021, when extremist supporters of Donald Trump broke in to try, in vain, to stop the US Congress certifying Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election.

The paper also said an upside-down US flag – a symbol of Trump's stolen election claim – was flown outside Alito's Virginia residence shortly after the insurrection. Alito said his wife flew the flag briefly in a political spat with neighbours.

Senator Richard Blumenthal, a Connecticut Democrat, posted on X: "Flying this flag is a political statement that is a clear and compelling reason for Alito's recusal. He cannot responsibly sit on Trump-related cases when he has already signaled his sympathy with 6 January rioters. He owes the American people an explanation."

Neither the court nor Alito had commented by yesterday evening.



Ukrainians in Lviv mark the Day of Heroes, which honours those who have fought and died for the country in all wars

PHOTOGRAPH: PAVLO PALAMARCHUK/ REUTERS

US denies UK claim that China is giving 'lethal aid' to Russia

Luke Harding
Shaun Walker *Kyiv*

Joe Biden's administration has challenged a claim by the British defence secretary, Grant Shapps, that China is sending "lethal aid" to Russia for use in its war in Ukraine.

Speaking on Wednesday, Shapps cited "new intelligence" that suggested Beijing was giving Moscow deadly "combat equipment" for the first time. Yesterday, the Ministry of Defence said it would not give further details.

It came just after Russia launched a new offensive in the north-east and relentlessly targeted Kharkiv, Ukraine's second city, with missiles and glide bombs. Yesterday, a strike on a printing house in the city killed seven and injured many more.

Previously, China has been accused by Washington of providing critical components used by Russia's military since its 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. These include microelectronics that have been fitted in tanks, missiles and other weapons.

Shapps' comments at the London Defence Conference went further. "Today I can reveal that we have evidence that Russia and China are collaborating on combat equipment for use in Ukraine," he said.

As part of his call for Nato to "wake up" and bolster defence spending, he added: "US and British defence intelligence can reveal that lethal aid is now flying from China to Russia and into Ukraine.

"And this is new intelligence, which leads me to be able to declassify and reveal this fact today. I think it's quite significant."

Shapps did not provide evidence to support his assertion. But he said there had been a 64% increase in trade between the countries since the start of the Ukraine war and that they were "covering each other's back".

"It's time for the world to wake up. And that means translating this moment to concrete plans and capabilities. And that starts with laying the foundations for an alliance-wide increase in spending on our collective deterrent," he said.

> ***'This new intelligence ... leads me to be able to declassify and reveal this fact today'***
>
> **Grant Shapps**
> *Defence secretary*

After its failure two years ago to seize the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, the Kremlin sought military supplies from authoritarian partners, sourcing "kamikaze" drones from Iran and artillery shells and short-range ballistic missiles from North Korea. Some of these missiles have been used in Moscow's bombardment of Kharkiv.

Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, appeared to take issue with Shapps' remarks on Beijing's new alleged role. He said the possibility China might "provide weapons directly - lethal assistance - to Russia" was a concern earlier, but that "we have not seen that to date".

The US did, however, have a "concern about what China's doing to fuel Russia's war machine, not giving weapons directly, but providing inputs to Russia's defence industrial base", he added.

The Chinese embassy in London dismissed Shapps' assertion as "totally groundless", accusing Britain of spreading "baseless accusations".

Additional reporting **Agencies**

AfD expelled from European parliament's far-right group

Jon Henley
Jennifer Rankin and
Lisa O'Carroll *Brussels*

The far-right German party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) was expelled from its pan-European parliamentary group yesterday after controversies over policy choices and the conduct of some of its leaders.

"The bureau of the Identity and Democracy group in the European parliament has decided today to exclude the German delegation, AfD, with immediate effect," the group of populist far-right parties said in a statement.

The day before, AfD's lead candidate in next month's European elections resigned from the party leadership and renounced all further campaign activities after criticism of comments he made last weekend that the Nazi SS were "not all criminals".

"The ID group no longer wants to be associated with the incidents involving Maximilian Krah, head of the AfD list for the European parliamentary elections," the group said.

Sources within the ID group said they had brought forward a decision due to take place after the elections.

Krah's comments to the Italian newspaper La Repubblica prompted France's far-right National Rally party to say this week it would no longer sit in the same group as the German party after the elections. Marine Le Pen, the party's leader, said on Wednesday it needed to make a "clean break", accusing AfD of being held hostage by its most radical elements.

ID, which also includes Matteo Salvini's League in Italy, Austria's Freedom party, Geert Wilders' Dutch Freedom party and the Vlaams Belang party in Belgium, is the more radical and anti-EU of the two hard-right groups in the parliament.

It was set to be the big winner of the 6-9 June elections, with polls projecting it would boost its seat tally from 59 to 85. But the expulsion of AfD's forecast 16 MEPs will lessen ID's expected gains and is likely to precipitate a wholesale recomposition of the parliament's hard-right forces.

Nine men held in Greece despite dismissal of shipwreck charges

Reuters

Greek police were accused yesterday of the "inhumane" treatment of nine Egyptian men after placing them in detention despite a court having thrown out charges against them over a deadly shipwreck.

Police said they were placing the men in custody as it was thought they could flee the country two days after a tribunal in the southern city of Kalamata dismissed charges against them due to a lack of jurisdiction.

Up to 700 people from Pakistan, Syria and Egypt had boarded a fishing trawler in Libya that was bound for Italy that sank off south-western Greece last June. There were 104 survivors rescued and only 82 bodies recovered. It was one of the deadliest shipwrecks to have taken place in the Mediterranean.

The disaster shocked Europe and the case has been followed closely in Greece, which has been a gateway to the EU for thousands of migrants and asylum seekers.

On Tuesday, a Greek court dismissed charges of setting up a criminal group and causing the shipwreck, citing lack of jurisdiction as the disaster had occurred in international waters. It also threw out charges of illegal entry into the country and people smuggling.

After the ruling, the men, who had spent 11 months in pre-trial detention and have pending asylum applications, were transferred to a police station where they remained in custody. It could take months for their applications to be processed.

Police said in their administrative decision they should be detained as there was a risk that they could flee Greece, and they would remain in detention until their asylum applications were processed.

Natasha Dailiani, a lawyer for the men, said it was "tragic and unacceptable", adding that the men should have been freed and they planned to appeal the detention order.

"It is inhumane to hold those people in detention after a court dismissed the charges against them and since they have already spent 11 months in prison in vain," she added.

Police authorities were not available for comment. The cause of the shipwreck is officially undetermined.



AfD supporters hold a banner reading 'we are for you' at a protest by German farmers in January

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Business

Watchdog launches formal investigation into vets' fees

Kalyeena Makortoff

The UK competition regulator has launched a formal investigation into the £2bn veterinary market, over concerns that pet owners could be overpaying for medicines and may not always be aware of the best treatment options available.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) announced yesterday that it was pushing ahead with a review of the sector in a move that could result in prescription fees being capped and leading pet-care chains being broken up.

"The message from our work so far has been loud and clear – many pet owners and professionals have concerns that need further investigation," the CMA chief executive, Sarah Cardell, said. "We've heard from people who are struggling to pay vet bills, potentially overpaying for medicines, and don't always know the best treatment options available to them. We also remain concerned about the incentives for large, integrated vet groups to act in ways which reduce consumer choice."

The investigation will also examine whether vets' profits are "consistent" with the levels expected in competitive markets, and if there was any incentive to limit customer choices when recommending treatments.

If it finds poor practices, the CMA said it could force firms to provide certain information to consumers, impose a cap on prescription fees, or order the sale or disposal of businesses or assets. The CMA can also recommend that the government change the regulator's powers.

Cardell said: "While we're aware of acute staff shortages and difficult working conditions for vets, we consider a formal market investigation is essential to ensure good outcomes for the millions of pet owners in the UK."

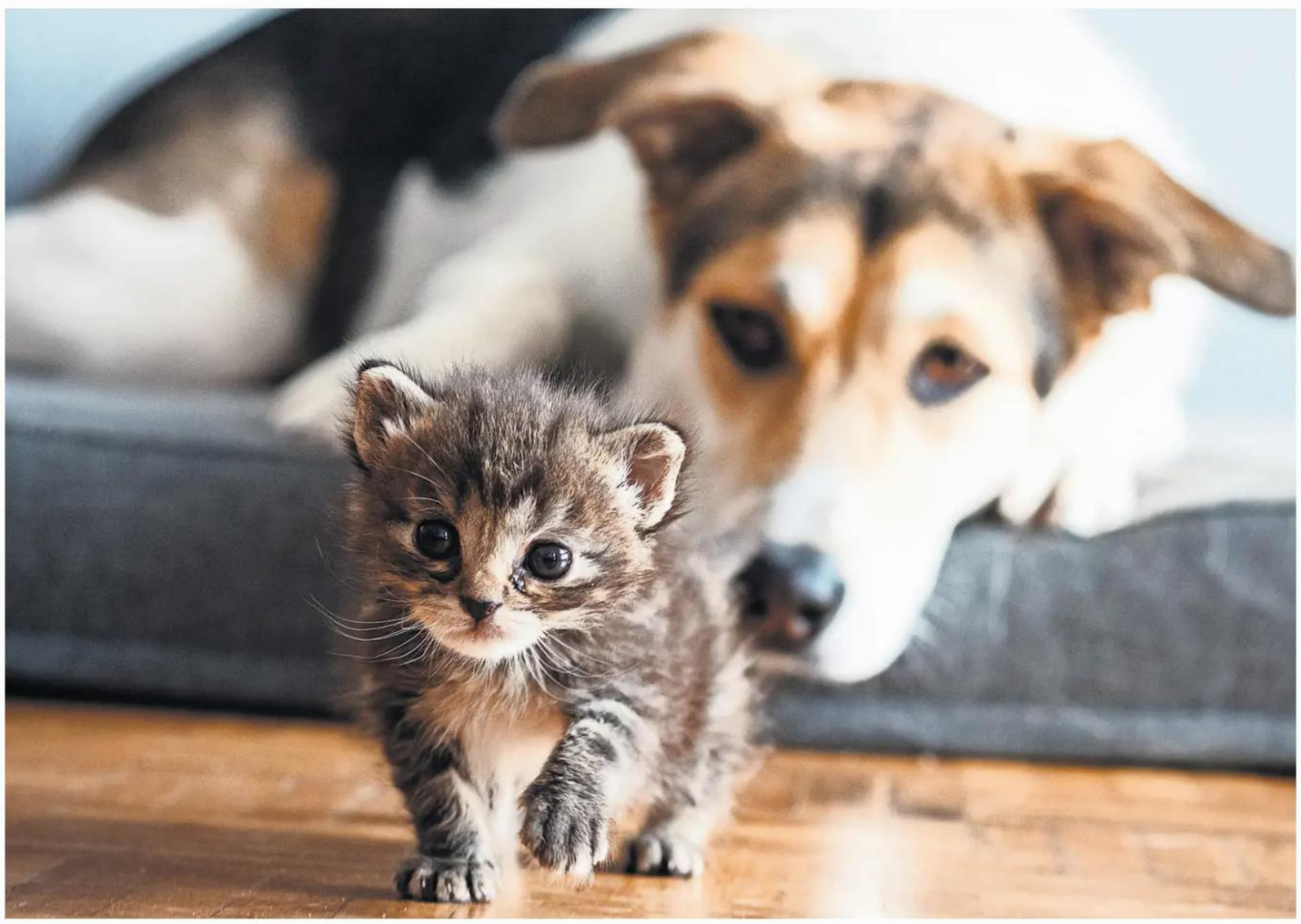
The British Veterinary Association (BVA), which represents more than 19,000 vets, said it had already acted on some of the CMA's concerns, including by issuing guidance to members on making their fees and ownership more transparent.

It also said an urgent review of the Veterinary Surgeons Act was needed. "As it stands, the legislation is not fit for purpose and is failing both vet teams and clients," the BVA said.

The BVA raised concerns about consumers taking out frustrations on staff. "As the CMA undertakes its investigation, it's important to remember that vets genuinely care and prioritise the health and welfare of animals. "Since the CMA first announced their review, vet teams have found themselves on the end of unpleasant, often abusive behaviour. We urge everyone to remember that vets are often not responsible for the pricing structures in a practice."

CVS – one of the six largest corporate vet groups – said it had a "clear strategy, with its purpose to give the best possible care to animals and its vision to be the veterinary company people most want to work for."

An initial CMA review in September prompted 56,000 responses from pet owners and those working in the industry. It will now appoint a group of independent experts to oversee the investigation, which will be headed by its panel chair, Martin Coleman.



▶ *The CMA is responding to concerns owners may not always be aware of the best treatment options for pets*

PHOTOGRAPH: SAMUEL BOIVIN/GETTY

National Grid taps investors to help fund £60bn switch to renewables

Alex Lawson

National Grid has tapped shareholders for nearly £7bn to help fund a £60bn spending spree to upgrade its networks to cope with the switch to low-carbon energy on either side of the Atlantic.

The energy infrastructure company announced a £6.8bn rights issue – where existing shareholders are offered new shares – to provide fresh funds for investment in thousands of miles of cables to connect homes to renewable energy in projects in Britain and the US.

It said the nearly £60bn in investment – to be spent between 2024 and 2029 – represented a "significant step-up" and was double the figure of the previous five-year period.

The plan includes £23bn to be spent in energy transmission in the UK to help expand offshore wind projects, as well as £8bn on "asset replacement, reinforcement and new connections". It will spend a further £28bn in the US.

The group's electricity system operator has estimated that £54bn would need to be spent between now and 2030, and a further £58bn in the following five years, to meet government decarbonisation targets. The spending will add £20 to £30 to customer bills.

John Pettigrew, National Grid's chief executive, said the fresh investment would add "single digit pounds" to bills, with the cost recovered over a period of up to 60 years. The switch away from gas-generated electricity to renewables would also reduce costs, he said, "so ultimately, the overall bill to consumers will come down".

National Grid said the funds would be spent on "critical energy infrastructure in the UK and US in support of the energy transition and economic growth objectives", but did not identify which projects it would invest in.

Projects announced under its "Great Grid Upgrade" plan last year are likely to receive funds. These include a proposal for two offshore high-voltage electricity links between Scotland and England and a planned project to upgrade existing power lines in East Anglia and Essex.

£6.8bn

Amount the energy infrastructure company will seek to raise from its shareholders through a rights issue

Toblerone owner fined €337m for anti-competitive practices

Lisa O'Carroll
Brussels correspondent

The owner of Toblerone, Milka and Oreo has been fined €337.5m (£288m) for anti-competitive practices in the European Union.

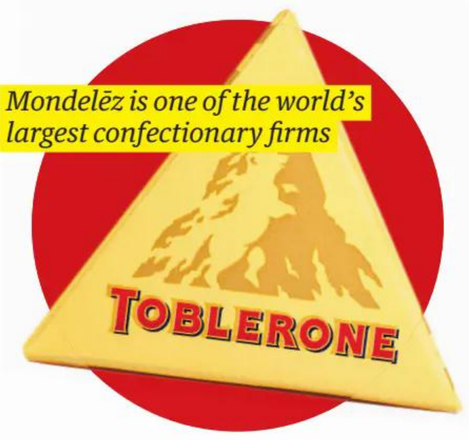
The US food group Mondelēz is one of the world's largest confectionery companies and also owns Ritz and TUC biscuits, Cadbury and Côte D'Or chocolate and the coffee brands JAG, Jacobs and Velours Noir.

It was found to have been involved in 22 unfair trade practices, according to the European Commission. This meant that wholesalers and shoppers and traders were prevented from buying chocolate bars in another member state where they could be up to 40% cheaper or selling into a market where they could get a higher price for their product.

"It is blatantly illegal," said the EU's competition commissioner, Margrethe Vestager, adding that the fine sent a "clear signal" the commission would penalise any company that broke the single market rules.

"This case is about the price of groceries, which is a key concern to European citizens – and even more obvious in times of very high inflation, where many are in a cost of living crisis." She said the EU investigation, which started in 2019, showed that Mondelēz had "illegally restricted retailers from sourcing these products from member states where prices are lower" to maintain higher prices. "This harmed consumers who ended up paying more for chocolates, biscuits and coffee," she said.

The restrictive practices breached internal market rules that allowed shoppers to buy from a different member state if products were cheaper or manufacturers or wholesalers to sell in a member state where they got higher prices for their goods.



Mondelēz is one of the world's largest confectionary firms

This "parallel trade" was "at the heart" of the concept of the single market, Vestager told reporters. She said price differences between member states for chocolate ranged from 10% to 40% and "sometimes more".

Vestager said the commission had found Mondelēz prevented 11 distributors "making such sales either by imposing contractual restrictions or by asking them to request permission on a case by case basis". It also found it had abused its dominant position.

In one instance Mondelēz took Côte D'Or chocolate bars off the shelves in the Netherlands to "prevent retailers reselling them in Belgium" where they were more expensive. In another case it prevented a wholesaler from buying its chocolate in Germany where it was cheaper. The commission said that unfair practices had stopped in 2020.

Business view
Nils Pratley



Forget Thames Water's woes: National Grid proves investors will still get behind UK assets

So much for the idea that the woes of the water sector, and Thames Water in particular, would kill investors' appetite for all British infrastructure assets. Here comes National Grid, which will probably be the UK's biggest-spending infrastructure company over the next decade, with a mammoth fundraising that would not be possible if the stink from Thames had infected everything in the vicinity.

National Grid's near-£7bn rights issue, to back a five-year £60bn spending programme in the UK and US, is the biggest by a London-listed company since 2009. It is larger than expected and comes before the UK energy regulator, Ofgem, has nailed down the price control regime for the 2026-31 period. Throw in the supposed uncertainties created by Thames, plus a general election, and you might assume the safe option was to wait a while.

Instead, the notable feature of yesterday's announcement is how easily one can raise £7bn when the cash is needed to help fund investment, rather than to repair a broken balance sheet. Yes, the shares fell 11% as the market absorbed the dilution from the new equity, but that's par for the course for this sort of exercise.

Financial markets, then, are not suffering a general panic about the UK's regulation of utilities, as a few scaremongers in the water industry would have us believe. Instead, investors seem to have reached the commonsense conclusion that Thames's troubles are self-inflicted and isolated.



▲ *National Grid's £7bn rights issue will help fund £60bn in investment*
PHOTOGRAPH: GARETH FULLER/PA

Electricity networks are not exactly like water, of course. The regulators are different and electricity comes with a net-zero halo as windfarms, solar farms and nuclear stations are plugged into the grid. Yet the tale from water's contagion merchants was that funding costs could rise across the UK infrastructure landscape if Thames goes down the plughole, wiping out its shareholders and (possibly) inflicting some pain on its bondholders.

> *Even in the water sector itself, borrowing costs for the better-run companies have risen only modestly during Thames's troubles*

As things stand, though, such terrible visions aren't materialising. Even in the water sector itself, borrowing costs for the better-run companies have risen only modestly during Thames's public agonies.

That analysis could change when Ofwat, the water regulator, eventually opines on the business plans, bill increases and cost of capital for the next five-year period. (That was due to happen on 12 June, but the election may now cause a delay.) Proposals seen as "tough" on financial returns might indeed affect investors' appetite to put up capital. But that outcome is probably not the way to bet, as argued in this column previously. Ofwat, like Ofgem, wants to accelerate investment, which means allowing profitable returns on capital.

The difference with Thames is simply that it is an outlier. Its financial engineering was more extreme and its operational performance more appalling than the rest; no regulator anywhere can be seen to land bill-payers with the cost of those mistakes. Thames's "special case" status seems to be understood by financial markets. If you don't screw up monumentally, life carries on. The contagion risk for wider UK infrastructure looks minimal.



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'[These properties are] just the tip of the iceberg of dirty money flowing through UK property'

Margaret Hodge
Labour MP

Margaret Hodge with the Labour candidate for Kensington and Bayswater, Joe Powell, on the 'kleptocracy walking tour'
PHOTOGRAPH: @MARGARETHODGE

'Kleptocracy walking tour' MP goes on the trail of dirty money

Rupert Neate
Wealth correspondent

Margaret Hodge, the veteran Labour MP and former minister, is knocking on doors of multimillion-pound London properties.

These homes are linked to the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, and the Azerbaijani president, Ilham Aliyev, in gated communities in Kensington and closely guarded by private security.

The MP for Barking, east London, is unfazed. She has spent a large part of her parliamentary career campaigning against the UK being used to launder "dirty money" of foreign leaders, and this serves to underline a continuing problem.

Hodge is leading a "kleptocracy walking tour" of some of the UK's richest streets to visit homes linked to kleptocrats, oligarchs and individuals subject to sanctions to "discuss details of properties, the impact of dirty money on our politics and economy, and UK corruption issues more broadly".

The first stop is a £4.4m ground-floor flat in a glass and steel block next door to the Design Museum. It was bought, in cash, by Lavrov's "stepdaughter", Polina Kovaleva in 2016, according to Land Registry documents, when she was a 21-year-old student at Loughborough University.

Kovaleva is the daughter of Svetlana Polyakova, named by independent Russian media as Lavrov's romantic partner. Kovaleva was subject to sanctions by the UK government in March 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine.

She still owns the flat, according to the Land Registry, despite calls for it – and thousands of UK assets owned by people subject to sanctions – to be seized, sold and the proceeds used to help Ukraine.

When the government placed Kovaleva on the list, it said: "This sends a strong signal that those benefiting from association of [sic] those responsible for Russian aggression are in scope of our sanctions." "How can it be a strong signal if she still owns it?" Hodge says as she marches up to the building, which has a swimming pool, gym, spa, cinema, golf simulator, games room and views across Holland Park.

Before she has a chance to press the buzzer the building's security spot her. "I would just like to say hello to her," says Hodge. "I'm a member of parliament."

"I'm sorry, but she is not in," the guard says. "How do you know she's not in?" Hodge replies, noting that he has not rung Kovaleva's flat.



Sergei Lavrov: Hodge visited a flat belonging to his 'stepdaughter'

When told to leave by a second guard, Hodge says: "She lives here, I have the right to knock on her door." Back out on the street, Hodge says Kovaleva's flat is "just the tip of the iceberg of dirty money flowing through UK property".

"A lot of these kleptocrats buy property here in the UK and that's their route into laundering their money into a legitimate system," she says. "[That the UK is] the jurisdiction of choice for so many kleptocrats and bad actors and wrongdoers is in part because the financial services sector is very lightly regulated, we do very little about enforcing the regulations, and our relationship with our crown dependencies."

The deputy foreign secretary, Andrew Mitchell, disclosed last week that nearly 40% of the world's dirty money is going through the City of London and other UK territories. This is despite the law, since 2022, requiring overseas entities who want to buy, sell or transfer property or land in the UK to register with Companies House and make clear who their "registrable beneficial owners or managing officers" are. He said the crown dependencies and overseas territories would face fresh Foreign Office demands to comply with UK laws on public registers of beneficial share ownership.

Research by the Centre for Public Data, University of Warwick and the London School of Economics found that more than 70% of properties in England and Wales held via overseas companies (109,000 out of 152,000) still do not publish information about who really owns them. They found that for 35% of properties owned via overseas shell companies (54,000 properties), even law enforcement agencies do not know the true identities of the beneficial owners.

David Lammy, the shadow foreign secretary, said on Tuesday that if elected a Labour government would make fighting corruption and forcing greater disclosure of property ownership one of the core themes of his foreign secretaryship.

After being politely asked to leave Kovaleva's building, Hodge continues her walking tour to another luxury gated community, where the family of Ilham Aliyev, according to the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, owns a £29.2m six-floor townhouse. Again, Hodge knocks on the door; again, she is asked to leave by security guards.

Morrisons warehouse staff on strike over changes to pensions

Sarah Butler

Almost 1,000 workers at two Morrisons warehouses will strike for the next three days over a cut in company contributions to their pensions that they say is worth up to £10m a year.

Warehouse stock controllers, cooks, administrators and canteen staff at the sites in Gadbrook, Cheshire, and Wakefield, West Yorkshire, who earn between £12 and £13 an hour, say they will lose an average of £500 a year each from a company plan to cut its pension contributions while forcing workers to pay more.



A picket line at the warehouse in Gadbrook, Cheshire, yesterday

Unite, the union representing the workers, says Morrisons is also ditching a long service pay award and increasing the speed at which goods are expected to be processed in warehouses. Sharon Graham, Unite's general secretary, has accused Morrisons – which is struggling with high levels of debt after a £7bn takeover by the US private equity firm Clayton Dubilier & Rice in 2021 – of "planning to fleece workers".

"These unmerited changes to workers' pensions will leave our members worse off every month. Unite will not stand for such behaviour from any employer, let alone one like Morrisons who is raking in massive profits during a cost of living crisis."

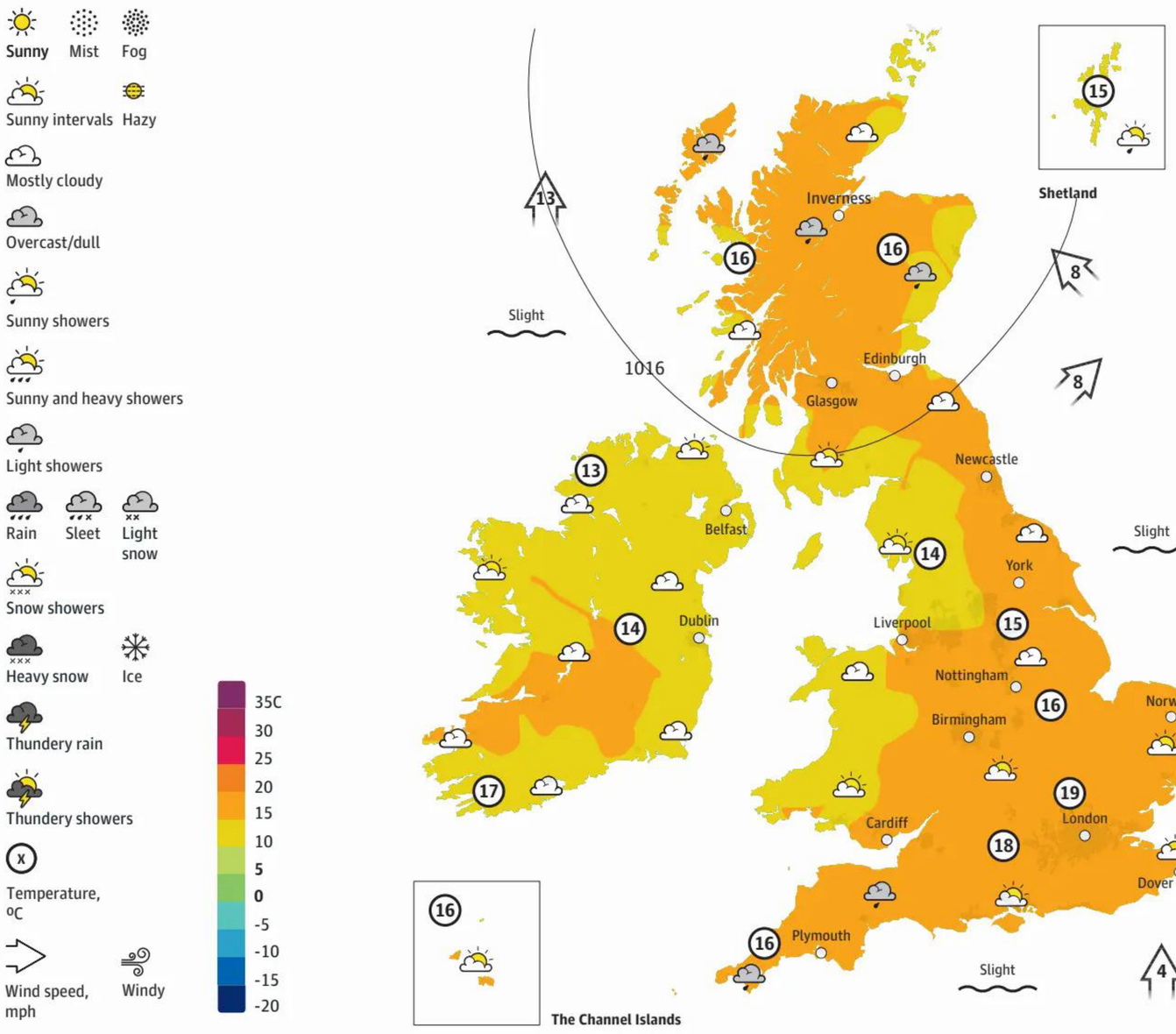
Until March, workers paid 3% of pay into pensions while Morrisons put in 5%, but it has moved to a policy of each side paying 4%. Morrisons said it would ultimately pay more into pensions because of planned changes to pension auto-enrolment rules, and that the loss in contributions per worker would be more than offset by an offered pay rise.

At present, workers earning less than £10,000 a year are not automatically enrolled on a pension scheme and firms do not have to pay contributions on earnings below £6,240. The government plans to abolish those limits, meaning all workers may have to be enrolled. A consultation report will be published in the autumn.

Morrisons said the two warehouses were operating, but at "reduced capacity", and that it was open to further dialogue. A spokesperson said: "We have made a number of new proposals to Unite, including a 9% pay award, a new service award scheme, and improvements to the planned changes."

Weather
Friday 24 May 2024

UK and Ireland Noon today



Forecast

Low 7 High 19
Tomorrow



Low 11 High 19
Sunday



Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO_2 readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

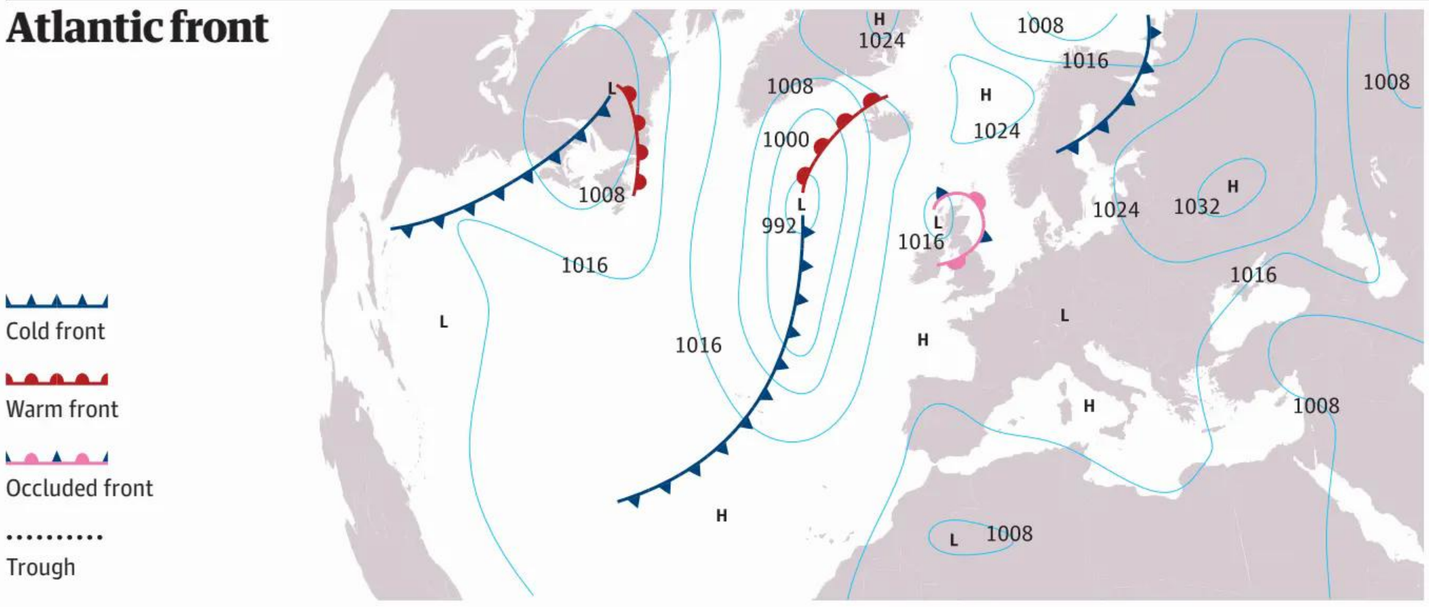
Latest	
21 May 2024	427.69
Weekly average	
12 May 2024	427.03
23 May 2023	423.49
23 May 2014	402.07
Pre-industrial base	*280*
Safe level	*350*

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

	Lows and highs	Precipitation	Air pollution
London	9 19	5%	Low
Manchester	7 15	55%	Low
Edinburgh	8 16	85%	Low
Belfast	10 14	85%	Low
Birmingham	8 17	80%	Low
Brighton	9 17	5%	Low
Bristol	8 16	10%	Low
Cardiff	7 16	15%	Low
Newcastle	7 17	70%	Low
Penzance	10 16	70%	Low

Atlantic front



Weatherwatch

Since 2015, when governments promised to try to keep global temperatures from rising 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, it has always seemed likely they would fail. Scientific data now shows this target was already being exceeded by quite a margin last summer in the northern hemisphere.

In an area including the whole of Europe, most of North America and Asia the average temperature then was 2.07C hotter than between 1850 and 1900, which scientists have been using as the "reference period" to measure the averages before the industrial revolution began to alter the climate.

But even that measurement may be too optimistic. Scientists say in the 19th century many of the thermometers and weather stations on which that average was based were not properly positioned, so it is possible the world was cooler than the measurements reflect.

In order to get a better "average", scientists used tree ring data from the whole of the northern hemisphere for the last 2,000 years and concluded the temperature was 0.24C lower than previously estimated. In this case, last summer's temperature rise would actually be 2.31C in these northern climes. **Paul Brown**

Around the world

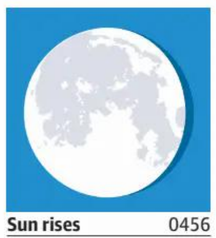
Algiers	28	Lisbon	25
Ams'dam	18	Madrid	27
Athens	27	Malaga	25
Auckland	16	Melb'rne	15
B Aires	12	Mexico C	32
Bangkok	31	Miami	33
Barcelona	21	Milan	21
Basra	43	Mombasa	30
Beijing	23	Moscow	21
Berlin	25	Mumbai	34
Bermuda	25	N Orleans	32
Brussels	18	Nairobi	24
Budapest	21	New Delhi	42
C'hagen	20	New York	30
Cairo	32	Oslo	26
Cape Town	21	Paris	19
Chicago	27	Perth	25
Corfu	28	Prague	20
Dakar	28	Reykjavik	10
Dhaka	37	Rio de J	31
Dublin	13	Rome	23
Florence	25	Shanghai	28
Gibraltar	22	Singapore	31
H Kong	28	Stockh'm	20
Harare	25	Strasb'g	19
Helsinki	26	Sydney	19
Istanbul	23	Tel Aviv	27
Jo'burg	22	Tenerife	24
K Lumpur	33	Tokyo	26
K'mandu	31	Toronto	25
Kabul	28	Vancouv'r	15
Kingston	32	Vienna	21
Kolkata	37	Warsaw	28
L Angeles	19	Wash'ton	29
Lagos	31	Well'ton	12
Lima	20	Zurich	18

High tides

Source: © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Times are local UK times

Aberdeen	**0230**	4.0m	**1451**	4.0m	**London Bridge**	**0301**	6.8m	**1520**	6.7m
Avonmouth	**0830**	12.2m	**2049**	12.3m	**Lossiemouth**	**0101**	3.8m	**1324**	3.8m
Barrow	**0028**	8.7m	**1248**	8.6m	**Milford Haven**	**0727**	6.5m	**1945**	6.6m
Belfast	**0008**	3.3m	**1223**	3.3m	**Newquay**	**0617**	6.4m	**1835**	6.6m
Cobh	**0640**	3.8m	**1901**	3.9m	**North Shields**	**0436**	4.7m	**1656**	4.7m
Cromer	**0744**	4.7m	**2004**	4.6m	**Oban**	**0654**	3.7m	**1914**	3.7m
Dover	**0000**	6.3m	**1220**	6.3m	**Penzance**	**0550**	5.1m	**1810**	5.3m
Dublin	**0027**	3.8m	**1258**	3.7m	**Plymouth**	**0707**	5.1m	**1923**	5.2m
Galway	**0632**	4.7m	**1843**	4.8m	**Portsmouth**	**0033**	4.5m	**1257**	4.4m
Greenock	**0145**	3.3m	**1342**	3.2m	**Southport**	**--**	--	**1206**	8.3m
Harwich	**0049**	3.7m	**1306**	3.8m	**Stornoway**	**0759**	4.3m	**2019**	4.5m
Holyhead	**1139**	5.2m	**2356**	5.3m	**Weymouth**	**0715**	1.1m	**1933**	1.2m
Hull	**0732**	7.1m	**1952**	6.8m	**Whitby**	**0511**	5.2m	**1731**	5.2m
Leith	**0348**	5.2m	**1612**	5.2m	**Wick**	**0024**	3.2m	**1245**	3.2m
Liverpool	**0008**	8.8m	**1225**	8.6m	**Workington**	**0031**	7.8m	**1248**	7.7m

Sun & Moon



Sun rises	0456
Sun sets	2058
Moon rises	2251
Moon sets	0450
Last Quarter	30 May

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2024

Lighting up

Belfast	2140 to 0503
Birm'ham	2110 to 0457
Brighton	2056 to 0458
Bristol	2109 to 0506
Carlisle	2128 to 0448
Cork	2134 to 0527
Dublin	2133 to 0510
Glasgow	2140 to 0449
Harlech	2122 to 0504
Inverness	2150 to 0436
London	2058 to 0454
M'chester	2117 to 0454
Newcastle	2124 to 0443
Norwich	2059 to 0444
Penzance	2114 to 0523

Football

Lopetegui has much to prove at West Ham

Jacob Steinberg, page 41 →

Rugby union

Ford-Robinson calm before battle with Sharks

Gerard Meagher, page 37 →



Sport



▲ *Grimsby Town owners Andrew Pettit (left) and Jason Stockwood are driving change at the club*
TIM GOODE/PA IMAGES

Tambourine man

Why our happy band at Grimsby will keep sharing spotlight as we focus on future

Jason Stockwood



In the 1980s, a big night out meant my brothers and mates donning our shiny shirts, necking several pints of Tennent's, then shuffling around the dancefloor of Pier 39 nightclub in Cleethorpes to the sound of George Benson's *Give Me the Night*.

Decades later I found out that the person who wrote this song, Rod Temperton, was a former fish filleter, born down the road from that now-defunct nightspot. He also played in the band Heatwave, wrote on Michael Jackson's Thriller album and has a back catalogue that puts him in the pantheon of great songwriters. I love the pictures of Rod next to Quincy Jones in the studios of LA or hearing his Lincolnshire accent talking about writing for Donna Summer. Despite his monumental success, he was known as The Invisible Man in the music industry owing to his low profile.

I've been fortunate to work with several brilliant people throughout my career who, like Rod, are more substance over spotlight, people happy to do the work to make the organisation look good but don't require the recognition themselves. Andrew Pettit, my partner at Grimsby Town, is one such leader. When we took control of the club in 2021 we agreed that the chair role would have a three-year term. Last week we announced that my term was up. Neither of us wanted the role, but we knew what was required was to help drive cultural transformation. As I had spent a large part of my career doing this work, it made sense for me to take the first shift. Now it's Andrew's turn.

I had preconceived ideas of what the role might be, largely ill-informed by the oak-panelled private boardroom we inherited and the blazers and club ties that still exist for some directors today. The reality of the role is that Andrew and I have done everything together as partners. The day-to-day involves working with the chief executive and head coach to build a culture of high performance while driving the board conversations on long-term strategy and investments.

Match days are when supporters and commercial partners rightly want to talk to you and share ideas about the club. There is often media to do, and I always tried to walk the ground to get a chance to say hello to as many people as possible. It's about being visible and available, come rain or shine.

I underestimated how a lifetime of supporting the same team can be a source of great kindness and solidarity. I recently visited one of our supporters who had written me a beautifully-considered letter when results were going badly. It offered a hand to pull me up for air from the depths of post-match Twitter, or the occasionally treacherous shallows of other social media; a reminder that most people love and care for the football clubs that are inextricably entwined into the narratives of their own families, irrespective of the results. My favourite part of the conversation was when he told me that he liked the fact "I don't care about how I dress".

We bought the club as part of a wider project to try to be useful in helping change the narrative of the place we love: a narrative that has been backward-looking to a period of industrial decline, to one respectful of the past but future-oriented. Over the past three years, alongside the club, I am proud to have been part of the team that has raised the money to build an Onside Youth Zone in Grimsby and to have co-founded a charity called Our Future, which is focused on building a coalition of people to make change a reality and to reconnect to all those people who are from our town, have had stellar careers and are looking to reconnect to the community. I am convinced the football club can be a connector and conduit to improve both the prospects and the impression people have about our town.

It's still unclear to me whether people who have grown up supporting a club should own one. The highs are intensely high, but the lows have an acuity unlike anything I have experienced. Having an entrepreneurial career helps, as the past 25 years have been about taking risks and living with uncertainty and often failure. Failure is written into the life I have chosen. I have been able to dust myself off from all of them in business, whereas failure at a football club is inconceivable to me. It means too much. The potential failure of a 146-year-old organisation that is core to my own and a whole town's identity feels like a challenge few would willingly take on.

I've been fortunate to work with several brilliant people who are happy to do the work but don't require the recognition

That said, I would, of course, sign up again for this journey in the time it takes someone to write "lefty, tofu-eating, DEI warrior". We achieved what we set out to do three years ago by transforming the culture, re-establishing ourselves as an EFL club and had the bonus of a historic FA Cup run last year. We have the ambition, vision and a strategy for a brighter future and a head coach and chief executive to match. Two weeks after writing about how hard last season was personally, I felt rejuvenated and excited about the season ahead. I am proud of the past three years and believe we are in good shape to kick on. In reality, Andrew and I will continue to work together, but he will be swapping his song writing for lead vocals, and I will grab a tambourine and move back into the lineup.

Jason Stockwood is the vice-chair of Grimsby Town

Murray's stick shift reflects endless hunt for an edge

Switch to a Yonex racket after 20 years with Head is a gamble that may pay off by elongating his career

Tumaini Carayol
Paris

Even as Andy Murray reckoned with a devastating setback in what will probably be the final months of his career, he was still thinking with total clarity. In the aftermath of a serious ankle injury at the Miami Open in March that left him facing a significant layoff, Murray sensed an opportunity.

Before returning home from Florida, the 37-year-old limped to a sports shop and browsed its stash of rackets. He left with a ridiculous haul; 10 frames, scales, a swingweight machine and a roll of lead tape to help modify their weight.

During his six weeks out of competition, Murray worked through the rackets, tinkering and testing which specifications were best. He eventually contacted Yonex to work with their racket professionals.

When he arrived in Bordeaux for his first day of training before last week's ATP Challenger event, Murray caused a stir on planet tennis by going to work with a Yonex Ezone 100. "It was something to do when I was injured," he said.

"I tried lots of different rackets. I tested them with Hawk-Eye when I was able to and I loved the Yonex. I'm really happy to be using the racket and I think it's going to help me for as long as I play."

Over time, top players become closely associated with the manufacturers they endorse. Murray had used Head rackets throughout his career and essentially was the face of the Head Radical range. To some, seeing Murray wielding a Yonex is akin to Harry Kane randomly showing up at Stamford Bridge as a Chelsea player.

As other players learned of Murray's switch, their shocked reactions were comical. Stefanos Tsitsipas was so taken aback he required a moment to process the news. Taylor Fritz needed to hear it twice. Tommy Paul, who endorses Yonex, said: "Wow, that's crazy," before staring silently into space. "I mean, that's awesome."

This has been a long time coming. In the second half of 2021, Murray started looking to change to a different Head racket and tried a few frames before returning to his trusty old weapon. Then and now, Murray has used electronic line-calling systems, which offer players data on pace, spin and much more to choose his racket. It is reflective of Murray's attention to detail that his decisions have been based on data rather than feeling.

This time, he was determined to see how the newer technology would suit his game: "I've been playing with the same racket for 20 years and in that time things change," he said. "The game has changed as well. I used the same string as well for all of that time."

Switching to any other brand would have been a shock, but this is also notable because of how starkly different the two rackets are. Murray's new modified Yonex Ezone 100 is much livelier than his Head PT57A with a larger and different shaped head. He may hope to inject more power into his game at a time when his movement and defensive capabilities have waned.

A racket can come to feel like the extension of a player's arm and as such they become sensitive to even the most minute changes to it. Cameron Norrie has used the same type since he was 12 years old.

He may hope to inject more power to his game at a time when his movement has waned



▲ *Andy Murray picked up a taste for Yonex from a sport shop in Miami*

Some players periodically conduct blind tests with numerous rackets: "I'll line up, put all the rackets the same, and I'll pick which one I like," says Coco Gauff. "I did that two years ago. I ended up picking the racket I was already using. I didn't know [it was my one]. That shows I'm happy where I'm at."

Fritz plays with an extremely light stick. In his late teens, he decided to add a very small amount of weight to it, five grams: "Then I had the worst year I've ever had," he says, laughing. "I hated it. I went back.

"Who knows what [the problem] could be. You change rackets, one shot feels better, one shot feels probably worse. I'm happy how everything feels for me, so I've never really been one to tinker around with it."

At the end of 2022, a breakthrough season when he climbed into the top 30 for the first time, Paul, now ranked No 14, changed from Wilson to a Yonex VCORE 98. In January, he reached a grand slam semi-final for the first time at the Australian Open. "It was all the racket, it wasn't me," he says, laughing.

Many do not adjust with such ease. It often takes time to grow accustomed to a new frame's nuances and to hit the ball freely under intense pressure. There can even be a period of discomfort.

"Breaking up that pattern and doing certain things differently, it ruins your rhythm," Tsitsipas says. "It ruins your flow. It gets you thinking. Once you start thinking a lot, it's an issue because you can't concentrate on what's happening in front of you."

That can be an acceptable trade-off for a player when they have long-term growth in mind, but Murray's pursuit of grand slam titles probably made him more resistant to significant change. Now, not only has he changed in the middle of the season, he has also done so in what he has said will probably be the final few months of his career. It may also be an indication he is hoping to find reasons to play on.

While many professionals say they would consider a change, few would do so mid-season. Iga Swiatek had thought about testing new rackets after the 2023 season, but even that risk was too great. Tsitsipas says he has made minimal changes to his specifications over the years: "It has served me relatively well.

"I might be a bit more open-minded to it towards the end of the year. We'll see. These are the moments you try to go try things and experiment with a few changes, but definitely not during the season. This is something that I wouldn't be too open-minded to try."

After 20 years of sticking with the same frame, Murray was finally brave enough to twist. It is an extremely bold and unusual move, but it is perhaps another glimpse of the drive this transcendent talent still possesses, one still so passionate about his craft and so determined to improve. The question is whether he will.

Four to watch at Roland Garros

There is a host of exciting – and vulnerable – talent in the women's draw in Paris. **Yara El-Shaboury** selects some who are especially worth keeping an eye on



British hope
Katie Boulter
Boulter makes her main draw debut. Her best performance was reaching the second round of the qualifying stages last year. Clay is her least familiar surface but she comes into the tournament with confidence after claiming two WTA titles in the past year.

Fierce competitor
Jelena Ostapenko
The Latvian's uncompromising play led to her only grand slam victory, in Paris in 2017, and she recently re-entered the top 10 for the first time in five years. She is fiercely competitive and known for openly berating her opponents, the umpire, and even herself on the court.

Unseeded Nadal faces tough start against Zverev

Tumaini Carayol
Paris

An unseeded Rafael Nadal will face Alexander Zverev in a heavyweight first-round contest at the French Open for what may be his final appearance at a tournament he has won a record 14 times.

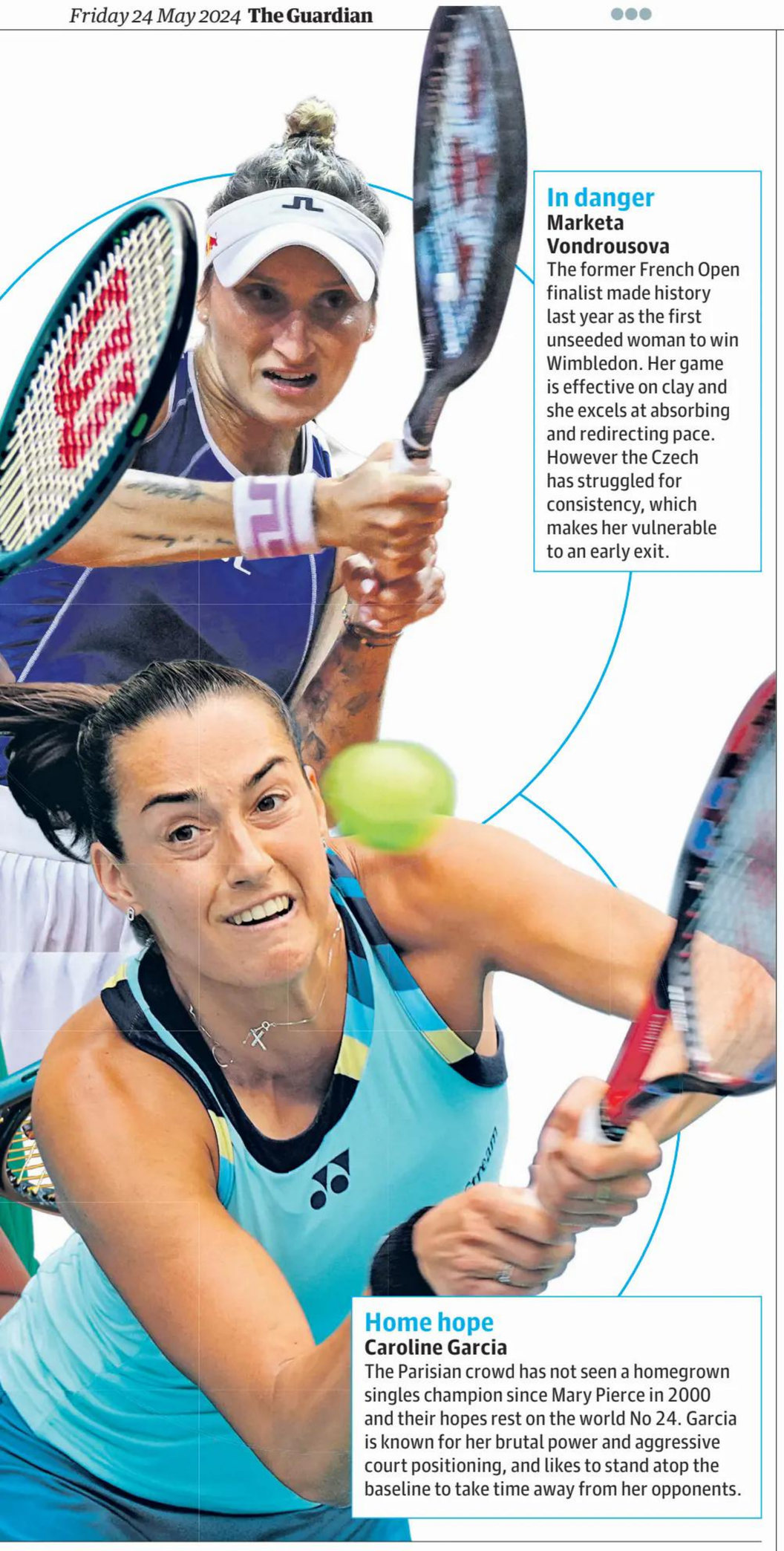
Ranked No 276 in the world, Nadal is unseeded at Roland Garros for the first time, meaning he was always vulnerable to facing a top seed early on. He has endured a difficult 18 months, struggling with various injuries that have forced him to spend most of his time away from the tour.

Nadal has compiled a remarkable 112-3 (97.4%) win-loss record at the French Open, an unprecedented level of dominance at one event, but he has not competed here since his 2022 triumph. While the 37-year-old has never lost in the first round in Paris, he has never competed without being a top-five seed.

Zverev is in top form having won the Italian Open in Rome last week, but his domestic abuse trial in Berlin will begin during the tournament, on 31 May. He has contested a penalty order after being accused of physically abusing a woman, his ex-girlfriend Brenda Patea, and "damaging her health" during an argument in Berlin in May 2020. He has always denied the allegations.

While Zverev is not required to attend the trial, and in Rome he said that he will not, the judge could summon him to appear if he is given one week's notice. It is scheduled to take place on two dates during the French Open, plus 7 June, and then two dates during Wimbledon; 5 and 12 July. Eight dates are scheduled.

Nadal had competed in one event



In danger
Marketa Vondrousova
The former French Open finalist made history last year as the first unseeded woman to win Wimbledon. Her game is effective on clay and she excels at absorbing and redirecting pace. However the Czech has struggled for consistency, which makes her vulnerable to an early exit.

Home hope
Caroline Garcia
The Parisian crowd has not seen a homegrown singles champion since Mary Pierce in 2000 and their hopes rest on the world No 24. Garcia is known for her brutal power and aggressive court positioning, and likes to stand atop the baseline to take time away from her opponents.

this year before the clay court season and he returned to action in Barcelona extremely uncertain about his body.

Andy Murray has also received an extremely high-profile first-round draw as he resumes his rivalry with Stan Wawrinka, the 2015 champion. The winner will face the British No 1, Cameron Norrie, the 32nd seed, in the second round.

Novak Djokovic, the top seed and defending champion, will begin against Pierre-Hugues Herbert. Zverev and Nadal have been drawn in the 37-year-old Djokovic's half, while Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner arrive after injuries forced them to withdraw from Rome.

Jack Draper will face a qualifier, and a potential second-round match against Alcaraz, while Dan Evans will face Holger Rune.

The women's draw has also thrown up the possibility of some significant early-round matches. Iga Swiatek, the world No 1 and defending champion, could face Naomi Osaka in the second round, which would be a meeting of the two most successful players in the women's draw. Swiatek, who arrives in Paris after winning Madrid and Rome, will begin her title defence against a qualifier, while Osaka starts against Lucia Bronzetti.

As the top four players continue to distinguish themselves from the rest of the field, third-seed Coco Gauff has landed in Swiatek's half while Aryna Sabalenka, the second seed, and the fourth, Elena Rybakina, lead the bottom half. After losing to Swiatek in the finals of Madrid and Rome, Sabalenka will play Erika Andreeva.

In her first main draw appearance, the British No 1, Katie Boulter, seeded 26th, faces an extremely tough opening match against the former world No 2 Paula Badosa. Harriet Dart will face Linda Noskova, the 27th seed.



▲ *Rafael Nadal, now ranked 276, has won the French Open 14 times*

Rugby union

Ford-Robinson calm as Sharks begin to circle

Prop extols virtues of life away from the scrum but is fully focused on Gloucester's Challenge Cup final

Gerard Meagher

Jamal Ford-Robinson is detailing what the award he won at Gloucester's end of season bash was for when eventually he explains that "essentially it's about being a good club man". Given his standing among his peers, you would be hard pressed to find anyone who he has shared a dressing room with to argue.

The award was a welcome end to a hectic season for Ford-Robinson that began in mid-October when he was summoned into the squad at the 11th hour and scored the winning try against Harlequins. It could yet end with a second winners' medal of the campaign with Gloucester facing South African side the Sharks in tonight's Challenge Cup final while along the way he has hit a century of Premiership appearances as well as 100 matches for Gloucester.

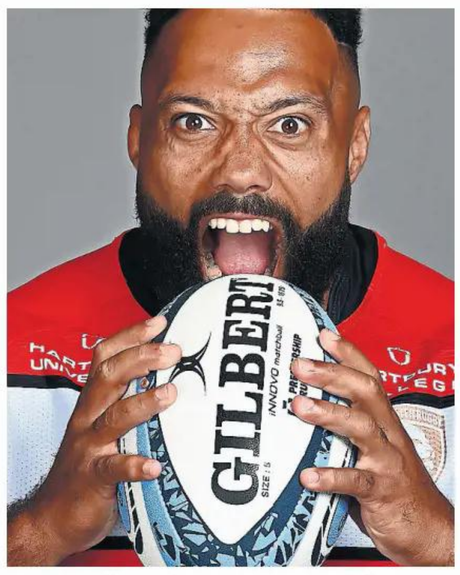
So how will he spend his summer reflecting on it all? "Weekend getaways in the caravan," he says. "I'm all about the caravan life. I went down to Brean [in Somerset] and got some serious caravan envy because we definitely had the smallest one. But I only paid £3,500 and I'm very happy with it. It's big enough for me, the missus and the dogs."

Add caravanning to the list of interests that Ford-Robinson enjoys. He has dabbled in wrestling - "I'm undisputed, undefeated, still 1-0!" - as well as esports coaching. He's a keen photographer and has recently started vlogging, while it was during lockdown that his TikTok videos went viral.

The TikTok videos may have dried up of late - though one of Ford-Robinson having his broken nose mended has received a million views - but he is prominent on social media. He has a big personality and does not mind sharing it. "I was in Leicester's academy from 16 until 18/19 and one of the issues I had was that I didn't have anything going on outside of rugby," says Ford-Robinson. "It wasn't looking good for me in terms of moving on to a senior contract. That was tough, it was a dark period in my life and that's what has led me to being the person that I am now. It's about not taking yourself too seriously."

As healthy a view as Ford-Robinson evidently has, you sense a hint of wariness to avoid coming across as someone who is not invested enough in Gloucester's fortunes. For all that his off-field interests can garner attention, equally, he is pleased his performances on the pitch have been recognised this season.

"I've very much willing to be open and have a joke but it's also nice to receive an award like that, especially from Skivs [George Skivington, Gloucester's head coach], because he does not give a flying monkeys about social media," says Ford-Robinson. "I'm not sure he's heard of it.



▲ *Jamal Ford-Robinson says he tries not to take life too seriously*

"One of the things that was referenced by Skivs when he announced me as the winner of the award was some movement in the Prem Cup final. I was due to start the game at loosehead but we had a few things happen during the week and I ended up being on the bench at tighthead. I was moved around to facilitate the bigger picture."

A victim of his versatility perhaps - Ford-Robinson is a rare breed in that he is equally happy on either side of the scrum - but clearly someone valued by Gloucester. When reaching his 100th game the former chief executive Lance Bradley explained how Ford-Robinson "is one of the best people I've ever worked with, including in my pre-sport days. Whatever trench you were in, you'd want him with you."

He will be needed in the trench with the Sharks packing a host of Springbok power in their forward pack including the prop Ox Nché and the second row Eben Etzebeth. Ford-Robinson is aware of their talents but does not strike you as someone who will be overawed by the occasion, nor succumb to paralysis by analysis.

"You saw what [Nché] did during the World Cup. When I've seen him play I've been very impressed. Not that I've got an all-seeing eye for it. But you want to play against the big players and see how you fare. If I watch rugby on the rare occasion it's more to just watch it as a game of rugby. At the end of the day he's just another human being."

Gloucester head into the match on the back of a welcome win over Newcastle to round off their Premiership season and flush the 90-0 drubbing by Northampton out of their system. "Our Premiership performances aren't where they should be but I call it back to the Prem Cup final, winning that at home, you don't get that opportunity very often and being in a European final and hopefully walking away with that one. When you look back at your career, you're not necessarily going to remember league positions, it's more, 'do you remember that final down in Tottenham? Do you remember that final that we had at home.' It's those big occasions when you have trophies on the line that will rest in your memory."

Sport In brief

Formula One

Norris bullish about catching Verstappen

Lando Norris believes he and his McLaren team remain in the Formula One world championship fight with Red Bull's Max Verstappen. Norris took his debut F1 win in Miami and last weekend at Imola put on a late charge to hunt Verstappen down. He was within seven-tenths of a second of the Dutchman at the chequered flag. Before this weekend's Monaco Grand Prix the 24-year-old was optimistic the gap to Verstappen could be bridged. "I am 60 points behind Max so it's a long, long way to go," he said. "We have definitely put ourselves in there. We lost a lot over the first couple of weekends so that's hurt us, but we are still a third of the way through so there are plenty of opportunities. We have things coming in the future and if things turn around we can easily start to come back at some of the teams." Norris also pointed out how strong he believes the team are, with his Australian teammate, Oscar Piastri, finishing fourth at Imola. "Along with Ferrari, we have two cars up there performing at every single session, in every single race, in qualifying," said Norris.
Giles Richards

Golf

Scheffler police officer left his bodycam off

The Louisville Metro police department has taken "corrective action" against an officer who arrested Scottie Scheffler before the second round of the US PGA Championship last week. The department said the officer failed to activate his body-worn camera (BWC) during the arrest. Scheffler, 27, was arrested in the early hours of last Friday on charges that he injured the LMPD detective, Bryan Gillis, and disobeyed commands as he drove to the course. The Masters champion claimed the incident was caused by a misunderstanding.
Bryan Armen Graham

Cricket *First one-day international*

Capsey digs in to earn 'scrappy' win over Pakistan

Raf Nicholson
County Ground, Derby

Alice Capsey hit a career-best 44 from 65 balls as England comfortably beat Pakistan by 37 runs in the first ODI against Pakistan at Derby.

But despite the victory margin the captain, Heather Knight described England's performance as "scrappy" and "a little bit lacking in execution", after a frustrating unbeaten 28-run last-wicket stand by the tourists.

"We want to be ruthless," Charlie Dean said. "Against teams like Australia, New Zealand, South Africa who have more depth in batting, we need to make sure that partnerships don't form near the back end. How we go about that is something we're exploring."

Put in to bat under grey skies, England had managed to score 243 for nine. But their innings never fully launched - there were bits-and-pieces contributions from all their top seven, but no one reached a half-century.

Capsey came the closest, but even she struggled to pace her innings, missing several attempted reverses and ramps in her 67-run partnership with Amy Jones, before plonking the ball back into the hands of bowler Nashra Sandhu in the 44th over.

Surprisingly, the usually flawless Jones shelled a couple of straightforward chances behind the stumps, helping Pakistan put a decent dent in their chase by the halfway point, reaching 106 for three. They were helped by some wayward English bowling, with the hosts conceding 40 extras to Pakistan's eight - a record for England in the 50-over format.

Jones was given the chance to atone in both cases - holding on to edges from the same batters, Sidra Amin and Muneeba Ali, off balls from Lauren Bell which jagged away. The curse of Pakistan's brittle batting then struck again, as they slumped from 149 for four to 178 for nine in the space of eight overs. But as their opponents decided to batten down the hatches, England failed to finish the job.

Knight had called for England to "soak up pressure" and to play with "calculated aggression" in the eve-of-series press conference, but no one quite found that sweet spot yesterday - least of all the skipper herself. She was dropped twice, the first time on nought trying to punch down the ground, and proceeded to crawl to 29 from 49 balls before finally swiping at one from Aliya Riaz outside off and toe-ending it to the keeper.

Nat Sciver-Brunt thumped back-to-back boundaries through the leg side against Nida Dar, but fell in similar unnecessary fashion to the same bowler two overs after her captain.

Otherwise, the remaining seven England wickets fell to spin. That included two to off-spinner Umm-e-Hani, who had missed out on selection in the T20s but yesterday took just 13 balls to remove Tammy Beaumont lbw after she failed to nail the sweep shot. "Slow bowling with the off side up is our nemesis," Dean said. "It's the kind of bowling we don't typically face in regional cricket, so it's a challenge."

Dean herself chipped in with 20 to add a bit of impetus at the back end of the innings, but in the main there was a surprising lack of confidence on display from a side who had whitewashed their opponents in the 20-over format a mere four days ago.

England were partly hobbled by the unexpected absence of the in-form Danni Wyatt, who missed out through illness. That did, however, remove coach Jon Lewis's selection headache, giving him a chance to throw in all three of his spinners for the first time in 50-over cricket, as well as two seam options in the shape of Bell and Kate Cross.

All bar Sarah Glenn chimed in with wickets, but there was also a lack of discipline at times, not least from Sophie Ecclestone, whose full tosses provided easy middle-overs pickings for Dar and Riaz.

Dean, though, eventually removed the pair in successive overs - Dar slog-sweeping to Beaumont in the deep, before Riaz appealed in vain to DRS after missing a sweep shot and being struck in front of leg stump - and a Pakistan mini-collapse of three for seven in 13 balls turned into an Ecclestone-inspired maxi-collapse which cost them the match.



Alice Capsey hit three boundaries in a breezy 44 at the County Ground

Scoreboard

Derby England beat Pakistan by 37 runs.

England

TT Beaumont lbw b Umm-e-Hani	33
ME Bouchier lbw b Nashra Sandhu	17
***HC Knight** c Najiha Alvi b Aliya Riaz	29
NR Sciver-Brunt c Najiha Alvi b Aliya Riaz	31
A Capsey c & b Nashra Sandhu	44
†AE Jones c Ayesha Zafar b Nida Dar	37
CE Dean b Nida Dar	20
S Ecclestone c Sadaf Shamas b Nida Dar	1
S Glenn not out	16
KL Cross c Nashra Sandhu b Umm-e-Hani	6
LK Bell not out	1
Extras (w8)	8
Total (for 9, 50 overs)	243

Fall 45, 61, 107, 118, 185, 216, 218, 227, 236.

Bowling Fatima Sana 6-0-39-0; Diana Baig 4-0-22-0; Nashra Sandhu 10-0-41-2; Umm-e-Hani 10-0-43-2; Nida Dar 10-0-56-3; Aliya Riaz 6-0-24-2; Ayesha Zafar 4-0-18-0.

Pakistan

Sadaf Shamas b Ecclestone	28
Sidra Amin c Jones b Bell	2
Muneeba Ali c Jones b Bell	34
Ayesha Zafar b Ecclestone	8
***Nida Dar** c Beaumont b Dean	26
Aliya Riaz lbw b Dean	21
Fatima Sana lbw b Ecclestone	5
†Najiha Alvi not out	26
Umm-e-Hani b Cross	1
Diana Baig c Sciver-Brunt b Cross	9
Nashra Sandhu not out	6
Extras (b1, lb6, w31, nb2)	40
Total (for 9, 50 overs)	206

Fall 37, 67, 79, 117, 149, 154, 156, 163, 178.

Bowling Cross 10-0-46-2; Bell 10-0-42-2; Ecclestone 10-1-26-3; Dean 10-1-39-2; Glenn 10-0-46-0.

Toss Pakistan elected to field.

Umpires S Redfern and K Cotton.

Darts *Premier League*

Littler hits nine-darter on way to final glory

Jonathan Liew
O2 Arena

We are now through the looking glass. We're over the frontier. We're not in Kansas any more, Toto. For a 17-year-old kid is now a major darts champion, and it feels totally inevitable, and it still makes absolutely no sense. Whatever Luke Littler goes on to achieve in this sport, somehow nothing will ever quite match the sheer tidal wave of shock and wonder he has inspired in his first six months as a professional, an explosion of talent and coolness and colour and attitude and showmanship that is, quite frankly, beyond comprehension.

Littler beat Luke Humphries 11-7 to claim the Premier League title, clinching victory courtesy of a stunning and irresistible surge after the interval that left the world champion and world No 1 gasping. Along the way Littler hit a nine-dart finish - 180, 180, 141 - that brought a crowd of 14,000 to the very brink of rapture. For a player of his tender years, he already instinctively grasps the first rule of big-time darts: give the people what they want.

There was a tear in the eye as he celebrated this win with his family and partner, a rare crack in a facade that thus far has been built on an arch and unshakeable self-assurance. "I've been practising really hard," he said in a small voice. "You could see on the oche I was dead focused, I didn't want to blink. I can put myself in the hat. I'm a major winner."

At 9.33pm, the pair emerged from the dressing room after the break with the score tied at 5-5. The standard had been good not spectacular. What followed in the subsequent 12 minutes will be replayed and relived for years by everyone who saw it.

Both players began the 11th leg with 180s. Littler hit another maximum. Humphries bailed out after four perfect darts. Up stepped Littler, nailing the treble-20, an expert adjustment down to the treble-19, and finally - with an arm of pure fidelity - pinned the double-12 to finish. Somehow, it was the emphatic crowning moment this achievement deserved: not just this win, or the semi-final triumph over Michael Smith that preceded it, but this whole Premier League campaign, a competition that - as many people suggested - he might not quite be ready for.

As laughable as it now seems, this was not an outrageous or deeply unorthodox opinion to hold at the time. Even after Littler's fairytale run to the world championship final, we didn't really know what this was yet. Moreover, we didn't really know who he was and the Premier League - a brutal travelling schedule encompassing 17 consecutive Thursdays - is as much a test of character and resolve as of darting ability.

But of course he was ready. In a way, he was born ready. That much has been evident over the course of the past six months, as Littler has taken to the professional circuit as if this was his destiny all along. A first world series title. A first Pro Tour title. A first European Tour title. Top of the Premier League table by a distance. A nine-dart finish to crown each of them.

"I was trying to stick in there," Humphries said. "But he just played much better. Me and Luke are the two greatest players in the world at the moment. I love playing him. I know I lose a lot, but it's a great battle."

This was the third time in five years the Premier League finalists had been debutants in the competition, which gives you some idea of the spectacular flux that has defined the sport of late. Now, though, a more definitive landscape appears to be emerging. These are quite clearly the two best players and even if the predictions of a two-decade rivalry feel a little premature this is certainly how dynasties begin.

Certainly the two men they defeated in the semi-finals feel further away from the summit than ever. Smith, demolished 10-5 by Littler, was never really there, a man vaguely dead behind the eyes, like someone who has been dragged to a nightclub against his will. The seven-time champion Michael van Gerwen was also beaten 10-5. Everything looks hard for Van Gerwen at the moment. The 60s look hard and the 180s elicit a grimace.

He is 35 and the memory of his imperial age is still fresh. It is barely a decade since he stepped on to this very stage, having just lost a world final, and conquered the Premier League at his first attempt. Now, in front of a UK record crowd, the mantle has passed. This is the world Van Gerwen helped to build. But it belongs to others now.



▲ *Luke Littler celebrates his victory in the Premier League Darts final*
TOM JENKINS/THE GUARDIAN

Results

Football

CINCH SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP PLAYOFFS
Final: First leg

Raith	(0) **1**	**Ross County**	(0) **2**
Stanton 82		Dhanda 53pen, Baldwin 71	

SERIE A
Cagliari 2 Fiorentina 3

Cricket

T20 INTERNATIONAL TRI-SERIES
Voorburg Scotland 157-8 (CA Young 3-31, MR Adair 3-36). Ireland 158-5 (A Balbirnie 56, LJ Tucker 55; CB Sole 3-28). Ireland beat Scotland by five wickets.

Tennis

ATP GENEVA OPEN (Switzerland)
Quarter-finals: T Machac (Cz) bt A Michelsen (US) 6-3 7-6 (7-2); **N Djokovic** (Ser) bt T Griekspoor (Neth) 7-5 6-1; **F Cobolli** (It) bt A Shevchenko (Kaz) 6-4 6-4; **C Ruud** (Nor) bt S Baez (Arg) 6-3 3-6 6-4.

ATP LYON OPEN (France)
Quarter-finals: T Etcheverry (Arg) bt D Köpfer (Ger) 6-4 6-1; **A Bublik** (Kaz) bt P Kotov (Rus) 6-7 (4-7) 7-6 (7-4) 6-3; **G Mpetshi Perricard** (Fr) bt H Gaston (Fr) 6-4 4-6 6-3; **L Darderi** (It) w/o A Rinderknech (Fr).

WTA MOROCCO OPEN (Rabat)
Quarter-finals: V Tomova (Bul) bt L Siegemund (Ger) 6-4 6-3; **P Stearns** (US) bt L Bronzetti (It) 6-4 4-6 7-5; **M Sherif** (Egy) bt S Sorribes Tormo (Sp) 6-3 6-3; **K Rakhimova** (Rus) bt E Cocciaretto (It) 7-5 7-5.

WTA INTERNATIONAUX DE STRASBOURG (France)
Quarter-finals: L Samsonova (Rus) bt B Haddad Maia (Br) 6-3 6-0; **M Keys** (US) bt M Linette (Pol) 6-1 6-3; **D Collins** (US) bt C Burel (Fr) 6-1 6-3.

Golf

SOUDAL OPEN (Antwerp, Belgium)
Leading first-round scores (GB/Ire unless stated)
62 S Jones (NZ). **64** R Langasque (Fr); I Elvira (Sp); M Jordan; N Nørgaard (Den); A Wilson. **65** C Syme. **66** M Baldwin; A Cockerill (Can); A Fitzpatrick; A del Rey (Sp); R Fisher; J Blixt (Swe); N von Dellingshausen (Ger).

JABRA LADIES OPEN (Évian-les-Bains, France)
Leading first-round scores (GB/Ire unless stated)
66 A Sauzon (Fr); I Laklalech (Mor). **67** J Melichova (Cz); M Metraux (Swi). **68** J Gustavsson (Swe); C Palomar-Herbin (Fr); N Nadaud (Fr); A Belac (Svn).

Darts

BETMGM PREMIER LEAGUE FINALS (London)
Semi-finals: L Littler (Eng) bt M Smith (Eng) 10-5; **L Humphries** (Eng) bt M van Gerwen (Neth) 10-5.
Final: L Littler (Eng) bt L Humphries (Eng) 11-7.

Fixtures

Football
Uefa Under-17 European Championship
Group D Portugal v England (6.30pm)
Rugby union
European Challenge Cup
Final Gloucester v Sharks (8pm)

Rugby league (8pm unless stated)
Betfred Men's Super League
Castleford v Hull FC; Huddersfield v Leigh; St Helens v Leeds
Betfred Women's Super League
St Helens v Leeds (5.30pm)
Cricket (11am unless stated)
T20 international Tri-series
Netherlands v Ireland, Voorburg (10am)
Vitality County Championship (first day of four)
Division One Durham v Somerset, Riverside; Hants v Surrey, Rose Bowl; Kent v Essex, Canterbury; Lancs v Warks, Old Trafford; Worcs v Notts, New Road
Division Two Gloucs v Derbys, Bristol; Leics v Glam, Grace Road; Middx v Sussex, Lord's; Northants v Yorks, Northampton

Greg Wood's racing tips

Goodwood **1.50** The Flying Seagull **2.25** Maxident **3.00** Strutting **3.35** Isle Of Jura **4.10** Street Kid (nap) **4.40** Zain Blue **5.10** Fair Wind
Haydock **2.05** Hello Cotai **2.40** Mizuumi **3.15** Chelsea Embankment **3.50** Loch Leven **4.20** Azure Blue **4.55** Doha **5.25** Amancio
Bath **2.15** Hearitfortheboys **2.50** Binadham **3.25** Media Guest **4.00** Liosa (nb) **4.30** Connie's Rose **5.00** Bittalemon **5.30** Carey Street **6.10** Havana Goldrush
Hereford **5.20** Global Esteem **5.55** Mactavish **6.30** Tonto Foley **7.00** Cher Tara **7.30** Riskintheground **8.00** Colonel Lesley
Pontefract **6.15** Harswell Duke **6.45** Love Wars **7.15** Gordon Grey **7.45** Eighteen Fourteen **8.15** Savvy Warrior **8.45** Princess Karine

Chelsea turn their focus to Maresca in manager hunt

Jacob Steinberg

Chelsea are set to ask Leicester for permission to speak to Enzo Maresca. The manager is competing with Brentford's Thomas Frank and Ipswich's Kieran McKenna, who is also a target for Brighton and Manchester United, in the race to replace Mauricio Pochettino.

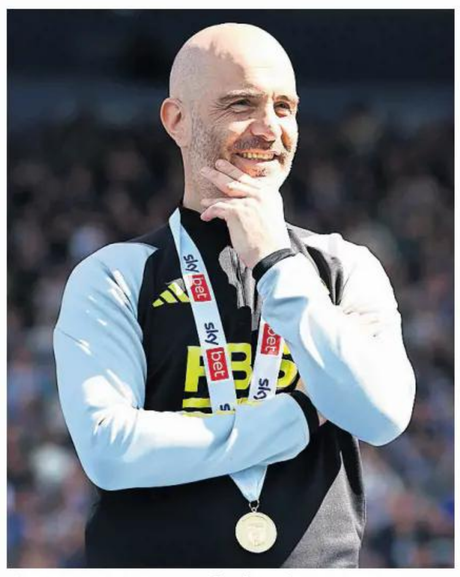
Chelsea are confident of making a swift appointment and McKenna, who inspired Ipswich's astonishing promotion to the Premier League, has been viewed as the leading candidate. But the race remains open and there is support for Maresca, who led Leicester to the Championship title last season and is admired by the recruitment team at Stamford Bridge.

The process began with Chelsea piecing together a longlist that featured at least eight candidates after Pochettino left by mutual consent this week. Along with McKenna, Frank and Maresca, Stuttgart's Sebastian Hoeness, Sporting Lisbon's Rúben Amorim, Girona's Míchel, Fulham's Marco Silva and Roberto De Zerbi were included. Interest in Silva is unlikely to be pursued.

Chelsea have notified Ipswich of their interest in McKenna but Brighton want him to replace De Zerbi. Sources close to McKenna, whose release clause is about £4m, believe the 38-year-old would favour United if they ask him to replace Erik ten Hag. Ipswich are desperate to hold on to their manager and have offered him a lucrative new deal.

It is understood Maresca, who would be interested in joining Chelsea, has a strong chance of landing the job. A consideration for the 44-year-old, whose release clause is about £8.5m, will be that Leicester could be hit with a points deduction before the start of the next season.

Frank is the most experienced of the leading trio. The Dane has done a fine job at Brentford since taking them into the top flight. Frank's release clause, previously set at £3m, is expected to have increased since he signed a new deal in 2022.



▲ *Enzo Maresca led Leicester to the Championship title last season*



▼ *Patrick Bamford faces a race against time to be fit for the playoff final*
CRAIG BROUGH/ACTION IMAGES

Bamford seeks end to 'vicious circle' and liftoff for Leeds

Striker reflects on his fitness troubles and old outspoken way before Sunday's Championship playoff final

Louise Taylor

Patrick Bamford listens politely, considers the argument, then shakes his head. "I think my injuries have just been bad luck," he says. "I don't think it was too intense under Marcelo Bielsa."

There is a school of thought that Leeds's much-adored former manager ultimately broke the team's outstanding striker but Bamford is not a subscriber. "There were times when it was hard under Marcelo," the 30-year-old acknowledges as he races against the clock to recover from minor knee trouble in time to return to Daniel Farke's team for Sunday's Championship playoff final against Southampton. "But, honestly, it was probably the best three and half years I've had in football.

"My problems were partly because, trying to help the team, I pushed too hard, came back too early and kept getting setbacks. It was a vicious circle. I was just never getting anywhere. Eventually that kind of backfired and I had two really tough years."

Three years ago Bamford scored 17 goals in 38 Premier League appearances and won an England cap but then those two injury-plagued seasons struck. Undermined by the absence of a forward as important off the ball as on it, a suddenly struggling Leeds asked Jesse Marsch, Javi Gracia and Sam Allardyce to take turns in Bielsa's old seat but still landed in the Championship last spring.

Farke's appointment changed the narrative but, despite Bamford scoring nine goals in 19 games before suffering a patella trauma during last month's 4-3 win at Middlesbrough, they missed out on automatic promotion.

As Bamford chats amiably, he relives the frustration of somehow finishing behind Leicester and Ipswich, despite collecting 90 points. "Fortunately Daniel Farke's a very level-headed person and an experienced manager," he says. "He remained calm, we got our heads round it and I hope Wembley will be a fantastic experience. I think the Premier League would definitely be better with Leeds in it."

Although Joël Piroe impressed at centre-forward in the playoff semi-final against Norwich and is a very decent finisher, he cannot match Bamford's defender-discombobulating movement out of possession.

"Playing for Nottingham Forest Under-18s I always remember the academy manager saying: 'Concentrate on your movement, on getting in behind,'" says the former Chelsea and Middlesbrough striker. "That really stuck with me and I learned a lot from watching Edinson Cavani from his days at Napoli onwards.

"But pressing from the front was one of the things Bielsa brought out in me. In training it was all about how fast you could get from zero to max speed. Being tall, that's harder and without Marcelo pushing me I probably wouldn't have worked on that. Even now people still think I'm slow. My running style's awful but I'm deceptively fast. I don't think too many defenders will beat me over 30-40 metres."

'Farke's experienced. I think the Premier League would definitely be better with Leeds in it'

Some Leeds fans have never appreciated just how good Bamford is and matters reached a nadir when a group turned up outside the house he shares with his partner and small children to complain about a penalty miss last season.

"There's only so much you can take before you snap and for me that was when it started involving my family," he says. "I know it's a small minority but sometimes it's the small voices that shout the loudest. Social media's brought a lot of good things but people can be blind to its consequences. They don't see the hurt and the damage.

"Don't get me wrong though, I've been here six years and I'm still enjoying it. The vast majority of the fans are fantastic. I hope I can show them my best form in the Premier League next season."

The top tier would be enhanced by the presence of a forward keen to highlight, among other issues, the climate emergency and racism. "I want to raise awareness of the need to look after the planet," he says as we discuss the "madness" of Newcastle and Tottenham flying to Australia for a post season friendly. "It needs our help. But there's a lot of things, not just environmental, I've spoken up on. If something's wrong, I'll say it how it is."

Bamford's amalgam of articulate candour, intelligence and, despite a healthy inner confidence, humility, makes it easy to understand why he was offered a Harvard scholarship after leaving private school in Nottingham with not only a raft of GSCE and A-levels but fluency in French and a real aptitude for playing the violin.

During his early days on a series of loans from Chelsea this did not always serve the middle-class architect's son overly well, prompting clashes with certain older-school managers. Perhaps he was too outspoken? "Potentially," says a forward who remains so close to Aitor Karanka he routinely gives his old Boro coach "a big hug" whenever they meet. "It caused me problems with some managers. Sometimes I maybe came across as cocky or arrogant. I wasn't – it was just that if I saw something as being wrong, I'd speak up regardless.

"It didn't always put me in the best position but, sometimes, people want to speak up then don't because they think they're going to get reprimanded. I don't believe that's really the right thing to do."

Football
In brief

Independent regulator

Bill going to extra time due to general election

Plans for an independent regulator for English football will not proceed further through parliament for now, with the football governance bill paused due to the general election. Despite its swift progress through the house, and with estimates that the bill could have completed its passage in a matter of weeks, there are thought to be too many stages in the process for it to be done in time. Labour has said that if elected it will introduce a regulator. There is uncertainty, however, over whether a new government would redraft the bill. **Paul MacInnes**

Nottingham Forest

Spurs weigh up move for Hudson-Odoi

Tottenham are considering a move for the Nottingham Forest winger Callum Hudson-Odoi. The 23-year-old was offered to Spurs last summer but Forest signed him for a cut-price £3m. Hudson-Odoi scored eight Premier League goals last season. **David Hytner**



▲ *Callum Hudson-Odoi is attracting interest after a productive season*

Plymouth Argyle

Rooney lined up for return to management

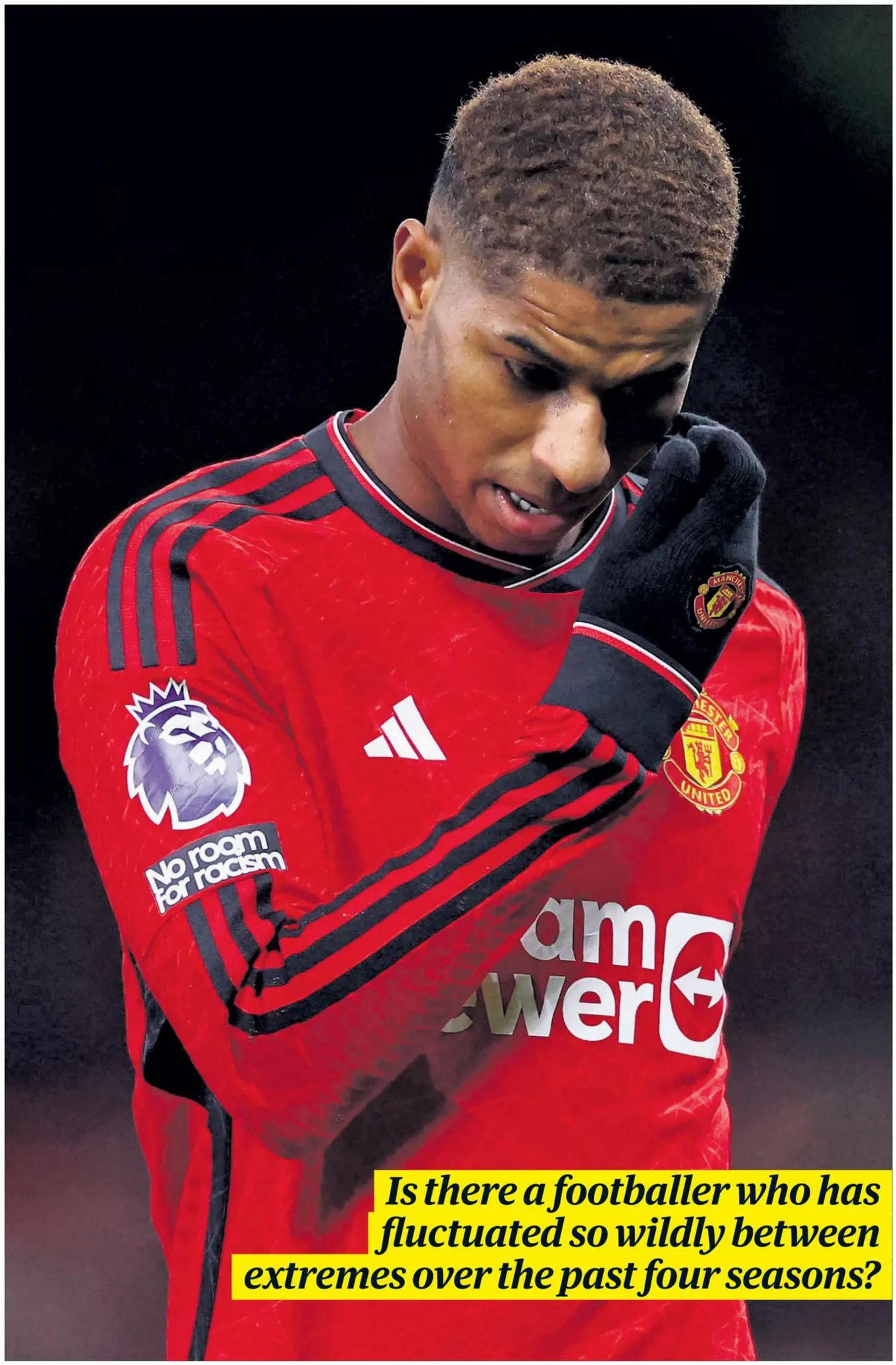
Wayne Rooney is the leading candidate to take charge of Plymouth Argyle, with the Championship club keen to offer the former England captain a return to the dugout. Rooney has been out of work since being sacked by Birmingham City in January. He knows Plymouth's director of football, Neil Dewsnip, from his days at Everton, where Dewsnip previously worked in the academy. **Ben Fisher**

Marks & Spencer mix up
Rashford models England formalwear despite not going to Euros Page 13 →

Rashford needs redemption at Wembley to salvage season

Striker's career of wild peaks and troughs requires a strong performance against City after his latest England blow

David Hytner



▼ *Marcus Rashford's mixed displays in United's FA Cup run encapsulate his season*
CARL RECINE/REUTERS

Marcus Rashford's finger-to-the-temple, eyes-closed goal celebration is a moment of contemplative stillness. Unveiled last season, it is the Manchester United forward's version of the shush. The noise around him might be loud but it does not matter. He will cut through it with his focus and mental strength.

There was a difference when he showed it off against Manchester City in March. On that occasion, the eyes blazed and he could not help but scream. It was the Premier League derby at the Etihad and he had just scored one of the goals of his career – a rising 25-yard drive of furious power. Was it better than his Ronaldo-esque, 40-yard knuckleball free-kick at Chelsea in a Carabao Cup tie in 2019? Maybe.

Really, though, the outpouring was triggered by the personal, emotional context. This is what proving a point looks like and as Rashford looks ahead to tomorrow's FA Cup final against City, he is back on familiar territory – doubted to the point of being unwanted; required to mine deeply into his resolve and talent.

Before the previous meeting with City, Rashford was so affected by the criticism of his form – which had been particularly unforgiving after a poor performance in the FA Cup win at Nottingham Forest – he responded with an open letter in the Players' Tribune.

Rashford felt his commitment to United had been questioned, his very desire to play the game; the cod psychology of his body language was too much. His words bristled with defiance. "Every single time I've been down, physically or mentally, I always feel like that's when I turn it around and play my best football for United and England," he wrote.

Enjoying the highs, bouncing back from the lows – it is a footballer's life but is there one who has fluctuated so wildly between the extremes as Rashford over the past four seasons?

The latest body blow was doled out by the England manager, Gareth Southgate, on Tuesday. It had been advertised after the international break in March when Rashford, having played for only 15 minutes, against Brazil (and badly at that), was reminded by Southgate there were compelling alternatives to him in the wide attacking positions.

It was a warning: improve or face the axe for Euro 2024. Rashford did not improve, failing to score in seven United games or play with any incision, a three-week injury absence not helping. So Southgate axed him. He could have postponed the decision and named Rashford in the provisional squad for the tournament, kicking the can down the road. But why do that when he thinks Rashford is done, at least for this season?

Rashford could score a hat-trick in the Cup final and it would not matter to Southgate. Or perhaps that would just have complicated the situation. Southgate felt he needed to act now, partly because of who Rashford is; the size of his profile. It was interesting to hear Southgate describe him as someone who "externally has people jump on him very quickly".

Rashford's lost season of 2021-22 has been recalled, even though he has not quite plumbed the depths to such an extent. Not quite. Back then, it looked as if he could do nothing right, all the old certainties having deserted him. He would later say that mental health problems were a factor.

He had been good the previous season – 2020 was also the year in which his child food poverty campaign made him a national hero – and his form spiked again, dramatically, in 2022-23; 30 goals for United, named as the club's player of the season. It was a feelgood comeback story.

This time out, it has not just been the low goals return (eight for United, one for England). There were the terrible optics of him hitting the town to celebrate his 26th birthday after United's defeat against City at Old Trafford last October and the notorious night out in Belfast in January, which had him report ill for training the next morning and dropped for the weekend's FA Cup tie at Newport. Erik ten Hag would recall him for the following game, at Wolves, and see him score after five minutes.

In the corresponding Wolves fixture last season – on New Year's Eve – Ten Hag had dropped him after Rashford overslept and missed the pre-match meeting. The forward came off the bench to score the winner and there was instant forgiveness. If you are going to err on the disciplinary front, best to do so when you are in excellent touch in front of goal.

Did Rashford really prove his point with the firecracker against City at the Etihad? On one level, yes. It showed that his capacity to do something extraordinary endures. On another, no. His performance was otherwise 4/10 – erratic, lacking in conviction.

United's run to the Cup final stands as a monument to Rashford's season. He played well in the third-round win at Wigan, involved in most of the team's best moments, even if he was also wasteful. Then came Newport and Forest. In the quarter-final against Liverpool, he blew a glorious chance to win it in stoppage time before sparking the extra-time comeback with the equaliser for 3-3. Then came Coventry in the semi-final when he laboured dreadfully.

It was easy to feel and hear the frustration of the United support towards Rashford that day. True fans love him and always will. But maybe – as in many families – it goes back to how people can be harsher with those they hold dear.

The reaction to the Players' Tribune piece is worth remembering. When a player makes such a move, tugging at tribal club ties and essentially inviting supporters to rally against sinister external forces (the media), it tends to end one way. Not this time. Many of the comments focused on Rashford's need to sort himself out.

Can he produce something, anything, out of the wreckage against City at Wembley? Will he even start? When Southgate gave him the bad news, he told him to "go and score a couple of goals at the weekend and put things right". As usual with Rashford, the response is everything.

Why City owe Cup run to collective power



Stefan Ortega is poised to play in goal ahead of the injured Ederson

A strong side will start against United but it was the supporting cast which paved the way to a Wembley final

Will Unwin

By the time 3pm rolls around tomorrow at Wembley, few will be thinking back to how the road to the FA Cup final began for Manchester City. It was a bleak January afternoon at the Etihad Stadium, where Huddersfield were dispatched 5-0 as the Premier League champions showed the gulf between them and a side who ended up being relegated from the Championship.

As it is custom, Pep Guardiola used the match to rest senior players, giving opportunities to Stefan Ortega, Oscar Bobb and the rarely-spotted Sergio Gómez, who was permitted the full 90 minutes of the stroll. Micah Hamilton made his first home appearance and Jacob Wright was afforded a debut in a mix-and-match event.

If City defeat Manchester United and lift the trophy, there will be a long line of players behind Kyle Walker. Trophies are not won in single matches - they take months of hard work. The final will be City's sixth match in the competition and it has been a difficult route - following Huddersfield it was all Premier League opposition with Tottenham, Luton, Newcastle and Chelsea defeated along the way.

Only Ortega, Bobb, Jérémy Doku and Julián Álvarez have featured in all five ties, and none could be described as a regular starter. Twenty-two players have been given action in the Cup and however unremarkable their contribution, it has mattered. Whether it was Ortega's four clean sheets, Rico Lewis's assist against Huddersfield or Doku earning the corner that led to Nathan Aké's late winner at Tottenham in the fourth round, they have made an impact.

Ortega's performances have gained the most attention across a season when he has become the most reliable - and called-upon - deputy keeper in English football. He has saved his team in both league and Cup despite Guardiola admitting he had not heard of his second-choice goalkeeper before signing him. Ortega played last season when United were defeated in the final and with rumours flying about that Ederson, who will miss the final due to a fractured eye socket, could be tempted to move to Saudi Arabia in the summer, he will be eager for another chance to prove his credentials as a No 1.

Only Ortega, Bobb, Doku and Álvarez have featured in all five ties and none are regular starters

The quarter-final victory over Newcastle was where Doku underlined his quality, providing a constant threat from a more central position. Guardiola moved him inside, maybe as an experiment, to see what he could do away from the wing. There is a degree of chaos whenever Doku is on the ball because his speed and trickery do not always marry together harmoniously, but it is rarely dull. He is a player City fans get excited about, and Cup outings have helped him to progress.

These are sink or swim occasions for reserves who are thrust into competitive games. Zack Steffen, City's previous second-choice goalkeeper, played in every round of the 2022 Cup run but then was not seen again after a calamity in the semi-final defeat by Liverpool. Guardiola needs to know whether those at his disposal have the right mental and physical attributes.

Often minutes are accumulated in the cup competitions to keep players in big squads happy but it is also down to them to take advantage of their opportunities. Kalvin Phillips's chances were not seized and he was shipped off in January to West Ham on loan. His fellow central midfielder Matheus Nunes is aware of the ruthless nature of playing for an elite club but equipped himself well when called upon 18 minutes into the win over Huddersfield and played the full match against Luton.

Guardiola wants to win every competition he enters and minutes are rarely given away: they have to be earned on the training ground. Hamilton and Wright, for example, have been kept around the first-team squad and were given Champions League debuts in March as reward for their progress.

The strongest XI will play at Wembley but once it is over, 40 medals - whether gold or silver - will be distributed between City players and staff. For Kevin De Bruyne or Bernardo Silva it may be another shiny thing to put in a box but for Ortega, Doku, Gómez, Hamilton and Wright, at least, it will be precious.

Premier League

Lopetegui wants to make 'big, big noise' at West Ham

Jacob Steinberg

West Ham's plans to overhaul their squad after confirming the appointment of Julen Lopetegui, who wants the Wolves defender Maximilian Kilman, will be affected by the Football Association charging Lucas Paquetá with alleged betting breaches.

Paquetá has an £85m release clause and was a target for Manchester City. But he is unlikely to move this summer and West Ham had factored his potential sale into their budget. It is understood the absence of a big sale would leave Lopetegui will less money to spend. West Ham are determined to keep the Ghana attacker Mohammed Kudus, whose release clause becomes active next year.

Lopetegui, who vowed to "make a big, big noise" after replacing David Moyes, has held talks over plans to make six to eight signings. West Ham are looking for two central defenders, a right-back, a midfielder, a right-footed left winger and a forward. They are also looking to sign a third-choice goalkeeper.

West Ham, who have handed Lopetegui a two-year deal with the option of a one-year extension, are prioritising defensive reinforcements after conceding 74 goals in the Premier League. They have explored a deal to sign the 28-year-old Brazil centre-back Fabricio Bruno from Flamengo, and intend to revive their move for Kilman, who was targeted by Moyes in January. Wolves will want about £45m for Kilman.

Lopetegui has brought five backroom staff with him and will consult with Tim Steidten, the technical director, on transfers. The Spaniard has arrived after Moyes departed at the end of four and a half successful years. Lopetegui, who won the Europa League with Sevilla, has been out of work since leaving Wolves last summer.

"I am very happy that West Ham chose me because I chose West Ham too," Lopetegui said. "We came here with the idea to make a big, big noise."

Analysis

Jacob Steinberg



Club-hopping Spaniard has chance to silence the doubters

West Ham have been putting the succession plan in place for a while. Tim Steidten was not long into his job as the technical director when he went to David Sullivan, the co-owner, and suggested Julen Lopetegui as a potential replacement for David Moyes. Contact was soon established, a video call with Sullivan last October giving Lopetegui an opportunity to develop a relationship with the key figure at the London Stadium. Moyes was already on borrowed time. Lopetegui was ready, unemployed and keen to work in the Premier League again.

Rúben Amorim, the Sporting manager, said no. Hansi Flick was overlooked. A host of homegrown names were barely considered. When it came down to it, Sullivan kept veering towards Lopetegui as the right person to replace West Ham's most successful manager of the Premier League era.

Some within the club urged Sullivan to think twice about going for the former Wolves manager. The thirst for a change did not stop some fans from saying that the club would be better off keeping Moyes if they were not going to pay Amorim's €15m (£13m) release clause. The theory is that Lopetegui, out of work since leaving Wolves last summer, was the cheap option.

The concern is that West Ham went down a similar path when they ditched Moyes in 2018 and trumpeted the "high-calibre" appointment of Manuel Pellegrini. Lopetegui is the former manager of Real Madrid and Spain. He won the Europa League with Sevilla in 2020. He's managed in the Champions League. He *sounds* more glamorous than Moyes, whose big problem always centred around his style of play.

However, for all that some figures are pushing Lopetegui as one of the greatest coaches around, there are people whose opinions on him are less complimentary. They will point out that Lopetegui won nothing at Porto; that he lost the Spain job after agreeing a deal with Madrid on the eve of the 2018 World Cup; that he was at Madrid for all of 138 days before being fired.

A source familiar with Sevilla notes how Lopetegui fizzled out after a strong start. There is criticism of his signings there. The team declined and had six defeats from 10 matches when Lopetegui was sacked in October 2022. Internal fallouts, the source says, are common. That should make things interesting with Steidten, who fell out with Moyes, and Sullivan, who can be a frustrating boss. Lopetegui did a fantastic job to guide Wolves out of the bottom three after his appointment in November 2022. However, the idea that he had no money is misleading. Wolves spent heavily during the January window and, although they were forced into sales because of concerns over profitability and sustainability rules, predictions that they would be dragged into another relegation battle were decisively crushed by Gary O'Neil after he was hired as Lopetegui's replacement.



Julen Lopetegui has managed Real Madrid and Spain in his time

West Ham, who will give Lopetegui funds, want between six and eight signings. They need to strengthen a slow, leaky defence incapable of playing a high line. A replacement for Vladimir Coufal at right-back is a must and none of the four senior centre-backs can consider themselves indispensable given West Ham conceded 90 goals this season, a record that Moyes has put down to losing Declan Rice.

Does that argument wash? Not when you consider that West Ham were almost relegated in Rice's final season and have signed three midfielders since his sale. Lopetegui has to address that area and find more energy. He also requires depth and quality on the flanks and alternatives to Michail Antonio up front. Perhaps, unlike Moyes, he can be trusted to use academy players.

Lopetegui was forced into pragmatism at Wolves, but his preference is to play an intense 4-3-3, with full-backs pushing up and creative players told to jink inside. Mohammed Kudus, Jarrod Bowen and Lucas Paquetá - if he is still a West Ham player - will be crucial. Under Lopetegui, Sevilla's average possession rose to more than 60%. The notion of a defensive manager is a little off. Lopetegui, a former Barcelona player, has cited Johan Cruyff as an inspiration. His win percentage in the Premier League was the highest of any Wolves manager.

Perhaps the conclusion is that few managers arrive with an unblemished record. Exciting and progressive does not necessarily mean successful. After all, Moyes was once the former Manchester United, Sunderland and Real Sociedad dud. A lot of fans fumed at both of his appointments by West Ham. Moyes, the supposed definition of an ambition-free hire, ended up winning the club's first trophy in 43 years. Lopetegui has a similar opportunity to silence the doubters.

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Sport

Littler wins big

Teen sensation claims Premier League Darts crown at the O2



Jonathan Liew *Page 38 →*

Heading out

Murray's change of racket reveals his ongoing hunt for an edge



Tumaini Carayol *Page 36 →*

Yellow card claims

West Ham fear for Paquetá career after spot-fixing charges

Jacob Steinberg

West Ham fear Lucas Paquetá's career could be over if he is found guilty of deliberately getting booked after the midfielder was charged by the Football Association in relation to alleged breaches of betting regulations.

The FA has been looking into allegations that Paquetá deliberately picked up yellow cards against Leicester, Aston Villa, Leeds and Bournemouth in 2022 and 2023. The governing body said in a statement that the Brazil international was suspected of directly seeking to "influence the progress, conduct, or any other aspect of, or occurrence in these matches by intentionally seeking to receive a card from the referee for the improper purpose of affecting the betting market in order for one or more persons to profit".

The news of Paquetá being charged came on the day West Ham announced Julen Lopetegui as their new head coach. Paquetá denies wrongdoing and any knowledge of the suspicious bets, which have been traced to Paquetá Island, off the coast of Rio de Janiero.



Lucas Paquetá denied the charges and vowed to 'fight with every breath to clear my name'

"I am extremely surprised and upset that the FA has decided to charge me," Paquetá said on Instagram. "For nine months, I have cooperated with every step of their investigation and provided all the information I can. I deny the charges in their entirety and will fight with every breath to clear my name."

West Ham said: "Lucas categorically denies the breach and will continue to robustly defend his position. The club will continue to support the player throughout the process."

Paquetá has also been charged with two breaches of FA rule F3 in respect of alleged failures to comply pursuant to FA rule F2, which relates to providing information and documents. Paquetá was interviewed by the FA last September and gave them access to his phone the following month.

Paquetá has until 3 June to respond to the charges, subject to requesting an extension. The investigation came to light last summer, scotching a move by Manchester City for West Ham's record £51m signing.

Paquetá has an £85m release clause and was a target for City again this summer but is now unlikely to move.

Lopetegui takes control *Page 41 →*



Winning start for England

Heather Knight's side ease to 37-run victory over Pakistan despite mixed display in first ODI of series

Match report *Page 38 →*

MATT WEST/SHUTTERSTOCK

Tuchel leads way for United job if Ten Hag is sacked

Jamie Jackson

Thomas Tuchel has emerged as the frontrunner to replace Erik ten Hag as Manchester United's manager should the club decide on a change.

He is understood to have the requisite profile as an accomplished tactician with vast experience of working in major clubs. Tuchel is a free agent having finished with Bayern Munich and has previously led clubs including Paris Saint-Germain and Chelsea.

There is confidence at United that he has the temperament to handle seasoned players and an admiration of a CV that includes winning the 2021 Champions League with Chelsea.

The decision on Ten Hag's future will become clear after tomorrow's FA Cup final against Manchester City, which the manager said Harry Maguire will miss because of injury.

Ipswich Town's Kieran McKenna, who is a target for Chelsea and Brighton, Brentford's Thomas Frank, the England manager, Gareth Southgate, and Mauricio Pochettino, who left Chelsea on Tuesday, are also on the shortlist.

Before the trip to Wembley Ten Hag defended a record that includes winning last season's Carabao Cup and losing the FA Cup final to City 12 months ago. "It's all about trophies but you need an opportunity to win a trophy," he said. "So in the last 10 years not so many trophies in this club, but we have an opportunity to win two trophies in two years."

Ten Hag was asked what he would say to those who view the final as his last match. "I came here to win trophies," he said. "I have nothing to say. Just focusing on the job I have to do and that is first win the game on Saturday and then the project, keep going with the project."

United's hierarchy are due to review the season next week. Ten Hag said he had held a debrief on the season with his employers: "We spoke about it lately. Underneath there are very good things, [young] players coming up and players developing, values coming up and at the same time we have on Saturday a big opportunity to win the next trophy."

On Tuesday Southgate left Marcus Rashford, who has scored eight goals for United this season, out of England's training squad for the Euros. Ten Hag believes this will motivate the forward. "He looks good," he said. "That is a career: ups and downs. A down can also give fuel and that is what I see in training - he will be highly motivated."



▲ *Thomas Tuchel led Chelsea to Champions League glory in 2021*

Rashford's final chance *Page 40 →*

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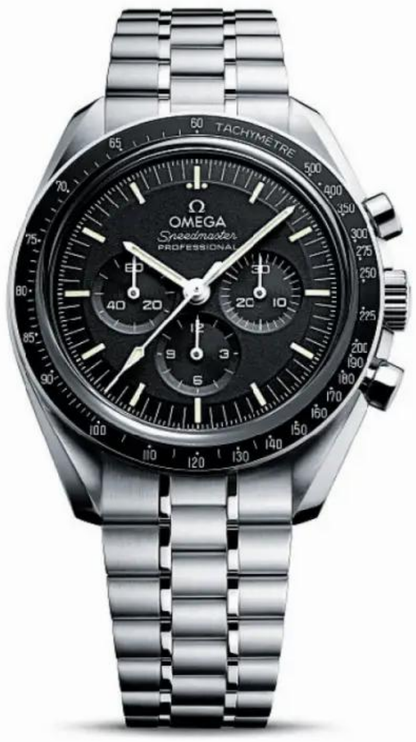
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This election is a pivot point for South Africa *Editorials, page 2*

How could Rishi Sunak have got it so wrong? *Gaby Hinsliff, page 3*

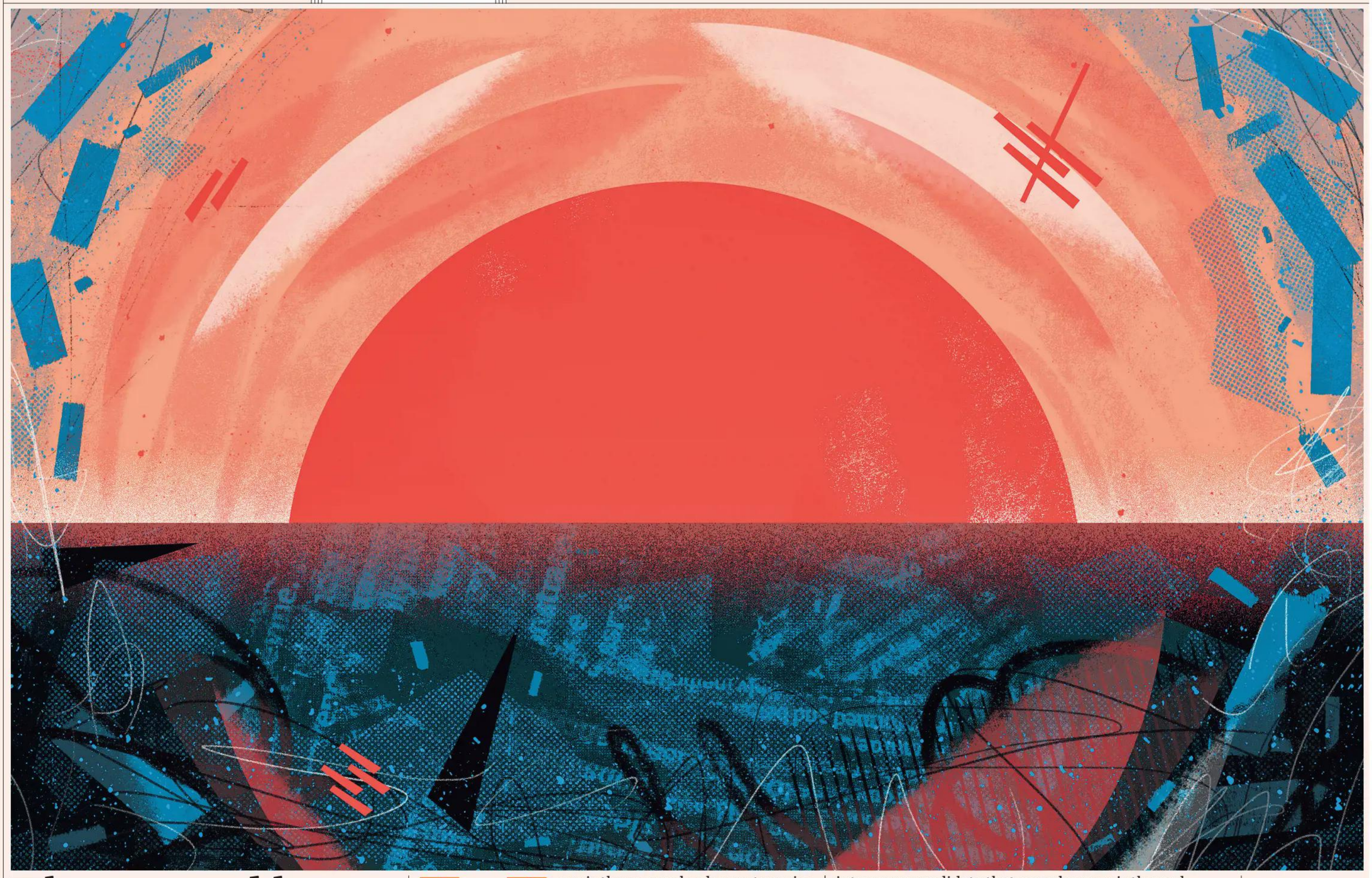
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Journal

Opinion and ideas



The mood has lifted. Labour can scarcely believe its luck

Polly Toynbee



Here is the one and only great service Rishi Sunak could perform for his country. Nothing so became him as leaving office, despite the deluge. The prospect of another six months of zombie government, everyone waiting and waiting for Labour, was an almost unendurable state of stasis. Everything he proposed only added to the smell of death and desperation in the air.

Labour's team could scarcely believe their luck, pinching themselves as they watched their opponent dash for the precipice. They were so ready that they could press send on a video within minutes. The contrast between their leader so draped in flags and the wretchedly bedraggled prime minister was more than any campaign could dream of. Yet these six weeks will feel eternally long, a never-ending prime minister's questions, day after day, until virtually every voter has been beaten into submission, mumbling the one-word slogans in their sleep: "change", "stability".

As the experience of Theresa May - the "strong and stable" one - reminds them, a lot can happen, as she blew her lead and her majority in the 2017 election. Labour dwells on that obsessively, drumming warnings into every candidate that complacency is the real enemy. Never for a moment do they forget to preface "what we will do" with "if we win". Keir Starmer chased every possible supporter in a fundraiser launched within hours of the announcement, followed by another from Angela Rayner. Inside the camp, they sound a bit hyper, "buzzy". Starmer's "six first steps" announced last week seemed timed as if they'd had some election timetable leak.

No prime minister has ever jumped early when they were a disastrous 20 points behind in the polls. So why did Sunak? Because he spied a tiny blip of a window when economic figures coalesced to look better - and he knows things can only get worse. That's what Labour will encourage people to assume. It will rub in another Tory record - the first government to leave living standards lower at the end of a parliament. No graphs of downward inflation will stop people knowing their food prices are 25% higher than two years ago. Despite recent improvements, wages will not return to 2008 levels until 2026. Rents and mortgages have shot up, and a million more people are due to renegotiate their mortgages before the end of the year.

This is real life. Neither the most brilliantly deceptive campaign nor the

ILLUSTRATION: NATE KITCH

The mood has lifted. Labour can scarcely believe its luck

Polly Toynbee

← *Continued from front*

(now-doubted) electioneering genius of Isaac Levido can undo what has been done. The more Sunak tries to sell "stability", the more Labour will remind people what instability has done to them. Tory messaging is wildly out of kilter when Sunak warns that Labour will return us to "square one". Is that Labour in 2010, when most people were better off than now? Is that before the axe of austerity shattered public services, when NHS waiting lists were at their lowest, child poverty fallen sharply, before the Brexit referendum calamity? "Square one" was a better place.

Then come the manifestos. Labour knows it needs glittering prizes alongside the sobriety of an inherited mammoth budget deficit; a £30bn black hole, says the IMF. A burst of hope is a prerequisite, and long-awaited policies will now need to shine. The Tory party manifesto will be pure fantasy. Any pledge it makes will only be a reminder of the devastation it leaves in its wake. The Tories have no hiding place, no safe topic for a daily press conference. Every issue is lethal. Their attacks on Labour already sound puerile.

They will turn to "wokery" and Rwanda as their refuge, but that can't save their bacon either. Instead, that will reaffirm, day after day, not only how remote they are from modern Britain, but how much they hate the country they have governed so badly. They hate its attitudes so much they simply deny them. Their broken electoral compass has no notion of where "middle England" lies now.

The country has changed, though the Mail, Telegraph and Sun deny it, having lost their finger on the national pulse long ago. "There are 1,000 hours to save Britain," wailed the Sunday Telegraph's editor, Allister Heath. Sunak, he writes, must "fight for the majority against an out-of-touch pro-Labour elite". Outside this cloud-cuckoo zone, the majority has become the "pro-Labour elite", but the right refuses to accept truths in front of its nose. Its proponents cannot admit that everything they hold dear is being rejected by voters they still regard as theirs.

They rail against net zero targets, calling for "pragmatism", yet 59% of people say the country is taking too little action on the climate crisis. Only 19% of respondents told the British Social Attitudes survey that people get benefits they don't deserve (this figure was 40% two decades ago). The country is evenly split on Rwanda, but only 16% of people think it is good value for money. And while Sunak says VAT on private schools is an attack on "aspiration", 71% don't object to abolishing the tax break. People don't want visas cut for foreign students, another Tory suggestion. While Tories keep warning Labour will wreck Brexit, people think overwhelmingly that Brexit has harmed their lives and the country, and 51% of people would support overturning the referendum result.

Here are the crunch markers for the end of the age of Thatcher: most people, including 73% of Conservative voters, don't want tax cuts and two-thirds of Tory voters want renationalisation of water and energy. People are not as nasty as Sunak thinks: nearly three-quarters of voters want benefits preserved, including 69% of Conservative voters.

So when Sunak's team despaired that all his crowd-pleasers failed to please, that's because they had long lost any sense of how people feel and think now. The Covid-19 pandemic was pivotal in shifting these attitudes. A Labour victory would not just be due to the mayhem of Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, but because Labour, by nature and instinct, inhabits where most people are, while the Tories paddle their canoes into the sunset of a discredited Thatcherism.

You know how far gone politicians are when they make the National Trust and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution into enemies of the people. Their patriotism is the love of some imaginary country – detesting Britain as it really is. That's why this election is cathartic for the country, not a pendulum swing but an epochal change, even if Labour dares not quite believe it yet.

The Guardian *Friday 24 May 2024*

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Parliament prorogued

Five years in which three prime ministers all proved they were not up the job

And so, at last and unlamented, the 2019 parliament will finally be laid to rest today. This parliament's prorogation is not shamelessly illegal, as Boris Johnson's lawless attempt to end its predecessor was five years ago. But that is just about all that can be said in its favour. In almost every respect, this has been as shoddy and as discreditable a period as British government has had to endure. There can rarely have been a parliament that comes to its end as unmourned as this one.

Yet the 2019 parliament is dying as it lived, amid needless chaos and with political desperation once again taking precedence over legislative substance. Rishi Sunak's gamble on a July election means that most of the government's programme, which was announced in the king's speech in November, will now never reach the statute book at all. This underscores a very troubling truth: that modern government is becoming more performative than effective, with MPs increasingly expected to campaign rather than to scrutinise or legislate.

Some of what seemed at times to be Mr Sunak's proudest boasts – his anti-smoking bill, his leasehold reform bill and his commitment to a football regulator among them – have simply been abandoned for self-inflicted lack of time. His promise to back Martyn's law legislation – a bill toughening up safety at public venues named after one of the victims of the Manchester Arena bombing, Martyn Hett – has proved worthless. It is as if the promise was all that mattered, with delivery reduced to a tedious but optional extra.

Mr Sunak's ministers spent yesterday trying to ensure that one of their signature pledges of recent months, the Post Office (Horizon system) offences bill, got over the line. The bill quashes hundreds of the post office operator convictions caused by the Horizon IT system. It addresses matters of life and death for some of those affected, while also raising difficult points of law, which a responsible parliament should have had time to debate. But Mr Sunak was blithely willing to put all that at risk. His victims and prisoners bill is still hanging in the balance too.

If one saga embodies what has been wrong with this government and with this parliament, it is the Rwanda deportation scheme. This was performative politics incarnate. It took up months of parliamentary time that could have been far better used. It was legally and morally dubious, and was fought to the end. It involved tens of millions of pounds of public expenditure. Yet along came Mr Sunak yesterday to reveal that actually it is not now going to happen, this side of the July vote anyway. This may be welcome, but the whole scheme was an abuse from the very start.

Unusually, there have been three governments in this parliament. All of them, especially those led by Mr Johnson and by Liz Truss, have provided object lessons in how not to govern well. But Mr Sunak has proved little better.

By coincidence, the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, was being quizzed yesterday at the Covid inquiry. His evidence painted a picture of a dysfunctional government and of political leaders and advisers who were simply not up to the job that the crisis required. Since 2019, they as individuals and the government system that they created around themselves have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Good riddance to them all. But Britain deserves so much better.

South Africa

This election is a pivot point – but what's the alternative to the ANC?

Thirty years after South Africans flocked to the country's first free and fair elections, the country is at another pivot point. Polls suggest that in Wednesday's general election, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) is likely to lose its majority for the first time, though its figures have improved somewhat in recent weeks. Despite some promising advances in the ANC's first decade in power, the country's political transformation with the end of apartheid was never adequately matched by economic and social change. GDP growth has averaged 0.8% annually since 2012.

A black middle class emerged, but income inequality is extraordinarily high. The top 0.1% hold 25% of the wealth, while the bottom 50% owe more than they own. Unemployment stands at more than 40% if those who have given up looking for jobs are included. The murder rate is one of the highest in the world. Education and the crumbling infrastructure are a source of national despair. Eskom, the state power company, has just said that it has "fixed" endemic blackouts. Others are sceptical. In 2022, more than four in five adults surveyed said the country was going in the wrong direction.

The president, Cyril Ramaphosa, injected fresh hope into the body politic when he took over in 2018, pledging "a new dawn ... inspired by our collective memory of Nelson Mandela". A veteran of the anti-apartheid struggle, he promised to set the country back on the right track after the "nine wasted years" of state capture – massive and entrenched corruption – and failure overseen by his predecessor, Jacob Zuma.

Those years showed the strength of South Africa's institutions: its independent media, civil society and judiciary. These elections too will be free and fair. But Mr Ramaphosa has had to acknowledge how far there still is to go in tackling corruption and factionalism, and turning the country round. He has faced questions himself about large amounts of cash taken from his farm, though a corruption watchdog cleared him. The more widely shared and potent criticism is that he has put party before country, failing to adequately challenge entrenched interests for fear the ANC would not hold together. Sympathetic observers suggest he had little choice if he wanted to stay on to steer the nation in a better direction.

The political alternatives are uninspiring to many South Africans, but could end up in coalition government anyway. The Economic Freedom Fighters, led by the controversial and opportunistic Julius Malema, are leftwing populists who want to expropriate land without compensation and nationalise mines, banks and other firms despite warnings about the economic impact. Mr Zuma, though barred from standing, is a renewed headache for Mr Ramaphosa thanks to his new uMkhonto we Sizwe party. The liberal Democratic Alliance, thought unlikely to enter an ANC coalition, is widely seen as catering primarily to the interests of the white minority.

The result is that – while electors queued for hours to cast their ballot in 1994 – only 40% of young people are registered to vote. In a poll, most of those aged 18 to 24 rejected the idea that democracy is always the best form of government. Ultimately, no nation is served by the dominance of a single party in perpetuity. The problem is not so much the disappointments and failures of the ANC as the fact that rivals have yet to offer a convincing alternative – which might also make the party raise its game.



The PM in Derbyshire yesterday
PHOTOGRAPH: PHIL NOBLE/REUTERS

His campaign is already a fiasco. How did Sunak get it so wrong?

Gaby Hinsliff



Cut your losses short and let your winners run. It's the oldest cliche on Wall Street, and at heart, Rishi Sunak is more of a banker than a politician. So, in retrospect, perhaps we should have guessed how he would react to the current collapse in the Conservative party's share price.

His bet on turning the country round hasn't worked out, so he's unwinding his position; dumping his stocks and getting out. On Wednesday, Sunak had the air of a man who is tired of waiting for the inevitable and would rather get it over with. What he doesn't seem to have realised – although, judging by their seasick expressions as they lined up behind him, plenty of his cabinet ministers have – is how much politics is *not* like banking. Cutting and running now, against the reported advice of the Tories' election guru, Isaac Levido, is a tacit admission that things are not going to get better; that, if anything, they are likely to get worse. And just like that, he has effectively turned his campaign into a public admission of failure.

By breakfast time on day one of the campaign, Sunak had already conceded that "we haven't made the progress on NHS waiting lists I would have liked", and that flights to Rwanda would not in fact be taking off before the election. (Though Nigel Farage isn't formally standing for election this time, having lost seven times in a row, expect him to make hay with that on Reform UK's behalf as the peak season for small boat crossings gets under way in June.) By the afternoon, the cabinet secretary Simon Case was describing Boris Johnson's regime as "the worst governing ever seen" to the Covid inquiry, in case any voters happened to have forgotten Partygate. It's as though someone had actively arranged a campaign around all the things voters are angriest about.

What next? Well, lights are flashing red all over the criminal justice system: this week it emerged that police chiefs privately discussed asking forces to delay arrests because the jails were too full, thanks to the Tories failing either to build more cell space or reform sentencing in time. Prisoners are already being released early to ease hellish overcrowding, and from this week some sentences will be cut short by up to 70 days, to victims' understandable distress.

Yet this campaign will not be a slam-dunk for Labour. For a start, all these problems will most likely be theirs to solve by 5 July, and it may be only when and if they get the keys to the Treasury that they understand exactly why Sunak chose to leave when he did. Inflation is down but not necessarily out, with speculation about an autumn rebound, and borrowing figures this month were worse than expected. On top of everything else it will be struggling to afford, a new Labour government will now need to find billions for the rightly generous compensation for victims of the infected blood scandal, announced by Sunak on what we know now was his way out of the door.

Though Wednesday's election announcement took them by surprise, the slickness of Keir Starmer's initial launch suggests his team are as ready as they'll ever be for a campaign they have war-gamed intensively, though they have still to finish selecting candidates in dozens of seats (including Islington North, where Jeremy Corbyn is tipped to run as an independent).

But Labour thinking still looks unfinished in some key manifesto areas, the party remains uncomfortably divided over Gaza, and Angela Rayner still faces an ongoing police investigation into the sale of her old council house. Starmer's rather remote leadership style, which leaves his colleagues struggling sometimes to work out what he wants, is meanwhile a potential weakness in a campaign where snap decisions have to be taken fast, under pressure, by a team scattered around the country.

"Instead of catching his enemies off balance, he has wrongfooted his own side. Now he faces the cold fury of his own MPs

But for now, these problems pale in comparison with a Conservative leader who pitched himself as the man to clear up the Tory mess but is now quitting with the job at best half finished, in order to lead his mutinous party on what looks like a suicide mission.

By going for the summer election that almost nobody expected, Sunak maximised the one advantage he had left – that of surprise. Yet, instead of catching his enemies off balance, somehow he has ended up managing to wrongfoot his own side, resulting in the kind of baffled backbench rage at Downing Street's apparent ineptitude that makes you wonder if the inevitable postmortem can be suppressed until polling day.

That he seemingly went to the palace to seek the dissolution of parliament before telling his own cabinet what was happening is a telling illustration of how little trust he has in his colleagues not to leak, or even try some wild last-minute insurrection. Now the cold hard fury of some of his own MPs, particularly those who don't have the Sunak family riches to cushion an expected fall, may well dog him to polling day and beyond.

But in choosing not to hang on till the bitter end, Sunak has done the right thing for a country that has had more than enough of all this psychodrama, and the right thing, too, perhaps, for his family. He has made his choice, and it was to cut his losses. Now let the winner run.



What victory should look like in Ukraine

Timothy Garton Ash



The mood in Ukraine is sombre these days. The casualties keep mounting. In the military cemetery in Lviv, I see widows and bereaved mothers sitting silently beside the fresh graves of their loved ones, heads bowed, a life sentence of suffering etched on their faces. Medical experts estimate that at least half the population is suffering from some degree of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Vladimir Putin's forces are grinding forward, using their numerical advantages and exploiting the slowness of the west to supply sufficient air defence and ammunition. Russia's main purpose seems to be to stretch the roughly 1,000km-long frontline so that, as Ukraine diverts troops to defend Kharkiv, Putin's army can push forward in the east, taking more of the Donetsk and Luhansk provinces that he already claims are irrevocably part of the Russian Federation.

Major Andriy Pidlisnyi, a battalion commander on active service since the first days of the full-scale war, tells me the mood among his troops is "not so good". And, he adds, "They think it's time for others to go and fight." But where are those others? A hotly contested law reducing the conscription age to 25 finally came into force last week, but wherever I turn I hear stories of young Ukrainian men trying to avoid the draft.

There is growing anger towards the west for not doing enough, and fast enough, to enable the country to defend itself. There is also nagging unhappiness with the performance of the president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, whose term would have ended on 20 May were the country not under martial law, and especially with the presidential administration headed by his powerful enforcer, Andriy Yermak. Several sources told me that Zelenskiy, the ex-TV star, obsessively studies his ratings - and those are gradually going down.

Interestingly, one criticism I heard repeatedly is that he continues to feed unrealistic hopes of total victory - that is, the reconquest of all Ukraine's sovereign territory in its 1991 frontiers, including Crimea. Even senior officials privately give a more cautious definition of victory. And everyone is deeply worried about what Donald Trump will do if re-elected president of the United States on 5 November.

Public opinion has also shifted a little. At the end of last year, the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology offered respondents two options for what Ukraine should do if "the west significantly cuts aid". A clear majority of 58% of them said the country should go on fighting, even with "risks for the territories controlled by Ukraine". However, 32% preferred the second option: "The hostilities cease with serious security guarantees from the west, but the liberation of the [Russian-occupied] territories is postponed for the indefinite future."

Note that this is only in the case of slashed western aid and only with serious security guarantees. What territory is lost will be crucial to the popular verdict. It's one thing to compromise over Crimea and the parts of the Donbas occupied by Russia since 2014; quite another to sacrifice the vast swaths of Ukrainian land between the two, where some 2.5 million people had their homes and livelihoods before the full-scale invasion. The bigger the territorial compromise, the stronger would have to be the immediate western guarantees of security, and the more credible the prospect of EU and Nato membership in a not distant and uncertain future. Even in that case, many Ukrainians would still be furious with their own government for negotiating what they would see as defeat, and lastingly bitter against the west for effectively compelling them to accept it.

So Ukraine is on the ropes. Using that boxing metaphor, one immediately thinks of the new world heavyweight champion, Oleksandr Usyk, the Ukrainian fighter who was seemingly down and out under the ferocious assault of the giant Tyson Fury, but then came back to win on points at the end of a brutal 12 rounds. A narrow victory in 12 rounds - not a knockout blow in the fifth - is the best that Usyk's homeland can hope for now.

The big difference is this: unlike the boxer, Ukraine can't defeat a larger opponent on its own. It needs more and bolder military support from the west right now, so it can put Putin Fury on the ropes. Then, and only then, can Ukraine get to the point where it may achieve an outcome that a majority of its own people will regard as victory, and most Russians as defeat. That should be the west's objective too.

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Letters

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Established 1906

Country diary

Hayling Island, Hampshire

When we arrive at the donkey sanctuary, the residents are out in the paddocks enjoying the spring sunshine. It's easy to pick out the retired beach donkeys, their backs bowed from giving rides to holidaying children. One local jack spent his days trudging up and down Hayling seafront, but others are from as far afield as Skegness. Each resident has their own story. Some were beloved pets that joined the herd following a change in their owner's circumstances or the death of a companion (the stress of bereavement can cause the surviving donkey to stop eating), while others have been rescued from neglect, abuse and abandonment.

The donkeys are in various stages of moult. A few already sport sleek summer pelts, but most are shedding their thick winter coats in clumps, giving them the moth-eaten appearance of well-loved soft toys. The youngsters gallop across the grass and flop down to dust-bathe, covering themselves with sand and dried soil. The seniors take a more sedentary approach to dealing with their itchy bodies, rubbing against the fence rails and soliciting scratches from obliging visitors. One particularly shaggy-haired individual has a jackdaw perched on his spine, the resourceful corvid plucking tufts of thick, wiry fur from the withers to line its nest.

As we pass the stables, a pair of swallows swoop out through an open door, their cobalt blue plumage gleaming in the sunlight. Donkeys also have a mutually beneficial association with these elegant hirundines, though less intimate than their symbiotic relationship with jackdaws. As temperatures rise, flies, mosquitoes and midges multiply and become more active. Drawn to equids' sweaty skin like iron filings to a magnet, they cause irritation and painful skin conditions such as sweet itch.

Attempts to stave off the biting insects by tail-swishing, head-tossing and foot-stamping are futile, but relief comes as the swallows cruise low, darting around the donkeys' limbs to snap up the winged attackers. With a brood of swallow chicks requiring 6,000 insects daily to survive, prime foraging just a few wingbeats from their nest site will be a huge advantage for these parents-to-be.
Claire Stares

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Why did Sunak go to the country now? Here's why

Why now and not the autumn for a general election (Sunak's big gamble, 23 May)? It's obvious, surely. In a desperate world, there will be record numbers of people arriving on small boats this summer, and few if any flights to Rwanda taking off, making no difference to the numbers coming across the Channel. Presumably, civil servants have made their predictions. Rishi Sunak wants to make high claims for his Rwanda policy and lord it over Labour, before it is proved definitively to be both inhumane and ineffective.
Dr Stefan Hawlin
Oxford

● The date of the general election seems designed to disenfranchise young people as much as possible, since most university students who vote do so at their term-time address. Universities are in recess on 4 July and many students will be at their parents' or between university accommodation. Please make sure anyone you know in this situation registers at an appropriate address, preferably with a postal vote.
Michelle Kimber
Plymouth

● I wonder, with his links to the US, whether Rishi Sunak has made a subconscious choice of election date: his own independence day?
Erica Burch
Hastings, East Sussex

● Rishi Sunak is clearly aware of Harold Wilson's 1966 view that England only win football competitions under Labour. His vacating No 10 before the end of Euro 2024 can only help the team.
Keith Flett
Tottenham, London

● I imagine the Tories have called an election just before the start of the summer holidays with the full knowledge that they will be able to spend unlimited time with their families and few friends after it.
Jonathan Cockburn
Hewelsfield, Gloucestershire

● In his speech, Rishi Sunak praised the kindness of the British public during the pandemic. The kindest thing they could do would be to vote to put him out of our misery.
Austen Lynch
Garstang, Lancashire

● Given that Rishi Sunak appears incapable of using a contactless card or an umbrella, is it time to introduce basic life skills classes for MPs?
Toby Morse
Bristol

● Does this mean that the prime minister is a Tory wet?
Peter Irvine
Warwick

● This week's Inside No 9 episode on BBC Two was bonkers, surreal and bordering on farce, only upstaged by the latest episode of Inside No 10.
Toby Wood
Peterborough

● Restoring the whip to Diane Abbott so she can be selected to fight the seat she has held for 37 years will be worth more to Labour than a five-minute party political broadcast.
Les Bright
Exeter

● I hope I can survive another six weeks of Tories like Danny Kruger telling me voting for them is voting for change and voting for Labour is voting for more of the same.
Martin Berman
Rutherglen, South Lanarkshire

● It's 6.30pm on Wednesday. Can I be the first to go on record as already fed up with the election campaign?
Isabella Stone
Sheffield

ICC warrants would be an anti-colonial step

Israel's response to the news that the ICC prosecutor has sought arrest warrants against Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity could have been expected ('Nations of civilised world' urged to reject arrest warrants, 22 May). From asserting that the warrants would hinder Israel's right to self-defence and create an offensive equivalence with Hamas's crimes to the preposterous smearing of the prosecutor as antisemitic, Israel's claims can be easily refuted.

The US, in its reaction, reverted to imperial type. Having welcomed the ICC's decision in March 2023 to issue an arrest warrant for international crimes against Vladimir Putin in respect of the war in Ukraine, it now called the ICC's request "outrageous". It claimed that faith should be had in Israel's judicial system to deal with international crimes, although all a neutral observer can see is a history of impunity. In short, the US has reacted with customary hostility when the ICC's actions do not suit its interests.

What is extraordinary, however, is to see supposedly staunch ICC supporters such as Germany echo some of Israel's claims in criticising the prosecutor, even though it clarified that it would abide by the law and execute the arrest warrants if issued. Israel's call on "nations of the civilised world" to boycott the ICC betrays a colonial mindset. In international relations and law, the trope of civilisation has a long history of justifying hegemony and the use of violence to establish and maintain it. It is time that these imperial and colonial mindsets are laid to rest. The issuing of the arrest warrants by the ICC's pre-trial chamber would be an important step in that direction.
Prof Lutz Oette
Soas University of London

Issues with euthanasia for mental suffering

The story of Zoraya ter Beek should certainly elicit our compassion ('I feel relief': Dutch woman, 29, granted assisted dying over mental suffering, 17 May). For such a young person to feel their mental suffering has been enough to make them wish for euthanasia is tragic. As psychiatrists, we are inclined to ask questions about the surety of her diagnoses and about the details of her treatment. A deeper instinct, obliterated once assisted suicide and euthanasia are legalised and normalised, says there is always something to be done: there is always hope. Euthanasia offers the opposite: nothing further to be done; no hope, only death.

But ter Beek's story has wider implications. For instance, it shows how the eligibility criteria for assisted suicide and euthanasia expand. In the Netherlands, the criteria now include not solely those with the capacity to make decisions, but those who lack capacity too; not solely physical suffering but mental (including being "tired of life"); not solely adults, but also children.

We have to recognise just how value-laden many psychiatric diagnoses are and how nebulous a term such as "unbearable suffering" must remain. The hopelessness of people with depression will seem to make their suffering unbearable, but clinicians must provide hope. Allowing euthanasia for mental health problems suggests a conflict between the policy of suicide prevention and a policy of suicide promotion.
Prof Julian C Hughes *University of Bristol,* **Prof Jonathan Cavanagh** *University of Glasgow,* **Prof Allan House** *University of Leeds,* **Prof Alan Thomas** *Newcastle University*

● *Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123, or email jo@samaritans.org*

Corrections and clarifications

● The machine being refilled with water in a 1942 photo showing works of art that had been stored for protection in Manod quarry near Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd, during the second world war, was a hygrometer, not a hydrometer as the image caption said (Painting back in Wales after wartime stint in slate mine, 8 May, p3). A hygrometer measures humidity, whereas a hydrometer measures the density of a liquid.

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Luton Town top of the Tipping league

Manchester City's "historic" fourth title (20 May) is perhaps not so surprising since they are the richest club; runners-up Arsenal are the second-richest, and the bottom club, Sheffield United, the second-poorest. A league that I created, by calculating points won per club value in billions of euros, puts Luton Town way out in front (208 points per billion) and Manchester City second from bottom (72 points per billion). Hats off to Luton!
Edward Tipping
Staveley, Cumbria

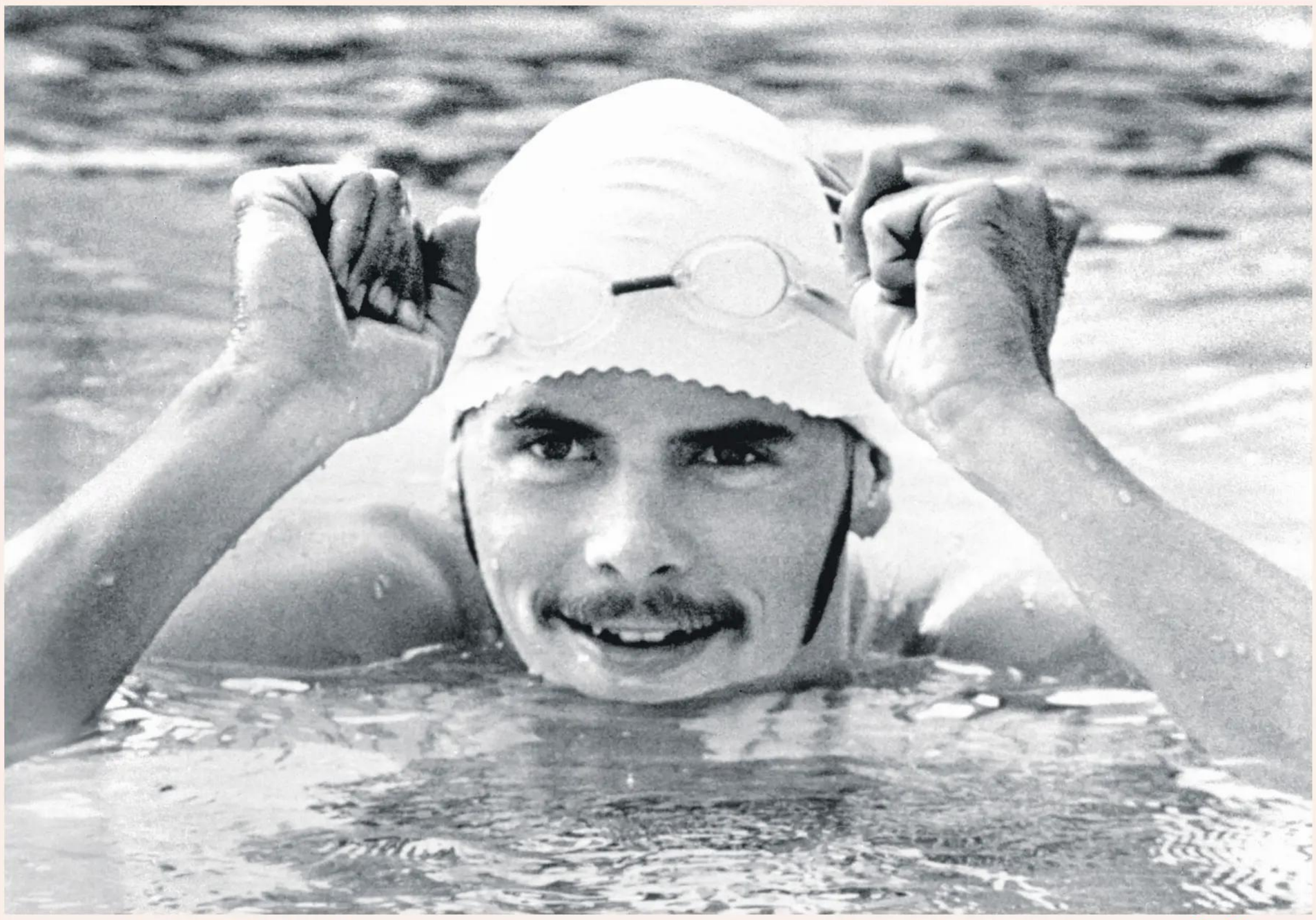
● I knew someone would mention nominative determinism after I wrote a letter about population. Mike Hine (Letters, 21 May) might like to know that until I retired I was Mr Plenty the Quantity Surveyor. In future, perhaps I should use my middle name, as below.
R Converwell Plenty
Stroud, Gloucestershire

● As a student in Dundee in the 1960s, I asked at a shop for spring onions and was told "It's not spring yet" (Letters, 22 May).
Dr Nigel Fairweather
Brixham, Devon

● When my boyfriend went into a chemist in Bishop's Stortford in 1977 for a treatment for crabs, he was told, nose-in-the-air, that this was an urban complaint. Hackney, probably.
Louise Foxcroft
London

● Adrian Chiles (G2, 23 May) can't find a good definition for "populist". I can't discover one for "socially conservative". Can anyone help?
Jane Lawson
London

● A populist is someone who thinks that there is always an easy answer to a difficult question.
David Upton
Middlesbrough



David Wilkie

Great British swimmer hailed for winning gold in the 200m breaststroke at the Montreal Olympics

On the day that David Wilkie, who has died of cancer aged 70, won an Olympic swimming gold medal in Montreal in 1976, he was the first British man to do so since Henry Taylor 68 years earlier.

Expectations for him were high: as a teenager, he had won Olympic silver for the 200m breaststroke in Munich in 1972, and the following year became world champion. In Montreal he delivered, beating the world record in the same event by three seconds – a country mile by swimming standards.

In his second Olympics he had hoped to target three gold medals, confident from his two 1975 world championship golds, his No 1 world ranking in both the 200m breaststroke and 200m individual medley, and his world No 2 status in the 100m breaststroke. However, the 200m individual medley was taken out of the Olympic programme in 1976, and Wilkie's US rival, John Hencken, came first in the 100m breaststroke, with Wilkie settling for silver before achieving his gold medal triumph.

Aged just 22, he then retired with five world records, 23 Commonwealth records, 16 European records and 30 British records to his name. In 1977 he was appointed MBE, and five years later was inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame. His idea on retiring was to explore the commercial possibilities of providing swimming aids.

Wilkie retired at the age of 22 with five world records, 23 Commonwealth records, 16 European records and 30 British records to his name PA

It was Wilkie who introduced the use of a hat and goggles while swimming. At the time they were considered artificial enhancements, with one official at an event in Canada telling him he could not wear a hat, on the grounds that it broke amateur laws.

As he told me in an interview shortly before the Rio Olympics in 2016: "I tried to be a bit of a rebel and grow my hair long, and I hated that chlorine got in my eyes. It worked for me and it became, I suppose, de rigueur for swimmers from that day on." In the 90s, he worked with the swimwear brand Speedo to develop the "speedmask" with goggles built into the swim hat, but it failed to catch on.

> **I tried to be a bit of a rebel and grow my hair long. It worked for me**

As a swimmer, it was quite clear to him that "success is usually only measured by the amount of gold medals you win … no one remembers the guy who won the silver or the bronze medal."

But continuing at that level at the next Olympics, in 1980, was not open to him: "In those days I could not have swum in Moscow because I was classed as a professional swimmer. Had I won in Moscow with the times I had done in Montreal, I would have won three gold medals. In those amateur days you were restricted to how many Olympics you could do if you made money out of your past glory."

Born in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), David was the son of Scottish parents, Jean and Harry Wilkie. His father, who ran a tea plantation, was very keen on sport, and the family were members of various swimming, golf and tennis clubs. David reflected: "Maybe I wish I had taken to tennis more naturally, but I had been swimming a long, long time, so by the time I got back to Scotland from aged 11, I was a good swimmer."

On their arrival in Edinburgh, his father sent him to the independent school Daniel Stewart's college (now Stewart's Melville College) and signed him up for Warrender Swimming Baths club. David hated training and could not understand the discipline, finding it tedious. At the age of 15 his coach threatened to kick him out of the club; the 1970 Commonwealth Games were held in Edinburgh and this rebuke spurred him on to win a bronze medal for Scotland at the age of 16.

By the time of the buildup to his first Olympics, two years later, he was ranked 36th in the world, but with a reputation for avoiding hard work. His apparent lack of commitment made his silver medal a surprise to many, but he had done enough to impress in the US, with the offer of scholarships at Harvard and other universities.

He accepted a place at the University of Miami, where he studied marine biology while training for the next Olympics. As he later admitted, had he not made the move from Edinburgh he would probably not have gone on to win Olympic gold.

Though based in the US, Wilkie became the one to break the American swimmers' dominance of the sport, and the clean sweep of medals that they might have expected in Montreal. "I was looked upon as an American that was swimming for Britain, because I spent four years in America. I was funded by them so they really thought I was a phoney Brit."

He went on to develop business interests beyond swimming, in 1986 co-founding the healthcare company Health Perception, which in 2004 was sold for £7.8m. Then he co-founded Pet's Kitchen, a pet food company supplying British supermarkets.

In this respect he was something of a pioneer in building a career that went beyond sporting success while young: "I think I was one of the first commercial athletes to make that change from sport into commercial life; writing books, working with television companies, opening up swimming pools, doing talks. It was an eye-opener for me, because it was a change in amateur sport. In '76 that breakdown started to happen between amateurism and professionalism."

In 1985 he married Helen Isacson, from Sweden. She and their two children, Natasha and Adam, survive him.

Ashley Newman

David Andrew Wilkie, swimmer and businessman, born 8 March 1954; died 22 May 2024

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Sir Jonah Walker-Smith

Barrister who was part of the defence team during the Oz magazine obscenity trial of 1971

At the moment John Mortimer QC rose to defend the publisher Felix Dennis in the Oz magazine obscenity trial at the Old Bailey in 1971, his junior sitting alongside him was the criminal barrister Jonah Walker-Smith. The case, a collision between the postwar establishment and hippy counterculture, was one most senior lawyers were eager to avoid because of the notorious content of the issue of the magazine in question, which had been edited by secondary schoolchildren, and included a cartoon of Rupert the Bear having sex.

Like Mortimer, Walker-Smith, who has died aged 84, never shrank from representing unpopular defendants. The pair succeeded in persuading the jury to find Dennis and his co-defendants, Richard Neville and Jim Anderson, not guilty of the main charge of "corrupting the morals of children".

It was a hearing dominated by the reactionary personality of Judge Michael Argyle, who sentenced all three – found guilty of lesser offences of publishing an obscene magazine and sending indecent articles through the post – to prison.

The court of appeal subsequently quashed the obscenity verdict and suspended the sentences. One judge sent out a clerk to buy £20 of the strongest pornography he could find; the Oz material paled in comparison.

Mortimer, later famous for his Rumpole of the Bailey stories, was pupil master to Walker-Smith when he joined chambers. It was a professional relationship that proved extremely creative.

One of Mortimer's tales, Rumpole and the Bubble Reputation, is based on Walker-Smith's bizarre experience when he and colleagues inspected a Soho strip club for legal purposes. Police raided the premises and the lawyers were also detained. The raid was reported and a libel case ensued, which Walker-Smith won.

Mortimer turned it into a comic episode that was later televised.



Walker-Smith enjoyed the challenge and personalities involved in criminal cases – a legal vocation that he sustained for almost 60 years

Walker-Smith was born in the market town of Witney, Oxfordshire, three days after Britain entered the second world war. His first name was John, but he was known by his second, Jonah. His father, Derek, a barrister, became a Conservative MP for Hertford and a health minister who championed polio vaccinations, and, eventually, was elevated to the peerage, taking the title Lord Broxbourne. His mother, Dorothy (nee Etherton), was an actor.

Educated at Westminster school, London, he won a scholarship to Christ Church, Oxford. After a gap year in Canada, he initially studied philosophy, politics and economics, but switched to modern history, graduating in 1962.

The following year he joined the bar. His father had specialised in property law but Jonah preferred the challenge and personalities involved in criminal cases – a legal vocation that he sustained for almost 60 years.

He joined chambers at 1 Dr Johnson's Buildings, which were then headed by the eminent Welsh Liberal MP Emlyn Hooson QC and where Mortimer also practised.

Early cases included courts martial in Cyprus, Germany and the Middle East as well as prosecution work. For most of his life, however, Walker-Smith acted for defendants as a legal aid funded lawyer, believing that everyone is entitled to well-argued representation in court.

He had political ambitions. In 1966, he stood unsuccessfully as Conservative candidate for Newcastle Central – a safe Labour seat. Two years later he was elected to Westminster city council, where he became deputy council leader and chaired key committees.

In 1983, the council leader stood down, triggering a contest between Walker-Smith, who promised "the maximum of pragmatism", and the arch-Thatcherite Shirley Porter. The first vote was tied, he lost narrowly on the second ballot and he then resigned from the council. It was through council work that he met his future wife, Aileen Smith. She was a social worker at the Soho Project, which supported young people living on the streets, and a lecturer at North London Polytechnic (University of North London). They married in 1974.

Among his high-profile cases was the Old Bailey art case involving the forger Tom Keating, in 1979. Walker-Smith represented Keating's partner, Jane Kelly. The charges against Keating were dropped when he fell ill; Kelly received a suspended sentence.

Walker-Smith also sat as a recorder, or part-time judge. In 1990, he was asked by his former pupil Geoffrey Robertson KC to join a new set of chambers established by libertarian lawyers in Doughty Street. Among his colleagues were Keir Starmer and Helena Kennedy.

Robertson, who also worked with Walker-Smith on the Oz trial, had reason to be grateful. Early in his career Robertson was given a ticket for parking his car outside court. A draconian magistrate issued a warrant for his arrest but made no provision for bail. When Robertson visited a police station he was detained and faced a night in the cells. Allowed a phone call, Robertson rang his pupil master, Walker-Smith, who swiftly appeared, borrowed the arrest warrant, tracked down a magistrate at home and secured papers for Robertson's release.

As a believer in the importance of legal aid, Walker-Smith stood up to hectoring judges when defending clients who were not always likable characters. On one occasion he sang Ralph McTell's song Streets of London in court to dramatise the many problems faced by a homeless man. In 2006, he wrote to the Spectator deploring an article suggesting that Saddam Hussein did not deserve a "fair trial".

In 1992, on his father's death, he inherited the family baronetcy. He nevertheless continued appearing as a defence barrister until the age of 80. Always gregarious, he enjoyed membership of the Garrick Club and horse-racing.

He is survived by Aileen, a daughter, Charmian, and son, Dan, and four grandchildren.

Owen Bowcott

John Jonah Walker-Smith, barrister, born 6 September 1939; died 9 March 2024

On one occasion he sang Streets of London in court to dramatise the many problems faced by a homeless man

Birthdays

Stanley Baxter, comedian and actor, 98; **Jim Broadbent**, actor, 75; **Gary Burghoff**, actor, 81; **Eric Cantona**, footballer and actor, 58; **Tommy Chong**, comedian and musician, 86; **Tansu Çiller**, academic, economist and former prime minister of Turkey, 78; **Bob Dylan**, singer and songwriter, 83; **Daisy Edgar-Jones**, actor, 26; **Dominic Grieve**, former Conservative MP and attorney general, 68; **Orla Kiely**, fashion designer, 61; **Patti LaBelle**, singer and songwriter, 80; **Liz McColgan**, Olympic athlete, 60; **Paul McCreesh**, founder and artistic director, Gabrieli Consort & Players, 64; **Alfred Molina**, actor, 71; **Adrian Moorhouse**, Olympic swimmer, 60; **Steven Norris**, businessman and former Conservative minister, 79; **Dermot O'Leary**, broadcaster, 51; **Sir Richard Ottaway**, former Conservative MP, 79; **Dave Peacock**, musician, 79; **Alice Perkins**, former chair, Post Office, 75; **Annamarie Phelps**, sports administrator, 58; **Priscilla Presley**, actor, 79; **Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg**, Conservative MP and former minister, 55; **Sir Luke Rittner**, former chief executive, Royal Academy of Dance, 77; **Dame Kristin Scott Thomas**, actor, 64; **Archie Shepp**, saxophonist and composer, 87; **Prof Jeremy Treglown**, writer and literary critic, 78; **Steve Upton**, musician, 78; **Tony Valentino**, guitarist, 83; **Richard Wilson**, sculptor, 71.

Letter

Bernard Hill

In 1993 the actor Bernard Hill (obituary, 7 May) created an extraordinary character in a three-part drama by Edward Bond for BBC television, Olly's Prison, directed by Roy Battersby.

The work's long opening scene pits Hill's character Mike against a silent daughter, brilliantly played by Charlotte Coleman, whom he eventually kills over her refusal to drink a cup of tea. The drama as a whole addresses profound issues of justice, family and morality, held together by Hill's troubled and enigmatic Everyman.

Tony Coult

Announcements

Births

BAMFORTH-TIGHE. A daughter, Isabelle Frances Lily, to Heather and Mike, and sister to Evelyn. "Their joy was the joy of the morning before the dew is dry, when every leaf is green."

For Announcements, Acknowledgments, Adoptions, Anniversaries, Birthdays, Births, Deaths, Engagements, Memorial Services and In Memoriam, email us at announcements@theguardian.com including your name, address and telephone number or phone 0203 353 2114.

Yesterday's solutions

Killer sudoku
Easy

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

Medium

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

Codeword

S	H	A	W	L	■	B	I	N	M	A	N	■								
U	■	N	■	E	■	A	■	E	■	B	■	G								
C	O	N	T	E	X	T	■	E	T	H	E	R								
K	■	O	■	W	■	I	■	D	■	O	■	U								
S	K	Y	J	A	C	K	S	■	F	R	O	M								
■	■	E	■	Y	■	■	H	■	A	■	■	P								
L	O	D	E	■	D	A	I	Q	U	I	R	I								
A	■	■	N	■	O	■	R	■	N	■	■	L								
P	R	E	J	U	D	G	E	■	A	B	L	Y								
W	■	■	O	■	G	■	■	F	■	U	■	■								
I	D	L	Y	■	E	M	B	E	Z	Z	L	E								
N	■	I	■	F	■	O	■	L	■	Z	■	P								
G	A	V	E	L	■	P	R	O	V	I	S	O								
S	■	E	■	A	■	E	■	N	■	N	■	X								
■	F	R	I	G	I	D	■	S	O	G	G	Y								

Cryptic crossword
Solution No. 29,390

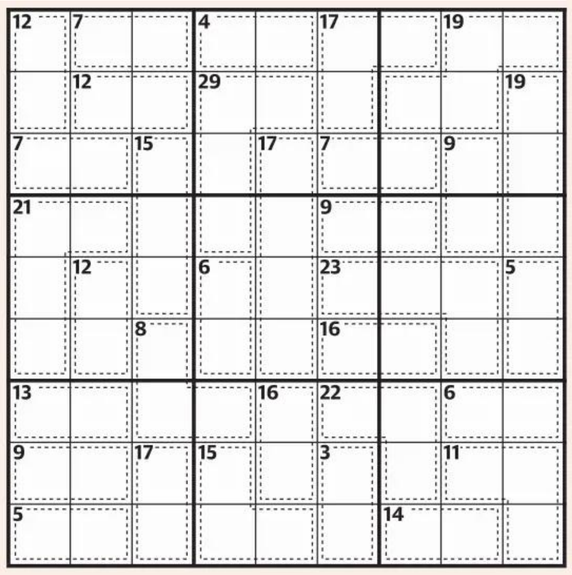
B	■	T	■	N	■	T	■	G	■	B	■	A	■	S
A	D	U	L	A	T	O	R	Y	■	I	G	L	O	O
C	■	R	■	T	■	U	■	R	■	L	■	I	■	U
K	A	T	S	U	■	C	R	A	D	L	E	C	A	P
■	■	L	■	R	■	H	■	T	■	■	■	A	■	■
E	L	E	N	O	R	E	■	I	S	L	A	N	D	S
X	■	■	■	P	■	■	O	■	O	■	T	■	I	■
T	E	S	T	A	■	C	O	N	■	G	R	E	E	N
O	■	W	■	T	■	O	■	■	■	G	■	■	■	C
L	E	A	T	H	E	R	■	C	H	E	L	O	N	E
■	■	N	■	■	■	A	■	O	■	R	■	R	■	■
D	O	N	A	T	E	L	L	O	■	H	A	W	K	S
O	■	E	■	U	■	S	■	T	■	E	■	E	■	I
V	I	C	A	R	■	E	Y	E	B	A	L	L	E	D
E	■	K	■	N	■	A	■	R	■	D	■	L	■	E

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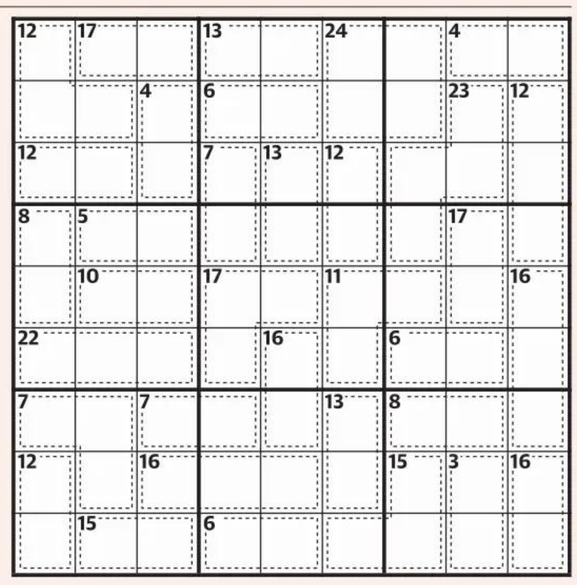
Killer sudoku

Easy

The normal rules of sudoku apply: fill each row, column and 3x3 box with all the numbers from 1 to 9. In addition, the digits in each inner shape (marked by dots) must add up to the number in the top corner of that box. No digit can be repeated within an inner shape.

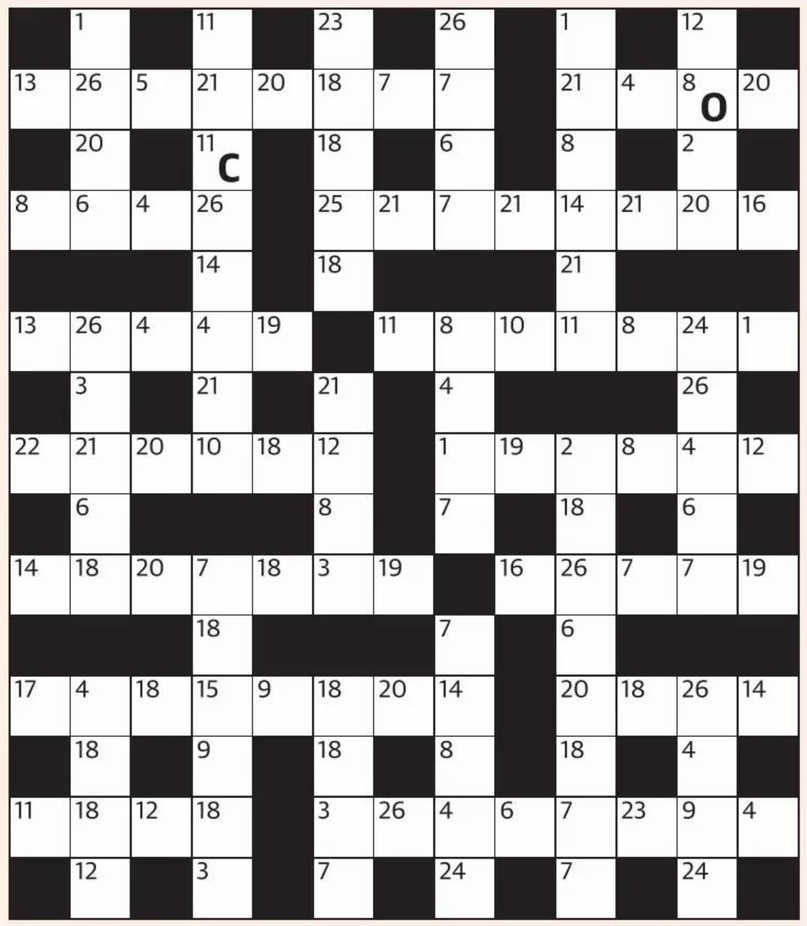


Medium



Codeword

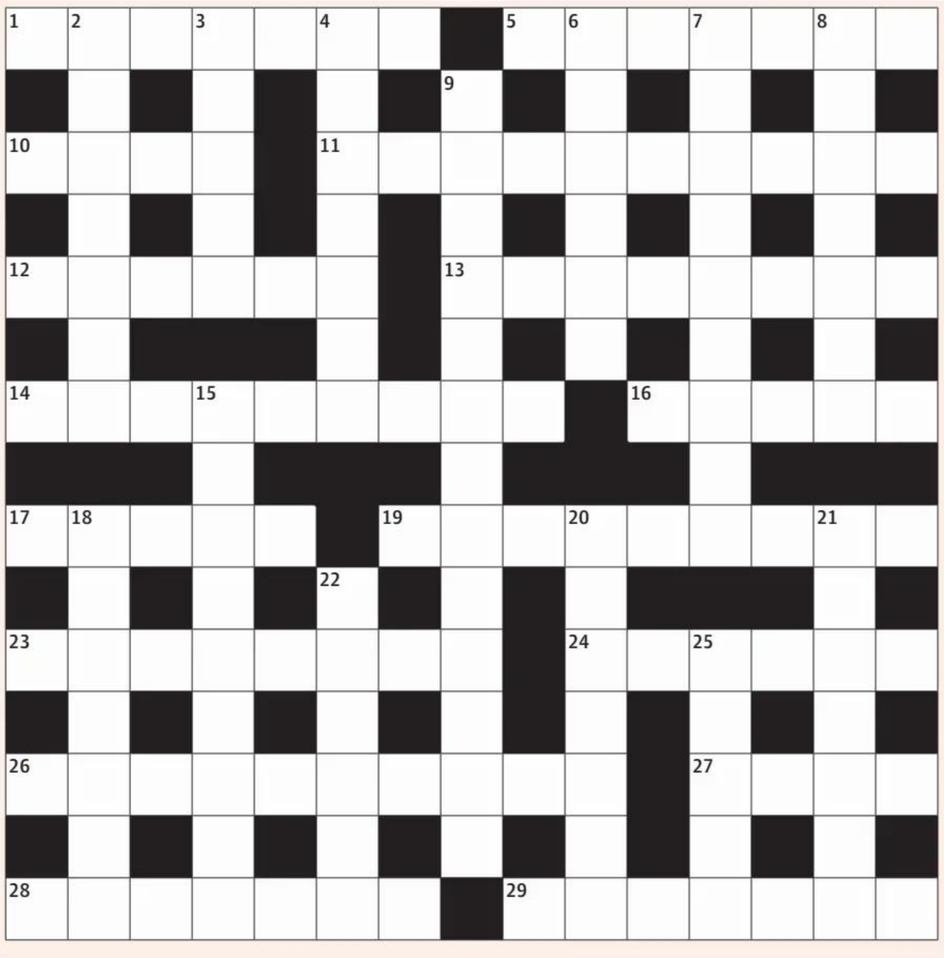
Each letter of the alphabet makes at least one appearance in the grid, and is represented by the same number wherever it appears. The letters decoded should help you to identify other letters and words in the grid.



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 O	9	10	11 C	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

Guardian cryptic crossword No 29,391 set by Philistine



Across

1 I say, why me, being sent back to a rogue school? (7)
5 How old clothes are rubbish! (7)
10 No member of an ethnic minority in America is a stinger (4)
11 Mrs Sprat does talk (4,3,3)
12/13 She sang of a broken heart, with straight love rejected (6,8)
14 Unreliable obsessive hiding cryptic code finally left (9)
16 Dealt with coffee from the East (5)
17 Analyse pretty top and bottom (5)
19 It's rot! Solve the problem! (4,2,3)
23/24 Intricate work or boys going berserk with spray can? (8,6)
26 One US city hospital with a misguided notion ... (3,7)
27 ... to return gold in another's RMB (4)
28 Revered creature that surprises me (4,3)
29 Taken up in total, pot mixed with ecstasy (7)

Down

2 Tea and a smile in distress (7)
3 Spearhead stolen from tyrant's warehouse (5)
4 Holy place thumbs-down for old toys (7)
6 Shaped primarily like a star (6)
7 Pause quickly for something to eat (9)
8 Rock managed in-house (7)
9 No need to make fun of such desperate pleas for demise (4-9)
15 Bag up very cautious bird (9)
18 Save peeled grocer's fruit (7)
20 The Sun, for one, may be a bit loud and non-U (7)
21 Steal the show from further back (7)
22 Decoration for military march is cheap stuff as well (6)
25 Settle clue for bark (3,2)

Saddle up!

From Beyoncé to Shaboozey, why pop has a country twang this summer



G2

Friday 24/05/24

Film & Music

Jane Asher
'It's like we're living in a bad dream'
page 3

Ghost
How S&M and LSD inspired the megahit
page 5



Ranked! Beastie Boys songs

Stevie Chick picks the New York trio's best tracks, blending gonzo hip-hop, funk and punk, 30 years after Ill Communication

1
Get It Together *(1994)*
By 1994, the Beasties didn't just dominate the zeitgeist: they *were* the zeitgeist: a multimedia machine with their own record label, magazine and clothing line. On this collab with Q-Tip, they held their own against their era's primo MC. Over a brilliantly off-the-cuff jazz-hop lick, Tip and the trio celebrate New York and their own selves, delivering an ineffable sliver of extemporaneous genius that captured them at their playful, inventive best. The swagger was justified.

2
Car Thief *(1989)*
Dosed up on intoxicants, the trio engage in vandalism and violence, pausing to mock Def Jam boss Russell Simmons and 60s folkie Donovan, the father of Ad-Rock's then-girlfriend, Ione Skye. Car Thief was a continuation of License to Ill's bad-boy posturing, only sharper, funnier and much, much funkier.

3
Sabotage *(1994)*
This one-chord wonder was a masterpiece of punk-rap fusion, sustaining its rage over three minutes of Fugazi-esque guitar, Super Fuzzed bass and Ad-Rock railing at the producer Mario Caldato. Add Spike Jonze's video, dressing the boys in fake moustaches to parody 70s cop-shows, and you had a pop-cultural moment.

4
Intergalactic *(1998)*
The Beasties began their last great anthem during the Ill Communication sessions, before junking everything but the "intergalactic planetary, planetary intergalactic" hook and dressing it with Mussorgsky string stabs and B-movie robot voices. The video, filmed in Tokyo, parodied Japanese monster movies.



5
Shake Your Rump *(1989)*
The Los Angeles-based producers the Dust Brothers had already composed most of the beats for Paul's Boutique before hooking up with the Beasties, but the Boys brought sampledelic creations such as Shake Your Rump alive, breaking up the dense collages of funk, disco and pop with their relentless, anarchic wiseacre-ing, like a horny, mic-toting version of the Marx brothers.

6
Pass the Mic *(1992)*
Invention reigned during those long, stoned afternoons at the G-Son studio, an inspired Yauch building a vast tube of cardboard boxes around Mike D's bass drum to achieve the colossal, John-Bonham-esque beat that drove this steroidal banger. "That clubhouse turned us into musicians," Ad-Rock later said.

7
Gratitude *(1992)*
The Beasties weren't interested in expensive gear – they preferred cheap vintage finds with personality. Yauch's Univox Super Fuzz distortion pedal, which featured on Sabotage and Pass the Mic, made his bass sound monumental on this brilliantly Cro-Magnon funk-rap-rock beast. "When Mr Super Fuzz showed up," wrote Ad-Rock, "shit got different."

8
B-Boy Bouillabaisse *(1989)*
Paul's Boutique ended with hip-hop's answer to Abbey Road's closing medley, its 13-minute spree of song fragments embodying the album's restless, sticky-fingered invention. The whole was greater than the sum of its parts, for sure – but some of those parts were sublime.

9
Bodhisattva Vow *(1994)*
Yauch's embrace of Buddhism marked a turning point, celebrated in this spiritual epic. Conjuring its heavy mood via hypnotic percussion, blasts of feedback and the chanting of monks, it transcended the hokey psychedelic cliches of trip-hop to deliver something deeper.

10
Sure Shot *(1994)*
Ill Communication's opening track played like a State of the Union address, establishing the Beasties' current canon of cool (including Lee Perry, John Woo and Vaughn Bodē) and, in Adam Yauch's offer of "love and respect" to womankind, explicitly repudiating their past sexism. As Ad-Rock later wrote, they could "actually change and learn from mistakes".

See full list of 20 at theguardian.com/music

Playlist



1 **Vicious Pink**
So You Want to Love Me?
Like a Fade to Grey you can dance to, the Leeds duo created perhaps the hardest, sexiest lost masterpiece of the 1980s, which finally got an official release this week.

2 **Amyl and the Sniffers**
U Should Not Be Doing That
"I was in Tokyo showing off my crack!" Amy Taylor is on withering form as she targets bitchy scenesters trying to dictate her life. The strutting glam rock is just as irrepressible.

3 **Shy FX**
Shebeen
Bass-heavy and soundsystem-ready, Shy FX departs his celebrated drum'n'bass for a dancehall track with the west London vocalist Mr Williamz, designed for wining and grinding in the sun.

4 **Okay Kaya**
The Groke
Over deeply peculiar lo-fi flute-driven disco-funk, the Norwegian-American singer confronts a grotesque beast in a metaphor for climate collapse – but makes it fun!

5 **Vince Staples**
Shame on the Devil
Taken from new album Dark Times, out today, Long Beach's finest frames himself as a leader still in need of direction and spiritual guidance, over a sad, drowsy vintage soul backing.

6 **Youth Lagoon**
Lucy Takes a Picture
With a poignant string motif worthy of peak Blue Nile, Trevor Powers returns with another alt-pop classic full of loving, tender poetry set amid changing seasons and dream landscapes.

7 **Raveena**
Lucky
Over blissful keys, a punchy beat and melodic guitar, the Punjabi-American singer channels her confidence in being adored: "No need to fight it, I know you love me."

THIS PAGE: LYNN GOLDSMITH; JOHN SWANNELL. COVER PHOTOGRAPHS: DANIEL PRAKOPCYK; ACACIA EVANS; MEG YOUNG; BLAIR CALDWELL

The reader interview

‘Do another nude scene? Never say never!’

Jane Asher on night terrors, post-performance rituals and why she can thank her bright-red hair for her career



If you were going to bake a Jane Asher cake that best summed you up, what would you bake and how would you decorate it? *TopTramp*
Summing somebody up is a tall order. I *do* love Jamaican ginger cake. I would make it nice and sticky, then decorate it with little theatre masks and TV screen decorations to sum up my work. I guess I should put a cake on a cake, because cakes are a big part of my life. So: a tiered cake? The cakes that delight me the most are those made by my grandchildren, which come smothered in sprinkles.

You are – as am I – of a certain age, and it will be my birthday soon. Does the thought of time’s winged chariot occupy your mind? *studsup*
It more occupies one’s nights rather than days. You can drop into dark pits if you’re not careful. Age becomes part of the yawning abyss that is beside us all. The things that worry you change. At a young age, I was terribly afraid of losing my parents, especially my mother. In midlife, you worry about dying yourself. What will it be like? Will I die in terrible pain? Now, in my ancient age [she is 78], I get depressed if I think about my children at my funeral. All the cliches that you’ll make the most of every day … but you can’t go around thinking: “I’ve got to enjoy every minute,” because you can’t. So – yes – but not to an overwhelming extent.

When you played Celia Ryder in the ITV adaptation of Brideshead Revisited, you gave an extra dimension to a character who, in the book, comes across as simply unpleasant. I’ve always thought an actor should like the character they are playing. Do you agree and did you sympathise with Celia? *WomanofWolfville*
It’s not so much you’ve got to like them, but you have to see their point of view. Otherwise, you are going to overlay your external feelings. I’ve played fascist murderers – it’s hard to admire them, but it doesn’t mean you can’t get into their mindset. Celia Ryder was an irritating, rather smug, silly woman. But while playing her, I became absolutely incensed that Jeremy Irons’ character was sleeping with Diana Quick’s character while I was lying ill on the ship.

I really loved your turn in the Vicente Aranda film Tirant lo Blanc. How was it doing a nude scene so many years after Deep End? Do you agree with Joanna Lumley’s take on screen nudity? *repoman71 and mkwasp*
I haven’t seen the film, because I don’t watch things I’m in. The nude scene was horrible. They are always unpleasant. You worry about how you look. There were no intimacy coordinators. You just took your dressing gown off and had to trust the director not to show the bits of you that you didn’t want shown.

Absolutely, I agree with Jo Lumley, who is a good friend, particularly when she says screen nudity takes you out of whatever you are watching as you think: “There’s Jane Asher taking her clothes off,” rather than it’s a character. Hinting at sex or nudity is more effective than stripping off completely. I wouldn’t do it now, but never say never! I think it’s unlikely, except with a lot of nice rosy filters.

> **We all feel immensely depressed at the state of the world, don’t we? It’s like we’re living in a bad dream**

Will we ever again see the positivity, social mobility and optimism that was about in the UK when your acting career took off? *SansCulottes1789*
We all feel immensely depressed at the state of the world, don’t we? I don’t want to be gloomy about the future, because you worry about your children and your grandchildren. There are a lots of wonderful things happening. I’m a strong believer in science and medicine, and AI – its good side, at least – is doing wonders already. Health and happiness in general are a lot better. But it’s hard to feel it at the moment. It’s like we’re living in a bad dream.

I saw you shopping a few years ago in Sainsbury’s, Cobham. Do you think it was better when they had an in-house Starbucks? I do. *ArthurSternom*
This is a *very* important question. I don’t feel quite qualified to answer, because I’m not sure I was there in the days when it had this wonderful Starbucks. But I can say extra coffee anywhere has got to be a bonus, as far as I’m concerned. So the answer is probably yes.

You recently trod the boards as Lady Kitty in Somerset Maugham’s The Circle, where you typically played two shows a day. How do you unwind after performing in such a demanding production? *VerulamiumParkRanger*
Wine is involved. I’ve already mentioned my coffee addiction, a morning thing, but a glass of wine in the evening is a very important, enjoyable part of my life. I usually have some supper, watch a bit of rubbish on the television. Nothing startling. I don’t suddenly do yoga! I’ll talk to Gerald [Scarfe, her husband], probably for a moan about the show: “I didn’t do this well.” It’s hard to go straight to bed. You’re still kind of wound up.

When I did pantomime – I’ve played the Wicked Queen and Snow White – we did two shows every day. But you can’t moan, because panto is such a joyous thing to do.

Did you have a chance at a Hollywood career or were you happy working here? *Kellysahero1970*
I don’t know whether I would have been an actor had I not done it from such a young age. I was walking along the street, with very long, bright-red hair – not like my pretend red now. It was an extraordinary colour and some film producer said: “I want to have that girl in my film.” It was a tiny part in Mandy, a very good film about a girl who is deaf. What always mystifies me is that it was black and white.

I was asked to do other bits in films from age five onwards. I had no grand plan. My father was a well-known doctor. I remember saying in an interview years ago: “I probably should have done something more serious with my life.” I had this lovely letter from a woman saying: “For goodness sake, shut up about how you should have done this, you should have done that. You entertain people and we enjoy it.” I thought: “Yeah, absolutely. Shut up, Jane.” So there you are.

As told to Rich Pelley

A Family Affair is out now on digital platforms.

Send us your questions for next week’s interviewee
theguardian.com/culture

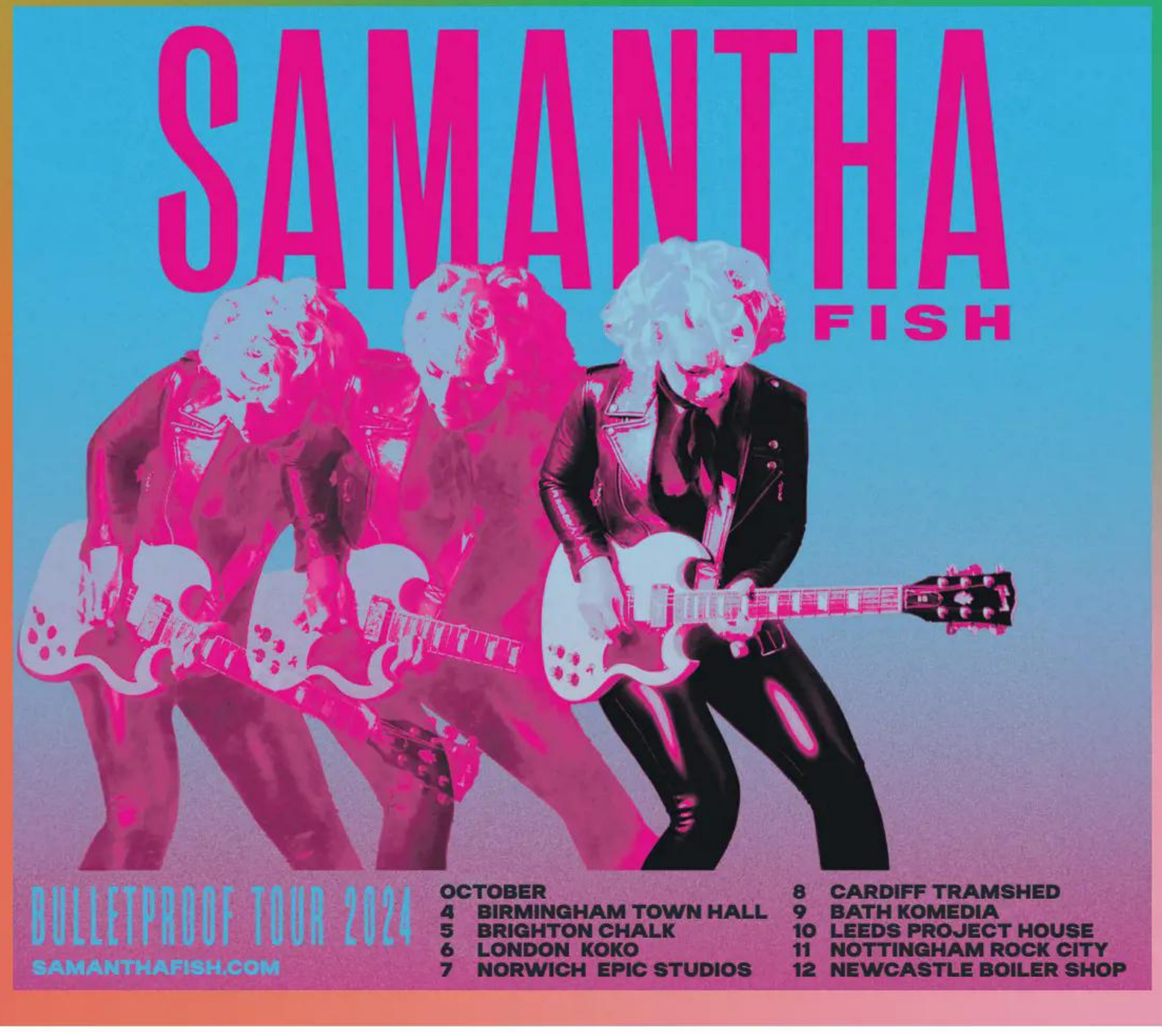

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12 NEWCASTLE BOILER SHOP





Rubin with his Oscar for Ghost; (left) Demi Moore and Patrick Swayze in the film

Unchained melody

Ghost screenwriter Bruce Joel Rubin talks to **Ryan Gilbey** about being gay in a straight marriage, falling out with Whoopi Goldberg and how LSD changed his life

When Bruce Joel Rubin was writing Ghost, he didn't think about the Oscars it might win (two, including one for him) or the money it would make (more than $500m). Instead, he drew on an intimate moment from his past. When Molly, played by Demi Moore, tells her boyfriend, Sam (Patrick Swayze), that she loves him, all he can say in return is: "Ditto." Back in his college days, Rubin was the ditto guy, unable to echo his then-girlfriend's heartfelt sentiment. But for an unusual reason: he was gay.

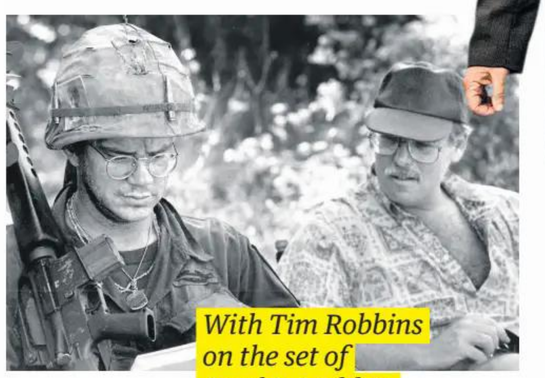
"I've never not been gay," says the genial 81-year-old from his home in a leafy part of Brooklyn, New York. "I am fully gay and I always knew it." This will not come as a shock to his wife, Blanche, who has known about his sexuality for more than 50 years, nor to their children and grandchildren, to whom Rubin came out more recently. Now, he is making it public in his memoir, It's Only a Movie.

"I don't like that I was closeted for so long," he says. "But it would just have confused people." Why spill the beans at all? "I didn't want to leave this world with any secrets.'"

It's Only a Movie covers everything from his New York University days with Martin Scorsese and Brian De Palma to his lifelong spiritual quest and his eventual success as a screenwriter and script doctor. His enlightenment began in the late 1960s, when he accidentally imbibed an entire syringe of LSD instead of the intended single drop. "It was shattering," he says, still sounding awestruck. "It left nothing behind, but the nothing itself was unassailable. I thought I had died. But I did come back, and when I asked why, a voice said loud and clear: 'To tell people what you saw.' OK. What did I see? The rest of my life has been a search for an answer."

Some of it he expressed in the movies he wrote, such as Ghost's nightmarish companion piece, Jacob's Ladder, starring Tim Robbins as a disturbed Vietnam veteran. There was also his trippy first feature, Brainstorm; in the book, he recalls visiting the set, where he was aghast to find Christopher Walken improvising his own dialogue. He was equally horrified when Miloš Forman, an early candidate to direct Ghost, suggested killing off Molly at the end. Along the way, Rubin turned down the chance to write The Lion King and hobnobbed with Michael Jackson, Madonna and Steven Spielberg. Robert De Niro asked him to write a script for Whitney Houston ("De Niro seemed to have romantic designs on her"), while the Marvel boss Kevin Feige rejected his treatment for Doctor Strange. Rubin also met the Dalai Lama and told him: "Forgive me, but I don't think you're my teacher."

His actual guru, Rudi, the Jewish owner of a Brooklyn antiques shop, routinely slept with his students, including Rubin. "It's a dark spot," he admits now. "But I love him, and he provided me with a level of awareness that has served me beyond belief." He still has the three-dollar Buddha figurine that Rudi sold him. When Rubin pointed out that it was chipped, Rudi replied: "Search for perfection in yourself, not in external objects." Bear that in mind next time you're trying to return an item.



With Tim Robbins on the set of Jacob's Ladder; (right) with his wife, Blanche

Despite Rubin's sexuality, marriage has been harmonious. He and his wife met under mystical circumstances. He had just heard Jefferson Airplane singing "You better find somebody to love" and thought he should act on that advice. Not long after, he was introduced to Blanche. He blurted out everything: that he was gay but had enjoyed what little sex he'd had with women and that he had petitioned God to find him a partner. They married two years later.

What had prevented Rubin from pursuing a gay life was not his sexuality but its sadomasochistic dimension, which he felt certain could never be satisfied. He had his first inkling of those desires when he was five. Another boy of the same age told him to remove his shirt, then bound him to a chair. Rubin writes: "Something about the experience took hold – a strange, sexual kind of identity."

He was convinced this would make him a pariah. "There were no clubs I knew about, no way to announce that part of my sexuality," he tells me. "I had no idea there were so many people who were invested in the same ride."

Rubin links his sexual identity to his talent. "Being 'other' is what led me to be a writer. I had to step out of the mainstream of life and look at it from a different angle. Finding yourself on the fringe of human experience is a gift rather than a torment. A movie like Ghost reached hundreds of millions of people, and it's my little hidden lifestyle that gave me a voice to speak to them."

He is especially proud of Sam's revelation at the end of Ghost: "The love inside – you take it with you." He smiles beatifically as he repeats it. "That's a nice thing to leave people with." His memories connected to the movie are largely positive. With one exception: Whoopi Goldberg, who won an Oscar for her uproarious turn as the bogus medium Oda Mae Brown, is no longer speaking to him, having found out that Rubin's initial reaction when her name came up was: "Anybody but Whoopi."



Male beauty for me is overwhelmingly powerful. I feel this explosive joy

"I mistakenly thought she'd be too broad," he says. "But nobody in the movie is more perfect than her. We became friends, I stayed at her house. Then somehow she heard about what I'd said. I don't know if a reconciliation will occur. I love Whoopi, but I don't think my life depends on it."

Rubin has no regrets about putting his gay self to one side. "Clearly, I held back my sexuality. My sexual life was always very internalised. Of course, one wants orgasmic life, but I had orgasms with Blanche. She and I had a good sex life." Was polyamory an option? "We had a conjoined relationship with a guy I liked in our ashram. She had a private moment with him and so did I. Also, I had a few other things along the way, which I didn't write about because they might embarrass people. It's not like I've been dead to that world. But I'm happily gay. And I'll tell you something you'll find out: when you hit your 80s and think your libido is gone, it comes flying back. So big! Male beauty for me is overwhelmingly powerful. Just seeing someone in the supermarket, I feel this explosive joy."

Lately, he has found alternative entertainment. "I'll tell you the biggest joy of my life right now. We filled our pond with koi and goldfish and one carp. And my wife and I go out every night at sunset to feed the fish. We've named them all and there's the little drama of: who's getting the food first? Sometimes the carp comes in and vacuums everything up. He's such a bad guy! We call him Big Mouth. Ah, it's the best movie."

Fish are all very well, but he reserves his profoundest feelings for people. "I love being around them and I love the human journey," he says, his earlier note of awe returning. "It's exquisite. And after this dialogue we've had together today, I have to say that I think you're really wonderful and I'm so happy to have met you. I *love* you." I'm speechless, which is not a good look for an interviewer. But I'm also extremely touched. And it seems only fitting to say: ditto.

It's Only a Movie by Bruce Joel Rubin is published by Sticking Place Books.

PHOTOGRAPHS: PARAMOUNT/ALLSTAR; ABRAHAM CARO MARIN/WIREIMAGE

Honky-tonk heroes

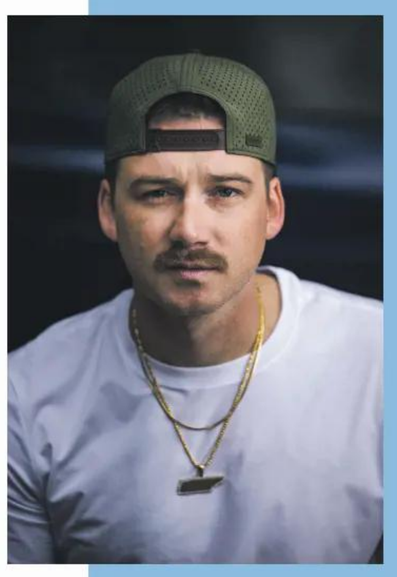




Shaboozey at the Stagecoach festival in California; (below) Morgan Wallen



Dasha at the Country Music Television awards in Austin; (below) Beyoncé





Chris Stapleton and Dua Lipa on stage in Texas; (right) Post Malone



From Dasha to Dua Lipa, pop stars are taking inspiration from country music. Is the biggest craze of 2024 here to stay, asks **Alexis Petridis**

Collins Obinna Chibueze, better known as Shaboozey, has to fit in interviews as and when he can; his schedule is "crazy". He is peering into his phone's camera, his dreadlocks silhouetted against the stark white of the photo studio where he is ensconced. He is answering questions about his eclectic musical passions – he loves the War on Drugs, Lil Yachty and the gruff-voiced Canadian country singer Colter Wall – and how growing up in the small town in Virginia where his Nigerian parents settled influenced his cocktail of hip-hop and country.

On the one hand, Virginia has its hip-hop heroes – Missy Elliott and Pharrell Williams among them – but on the other, "Virginia is a southern state, very rural. A lot of stories were made there, from the colonial days to civil war to political stuff."

Shaboozey has a question he wants to put to me: "So, is my single *really* big in the UK?"

It is. A Bar Song (Tipsy) deftly melds Shaboozey's bruised croon and rap flow to a backing of lazily strummed acoustic guitar and fiddle. It took up residence in the upper reaches of the UK singles chart three weeks ago and shows no signs of vacating them soon.

It's part of a wave of huge country-infused pop singles this year: Post Malone and Morgan Wallen's I Had Some Help, Dasha's Austin, Noah Kahan's chart-topping Stick Season and another No 1 hit, Texas Hold 'Em by Beyoncé. It's hardly unprecedented for the UK singles chart to feature huge country hits – the 1970s saw a string of No 1 singles and albums, by Tammy Wynette, Kenny Rogers and Glen Campbell – but not at the level we are seeing now.

For the most part, country music in Britain has maintained a position as a niche pursuit: big enough to support the annual Country to Country festival, which fills arenas in London, Glasgow and Belfast, but not big enough to turn the artists who headline it – Kane Brown, Thomas Rhett, Old Dominion – into household names. And 2024's hits are not by mainstream country artists. They are primarily by artists described by Alexandra Hannaby, of the Country Music Association's UK taskforce, as "country-adjacent": mainstream pop or R&B artists pivoting towards a different sound.

The country-adjacent pivot seems to be one of 2024's big pop trends. In the wake of Cowboy Carter, Lana Del Rey announced her next album would focus on country music, while Post Malone's collaboration with Wallen represents a distinct step away from the guitar-pop of his most recent album, Austin, let alone his trap-influenced beginnings.

Last week, Dua Lipa – not a vocalist noted for her passion for rhinestones or pedal-steel guitar – appeared unexpectedly at the Academy of Country Music awards with the hirsute, Stetson-sporting Nashville star Chris Stapleton. The duet they performed, Think I'm in Love With You, has just been released as a single. Stapleton's producer, Dave Cobb, was also at the boards for the new album by Zayn Malik (formerly of One Direction), which is full of heartfelt country-adjacent guitar strumming.

"Country-adjacent" certainly fits Dasha, whose single Austin is enjoying its sixth week in the UK Top 10. Despite its preponderance of fingerpicked guitar, the line-dancing-inspired choreography in the video (which helped propel the track to TikTok ubiquity) and indeed the cowboy boot on its sleeve, you can tell she is not part of the Nashville establishment by her merch, which features the word "cuntry" in flowing script. She tells me she started out writing country songs as a teenager in California, shifted to straight-ahead pop on her 2023 debut album, Dirty Blonde, then shifted back after its release.

"I played the first album release show for Dirty Blonde and I remember getting off stage and thinking: that was not me, that was a total act I just put on. And that's when I fired my management, fired my label, took everything to ground zero. My brother's ex-girlfriend and I were in the car and I was playing Morgan Wallen and Zach Bryan and Thomas Rhett – that's all I really listen to. She was like: 'Girl, why are you not making country music again?' It kind of hit me over the head with a frying pan. I wrote Austin and King of California and Drown Me and I was like: we're back on."

Dasha says the appeal of country to artists from other genres is

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY; REUTERS

straightforward: "Country keeps it so grounded and so down-home. It's not talking about unrelatable, high-level things - country's for normal people that work 9-to-5 and have hard lifestyles. I feel like that brings a level of authenticity and people are wanting to tap into that again."

The question of why country has taken root in a previously agnostic British pop landscape is more complex. Hannaby and Sara Sesardic - who is responsible for Spotify's editorial output in the UK and Ireland, curating playlists including its flagship Hot Hits UK - think the shift began before the latest rash of hits.

Hannaby noted a sudden rise in country artists' streaming figures "three months before Beyoncé's album came out, so it definitely wasn't triggered by that". It was driven by a handful of Nashville superstars who seemed to be crossing into the mainstream consciousness - what she calls "a super-spike for Morgan Wallen, Luke Combs, Luke Bryan. Both Combs and Wallen sold out multiple nights at the O2 last year. At Wallen's gigs, there are loads of screaming 16-year-old girls, which you don't normally get at country shows in the UK. It's the same thing as the country-adjacent pop - it's attracting a different audience."

Sesardic, meanwhile, says Spotify noticed a change from an "aesthetic perspective" last summer: "At all of the big stadium shows last year, Harry Styles or Beyoncé, people were wearing these cowboy hats - pink or sparkly ones. There was a cowgirl aesthetic in the Barbie movie, which as we know kind of took over popular culture."

On the most basic level, the rise in country-pop could be another example of streaming and social media broadening the palate of mainstream pop, which in recent years has expanded beyond its usual boundaries to embrace music from South America, Africa and Asia. "It's broken down these barriers that used to exist," says the Radio 1 DJ Mollie King, who has tracked pop's shifting horizons as the host of the station's weekly Future Pop show. "People are just finding songs they like, whether it's K-pop or country. If it's a great song, whatever it is, then people will focus on it."

There's more of a pull to things that feel authentic, that tell stories. There's clearly a kind of escapism

Equally, though, you could view country-pop as part of a broader pop trend: 2024 has been marked by the vast success of Benson Boone's Beautiful Things, Teddy Swims' Lose Control, Mark Ambor's Belong Together, Myles Smith's Stargazing and the unexpected return of Hozier to the top of the charts with Too Sweet, all songs that match a powerful vocal to rootsy instrumentation. It's as if pop has started reverting to its pre-Covid love of the kind of sound that propelled Lewis Capaldi and Rag'n'Bone Man to platinum success, albeit with a noticeably more American flavour and a more straightforwardly photogenic set of stars.

"Guitar-based stuff is really connecting and working at the moment," says Sesardic. "We're in a period where there's more of a pull to things that feel authentic, that tell stories. We're living in difficult times and there's clearly a kind of escapism through that music that people are really associating with." It might not be as obviously escapist as, say, dance music, but country is still rooted in a culture and style noticeably different from Britain's.

And there is always the fact that the biggest pop star in the world in 2024 is at heart a country artist. As King points out, even if you are too young to remember the days before Taylor Swift outgrew her Nashville roots, she has spent years re-recording her old albums, while her current blockbuster tour is designed to showcase every area of her musical past.

"We've seen Taylor Swift go through so many different eras - I Knew You Were Trouble, the whole Max Martin super-pop thing - but we've also seen where she started from, which is also kind of where she went back to with [her 2020 albums] Folklore and Evermore. It can't be a coincidence that this is what people are wanting at the moment, when she's this unstoppable phenomenon."

Whatever the reason for country-pop's ascent - the all-pervading influence of Swift, a shift to a more "authentic" strain of pop, country's relatable storytelling coupled with a hint of escapism, a general penchant for cowboy hats - no one I speak to thinks its success is a blip, more an expansion of the tastes of UK pop fans ("I can see the stats and I can see the change," says Hannaby, firmly).

So, expectations are high for Shaboozey's first post-Beyoncé album, the forthcoming Where I've Been, Isn't Where I'm Going. "Open-mindedness, that's what it's like now," he says, as he heads back to have his photograph taken again. "We just have access to so much music now - people have these different discovery points. I can't speak as to why those people are finding a discovery point now, but, you know, the more the merrier."

Where I've Been, Isn't Where I'm Going by Shaboozey is out on 31 May on Empire. Austin by Dasha is out now on Warner Records.



Valeria Golino in Cannes

'I had situations'

Valeria Golino tells **Xan Brooks** about swapping Hollywood for pansexual arthouse

Valeria Golino rolls into her Cannes hotel late, trailing cigarette smoke and apologies. She hasn't even had time to check in when a publicist steers her into the garden and plumps her beneath an awning. She's being rained on a little and has to reposition her chair. "Let us sit very close together," she says, which is lovely when she is still and faintly alarming when she's not. Her emphatic hand gestures almost take my nose off.

Golino won best actress at Venice (for Francesco Maselli's A Tale of Love) when she was a teenager. She has appeared in arthouse European films and Hollywood spectaculars alike. These days, she's primarily known as a film-maker, having played in Cannes with her first two features (Miele, Euforia). I last saw her in Portrait of a Lady on Fire; she'll next appear in Pablo Larraín's Maria Callas biopic, opposite Angelina Jolie. In between those films, she's been working. "Mostly three years on one project."

Have I seen her big project? I assure her that I have. The Art of Joy is a handsome, involving six-part drama for Sky Original, based on the novel by Goliarda Sapienza. It charts the life of the dynamic Modesta, abused by her father and almost saved by the nuns, who goes about the world freestyle, like a proto-feminist Augie March. Golino explains that she loves Modesta because she has agency and is unburdened by guilt - all of which make her a freak in Italian literature. "She sidesteps all the archetypes. She's not a femme fatale, she's pansexual, she's not a man-hater." She reaches for a cigarette. "I'm not a man-hater either," she says. "I am a lover of men."

In a sense, her career has come full-circle. Golina made her screen debut acting for the great Lina Wertmüller. Now, here she is, at 58, making female-focused tales of her own. "I adored Lina; she was like an aunt to me. The problem was that on set she was ferocious. I was in my first movie and didn't know anything and she was like: 'You, bitch, come here!'" Different times, she shrugs. "Lina was one of three female directors on the planet. She had to show that she was more tough, more violent than the men."

In her first flush of success, Golina lit out for Hollywood. She played Tom Cruise's girlfriend in Rain Man; co-starred in Hot Shots! and its sequel. She had a great time, by and large, but says she couldn't square a blockbuster career with her auteurist early leanings. "It was like, do you want to do a movie with Arnold Schwarzenegger and James Cameron, or do you want to do a mini-movie in Greece with a Cypriot director for no money? 'Oh, I think that I'll do the little movie in Greece.'" In hindsight, she feels she should have gone with Cameron.

I've read that she also auditioned for Pretty Woman; almost played the part of the Los Angeles sex worker that would eventually send Julia Roberts stratospheric. Jennifer Jason Leigh read for the same role. Leigh would later recall the film's director, Garry Marshall, telling her to give the sex worker more "twinkle". He said: "She's only been in the job a few weeks. It's still fun for her."

Golino hoots. She had never heard this story before. "There are a lot of things you can't say today," she says. "But I would also say that there are things you might say on a film that you would not say in real life, because we are exploring the character. So for him to say that she's having fun is maybe OK. Maybe! Because we need to take some liberties when we are exploring the world of a film."

Sure, 1980s Hollywood could be an exploitative place. So, too, was 1980s Italy. "It was everywhere," she says. "And I was 21, 22, a pretty European girl; I had to look after myself. So I had situations with all the people we know. No need to name names. Me too, me too." She waves a hand in dismissal.

Once again, different times. There were upsides and downsides. Here's a story, she says: "When I was 19, I fell in love with an Italian director I worked with who was 43. We had relations for three or four years. He didn't even want to, poor guy; I was the one who chased him! Now, it would be strange, a scandal. Back then, it's OK."

I ask if she sees anything of herself in Modesta, the Sicilian urchin who knows how to take care of herself. She swears she does not: she lacks Modesta's courage, plus her ability to spin situations to her advantage. She says: "If I were Modesta, I'd be a Monte Carlo princess."

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY; ALAMY; SKY ITALIA





Golino with Tom Cruise in Rain Man; (right) The Art of Joy



Peter Bradshaw's film of the week

Hit Man



Breezy fake assassin caper hits the target

★★★★☆

Dir *Richard Linklater*

Starring *Glen Powell, Adria Arjona, Retta*

115 mins **Cert** *15*

For this thoroughly entertaining comedy thriller, Richard Linklater finds the distinctive register of sunny geniality that he so often gives us - when he's not working on more demanding movies such as Boyhood or the Before series. And yet the question of criminal violence presented in terms of goofy unreality gives this film a flavour of the Coen brothers.

It is loosely based on the true story of Gary Johnson, an undercover law enforcement officer in Houston, Texas. Johnson specialised in posing as a "hitman", setting up meets with people who wanted others offed, secretly taping them while they said so, leading to them being charged with conspiracy to murder, while always at risk of having the charge overturned due to entrapment.

Linklater and co-writer and star Glen Powell transpose the action to New Orleans and make their bogus assassin an earnest liberal arts professor called Gary, a nerdy birdwatcher who lectures on philosophical concepts of the self and also happens to be a tech whiz who volunteers for the police, helping with their surveillance equipment. When the cops' regular undercover "hitman" Jasper (Austin Amelio) is suspended, the police need someone else and Gary is asked if he wouldn't mind stepping in to help out.

Powell's cheerfully likable performance gets us past the absurdity of this premise. Out of nowhere, Gary turns out to be a natural at faking a tough-guy hitman routine. One awestruck cop - played by Retta - calls him "Daniel Day" and another says he's the "Caucasian Idris". But when Gary meets beautiful, terrified Madison (Adria Arjona), who wants her abusive husband killed, he falls in love and his excitingly phoney existence spirals out of control.

Amusingly, Gary's existential imposture allows him and us to reflect on the fact that the "hitman", like the "self", does not exist - or, at any rate, not outside the movies' fantasy world. There are contract killers in criminal organisations, but they are much closer to snipers in the military and do not work for civilians.

While watching this film, you can spend time waiting for the super-ironic twist. Noir cynicism isn't the point, though - and the film's flaw is that it can't quite absorb the off-camera acts of violence into its fabric of good-humoured comedy. But it is a very diverting adventure in role play. Hit Man comes close to fantasy and approaches screwball, but keeps the realism. A hit is what it deserves to be.

Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga

★★★★☆

Dir *George Miller*

Starring *Anya Taylor-Joy, Chris Hemsworth, Tom Burke*

148 mins **Cert** *15*

"My childhood! My mother! I want them back!" With this howl of anguish, young Furiosa, played by Anya Taylor-Joy, sets the tone of vengeful rage that runs through George Miller's spectacular prequel to his Mad Max reboot from 2015. Once again, there are the crazily weird convoy action sequences: delirious high-velocity contests between motorbikes, 18-wheelers and armed parascenders attacking each other while zooming in the same direction.

Furiosa is the origin story of the glamorous, one-armed badass from the first film. It is, of course, set in Australia's vast, post-apocalyptic wilderness, where warlords rule over precious reserves of food, water, ammo and fuel. Furiosa, played in the first film by Charlize Theron, was notionally in service of the hateful Immortan Joe.

Now, her younger self is played by Taylor-Joy as a fierce warrior-survivor who effectively fulfils the action role originally played by Mad Max. Furiosa, as a kid, is once part of a quiet community in an obscure oasis. She is kidnapped and winds up enslaved by Doctor Dementus, a strangely hilarious villain played by Chris Hemsworth. Furiosa is to pass into the hands of the hideous Immortan Joe (Lachy Hulme), to assist rig-driver Praetorian Jack (Tom Burke). She seems to have a platonic romantic connection with Jack, but the Mad Max world is interestingly sexless; no male dares make a move on Furiosa. It is all leading to a final showdown with the awful Dementus.



Hemsworth comes very close to pinching the whole film, but Miller keeps a lid on humour, as that kind of comic flex can sometimes upend it all. In a sense, Dementus is a character contrived to give Furiosa someone to face off with. Taylor-Joy and Hemsworth are a great pairing and Taylor-Joy is an overwhelmingly convincing action heroine. She sells this.

Slow

★★★☆☆

Dir *Marija Kavtaradze*

Starring *Greta Grinevičiūtė, Kęstutis Cicėnas, Pijus Ganusauskas*

108 mins **Cert** *15*

A delicate love affair blooms in the new film from the Lithuanian director Marija Kavtaradze, which explores attraction and intimacy with intelligence and compassion. It tells the story of Elena (Greta Grinevičiūtė), a contemporary dancer leading a workshop for deaf teenagers, who falls for a sign language interpreter, Dovydas (Kęstutis Cicėnas). When Dovydas tells her he is asexual, she assumes she is being rejected. He clarifies he is telling her *because* he likes her. They decide to try to make it work.

Shot on 16mm film, Slow looks grainy and tactile, fitting for a film interested in human touch. Dovydas's experience of asexuality, an underrepresented subject on screen, is portrayed with care. With strong performances, the relationship unfolds gently.

But there's a sense that perhaps too much is withheld. An encounter between Elena and a messy ex is charged with an earthy tension that is missing in the starry-eyed central love affair. As a result, scenes seem like intellectual explorations of a theme rather than grounded conflicts. Elena's own physicality connects dance and body sensuality. However, Dovydas's motivations remain mysterious.

This makes the film uneven, though Slow rediscovers its footing in an ending that speaks to a central strength: telling a perceptive, mature and moving story about the many ways people can love. **Rebecca Liu**



Games



Hellblade II: Senua's Saga

Xbox X/S, PC

★★★★★

To say that Hellblade II is stressful would be an understatement. Part blood-soaked Norse epic, part harrowingly authentic depiction of living with psychosis, it blurs historical horrors with the snarling demons residing in our heads. Following Senua's nightmarish journey through Helheim, this unlikely sequel finds our grief-stricken heroine alone in a hostile 10th-century Iceland. Melina Juergens gives an exceptional performance as Senua, the voices in her head brought hauntingly to life by the actors Helen Goalen and Abbi Greenland.

As you battle everything from Vikings to giants and the undead, the line between the real world and Senua's psychosis blurs. An unnerving cavern section dials up the psychological horror to almost unbearable levels.

Hellblade II uses the otherworldly rock faces of Iceland to bring its surrealist fiction to life, delivering the most visually stunning game of this console generation to date. As a big-budget sequel to an arthouse game about PTSD, it is 2024's most unlikely blockbuster. Yet from its nerve-shredding start right to its bold, bloody climax, it's an affecting, terrifying triumph. It is brief and tightly scripted, providing a harrowing, profound experience.

But there is kindness interwoven within the cruelty, implying that even the world's worst monsters were once human. In an increasingly divided age, this message of choosing empathy over hatred feels especially poignant. As big companies shutter Bafta-winning studios, a game like Hellblade II deserves to be cherished. Who knows how many more such cerebral epics this risk-averse industry will produce. **Tom Regan**



Alexis Petridis's album of the week

Paul Weller 66



PHOTOGRAPH: NICOLE NODLAND

Growing old gracefully: yet another Weller talent

Rock

Label Polydor

★★★★☆

Among the tracks on Paul Weller's 17th solo album, A Glimpse of You isn't really a standout. It's melodically pretty, but a bit slight; pleasant, but unlikely to elbow The Changingman or Broken Stones from the setlist. Yet A Glimpse of You has the capacity to bring the longstanding Weller fan up short. It happens in the second verse, which appears to depict Weller contemplating his own mortality. "Into the gardens in blooming May," he sings, his voice sounding weathered. "I find a wooden seat where I can wait until the end of the world."

To which the more casual listener might respond: so what? It's a long time since anyone considered rock music exclusively a young person's game; we're used to music that reflects the artist's age. But this is Paul Weller we're talking about, a man who spent the early years of his career making an enormous song and dance about the importance of youth – "you better listen, man, because the kids know where it's at", "life is a drink and you get drunk when you're young", "there should be a youth explosion", "I want us to be like Peter Pan", etc. Indeed, he expresses utter mortification at the very idea of growing old: "The man that you once loved is bald and fat-uh!" he snapped on 1979's Private Hell, as if hair loss and weight gain were a fate too horrific to countenance.

Yet here he is, admittedly neither bald nor fat, but trumpeting his advanced years in the album's very title (although one suspects 66 is named not just for Weller's age, but to commemorate the year he views as pop's *annus mirabilis*) and blithely singing about enjoying a little sit in the park.

In fact, Weller has made a far better job of growing up in public than anyone might have expected. This is largely down to his restlessness, his willingness to change his mind suddenly. It happened most recently with the trio of exploratory albums he made between 2008 and 2012, which succeeded in shaking off the artistic torpor that afflicted him in the early 00s. There are still hints of the experimentalism of Wake Up the Nation or Sonik Kicks here; one of their musical touchstones was Krautrock, and there is a distinctly motorik cast to the rhythm of Jumble Queen, while In Full Flight, a fantastic collaboration with the production duo White Label, offers up a kind of dubbed-out, psychedelic take on early 60s soul, if such a thing can be imagined.



But more striking is 66's elegiac tone. Weller has talked about curbing his relentless work rate and a sense of slowing down seems to have seeped in. It's everywhere, from the preponderance of sun-dappled ballads, to the weariness that soaks the closing track, Burn Out, to his decision to hand over lyrical duties to others. Two of his chosen lyricists are Noel Gallagher and Bobby Gillespie, which suggests Weller is a brave soul.

Once you've got your head around the idea of a more sedentary, ruminative Weller doing things like grasping for the notion of an afterlife ("I want to believe in something greater than me," he sings on Soul Wandering) or clutching on to fleeting memories of the past on the melancholy Nothing, 66 has a lot to commend it. If Sleepy Hollow overdoes the flute-assisted whimsy and the Covid-inspired I Woke Up feels overwrought, they're compensated for by Ship of Fools, a collaboration with the Madness frontman Suggs that carries something of the Kinks' Afternoon Tea in its DNA, and the lovely, slow exhalation of Rise Up Singing, bolstered by Hannah Peel's sumptuous Philly soul orchestration and a guitar solo that nods to You're the Best Thing. It isn't the only moment that evokes Weller's time in the Style Council: their Francophile tendencies are reflected in the gorgeous, chanson-like waltz of My Best Friend's Coat.

Nor is 66 above springing surprises. Flying Fish rests on disco drums, burbling synths and an Abba-esque melody. To be specific, it sounds pleasingly like The Winner Takes It All, but its gleeful buoyancy makes 66's preoccupation with ageing and the passing of time seem curiously beside the point. For a man showing signs of slowing down, Weller can seem remarkably like an artist still in the thick of it.

Artist Ezra Feinberg

Album Soft Power

Label Tonal Union

Contemporary album of the month

★★★★☆



Ezra Feinberg came to our attention about 20 years ago as the leader of the San Francisco-based collective Citay. This is his third solo album – although the "rock" elements have been slowly excised from his vocabulary. Feinberg was a key contributor on the Arp album Zebra in 2018, and much of Soft Power (released 31 May) draws from the same spirit – therapeutic, ambient, playfully minimal. On the opening track, Future Sand, Feinberg plays folksy clawhammer guitar while the flautist David Lackner soars over the top, reminiscent of the bucolic beauty of John Cameron and Harold McNair's music for Kes. Pose Beams is a piece of gently throbbing minimalism, featuring the drone musicians Robbie Lee and Jefre Cantu-Ledesma. Best of all might be the closing track, Get Some Rest, a lovely, pastoral piece in 6/8 where Mary Lattimore's harp weaves seamlessly with Fender Rhodes, acoustic guitar and flute. By omitting the vocals, the fuzz and the improvisatory freakouts, Feinberg has made his music more intense than ever. **John Lewis**

Pop

Artist Nathy Peluso

Album Grasa

Label 5020

★★★★☆



It's curious that Nathy Peluso isn't a household name. Huge in Argentina and Spain, she picked up a Grammy nomination for her debut album, Calambre, a blend of neo-soul, Latin trap and 90s hip-hop. But in the UK she has slipped by relatively unnoticed. This eclectic second album could rectify that. The 50s Italo-balladry of the opener, Corleone, gets crushed under the rubbery horns of the next track, Aprender a Amar, and its snarling refusal to be underestimated; El Día Que Perdí Mi Juventud, its yearning haunted by a cymbal that simmers, is swept away by the lavish salsa of La Presa. Peluso opens the album with a lyric suggesting her ambition is killing her, but the scope and execution suggest an artist who is very much alive. **Alim Kheraj**

Classical

Artist Hallé/Elder

Album Elgar Symphonies Nos 1 & 2

Label Hallé

★★★★★



Elgar's music has played a significant part in Mark Elder's 24 years as music director of the Hallé. When the orchestra founded its own record label, the early releases included both Elgar symphonies. Now, as Elder's tenure ends, the release of performances from concerts in 2021 and 2018 brings the story full circle. Elder's approach has not altered appreciably. But what has obviously matured and deepened is the relationship between conductor and orchestra, as evidenced in the security, warmth and refinement of the playing. In both works, Elder's grasp of the symphonic architecture seems faultless, so that the very different endings of the works are overwhelmingly convincing. These performances are, I think, as fine as any currently available. **Andrew Clements**

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In too deep … Vicky McClure as Emma

Review Insomnia, Paramount+

Sex, drugs and sweat-soaked PJs lift ponderously paced potboiler

★★★☆☆

Jack Seale



Emma Averill (Vicky McClure) has it all. She is married with two children and is a compassionate, competent family lawyer. Her firm's central London conference room looks out over St Paul's, but after another fulfilling and lucrative day, her BMW swooshes her home fast enough to crunch on to the gravel drive of her big country house in time for a bedtime story with her son. When she and her ruggedly bearded hubby, Rob (Tom Cullen), invite their urbane friends over for a relaxed weekend lunch, the chilli she whips up in their massive kitchen is divine and is served on a palatial wooden dining table made by Rob's own strong hands.

But Emma is the protagonist in a psychological thriller, of the kind that used to blaze across two breathless episodes on ITV midweek, but now hangs around for six rather more pretentious ones on Paramount+. So Insomnia, adapted from her novel by Sarah Pinborough, says to Emma: nice upper-middle-class life you've got there. Be a shame if something absolutely bananas happened to it.

The initial cracks are routine. Emma's daughter is old enough to be interested in sex and weed, but not wise enough to enjoy them responsibly; her young son is drawing weird pictures; a case at work is going against her; her black-sheep sister, Phoebe (Leanne Best), has just reappeared unexpectedly; and, worst of all, it's her 40th birthday next week.

But this landmark is not just an ugly number: when Emma and Phoebe's mother hit 40, her mental health problems worsened, causing the girls to be taken into care. Now, Emma is having trouble sleeping, with visions of her mum's disturbing night-time behaviours. The news that her mother has been transferred from her secure facility to a hospital deathbed ratchets up Emma's instability. In her sleep, she starts feverishly lighting candles, running baths, rattling door handles and talking to the inside of cupboards, just like Mother used to. When she awakes to find herself knee-deep in the garden pond, she knows something is up. Is she the bearer of a hereditary curse?

As well as the fear of ageing and the perennial terror of becoming your parent, Insomnia turns its bloodshot gaze to the secrets within families and the passing down of trauma from one generation to the next. But, really, we are just waiting for the pot to boil, which it has barely started to do by the end of the introductory double bill. The unnerving stillness of the Averill house at night and the creepiness of the children's home flashbacks can take us only so far: there is a woman doing very odd stuff in the small hours and Insomnia's character studies and subplots aren't compelling enough to stop us drumming our fingers and waiting to be told why.

Getting there means navigating one of those stories that relies on suppressed memories bubbling to the surface when dramatically convenient. If everyone could just remember everything now, they could save us several hours of viewing time – and save McClure from having to do so much anguished staring in sweat-soaked silk pyjamas. Insomnia is nagged by the doom that looms over every psychological thriller: viewers might be better off waiting for episode six to drop, then watching the last half hour for answers, like bored readers flipping to the final few pages. The ending that awaits them will cause half the audience to say: "Whoa, deep," and the other half to say: "Oh come ON."

And yet Insomnia does reward those who don't hit the skip button. The section where the tension brims and everyone starts having sex with, or murdering, each other is lent a pleasingly woozy quality by the show not being in any hurry. Episode four consists almost entirely of people drinking wine and taking drugs, with the abuse of prescription medication a bracingly honest depiction of how people with money react to stressful events. The fractious dynamic between McClure and Best as mutually resentful siblings – one a golden child who is flourishing as a responsible adult, the other a scrappy rebel who is unhappy, but free – is given time to become convincing. The final episode's jamboree of drugging, stabbing and bludgeoning includes a comeuppance that is as satisfying as it is inevitable.

There is also a last twist that will stay with you just long enough for you to conclude how little sense it makes. Emma has been through hell, but you will have forgotten her before your head hits the pillow.

The Nevermets
10pm, Channel 4



"She is crazy for going out there and doing it … but not bad crazy – good crazy!" That's a friend of Sarah – a 38-year-old British woman who, after virtually dating Jgoy for two years without ever having seen him in person, is about to meet him for the first time in the Philippines. The couple *(above)* are just one fascinating pair who are followed in this look at long-distance partnerships, narrated by Dawn French. The countdowns to their unions are undeniably thrilling.
Hollie Richardson

Unreported World
7.30pm, Channel 4
Krishnan Guru-Murthy rides the Korean pop wave, which, according to his report, is estimated to be worth $8bn. In Seoul, he speaks to teenage students at K-pop dance schools, where only 1% make it big, then looks at the pop phenomenon's darkest side – the country has one of the highest suicide rates in the world. **HR**

Hidden Treasures of the National Trust
9pm, BBC Two
To the impossibly verdant Stourhead in Wiltshire, with the house's endless Saltburn-style corridors and magnificent lake. The big news: there may be an old castle hidden under the lawn, which prompts a comradely archaeological dig. A potted history of Country Life magazine provides a pleasant digression. **Jack Seale**

Sue Perkins: Lost in Thailand
9pm, Channel 5
It's the last leg of Perkins's off-the-beaten-track Thai tour, which she begins by sparring with the Muay Thai champion fighter Jade Sirisompan. Things end with a jam with traditional Molam musicians, who put a spin on some banging disco tunes. **HR**

The Young Offenders
9.30pm, BBC One
Peter Foott's craic-filled, Cork-set comedy continues to follow Conor (Alex Murphy) navigating life after a stint in prison. This week, he's being forced by his mum to bond with her new partner, Tony, on a fishing trip. Cue some mishaps with maggots and tent poles, followed by a boozy night. **HR**

Jerrod Carmichael Reality Show
10pm, Sky Comedy
The brutally honest US comic won an Emmy for a comedy special about coming out. This eight-part project cranks up the candour even more as a camera crew shadows his every move. "I'm trying to self-Truman Show myself," he declares. But how will his friends, parents and lovers feel about being filmed?
Graeme Virtue

What's On
Scan the QR code below to sign up for the What's On newsletter, our free TV email with the best reviews, news and exclusive writing direct to your inbox every Monday

BBC One

6.0 **Breakfast** (T) **9.30** Rip Off Britain (T) **10.15** The Moment of Proof (T) (R) **10.45** Defenders (T) (R) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **12.15** Bargain Hunt (T) **1.0** News (T) **1.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **1.45** Hope Street (T) **2.30** Money for Nothing (T) **3.0** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **3.45** RHS Chelsea Flower Show (T) **4.30** The Finish Line (T) **5.15** Pointless (T) **6.0** News (T) **6.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **7.0** The One Show (T) **7.30** RHS Chelsea Flower Show (T)

8.0 **Would I Lie to You?** (T) (R) With Claudia Winkleman and the Rev Kate Bottley.
8.30 **Outnumbered** (T) (R) Ben auditions for the school musical.
9.0 **Have I Got News for You** (T) Amol Rajan hosts.
9.30 **The Young Offenders** (T) Healy plans a fishing trip to where he grew up.

10.0 **News** (T)
10.30 **Regional News** (T) Weather
10.40 FILM **Spider-Man: Far from Home** (Jon Watts, 2019) (T) Peter's European vacation leads to a battle with monsters from another dimension. Action fantasy, starring Tom Holland.
12.40 **Rebus** (T) (R) **1.30** Weather (T) **1.35** News (T)

BBC Two

6.30 **Homes Under the Hammer** (T) (R) **7.30** Marcus Wareing Simply Provence (T) (R) **8.0** Sign Zone: Antiques Roadshow (T) (R) **9.0** News (T) **1.0** Impossible (T) (R) **1.45** Mastermind (T) (R) **2.15** Great Coastal Railway Journeys (T) (R) **2.45** The Farmers' Country Showdown (T) (R) **3.15** Yellowstone (T) (R) **4.15** Who Do You Think You Are? (T) (R) **5.15** Flog It! (T) (R) **6.0** House of Games (T) (R) **6.30** Simply Provence (T) **7.0** Beechgrove Garden (T) **7.30** Grand Tours of Scotland's Rivers (T)

8.0 **RHS Chelsea Flower Show** (T) Monty Don and Joe Swift provide their expert analysis of the winning garden in the BBC RHS People's Choice Award.
9.0 **Hidden Treasures of the National Trust** (T) A missing masterpiece returns to its stately home after two centuries.

10.0 **QI** (T) (R) With Tom Allen.
10.30 **Newsnight** (T) Weather
11.05 **Rob and Rylan's Grand Tour** (T) (R) A visit to Florence.
12.05 **Secrets and Spies: A Nuclear Game** (T) (R) **1.05** Sign Zone: Andi Oliver's Fabulous Feasts (T) (R) **2.05** Great British Railway Journeys (T) (R) **2.35** Touring Toolshed (T) (R) **3.05** This Is BBC Two (T)

ITV1

6.0 **Good Morning Britain** (T) **9.0** Lorraine (T) **10.0** This Morning (T) **12.30** Loose Women (T) **1.30** News and Weather (T) **1.55** Local News and Weather (T) **2.0** Dickinson's Real Deal (T) (R) **3.0** Lingo (T) (R) **4.0** Tipping Point (T) (R) **5.0** The Chase (T) (R) **6.0** Local News and Weather (T) **6.30** News and Weather (T) **7.30** Emmerdale (T)

8.0 **Coronation Street** (T) A furious Abi accuses Dean of distributing videos of her, and Evelyn and Roy start a book club.
9.0 **Beat the Chasers** (T) (R) Bradley Walsh hosts as contestants take on Issa Schultz, Mark Labbett, Shaun Wallace, Jenny Ryan and Darragh Ennis.

10.0 **News** (T) Weather
10.30 **Local News** (T) Weather
10.45 **ITV Studio Sessions** (T) Music from Sekou.
11.15 FILM **Dr No** (Terence Young, 1962) (T) Spy thriller, starring Sean Connery.
1.05 **Shop on TV 3.0** The Larkins (T) (R) **3.50** Unwind With ITV (T) **5.05** Katie Piper's Breakfast Show (T) (R)

Channel 4

6.30 **3rd Rock from the Sun** (T) (R) **7.45** Everybody Loves Raymond (T) (R) **9.40** Frasier (T) (R) **11.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **12.05** News (T) **12.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **1.05** Find It, Fix It, Flog It (T) (R) **2.10** Countdown (T) **3.0** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.0** Narrow Escapes (T) **5.0** Come Dine With Me: The Professionals (T) **6.0** Four in a Bed (T) **6.30** The Simpsons (T) (R) **7.0** News (T) **7.30** Unreported World (T)

8.0 **Double the Money** (T) The remaining eight teams are given two weeks to double their £2,000 stake. Half of the teams decide to host events, while others attempt food-based projects.
9.0 **Gogglebox** (T) The armchair critics share their opinions on what they have been watching during the week.

10.0 **The Nevermets** (T)
11.05 **Joe & Katherine's Bargain Holidays** (T)
12.10 **Micky Flanagan: Back in the Game** (T) (R) **1.35** Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **2.20** Come Dine With Me (T) (R) **4.30** Location, Location, Location (T) (R) **5.20** Sunday Brunch Best Bits (T) (R) **5.40** Beat the Chef (T) (R)

Channel 5

6.0 **Milkshake! 9.15** Jeremy Vine (T) **11.15** Storm Huntley (T) **12.45** Friends (T) (R) **1.40** News (T) **1.45** Home and Away (T) (R) **2.15** FILM Lies Between Friends (Ann Forry, 2022) (T) **4.0** Bargain-Loving Brits in the Sun (T) (R) **5.0** News (T) **6.0** Police Interceptors (T) (R) **7.0** Jane McDonald: Lost in Japan (T) (R)

8.0 **The Big Steam Adventure: Here We Go Again!** (T) John Sergeant, Peter Davison and Paul "Piglet" Middleton explore the Scottish Highlands.
9.0 **Sue Perkins: Lost in Thailand** (T) Sue visits the capital, Bangkok, looking at one of the ways its pollution problem is being addressed.

10.0 **The Cancellation of Jim Davidson** (T) The comedian looks back at his controversial life and career.
11.30 **When 80s TV Goes Horribly Wrong** (T) (R)
1.25 **Live Casino Show** (T) **3.25** 10 Years Younger in 10 Days (T) (R) **4.10** Our Yorkshire Farm (T) (R) **5.0** House Doctor (T) (R)

BBC Four

7.0 **Top of the Pops** (T) (R) From 1996, with Alcatraz, Luniz and Diana Ross. **7.30** Top of the Pops (T) (R) With 3T, Blur and Oasis. From 1996.

8.0 **Top of the Pops** (T) (R) From 1988, with LA Mix, Ofra Haza and Climie Fisher.
8.30 **Top of the Pops** (T) (R) With Blondie, Heatwave and Thin Lizzy. From 1978.
9.0 **Top of the Pops** (T) (R) An edition from 1984, with Shakatak, Tina Turner, Nik Kershaw, the Eurythmics, Slade and Tina Turner.

10.10 **Tina Turner at the BBC** (T) (R) Archive footage.
11.10 **When Tina Turner Came to Britain** (T) (R) Documentary about the singer's 50-year relationship with the UK.
12.10 **Tina Turner: Simply the Best** (T) (R) **12.55** The 80s: Music's Greatest Decade? With Dylan Jones (T) (R) **1.55** Top of the Pops (T) (R) Three editions.

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm My Mate's a Bad Date **7.20** The Catch Up **7.25** FILM The Witches (2020) **9.0** Paranormal: The Girl, the Ghost and the Gravestone **9.30** Paranormal: The Girl, the Ghost and the Gravestone **10.0** FILM Late Night (2019) **11.35** Dinosaur **12.05** Dinosaur **12.30** Paranormal: The Girl, the Ghost and the Gravestone **1.0** Paranormal: The Girl, the Ghost and the Gravestone **1.30** I Kissed a Girl **2.15** I Kissed a Girl **3.0** Dinosaur **3.30** Dinosaur

Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.10** Secrets of the Supercars **8.0** World's Most Dangerous Roads **9.20** Top Gear Vietnam Special **11.0** Top Gear: Polar Challenge **12.0** Storage Hunters UK **12.30** Storage Hunters UK **1.0** Storage Hunters UK **1.30** Storage Hunters UK **2.0** Gadget Man **2.30** Gadget Man **3.0** Top Gear **4.0** Top Gear **5.0** Hairy Bikers' Best of British **6.0** Rick Stein's French Odyssey **6.30** Rick Stein's French Odyssey **7.0** Richard Osman's House of Games **7.40** Richard Osman's House of Games **8.20** QI XL **9.0** QI XL **9.40** Would I Lie to You? **10.20** Would I Lie to You? **11.0** Taskmaster **12.0** Mock the Week **12.40** Would I Lie to You? **1.20** QI XL **2.0** Whose Line Is It Anyway? USA **2.25** Secrets of the Supercars **3.25** Gadget Man **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am Hollyoaks **6.30** Hollyoaks **7.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **8.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **9.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **9.30** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **10.0** Young Sheldon **10.30** Young Sheldon **11.0** Modern Family **11.30** Modern Family **12.0** The Big Bang Theory **2.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **2.30** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **3.0** Modern Family **3.30** Modern Family **4.0** Young Sheldon **4.30** Young Sheldon **5.0** The Big Bang Theory **5.30** The Big Bang Theory **6.0** The Big Bang Theory **6.30** The Big Bang Theory **7.0** Hollyoaks **7.30** Modern Family **8.0** Teen First Dates **9.0** FILM Meet the Parents (2000) **11.10** Naked Attraction **12.15** The Big Bang Theory **12.45** The Big Bang Theory **1.15** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **1.50** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **2.15** Modern Family **3.05** Naked Attraction **4.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **4.50** Brooklyn Nine-Nine

Film4

11.0am FILM Two Way Stretch (1960) **12.45** FILM Payroll (1961) **2.55** FILM The Nevadan (1950) **4.35** FILM The Golden Voyage of Sinbad (1974) **6.50** FILM The Italian Job (2003) **9.0** FILM Three Thousand Years of Longing (2022) **11.10** FILM A Banquet (2021) **1.05** FILM The Handmaiden (2016)

ITV2

6.0am CITV **9.0** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **9.10** Catchphrase Celebrity Special **10.0** Veronica Mars **11.0** Dawson's Creek **12.0** Secret Crush **1.0** Dress to Impress **2.0** Family Fortunes **3.0** Veronica Mars **4.0** Dawson's Creek **5.0** Dress to Impress **6.0** Celebrity Catchphrase **7.0** Family Fortunes **8.0** Bob's Burgers **9.0** FILM Horrible Bosses 2 (2014) **11.15** Family Guy **12.15** American Dad! **1.15** Bob's Burgers **1.45** Bob's Burgers **2.10** Don't Hate the Playaz **2.50** Unwind With ITV **3.0** Teleshopping

Sky Max

6.0am NCIS: Los Angeles **7.0** DC's Legends of Tomorrow **8.0** The Flash **9.0** Stargate SG-1 **11.0** NCIS: Los Angeles **12.0** The Flash **1.0** MacGyver **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** DC's Legends of Tomorrow **6.0** Stargate SG-1 **7.0** Stargate SG-1 **8.0** Rob & Romesh vs Cricket: South Africa **9.0** A League of Their Own: Mexican Road Trip **10.0** The Walking Dead **11.0** Never Mind the Buzzcocks **11.50** Hold the Front Page **12.55** Resident Alien **2.0** Peacemaker **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** Highway Patrol **5.30** Highway Patrol

Sky Arts

6.0am Darbar Festival 2022 **7.15** Gilbert and Sullivan: A Motley Pair **7.50** The Joy of Painting **9.0** Tales of the Unexpected **10.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **11.0** Discovering: Diane Keaton **12.0** The Joy of Painting **12.30** The Joy of Painting **1.0** Tales of the Unexpected **1.30** Tales of the Unexpected **2.0** Julie Andrews Forever **3.0** The Big Design Challenge **4.0** Discovering: Morgan Freeman **5.0** The Joy of Painting **5.30** The Joy of Painting **6.0** Australian Ballet: Cinderella **7.35** Eric Clapton: Concert By the Lake - Band Du Lac **10.0** Grand Ole Opry **11.0** Guy Garvey: From the Vaults **12.0** Billy Joel Live at Yankee Stadium **1.45** Live from the Artists Den **3.0** Classic Albums **4.0** Cheltenham Literature Festival **5.0** Auction **5.30** Auction

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Fish Town **7.0** The Guest Wing **7.55** True Blood **10.05** Billions **12.15** Game of Thrones **1.20** Ray Donovan **3.30** True Blood **4.35** True Blood **5.40** Billions **7.55** Game of Thrones **9.0** The Pacific **10.0** The Tattooist of Auschwitz **11.05** The White Lotus **12.35** House of the Dragon **1.45** Euphoria **2.50** Game of Thrones **4.0** The Guest Wing


The Handmaiden, Film4

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.30** Essential Classics **1.0** Classical Live. From LSO St Luke's, Quatuor Van Kuijk play Haydn's Quartet in G minor, Op 74, No 3, "The Rider" and Mozart's Quartet No 17 in B flat major, K458, "Hunt". Plus, Mario Venzago conducts the Symphony Orchestra of the Korean Broadcasting System in R Schumann's Symphony No 2 in C, Op 61. **4.0** Composer of the Week: Rimsky-Korsakov (5/5) **5.0** In Tune **7.0** Classical Mixtape **7.30** Friday Night Is Music Night. Roderick Dunk conducts the BBC Concert Orchestra and singers Katie Birtill and Emma Kershaw in classic show songs from Broadway, recorded at Chichester Festival theatre in January. **9.45** The Essay: Art and Uncertainty. With Margaret Heffernan. (R) **10.0** Late Junction. Includes a session by JJJJJerome and Angeline Morrison. (R) **11.30** 'Round Midnight **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

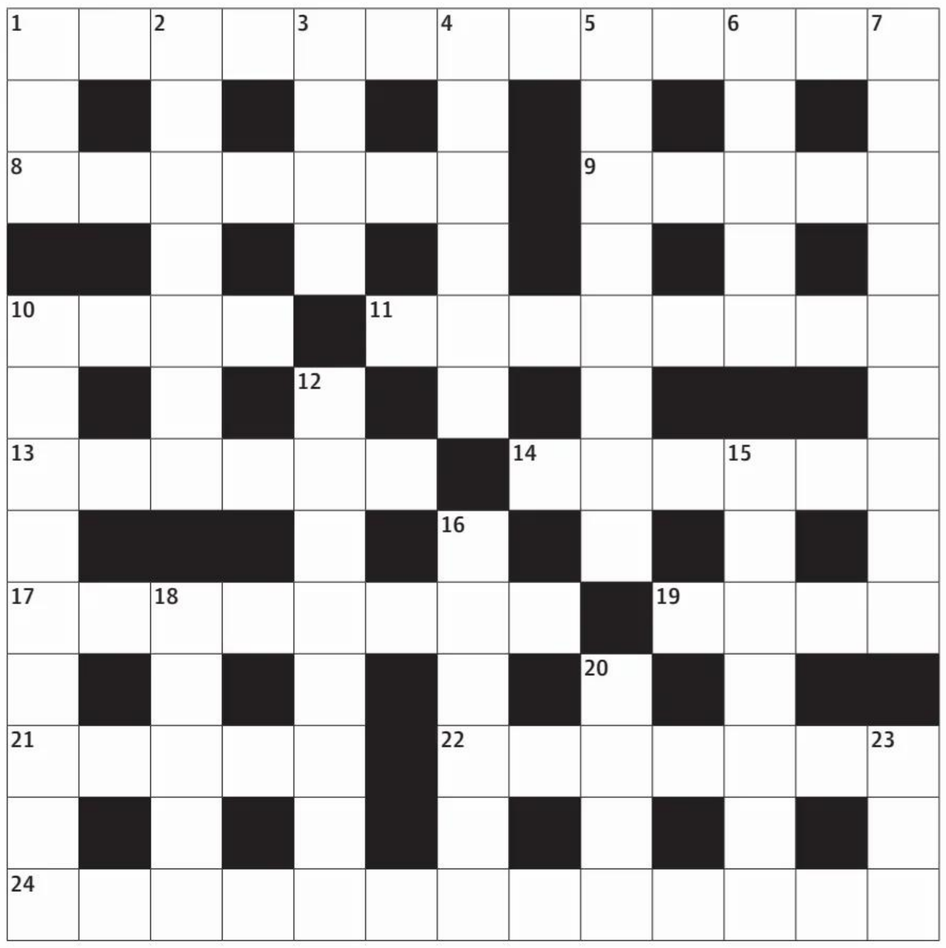
6.0am Today **9.0** Desert Island Discs. With Sarah Storey. (R) **10.0** Woman's Hour **11.0** The Food Programme **11.45** Book of the Week: A Body Made of Glass. By Caroline Crampton. (5/5) **12.0** News **12.04** AntiSocial (8/9) **12.57** Weather **1.0** The World at One **1.45** Shadow War: China and the West. The possibility of war between China and the west. (10/10) **2.0** The Archers (R) **2.15** Money Gone. Satirical drama, by Ed Sellek. Grace gets help from an unexpected source. (5/5) **2.45** Child. India Rakusen speaks to child psychotherapist Graham Music about attachment. (24/27) **3.0** Gardeners' Question Time. Experts answer listeners' queries at this year's Chelsea Flower Show. **3.45** Short Works. Dwr, by Catrin Kean. **4.0** Last Word **4.30** More Or Less (R) **5.0** PM **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.30** Dead Ringers (5/6) **7.0** The Archers **7.15** Add to Playlist. A musical journey of discovery, with Jeffrey Boakye and Anna Phoebe and guests composer Neil Brand and jazz singer and composer Natalie Duncan. (1/6) **8.0** Any Questions? **8.50** A Point of View **9.0** Free Thinking (8/13) **9.59** Weather **10.0** The World Tonight **10.45** Book at Bedtime: Making Amends. Bruce, by Nick Walker. (R) **11.0** Americast. Analysis of cultural and social stories breaking in the US. (20) **11.30** Today in Parliament. Political round-up. **12.0** News **12.30** Book of the Week: A Body Made of Glass (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.20** Shipping Forecast **5.30** News **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45** Just One Thing With Michael Mosley: Yoga (R)

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am Massachusetts Avenue (2/2) **6.45** The Resistance of Mrs Brown (5/5) **7.0** The Older Woman (2/6) **7.30** Albert and Me (8/8) **8.0** Says on the Tin (2/6) **8.30** Brooklyn (10/10) **8.45** The Mill on the Floss (10/10) **9.0** Yesterday in Parliament **9.30** Owning Colour (5/5) **9.45** Daily Service **10.0** Soul Music (1/4) **10.30** Bombay's Beatle **11.0** Massachusetts Avenue (2/2) **11.45** The Resistance of Mrs Brown (5/5) **12.0** The Older Woman (2/6) **12.30** Albert and Me (8/8) **1.0** Says on the Tin (2/6) **1.30** Brooklyn (10/10) **1.45** The Mill on the Floss (10/10) **2.0** The 3rd Degree (4/6) **2.30** Do Nothing 'Til You Hear from Me (6/6) **3.0** The Late Mr Shakespeare **4.0** Soul Music (1/4) **4.30** Bombay's Beatle **5.0** Massachusetts Avenue (2/2) **5.45** The Resistance of Mrs Brown (5/5) **6.0** The Older Woman (2/6) **6.30** Albert and Me (8/8) **7.0** Says on the Tin (2/6) **7.30** Brooklyn (10/10) **7.45** The Mill on the Floss (10/10) **8.0** The 3rd Degree (4/6) **8.30** Do Nothing 'Til You Hear from Me (6/6) **9.0** The Late Mr Shakespeare **10.0** Comedy Club: Michael Spicer - No Room (1/10) **10.15** Michael Spicer: No Room (2/10) **10.30** The Maltby Collection (6/6) **11.0** Absolute Power (2/6) **11.30** Tez Talks (1/4) **11.45** Irish Micks and Legends (1/4) **12.0** Soul Music (1/4) **12.30** Bombay's Beatle **1.0** Massachusetts Avenue (2/2) **1.45** The Resistance of Mrs Brown (5/5) **2.0** The Older Woman (2/6) **2.30** Albert and Me (8/8) **3.0** Says on the Tin (2/6) **3.30** Brooklyn (10/10) **3.45** The Mill on the Floss (10/10) **4.0** The 3rd Degree (4/6) **4.30** Do Nothing 'Til You Hear from Me (6/6) **5.0** The Late Mr Shakespeare

TODAY'S TRIVIA CORNER ANSWER **ARSENAL**

Quick crossword no 16,864



Across

1 In shock (13)
8 Speculative behaviour (7)
9 Rationale (5)
10 Very thin (4)
11 Hidden (8)
13 Book pages (6)
14 It's a tip (6)
17 Desire (8)
19 Manicurist's tool (4)
21 Play it slowly (5)
22 Inundated (7)
24 Study of fossils (13)

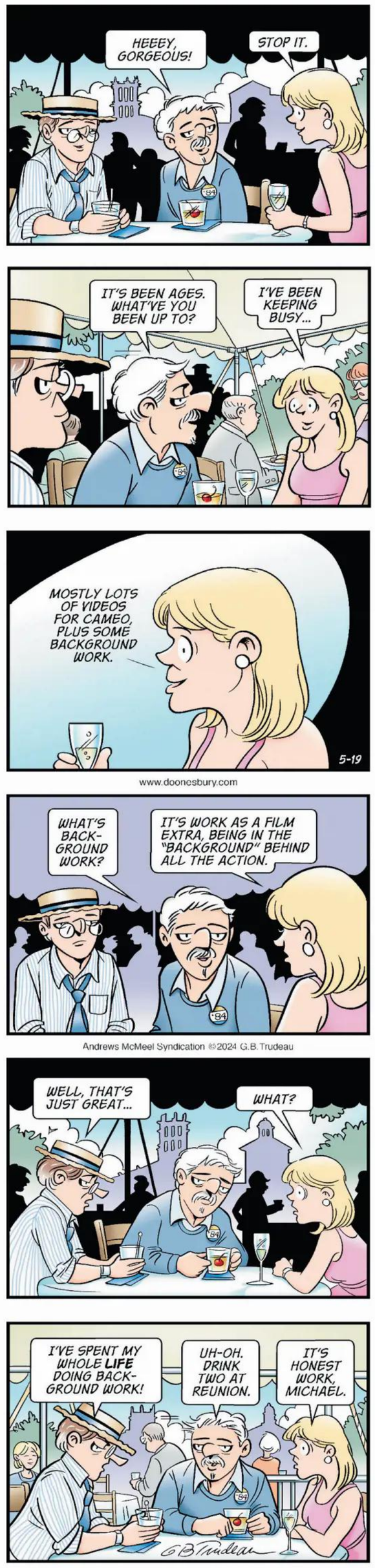
Down

1 Old watch chain (3)
2 Insect's super-sensitive part (7)
3 Find two on a wicket (4)
4 Fixed (an election, say) (6)
5 Having a bad reaction to something (8)
6 Mean - and drunk (5)
7 Moral decline (9)
10 Bungled dive (5,4)
12 Tall plant support (8)
15 Before (5,2)
16 Strongly urge (6)
18 T S Eliot's cruellest month (5)
20 Local ___, 1983 Bill Forsyth film (4)
23 Vote against the motion (3)

Stuck? For help call 0906 200 83 83. Calls cost £1.10 per minute, plus your phone company's access charge. Service supplied by ATS. Call 0330 333 6946 for customer service (charged at standard rate).To buy puzzle books, visit guardianbookshop.com or call 0330 333 6846.

Garry Trudeau

Doonesbury



Sudoku no 6,490

Hard. Fill the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9.

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

Suguru

Fill the grid so that each square in an outlined block contains a digit. A block of two squares contains the digits 1 and 2, a block of three squares contains the digits 1, 2 and 3, and so on. No same digit appears in neighbouring squares, not even diagonally.

					2
3	1				
					3
	4				
		2			
				4	

Wordsearch

Can you find 15 words with "arm" in the grid? Words can run forwards, backwards, vertically or diagonally, but always in a straight, unbroken line.

H	E	M	R	A	S	I	G	A
T	N	R	D	I	S	A	R	M
M	C	D	U	M	Y	M	W	V
R	N	T	R	T	O	O	R	O
A	H	A	E	R	A	I	E	V
W	M	A	I	L	A	M	A	E
S	N	A	R	H	M	U	R	R
Y	L	S	C	M	N	R	M	A
M	E	M	O	A	F	T	A	R
R	R	M	R	A	F	U	E	M
A	R	M	I	G	E	R	L	C

Yesterday's solutions

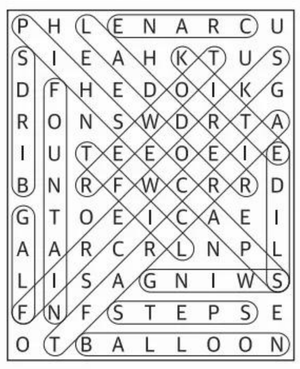
Sudoku no 6,489

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

Suguru

3	1	5	2	1	2
4	2	4	3	4	3
1	3	5	1	2	1
4	2	4	3	5	3
1	3	1	2	1	2
2	4	5	3	5	4

Wordsearch



Solution no 16,863



Word wheel
ANNOTATED

Trivia corner



Which team has won the most FA Cups?

a. Arsenal
b. Tottenham Hotspur
c. Manchester United
d. Liverpool
Answer top right

Word wheel

Find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each must use the central letter and at least two others. Letters may be used only once. You may not use plurals, foreign words or proper nouns. There is at least one nine-letter word to be found. TARGET: Excellent-36. Good-30. Average-22.

