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Care agencies accused of exploiting foreign workers

Exclusive Migrants left trapped with huge debts and little or no work

Kiran Stacey
Poonam Joshi

British social care agencies have been accused of exploiting foreign workers, leaving migrants living on the breadline as they struggle to pay off debts run up while trying to secure jobs that fail to materialise.

Dozens of people working for 11 different care providers have told the Guardian they paid thousands of pounds to agents to secure jobs working in UK care homes or residential care, with most finding limited or no employment when they arrived.

Many are now struggling to pay off huge debts in their home countries and having to work in irregular jobs for below the minimum wage.

Both Labour and the Conservatives are under pressure to tackle the issue if they win next month's election. The Tories have recently banned migrant care workers from bringing their dependants with them, and Labour said last week it would keep this in place in an effort to reduce net migration to the UK.

But experts say the ban fails to tackle the deeper issue of exploitation of the workers themselves, many of whom are still in the UK and living in poverty, afraid to leave their employers for fear of losing their visa status.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has now written to both parties to demand a full government inquiry into treatment of migrant care workers when parliament returns.

Prof Nicola Ranger, the acting general secretary of the RCN, said: "The exploitation of migrant care workers is a national scandal but little has been done to tackle it . A chronically understaffed social care sector has supercharged its recruitment of staff from overseas and a lack of regulation and

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Labour to shine light on Sunak's hedge fund

Jessica Elgot
Deputy political editor

Rishi Sunak must face questions about the fortune he earned at a hedge fund that engineered a deal at the heart of the financial crash, Labour has said as it prepares to launch its first big attack on the prime minister before the election debates.

The party aims to turn the spotlight on to Sunak's time before politics ahead of the first TV debate between the Tory and Labour leaders, after a week dominated by rows over Diane Abbott's candidacy.

Key to Labour's attempt to get back on the front foot will be to scrutinise Sunak's time as a partner at TCI, a hedge fund that launched an activist campaign against the Dutch bank ABN Amro, which resulted in its sale to RBS in 2007. The takeover was later described as "an extremely risky deal" by the independent financial regulator, which said it was a key factor leading to RBS's failure.

As Labour goes on the attack against Sunak this week, it will also aim to shore up its defences on weak spots including migration and security.

Starmer will pledge a "triple lock commitment" to the nuclear deterrent at a press conference fronted by candidates with military backgrounds, and will promise to build four new nuclear submarines.

He and Sunak will go head to head on ITV at the first debate tomorrow.

The Labour leader hopes to force an interrogation

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Zelenskiy's warning to Trump over Ukraine

Luke Harding, Shaun Walker, Nick Hopkins and Katharine Viner *Kyiv*

Donald Trump risks being a "loser president" if he wins November's election and imposes a bad peace deal on Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskiy has said, saying it would mean the end of the US as a global "player".

In an interview with the Guardian in Kyiv, Ukraine's president said he had "no strategy yet" for what to do if Trump returned to the White House, and that the former British prime minister Boris Johnson had approached him on his behalf.

If Trump beats Joe Biden, he is widely expected to cut off US military support to Ukraine. Last year he boasted he could end the war in "24 hours".

Trump's aides have previously sketched out a plan that would involve giving Ukraine's eastern regions to Russia, as well as Crimea. But Zelenskiy made clear that "Ukrainians would not put up with that". Nor would they accept a Russian "ultimatum" that forced Ukraine to abandon

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PHOTOGRAPH: LORNE CAMPBELL/GUZELIAN

Rob Burrow 1982-2024 The rugby league legend who suffered motor neurone disease and inspired a fundraising campaign of almost £20m alongside his wife, Lindsey, and former teammate Kevin Sinfield, has died aged 41. Sport →



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Debt repayments soar for countries most vulnerable to global heating

Larry Elliott
Economics editor

Debt payments by the 50 countries most vulnerable to the climate crisis have doubled since the start of the Covid pandemic and now stand at their highest level in more than three decades, campaigners have warned.

The Debt Justice charity said countries at the highest risk of being affected by global heating were paying 15.5% of government revenues to external creditors – up from less than 8% before Covid-19 and 4% at their lowest recent point in 2010.

Using data from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the charity said its new report showed the urgent need for comprehensive debt relief so that poor countries could invest in measures to address the climate crisis.

"Record levels of debt are crushing the ability of the most vulnerable countries to tackle the climate emergency," said Heidi Chow, the executive director of Debt Justice.

"We need a rapid and effective debt relief scheme to cancel debts down to a sustainable level. The UK can play its part by legislating to ensure private lenders take part in international debt relief agreements."

For the 50 countries covered in the report, 38% of their external interest payments are to private lenders, 35% to multilateral institutions, 14% to China and 13% to other governments.

Two rounds of comprehensive debt relief in the late 1990s and mid-2000s resulted in a sharp fall in the debt burdens of poor countries but repayments rose steadily in the 2010s before soaring from 2020 onwards.

Debt Justice cited several reasons. One is that the debt suspension scheme agreed at the start of the pandemic has ended, and the suspended debts are now due to be repaid.

Borrowers have also been hit by a rise in global interest rates from the rock-bottom levels of the 2010s. Also, the strong value of the US dollar has increased the relative size of external debt payments, which are mainly owed in dollars.

A 10-day conference focusing on countries' ability to finance climate action, including through climate finance and unsustainable debt levels, begins in Bonn, Germany, today, and Debt Justice said the example of drought-afflicted Zambia underlined the need for action.

After three and a half years of negotiations, the Zambian government has recently sealed a debt restructuring deal with some – but not all – of its private lenders.

Zambia's debt deal allows for large rises in repayments if the economy does better than expected, but there is no equivalent clause to reduce payments in the event of a shock such as a drought. Under the terms of the deal, Zambia will have to pay bondholders $450m (£353m) this year.

Tim Jones, the head of policy at Debt Justice, called the deal "outrageous", adding that the $450m was "money which could have been used to respond to the national disaster. As well as debt cancellation, rich countries urgently need to pay their climate debt by delivering grant-based, adequate climate finance."

UK agencies accused of exploitation of foreign care workers

Continued *from page 1*



Some care workers say they paid large fees to agents who promised them full-time work
PHOTOGRAPH: PHANIE/ALAMY

enforcement has allowed some employers to profit from the mistreatment of migrants."

She added: "An urgent government investigation into exploitation across the social care sector must be a priority for whoever wins the general election. Lives are being ruined daily and this work has to start as soon as possible."

David Neal, who raised the alarm about the care visa system when he was the government's borders inspector, said: "As soon as we looked at social care visas, we realised there was exploitation going on."

He added: "Throughout my inspection, I was thinking of the Windrush scandal and there are echoes of it here: the state inviting workers to come to this country to help us in the labour market and then abandoning them."

Lawyers say UK care providers that promise regular full-time work and then offer exploitative or underpaid jobs on arrival may have broken the law. The sponsorship system means an individual's visa status is tied to a particular employer, meaning many feel trapped.

Johanna White, a solicitor at the Anti Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit, a charity, said: "I can see what look like indicators of trafficking and modern slavery.

"In many cases, there appears to have been deceptive recruitment, with the individuals being given false information and promises to induce them to pay large fees upfront to the agents for the opportunity to live and work in the UK, being left vulnerable to forced labour, financial exploitation or both."

The Guardian spoke to more than 30 workers, all from India – though they said others from sub-Saharan Africa had suffered similar experiences.

All told roughly the same story, of paying immigration agents – and in some cases, the care provider itself – several thousand pounds in fees to secure a visa to work either in a care home or as in people's homes.

Most said the agents promised the money would cover the visa, flights and a month's accommodation, and that they would be guaranteed full-time work earning above £20,000 a year. The salary would quickly clear any debt incurred to pay the initial fees, many say they were told.

Shortly before arriving in the UK, however, workers claim they were told they would have to pay for their own flights and find accommodation for themselves. And then when they arrived, they did not get the jobs they were promised. In most cases there was no work at all or the hours and pay were far less than promised.

Workers at one company say they were pressed to work for that company as drivers or cleaners instead. Several say they are using food banks, while some say they are sharing rooms, and even beds, with other migrants to make ends meet.

In several cases, workers complaining about the conditions say they were told their sponsorship would be removed if they did not remain silent and they would be deported back to India. Some said their families had also been threatened by India-based immigration agents should they try to speak out.

Shahid Chera Pparambil, one of the workers, said: "If I go back to India, I don't have anywhere to live. I don't have any option other than committing suicide." He added that the debt he had incurred in India was now causing problems for the family he had left behind. "People are coming and demanding money from us, from my wife and family."

Neal's report, which was published after he had been sacked from his role, warned that the Home Office did not have sufficient oversight of the visas being offered.

The Home Office said: "We prevent overseas care workers from entering the United Kingdom without genuine roles or fair pay to safeguard against destitution. Illegal labour market activities face zero tolerance; we enforce strict measures against exploitative care providers. The number of visas granted has been reduced as we tackle noncompliance and abuse head-on."

Six of the 11 employers identified by the Guardian have had their licences to bring in more migrant care workers suspended or cancelled. However, the other five retain the ability to bring in workers from abroad.

Workers' experiences *Page 14*→

Catch your breath with Guardian Weekly



Jonathan Freedland
Columnist

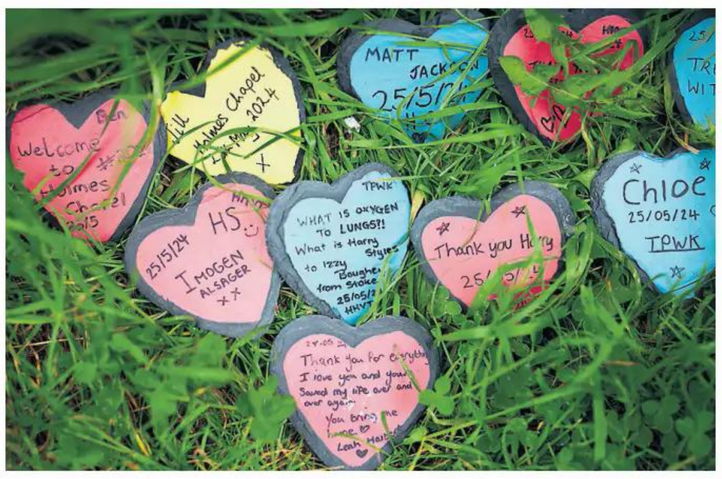
There are weeks, and last week was one of them, when it seems the news just won't stop: huge events coming every day, sometimes every hour. The pace, and the volume, can feel overwhelming. If you'd prefer to slow things down a bit, then the Guardian Weekly could be for you. It's a beautifully designed magazine you can hold in your hands, offering an expertly curated look at the previous seven days, featuring our correspondents across the globe and the best of our opinion, feature and culture writing. Founded in 1919, and relaunched as a magazine in 2018, Guardian Weekly is a internationally focused selection of the best of the Guardian and Observer's journalism, delivered directly to your door.

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This direction

Village launches tour of Harry Styles haunts







PHOTOGRAPHS: MARK WAUGH/THE GUARDIAN

Hannah Al-Othman

In recent years, the ticket office at Holmes Chapel railway station in Cheshire has become something of a shrine to the village's most famous former resident.

A lifesize cardboard cutout of the music megastar Harry Styles stands on one side of the small building while, on the other, fans crowd round to sign a guestbook filled with messages to the star.

Since Styles's global tour last year, the village has become a mecca for his fans - known as "Harries" - so much so that from this week, Holmes Chapel Partnership is running official guided tours.

The tours - which last about three hours and cost £20 a ticket - take in Mandeville bakery, where Styles once worked part-time and where fans can pose with another giant picture of the singer.

The last stop is Twemlow Viaduct, where the star reputedly had his first kiss and later returned to write his name on the bricks, caught on film in the One Direction documentary This Is Us.

Phoebe Hodges, 18, and Mia Tesolin, 18, from Canberra, Australia, have joined one of the tours. They have been travelling around Europe for two-and-a-half months and on their way from London to Scotland have stopped off at their only other English destination: Holmes Chapel.

They found out about the tour in the village and managed to bag a couple of spots. "We were very happy," Hodges said.

Sadie Huxley, 15, from Stoke-on-Trent, is also walking in Styles's footsteps - her dad dropped her off at Holmes Chapel station this morning. "I've been a fan of him since I was a little girl," she said of the star. "I'm quite excited."

She saw Styles in Coventry last year and constantly rewatches the videos on her phone, saying: "It's become a daily routine for me."

Hazel Sutcliffe, 73, the vice-chair of Holmes Chapel Partnership, said that last year they designed a free map of the village to hand out to the ever-growing numbers of Harries - and 5,000 were picked up. However, fans were accessing the viaduct from a dangerous main road, so the tours were set up with safety in mind, taking Harries through the fields that Styles would have walked through himself.



▲ *The walking tour of Harry Styles's childhood village of Holmes Chapel, Cheshire, is attracting fans, AKA Harries. Above left: the route*



Styles merchandise on sale in Sam Dale & Son's village shop

> *'I didn't know he was going to be a global phenomenon, so I didn't take much notice'*
>
> **Hazel Sutcliffe** *on her memory of Harry Styles*

Sutcliffe first became aware of Styles when he appeared on The X Factor talent show. "I've been a customer at Mandeville's pretty much all my life," she said, "but I didn't know he was going to be a global phenomenon, so I didn't take much notice [of him]."

The interest in Holmes Chapel is having a positive impact for the local businesses, she said. Many offer discounts to fans on the tours.

And in quiet periods - such as the days between Christmas and New Year - tourism supports local trade. "Some retailers said the only people they had coming in were Harries," Peter Whiers, 67, chair of Holmes Chapel Partnership, added.

▲ *Daisy Sullivan, 14, and Lillian Boulton, 13, at Mandeville bakery and, above, slate hearts at the viaduct - intended to reduce graffiti*

Residents had complained about fans scrawling names and messages to Styles on the viaduct, so on the tours fans are given slate hearts to write messages on and leave there.

"What we'd really love is to sneak [Harry] down here and let him write a message," Whiers said.

The partnership received more than 150 applications for the job of tour guide during a recruitment drive in April, with at least 30 from overseas including from Minsk, Buenos Aires and California.

Last year, the ticket office at Holmes Chapel station was threatened with closure, but it was saved - to the relief of not only older passengers buying paper tickets but also the legion of Styles fans from Japan, Ecuador, Canada and beyond who travelled there.

The station manager, Graham Blake, 62, passes the books full of messages on to Styles via his dad, Des. Blake remembers Styles taking the train to London every week when he was on The X Factor. "It's a little village," he said. "Everybody knows everybody."

Tickets for the tours went on sale on Thursday; by Friday about 5% had gone. With the station marking the start of the tour, Blake's guestbooks are likely to get fuller.

"People ask me if he'll read the messages. I say: 'Of course he will.'"

China steps up space race by landing probe on far side of moon

Nicola Davis
Science correspondent

China has landed its uncrewed Chang'e-6 lunar probe on the far side of the moon, marking an important step in the country's 53-day mission to retrieve rock and soil samples from the "dark" lunar hemisphere, in what would be a world first.

The landing elevates China's space power status in a global rush to the moon, where countries including the US are hoping to exploit lunar minerals to sustain long-term astronaut missions and moon bases within the next decade.

Prof Martin Barstow of the University of Leicester said the feat was a great technical success for the Chinese space programme. "Landing on the moon is difficult, but doing so on the far side, where communications are particularly difficult, is an enormous technical achievement," he said. "We are not able to communicate with the far side directly from Earth, so other spacecraft need to be in orbit around the moon to relay commands and receive data."

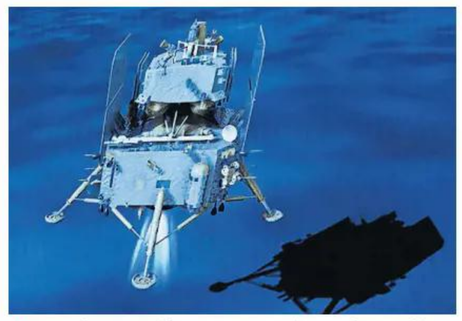
The Chang'e-6 probe is expected to collect about 2kg of rock and soil samples from a region within one of the oldest craters on the moon, known as the South Pole-Aitken (SPA) basin. Then it must attempt an unprecedented launch from the far side of the moon.

The far side of the moon - sometimes called the "dark side" because it is not visible from Earth - is of considerable interest to scientists.

Prof Mahesh Anand, of the Open University, said: "Scientific analyses of these returned lunar samples using modern analytical methods and techniques could reveal new insights into the formation and evolution of the moon and by extension that of the solar system itself."

The Xinhua news agency said its work should be complete within two days and would involve grabbing specimens using a robotic arm and drilling beneath the surface.

The US is planning a crewed mission by 2026, with China aiming to launch one by 2030. The latter is also planning to create an inhabited lunar base. Washington has warned that China's space programme is being used to mask military objectives.



▲ *An image from an animation of the unmanned probe's moon landing*

Labour to shine light on Sunak's hedge fund deal in financial crash

Continued from page 1

of Sunak on his past at TCI, after its involvement in the deal in which the bank, riddled with sub-prime mortgages, was sold to RBS.

Separately, Sunak's boss at the multibillion-pound fund, Chris Hohn, admitted in January 2009 that the fund had bet against British banks during the crash.

Sunak was a partner at TCI when it began pushing the sale of ABN Amro via its 1% stake in the Dutch bank in early 2007 and lobbied heavily for RBS's takeover bid. The RBS-led consortium bought ABN Amro for £50bn in October 2007 - the biggest takeover in banking history.

The taxpayer spent £45.5bn bailing out RBS, and the independent regulator, the Financial Services Authority, said the acquisition "undoubtedly contributed significantly to RBS's vulnerability".

Darren Jones, the shadow chief secretary to the Treasury, told the Guardian he believed Sunak had "bet against Britain" before entering politics. "If I was still a member of the liaison committee, I would definitely have been asking questions about his past behaviour, because I think it's in the public interest that voters know that he essentially bet against Britain and may have profited off the back of it."

There is no suggestion Sunak or TCI broke any rules. But Jones said it was a matter of integrity for the man who became chancellor and then prime minister. "There is a public interest in him fessing up about his role during this period of time and people understanding the fact that when they were having to suffer the consequences of austerity that followed under the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in coalition years, that Rishi Sunak was at the heart of this problem coming up in the first place."

Jones said records show Sunak was one of a small team. TCI had 19 partners during the two years the deal took place. He said Sunak would have been aware of the deal. "This was the biggest banking deal at the time."

The Treasury has previously said Sunak did not have a direct role in the deal. A Conservative spokesperson said in response to the attack: "This is not correct. The Labour party created the banking crisis which caused Labour's great recession."

The BBC announced the second leaders' debate for 26 June - the last week of the campaign. Starmer is unlikely to agree to any further debates.



Tories to allow ban on trans women in single-sex spaces

Jessica Elgot
Deputy political editor

Kemi Badenoch has said the Conservatives will change the Equality Act to rewrite the definition of sex and allow organisations to bar trans women from single-sex spaces, including hospital wards and sports events.

The party will make clear that the protected characteristic of sex means biological sex, enabling those who wish to bar male-bodied people from organisations or activities to do so.

The minister for women and equalities said: "Whether it is rapists being housed in women's prisons, or instances of men playing in women's sports where they have an unfair advantage, it is clear that public authorities and regulatory bodies are confused about what the law says on sex and gender and when to act - often for fear of being accused of transphobia, or not being inclusive."

Last year, Badenoch asked the Equality and Human Rights Commission to advise on the change. The equalities watchdog said the new definition would make it possible to exclude trans people from same-sex spaces even if they hold a gender recognition certificate.

The law will still protect against discrimination based on the status of gender reassignment, the Conservatives said.

The party also said it would change the law to make gender recognition a reserved matter that only the UK government could legislate on, a reaction to the row over the Scottish gender recognition bill, which was blocked by Westminster.

Announcing the change, Rishi Sunak said that he wanted to enshrine the right to single-sex spaces in law.

"The safety of women and girls is too important to allow the current confusion around definitions of sex and gender to persist," he said.

Sunak and the Conservatives have used gender and trans rights as a key plank of their election strategy against Labour and Keir Starmer.

Sketch
John Crace



Happy Atkins sends the Tory babbleometer off the scale as careful Cooper feels the pain

She lives! I must admit I had been getting worried about Victoria Atkins. Ever since Rishi Sunak called the general election she has been missing in action. She couldn't even be bothered to make an appearance when junior doctors announced they were continuing strike action. Obviously that was of no interest to a health secretary.

So it was a relief to discover that Vicky has not died or is not otherwise incapacitated. Well, not much. Either that or she sent a body double on to the Sunday morning politics shows to speak on behalf of the government and to show that - for an hour at least - she was right behind the Conservatives' campaign to get re-elected. Though she might well go back into hiding after that. Any Tory MP with serious career ambitions is trying to distance themselves from Rish!.

Atkins was all smiles on both the Laura Kuenssberg show and Sunday Morning with Trevor Phillips. Positively beaming with good vibes. In fact I'd go so far as to say I've never seen her looking so happy.

So why so cheerful? Could it be that in her 10 days on a silent retreat she's managed to avoid the poll suggesting the Tories face an electoral wipeout? Or is she just pretty chilled about the situation? Que sera, sera. Looking forward to at least five years of R&R in opposition. Or maybe she had been up all night at a party with Michael Gove.

Kuenssberg began with the Tories' latest promise to open 100 more GP surgeries. Wasn't that a con as they had already closed 400 since 2013? Not what most people would call a like-for-like replacement. Vicky's grin grew even wider. Her promise was to restore promises. To put in train training. The babbleometer was off the scale. What she wanted was for everyone in the country to be able to see their GP at least once a day. Twice if necessary. Or something like that.

Better still, she was cutting the funding for pharmacists so that they could see all those patients who needed to see a health professional for a third time in a day. Atkins was entirely confident that, with a bit of practice, pharmacists would be able to do open heart surgery in the back room of their premises. By the end of the next parliament, they would be qualified to perform lobotomies on government ministers.

We then moved on to hospital



waiting lists. If you tracked the graph since the Tories came into office in 2010, waiting lists had consistently risen. Vicky was quick with an answer. It was all down to the pandemic. Send for a doctor! The health secretary thinks Covid began 10 years before 2020.

Oh, said Atkins. Then it must have been something to do with the last Labour government. Because they had also been in power since 2010? Whatever drugs she had been taking, they weren't working any more. She even started hallucinating about the 40 hospitals that haven't been built. Magical realism is now in the Tory party manifesto.

Trevor Phillips broadened the discussion a bit. Take immigration. How was she going to fill the 180,000 vacancies in health and social care? Especially if she was planning to deport the 300,000 or so overseas health professionals already working in the UK? Ah, said Vicky. What you had to remember was that two contradictory things could both be true. There were actually loads of Brits who had no idea just how much they wanted to fill those jobs. The training was no bother. Twenty minutes at most.

Meanwhile, Yvette Cooper was channelling her inner misery. No one could ever accuse her of enjoying her job. These shows are now an ordeal for a shadow home secretary whom everyone expects to be in government in under five weeks, as people rightly expect to hear answers.

If taxes and borrowing aren't to go up, then where is the money coming from – other than by slashing departmental budgets? So there was little that Yvette could do but to deadbat every question. It made for a gruelling 15 minutes on both channels.

Kuenssberg began with the Diane Abbott row. "I'm very glad it's all resolved," Cooper said. But it isn't. "I'm very glad it's all resolved," Yvette repeated twice more.

On immigration, Cooper was equally tight-lipped. Labour would be doing things very differently to the Conservatives but in many ways would also be identical. Make sense? "I'm sorry but I'm not going to give you a number for how many fewer migrants we would allow in to the country," Yvette said. That was top secret. A need to know basis. She'd have to kill us etc.

Mercifully, we came to a close. Yvette was left to her inner world of pain. She could have done with some of whatever Gove is having.

Net migration

No target but figures will fall under Labour, says Cooper

Ben Quinn
Libby Brooks

Yvette Cooper has said she expects net migration to the UK to fall "swiftly" under a Labour government, but refused to say by how much.

The shadow home secretary told broadcasters yesterday that it was clear net migration must come down. She stopped short of setting a target, however, saying the Conservatives had failed when they have done so.

It came as Keir Starmer made a renewed pitch for Conservative voters by making a manifesto commitment to slash levels of immigration and ban law-breaking employers from hiring foreign workers.

Plans set out by the Labour leader in the Sun on Sunday could include laws to bar companies that break employment law – for example, by failing to pay the minimum wage – from hiring foreigners. Legislation would link the immigration system to training, as businesses applying for foreign worker visas would have to train British people to do the jobs.

Cooper told the BBC's Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg: "We're not setting a target ... partly because, to be honest, every time the Conservatives have done this, frankly, then they have just ended up being totally all over the place.

"Also because from one year to another, there are variations. The pandemic meant the net migration figures fell, but the homes for Ukraine visa rightly meant figures increased because of the war in Ukraine."

When pressed by Trevor Phillips on Sky News as to whether she believed UK residents could fill the thousands of vacancies in the adult social care sector and replace foreign workers, Cooper said there would continue to be a health and social care visa.

"Immigration has always been important to this country, but it needs to be properly controlled," she said.

James Cleverly, the home secretary, responded by saying: "Keir Starmer has a track record of supporting high immigration levels and helping foreign criminals stay in Britain because he believes all immigration law is racist."

The UK has experienced broadly similar levels of migration over the past few decades compared with other high-income countries, according to Oxford University's Migration Observatory.



The home secretary, James Cleverly, said Starmer believed all immigration law was racist

PHOTOGRAPH: MARK THOMAS/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

The shadow home secretary, Yvette Cooper, and the health secretary, Victoria Atkins, on Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg

PHOTOGRAPH: JEFF OVERS/BBC/PA

Analysis
Jessica Elgot



Expect the debate to get personal – playing the man, not the ball, is working for Starmer

When the history of Keir Starmer's resurrection of the Labour party comes to be written, one of the most important turning points will be the decision to start playing the man, not the ball, when it came to Boris Johnson and Partygate.

The key weak spot for Rishi Sunak is his career as a hedge fund partner at the time of the financial crisis. Labour believes the prime minister's response will be a fundamental test, given he has built his reputation on his economic competence.

The battle lines on policy have already been drawn for the debate tomorrow, with both sides building their defences as well as preparing their attacks. The Conservatives will want to focus on gender, defence spending and pensions – all areas where Labour has been challenged to match its commitments and has not done so. Labour has been doing groundwork on other key weak spots over the weekend, on bringing down net migration and on commitment to the UK's nuclear deterrent.

But both sides are now prepared for things to start getting personal. Sunak is doing his debate preparations with Oliver Dowden. The deputy prime minister has been asked to play Starmer and Tory aides will be in a mock audience asking hostile questions. Sunak believes the debates are key to changing the narrative and that the audience will be watching him for signs of the underdog making a comeback.

Labour knows the debate is theirs to lose and wants to keep the number of these to a minimum, brushing aside Tory challenges to hold up to six head-to-head debates. In its debate prep, Tom Webb, who is Labour's policy director, stands in for Sunak, continuing the role he plays during PMQs prep. Starmer will appear at one event today but then turn his full focus to preparations.

The key weak spot for Sunak is his career as a hedge fund partner in the financial crisis – given his reputation for economic competence

Over the past few months, Starmer's team has deliberately picked events which involve Q&As with groups of workers, with one eye on getting him debate-ready.

"We know that people are quite cautious about asking difficult questions in front of their bosses, but there have been a few, and it's good practice," said one Labour source. "But we definitely haven't drafted in any Labour councillors!"

Another added: "The debate will be a big moment. It's the first time that many voters will have seen Keir and Sunak go head to head as they will only just have started paying attention to politics since the election was called. But we're feeling confident. Keir is good at this stuff, and he's well prepared."

Internally, Labour also has a crucial week. On Tuesday the national executive committee will meet to approve all election candidates – the crunch point for any final complaints or resignations but now seen as broadly a formality. On Friday, Labour will convene its pivotal clause V meeting where its most influential figures will go through the manifesto line by line and thrash out any outstanding differences.

Labour insiders say it will be a slimmed-down and precision-targeted offering – there is no big new spending offer as a manifesto surprise. In this highly cautious operation, one of the best ways to avoid traps is to avoid having any rabbits.

General election 2024

‘You don’t say no to her’

Sue Gray, from Partygate to Labour party player

Jessica Elgot
Pippa Crerar
Rowena Mason

There is one woman Labour donors are even more keen to meet than Rachel Reeves, even though it is now Labour lore that tickets to the party’s business day with the shadow chancellor sold out faster than Taylor Swift tickets. That woman is Sue Gray. Everyone wants to meet the power behind the throne.

Gray was once a fabled Whitehall figure, whose reputation as the guardian of government ethics was unmatched among civil servants but barely known by the public. That changed when she became the public face of the investigation into Partygate – the flagrant breaking of Covid rules by officials under and including Boris Johnson. Then, in March 2023, Gray sensationally departed Whitehall to become Keir Starmer’s chief of staff.

But in the next five weeks she will take a backseat to Morgan McSweeney, the strategy guru who is the only senior staff member to rival Gray in influence. Since Rishi Sunak announced the election date, Gray has been focused primarily on the second round of access talks with the civil service in preparation for if and when – if the polls are right – Labour forms the next government.

However, the separation of government and politics is not so simple. In recent months, Gray had joined the election planning meetings led by McSweeney and the campaign coordinator Pat McFadden. She and McSweeney still speak daily, and there are areas of overlap including the party’s handling of the row around the veteran Labour MP Diane Abbott.

“Sue doesn’t see things through the eyes of voters – she hasn’t ever needed to,” said one Labour figure on the operation’s political wing. “She’s the chief of staff but Morgan is running the show for this bit.”

Until Gray’s arrival, McSweeney retained a near unrivalled closeness to the leader. Starmer’s original chief of staff, the ex-MP Jenny Chapman, was his biggest champion, but her style alienated some MPs and she was moved to sit in the shadow cabinet as a peer.

Starmer struggled to find a chief of staff who would grasp his instincts and gel with his tight-knit and fiercely political team, and as polls began to suggest a large Labour majority, there was a strong sense that the appointment would also need a huge amount of institutional knowledge about how to operate in government, which had been lost in 14 years of opposition.



▲ *Keir Starmer with Sue Gray, the power behind the throne. Their backgrounds are acutely similar*
PHOTOGRAPH: TAYFUN SALCI/SHUTTERSTOCK

Gray’s appointment was a political earthquake in Westminster, particularly in Whitehall, because it seemed such an extraordinary move for the civil service lifer, famed as the chief inquisitor into ministerial misdoings. But once people got over their initial shock, the decision was easier to understand for those who knew her.

“She cares a lot about the exercise of power,” said one ex-government official. “She was an incredibly powerful figure who has made choices to ensure that kind of exercise of power continues. I never thought she was a Labour sleeper, but I did think she was someone interested in advancing her own views.”

Senior Labour figures have expressed surprise at how quickly Gray has transformed into someone able to speak for Starmer and take decisions on his behalf. At an event last year, the Labour leader was about to answer a question when she piped up from the sidelines to say: “Do you mind if I take this one?”

Shadow ministers have often been surprised by her arrival at the most innocuous of meetings and she has been highly visible in Westminster, at shadow cabinet book launches and thinktank parties, striking up conversations with MPs and researchers.

> ***‘She has been painted as this very Whitehall figure, but she’s very political’***
>
> **Colleague of Sue Gray**

While Gray waited the required six months to start her new role, her reputation preceded her. One MP said: “I think there was a definite feeling in the party that she would sort all the shit out … and that was inevitably going to end in disappointment.” An aide said: “Everybody thought Sue would be the answer to all of their problems. But she’s not superhuman, she can’t do everything.”

There are still widespread complaints of painfully slow decision-making at the top of the party. But her reputation as an inquisitor has helped Gray immensely when it comes to influencing junior staff and MPs. One junior shadow minister said: “An aide called me and asked if I wanted to move to a different team, and I said no. Then the shadow secretary of state called me and I said no. But then Sue Gray called, and you don’t say no to Sue Gray.”

Her experience running the Cabinet Office’s propriety and ethics team means she is expected to be particularly interested in the standards regime in government, which Starmer has long felt is failing.

Gray is Starmer’s political fixer and mediator, who has set about smoothing dysfunctional structures within his office and repairing relations with key figures who felt alienated – though no one believes that task is anywhere near complete. But she has made it her business to improve relations with two key groups that felt alienated by the leader’s office, according to senior sources. The first is shadow cabinet ministers, especially those bruised by negative briefing, such as Louise Haigh, Lisa Nandy and Angela Rayner, of whom she is a particular champion.

The second is Labour’s metro mayors, whom she has been meeting regularly in a charm offensive and who are crucial to one of Labour’s first major intended bills, the “take back control” bill on devolution.

There have been efforts to include senior politicians more closely in major decision-making. “The boys have previously been very sneering of involving MPs in any decisions at all,” one shadow cabinet minister said, using the description applied by many Labour MPs to the small coterie of male aides around Starmer with a taste for aggressive political tactics.

Gray’s mode of operating has not been confined to diplomacy and she has been prepared to lay down the law. Two Labour officials said Gray had alienated some staff by launching a leak inquiry into a Guardian report on the party’s plan to drop its £28bn climate investment commitment. “Her leak inquiry leaked,” one official said. “That wasn’t good.”

Yet it has not held her back from letting staff know when she’s unhappy. Sources said she was concerned with the way in which Diane Abbott’s case had been mishandled, and her frustration over the briefing against the veteran Labour MP was made clear to the inner team.

There is a well-formed view that Gray will be the most influential figure in terms of jobs. There are already jitters among long-serving aides and shadow ministers who fear they will quickly find themselves unemployed, though Starmer is not intending a major reshuffle of his shadow cabinet – at least, not immediately. Even among the most senior staff, barely anyone has been promised a particular role in government, and the majority are in the dark about the future.

A shadow cabinet adviser said: “The only thing anyone in the party can talk about is what job everyone is getting in the next government, and the unspoken thing is, they know Sue is watching them and seeing if they will make the cut. Probably the reality is that hardly any of them will – they would be eaten alive.”

Her hiring and firing powers are likely to extend to the civil service with the current cabinet secretary, Simon Case, thought to be particularly vulnerable, owing to what was felt to be his poor handling of her departure from the civil service.

Officially, Gray has three priorities in her role. The first is to be Starmer’s ambassador within the party; the second is to oversee the process for decision-making; and the third is the practical preparations for government. Work has started on about 20 bills, some in significantly more detail than others. Access talks with civil servants are in their second round.

Key to the early reforms will be the creation of cross-departmental



ILLUSTRATION: PA/GUARDIAN DESIGN



mission boards, which will have responsibility for driving through progress on Starmer's five missions, the bedrock of his intended premiership. They will focus on economic growth, the NHS, crime and justice, affordable green energy and improving opportunity.

But her other job is to spot disasters that could derail the early days of government - the FT reported that it was labelled "Sue's shit list" - such as the collapse of Thames Water, council and university bankruptcies, and a battle over public sector pay.

She has already been doing crisis management in opposition, getting closely involved in the party's response to the Israel-Gaza conflict and attempting to smooth relations with trade unions after a row about workers' rights.

Gray is not only interested in the mechanics of government, but in policy. "She has been painted as this very Whitehall figure, but she's very political," one colleague said. "She's not the voice of caution. If anything, she has been telling shadow ministers: 'You own this issue, you can legislate, make your mark, don't be too timid.'"

Those policy interests were first revealed in Starmer's biography, written by Tom Baldwin, for which Gray agreed to be interviewed. Her proposal for the party to look at the wider use of citizens' assemblies was picked up by the national press and quickly disavowed by the party, though it gave an illuminating insight into Gray's character.

Far from being a Whitehall creature, she is invested in active citizenship and inspired by how consensus was built in Ireland by citizens' juries on equal marriage and abortion. But among Labour staffers, there has been little discussion of the substance and more on whether it was appropriate for the interview to take place.

The first some aides heard about it was from Baldwin himself. "It's a book about Keir," said one. "It feels a bit odd for her to have done it."

In the interview, Gray said she was working on the creation of a unit at the centre of government that would be "focused purely on mission delivery and transparency of performance".

After 5 July, if Gray makes it to Downing Street, she will arrive with a reputation already well established among civil servants, many of whom describe having been terrified of Gray's investigative skills when she was head of propriety and ethics at the Cabinet Office. "She used to have these cats," says one official. "Somehow we convinced ourselves they were her familiars, and whenever they would walk into a room we would all stop talking."

One senior ex-official said Gray was spoken of in "hushed tones" across Whitehall. "There were a number of things where Sue's view became the received wisdom. It became indispensable. The team she ran had, effectively, a veto on ministerial appointments, a big say in reshuffles, in disputes, resignations. She didn't always seek closeness with the principals, but she knew exceptionally well how to exercise influence."

David Lidington, the former chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster, recalled Gray as an impeccable professional during his time working with her.

"She had a fearsome reputation among MPs and ministers, especially among those who hadn't met her," he said. "She always gave the impression that she hated a minister being high-handed or blaming officials who couldn't fight back. She hated bullying or hectoring."

Gray is not from the typical civil service mould. One senior Labour figure said Gray and Starmer had connected because of their acutely similar backgrounds. Both are from working-class families - Gray's were Irish immigrants, and she did not go to university but went straight into the civil service.

Both Gray and Starmer have a deep connection to Northern Ireland, where he was human rights adviser to the Policing Board, and where she took a career break and ran the Cove bar in Newry during the Troubles with her Portaferry-born husband, Bill Conlon, a country singer.

But although that time is crucial to her origin story, perhaps more revealing of her personality is her time back in Northern Ireland years later, where she was permanent secretary of the Department of Finance and coveted the top job there but failed to be appointed.

Her response was to give a deeply critical on-the-record interview to the BBC: "Why didn't I get the job? I'm not sure I'll ever quite know, but I suspect people may have thought that I perhaps was too much of a challenger, or a disrupter. I am both. And yes, I wanted to have change."

That little-known interview is an astonishing insight into Gray's character and perhaps the best predictor of her future direction - those were not the words of a secretive, cautious mandarin.

After Gray returned to the Cabinet Office, where she would conduct the career-defining Partygate report on the conduct of Johnson and other senior figures during the pandemic, she found herself "bruised", according to one colleague, by the public exposure and with little help or protection from the incumbent government.

Government sources have denied that Case blocked her progression to a Whitehall permanent secretary role. But it was at this stage Gray, the self-described radical, decided to make a handbrake turn and cross over to Starmer's Labour party. It was a huge risk, but one that offered the chance to become one of the most influential figures in the country.

"She will run the government," one close former colleague said. "She has a huge advantage, that she knows the personnel and she knows her way round Whitehall. And if she gets Olly Robbins [the former Brexit negotiator] as her pick for cabinet secretary, those two will be in charge of the country."

General election 2024

Gaza crisis Labour leader's focus on rule of law makes policy a tightrope in waiting

Patrick Wintour
Diplomatic editor

The certainty that the Gaza crisis will not be resolved by polling day means Keir Starmer already knows the first foreign policy challenge of his expected premiership. Even if the peace proposal announced by Joe Biden on Friday were accepted by Israel and Hamas, something a Labour-run Foreign Office would encourage, vast problems remain about the future role of Hamas and Iran in Middle Eastern politics, Israel's conduct in the conflict, and restoring faith in the universality of international law.

Internal party pressure, Starmer's background as a human rights lawyer and the unexpected prominence of international law in the conflict have led Labour to slowly distance itself from its support for the government approach. How much this will translate into hard policy inside the Foreign Office is contested.

The pressures will flow in many ways. Labour Friends of Israel (LFI) released a pamphlet last week approving recognition of a Palestinian state, but only once Israel receives credible security guarantees. By contrast, Na'amod, one of the British Jewish groups opposed to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, has circulated a checklist of questions parties should answer, including a call for a complete ceasefire and an end to arms exports.

A leaked video of the deputy leader, Angela Rayner, talking to Muslim voters last weekend showed a nervousness about expectations. She promised that a Palestinian state would be recognised by a Labour government, but gave no date and said there was "nothing to recognise at the moment – it is decimated". She also played down the idea that Labour alone could force Israel to change its course, saying: "If Labour get into government, we are limited. I will be honest. Biden from the US, who has way more influence, has only got limited influence. Qatar and Saudi Arabia are all working to stop what is happening."

At the same time, there would be a new mood in Westminster. The decline in influence of Conservative Friends of Israel, close to Benjamin Netanyahu and the Likud party, and the corresponding rise of LFI, much more critical of Netanyahu, would alter the tone of debate.

Labour's support for Israel has become slowly but increasingly conditional. Starmer and the shadow foreign secretary, David Lammy, have come a long way since the leader gave a speech at Chatham House on 31 October in favour of a humanitarian pause, but not a ceasefire, which he said would have left Hamas in a position to mount further attacks.

As the death toll has risen and adverse international court judgments have mounted, Labour has adapted its position. Starmer's commitment to the international rule of law born in his Doughty Street Chambers in the 1990s has had consequences. On 20 May, Lammy told MPs: "Labour believes the UK and all parties to the Rome statute have a legal obligation to comply with orders and warrants issued by the [international criminal court]. Democracies that believe in the rule of law must submit themselves to it.

"Labour believes that the ICC's independence must be upheld and respected, and that it is right that the conduct of all parties is addressed by the court. Arrest warrants are not a conviction or a determination of guilt, but they do reflect the evidence and the judgment of the prosecutor about the grounds for individual criminal responsibility."

If warrants were issued, as requested by the ICC prosecutor, and Netanyahu remained prime minister, then it would be prudent for him not to visit a Starmer-led Britain. The contrast between the US Congress feting Netanyahu and UK ministers seeking his arrest would be stark.

Lammy has urged Israel to comply with what he describes as the "binding orders" of the international court of justice to end its Rafah offensive. Labour says it opposed the military action and that it should lead to the suspension of exports of weapons and components that could be used in the offensive.

> *'Democracies that believe in the rule of law must submit themselves to it ... The ICC's independence must be respected'*



David Lammy
Shadow foreign secretary

Asked last week what Israel should do after the Rafah airstrike that killed 45 Palestinians, Starmer's reply – "stop" – was effective for its brevity and clarity. It would be more significant if it implied that, in common with some Foreign Office officials, he no longer shared Netanyahu's faith in a complete military victory over Hamas, or that one was unattainable at an acceptable price in terms of civilian deaths.

The growing Labour criticisms of Israel's conduct in the war are separate to any distinct role the party may play in resolving the conflict and securing a two-state solution. Here, Labour would be one voice among many, and its role would largely be set by elections in Israel and the US.

But the LFI paper on Palestinian recognition gives clues as to the parameters in which Lammy might operate. In its latest pamphlet, it moves on from insisting Palestinian recognition should come only at the end of bilateral talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and says it should come as part of a series of incremental diplomatic compromises.

It envisages a reformed authority running a demilitarised Gaza; Hamas would be excluded from authority-run elections and all candidates would be required to disavow violence; Saudi Arabia-Israel relations would be normalised; and some land in the West Bank would be transferred from joint administration to sole control of the authority. LFI argues a Palestinian Authority-led state could be sold to sceptical Israelis "as the greatest available hedge against resurgence of Hamas, the path to a regional and economic and security pact, and a defeat for Iran".

Could a Labour government play a peacemaking role in the Middle East? Probably not. Few Gulf leaders scratch their heads asking what London thinks. But Lammy knows the charge of double standards has stuck in the global south, and wants to back an international anti-corruption court. Labour Together, the thinktank that has tried to invent Starmerism, has argued a Labour Foreign Office could play a distinctive role in conflict resolution, a sort of western version of Qatari mediation. Looking for a niche, Labour might find this attractive.

Ultimately, the scope for manoeuvre will depend on whether the duopoly Britain faces is Trump-Netanyahu or something like Biden-Gantz. If it is the former, advocates of the international rule of law know a dark winter awaits.



Facebook Tories plough cash into ads for lost-cause seats

Alex Hern
Marjan Kalanaki

The Conservative party has spent almost all of its ad budget since the beginning of the year in constituencies that were once marginal but are now looking more like surefire losses, Guardian analysis shows.

The strategy is known within the party as the "80/20" approach, in which it focuses all its spending on the 80 seats it came closest to losing in 2019 and the 20 seats it came closest to winning.

Ad spending reports on Facebook show that these constituencies are where the party is funnelling its money. More than half of the party's spending on the social network since January has gone to its 80 tightest seats, or to seats it does not hold at all.

The Guardian collected every advert run on Facebook or Instagram since the beginning of the year that mentions a Conservative prospective parliamentary candidate (PPC) by name, and that was paid for by either the Conservative party or the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party. The social network does not report absolute spending, but gives an approximation, showing that at least £100,000 was spent on such adverts in the past five months.

However, the distribution of the spending suggests the party's campaigning has not yet caught up with the reality of the polls. Almost a fifth of the budget was spent on seats that the party would lose with a swing of at least 3% against it, including Bury North, which it won by just 105 votes in 2019, and Burnley, which it gained from Labour by a margin of 1,352.

The party even devoted funding to adverts in seats it doesn't hold. The Scottish Conservatives spent 5% of the total national-level funding on a range of seats held by the SNP, including East Renfrewshire, held by the SNP with a majority of more than 5,400, and Angus and Perthshire Glens, a new constituency formed from a cluster of five SNP-held seats.

Plans for an "80/20" election strategy, first reported in January 2023,



▼ *Rishi Sunak visiting a cake stall during a Conservative election campaign event in Bury*

PHOTOGRAPH: CARL COURT/AP

Lib Dems launch 'Portillo pot' to oust ministers

The Liberal Democrats have launched a new fundraising campaign, named the "Portillo pot", aimed at ousting cabinet ministers in blue wall seats.

The party's leader, Ed Davey, told the Guardian he would most like to defeat the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt; the justice secretary, Alex Chalk; and the education secretary, Gillian Keegan.

Hunt, the Conservative candidate for Godalming and Ash, has long been on course to become the first chancellor in modern times to lose at a general election, according to polls. The fear of such a loss pushed him to contribute more than £100,000 of his own money to his constituency party since 2019 in order to bolster his chances of re-election.

Chalk, the candidate for Cheltenham, won his seat in 2019 by a slim margin of 981 , and is also on course to lose to the Lib Dems after they retained control of Cheltenham borough council last month in the local elections.

Polls have also predicted Keegan, the candidate for Chichester in West Sussex, is on course to lose her seat.

In an email seen by the Guardian, the Lib Dems told members: "This is a critical moment in our general election fundraising. The Conservative party machine is pouring funding into our target seats across the blue wall, in particular cabinet ministers' seats. After multimillion-pound donations from Conservative donors, including Frank Hester, money is no object for their campaigns ...

"Jeremy Hunt said his seat was on a knife-edge in the Evening Standard but it's clear the Conservatives are paying to bail out the failing campaigns of the ministers they have left.

"We need to launch a new fundraising campaign to combat these Conservatives. This new 'Portillo pot' will be spent in seats where Conservative ministers are paying to hold on to power."

Aletha Adu

are aimed at turning around the party's polling deficit. The strategy was based in part on an assumption that the polls would narrow as the election drew closer.

In fact, the margin has remained stable since last year, the most noticeable trend being an increase in the share of the vote for Reform UK, largely at the expense of the Conservatives. Labour is about 21 points ahead of the Tory party, according to the Guardian's polling tracker.

If that swing is replicated nationally, then seats like those of Greg Hands in Chelsea and Fulham, Jeremy Hunt's in Godalming and Ash, and Connor Donnithorne in Camborne, Redruth and Hayle - all of which received national funding for social media advertising - would be all but impossible to defend.

With more than 100 Tory PPCs still to go through selection, the party is likely to increase its spending on Facebook in the coming weeks. Some, though, has been wasted, no matter the result: adverts supporting Andrea Leadsom and Michael Gove won't help secure re-election for the pair, who have confirmed that they are standing down.

Additional reporting
Carmen Aguilar Garcia

Reselection
Abbott says she 'will run and win' seat

Ben Quinn
Jessica Elgot

Diane Abbott said last night she intended to "run and win" for Labour in Hackney North and Stoke Newington, days before a meeting of the party's executive is expected to approve her candidacy.

Keir Starmer said last week that Abbot was "free to stand" as a Labour candidate having regained the whip after a long suspension. It followed days of speculation that Abbot would be blocked from standing, culminating in her saying Labour was carrying out a "cull of leftwingers".

Abbott also denied a report that she had been offered a seat in the House of Lords if she agreed to stand aside in the constituency she has represented for 37 years. "I have never been offered a seat in the Lords, and would not accept one if offered. I am the adopted Labour candidate for Hackney North and Stoke Newington. I intend to run and to win as Labour's candidate," she posted on X.

The shadow home secretary, Yvette Cooper, had earlier denied reports in the Sunday Times that several Labour MPs had been offered peerages to quit and make way for allies of Starmer. Cooper told Sky News: "It's not the way the system works. There's a whole process with the independent committee that will vet nominations."

Cooper said that "no party can do that or make that sort of commitment" but in practice party leaders and the prime minister do have that power. Though nominations are vetted by an independent committee, it is for political parties to decide who receives them. The committee checks if the nomination is a person of good standing but does not have a veto.

Abbott was widely expected by Labour MPs to announce her retirement and be given a peerage, until a Labour source briefed last week that she would be banned from standing and Abbott said she still intended to fight to be a candidate.

She was suspended from the party last year after writing a letter to the Observer saying Jewish people and Travellers suffered prejudice but not racism, comparing their experiences to those of people with red hair. Abbott apologised but was placed under investigation and lost the Labour whip.

The row over Abbott has unfolded as other left-leaning Labour figures have been blocked from standing in the election.

Faiza Shaheen, blocked by Labour from standing in Chingford and Woodford Green, said she would challenge the decision in court. She said she had faced "a systematic campaign of racism, Islamophobia and bullying".

Lloyd Russell-Moyle, who had been the MP for Brighton Kemptown since 2017, said last week he had been suspended from the party and would not be allowed to stand for Labour at the election.



▲ *Diane Abbott had said Labour was carrying out a 'cull of leftwingers'*

Fraud claims
Police look at Tory's election advertising

Ben Quinn

Campaign material used by a Tory candidate seeking re-election as an MP is being reviewed by police after complaints that it makes him appear as if he is standing for Labour.

Robert Largan posted a picture of his face on X superimposed on a red background with the slogan "Labour for Largan".

Only the faint silhouette of the Tory oak and a legal text stating the advert is on behalf of the candidate for High Peak Conservatives in Derbyshire give any clues that he is standing for Rishi Sunak's party.

Derbyshire police said the incident would be reviewed after "a number of messages in relation to claims of election fraud, raised due to concerns around marketing material".

Largan posted a similar advert in the colours of Reform UK, with the slogan "Reform for Robert".

His website makes no mention of his party's leader and the dominant colour is green. His profile on X states: "Vote Local. Vote Largan."

He tweeted: "So many local Labour voters have told me they're going to vote for me, because they want to keep me as their local MP. There have been so many that I'm launching a new Labour for Largan club."

Largan, 37, is defending one of the most marginal Tory-held seats, where he won with a majority of just 590 at the 2019 general election.

A Conservative spokesperson said: "The materials clearly carry imprints, as required by electoral law."

The Electoral Commission said it is responsible for making sure campaign material includes imprints to identify the person or organisation which has caused it to be published.

"Our remit does not extend to the content or style of campaign material. This is not subject to regulation by any UK body," it added.

Largan's Labour rival, Jon Pearce, tweeted: "Labour - accept no imitations. (Especially not Tory Whips who gave us the cost of living crisis, nearly 8 million people on NHS waiting lists & raw sewage pumped into High Peak rivers.)"

Drug that 'melts away' tumours lifts hopes of bowel cancer cure

Andrew Gregory

A "gamechanger" immunotherapy drug that "melts away" tumours dramatically increases the chances of curing bowel cancer and may even replace the need for surgery, doctors have said. Pembrolizumab targets and blocks a specific protein on the surface of immune cells that then seek out and destroy cancer cells.

Giving the drug before surgery instead of chemotherapy led to a huge increase in patients being declared cancer-free, a clinical trial found. The results were presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

The study was led by University College London (UCL), University College London hospital (UCLH), the Christie NHS foundation trust in Manchester, St James's University hospital in Leeds, University hospital Southampton and the University of Glasgow.

Prof Mark Saunders, a consultant clinical oncologist at the Christie, said: "Immunotherapy prior to surgery could well become a 'gamechanger' for these patients with this type of cancer ... In the future, immunotherapy may even replace the need for surgery."

In the trial, funded by Merck Sharp and Dohme and sponsored by UCL, researchers recruited 32 patients with stage two or three bowel cancer and a certain genetic profile (MMR deficient/MSI-High bowel cancer) from five hospitals. Patients were given nine weeks of pembrolizumab, also known as Keytruda, before surgery instead of the usual chemotherapy and surgery, then monitored.

Results showed that 59% of patients had no signs of cancer after treatment with pembrolizumab, with any cancer in the remaining 41% of patients removed during surgery.

All of the patients in the trial were cancer-free after treatment.

When standard chemotherapy was given to patients with this genetic profile, less than 5% had no signs of cancer after surgery, UCL said.

Dr Kai-Keen Shiu, the trial's chief investigator and a consultant medical oncologist at UCLH, said: "If you melt the cancer away before surgery you normally triple survival chances."



Selected stores and lines. Subject to availability. Palm Tree and Hibiscus Linen Rich Short Sleeve Men's Shirt £14. Palm Tree and Hibiscus Linen Rich Short Sleeve Boy's Shirt, 1-8yrs £6-£8. Palm Tree and Hibiscus Linen Rich Dress 1-8yrs £10-£14. Delivery, collection and minimum basket charges may apply. UK delivery only. Carrier bag charges may apply. Delivery/collection slots subject to availability. May exclude Asda Express stores and small stores - see ASDA.com/smallstores

Alarm over sharp rise in cancer in under-50s

Andrew Gregory
Health editor

The number of under-50s being diagnosed with cancer in the UK has risen 24% in two decades, a sharper increase than any other age group, according to shocking figures experts say are probably linked to obesity levels, cheap junk food and inactivity.

Early-onset incidence rates grew from 132.9 per 100,000 people in 1995 to 164.6 in 2019, a new analysis of data shows. About 35,000 people under 50 are now developing cancer every year, almost 100 young women and men a day, the research reveals.

There is mounting concern that a global epidemic of cancer among young people may be emerging. The explosion in cases was a key focus of discussion this weekend at the world's largest cancer conference, the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (Asco).

Experts are still in the early stages of understanding the reasons behind the rise in cases. But most believe poor diets, physical inactivity and obesity are likely to be among the factors behind it.

Incidence rates of cancer have grown among all ages in the past two decades. But the 24% increase among the under-50s is much higher than those seen among other age groups.

"Over recent decades, there has been a clear increase in cancer incidence rates in young adults in the UK," said Prof Charles Swanton, Cancer Research UK's chief clinician. "Evidence suggests that more adults under 50 may be getting cancer than ever before."

24%
Rise in early-onset incidence rates between 1995 and 2019, from 132.9 cases per 100,000 people to 164.6

13%
Rise in overall incidence rate of cancer in all ages between 1995 and 2019, from 539 per 100,000 to 611.5

The second biggest rise in cases was among the under-25s. Their rate jumped 16% from 16.6 cases per 100,000 in 1995 to 19.2 cases.

The overall incidence rate of cancer cases across all ages grew from 539 per 100,000 people in 1995 to 611.5 in 2019, according to the Cancer Research UK analysis. That is an increase of 13% - almost half the growth rate seen in the under-50s.

Early onset cancers are still uncommon. About 90% of all cancers affect people over the age of 50. But Swanton said the trend was still worrying with 34,945 cases in 2019. That total is up 34% from 26,176 in 1995. The reason the percentage change is greater than the 24% rate rise is probably due to population growth.

"Increased exposure to known as well as unknown cancer risk factors, changes to lifestyles and diets over time, and rising obesity may all contribute to the uptick in early-onset cancer," Swanton said.

Britain has one of the highest obesity rates in Europe, with two in three adults overweight or obese.

"Genetics, improvements in diagnosis and screening, and the microbiome could also play a role," added Swanton. "We are seeing them through our clinics and it is disturbing and we don't have a good answer as to why this is happening. It really is a scientific conundrum that urgently needs to be solved."

The surge in early onset cases is a global problem. The number of under-50s affected worldwide has risen by almost 80%, the Guardian reported last year. A recent review of registry records from 44 countries found the incidence of early-onset cancers was rising rapidly for bowel and 13 other types of cancers, many of which affect the digestive system.

Dr Aparna Parikh, an associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and an oncologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, is part of Team Prospect, an international research group funded by Cancer Research UK that is studying the increase in cases.

Speaking at the Asco conference, she said: "We want to gain a deep mechanistic understanding of biological processes and environmental causes, and to do this we're looking at a diverse set of data and patients from all around the world."

While researchers race to unlock more answers, there are ways people can reduce their risk, Swanton said.

"Around four in 10 cancer cases are preventable, and there are steps people can take to help reduce their cancer risk," he said. "Not smoking, keeping a healthy weight, being safe in the sun and cutting down on alcohol all make a big difference."



▼ *The UK's first large-scale seagrass nursery grows the plants itself before reintroducing them into the wild*

PHOTOGRAPHS: DIMITRIS LEGAKIS/THE GUARDIAN







'It gives you tingles' Seed project aims to restore UK's lost seagrass meadows

Steven Morris

It is a much-loved stretch of Celtic coastline, revered by poetry lovers as the place where Dylan Thomas lived his final years and by thrill-seekers as a spot for breaking land speed records.

Now between Thomas's boathouse home at Laugharne and the natural fast track of Pendine Sands in south-west Wales, an ambitious project will try to help restore one of the world's most important and threatened habitats: seagrass meadows.

Two species of seagrass – flowering plants that live in shallow, sheltered bays, provide a vital habitat for seahorses, octopuses and cuttlefish, and are an important carbon sink – are being grown in ponds fed with seawater pumped in from Carmarthen Bay.

Over the past two years, what is being billed as the UK's first large-scale seagrass nursery has processed 1.5m seeds collected from sites in Wales and England and grown tens of thousands of plants, the first of which have been introduced into the wild to restore underwater meadows.

The nursery lead, Emily Yates, said: "When we started this, I stood in the polytunnel and thought: 'I can't wait until we're creating meadows of seagrass.' When you plant those seeds for the first time, you just hope they grow. And they have, and the first are now out there now creating new meadows, and biodiversity is coming back to places that have been bare, barren sand."

The Guardian was given an exclusive first tour of the nursery. The visit began in a shipping container, the site's lab. Here they have vessels of seeds harvested from sites in north Wales, mostly from the water around the Llŷn peninsula, and the Solent in southern England. They are processed at a warehouse in Bridgend, south Wales, and stored in conditions like their natural habitat – quite chilly and salty.

The seeds are then planted at two spots. One is a polytunnel where it is possible to control the conditions for delicate young plants – and keep the Welsh rain off the staff.

Yates said the challenge was that there was no manual for growing seagrass plants from seed. "For most plants, there's at least a dusty Victorian notebook you can find. Not for this." There are seagrass projects taking place around the world. "But it grows very differently in different areas, so we're writing the handbook here."

The team has found that planting the seeds in a combination of a loam (often used for council cricket pitches) and play sand works well. The two main UK species, eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) and dwarf eelgrass (*Zostera noltii*), are grown in pools.

Their second growing area is a pond outside where a business used to breed worms for fish farms. There are signs that growing the plants outside may mean the adults are hardier. "They're not in the spa-like conditions of the polytunnel," said Yates. "These plants are a lot darker, there's a lot more chlorophyll in their leaves. They may be a bit more hardy than the ones in the polytunnel."

Last month, for the first time, the team sent 1,500 plants each to projects in north Wales and the Solent. "So those are now out there actively restoring and establishing meadows," said Yates. The team has now also produced plants from seeds from seagrass nurtured here, seen as an important breakthrough. "We're completing the cycle."

> ***'The first seeds are creating meadows, and biodiversity is coming back to places that have been bare, barren sand'***
>
> 
>
> **Emily Yates**
> *Nursery lead*

The project is a joint venture by the charity Project Seagrass (which has Coldplay as a patron) and the wetland specialist Salix, part of the RSK Group.

The UK has lost about 90% of its seagrass meadows, half of which have vanished in the past three decades. A wasting disease caused a drastic reduction in the 1930s, and their replenishment is hampered by increased human factors such as pollution and physical disturbance, including dredging. Project Seagrass argues that without replanting there is not much chance of natural recovery.

At the moment, the seagrass nursery takes up only a small part of the 20-hectare (50-acre) site, which includes 40 pools, 100 metres long. The hope is that over time, more of the ponds will be converted into seagrass nursery pools.

Yates said: "We speak to people when we're out on site who say: 'Oh, I remember there being seagrass here, and swimming through it.' Hopefully they'll see it come back. It gives you tingles."

'Wonder' of poetry can fight the climate crisis, says poet laureate

Rachel Hall

Poets can help fight climate breakdown by making us "spellbound, full of wonder and beguiled" by nature, the poet laureate has said.

Simon Armitage, who promised to dedicate his writing to environmental issues when he was appointed poet laureate in 2019, has written a new book of poems called Blossomise, which he hopes will remind readers of the beauty of nature.



▲ *Simon Armitage has released a new book of poems called Blossomise*

Asked at the Hay festival in Powys about the role of poets in communicating the threat of climate breakdown, he said: "We do what we can. My feeling about this book is it's slightly different from my other work in that there's a lot of praise and wonder in it.

"I think if we are spellbound and full of wonder and beguiled by nature we're just less likely to want to destroy it.

"I wanted to celebrate and to recognise blossom as an incredibly joyful thing but I also wanted to write about the way the weather is upside down and the climate and the environment are in peril."

He was invited to write the book by the National Trust to celebrate blossom artistically, echoing the cherry blossom festivals in Japan. He suggested it had done "incredibly well" because it offered a "sense of hope".

The National Trust also provided statistics on the decline of orchards to inform his work. "We're not just talking about beautiful places to wander through in floaty white blouses, we're talking about habitats for fertilisation, pollination," he said.

The book features juxtapositions of blossoms with concrete buildings. One poem named Plum Tree Among the Skyscrapers describes a "potting compost of burger boxes", which is "staging a one tree show with high vis blossoms and lip gloss petals" and "outshining the smoke sculptures and blubbering fountains".

Armitage tried to write poems "without falling into romanticism and sentimentality", he said. "Poets have been drawing on nature ever since poetry first spoke its first utterance so there's a pressure to find new language, new metaphor without straying too far from the topic," he said. "That was the challenge, to write in a contemporary way, in a contemporary world."


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'They will not silence his voice'

Grief and defiance as journalist's widow visits the site of his death



Sampaio said: 'This is a special place for me'

Tom Phillips
Itaquaí River

Alessandra Sampaio fell to her knees and wept as she clambered on to the boat's deck and came face to face with the remote riverside clearing where her husband's life was extinguished and hers was turned upside down.

The sound of Sampaio's lament mixed with birdsong and the voice of an Indigenous shaman echoed through the jungle where the British journalist Dom Phillips and his Brazilian comrade Bruno Pereira were shot dead in June 2022.

"Dom and Bruno are here! Save them! Their spirits are lost here! We can't see them but they are here!" the 85-year-old medicine man, César Marubo, cried out, imploring his people's god and creator, Kana Voã, to guide their souls towards paradise.

"Take them by the hand and lift them up into heaven!" Marubo pleaded, his eyes also filling with tears.

On the riverbank before them, framed by Amazonian money trees laden with bright red fruit, two wooden crosses marked the spot where Phillips and Pereira were ambushed and murdered, allegedly by a trio of men accused of illegal fishing who are now in prison awaiting trial for the killing.

"What I most want is to leave this pain behind," Sampaio had said the previous evening, as she prepared to make her first journey to the place where Phillips's final reporting mission came to a sudden and brutal end.

Sampaio's visit, marking the second anniversary of a crime that shocked the world, was part of a deeply personal quest to come to terms with the loss of her husband, a longtime Guardian reporter who was writing a book about the Amazon when he was killed.

"I'm not angry. I've never felt anger … I just miss him so much," said Sampaio, wearing the wedding ring recovered from her husband's body around her neck.

But the pilgrimage was also designed to announce the creation of the Dom Phillips Institute, which will honour his legacy through educational initiatives raising awareness of the complexities and magnificence of the Amazon and its original inhabitants.

"We don't want to be frozen in pain and frustration. We want to forge ahead," Sampaio said as she journeyed by boat along the Itaquaí River towards the shrine activists have built at the scene of the crime. "We must transform this pain into a positive movement – and give new meaning to everything that happened."



Sampaio said the institute would be guided by her husband's qualities: tenderness, a burning desire to listen, and respect for diversity and life.

"I think that if Dom was here talking to me now he'd say: 'Go, Alê: move forwards, learn more, make contacts, help to echo this message about this incredible thing that is the Amazon and all of its beauties,'" Sampaio said before travelling to the memorial on the same vessel Indigenous searchers used in their search for Phillips and Pereira after they disappeared while heading to the river town of Atalaia do Norte. Members of those search teams accompanied Sampaio on last week's visit.

> ***'If Dom was here, he'd say: move forwards, help to echo this message about the Amazon's beauties'***
>
> **Alessandra Sampaio**
> *Widow of Dom Phillips*

▲ *Alessandra Sampaio is launching the Dom Phillips Institute to protect the Amazon and its original dwellers*

PHOTOGRAPHS: JOÃO LAET/THE GUARDIAN







▲ *Dom Phillips, above left, was writing a book on the Amazon. Above, crosses mark the spot where he and Bruno Pereira were murdered*

◀ *Sampaio in tears where her husband was killed two years ago, a crime that shocked the world*

"It was such a tragedy … and we are here to celebrate them," said Binin Carlos Matis, an Indigenous activist who worked with Pereira trying to defend his ancestral home in the Javari valley Indigenous territory, a Portugal-sized sprawl of jungle that is home to the world's largest concentration of isolated peoples.

Orlando Possuelo, an Indigenous expert who helped coordinate the search operation, hoped the memorial would also remind frontline activists of the dangers their struggle to preserve the Amazon involved. "We don't want the Javari valley to be filled with crosses," he said.

The headquarters of Possuelo's Indigenous monitoring group, Evu, in Atalaia do Norte was the first stop on Sampaio's two-day tour of the isolated rainforest near Brazil's borders with Colombia and Peru.

There, she heard distressing reports about the assault on the Javari valley territory where illegal fishers, poachers, miners and drug traffickers continue to operate despite government pledges to crack down.

"There are 300 points of invasion," Possuelo told Sampaio, pointing to a map peppered with coloured dots denoting the different threats.

Days earlier, Evu activists had chased off a gang of five poachers, confiscating tapir and peccary meat and hundreds of *tracajá* river turtles they were trying to smuggle out and sell. On the eve of Sampaio's arrival, an Evu member was assaulted at a local bar – an attack members suspect was motivated by their work.

But Sampaio also heard heartening accounts of how Evu had ramped up its activities in the two years since her husband was killed while reporting on the group's fight to protect Indigenous lives. Evu's membership has doubled to about 40 since then, with plans for a 116-strong force in the coming years, patrolling the Javari valley's six major waterways.

The next day, Sampaio visited the base of the Indigenous association Univaja, which served as the nerve centre of the 2022 search effort, to discuss her plans for the institute and ask local leaders how it could help their cause. "They will not silence Dom's voice," she told them.

Representatives of the Matis, Marubo and Mayuruna peoples took turns to voice their hopes and fears over the region's future.

Nilo Marubo, a teacher, spoke about how a lack of education and opportunities was driving young people from Indigenous villages. "When they arrive in the cities they end up getting mixed up in alcoholism, drugs and even [criminal] factions," he said.

Marina Mayuruna, a 27-year-old activist, denounced violence affecting Indigenous women and girls. "Some men will tell you this doesn't happen. But it does, and it's the women who suffer," she said.

Clovis Marubo, a 58-year-old leader, feared younger generations were becoming disconnected from traditional ways of life as western culture marched deeper into the region. "Our culture is becoming folklore," he said, ruing how many youngsters no longer knew how to use bows or speak native tongues.

Silvana Marubo lamented the threats to Indigenous activists and their non-Indigenous allies. "I worry who the next Doms and Brunos will be," she said, telling Sampaio: "Your pain is our pain … your tears are our tears. Your struggle is our struggle."

Sampaio listened intently as her Indigenous hosts spoke. At times tears rolled down her cheeks. At others she smiled and laughed.

One afternoon, Sampaio took part in a Matis whipping ritual called *mariwin*, in which men wearing masks and covered in leaves thrash participants with palm stalks to frighten off evil spirits. Sampaio winced as the lash struck her back but vowed to return to the Javari valley to ensure the Dom Phillips Institute's first project benefited a place he had loved and where he was lost. "I don't want to be stuck with this [negative] image of the Javari. For me, the Javari is a world waiting to be discovered," she said, staring out across the bronze-coloured waters where her spouse once roved. "This is a special place for me."

‘He had no contract for me’

Care workers trapped without regular income

Kiran Stacey
Poonam Joshi

Akhil Jenny was living in a small town in southern India, struggling with crippling debts, when a work contact offered him a way out.

“I had a nursing qualification and wanted to come to the UK,” Jenny told the Guardian. “That’s what Shinto Sebastian offered me – a well-paid job as a care worker in Britain. It solved all my problems.”

Jenny soon realised the offer from Sebastian, an India-based immigration agent, was too good to be true. Jenny sold off family assets to pay his agent, only to find that the British company that sponsored him had no care job for him when he arrived.

Workers who came to Britain legally are now trapped with small sources of irregular income, unable to leave their employer for fear of deportation and unable to go home for fear of being unable to pay off their debts.

While the government has tightened up the number of people who can enter Britain on care worker visas, experts say it has done little to tackle the deeper problem of rampant abuse of the immigration system. Dora-Olivia Vicol, the chief executive of the Work Rights Centre, said many were being “excluded from the benefits system, with no financial safety net and facing extraordinary risks and stress”.

The Guardian has spoken to dozens of migrant workers who described similar experiences. They heard about a job opportunity in the UK through friends or social media influencers who referred them to an immigration agent in India. They said the agent charged them between £8,000 and £20,000 to process their visa, with some promising the money would cover flights, airport transfers and a month’s accommodation.

In most, but not all, cases the workers said the India-based agent worked with a British agent or recruitment company.

Eventually the worker would be given a certificate showing they had secured sponsorship with a particular care home or agency. It listed not only the employer but also the hours they would work and the salary they would receive.

But on arriving in Britain, most found little or no work available. Some said they were asked to jump through hoops such as buying a car or securing a tenancy before being allowed to take on a few shifts. Some said they were simply told there was no work available and were immediately sacked. In a few cases, they said they were asked to work for the care company – but as cleaners or drivers.

Vicol said: “The health and care worker visa has left hundreds of migrant care workers trapped in limbo. Many describe being tied to sponsors who offer little or no work and being banned from taking on full-time employment anywhere else. Many are in debt after paying eye-watering recruitment fees.

“The only way for them to find a new job is by finding another licensed sponsor.”

Jenny paid Sebastian £16,000 and was told this covered flights, airport travel and one month’s accommodation, in addition to the cost of a sponsorship certificate (£239) and visa (£551 for more than three years). Jenny persuaded his father to sell off family land to pay his fees.

Just like others, Jenny was introduced to a British intermediary – in this case London Radiant Group, run by Yusuf Badarudeen, which describes itself online as a recruitment company.

It is not clear which services Badarudeen provided for Jenny, or if he received money for this. Badarudeen told the Guardian he provided logistical support for incoming migrants. He said in a statement: “We as a company help other overseas businesses for their customers in onboarding such as airport pickups, accommodation, general training through third-party providers. There is a fee that we charge depending on the level of support, however, we do not provide any certificate of sponsorship or employment.”



▲ *Geo Ambooken, with his wife, Shilja Kawakkacherry, and children*
PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/ THE GUARDIAN

‘I was told I didn't speak proper English or have proper qualifications. I was given a cleaning job for two hours a day’

Akhil Jenny *Nurse, who qualified in India*

Eventually Sebastian gave Jenny a certificate of sponsorship endorsed by Flamelily, a Sheffield company providing at-home care workers, guaranteeing him 37.5 hours a week on a salary of £21,580 a year. Sebastian was then able to procure him a visa.

Flamelily, which trades as Civility Care, promises an “outstanding care service” and an “ethical care approach aligned with our family values”. Like all the employers in question, the care services it offers are regulated and approved by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). There is no suggestion those services are affected by the visa allegations.

Jenny got almost nothing he says he was promised. The agents told him he would need to pay for his own flights, accommodation and finally his own taxi from Manchester airport to Sheffield. When he got to Sheffield, he called a Flamelily director, Sheu Matewe, only to find there was no job.

“He said he didn’t have a contract for me,” Jenny said. Speaking in fluent English, he added: “He also said I didn’t speak proper English or have proper qualifications. I fought a lot with him and finally he gave me a cleaning job for two or three hours a day maximum for £11 an hour.”

Jenny is still living in Sheffield,



Akhil Jenny – who arrived in Britain having paid an India-based immigration agent £16,000 and was given no care job by the company that sponsored him – is a housemate of Geo Ambooken's in Sheffield

sharing a bed with another migrant worker. If he wants more privacy, he sleeps on the kitchen floor.

For a while he worked irregular shifts as a driver for Flamelily, but two months ago Matewe emailed to say the employment was being terminated – a decision driven by "operational realities".

Jenny's housemate Geo Ambooken paid Badarudeen for what he said he thought were immigration services, putting more than £2,000 in a UK account belonging to another company of which Badarudeen is a director, Brittish Group Ltd [sic].

Like Jenny, Ambooken was sponsored by Flamelily but, he says, when he arrived he was told there was no care work available. Like Jenny, he worked as a driver for the company, ferrying around care workers and being paid £80 a day for 16 hours' work on average.

Asked about taking payments from workers, Badarudeen said: "We are not aware of any payment that they are claiming to have paid to [the] above mentioned company. However, there was a payment made to a London account for a family onboarding."

Asked to specify what he provided as part of that process, Badarudeen added: "Please do not get in touch with me as I have given you enough information."

Matewe said: "The claims made about our company offering nonexistent or unsuitable work opportunities to migrant workers are categorically false. Flamelily Care Ltd operates transparently and ethically, and we are committed to upholding the welfare and rights of all employees and visa applicants."

He added: "We are launching our own internal investigation to thoroughly examine these accusations and ensure that our practices align with our values and legal obligations. We are also liaising with legal advisers."

£80

The amount per day received by Geo Ambooken for carrying out an average of 16 hours' work

90

Hours of work a week done by Nishamol Sebastian for £1,700 a month – equivalent to about £4 an hour

Lawyers told the Guardian that issuing a certificate of sponsorship without having a specific job to offer would break the Home Office's rules on how they should be issued and could be enough for officials to revoke a licence to issue more. Multiple workers – including Jenny – told the Guardian they had reported Flamelily to the Home Office, but the company still has its Home Office licence.

The Home Office would not comment on individual cases or companies, or licensing decisions.

Nishamol Sebastian, another care worker from the south of India, paid her agents more than £15,000 in fees, which she believed were to pay for her visa. She was due to work for a care provider, Homecare1st, which sponsored her visa. But when she arrived in the UK, she says she was told by the director, Matilda Mwenya, she would have to get a driving licence and a car before she could start.

Sebastian bought a car for £2,250. Then, she says, Mwenya told her to take out business insurance at an extra cost of £2,000.

Two months after arriving, Sebastian started work. But instead of the 39 hours of work promised on her sponsorship certificate, she says she was made to work 90, for which she was paid £1,700 a month, equivalent to just over £4 an hour – well below the minimum wage.

Last July, she got a message from Mwenya saying the company's licence to sponsor new migrants was suspended. Another message said they no longer had enough work and would put her and others on unpaid leave for four weeks.

Four months later the Home Office reinstated the company's licence, but Sebastian, who did not work for them during that time, had had enough. She found another job, with an employer who gave her a new certificate of sponsorship, and she now works in a neurological rehabilitation centre.

Others have not been so lucky.

The Guardian has spoken to 12 migrants who came to Britain to work for Homecare1st, all of whom said they were not given the work listed on their certificates of sponsorship. Some say they were told to do unpaid office work; others were given no shifts. One says his employment was terminated after two days; he was told the company's licence was suspended and there was no work.

Three paid Mwenya between £2,000 and £6,000 for what they believed to be visa fees before they came to the UK. When one complained about not getting work, he said Mwenya told him she would refund him via his agent. He says the money was never returned.

Mwenya told the Guardian: "All employees are aware of the channels within the company to raise any concerns they may have, if they wish, and none were raised."

Several migrant workers say they complained to the Home Office about Homecare1st. But after officials reinstated its licence to issue certificates of sponsorship last year, it is still allowed to bring new workers into Britain.

The Guardian has spoken to dozens of other workers with similar stories, all of whom are desperate for help from UK regulators or law officers.

David Neal, the government's former chief inspector of borders, told the Guardian: "Rather like the Post Office scandal, there is a real problem of the system rolling its eyes and then not doing anything."

Experts say regulators such as the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, which was set up after the 2004 Morecambe Bay cockle-picking disaster, are underfunded and unsure of how to deal with the changing nature of modern-day slavery allegations.

Eleanor Lyons, the government's anti-slavery commissioner, told MPs in February she was concerned about exploitation of care workers, but also explained she was dealing with dwindling resources. "The focus of the Home Office is on tackling illegal migration and small boats, and modern slavery and human trafficking is no longer the priority that it was," she told the home affairs select committee.

The police also seem unsure of how to deal with such cases. Several workers the Guardian spoke to also approached the police for help, but while lawyers say some of the allegations have what look like indicators of modern slavery, no action appears to have been taken.

Nishamol Sebastian said: "I have complained to the chief minister of Kerala [her home state] and to the CQC. The police said this was not modern slavery. I spoke to the Home Office. Hampshire and Bagshot councils both called from their safeguarding teams. But nothing has been done."

Explained

Relaxation of visa rules led to culture of casual exploitation

Dozens of foreign workers in social care in the UK say they have faced financial exploitation, paying thousands of pounds to secure full-time jobs and often finding little or no work available when they arrive.

Experts say the number of such cases has jumped in recent years after the government relaxed the visa system for care work in an attempt to solve chronic staff shortages. What is happening and why?

Why are so many people arriving on care visas?

Care work has always been difficult to recruit workers into. Long hours, hard work and relatively low wages have meant that the sector has always had higher vacancy and staff turnover rates than the economy as a whole.

The combination of post-Brexit immigration controls and staff resignations during and after the Covid pandemic left things worse than ever. In 2022-23 there were 160,000 vacancies, according to the charity Skills for Care, which projects there will be another 480,000 jobs in the sector by 2035.

In response, the government added care work to the shortage occupation list, the official list of jobs deemed difficult to fill, making it easier for employers to bring in people from abroad.

The salary threshold is lower than for other visa routes into the UK, and a company can register with the Home Office before issuing sponsorship certificates to bring qualified health professionals into the country. To be eligible for a licence, a company must be regulated by the Care Quality Commission and cannot have had a licence revoked in the past 12 months.

Why is this system problematic?

Certificates of sponsorship are mainly used by companies in highly skilled sectors such as technology, banking and consultancy. They are easy to issue, and in sectors where workers are unlikely to face the risk of exploitative labour conditions the system largely works.

The care sector, however, is full of poorly paid workers who are vulnerable to exploitation, and so the ease of issuing certificates becomes a liability. Moreover, the Home Office appears to lack the resources to monitor employers properly. A recent report by David Neal, a former chief inspector of borders, found the department had one compliance officer for every 1,600 employers licensed to sponsor migrant workers.

What have migrant workers said?

Almost all of the care workers the Guardian spoke to had the same story. They said they had paid thousands of pounds to immigration agents to secure a visa and work in the UK, only for the work listed on their sponsorship certificate never to materialise.

Workers said they paid agencies directly before arrival. Some agencies were accused of using professional care workers as underpaid labourers, getting them to perform jobs such as cleaning and driving.

What can the workers do?

Care worker visas allow holders to work for an additional 20 hours a week for another employer, but this is supposed to top up their regular employment, not replace it.

Workers can leave their employer, but doing so can put their immigration status at risk. They are allowed 60 days after leaving a sponsor to find another, which experts say is not long enough for many people to find alternative work. **Kiran Stacey**

Rise in patients treated in corridors a 'national emergency', say nurses

Denis Campbell
Robyn Vinter

Overcrowding is forcing hospitals to treat so many patients in corridors and storerooms that it constitutes a "national emergency", the UK's nursing union will warn today.

The growing and widespread practice is endangering patients' safety by leaving them without oxygen or easily able to attract staff's attention, according to the Royal College of Nursing (RCN).

"Corridor care" also deprives patients of their dignity because they have to undergo intimate examinations in view of others and do not have easy access to a toilet, it says.

Hospitals get so stretched that some patients have died while being looked after in what the RCN says are "inappropriate areas", which can also include car parks and fracture rooms.

The RCN is calling on the NHS to recognise the serious risk that "corridor care" poses to patients by recording every time it happens and classifying it as a "never event". The latter would put it on a par with incidents such as surgeons operating on the wrong part of someone's body.

A new RCN report, based on a survey of 11,000 nurses UK-wide, includes evidence of the impact on patients and staff of care being delivered in such settings. One nurse said: "You wouldn't treat a dog this way."

Nurses described patients being told they had cancer while they were stuck in public areas and told of someone with dementia being left for hours without oxygen in a corridor.

Prof Nicola Ranger, the union's acting general secretary and chief executive, will say today in her keynote address at the start of its annual conference: "Our once world-leading services are treating patients in car parks and store cupboards. The elderly are languishing on chairs for hours on end and patients are dying in corridors. The horror of this situation cannot be understated. It is a national emergency for patient safety."



▲ *The RCN wants corridor care to be classed as a 'never event', equivalent to an operation on the wrong part of a patient's body* PHOTOGRAPH: ALAMY

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine (RCEM), which represents A&E doctors, said patients being trapped in non-clinical parts of hospitals was "disgraceful, dehumanising and dangerous".

"As shocking as they [the RCN's findings] are, treating patients in corridors, cupboards and car parks is the daily reality our members and their colleagues face every time they go to work", said Dr Adrian Boyle, the RCEM's president.

He urged whoever forms the government after the 4 July general election to increase the number of permanent staffed beds in hospitals and to implement long-overdue "significant and substantial reform" of social care to reduce the number of people needing hospital care.

Matthew Stewart, a staff nurse in critical care and an RCN representative, said nurses across the UK had noticed a sharp increase in "corridor care" in recent years. "Probably pre-pandemic we would have the occasional corridor patient, but that was based on when we were, for example, cleaning their bed space or something like that. It was a very short period of time and in a very rare situation that would happen."

He added that nurses were left unable to care properly for patients stuck in corridors, store cupboards or waiting rooms because such places did not have equipment.

Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary, said: "NHS nurses are sounding the alarm on the appalling state of the NHS after 14 years of Conservative neglect. Patients and staff alike can see that the NHS is broken."

NHS England said it was trying to relieve the intense pressure on hospitals by creating more GP appointments, increasing the number of "virtual wards" (in which patients are cared for at home), providing extra beds and discharging patients on time.

A spokesperson said: "The NHS is facing significant demand for services and quality of care remains a priority. One of the key ambitions of our urgent and emergency care recovery plan is to improve patient flow in and out of hospitals.

"The NHS delivered an extra 5,000 core beds this winter, alongside measures to help patients avoid an A&E admission in the first place.

"Tools like our world-leading virtual ward programme and discharge lounges all help to improve care for patients."



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

Music review Songs that can live forever – just maybe

Liam Gallagher
Utilita Arena Sheffield
★★★★☆

Daniel Dylan Wray

"I haven't got any fucking new ones for you, so it's going to have to be an old one, all right?" proclaims Liam Gallagher during a set that feels like a time capsule of 1994. Performing Oasis's classic debut Definitely Maybe in full, he is set against a backdrop replicating the album's cover, with a huge globe, picture of Burt Bacharach and flamingos.

As the whirring crashes of Rock' n' Roll Star begin, it's hard to feel any sense of occasion. Despite the album turning 30, it has remained a culturally omnipresent force, with the songs still largely inescapable, and it's been the opener to Gallagher's solo set for years.

However, what feels like business as usual quickly morphs into something more considered. A six-piece band, complete with backing singers and a string quartet, adds real weight and lift to these songs. A pummelling Bring it on Down feels meaty yet detailed as a trio of guitars stretch it into an almost psychedelic wig out. There's Definitely Maybe B-sides and offcuts such as D'Yer Wanna Be a Spaceman and Cloudburst, but perhaps the most unexpected outing is Half the World Away, dedicated to Noel. It's a string-soaked, stirring rendition performed with grace and punch as the room lights up in a sea of phones and every voice unites for a warm singalong.

There's not a single Liam Gallagher solo song tonight as he fires out Oasis hits with rapidity, from a grand and sweeping Whatever to a raucous Cigarettes & Alcohol. A final run of Supersonic, Slide Away and Live Forever sets the place alight before I Am the Walrus closes the set, as was customary at a 1994 Oasis show.

It's an unashamed nostalgia fest, but given many anniversary play-your-classic-album-in-full shows can feel tossed off, perfunctory and occasionally disinterested, Gallagher has put real thought and care into performing these songs – ones you can't help but feel will still be ubiquitous in another 30 years.



▲ *Liam Gallagher sings Definitely Maybe during the anniversary tour*

There's not a single solo song as he fires out Oasis hits

'Reboot' dog breeds to halt genetic ailments, says expert

Nicola Davis
Science correspondent

Dog breeds must be "rebooted" through careful cross-breeding to save them from ingrained health problems, a leading expert has said.

From French bulldogs with spinal and respiratory problems, to cavalier King Charles spaniels with skull malformations, many breeds are prone to specific disorders. But while efforts have been made to breed healthier dogs by screening for problematic traits, the approach has limits.

Clare Rusbridge, professor in veterinary neurology at the University of Surrey, said many diseases arose from a complex array of genetic variants, while the gene pool of breeds was often so small that there were simply not enough unaffected individuals to breed from. "There needs to be an acceptance of allowing new genetic material in," she said.

A case in point, said Rusbridge, was the cavalier King Charles spaniel. "They all have a heart murmur by 10 years old, and most of them die from mitral valve disease," she said.

While scientists have discovered cavalier King Charles spaniels with genetic variants that protect them from myxomatous mitral valve disease (MMVD), Rusbridge said their rarity meant it would be more fruitful to cross cavalier King Charles spaniels with other breeds to produce dogs with better health. The offspring could then be crossed back into the original breed.

"It doesn't take many crossbreeds before you get back to a dog which looks like the original," she said.

This did not mean doing away with beloved dog breeds. Instead, the idea was to save them. "Reboot the breed," she said. Such efforts must involve crossbreed registries, Rusbridge added, and a route by which later generations could be registered as members of the original breed.



▲ *Cavalier King Charles spaniels are prone to skull malformations*

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187730

Photo © Dan Ross / British Red Cross

Fears of cultural crisis in Edinburgh as fringe venue is put up for sale

Severin Carrell
Scotland editor

Senior figures in the arts have warned that Edinburgh faces a cultural crisis after it emerged that one of the city's most famous venues, Summerhall, has been put up for sale.

Summerhall, housed in the city's former veterinary school, has earned a reputation as one of the UK's most innovative and critically acclaimed venues since it was set up 12 years ago by Robert McDowell.

The complex, with galleries, theatres and a cinema, has featured acts such as the Russian arts collective Pussy Riot, the legendary Chic bassist Nile Rodgers and a late night "pop dungeon" hosted by Charlotte Church. It is one of the city's most cherished fringe festival venues.

However, it emerged last month that the family trust which owns and heavily subsidises Summerhall, Oesselman Estate, have put it on the market after McDowell's brothers said its losses could not be sustained.

The property firm marketing the sprawling site, which includes a pub and brewery, a gin distillery and a technology incubator which nurtured Skyscanner, called it "a rare opportunity" to buy "a thriving mixed-use investment with extensive refurbishment and redevelopment potential".

Karine Polwart, the award-winning folk singer, described Summerhall as of "unparalled importance" when she signed a petition backed by nearly 13,000 people.

The decision to sell Summerhall exposed a rift between McDowell and his brothers, who jointly control the Isle of Man-based family trust and outvoted him earlier this year.

In an interview with the Guardian by email, McDowell said: "My brothers haven't seen the transformative effect of a venue like Summerhall on the psyche of a city, because they don't live here, so I can understand that the loss of it doesn't feel as perilous to them as it does to me and many others.

"We are second only to London's Barbican in visitor numbers, but we host far more shows, events, and performances. We exist to honour the founding principle of the first Edinburgh festivals, never more needed than now, 'to heal the wounds of war through the languages of the arts'."

The sale has triggered calls for government intervention or a community bid using Scotland's significant property buy-out laws. McDowell and Sam Gough, chief executive of Summerhall's management company, hope the future buyer will agree to preserve Summerhall's arts component.

David Greig, the playwright and director of the Lyceum theatre, said the sale exposed a far wider crisis, adding that "Summerhall is the heart of the fringe now", giving space to experimental and early career artists.



MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: MURDO MACLEOD/THE GUARDIAN

'Summerhall is the heart of the fringe now'

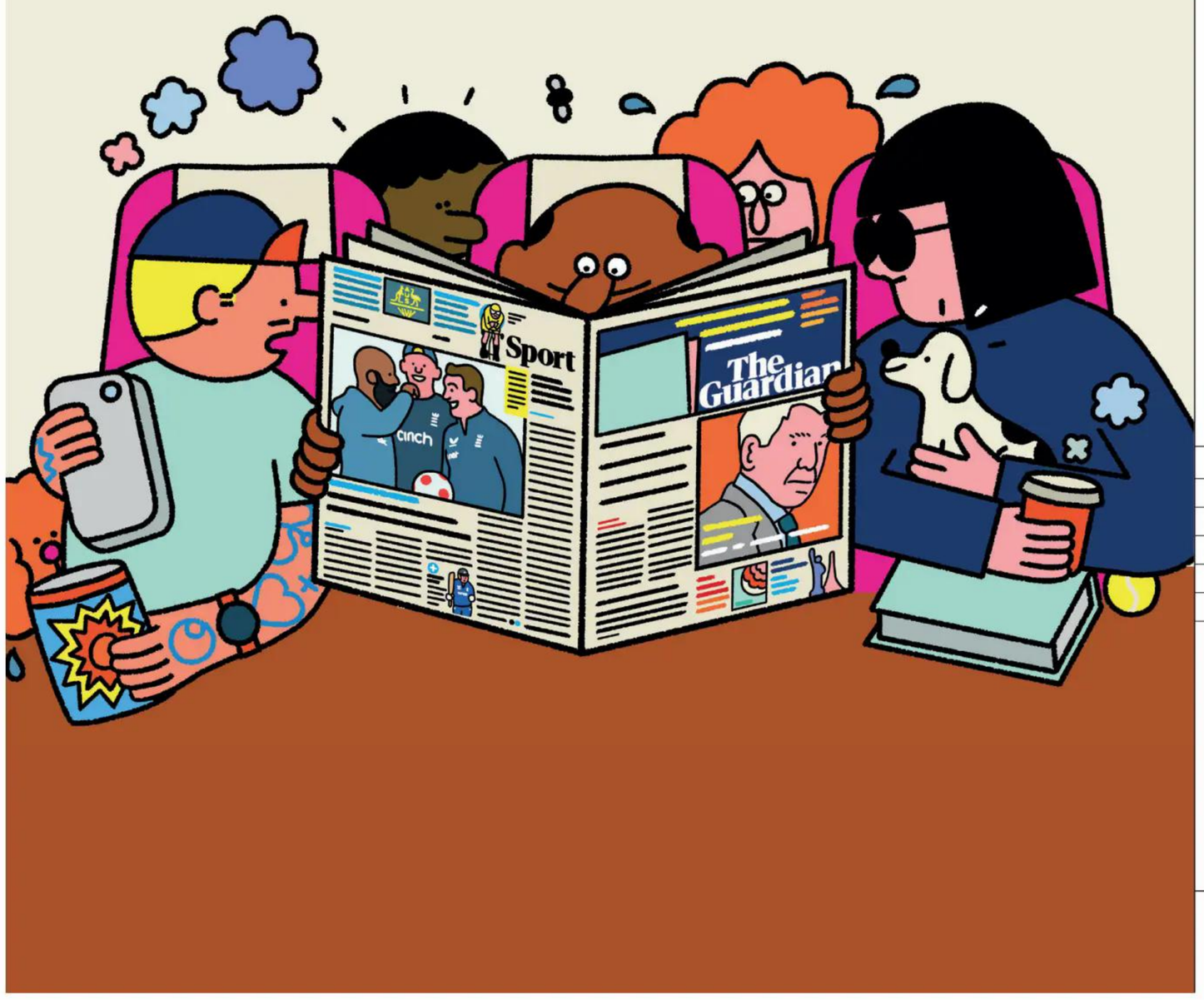
David Greig
Playwright



Summerhall, on the site of an old veterinary school, is key for the Edinburgh fringe. Nile Rodgers, below, has played there

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Asylum seekers make multiple complaints of abuse in hotels

Diane Taylor

Hundreds of complaints about the ill-treatment of asylum seekers by staff in hotels and other accommodation have been lodged with the Home Office, a Guardian investigation has found.

The complaints have been made in the past year and asylum seekers say they include abuse and harassment, failures to deal with vulnerabilities such as mental health problems and serious self-harm, and staff walking into their bedrooms unannounced.

Data released to the Guardian after a freedom of information request showed there were 428 complaints over the last year about staff behaviour and the treatment of asylum seekers. A further 463 complaints were made about meals provided, with problems including inedible food and a lack of milk for children.

The incidents took place in what the Home Office calls initial accommodation. These are often hotels or accommodation run by contractors, which pass complaints on to the Home Office. The Home Office said it was unable to provide a further breakdown of the concerns raised.

One asylum seeker said: "When we complain, our complaints get closed down. A male member of staff opened our bedroom door with a key when my daughter was in there. I can't sleep at night knowing staff have the key to our bedroom."

A second asylum seeker said: "They provide very little milk for my children and they have rules restricting choices of the food that is served. They treat us like animals. Honestly, we suffer in this hotel."

The charity Refugee Action documents complaints from asylum seekers. One involved a woman who was a victim of sexual exploitation. Because of a problem with the door of her room, she was reliant on staff to open it and let her out. She said a male manager told her: "You can come and stay in my house next door."

In another case, a doctor raised concerns about children being small in height and weight for their ages and suffering from vitamin deficiency.

Georgia Eracleous, of the charity Care4Calais, said: "Most of the security guards at hotels are men and sometimes they can come across aggressively. It can be intimidating for the asylum seekers when staff enter their rooms without permission."

The chief executive of Refugee Action, Tim Naor Hilton, said the number of issues reported to the Home Office was "just the tip of the iceberg. Problems often go unreported because people are worried that raising their voice will affect their asylum claim, or they will be disbelieved, denied or ignored. It's vital that the next government tears up these rip-off contracts and properly funds councils to deliver housing."

428

Complaints about staff behaviour in accommodation in past year, with 463 more about inedible food

On Wednesday, a report by parliament's cross-party public accounts committee said 300 hotels were in use at the end of March, while the use of another 100 had been ended.

The report raised concerns about self-harm and suicide in this sort of accommodation and stated: "While the Home Office told us it incorporated safety measures into its contracts with providers, it could not provide any information about any penalties for falling below standards."

A Home Office spokesperson said: "Despite the number of people arriving in the UK reaching record levels, we continue to provide support for asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute. The food provided ... must meet NHS Eatwell standards and responds to all culture and dietary requirements. Where concerns are raised about any aspect of the service delivered in a hotel, we work with the provider to ensure these concerns are addressed and all complaints are dealt with seriously."

Junior doctor comes to rescue in mystery of fish out of water

Robyn Vinter
North of England correspondent

How did a live goldfish come to be found on a Newcastle lawn? It is hardly the mystery of the century but it has confounded social media users ever since Ben Beska, a junior doctor, posted on X about his unlikely animal rescue.

Beska noticed magpies squawking over something in his garden. After discovering it was a goldfish – and "seconds from death" – the NHS cardiology doctor quickly put the flapping fish in an old freezer drawer full of water.

"It started to swim around so it was alive," he told the PA Media news agency. "I locked my cats out of the kitchen, obviously."

His initial post of the goldfish lying in the grass has attracted more than 16m views on X.

Beska has since bought a tank for the fish, which he named Alice after a text message he sent to a friend about it autocorrected from "it's alive" to "it's alice".

"It's doing much better than it was on the lawn," he said. "I think it was seconds from death, so it's a lucky fish. It's pretty mad really, finding a fish on the lawn. I have no idea how it got in the garden."

He suspected a bird had picked it up fish from a pond and dropped it, but he said there were no ponds nearby and it must have travelled a "reasonable distance".

Additional reporting **PA Media**





Normandy remembered
Re-enactors in the French town of Ste-Mère-Église prepare to mark 80 years since the D-day landings. On 6 June 1944 more than 150,000 troops landed on five beaches in Normandy, the start of a long campaign that eventually led to allied victory over Nazi Germany.

PHOTOGRAPHS: BENOIT TESSIER/ REUTERS

Murdoch, 93, marries for fifth time in a ceremony at his US vineyard

Maya Yang

The billionaire rightwing media mogul Rupert Murdoch has married for the fifth time.

The 93-year-old married Elena Zhukova, 67, a retired molecular biologist, at his Moraga vineyard in California yesterday. Pictures released by the Murdoch-owned tabloid the Sun, showed the couple smiling next to each other.

The wedding took place a little more than a year after reports first emerged last April of Murdoch dating Zhukova, soon after he had ended his two-week long engagement to Ann Lesley Smith, a 67-year-old conservative radio host.

Murdoch met Zhukova through a large family gathering hosted by his third ex-wife, Wendi Deng, to whom he was married for 14 years before filing for divorce in 2013.

Zhukova's 42-year-old daughter, Dasha Zhukova, a Russian-American art collector and philanthropist, was previously married to Roman Abramovich, a Russian oligarch and a former owner of the Premier League football club Chelsea.

Murdoch divorced his fourth wife, Jerry Hall, a 67-year-old actor and model, in 2022.

Hall was apparently waiting to meet Murdoch at their Oxfordshire home when she received an email from him which allegedly said: "Jerry, sadly I've decided to call an end to our marriage ... We have certainly had some good times, but I have much to do. My New York lawyer will be contacting yours immediately."

Last September, after a seven-decade career, Murdoch stepped down as chair of Fox and News Corp.

Murdoch's News Corp, which is publicly traded and based in New York, owns hundreds of local, national and international news outlets including the Wall Street Journal, Fox News and Sky News Australia, as well as the publisher HarperCollins.

According to Forbes, Murdoch's net worth is about $19.5bn (£15.3bn).



▲ *Rupert Murdoch married Elena Zhukova, a retired microbiologist*



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'The writing stops'
Letter shines light on Kafka's writer's block
Page 25



Israel
Far right threatens to collapse coalition
Page 26

World



▲ *Supporters of uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) celebrate yesterday in KwaXimba after the party's big win in KwaZulu-Natal.*

MK, under the former ANC leader Jacob Zuma, won 58 seats overall but boycotted the results party

PHOTOGRAPH: RAJESH JANTILAL/AFP/GETTY

ANC on lookout for coalition partners after losing overall majority for the first time

Rachel Savage
Johannesburg

Final results from last week's South African elections were released yesterday, confirming that the African National Congress party had lost its majority for the first time in 30 years and firing the starting gun on unprecedented coalition talks.

The ANC, which led the fight to free South Africa from apartheid, won 159 seats in the 400-member national assembly on a vote share of just over 40%. High unemployment, power cuts, violent crime and crumbling infrastructure have contributed to a haemorrhaging of support for the former liberation movement.

The pro-business Democratic Alliance (DA) won 87 seats, uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) – a new party led by the former president Jacob Zuma – took 58, and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a Marxist-Leninist party led by the ousted ANC youth leader Julius Malema took 39.

The ANC also lost its majority in three provinces: Northern Cape; Gauteng, home to the commercial centre of Johannesburg and the capital, Pretoria; and KwaZulu-Natal, where MK was the largest party.

"What this election has made plain is that the people of South Africa expect their leaders to work together to meet their needs," South Africa's president, Cyril Ramaphosa, told an audience of politicians, diplomats and civil society leaders after the official results announcement, as thunder rumbled outside.

"They expect the parties for which they have voted to find common ground, to overcome their differences, to act and work together for the good of everyone."

Ramaphosa also joked, to laughter from the crowd, that he wished it was true when the electoral commission chairman accidentally said he was announcing the 2029 election results.

The president faces questions about his future as the ANC turns to the task of coalition building. Meanwhile, a spokesperson for Zuma's MK party said it had boycotted the election results event.

Zuma had warned before the results announcement that it should not go ahead, saying "people would be provoked", raising the spectre of the deadly riots that broke out when he was sent to prison in 2021.

Ramaphosa's position was not on the table for the coalition talks that will now take place, the secretary general of the ANC said prior to final results being announced.

Fikile Mbalula told a press conference at the election results centre: "If you come to us with a demand that Ramaphosa must step down as the president, that is not going to happen … It's a no-go area."

MK leaders have said they will not work with the ANC while it is led by Ramaphosa, with whom Zuma has a bitter rivalry. The latter was president from 2009 to 2018 and was forced to resign by the ANC amid corruption allegations, which he denies.

"Political parties have approached us and we will be talking to … everybody. Talks about talks are in full swing," Mbalula said. "Talks about talks are in full swing."

Speaking about MK, he said: "We've got many reservations about that party, but we will talk to them. But no political party will dictate terms like that to us as the ANC."

Despite being in its weakest position since it swept to power under Nelson Mandela in 1994, the ANC has other options.

A tie-up with the DA could be favoured by the more business-friendly wing of the ANC. However, such a coalition would face criticism from the many black South Africans who see the white-led DA as favouring the interests of white people, which the DA denies.

Some analysts have said that bringing in a third, black-led party could help the ANC head off those criticisms.

DA leaders have said a coalition is an option, as well a "confidence and supply" arrangement with an ANC minority government and staying in opposition.

An option that is likely to be preferred by the left wing of the ANC is to link up with the EFF. That would need another partner to clear the 50% needed, though.

Often mentioned is the Inkatha Freedom party, which took 17 seats, and like MK, gets most of its support from Zulu people.

MK had demanded a recount, making unsubstantiated allegations of vote rigging. "Nobody must declare tomorrow. If that happens, people will be provoked, we know what we are talking about," Zuma, 82, told reporters at the results centre on Saturday. "Don't start trouble when there is no trouble."

The words of Zuma, who was the ANC's intelligence chief during apartheid, had raised fears of violence. More than 300 people were killed in riots in July 2021 after Zuma was sent to jail for contempt of court.

The constitution stipulates that parliament must sit within 14 days of the final election results and elect a president at that first sitting.

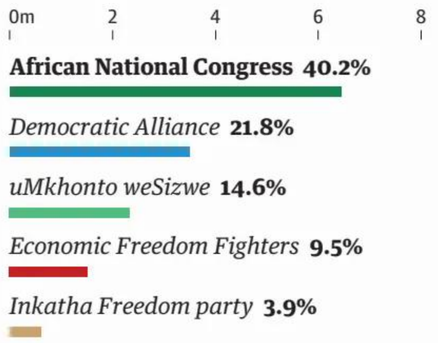
South Africa is a leading voice for its continent and the developing world on the global stage and is due to take over the presidency of the G20, the group of 20 rich and developing nations, late this year. It is the only African nation in that group.

"Everyone is looking to see if South Africa can weather the storm and come out the other side," the political analyst Oscar van Heerden said on the country's eNCA news network.

'Parties approached us and we will talk to … everybody. Talks about talks are in full swing'

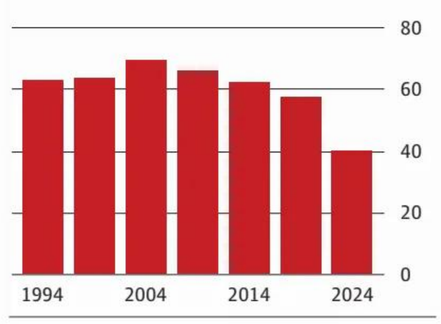
Fikile Mbalula
Secretary general, ANC

South Africa election results
Votes, millions and % vote share



Source: IEC. 99.95% of voting districts completed

ANC's vote share has been declining since 2004
Vote share, %



Source: Electoral Commission of South Africa


G-KAYI
G-DANJ

▼ Alcester, Warwickshire

A mass ascent of 135 hot-air balloons over Ragley Hall stately home on the final day of the Midlands air festival

PHOTOGRAPH: SIMON CHAPMAN/LNP



Ukrainian troops near Bakhmut. The head of Pravfond has been subject to sanctions by the EU over the war

PHOTOGRAPH: IRYNA RYBAKOVA/AP

Legal fund helping Russians abroad is exposed as Kremlin influence operation

Andrew Roth

Leaked documents have exposed the activities of a Russian state-backed legal defence foundation that European intelligence agencies and analysts say is a Kremlin influence operation active in 48 countries.

Internal documents from the Fund for Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad (Pravfond) indicate the foundation finances propaganda websites targeted at Europeans, helped pay for the legal defence of the convicted arms trafficker Viktor Bout and the assassin Vadim Krasikov, and has used former intelligence officers as directors of its operations in Europe.

Public data also shows Pravfond's local partners have received subsidies from several European states where the foundation has branches, raising questions about the use of public funds and national security concerns days before the European elections.

More than 40 internal Pravfond documents, obtained by the Danish public broadcaster DR from a European intelligence source and shared with European news outlets including the Guardian, showed the organisation has had former intelligence agents among its leadership.

They include Vladimir Pozdorovkin, identified by European intelligence sources as an agent for the SVR, Russia's foreign intelligence service, who is Pravfond's curator for the Nordic and Baltic countries;

> ***'It is a pseudo legal protection system [and] an influence operations fund'***
>
> **Estonian report, 2020**
> *Describing Pravfond*

and Anatoly Sorokin, shown by the documents as a member of the SVR, who curates Pravfond's Middle East, Moldova, and Transnistria division. The head of the Institute of the Russian Diaspora, listed on official documents as Pravfond's "project implementer", is Sergey Panteleyev, who has been subject to EU sanctions as a member of a Russian military intelligence unit specialising in psychological warfare.

Andrei Soldatov, an expert on the Russian intelligence services, said Pravfond appeared to be a "classic soft power effort" and ties between intelligence and compatriot organisations were "well documented". He noted that Andrey Milyutin, who has a senior role in Russia's security agency, the FSB, was in the government's committee on "compatriots living abroad", indicating the link between intelligence activity and outreach to the Russian diaspora.

In a 2020 report, the Estonian security services called Pravfond a "pseudo legal protection system" that "in reality is an influence operations fund", and have said the FSB uses it to recruit collaborators abroad.

Pravfond was founded in 2012 by presidential decree and backed by the Russian ministry of foreign affairs and the federal agency Rossotrudnichestvo, which administers foreign aid. The head of Pravfond, Alexander Udaltsov, is subject to EU sanctions over support for the assault on Ukraine.

Pravfond did not reply to questions from the Guardian and its reporting partners, although some recipients of its local grants did.

The documents showed Pravfond sponsored the legal defence of Krasikov, an alleged FSB agent given a life sentence for the murder of the former Chechen field commander Zelimkhan Khangoshvili in Berlin in 2019. They also indicated the lawyer Robert Unger received €60,000 (£51,000) in legal fees from Pravfond in 2021. A European intelligence source said it had documents showing Unger got a larger sum for representing Krasikov previously but could not provide these.

Unger said his mandate for Krasikov ended in 2021 after the life sentence but he was "still subject to legal professional confidentiality".

A 2014 Pravfond document showed it gave large sums to the legal defences of Bout and the drugs trafficker Konstantin Yaroshenko, both later returned to Russia in prisoner exchanges with the US.

The documents indicated Pravfond also financed websites purporting to fight "Russophobia".

Documents showed it funded golos.eu, an online portal operating out of a Brussels post-office box and providing a vehicle for criticism of the Ukrainian government.

Yuri Andriychenko, deputy editor of golos.eu, told the Guardian it had not received Pravfond money and denied links to the Russian state, suggesting someone else had applied for funding using the site's name.

Zelenskiy warns Trump against imposing peace deal on Ukraine

Continued *from page 1*

integration with Europe and future membership of Nato, he said.

Zelenskiy acknowledged that a re-elected Trump could, if he wanted to, impose a crushing military defeat on Ukraine. He could cut off "support, weapons and money", and even "make deals" with Kyiv's partners so they stop deliveries of vital arms.

"Ukraine, barehanded, without weapons, will not be able to fight a multimillion [Russian] army," Zelenskiy told the Guardian.

Speaking inside his presidential headquarters, he said he thought this scenario was unlikely. But he said if it happened there would be grave consequences for the US's standing in the world – as well as for Trump personally. "Does he want to become a loser president? Do you understand what can happen?" Zelenskiy said.

He predicted that Vladimir Putin would violate any Trump-brokered deal. "A ceasefire is a trap," he said. After a pause Putin would "go further", humiliating Trump and making him look "very weak" in the eyes of the world, he said.

Zelenskiy continued: "This is not about him [Trump] as a person but about the institutions of the United States. They will become very weak. The US will not be the leader of the world any more. Yes, it will be powerful, first of all, in the domestic economy because it has a powerful economy without a doubt. But in terms of international influence it will be equal to zero."

Realising that Washington was no longer "a player", other mostly authoritarian countries and leaders would "come into the arena" and emulate Putin's aggressive approach, Zelenskiy suggested. And this would end in global disaster: "The beginning of what everyone is so afraid to talk about. This is reality. And this is the real third world war."

Asked whether Johnson had spoken to Trump on Ukraine's behalf, Zelenskiy said: "I think he tried, and I think he spoke to him."

He added: "I am sorry that I am using Boris as an instrument."

The initiative came as Kyiv lobbied pro-Trump Republicans in Congress and tried to persuade them to drop their opposition to Ukraine aid. The $61bn military aid package passed in April after a six-month delay.

Zelenskiy made his comments a day before a New York jury on Thursday convicted Trump of all 34 counts of falsifying business records. The verdict in the hush-money trial made him the first former president to be found guilty of felony crimes in the US's near 250-year history.



Volodymyr Zelenskiy during the interview with the Guardian in Kyiv

In 2019, as president, Trump rang Zelenskiy and asked him to investigate his election rival Biden and Biden's son Hunter. If Zelenskiy failed to find dirt on Hunter Biden, US security assistance to Ukraine would be withheld, Trump suggested, according to a leak of the call. The scandal led to Trump's first impeachment.

Zelenskiy said he had invited Trump to visit Ukraine: "I want to talk to him openly. I want him to come and see the war for himself. And then to talk to him. I think he would need it to understand the situation better."

The Ukrainian president said he understood that Trump "knows" Putin, based on the former president's own statements. Communicating with Putin was not the same as knowing him, Zelenskiy said, adding that to understand him better Trump should "see the results of what he brought to Ukraine".

Rare letter from Kafka shows the torment of his writer's block

Kate Connolly
Berlin

A rare letter written by Franz Kafka to his publisher shows just how anguished a struggle it was for the Bohemian writer to put pen to paper, especially as his health deteriorated.

The letter, which will soon be auctioned, coincided with Kafka's diagnosis with tuberculosis, which would end up killing him and which, scholars say, very probably added to his sense of mental paralysis and helplessness.

"When worries have penetrated to a certain layer of existence, the writing and the complaining obviously stop," he wrote to his friend and publisher, the Austrian poet Albert Ehrenstein. "My resistance was not all that strong either."

Undated, the letter is believed to have been written between April and June 1920, when Kafka was being treated for his illness at a clinic in Merano, northern Italy. Writer's block haunted Kafka – who was 40 when he died 100 years ago today – throughout his life, but was exacerbated by his poor physical condition.

Neatly handwritten, the letter is thought to be Kafka's response to Ehrenstein's request for a contribution to Die Gefährten (The Fellows), the expressionist journal he was editing. He had recently seen new work by Kafka in print, possibly his short story collection Ein Landarzt (A Country Doctor), written in 1917 and published two years later. But Kafka quickly disabused him of the notion that he was actively writing.

"I haven't written anything for three years, what's been published now are old things, I don't have any other work, not even something I've started," he wrote.

Gabriel Heaton, a books and manuscript specialist at Sotheby's in London, which is putting the letter up for auction online on 26 June, said letters by Kafka making reference to his writing were rare.

"This is quite a scarce thing, as well as being a letter with significant content that really feels like it pulls you towards him as a person, and gives you a sense of the individual," he said.

The tone of the letter, signed simply "Kafka", was that of a writer as well as of someone talking to his friend, Heaton said, but it was "not a self-consciously literary" letter. "To have, of all writers, Kafka talking to us about writer's block is particularly poignant and meaningful. He's almost like the laureate of writer's block, as we see from his diaries."

These include numerous tart and painful references to the condition, such as "the end of writing, when will it take me up again?", "the old incapacity" and "complete standstill. Unending torments".

"You have to dive down, as it were, and sink more rapidly than that which sinks in advance of you," he wrote in his diary on 30 January 1915.

Despite his melancholy tone, it was around this time that Kafka embarked on what was arguably the most intense love affair of his life, with the Czech journalist Milena Pollaková-Jesenská, who had just translated his work Der Heizer (The Stoker). She is said to have been instrumental in encouraging him to overcome his creative stagnation to write his final masterpieces, The Castle and A Hunger Artist.

"Whilst the letter was written in a moment of some despair, it's particularly poignant knowing as we do now that he was about to have this transformative experience, which would energise him to one final burst of creativity," said Heaton. The lot is estimated to fetch £70,000 to £90,000. The centenary of Kafka's death has triggered a wave of new books, biopics and exhibitions.



The letter coincided with his tuberculosis diagnosis



▶ *Franz Kafka in 1906. He wrote in his diaries of the 'old incapacity' and 'standstill' of his writer's block*
PHOTOGRAPH: BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Mayor faces the mother of all election contests

Angela Giuffrida
Rome

The last time Igor De Santis ran for mayor in Ingria, a tiny village surrounded by forests and mountains close to Turin, he won an easy landslide victory. But he faces a tough challenge in his attempt to win a fourth mandate after his mother joined a rival camp.

Ingria, one of the smallest villages in Italy, has 46 inhabitants. A further 26 people, registered to vote from abroad, make up the electorate.

De Santis, 42, has led the administration since 2009 and had expected competition in the mayoral race from an opposition councillor, Renato Poletto. The situation became more complicated when Stefano Venuti, a Milan resident who has a second home in Ingria, entered the contest. "We weren't expecting that," said De Santis.

The micro-race was fully upended by Poletto, 70, announcing he had secured the support of De Santis's mother, Milena Crosasso, and had put her forward for a councillor position in the ballot to elect a new council on 8-9 June, as part of a list comprising nine women and one man. A total of 30 people – two-thirds of the village's inhabitants – are competing for positions.

"I did ask her to join me but after she saw that Poletto's list was mostly women she decided to go with them," said De Santis. "They are all volunteers who have worked really hard for the village."

Crosasso said the rivalry would not affect family harmony. "Both my son and I want the best for the community and this is an opportunity to give voice to women's points of view without weakening family bonds."

Despite the competition, De Santis, whose grandfather was mayor of Ingria for 30 years, said he was "optimistic" he could win.

In brief

India

Modi-led alliance could win two-thirds majority

The alliance led by the party of the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, is projected to win a big majority in the general election that concluded on Saturday, TV exit polls have said.

Most exit polls projected the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by Modi's Bharatiya Janata party (BJP), could win a two-thirds majority in the 543-member lower house of parliament, which would allow the government to usher in far-reaching amendments to the constitution.

A summary of six exit polls projected the NDA could win between 355 and 380 seats, a prediction that is likely to boost financial markets when they reopen today. The NDA won 353 seats in the 2019 general election, of which BJP candidates accounted for 303.

The opposition India alliance, which is led by Rahul Gandhi's Congress party, was projected to win between 125 and 165 seats.

Exit polls, which are conducted by polling agencies, have a patchy record in India. They have often got the outcome of elections wrong, with analysts saying it is a challenge to get results right in the large and diverse country. **Reuters**

Germany

Firefighter dies during flood rescue operation

A volunteer firefighter has died during a rescue operation amid flooding in the south of Germany.

Four emergency workers were attempting to reach people trapped near Pfaffenhofen in Bavaria when their boat capsized. Three of the crew managed to reach safety, while the fourth, a 42-year-old, was found dead in the water by other rescue workers at around 2.20am.

The German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, wrote on X: "I am saddened by the death of a firefighter in Pfaffenhofen. My thoughts are with his family and colleagues. We owe thanks and respect to the rescue workers and helpers who are fighting the consequences of the floods in many places."

An operation was under way to find another volunteer firefighter in Offingen, Bavaria. The 22-year-old fell into flood water after his vessel capsized overnight, police said.

Heavy rain that began on Friday has caused flooding across the southern states of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria. **Agence France-Presse** *Berlin*



▲ *Volunteer rescue workers in the town of Schrobenhausen, Bavaria*

United States

Burst mains leave city of Atlanta high and dry

A state of emergency has been declared in Atlanta, Georgia, after corroded water mains pipes burst, causing significant outages and disruptions and leaving much of the city without running water.

People in the Metropolitan Atlanta area were advised to boil water. One local hospital had to evacuate some patients to other facilities and divert most ambulances, while Megan Thee Stallion concerts scheduled for Friday and Saturday were cancelled. Many business closed, including the Georgia Aquarium and the World of Coca-Cola. Other events in the area were also cancelled. **Michael Sainato**

Netanyahu's coalition partners threaten to quit over ceasefire deal touted by US

Bethan McKernan
Jerusalem

Benjamin Netanyahu is once again trying to balance the demands of centrist and far-right members of his government after a threat from his extremist allies to collapse the coalition if Israel moves forward with a new ceasefire plan for Gaza announced by Joe Biden.

In an unexpected broadcast from the White House on Friday night, the US president urged Hamas to accept what he said was a new proposal from Israel for a three-phrase roadmap towards a permanent ceasefire.

But in remarks on Saturday, Netanyahu immediately undermined Biden, reiterating that Israel wants the complete destruction of Hamas before it will agree to ending the war.

Hamas provisionally welcomed Biden's announcement, although it had said as recently as Thursday it still views a full withdrawal of Israeli troops as a precondition to talks.

As expected, the prime minister's far-right coalition partners, including the finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, and the national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, voiced opposition to the plan when shabbat ended on Saturday night, threatening to resign if it goes ahead. Such a deal would be "foolhardy, constituting a victory for terrorism and a threat to Israel's national security," Ben-Gvir, the head of the ultranationalist Jewish Power party, said on X.

An aide to Netanyahu confirmed yesterday that Israel had put the framework forward, but described it as "flawed" and in need of more work.

However, he is also under increasing pressure from his military and intelligence chiefs, as well as the centrist members of his war cabinet, to accept a ceasefire and hostage release deal. Benny Gantz, a rival who joined Netanyahu's emergency unity government after 7 October, has said he will resign if the prime minister does not commit to a "day-after" plan for Gaza by a deadline of 8 June.

Yair Lapid, Israel's opposition leader, urged Netanyahu to agree to a deal, saying his Yesh Atid party would support it even if rightwing factions rebelled - meaning it would be likely to pass. "The government of Israel cannot ignore President Biden's consequential speech. There is a deal on the table and it should be made," he said on Saturday.

Netanyahu, long plagued by corruption charges he denies, sees staying in office as his best chance of avoiding prosecution, as well as putting off investigations and hearings into the security failures that contributed to Hamas's 7 October assault, in which 1,200 Israelis, mostly civilians, were killed and another 250 taken hostage. About 100 were released in November.

During Saturday night's protest in Tel Aviv led by the families of hostages held by Hamas, thousands of people called on the government to act on the new proposal. A joint statement from the mediators the US, Egypt and Qatar said they "jointly call on both Hamas and Israel to finalise the agreement ... [to] bring immediate relief both to the long-suffering people of Gaza as well as the long-suffering hostages and their families".

Despite Biden's description of the peace deal as an Israeli proposal, his speech seemed to be designed to pressure both parties into discussions.

On Sunday, the White House national security spokesperson, John Kirby, said in an interview with ABC News: "We have every expectation that if Hamas agrees to the proposal as was transmitted to them, an Israeli proposal - then Israel would say yes."

Gershon Baskin, an Israeli activist who has negotiated with Hamas, told the Associated Press: "It seems that Biden is trying to force it on the Israeli government. He was clearly speaking directly to the Israeli people."

Friday's announcement is the third "last-ditch" ceasefire proposal endorsed by the US after failed attempts last month and in February.

There is only one substantial difference between the new plan and previous roadmaps: the first phase, a six-week-long ceasefire in which a limited number of Israeli hostages would be exchanged for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, would be indefinitely extendable while negotiators thrash out the next stage.

In phase two, all hostages would be released, Israel would completely withdraw from Gaza, and both parties would agree a lasting truce. The third phrase is supposed to implement plans for Gaza's future.

More than 36,000 people have been killed by Israel in the war in Gaza, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

Aid shipments

Commercial trucks choking off critical supplies, say NGOs

Emma Graham-Harrison
Jerusalem



▶ *Children wait for food to be given out by aid agencies in Deir al-Balah, in central Gaza, where two child deaths from malnutrition were reported by hospitals last week*

PHOTOGRAPH: HASSAN JEDI/GETTY IMAGES

Aid shipments into southern Gaza are being squeezed out by commercial convoys, humanitarian organisations say, at a time when Israel's military push into Rafah has choked off supply routes critical to feeding hundreds of thousands of people.

Deliveries of food, medicine and other aid into Gaza fell by two-thirds after Israel began its ground operation on 7 May, UN figures have shown. But overall the number of trucks entering Gaza rose in May compared with April, according to Israeli officials.

Part of the reason for the stark difference in accounts of what supplies reached the territory is a rise in commercial shipments.

Last month the Israeli military lifted a ban on the sale of food to Gaza from Israel and the occupied West Bank, Reuters reported on Friday. Traders got the green light to resume buying fresh fruit and vegetables, dairy and other goods.

Inside Gaza, residents have said there is more food in markets but that prices are many times higher than before the war, and after months of fighting and displacement few people can afford to buy much.

A group of aid agencies warned that there was a "mirage of improved access", when efforts to feed people in Gaza were on the verge of collapse.

"While Kerem Shalom remains officially open, commercial trucks rather have been prioritised, and the movement of aid remains unpredictable, inconsistent, and critically low," a group of 20 aid agencies said last week.

In April, about 5,000 truckloads of aid came through Kerem Shalom and Rafah, the two main crossings into southern Gaza. In the last three weeks of May, just a few hundred came through Kerem Shalom; Rafah has been fully closed.

The average daily number of trucks going into Gaza rose last month to about 350 from about 300 in April, the "vast majority" passing through Kerem Shalom, said Shimon Freedman, a spokesperson for Cogat, the Israeli body responsible for humanitarian coordination. There was no priority for commercial shipments, he added. Ami Shaked, the manager of the Kerem Shalom complex where shipments are checked by Israeli security, confirmed that truck deliveries for businesses were outpacing aid, but said it was driven by commercial interests of logistics firms.

"This problem is the same on two sides [of the crossing], the Palestinian sides choose to take the goods of the businessmen ... the Israelis the same," he said at the crossing.

"It is because if I have a contract with Unrwa [the UN agency for Palestinian refugees], they will pay for example 2,000 shekels for each truck. The market now in the pure business is between 7,000 and 10,000 [shekels] for each truck, so they prefer to take the goods of the businessmen."

Aid organisations have disputed that claim, saying they have long-term contracts for trucks, and when limited capacity to enter Gaza and move through a military zone is allotted to commercial trucks it comes at the price of aid supplies.

Obstacles include lack of permits from Israeli troops to drive to Kerem Shalom, and roads into the collection area snarled by commercial vehicles waiting to load and unload.

"The Israeli military operation and activities since 6 May have been crippling to the humanitarian response," said Juliette Touma, communications director for Unrwa.

"[The reasons] include restrictions imposed on our movement, including to pick up humanitarian supplies from Kerem Shalom. The Israeli authorities have not been giving us enough authorisations to move ... Also the area around Kerem Shalom has very, very quickly become extremely dangerous."

Aid workers have long called for more trade into Gaza, to complement the supplies they can deliver. Food for sale allows those who can afford it to have a healthier, more varied diet, and potentially take some pressure off the demand for aid.

But more food in markets, at the cost of basic aid deliveries, will deepen rather than relieve a hunger crisis that is getting worse in the south. Last week two child deaths from malnutrition were reported in Deir al-Balah hospitals.

‘It’s a fixation’: study of posts reveals scale of Trump’s plan for revenge against foes

David Smith
Washington

A study of Donald Trump’s social media posts has revealed the scale of the former US president’s ambitions to target Joe Biden, judges and other perceived political enemies if he returns to power.

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (Crew), a watchdog organisation, analysed more than 13,000 messages published by Trump on his Truth Social platform and found him vowing revenge, retaliation and retribution against his foes.

The presumptive Republican nominee has threatened to use the federal government to go after Biden during a second Trump administration 25 times since the start of 2023, the study found. These threats include FBI raids, investigations, indictments and even jail time.

He has also threatened or suggested that the FBI and justice department should take action against senators, judges, members of Biden’s family and even non-governmental organisations.

“He is promising to go after what he perceives to be his political enemies,” said Robert Maguire, the vice-president for research and data at Crew. “He is promising to essentially weaponise the government against anyone he sees as not sufficiently loyal or who is openly opposed to him.”

Trump launched Truth Social in early 2022 after he was banned from major sites such as Facebook and the platform then known as Twitter following the 6 January 2021 attack on the US Capitol. Although he has since been reinstated to both, he has mostly stayed off X, as it is now called, the Elon Musk-owned platform that was once his primary megaphone.

Trump reaches far fewer people on his platform, where he has fewer than 7 million followers, than he might on X, where he boasts 87 million. The research firm Similarweb estimates that Truth Social had roughly 5m monthly visits in February of this year. This compares with more than 2bn for the short video platform TikTok and more than 3bn for Facebook.

On Saturday night he joined TikTok, the same platform he had tried to ban as president on national security grounds, and by yesterday had already attracted a million followers. “This is just one of many ways we’re going to reach out to voters,” an adviser to Trump’s campaign told Politico. “TikTok skews towards a younger audience.”

> ***‘He is promising to go after what he perceives to be his political enemies’***
>
> **Robert Maguire**
> *Analyst*

Crew said that Trump’s niche following up to now meant that the extent of his threats had flown mostly under the radar. “We figured it would be helpful to quantify these comments that he’s making to show this isn’t just a whim or a passing idea … It’s a fixation of his, it’s a promise he’s making to use the government in ways that are squarely unethical.”

Crew analysed more than 13,000 of Trump’s Truth Social posts from 1 January 2023 to 1 April 2024 and found that, while he has recently dialled down some of his more violent rhetoric, he remains fixated on threatening opponents.

Its report says his attitude can be summed up in one Truth Social post from August 2023: “IF YOU GO AFTER ME, I’M COMING AFTER YOU!”

Many of his threats to Biden reflect Trump’s now familiar tactic of reversing charges against his opponents, conjuring a mirror world in which he claims they are guilty of the very offence of which he is accused.

In one post about the special counsel Jack Smith, he warned that there would be “repercussions far greater than anything that Biden or his Thugs could understand” and, if the investigation continued, it would open a “Pandora’s Box” of retribution. In another, Trump wrote that his federal indictments were “setting a BAD precedent for yourself, Joe. The same can happen to you.”

Trump has repeatedly threatened Biden with investigation and indictment. In one post he called on the attorney general, Merrick Garland, to appoint a special counsel “to investigate Joe Biden who hates Biden as much as Jack Smith hates me”.

In another he asked: “When will Joe Biden be Indicted for his many crimes against our Nation?”

Trump has “retruthed” others’ posts about Biden that are even more ominous. In June last year he reposted a clip from the Republican representative Marjorie Taylor Greene asserting: “Joe Biden shouldn’t just be impeached, he should be handcuffed and hauled out of the White House for his crimes.”

He also posted a screenshot of a different post saying the FBI should “raid all of [Biden’s] residences and seize anything they want”.

Some posts announced plans for retribution against the specific lawyers, judges and other officials whom Trump blames for his legal troubles. He has also made threats to non-profit organisations.



◀ *Stormy Daniels, the adult film actor whose payoff was at the heart of the case, said she thought Trump should be jailed*

PHOTOGRAPH: MIKE BLAKE/ REUTERS

Ex-president hails support of Republican party since trial

Michael Sainato
Gainesville, Florida

Donald Trump lauded the Republican party yesterday for rallying behind him after his conviction on 34 felony charges in a hush-money case aimed at influencing the 2016 election.

Trump made the comments in his first sit-down press interview since the verdict was returned on Friday, finding him guilty of falsifying business records linked to an illicit affair with adult actor Stormy Daniels.

The former US president appeared yesterday in a taped interview on Fox & Friends, a friendly forum on the right-wing channel in which a trio of hosts served him softball questions.

Throughout the interview, Trump derided the conviction, characterising it as “weaponisation” of the US justice system, while thanking the Republican party for their support.

“People get it. It’s a scam,” he said, speaking of the trial. “And the Republican party … they’ve stuck together in this. They see it’s a weaponisation of the justice department of the FBI and that’s all coming out of Washington.”

Nearly all senior Republican leaders have defended Trump, echoing his claims that the convictions were politically motivated, including the House speaker, Mike Johnson; the House majority leader, Steve Scalise; and the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell. Since the verdict, Trump campaign officials say they have seen a funding boost of tens of millions of dollars in donations.

Trump and the Fox News interviewers characterised the so-called weaponisation as similar to corruption in Latin American governments. He claimed his attorney’s objections were routinely denied throughout the trial, while the prosecution was given preferential treatment.

“These people are sick, they’re sick, they’re deranged,” said Trump. “The enemy from within, they are doing damage in this country.”

He claimed his political opponents want to “quadruple” taxes, and dismissed New York and Washington DC as partisan areas where Republicans receive “virtually no votes”. He said his campaign had received an influx of nearly $53m (£42m) in donations since the conviction and claimed it had bumped up his approval ratings against Joe Biden.



▲ *Donald Trump speaking after the trial, which he claims was ‘a scam’*

A Reuters poll found one in 10 Republicans were less likely to vote for Trump following the conviction. A Morning Consult poll found 49% of independents and 15% of Republicans thought Trump should end his presidential campaign as a result.

Over the course of the trial, Trump frequently maintained a narrow lead over his Democratic opponent in head-to-head surveys.

Trump also kept performing strongly in the swing states needed to win the 2024 race for the White House. Strategists from both the Trump and Biden campaigns will be watching polls this week to see if the verdict has had an impact.

Stormy Daniels, whose payoff was at the centre of the case, warned that Trump was “completely and utterly out of touch with reality”.

She told the Sunday Mirror: “I think he should be sentenced to jail and some community service working for the less fortunate, or being the volunteer punching bag at a women’s shelter.”

She said she felt “shocked” but vindicated after the jury at a New York court convicted Trump, indicating they believed her testimony.

Trump will be sentenced later this month, just before the Republican party convention, which is almost certain to nominate him as the party’s presidential candidate.

Business

Union steps up action at Tata steelworks in south Wales

Simon Goodley

Union leaders are preparing to increase industrial action at two south Wales steelworks, in a further escalation of a row over almost 3,000 job losses that threatens to become a big general election issue.

Unite said the moves at the Port Talbot and Llanwern works were in response to a threat by the sites' Indian owner, Tata Steel, to cut redundancy pay after members had voted for an overtime ban.

The actions come after Tata rejected a trade union plan earlier this year designed to keep Port Talbot's blast furnaces running, with their closure putting 2,800 jobs at risk and leaving the UK on course to become the only major economy unable to make steel from scratch.

Tata told workers' representatives in January that it could no longer afford to continue production at the loss-making Port Talbot plant while it completed a four-year transition plan to greener production. The company said operating the old furnaces was losing it £1m a day.

The row could become an election issue, with competing proposals from the Conservatives, the unions and Labour.

Tata and the government agreed a deal last year whereby the company would receive £500m in state subsidies to help its move to new "greener" furnaces – which could cut UK emissions by about 2% if renewable electricity is used. The deal also involved starting to close blast furnaces from this month. At the time, the business and trade secretary, Kemi Badenoch, said: "This proposal will secure a sustainable future for Welsh steel and is expected to save thousands of jobs in the long term."

Keir Starmer has signalled that a Labour government would reverse the agreement. On a visit to Wales last week, he said: "I will fight for every single job and fight for the future of steel in Wales."

The shadow Welsh secretary, Jo Stevens, said yesterday: "We have repeatedly said no irreversible decisions should be made before polling day. Labour's plans for a steel fund will ensure the future of the industry is fuelled by the skills, talent and ambition of Welsh steelworkers.

"We don't want to see a single job go at the site, but Conservative ministers failed to take steps to protect workers and communities before a general election was called."

Labour has said it would invest £3bn in the transition to green steel.



▲ *Sharon Graham of Unite says it 'will not tolerate bullyboy tactics'*

But weekend reports suggested the party would not support a union plan that proposes keeping a blast furnace in operation while building an electric arc furnace, saving jobs.

The general secretary of Unite, Sharon Graham, said: "Unite and its members will not tolerate Tata's bullyboy tactics and neither should Labour. The union is now preparing to escalate industrial action in direct response to the company's threats.

"The company is trying to hold the country to ransom, while needlessly throwing thousands of workers on the scrapheap. If Tata is not prepared to do the right thing, then an incoming Labour government must ensure it does."

A Tata Steel spokesperson said the redundancy terms on offer were "generous" and that Tata was "now considering our legal options".

He added: "The enhanced package will remain in place unless industrial action is taken, in which case it would revert to our standard terms."

Under the current plan, about 1,900 jobs are expected to be lost at Port Talbot, with 600 more at risk across the rest of the UK and 300 expected to go in the next three years.

A Conservative party spokesperson said the government had "put in place one of the biggest support packages in UK history, investing half a billion pounds in new, modern electric arc furnaces to secure the future of the steelworks in south Wales. The Labour Party, despite running the Welsh government, have done nothing to help in this process."



Ads for shares The TV channels turned investors

Jane Croft

When Kubos Semiconductors recently raised $2m (£1.6m) to accelerate the development of its microLED technology, its lineup of investors was surprising.

S4C, the Welsh-language television channel, was among those taking an equity stake in Kubos, which has a base in south Wales, alongside the Development Bank of Wales and Drew Nelson, the founder of the British chipmaker IQE.

The investment was the first by S4C's new commercial growth fund run by Laura Franses, a former Channel 4 executive. The fund has been set up to provide funding for fast-growing Welsh companies in exchange for equity.

"I would call it an adjacent business and it is a business that is connected with television viewing," Franses said of Kubos, which was spun out of research at the University of Cambridge and is now developing new technology for the augmented reality and virtual reality industries. Its microLEDs should result in improved brightness and colour consistency on VR headsets, enabling viewers to watch content on their devices for longer.

S4C's investment is part of a growing shift by broadcasters including Channel 4 and ITV to take stakes in early-stage businesses, often by providing advertising airtime in return for equity in digital companies.

Last week, ITV took a stake in the online estate agency Purplebricks. The broadcaster set up its AdVentures Invest division in 2020, which allows it to take minority stakes in return for advertising on ITV's channels and its streaming service, ITVX.

The investment fund owns stakes in PitPat, a pet health company, the ibuprofen maker Flarin, and Carwow, an online car marketplace. It has invested £20m and has some unconverted loan notes, according to its 2023 accounts.

£45m

The balance sheet value of the investments held by Channel 4 Ventures as of 31 December 2022

Channel 4 set up a similar division in 2015, Channel 4 Ventures, as part of a plan to diversify its revenue away from advertising revenues. It has completed more than 50 deals, backing companies such as the location technology platform what3words, Oddbox, which sells boxes of "wonky" fruit and veg, Purplebricks, the image-sharing social media site Pinterest, the crowdfunding investment platform Crowdcube, Carwow, Raylo, a gadget-leasing company, and the flatpack furniture firm Swyft.

The division has 21 active equity investments with a balance sheet value of £45m as of 31 December 2022, up from £30m at the end of 2021.

Broadcasters continue to face a downturn in advertising spending – which is traditionally seen as a bellwether of the economic climate.

One analyst said the more recent investments have come when there is likely to be spare advertising inventory. Alex DeGroote, a city media analyst, said: "It makes sense for broadcasters because they may have unsold advertising space during the current downturn and because some of these early-stage investments might make money and improve diversity. The advertising outlook has improved for the second quarter of 2024 but the outlook for the rest of the year looks uncertain."

Vinay Solanki, the head of Channel 4 Ventures, believes that despite the growth of social media, consumer companies still rely on the power of TV advertising campaigns. "When you are getting millions of people there is no alternative to that," he said. "TV is a cultural institution. It's the water cooler for the nation – you will see this in the election campaign – and people forget that.

"If you think about the investment market, we have a really important role to play. There are very few consumer specialist funds left. Everyone is chasing AI and tech."

Human capital

Benefits and drawbacks of net immigration

Page 30





The Port Talbot plant. Tata says operating the old furnaces there loses it £1m a day

PHOTOGRAPH: TOBY MELVILLE/REUTERS

Opec and allies extend cuts in production to boost flagging crude oil price

Graeme Wearden

The Opec+ group of oil producers have agreed to extend most of their production curbs into next year, in an attempt to shore up crude prices.

After a ministerial meeting in Riyadh yesterday, the Opec cartel and allies including Russia decided to extend a cut of 2m barrels a day until the end of 2025, rather than the end of 2024.

A group of Opec+ members agreed to extend a further set of voluntary cuts, in another move aimed at supporting oil prices amid subdued global demand.

Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Algeria and Oman gathered on the sidelines of the Riyadh meeting, and pledged to extend their additional voluntary cuts of 1.65m barrels a day until the end of December 2025.

A second group of additional voluntary cuts totalling 2.2m barrels a day, announced in November 2023, will now be extended until the end of September 2024 - and then phased out over the next year.

The cuts aim to "support the stability and balance of oil markets", said the Saudi ministry of energy.

Opec also agreed a new output target for the United Arab Emirates - it will be allowed to gradually raise production by 300,000 barrels a day, up from the current level of 2.9m bpd.

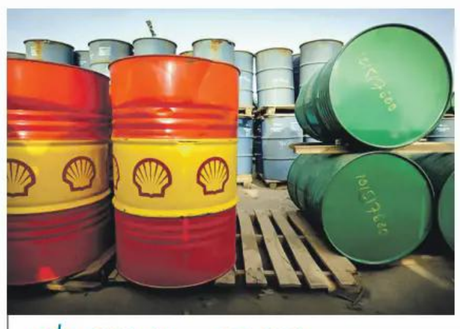
The Brent crude oil price weakened last month, falling from almost $88 a barrel at the end of April to $81.62 a barrel at the end of May.

The Opec+ meeting came as Saudi Arabia, the organisation's largest oil producer, began the sale of 1.545m shares in its Saudi Aramco producer, or about 0.64% of shares in issue, which could raise $12bn.

This secondary share sale comes five years after Aramco was floated on the public markets, in the world's largest initial public offering. It runs until Thursday, and was the subject of strong interest from investors yesterday when demand already exceeded the number of shares on offer.

Bill Blain, a market strategist at Wind Shift Capital, said Saudi Arabia was using its oil wealth to innovate and diversify. "Although some of the projects at the core of the reinvention of Saudi have already been scaled back due to escalating costs, and its purchase of global sports franchises is generally misunderstood, the plan is to fuel the economy with plentiful investment by the state SWF [sovereign wealth fund], the Public Investment Fund," Blain added.

OPEC+ will hold its next meeting on 1 December.



$81.62

Price of a barrel of Brent crude oil at the end of May, compared with almost $88 at the end of April

Half of people on universal credit losing money in DWP deductions

Hazel Sheffield

Half of those on universal credit are losing money on every payment because of automatic deductions by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), according to research.

Claimants are losing £1 in every £13 of basic payment to repay debts to private landlords and utility companies and correct mistakes made by the tax office, said the New Economics Foundation (NEF), a left-leaning thinktank. Each household with money deducted lost an average of £63 a month. This amounted to a total loss of £1.3bn from benefits support in 2022-23, NEF found through a series of parliamentary questions.

Annie (not her real name) is a single parent of two children in north-east England who receives disability benefits and is unable to work. She takes part in Changing Realities, a project supported by the universities of York and Salford in which more than 100 parents and carers across the UK document life on a low income.

Annie has £66 taken from her £660 a month benefit, in part to pay back a loan she had from the DWP to cope with costs at the start of the school year and Christmas. She said: "That's the only loan that any of us [on benefits] have access to, and for me, it helps a lot with pre-Christmas and getting back to school in September - having money to cover the costs that can't fit into my daily budget."

But the deductions mean every month Annie is struggling to meet costs. "That's an extra £66 that could go towards the food budget, or the children could join clubs. Right now, fruit is a luxury, meat is a luxury. I am skipping meals left, right and centre because the kids need to eat."

The amount deducted was found to vary across the country, with two-thirds of households in Blackpool South receiving universal credit having money taken from payments - almost double the proportion in the South West Devon constituency.

NEF said these deductions trapped households in a cycle of debt, with a failure to provide proper support followed by an aggressive pursuit of the debts that built up, affecting people's mental and physical health. Sam Tims, a senior economist at NEF, said: "If we want an economy that allows everyone to thrive, the next government must guarantee that social security covers people's essentials."

The DWP said deductions were capped at 25% and used as a last resort to help claimants clear debt.

'It makes sense for broadcasters as they may have unsold advertising space'

Alex DeGroote
Media analyst

So far, the equity stakes - and the potential risks - taken by broadcasters have been relatively small. Channel 4 Ventures, which typically does between 10 and 15 deals a year, began doing deals of around £1m to £2m but now typically invests between £1m and £5m in airtime. Nonetheless, there have been failures. Boomin, an online property portal in which Channel 4 held a stake, called in liquidators in 2022.

Solanki said each investment was made in "an incredibly thought-through way. If you are doing this sort of activity you need to step back. We look at it as a portfolio and we have an assumed level of things that aren't going to work out and I think everyone - all the early investors - do exactly the same."

Franses, who is an adviser to S4C's commercial growth fund, which has funds to invest, agreed. "It's risky to do nothing in this market; the risk is bigger to sit still." She said S4C spent six months evaluating the Kubos deal, which was a "calculated risk" as part of what will become a broader portfolio of investments.

Gill Hind, who covers the TV market at Enders Analysis, said: "These equity investments ... are quite small so there is less concern about potential risk. For ITV or Channel 4, taking stakes can help them fulfil their societal remit to back creative companies. TV advertising can now target a particular postcode or demographic and it helps if, in a sales pitch, broadcasters can tell other small businesses that this has worked."

Rate cuts likely across eurozone and Canada after inflation drops

Graeme Wearden

Borrowers in the eurozone and Canada are expected to get some relief from high interest rates this week.

After recent drops in inflation, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the Bank of Canada (BoC) are forecast to lower benchmark rates in the coming days. The ECB will set its policy on Thursday, with the money markets indicating a 93% chance of rate cuts.

A poll of 82 economists by Reuters last week found they expected a rate cut on 6 June, after several ECB policymakers hinted it was a done deal.

There is an 82% chance that the BoC will cut borrowing costs on Wednesday, from 5% to 4.75%, market pricing indicates. These odds rose on Friday after Canada's GDP grew more slowly than forecast in the first three months of the year. This would put the ECB and BoC in the first wave of major central banks to ease policy in the current cycle, after the Swiss National Bank cut its rates in March.

The future path of rates remains unclear, given signs that inflation could be more persistent than hoped.

Data released on Friday showed that eurozone inflation rose in May, for the first month this year, to 2.6%. That took it further away from the ECB's forecast of 2%, but was still much lower than the year before when euro-area inflation was 6.1%. Canada's annual inflation rate cooled to 2.7% in April, down from 2.9% in March, potentially clearing the way for the BoC to ease policy this week.

UK inflation fell to 2.3% in April but the Bank of England is not expected to cut rates until late this year.

Balancing act Immigration must be matched with infrastructure investment



Larry Elliott
Economics editor

Imagine that during the election campaign Rishi Sunak announced that by 2038 he expected immigration to boost the population by 3.7 million - more than the current number of people living in Wales. What would your response be?

It's a question worth asking, because such an increase is precisely what has been seen since David Cameron pledged in 2010 to reduce net immigration to the tens of thousands annually. In the current parliament alone, net migration to the UK has been 2 million.

One response might be that from days of yore Britain's history has been shaped and enriched by migrants, so it makes sense to continue with a liberal response.

Another would be that the economy relies heavily on workers from overseas and that without them the NHS and social care would collapse. Universities that rely on foreign students because they pay higher fees than their UK-born counterparts are facing a financial crisis.

But it's reasonable to assume that many people would want to know whether there was a plan for coping with an increase in the population equivalent to the size of Edinburgh, Leeds, Sheffield, Nottingham, Stoke, Bristol and Cardiff combined in such a relatively short period.

They might ask what the impact would be on the availability of housing, on rents in our big cities, and on school places. They would want to know what it would mean for NHS waiting lists and whether the arrival of foreign-born workers would drive down wages.

These would be legitimate

▼ *Net immigration has done nothing to arrest the downward trend in per capita GDP in the UK since 2010*

PHOTOGRAPH: PAUL QUAYLE/ALAMY



questions to ask, and they are being asked not only in the UK but across the developed west: in other European countries, and in North America and Oceania alike. Nor is Britain exceptional in the size of its foreign-born population. Indeed, it is very much middle of the pack for high-income countries.

That said, large net inward migration flows are relatively

3.7m

Increase in the UK's population from immigration since 2010. The rise over the current parliament is 2 million

recent for the UK. In almost every year between the end of the second world war and the early 1980s more people emigrated than migrated inward. It has only been in the past 25 years that net migration to the UK has picked up and become so important to the economy.

There have been benefits from net immigration. Well-educated and skilled workers from eastern Europe enhanced the UK's stock of human capital. They helped to boost growth and plugged gaps in the jobs market.

Ashley Webb, a UK economist at Capital Economics, says net immigration from non-EU countries has been entirely responsible for the rise in labour supply since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, and that future net immigration will ease labour shortages and put downward pressure on inflation.

Webb is right to point out that net immigration solves some short-term problems. Whether it is so good for the UK in the long term is another matter.

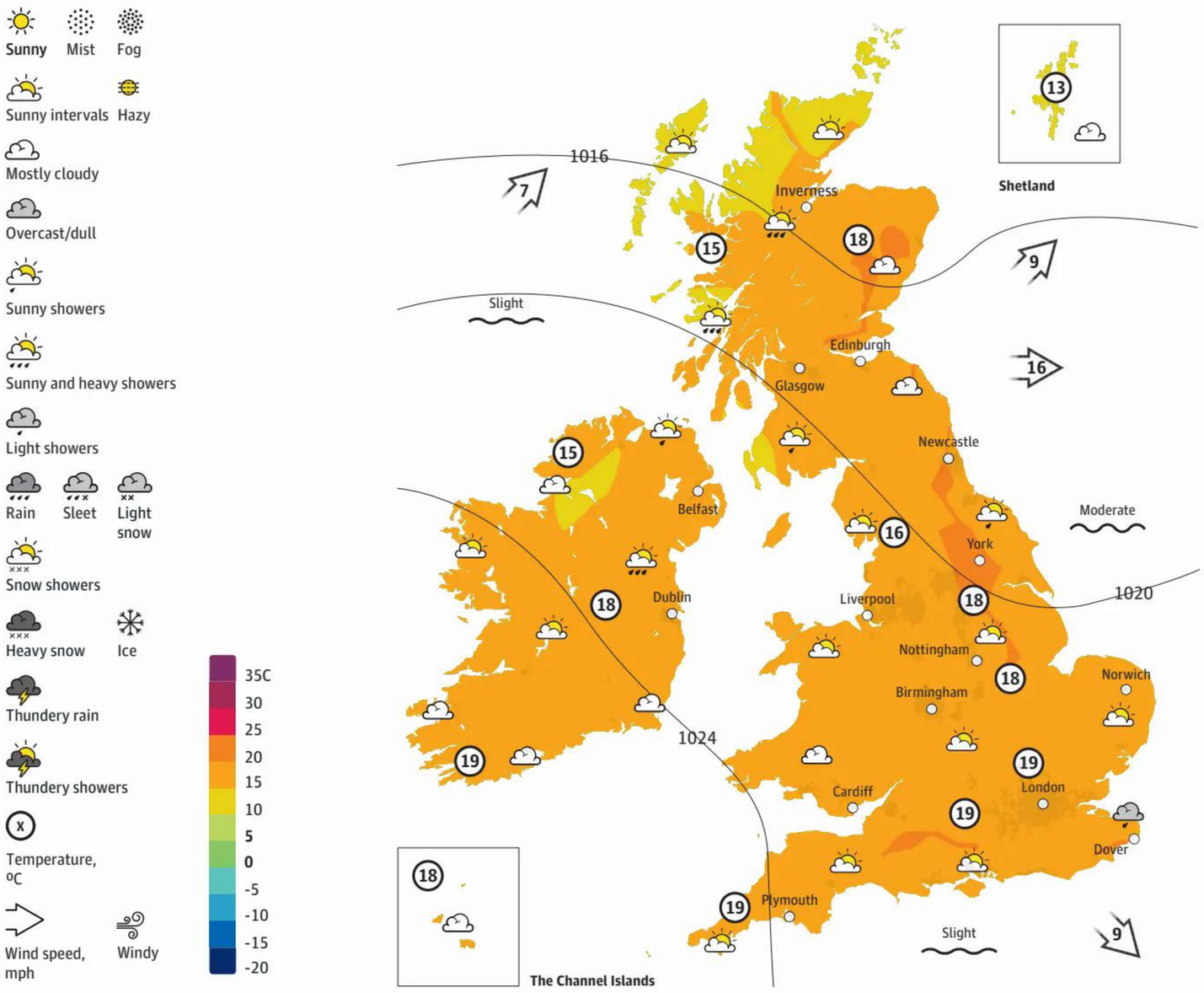
For a start, what matters is not the size of the economy measured by gross domestic product but the size of the economy divided by the number of people. Per capita GDP fell by 1.2% between the end of 2019 and the start of 2024. Net immigration has done nothing to arrest the downward trend in per capita GDP since 2010.

Then there's housing - or the lack of it. Housing supply has not remotely kept up with demand in recent years, leading to higher property prices and more expensive rents. These pressures will persist even if the Office for National Statistics' assumption that net migration to the UK will settle down to an average of 315,000 in the coming years proves accurate.

Large-scale immigration without the equivalent large-scale investment in the infrastructure to cope with the pressures it causes is an accident waiting to happen.

Weather
Monday 3 June 2024

UK and Ireland Noon today

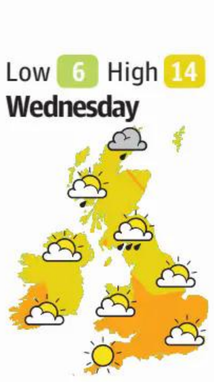


Forecast

Low 12 High 15
Tomorrow



Low 6 High 14
Wednesday



Carbon count

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

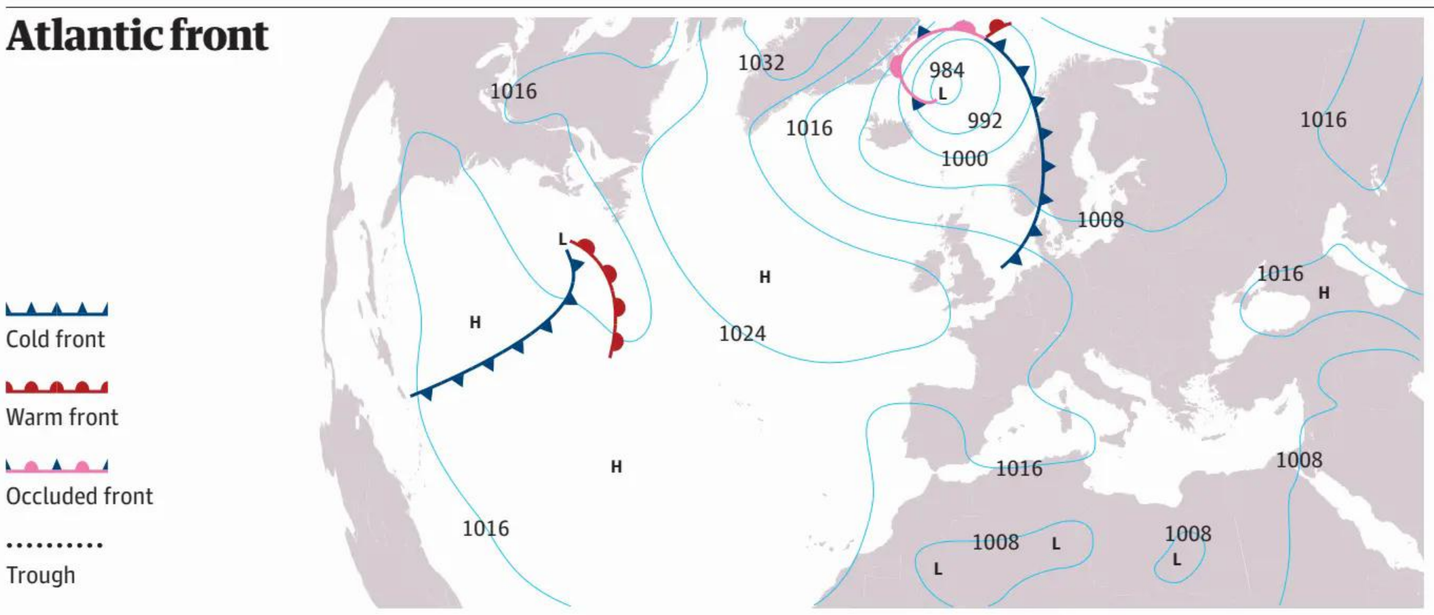
Latest	
01 Jun 2024	427.43
Weekly average	
26 May 2024	426.88
02 Jun 2023	424.62
02 Jun 2014	402.09
Pre-industrial base	*280*
Safe level	*350*

Source: NOAA-ESRL

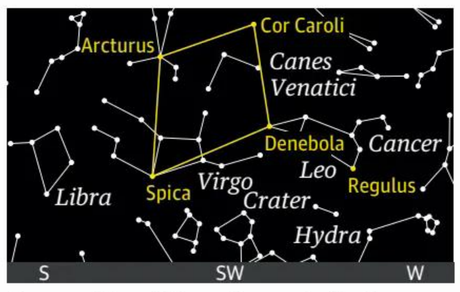
Around the UK

	Lows and highs		Precipitation	Air pollution
London	13	19	25%	Low
Manchester	12	17	60%	Low
Edinburgh	11	19	0%	Low
Belfast	12	17	60%	Low
Glasgow	11	17	25%	Low
Inverness	10	18	10%	Low
Leeds	12	19	25%	Low
Liverpool	13	17	25%	Low
Newcastle	10	19	5%	Low
Sheffield	12	18	15%	Low

Atlantic front



Starwatch



Beyond traditional constellations, asterisms - groups of stars - can provide a useful alternative way to find your way around the night sky. This week we look at one that spans four northern spring constellations.

The chart shows the view looking south-west from London at about 11pm this week. The Great Diamond is composed of four stars: Arcturus in Boötes, the herdsman; Cor Caroli in Canes Venatici, the hunting dogs; Denebola in Leo; and Spica in Virgo. All are the brightest in their constellations apart from Denebola, outshone by Regulus. Arcturus and Spica are first magnitude stars, Arcturus the fourth brightest, and Spica the 15th.

There is also a beautiful colour difference to notice between these two: Arcturus is a deep orange whereas Spica is brilliant blue-white. Continue to follow the asterism anti-clockwise and the stars progressively drop in brightness. **Stuart Clark**

Around the world

Algiers	26	Lisbon	28
Ams'dam	17	Madrid	30
Athens	30	Malaga	26
Auckland	17	Melb'rne	13
B Aires	12	Mexico C	32
Bangkok	33	Miami	30
Barcelona	24	Milan	25
Basra	46	Mombasa	31
Beijing	32	Moscow	25
Berlin	20	Mumbai	33
Bermuda	24	N Orleans	30
Brussels	18	Nairobi	26
Budapest	23	New Delhi	43
C'hagen	20	New York	28
Cairo	36	Oslo	26
Cape Town	16	Paris	21
Chicago	28	Perth	20
Corfu	30	Prague	19
Dakar	27	Reykjavik	7
Dhaka	33	Rio de J	27
Dublin	18	Rome	23
Florence	23	Shanghai	32
Gibraltar	22	Singapore	30
H Kong	28	Stockh'm	23
Harare	27	Strasb'g	21
Helsinki	23	Sydney	18
Istanbul	31	Tel Aviv	30
Jo'burg	13	Tenerife	25
K Lumpur	33	Tokyo	24
K'mandu	27	Toronto	23
Kabul	25	Vancouv'r	15
Kingston	31	Vienna	22
Kolkata	33	Warsaw	24
L Angeles	23	Wash'ton	28
Lagos	31	Well'ton	13
Lima	20	Zurich	18

High tides

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

Aberdeen	--	--	**1123**	3.9m
Avonmouth	**0501**	11.7m	**1733**	11.7m
Barrow	**0922**	8.6m	**2159**	8.4m
Belfast	**0906**	3.3m	**2140**	3.2m
Cobh	**0311**	3.7m	**1537**	3.7m
Cromer	**0443**	4.4m	**1640**	4.7m
Dover	**0920**	6.0m	**2138**	6.3m
Dublin	**0933**	3.9m	**2216**	3.7m
Galway	**0303**	4.6m	**1537**	4.7m
Greenock	**1025**	3.2m	**2258**	3.1m
Harwich	**0945**	3.7m	**2158**	3.7m
Holyhead	**0815**	5.2m	**2057**	5.1m
Hull	**0420**	6.6m	**1623**	7.0m
Leith	**0022**	5.0m	**1236**	5.2m
Liverpool	**0902**	8.7m	**2139**	8.5m
London Bridge	--	--	**1150**	6.5m
Lossiemouth	**0932**	3.7m	**2225**	3.7m
Milford Haven	**0401**	6.3m	**1633**	6.2m
Newquay	**0257**	6.2m	**1528**	6.2m
North Shields	**0123**	4.5m	**1328**	4.7m
Oban	**0401**	3.6m	**1623**	3.3m
Penzance	**0229**	5.0m	**1503**	4.9m
Plymouth	**0329**	5.0m	**1606**	4.9m
Portsmouth	**0920**	4.3m	**2154**	4.6m
Southport	**0824**	8.4m	**2101**	8.2m
Stornoway	**0451**	4.4m	**1736**	4.2m
Weymouth	**0348**	1.0m	**1629**	1.0m
Whitby	**0155**	4.9m	**1402**	5.2m
Wick	**0908**	3.1m	**2200**	3.1m
Workington	**0927**	7.6m	**2202**	7.5m

Sun & Moon



Sun rises	0446
Sun sets	2110
Moon rises	0253
Moon sets	1743
New Moon	6 June

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

Lighting up

Belfast	2153 to 0453
Birm'ham	2122 to 0448
Brighton	2107 to 0450
Bristol	2120 to 0458
Carlisle	2142 to 0437
Cork	2146 to 0518
Dublin	2146 to 0500
Glasgow	2154 to 0437
Harlech	2134 to 0455
Inverness	2205 to 0423
London	2110 to 0446
M'chester	2130 to 0445
Newcastle	2138 to 0432
Norwich	2111 to 0435
Penzance	2125 to 0515

Sport

Football

Are this Madrid even better than giants of the 50s?

Page 40 →



Rugby union

Russell v Smith is a must-watch in Premiership final

Page 36 →





▲ *Duncan Ferguson presided over Inverness Caledonian Thistle's relegation to Scotland's third tier; (left) fans protest at the proposed move in May*

MAIN IMAGE: MARK SCATES/SNS GROUP

Highland games

Inverness satellite plan betrays fans and sends totally the wrong signal

Ewan Murray



It feels only five minutes ago that Duncan Ferguson was wheeling down the Goodison Park touchline in celebration. Everton's victory against Chelsea in December 2019 fuelled theories that Ferguson should be named as the permanent successor to Marco Silva. Even when Carlo Ancelotti got that job, Ferguson was a key part of the coaching team. Much longer has passed since Inverness Caledonian Thistle created shockwaves with a Scottish Cup win at Celtic. As Super Caley Went Ballistic (Celtic are atrocious) in 2000, the acrimonious 1994 merger of Caledonian and Inverness Thistle finally appeared fully justified.

How Ferguson and Inverness have cause to ponder those high points. If Caley Thistle's meek relegation to Scotland's third tier on Ferguson's watch was no real surprise, what came next was. The club triggered anger while being "delighted to announce" the first team will move training base to Kelty, 135 miles from Inverness. The reason? "The commercial success of the city has led to very high prices for the accommodation we require to house players," the club said. Fife is apparently the solution, partly because it should be easier to coax players from Scotland's central belt.

"We obviously never intended to be in the same division as Kelty when originally exploring this concept," a statement read. Yet in the same division they are; one of many bamboozling aspects of this business is the handing of precious funds to an on-field rival. When the laughing stops, it is worth pondering how desperately sad this situation is. A blunt reality is Inverness could win their first eight matches next season and nobody would care where they train. There may be valid football and fiscal reasons behind what they are planning. However, the stirring of a supporter base is not only about more than that but has been hugely impressive. Such anger has not been in evidence since the merger itself.

Fans object to their football club being uncoupled from a city. Season-ticket boycotts – there are only 1500 season-ticket holders to begin with – have been floated. This is a club propped up by director loans. If fans withdraw their cash, administration looks inevitable; those in support of such an outcome understate the harm done to low-paid workers and small creditors. This is as serious a scenario as it is bizarre.

The front page of the Inverness Courier screamed: "Betrayal!" Fundamentally, one has to ask whether the fraught amalgamation of Caley and Thistle was worth it if within three decades the new club are reduced to this, a satellite operation which floats into town once a fortnight. Children who grow up with aspirations of playing for their local team hardly envisage training more than two hours away.

Under cross-examination from an articulate group of supporters on The Wyness Shuffle podcast the chairman, Ross Morrison, delivered an extraordinary performance. By the end, the extent of his rambling was such that it was impossible not to feel sorry for the man. Morrison says he has sunk £1.5m into Inverness. He conceded Ferguson was overpaid in the Championship, was probably too expensive to dismiss despite taking a pay cut, blamed a player's unwillingness to stay in Inverness on their wife, and took aim at supporters for not being upset enough at the potential closure of the youth academy.

What Big Dunc makes of all this is anybody's guess. We have been left to assume the football benefits theoretically attached to this flit are to his liking. He has been protective of his record since returning to Scotland but his interviews lack substance. Ferguson propped up his failing squad with loanees from England – a necessary step, he will argue – without giving the impression the broader health of this club was his concern. Ferguson could write off a disastrous spell at Forest Green Rovers on the basis of off-field chaos. He may well do likewise when his Inverness stint ends. Yet the man once tipped to lead Everton has done little to demonstrate there is anything to his management approach beyond brawn and bravado. He will start the new season coaching at Montrose, Annan and Stenhousemuir.

Fans object to their club being uncoupled from the city

As this scenario rumbles on, Scottish football remains staunchly and strangely reluctant to engage with external assessors. Ian Maxwell, the chief executive of the Scottish Football Association, scoffed at the notion of an independent regulator when in front of parliamentarians. Neil Doncaster, Maxwell's counterpart at the Scottish Professional Football League, did likewise during a recent radio interview. The go-to argument for both is that Scottish clubs are in rude health, hence fresh eyes are totally unnecessary.

Livingston, recently relegated from the Premiership, spend more time in courtrooms than Rumpole of the Bailey. Ross County's two most recent sets of accounts show £1.1m has been written off by their parent company to keep their head above water in the top flight. Dundee United's level of debt to their America-based owner crashed through £10m a long time ago. Dundee gifted shares to Gordon Strachan, their technical director, in lieu of a £192,000 payment. Edinburgh City received a six-point penalty for failing to pay players on time. Scottish football is generally a mess; the Inverness case is extreme because of the existence of no sugar daddy but they are symptomatic of a broader picture. The episode reminds us that ties between football clubs and their village, town or city are important. At least, they should be.

Results

Football

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Final

Borussia Dortmund (0) **0** — **Real Madrid** (0) **2**
86,212 — Carvajal 74, Vinícius Jr 83

UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2025 QUALIFIERS

Group A1 Netherlands 1 Finland 0; Norway 0 Italy 0

Group A2 Czech Republic 1 Belgium 2; Denmark 0 Spain 2

Group A3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
France	3	3	0	0	4	1	+3	9
Sweden	3	1	1	1	4	2	+2	4
England	3	1	1	1	4	3	+1	4
Republic of Ireland	3	0	0	3	0	6	-6	0

England (1) **1** — **France** (1) **2**
Mead 30 — De Almeida 41, Katoto 68

Rep of Ireland 0 Sweden 3

Group A4 Austria 1 Iceland 1; Germany 4 Poland 1

Group B1 Turkey 1 Azerbaijan 0; Switzerland 2 Hungary 1

Group B2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Scotland	3	2	1	0	5	1	+4	7
Serbia	3	2	1	0	6	3	+3	7
Slovakia	3	1	0	2	3	3	0	3
Israel	3	0	0	3	3	10	-7	0

Scotland (3) **4** — **Israel** (0) **1**
Emslie 17 36, Hanson 30 Thomas 63pen — Sommer 84

Serbia 2 Slovakia 1

Group B3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Portugal	3	3	0	0	9	0	+9	9
Northern Ireland	3	1	1	1	3	5	-2	4
Bosnia-Hz	3	1	0	2	2	6	-4	3
Malta	3	0	1	2	0	3	-3	1

Portugal (1) **4** — **Northern Ireland** (0) **0**
Costa 25pen, Alves 49 90+6 Amado 83

Malta 0 Bosnia-Herzegovina 1

Group B4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Wales	3	2	1	0	11	1	+10	7
Croatia	3	2	0	1	2	4	-2	6
Ukraine	3	1	1	1	3	2	+1	4
Kosovo	3	0	0	3	0	9	-9	0

Wales (0) **1** — **Ukraine** (1) **1**
Barton 64pen — Andrukhiv 3

Kosovo 0 Croatia 1

Group C1 Cyprus 0 Georgia 2; Lithuania 0 Belarus 3 (forfeit)

Group C2 North Macedonia 1 Moldova 1; Slovenia 6 Latvia 0

Group C3 Greece 2 Montenegro 2; Faroe Island 4 Andorra 0

Group C4 Armenia 2 Kazakhstan 1; Romania 1 Bulgaria 0

Group C5 Estonia 1 Albania 2

UEFA UNDER-17 EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Semi-finals Denmark 0 Italy 1; Serbia 2 Portugal 3

MEN'S INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLIES

Costa Rica 0 Uruguay 0; Indonesia 0 Tanzania 0; Mexico 1 Bolivia 0
Friday Bangladesh 0 Chinese Taipei 4; Bolivia 1 El Salvador 2; Curaçao 1 Trinidad & Tobago 3; Seychelles 1 South Sudan 5; Tanzania 2 Mali 2; Uruguay 1 Russia 1; Uzbekistan 3 India 0; Venezuela 0 Colombia 2

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLIES

Argentina 2 Costa Rica 0; Brazil 4 Jamaica 0; Canada 2 Mexico 0; Curaçao 0 Aruba 0; Guatemala 1 Chile 6; Iran 0 Belarus 1; USA 4 South Korea 0; Nicaragua 1 Peru 0; **Friday** Australia 1 China 1; Japan 2 New Zealand 0

SERIE A

Atlanta 2 Fiorentina 3

Cricket

ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP

Grand Prairie, Texas Canada 194-5 (NS Dhaliwal 61, NR Kirton 51). USA 197-3 (A Jones 94, AGS Gous 65). USA beat Canada by seven wickets.

Providence, Guyana Papua New Guinea 136-8 (S Bau 50). West Indies 137-5 (RL Chase 42). West Indies beat Papua New Guinea by five wickets.

VITALITY T20 BLAST

North Group

	P	W	L	T	NR	RR	Pts
Lancashire	3	2	1	0	0	2.63	4
Birmingham	2	2	0	0	0	1.32	4
Yorkshire	3	2	1	0	0	0.91	4
Northamptonshire	3	2	1	0	0	0.58	4
Leicestershire	2	1	1	0	0	1.29	2
Derbyshire	3	1	2	0	0	-0.82	2
Worcestershire	2	1	1	0	0	-1.71	2
Nottinghamshire	2	0	2	0	0	-2.15	0
Durham	2	0	2	0	0	-3.09	0

Old Trafford Lancashire 179-7. Derbyshire 122 (BD Guest 42; CJ Green 4-12). Lancashire beat Derbyshire by 57 runs.

Northampton Yorkshire 186-6 (DJ Malan 41; RS Bopara 4-34) Northamptonshire 157-8. Yorkshire beat Northamptonshire by 29 runs.

Edgbaston Leicestershire 176-6 (PSP Handscomb 75 no). Derbyshire 178-6 (SR Patel 64). Derbyshire beat Leicestershire by four wickets.

Edgbaston Birmingham 149 (RM Yates 68). Notts Outlaws 127. Birmingham beat Notts Outlaws by 22 runs.

Played on Friday

New Road Lancashire 169-5 (SJ Croft 52 no, MF Hurst 45). Worcestershire 172-5 (BL D'Oliveira 61). Worcestershire beat Lancashire by five wickets.

Riverside Durham 101. Birmingham 105-4. Birmingham beat Durham by six wickets.

Grace Road Yorkshire 151-7 (Shan Masood 45). Leicestershire 155-3 (SG Budinger 50). Leicestershire beat Yorkshire by seven wickets.

Trent Bridge Notts Outlaws 154 (JA Haynes 51, JM Clarke 48). Northamptonshire 157-2 (DJ Willey 79; MP Breetzke 51 no). Northamptonshire beat Notts Outlaws by eight wickets.

South Group

	P	W	L	T	NR	RR	Pts
Surrey	3	3	0	0	0	1.38	6
Kent	2	1	1	0	0	2.40	2
Gloucestershire	2	1	1	0	0	0.63	2
Glamorgan	2	1	1	0	0	0.15	2
Hampshire	2	1	1	0	0	-0.10	2
Essex	3	1	2	0	0	-0.27	2
Sussex	2	1	1	0	0	-0.60	2
Somerset	2	1	1	0	0	-1.16	2
Middlesex	2	0	2	0	0	-3.19	0

The Rose Bowl Kent 165-9 (SW Billings 43, DJ Bell-Drummond 42). Hampshire 166-7 (JJ Weatherley 49). Hampshire beat Kent by three wickets.

Sophia Gardens Glamorgan 183-7 (SA Northeast 61 no; TS Mills 4-33). Sussex 158-6 (JM Coles 69 no). Glamorgan beat Sussex by 25 runs.

Chelmsford Middlesex 203-7 (MDE Holden 85, MK Andersson 49). Essex 207-6 (MS Pepper 101). Essex beat Middlesex by four wickets.

The Kia Oval Surrey 163 (JL Smith XX, OJD Pope 40). Somerset 106. Surrey beat Somerset by 57 runs.

Played on Friday

Sophia Gardens Surrey 200-8 (JL Smith 76). Glamorgan 181-7 (M Labuschagne 58; CA Ingram 50). Surrey beat Glamorgan by 19 runs.

Taunton Essex 193-6 (D Elgar 77). Somerset 197-6 (TB Abell 55, L Gregory 44). Somerset beat Essex by four wickets.

Chelmsford Kent 205-8 (JL Denly 56). Middlesex 107 (MW Parkinson 4-25). Kent beat Middlesex by 98 runs.

Hove Gloucestershire 167-8 (JMR Taylor 52; TS Mills 4-25). Sussex 168-7 (FJ Hudson-Prentice 47). Sussex beat Gloucestershire by three wickets.

CHARLOTTE EDWARDS CUP

	P	W	L	T	NR	RR	Pts
South East Stars	5	4	0	0	1	1.11	19
The Blaze	5	5	0	0	0	0.57	17
Central Sparks	5	3	2	0	0	0.55	13
Thunder	5	2	3	0	0	-0.21	9
Southern Vipers	5	2	3	0	0	0.24	8
Sunrisers	5	2	3	0	0	-0.90	8
Western Storm	5	1	3	0	1	-0.31	7
Northern Diamonds	5	0	5	0	0	-0.87	0

Northampton Northern Diamonds 123-8. Sunrisers 126-6 (G Scrivens 64). Sunrisers beat Northern Diamonds by four wickets.

The Kia Oval Southern Vipers 142-6 (A Monaghan 44no). South East Stars 146-4 (SIR Dunkley 53, PJ Scholfield 50). South East Stars beat Southern Vipers by six wickets.

Old Trafford Lancashire Thunder 111-9 (KL Gordon 5-12). The Blaze 112-3. The Blaze beat Lancashire Thunder by seven wickets.

Played on Friday

Chester-le-Street Northern Diamond 124 (L Dobson 55; MR Corteen-Coleman 5-19). South East Stars 127-4 (BF Smith 57). South East Stars beat Northern Diamonds by six wickets.

Trent Bridge The Blaze 134-6 (KE Bryce 57). Central Sparks 124-7. The Blaze beat Central Sparks by 10 runs.

Taunton Western Storm 134-8 (Luff 41). Sunrisers 106 (E Anderson 4-9). Western Storm beat Sunrisers by 28 runs.

Rugby union

GALLAGHER PREMIERSHIP PLAYOFFS

Semi-finals: Bath 31 Sale 23
Friday Northampton 22 Saracens 20

UNITED CHAMPIONSHIP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	B	Pts
Munster	18	13	1	4	483	318	14	68
Bulls	18	13	0	5	639	433	14	66
Leinster	18	13	0	5	554	350	13	65
Glasgow	18	13	0	5	519	353	13	65
Stormers	18	12	0	6	468	348	11	59
Ulster	18	11	0	7	437	409	10	54
Benetton	18	11	1	6	411	400	8	54
Ospreys	18	10	0	8	414	449	10	50
Lions	18	9	0	9	526	398	14	50
Edinburgh	18	11	0	7	416	397	5	49
Connacht	18	9	0	9	404	432	9	45
Cardiff	18	4	1	13	389	414	14	32
Scarlets	18	5	0	13	313	575	7	27
Sharks	18	4	0	14	343	431	9	25
Dragons	18	3	0	15	300	611	4	16
Zebre	18	1	1	16	345	643	9	15

Benetton 31 Edinburgh 6; Cardiff 29 Ospreys 33; Munster 29 Ulster 24; Scarlets 32 Dragons 15; Sharks 14 Bulls 26; Stormers 29 Lions 24
Friday Glasgow 38 Zebre 26; Leinster 33 Connacht 7

ALLIANZ WOMEN'S PREMIERSHIP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	B	Pts
Gloucester-Hartpury	16	15	0	1	593	312	16	74
Saracens	16	14	0	2	664	283	14	70
Bristol	16	11	0	5	515	280	14	58
Exeter	16	10	1	5	565	357	15	57
Loughborough	16	7	0	9	375	478	10	38
Ealing Trailfinders	16	5	0	11	355	515	9	29
Harlequins	16	4	1	11	403	513	11	29
Sale	16	3	0	13	247	624	6	13
Leicester	16	2	0	14	300	655	7	10

Exeter 59 Leicester 27; Harlequins 27 Trailfinders 54; Loughborough 24 Saracens 33; Sale 27 Bristol 24

Rugby league

BETFRED SUPER LEAGUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PD	Pts
St Helens	13	10	0	3	353	136	+217	20
Wigan	12	10	0	2	357	156	+201	20
Hull KR	13	9	0	4	338	183	+155	18
Warrington	13	9	0	4	320	170	+150	18
Catalans Dragons	13	8	0	5	264	192	+72	16
Salford	13	8	0	5	250	256	-6	16
Leeds	13	7	0	6	246	242	+4	14
Huddersfield	13	6	0	7	274	263	+11	12
Leigh	12	4	1	7	244	206	+38	9
Castleford	13	3	1	9	218	406	-188	7
Hull FC	13	1	0	12	162	440	-278	2
London Broncos	13	1	0	12	134	510	-376	2

Warrington 18 Wigan 19; Hull KR 12 Leigh 0; Leeds 32 Castleford 4; Salford 34 London Broncos 4
Friday Huddersfield 24 Hull FC 18; St Helens 24 Catalans 12

BETFRED WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PD	Pts
Leeds	5	4	0	1	224	26	+198	8
Wigan	5	4	0	1	230	44	+186	8
St Helens	5	4	0	1	170	44	+126	8
York	5	4	0	1	152	56	+96	8
Warrington	5	2	0	3	52	194	-142	4
Barrow	5	1	0	4	40	134	-94	2
Huddersfield	5	1	0	4	52	288	-236	2
Featherstone	5	0	0	5	64	198	-134	0

Featherstone 10 Huddersfield 30; Leeds 68 Barrow 0; York 44 Warrington 4 **Friday** St Helens 24 Wigan 8

BETFRED CHAMPIONSHIP

Batley 31 Sheffield 18; Bradford 36 Barrow 24; Doncaster 25 Whitehaven 25; Featherstone 40 Swinton 42; Halifax 24 Toulouse 38; York 18 Widnes 22
Friday Wakefield 56 Dewsbury 0

BETFRED LEAGUE ONE

Cornwall 30 Newcastle 6; Midlands 18 Keighley 25; North Wales 24 Oldham 25; Workington 22 Hunslet 24

WHEELCHAIR CHALLENGE CUP

Friday Catalans Dragons 81 Wigan 18

Tennis

FRENCH OPEN (Paris)

Men: Third round: N DJOKOVIC (Ser, 1) bt L MUSETTI (It, 30) 7-5 6-7(6) 2-6 6-3 6-0; **F CERÚNDOLO** (Arg, 23) bt T PAUL (US, 14) 3-6 6-3 6-3 6-2; **T FRITZ** (US, 12) bt T Kokkinakis (Aus) 6-3 6-2 6-7(4) 5-7 6-3; **C RUUD** (Nor, 7) bt T ETCHEVERRY (Arg, 28) 6-4 1-6 6-2 6-2; **A ZVEREV** (Ger, 4) bt T GRIEKSPOOR (Neth, 26) 3-6 6-4 6-2 4-6 7-6(3); **H RUNE** (Den, 13) bt J Kovalik (Svk) 7-5 6-1 7-6(2); **A DE MINAUR** (Aus, 11) bt JL Struff (Ger) 4-6 6-4 6-3 6-3; **D MEDVEDEV** (Rus, 5) bt T Machac (Cz) 7-6(4) 7-5 1-6 6-4; **F AUGER-ALIASSIME** (Can, 21) bt B SHELTON (US, 15) 6-4 6-2 6-1; **H HURKACZ** (Pol, 8) bt D Shapovalov (Can) 6-3 7-6(0) 4-6 6-1; **G DIMITROV** (Bul, 10) bt Z Bergs (Bel) 6-3 7-6(4) 4-6 6-4

Fourth round: C ALCARAZ (Sp, 3) bt F AUGER-ALIASSIME (Can, 21) 6-3 6-3 6-1; **S TSITSIPAS** (Gre, 9) bt M Arnaldi (It) 3-6 7-6(4) 6-2 6-2; **G DIMITROV** (Bul, 10) bt H HURKACZ (Pol, 8) 7-6(5) 6-4 7-6(3); **J SINNER** (It, 2) bt C Moutet (Fr) 2-6 6-3 6-2 6-1

Women: Third round: E Avanesyan (Rus) bt ZHENG Q (Chn, 7) 3-6 6-3 7-6(6); **J PAOLINI** (It, 12) bt B Andreescu (Can) 6-1 3-6 6-0; **E SVITOLINA** (Ukr, 15) bt A Bogdan (Rom) 7-5 6-2; **E RYBAKINA** (Kaz, 4) bt E MERTENS (Bel, 25) 6-4 6-2; **V Gracheva** (Fr) bt I Begu (Rom) 7-5 6-3; **M Andreeva** (Rus) bt P Stearns (US) 6-2 6-1; **E NAVARRO** (US, 22) bt M KEYS (US, 14) 7-6(5) 7-6(3); **A SABALENKA** (Blr, 2) bt P Badosa (Sp) 7-5 6-1

Fourth round: I SWIATEK (Pol, 1) bt A Potapova (Rus) 6-0 6-0; **M VONDROUSOVA** (Cz, 5) bt O Danilovic (Ser) 6-4 6-2; **C GAUFF** (US, 3) bt E Cocciaretto (It) 6-1 6-2; **O JABEUR** (Tun, 8) bt C Tauson (Den) 6-4 6-4

Golf

EUROPEAN OPEN (Hamburg, Germany)

Leading final scores (GB & Ire unless stated)
279 L Canter 68 66 73 72. **281** T Lawrence (SA) 77 67 69 68; B Wiesberger (Aut) 71 72 67 71. **282** J Guerrier (Fr) 71 71 71 69; N Nørgaard Møller (Den) 69 68 71 74. **283** K Nakajima (Jpn) 71 71 70 71. **284** R Cabrera (Sp) 72 70 70 72. **285** T McKibbin 69 71 71 74; G Migliozzi (It) 70 70 67 78; J Veerman (US) 71 72 71 71; T Lewis 72 70 70 73; G Porteous 69 69 77 70.

DORMY OPEN (Helsingborg, Sweden)

Leading final scores (GB & Ire unless stated) **205**
P Delacour (Fr) 68 70 67 (won after first extra playoff hole); H Briem (Ger) 72 69 64. **206** N Broch Estrup (Den) 68 70 68; P Urs (Ind) 70 66 70. **207** J Gustavsson (Swe) 72 66 69; C Gainer 65 71 71; K Rudgeley (Aus) 69 71 67. **208** M de Roey (Bel) 69 69 70; M Prat (Sp) 70 68 70.

Athletics *Diamond League*

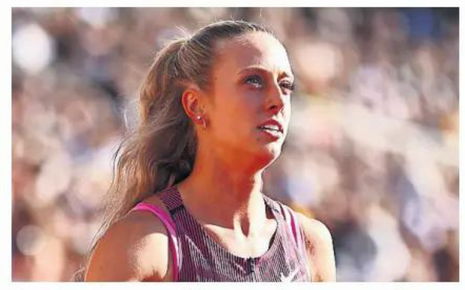
Rampant Reekie and Muir storm to victories

Jemma Reekie continued a sensational season of 800m running for Britain's women as she led home four sub-two minute runners in Stockholm. Her run of 1:57:79 means she now has the fourth- and ninth-best times of the year worldwide, in a top-10 list bookended by British runners, with Keely Hodgkinson's 1:55:78 leading the way and 17-year-old Phoebe Gill's breakthrough run of 1:57:86 in 10th. Laura Muir provided another British middle distance victory in the 1500m, the class of the field sprinting clear at the finish to win in 3:57:99. **Guardian sport**

Cricket *Vitality T20 Blast*

Smith's 87 smashes Surrey past champions

Surrey made it three wins from three after Jamie Smith smashed 87 off 38 balls to inspire a 57-run victory over current champions Somerset. It was largely a one-man show at the Oval as Smith smashed seven sixes and scored 87 at a strike rate of 228.95 to help Surrey to 163 all out. The visitors were skittled for 106 with Sean Abbott taking three for eight. Essex, last season's beaten finalists, chased down Middlesex's target of 204 thanks to a 44-ball 101 from Michael Pepper. **PA Media**



▲ *Jemma Reekie now has two of the year's 10 best 800m times*

The week ahead



Leah Williamson and England will tomorrow be trying to avenge Friday's defeat by France

Today

Football (7.45pm unless stated)
Men's international friendlies
Albania v Liechtenstein (7pm); Croatia v North Macedonia (6pm); England v Bosnia-Herzegovina; Germany v Ukraine; Gibraltar v Scotland (5pm)
Women's international friendlies
Argentina v Costa Rica (11.50pm); Australia v China (10.40am); Japan v New Zealand (3pm)
Men's U21 international friendly
Turkey v Scotland (6pm)
SSE Airtricity Premier League
Derry v Waterford (6pm); Sligo v Drogheda (5pm); St Patricks v Dundalk (5.15pm)
Cricket
ICC Men's T20 World Cup
Namibia v Oman, Bridgetown (1.30am) *Sky Sports Cricket*; Sri Lanka v South Africa, New York (3.30pm) *SSC*

Tomorrow

Football (7.45pm unless stated)
Women's Euro 2025 qualifiers
Group A Belgium v Czech Republic (7pm); Finland v Netherlands (5pm); France v England (8pm) *ITV4*; Iceland v Austria (8.30pm); Italy v Norway (5.15pm); Poland v Germany (5pm); Spain v Denmark (8.30pm); Sweden v Republic of Ireland (5.30pm); **Group B** Azerbaijan v Turkey (4pm); Bosnia & Herzegovina v Malta (3pm); Croatia v Kosovo (7pm); Hungary v Switzerland (4.30pm); Israel v Scotland (3pm) *BBC Scotland*; Northern Ireland v Portugal (7pm) *BBC iPlayer*; Slovakia v Serbia (5pm); Ukraine v Wales (7pm) *BBC One Wales* **Group C** Albania v Luxembourg (5pm); Andorra v Montenegro (6pm); Bulgaria v Romania (5pm); Faroe Islands v Greece (4.45pm); Georgia v Cyprus (5pm); Kazakhstan v Armenia (3pm); Latvia v Slovenia (4pm); Moldova v North Macedonia (5pm)
Men's international friendlies
Austria v Serbia; Italy v Turkey (8pm); Portugal v Finland; Republic of Ireland v Hungary; Romania v Bulgaria (7.30pm); Slovenia v Armenia (5pm); Switzerland v Estonia (7.15pm)
Women's international friendlies
Senegal v South Africa (6pm)
Cricket
ICC Men's T20 World Cup
Afghanistan v Uganda, Providence (1.30am) *SSC*; England v Scotland, Bridgetown (3.30pm) *SSC*; Netherlands v Nepal, Grand Prairie (4.30pm) *SSC*

Wednesday

Football (3pm unless stated)
Uefa Under-17 Championship
Final Italy v Portugal
Men's international friendlies
Belgium v Montenegro (7.30pm); Denmark v Sweden (6pm); France v Luxembourg (8pm); Norway v Kosovo (6pm); Slovakia v San Marino (5pm); Spain v Andorra (8.30pm)
Women's international friendlies
Brazil v Jamaica (midnight); Canada v Mexico (12:30am); USA v South Korea (1am)
Cricket
ICC Men's T20 World Cup
India v Ireland, New York (3.30pm) *Sky Sports Cricket*

Thursday

Football (3pm unless stated)
Men's international friendlies
Gibraltar v Wales (5pm) *S4C/BBC iPlayer*; Mexico v Uruguay (2am); Netherlands v Canada (7.45pm)
Cricket
ICC Men's T20 World Cup
Australia v Oman, Bridgetown (1.30am) *SSC*; Namibia v Scotland, Bridgetown (8pm) *SSC*; Papua New Guinea v Uganda, Providence (12.30am) *SSC*; USA v Pakistan, Grand Prairie (4.30pm) *SSC*
Vitality T20 Blast
Middlesex v Glamorgan, Lord's (6.15pm); Notts Outlaws v Worcestershire, Trent Bridge (6.30pm)
Charlotte Edwards Cup
Sunrisers v South East Stars, Lord's (2.15pm)
Golf
DP World Tour Scandinavian Mixed (to Sun) *Sky Sports Golf*
PGA Tour Memorial Tournament (to Sun) *Sky Sports Golf*

Friday

Football (7.45pm unless stated)
Men's international friendlies
Albania v Azerbaijan (6pm); Armenia v Kazakhstan (5pm); Belarus v Russia (6pm); Czech Republic v Malta (4.30pm); England v Iceland *Channel 4*; Germany v Greece; Poland v Ukraine; Romania v Liechtenstein (7pm); Scotland v Finland *BBC Scot*
Cricket
ICC Men's T20 World Cup
Canada v Ireland, New York (3.30pm) *Sky Sports Cricket*
Vitality T20 Blast
Essex v Glamorgan, Chelmsford (7pm); Gloucestershire v Hampshire, Bristol (6.30pm); Kent v Somerset, Canterbury (6.30pm); Lancashire v Birmingham, Old Trafford (6.30pm); Leicestershire v Durham, Leicester (6.30pm); Surrey v Sussex, The Oval (6.30pm); Derbyshire v Notts Outlaws, Derby (6.30pm); Northamptonshire v Worcestershire, Northampton (7.05pm)
Charlotte Edwards Cup
Lancashire v Southern Vipers, Old Trafford (2.30pm); The Blaze v Western Storm, Leicester (1pm)
Rugby union
United Rugby Championship
Munster v Ospreys (7.35pm)

Saturday

Football (3pm unless stated)
Men's international friendlies
Belgium v Luxembourg (7pm); Denmark v Norway (6.30pm); Hungary v Israel (5pm); Moldova v Cyprus (5pm); Peru v Paraguay (1.30am); Portugal v Croatia (5.45pm); Slovenia v Bulgaria (2pm); Sweden v Serbia (5pm); Switzerland v Austria (5pm); Spain v Northern Ireland (8.30pm); USA v Colombia (10.30pm)
Cricket
ICC Men's T20 World Cup
Australia v England, Bridgetown (6pm) *SSC*; Netherlands v South Africa, New York (3.30pm) *SSC*; New Zealand v Afghanistan, Providence (12.30am) *SSC*; Sri Lanka v Bangladesh, Grand Prairie (1.30am) *SSC*
Vitality T20 Blast
Birmingham v Durham, Edgbaston (3.30pm)
Charlotte Edwards Cup
Central Sparks v Northern Diamonds, Edgbaston (11.30am)
Rugby union
Gallagher English Premiership
Playoff final Northampton v Bath (3pm)
United Rugby Championship
Bulls v Bennetton (7.35pm); Glasgow v Stormers (7.35pm); Leinster v Ulster (5pm)
Rugby league
Betfred Challenge Cup
Final Wigan v Warrington, Wembley (3pm)
Betfred Women's Challenge Cup
Final St Helen's v Leeds, Wembley (11.45am)
1895 Cup
Final Wakefield v Sheffield, Wembley (5.45pm)

Sunday

Football (7.45pm unless stated)
Men's international friendlies
Argentina v Ecuador (11pm); France v Canada (8.15pm); Italy v Bosnia-Herzegovina; Mexico v Brazil (1.30am); Montenegro v Georgia; Slovakia v Wales *S4C/BBC iPlayer*
Cricket
ICC Men's T20 World Cup
India v Pakistan, New York (3.30pm) *Sky Sports Cricket*; Oman v Scotland, North Sound (6pm) *Sky Sports Cricket*; West Indies v Uganda, Providence (1.30am) *Sky Sports Cricket*
Vitality T20 Blast
Gloucestershire v Sussex, Bristol (2.30pm); Kent v Middlesex, Canterbury (3.30pm); Leicestershire v Worcestershire, Leicester (2.30pm); Notts Outlaws v Lancashire, Trent Bridge (2.30pm); Somerset v Hampshire, Taunton (2.30pm); Yorkshire v Derbyshire, Headingley (3pm)
Charlotte Edwards Cup
Lancashire v Sunrisers, Blackpool (1am); Northern Diamonds v The Blaze, Headingley (11am); South East Stars v Central Sparks, Canterbury (11am); Western Storm v Southern Vipers, Bristol (10.30am)
Rugby union
Allianz women's Premiership
Playoff semi-finals
Gloucestershire-Hartpury v Exeter (4.30pm); Saracens v Bristol (2pm)
Formula One
Canadian Grand Prix
Gilles Villeneuve, Montreal

The main event

Northampton v Bath

3pm, Saturday, ITV, TNT Sports 1

Northampton's Courtney Lawes will be hoping for a perfect end to his 17-year Saints career against Bath in the Premiership final



'We fancy our chances': Brook backs England's title defence

Batter praises team's depth before T20 World Cup opener against Scotland tomorrow

Ali Martin
Bridgetown

After two World Cup campaigns with wildly different outcomes and a personally challenging start to this year, a leaner, more focused Harry Brook heads into this latest push for global glory confident that England have the power to bring home the trophy.

Doing so would certainly change the narrative from late last year in India, where Jos Buttler's team were barely also-rans in their 50-over title defence. Brook, whose first winter with England in 2022-23 returned the T20 World Cup, has a diagnosis for that no-show and, with it, clarity as to how things must differ over the next four weeks.

"We fancy our chances," Brook said, before England tuned up for their Group B opener with Scotland tomorrow at the Three Ws Oval, north of Bridgetown. "We've got a very good side. We're confident we can bring it home again."

Asked what needed to change from the 50-over World Cup, the batter replied: "[We need to] be a bit more relaxed; probably stay in the moment a little bit more, as a group and personally. We weren't in a great space at the time. The way we started wasn't great, either. It wasn't the best competition to be part of."

The weather is volatile in Barbados – this is very much the end of tourist season – but, from the outside, England's outlook appears far brighter. If India was a case of losing touch with the rhythms of 50-over cricket, Brook insists the same cannot be said about Twenty20 given its status as the dominant white-ball format these days.

On a personal level, this season – with an overseas tour in June – represents a comeback for Brook, who missed the Test tour of India owing to the death of his grandmother Pauline, a huge supporter of his cricket while he was growing up. At one stage the last three fixtures of that 4-1 defeat were targets, but events dictated otherwise.

"Trying to spend as much time as I could with my grandma at that time was the right call and I don't regret it for a minute," he said. "I had a couple of conversations with [Ben Stokes, the Test captain] and he basically said: 'Whatever happens, family is the most important thing and you'd regret going back to play cricket if something happened.'"

Cricket-wise, Brook spent the first significant break of his England career drilling down on his fitness and, while hardly out of shape before, is looking remarkably svelte. Some players bulk up for extra power but Brook, with a natural ability to clear the rope through timing, has gone the other way to augment other facets of his game.

"Obviously it wasn't in great circumstances but I just tried to train as hard as possible; trying to lose a bit of weight and trying to get a bit leaner," he said. "Batting in the middle order, running twos are going to be quite a big thing for my game. And in the field as well. I've been trying to get quicker at running over the last 12 to 18 months."

Brook is the last man in an all right-handed top five, a potential achilles heel given the Caribbean cross-winds. That said, he possesses a 360-degree game, able to hit inside out – such as that slapped six over extra cover to seal the recent 2-0 series win over Pakistan – and, like others, is well drilled in the reverse sweep. Kieron Pollard, the Trinidadian hired as a consultant coach, is being mined for information.

Brook, though inked in for an immediate Test return given his scorching start to life in the longer format, has shown only flashes of his promise against the white-ball and averaged 11 in the T20 World Cup two years ago. Not that England have doubts here, long term, demonstrated by the three-year central contract he signed last autumn.

He said: "International cricket is my priority and I want to play all three formats for as long as I can. That contract does give a little bit of confidence and solidification. I feel like I can be around the three squads for the next three years and there's a lot to do."

Tomorrow's match begins at 10.30am local time (3.30pm BST) – one of 25 games with a morning start in this tournament to maximise the television audience in India – and a date with Scotland is a first chance for England to show the clouds of last winter have made way for sunshine.



◀ *Harry Brook bats in the nets in Bridgetown as England step up their preparation for the T20 World Cup*
GARETH COPLEY/ GETTY IMAGES

Stars and stripe show from hosts



Aaron Jones revels in his stunning innings after sealing victory for USA in their tournament opener
MATT ROBERTS/ ICC/GETTY IMAGES

Freewheeling Jones clobbers Canada in debut win for USA

USA	197-3
USA win by seven wickets	
Canada	194-5

Andy Bull
Dallas

Build it, and they will come. The great American cricket experiment got under way on Saturday night, when USA beat Canada by seven wickets in the opening match of the T20 World Cup at the little ground in Grand Prairie, Texas. And hell's bells if it wasn't, in its own little way, one of the game's great occasions.

A crowd of around 5,000 were treated to a brilliantly freewheeling innings by USA's Aaron Jones, a pocket-rocket batsman who was born in Queens and raised in Barbados. Jones clobbered 10 sixes, one of them clean out of the ground, in an undefeated innings of 94 off just 40 balls.

It was an achievement to get the match on at all. A mini tornado ripped through here last Tuesday. It took out one of the giant screens and ripped out a stretch of the heavy metal railings around the ground. There had been four days of torrential rain and flash floods since, and a lot of the surrounding towns have been without power.

The small team of staff have since been working around the clock, and the entire ground is being powered by temporary generators. But in the end the only real hitch was that they could have shifted a few more tickets. The high prices meant there were a few too many empty seats.

The people who did turn up



▲ *The Stetsons were on show for the opening game just outside Dallas*

enjoyed a real treat. USA were heavy favourites given that they had recently won a series against Canada 4-0, and another against Bangladesh 2-1, but their bowlers seemed to be experiencing a few first-night nerves. Canada rattled off 40 runs from the opening four overs after being put in to bat. Their opener Aaron Johnson thrashed Muhammad Ali Khan's very first ball for four. He scored three more in four balls of Khan's second over, with four more in byes off a bouncer that ricocheted off his helmet.

Johnson was caught at long-off but his opening partner, Navneet Dhaliwhal, pressed on. He walloped the first six of the tournament off the former India under-19 player Harmeet Singh.

Dhaliwhal was joined by Nicholas Kirton in an entertaining 62-run stand for the fourth wicket. Kirton, who has quick hands and a handsome drive, collared a couple of crisp sixes over cover. Corey Anderson had Dhaliwhal caught at long-off with the first ball he bowled. Still, Kirton went on to make 51, and Canada's total of 194 looked pretty daunting.

Especially when USA were 40 for one after the first six overs, with opener Steven Taylor out lbw to the second ball of the innings. But that only brought in Jones. He put on 131 for the third wicket with Andries Gous.

Jones's fifty came off just 22 balls. It was ferocious going, and it rattled Canada. The game turned in the 14th over, when they brought their fast bowler Jeremy Gordon back into the attack. His first two overs cost only 11, but his third was studded with three sixes, two fours, three wides, and a catch off a no ball, and went for 33. USA romped home from there.

So there were a few more Stetsons in the crowd, a heap more smoked brisket on sale, the stadium announcer had a southern twang, and if you looked hard enough there were one or two clues around the ground fit for the occasion, like the scoreboard listing the "balls" and "strikes" hanging from the balcony, and the Spanish translations on the signage ("*Este Alerta! Cuidado con las pelotas*!"). Mainly, though, it will just go down as a great game of T20 cricket, lit up by Jones's extraordinary batting.

West Indies avoid upset

Roston Chase steered West Indies through a nervy chase in their opener in Guyana, seeing off a brave effort by Papua New Guinea. Chase made an unbeaten 42 off 27 balls as the tournament co-hosts sealed a five-wicket win with an over to spare, but it was not plain sailing as they chased down a modest target of 137 built around a knock of 50 from Sese Bau for the world's 20th-ranked side. When Sherfane Rutherford fell off the final ball of the 16th over, his side still needed 40 runs off the last four overs. However, Chase kept his cool as he finished things off in relative comfort, hitting four boundaries and a six in his last seven deliveries in a dramatic gear shift. PA Media

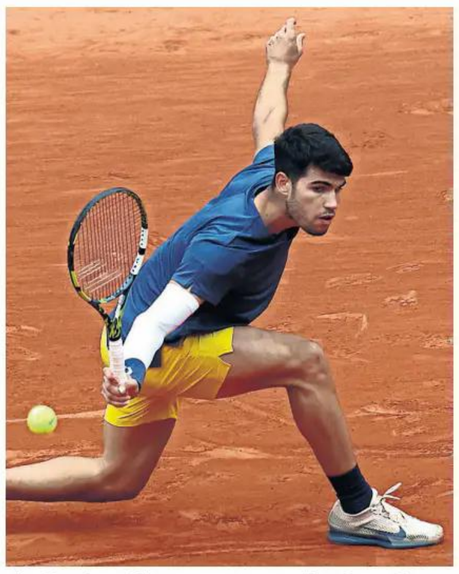
Swiatek stolls into quarter-finals after punishing Potapova

Tumaini Carayol
Roland Garros

After an opening week defined by Iga Swiatek's grit, as she saved match point and recovered from the brink of defeat against a resurgent Naomi Osaka in her second-round match, the Pole's bakery reopened with ruthless efficiency yesterday as the best player in the world demolished Anastasia Potapova 6-0, 6-0 to return to the French Open quarter-finals.

Even in matches with such emphatic scorelines, the final result is not always reflective of how competitive some can be. Sometimes the games are tight but the superior player wins the points that matter.

This was not one of those matches. Across only 40 minutes, Swiatek destroyed the 41st-best female tennis player in the world. It was the shortest completed match of Swiatek's career and Potapova won only 10 points. The Russian did not contest a deuce game and the closest she came to winning a game was at 30-30 in the second game. It was about as dominant a win as can be seen at grand-slam level.



▲ *Carlos Alcaraz secured a 6-3, 6-3, 6-1 win over Félix Auger-Aliassime*

"Comfortable," Swiatek said, describing what it feels like to be in the zone. "You just go with it because there's no point of changing anything. You just continue what you've been doing and what has been working. But I was always focusing on the next point. I didn't really look at what happened before. So that was probably also why I could be efficient."

This is the fourth consecutive year that Swiatek has inflicted a double bagel on an opponent during the clay season and the second 6-0, 6-0 scoreline of her career at Roland Garros. Such is her notoriety for dismantling opponents, players following Swiatek on court now have to make sure they begin their warm-up routines early.

"Usually if you're after her, you know it's probably going to be a quick match," said Coco Gauff, who followed Swiatek on to Court Philippe-Chatrier. "So I figured the match would probably go an hour 15, an hour at the quickest. I definitely wasn't expecting 40 minutes."

As Swiatek continued her search for a third consecutive French Open title, she was joined in the quarter-finals by the highest seeded players in the top half of the draw. She will next face Marketa Vondrousova, the Wimbledon champion and fifth seed, who defeated Olga Danilovic 6-4, 6-2. Gauff, the third seed, also won comfortably, beating Elisabetta Cocciaretto 6-1, 6-2, and she will face a resurgent Ons Jabeur, seeded eighth, who defeated Clara Tauson 6-4, 6-4.

In the men's draw the third seed, Carlos Alcaraz, beat Félix Auger-Aliassime, the 21st seed, 6-3, 6-3, 6-1 to reach the quarter-finals. He will face the ninth seed, Stefanos Tsitsipas, who defeated Matteo Arnaldi 3-6, 7-6 (4), 6-2, 6-2. Arnaldi had served for a two-set lead at 5-4 in the second set before Tsitsipas retrieved the break and took control.

A tough match awaits Tsitsipas, who has not been able to solve the challenge of facing Alcaraz so far in his career. The Spaniard leads the head-to-head 5-0. Right after his fourth-round win, Alcaraz said he knew the key to defeating Tsitsipas.

"The matches that we've played, I won all of them," he said. "So that's what I wanted to mean when I said that I have the key against him. It doesn't mean I have to play at my 50%. So I know that Stefanos is playing great, but I know tactically what I have to do in the match, which I'm not going to say, obviously."

While most top male players avoid doubles because of the best-of-five-sets singles format, this week Tsitsipas committed to the triple crown in Paris. In addition to entering the doubles draw with his brother, Petros, he has also entered the mixed doubles draw with his girlfriend, Paula Badosa.

Tsitsipas said in recent days: "Playing doubles and mixed doubles, it is something that you think: 'No one does it. Why should you do it? I [am] in a phase of my life where tennis brings me joy, and [I] want to be here and spend time with loved ones, but also focus professionally."

Yesterday evening, Jannik Sinner, the second seed, recovered from a set and a break down to reach the quarter-finals with a 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-1 win over Corentin Moutet, the last Frenchman in the draw.



Swiatek surges to quickfire victory

Iga Swiatek needed just 40 minutes, the shortest match of her career, to defeat Anastasia Potapova

CLIVE BRUNSKILL/ GETTY IMAGES

'Now or never' for Murray brothers at Wimbledon

Tumaini Carayol
Roland Garros

Jamie Murray believes it may be a case of "now or never" for him and his brother, Andy, to fulfil their goal of competing together in the men's doubles at Wimbledon in what could be Andy's final appearance there.

"It would obviously be really cool to do it," Jamie said. "It's something that we probably wanted to do at some point in our career and maybe now is the only opportunity to do it. So maybe it's a case of now or never, but yeah, we'll see. [We] need to figure out what's going to happen first and then go from there."

While Andy had joked that his brother might opt to play with a "good partner" instead of him, Jamie said that it was actually his idea to play together. "I asked [Andy] if he wanted to play and it's not necessarily an easy decision for him to commit to playing the doubles," Jamie said.

"Also with me, he knows obviously I want to play and do my best and play as long as we can. So I think that's never an easy decision for him."

Jamie takes up his new role as the tournament director of Queen's Club this month, meaning the 38-year-old will be off the tour for the first two weeks of the grass season. His regular partner, Michael Venus of New Zealand, will compete with Britain's Neal Skupski during the grass season. Andy has said he is unlikely to play after the summer, but the 37-year-old has not fully confirmed his retirement or a date.

The Murray brothers have never competed together at Wimbledon, but in 2015 they teamed up to win every doubles match during Great Britain's Davis Cup title run.



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Rugby union

Russell in form to conduct Bath's push for glory

Fly-half can pull strings when club take on Northampton at Twickenham looking for a first league title in 28 years

Robert Kitson

The finale to the English club season almost feels like a throwback to another era. On Saturday Bath will seek to claim their first league title since 1996 while Northampton's solitary Premiership title was won 10 years ago. Add in a near-capacity crowd for a domestic Twickenham final - attendances have been on the wane in recent times - and it has all the makings of a cracking occasion.

Bath, in particular, are daring to dream that decades of frustration could be almost over. Two years ago they finished bottom of the league but the 31-23 semi-final win against Sale on Saturday was the latest example of their bench strength and increasing ability to tough out tight games. In Finn Russell at fly-half they also have a conductor who relishes big occasions.

There are plenty of other influential figures in Bath's rise - the well-organised director of rugby, Johann van Graan, the captain, Ben Spencer, and the long-striding flanker Ted Hill deserve a mention - but Russell has brought a more upbeat tempo and revitalised the club's previously discordant orchestra. As he has proved with Scotland in recent times, Twickenham is also a venue where he has enjoyed some success.

No wonder the television cameras caught the Bath owner, Bruce Craig, murmuring his approval - "I think he's worth my money" - as Russell put the finishing touches to a kicking display which brought him 16 points to see off a Sale team who, at times, looked capable of forcing their way to a second consecutive final. When Bath were in their trophy-winning pomp they had gifted controllers at No 10 in the shape of Stuart Barnes and Mike Catt and Russell is regarded by his half-back partner Spencer as similarly influential.

"He is an unbelievable rugby player," Spencer said. "There is a calmness and a class about him that oozes through the team. He allows boys to be themselves and what he has added to this group this year has been unbelievable. He gives boys so much confidence. You watch his highlights reel and you see the crossfield kicks and the big long passes but underneath that is a really strong defensive game. He reads the game so well."

It is just as well for all concerned, then, that Russell made such a speedy recovery from a groin injury sustained against Exeter in early April and is available for the knockout stages. "On days like this you need your No 10 to shine," Van Graan said. "What Finn and Rory Murray, the head of medical, went through to get him back on to the pitch, that's no easy feat."

It sets up a showdown between the 31-year-old and his near namesake, Northampton's young fly-half Fin Smith. The latter was named last week as players' player of the season and is a strong contender to start at 10 for England. With Owen Farrell nursing a quad muscle injury it was the 22-year-old Smith who helped Saints to put away Saracens at Franklin's Gardens and steer his side to their first Premiership final since 2014.

Both finalists, though, will also be aware of the importance of set-piece superiority and defence, with the Northampton centre Fraser Dingwall admitting his team's attack had not fired particularly well against Sarries. "I don't think we were at our best," Dingwall said. "We won because our defence and our set piece was really good and then we took our opportunities. We didn't create as much as we normally would, which you can say is credit to Sarries."

Dingwall, however, believes Saints now have a rising sense of belief having topped the regular-season league and reached the Champions Cup semi-final this season. "This year we have faced so many challenges and so many big occasions that we have belief in this group about what we are capable of."

The Rugby Football Union is awaiting further information from Sale and Bath regarding incidents in the stands during the game on Saturday. A 28-year-old male supporter was left with a cut above an eye and had his sunglasses broken after a post-match altercation with Sale's non-playing England lock Jonny Hill and there were complaints of alcohol-fuelled abuse of visiting fans. Both clubs say their investigations are continuing.



Finn Russell kicked 16 points against Sale

Racing

City of Troy reaches career crossroads after Derby triumph

Greg Wood

City Of Troy has a binary form line of 111-01 after his smooth and comprehensive success in the Derby at Epsom on Saturday, and when his racing career concludes - hopefully in November 2025, but perhaps more plausibly in five months' time - the zero in the 2,000 Guineas last month may well prove to have been every bit as significant as any of the ones.

There is an alternate reality in which City Of Troy did not get upset in the stalls before the Guineas and remains unbeaten, and in which this column is discussing the pros and cons of sending him to the St Leger at Doncaster in September, the final leg of the Triple Crown.

But he did and he isn't, and as much as many of us would love to see another attempt at the Triple Crown - the atmosphere on Town Moor as Camelot went to post in 2012 was extraordinary - the possibilities for City Of Troy are equally compelling.

The success on Saturday - and City





Of Troy's subsequent anointing by Aidan O'Brien as the best of his 10 Derby winners – was a double-win for the Coolmore Stud syndicate that owns him. They have another exceptional stallion prospect when the time comes, who will earn a huge multiple of Saturday's £800,000 first prize in covering fees before any of his foals even see a track. The effect on his sire Justify's fee, meanwhile, could be just as dramatic.

The path that "the lads" in the syndicate map out for the Derby winner now will be as much about Justify as it is about City Of Troy. The latest star of the Coolmore roster has sired Grade One and Group One winners on dirt and turf in his first two crops, and now has a winner of the most prestigious European Classic.

Justify is well on the way towards being the first dual-purpose stallion of Flat racing's global era, capable of siring high-class middle-distance winners whatever the surface and conditions. The remainder of City Of Troy's career could conceivably complete the process.

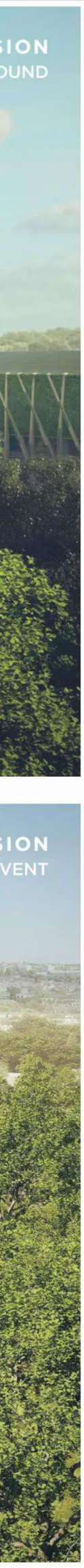
There was talk of a run in the 10-furlong Travers Stakes at Saratoga in August before City Of Troy's flop in the Guineas and the potential payoff from a win in America's "Midsummer Derby", against a field that could well include the Kentucky Derby winner, Mystik Dan, would be huge.

It would be a gamble, of course. There are more traditional targets for a Derby winner, including the Irish Derby, the Eclipse in July, the International Stakes at York in August and, in early September, the Irish Champion Stakes. The Travers, though, is also a natural springboard to the Breeders' Cup Classic, a race that has been unfinished business for Ballydoyle and Coolmore ever since Giant's Causeway's narrow defeat behind Tiznow in a race for the ages nearly a quarter of a century ago.

City Of Troy was quoted at about 8-1 for the Triple Crown before his flop in the Guineas. He is now the same sort of price to become the first horse to win the Derby and the Breeders' Cup Classic, and with all due respect to Doncaster and the St Leger, that would be an achievement to surpass even a Triple Crown.

Greg Wood's tips

Ayr **2.15** Haazeez **2.45** Desert Quest **3.15** Little Empire **3.45** Boy Douglas **4.15** Ayr Poet **4.45** Monhammer
Brighton **2.30** Voltaic **3.00** Mutamanni **3.30** Blenheim Star **4.00** On The Cards **4.30** Oh So Audacious **5.00** Bluebells Boy
Windsor **5.10** Noisy Music **5.45** Cayman Tai **6.15** Gutsy Girl **6.45** Jimmy Speaking (nb) **7.15** Silver Gunn **7.45** Angel On High **8.15** Miss Harmony **8.45** My Ambition
Wetherby **6.30** Unspoken Love **7.00** Night Of Desire **7.30** Glistening Nights **8.00** Yazaman (nap) **8.30** Wintercrack **9.00** Smooth Silesie



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Boxing

Wilder's time at top is over but Dubois' star on the rise

Bryan Armen Graham

Deontay Wilder's career as an elite heavyweight came to a crashing end. For Daniel Dubois, the journey into the top flight is only just beginning. And the unceasing, unsentimental round-and-round of boxing's glamour division turned in dramatic fashion early yesterday morning in the Nafud desert.

Wilder, who held the WBC's version of the heavyweight title from 2015 to 2020, suffered a brutal fifth-round knockout by Zhilei Zhang.

The disastrous defeat for Wilder marked the American's fourth loss in his past five outings and the likely terminus for the 38-year-old widely regarded as boxing's biggest puncher, who had hinted strongly at retirement in the run-up to the fight at Riyadh's Kingdom Arena.

"I have to pay attention to his right hand, but I took his right hand away," Zhang said through a translator. "I block a few punches, but he punches hard. I give him a lot of respect."

Zhang – the 41-year-old fighter from China's Henan province based in the suburbs of Newark, New Jersey – was coming off a December setback against Joseph Parker where he lost on points despite scoring two knockdowns. But he spent the opening four rounds yesterday pressing a weight advantage of 68lb and walking down Wilder, who appeared a shadow of the knockout artist who raced to a record of 40 wins in 40 fights with 39 coming inside the distance before the first instalment of his heavyweight title trilogy with Tyson Fury in 2018.

Wilder roused from his slumber early in the fifth, landing a pair of wild right hands, but the abrupt offensive created openings. Within moments Zhang had spun Wilder 180 degrees with a lead right hook that left the American stunned before following it up with a free shot: a second right hook that dumped Wilder on the seat of his trunks. He managed to beat the 10 count but he was out on his feet and the referee, Kieran McCann, stopped it at the 1min 51sec mark.

"I lost to Parker," Zhang said. "He was a better man that night. But I learned a lot from that fight, because after I knocked out Joe Joyce [twice in 2023] I was overconfident and I underestimated Parker. So I learned that I had to stay focused. As long as the bell doesn't ring, stay focused."

The mostly dull affair, at least until the denouement, was in contrast with the melee before it, when Dubois took a stride towards a heavyweight title shot with an eighth-round stoppage of Filip Hrgovic, a 2016 Olympic bronze medallist and the IBF's mandatory challenger.

Dubois, a 26-year-old from south-east London who lost by ninth-round knockout against Oleksandr Usyk in August, absorbed heaps of punishment in the opening rounds as Hrgovic found consistent purchase with one right hand after another. But the 31-year-old Croatian was cut over his right eye in the second round and over his left in the fifth and his conditioning wilted.

By the seventh Dubois was stalking Hrgovic around the ring, landing blows. Hrgovic, whose white trunks had faded to an ominous pink, was badly hurt by a right hand near the end of the frame, then a pair of shots along the ropes that might have closed the show if not for the bell.

Dubois picked up where he left off in the eighth but it wasn't long before the referee, John Latham, called time, summoning the ringside physician to inspect Hrgovic's wounds. When the doctor proved unsatisfied, Latham waved the fight off and Dubois had recorded the best win of his career.

"I ate them shots, but it was all to wake me up," Dubois said of his sluggish start. "Once I've felt a few shots, a few stings, I woke up and I was just on it … I'm just so proud of myself for this. It's all a learning experience. I've come from rock bottom last year and now we're back on top."

The heavy-handed Briton, nicknamed Dynamite, claimed the IBF's interim heavyweight title with his win. Dubois could move into a showdown with Anthony Joshua, who took in the action yesterday from ringside. Dubois said: "I've heard the next opponent will be AJ, so bring it on."



Zhilei Zhang goes on the attack against Deontay Wilder

Family and friends salute Burrow's 'love, spirit and bravery'

Aaron Bower

Rob Burrow, the former rugby league player who came to national attention after his diagnosis with motor neurone disease, has died at the age of 41 following a short illness.

Burrow, one of the modern era's great players who won every domestic honour available throughout a stellar playing career with Leeds as well as being capped by both England and Great Britain, was diagnosed with the condition in 2019 and helped inspire almost £20m in fundraising to support people living with MND.

In a statement, Leeds said: "Rob inspired the entire country with his brave battle against motor neurone disease since his diagnosis.

"He passed away peacefully at Pinderfields Hospital near his home surrounded by his loving family after becoming ill earlier this week."

The Burrow family added in their own statement: "His determination and spirit in the face of MND over the last four and a half years came as no surprise. Rob never accepted that he couldn't do something, he just found his own way of doing it better than anyone else. He will continue to inspire us all every day."

Alongside his close friend and former teammate Kevin Sinfield, the pair raised the condition in the national consciousness. After his diagnosis, Burrow and his family raised awareness plus millions of pounds for the MND community, including the foundation of the Rob Burrow Leeds Marathon in 2023.

> *'He taught us: in a world full of adversity, we must dare to dream'*
>
> **The Prince of Wales**
> *Presented CBE to Burrow*

That significant fundraising also included £6m to build the Rob Burrow Centre for MND in Leeds, to help support people living with the disease. The breaking of the ground on that facility is due to take place today.

After making his debut for Leeds in 2001, Burrow went on to become one of the most important players in the club's history. A member of the Rhinos' golden generation, he was instrumental in helping Leeds end their 32-year wait for a league championship with victory in the 2004 Super League Grand Final.

He went on to win eight Super League titles, perhaps the most notable of which was in 2011 against St Helens when he scored what is still regarded as the greatest try in Grand Final history. He also helped Leeds win the treble in 2015 and in 2017, in his final match as a player, he helped the Rhinos defeat Castleford in the league showpiece at Old Trafford.

Burrow made 492 appearances for Leeds, placing him fifth in the club's all-time appearance list. He was capped five times by Great Britain, 15 by England and won the Challenge Cup in 2014 and 2015, as well as the World Club Challenge on three occasions. He remains one of the modern era's most decorated players.

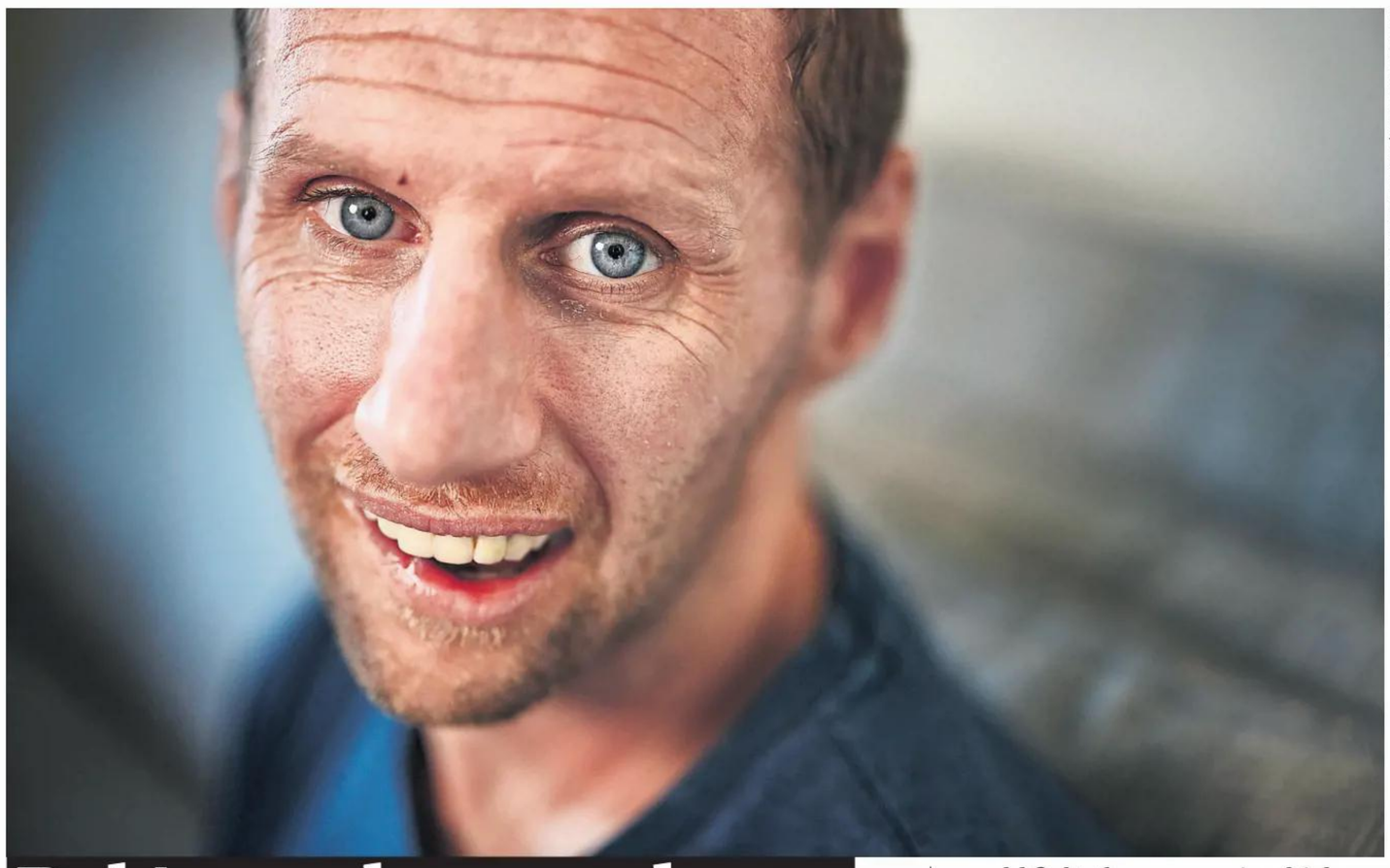
The Prince of Wales, who presented CBEs to Burrow and Sinfield in January, saluted "a legend of rugby league" on social media, adding: "Rob Burrow had a huge heart. He taught us 'in a world full of adversity, we must dare to dream'."

Burrow's former Rhinos teammate Barrie McDermott, who has also played a part in fundraising for the MND community, said on X: "He was brave beyond words in those last few months, he has taught me so much about courage, kindness and love."

The Motor Neurone Disease Association, for whom Burrow was a patron, said it was "incredibly grateful to Rob and his family for helping to raise awareness of MND, and funds for the Association, by sharing the details of their journey and by inspiring so many people both within the MND community and the wider public."



▲ *Rob Burrow lifts the Super League trophy alongside (left of centre) Kevin Sinfield after Leeds win the 2015 Grand Final* CLIVE BRUNSKILL/GETTY IMAGES



CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/THE GUARDIAN

Rob's words were always more tender than sombre

Continued *from back page*

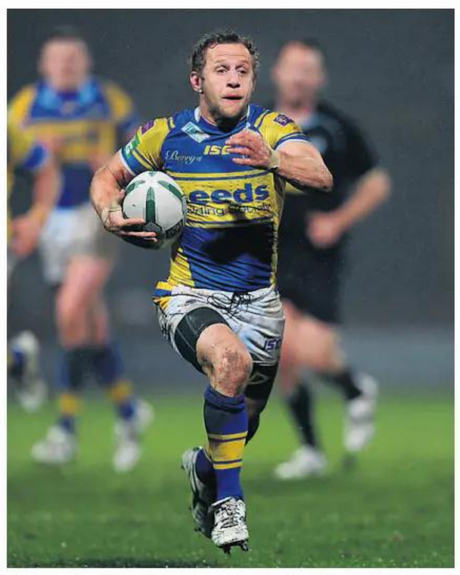
16 months after he had been told he had less than two years to live, Rob and I were able to talk. It was an exhausting process for him but he was determined to complete our interview. We had three sessions over two weeks and, as he reflected on the meaning of his life and looming death, Rob also spent many hours using Eyegaze to email me his more complex replies. The interview ran as an amalgam of his "live" answers via Eyegaze and his emailed insights.

The first were much shorter, of course, but they were moving. "I appreciate the simple things," Rob's voice said as it boomed out of the computer. "I don't have a bucket list because I've had such a wonderful life. However, I want to make the most of the time I have left."

It took him almost 10 minutes to formulate that answer - which gave me an insight into how testing life had become for Rob. And then I would wake to some extraordinary emails, which amplified those thoughts, as Rob had spent so much time on his own to add texture and depth to his replies.

"I have changed my opinion about living in the moment," he wrote to me late one night. "Since my diagnosis I see the moment as it is and find meaning in it. When the kids are playing in the garden or purely having fun, it makes me appreciate the moment. One day, before I know it, I won't be able to enjoy these timeless moments. When I tell Lindsey and the kids I love them, you never know how far you are from telling them that for the last time."

Rob was only 41 when he died. He and Lindsey had been together, apart from a brief break when she was at university, since they were 15. It was an immense love story that became even more moving in the often harrowing last year of his life. Lindsey's care never wavered.



▲ *Rob Burrow carries the battle to London Broncos in April 2013*

I have been to their home often in recent months and, as it became increasingly difficult for Rob to swallow even mashed food, Lindsey still found ways to help him. She maintained her steady source of good cheer, talking brightly or gently to Rob, even though he was too frail and exhausted to respond with much more than a "Yes" or a "No" on the Eyegaze machine.

But a flickering fire still burned inside him. He wanted to live as long as possible. Rob always said that he would accept the diagnosis of MND, a disease of almost unbearable cruelty, but that he would fight the prognosis which, on that terrible day in December 2019, told him that he could only expect to live for another 18 months or, at most, two years.

In the end, Rob lived for more than four and a half years. In that time he won awards and he was loved and exalted even more than when he played for Leeds. But, far more importantly, he loved every day that he saw his three young children - Macy, Maya and Jackson - run across to him with such love and life. They are pretty amazing kids and it says so much for Rob, and Lindsey, that they have flourished despite their dad being in the merciless grip of MND.

Lindsey messaged me last Tuesday evening to tell me that Rob had been hospitalised with pneumonia. She said she was trying to remain positive but she knew how ill he had become. It was a distressing echo of the events of last summer when she had feared that a different bout of pneumonia would hasten the end of Rob's life. But he rallied then and was able to return home.

His recovery made me think of what he had once told me about his rugby league career. "I played to my strengths," Rob said. "I had speed and agility. I didn't try to be anything I wasn't. I never had any doubts. I'm tougher than I look."

He almost laughed when he said those words but the sound was trapped in his body.

The mighty Rob Burrow was one of the most extraordinary men I have met. He was definitely the toughest. But when I heard yesterday that death had finally come for him, offering a merciful release after he had suffered so long, I also thought how he had told me of his good fortune.

Death was never far from our conversations but Rob's words were always more tender than they were sombre. The breath caught in the back of my throat when he wrote this line: "There's something beautiful about being cared for by the only girl you've ever loved."

Lindsey was with Rob until the very end, showing him the love and the care that had sustained him so long.

8

*The **number of Super League** titles that Rob Burrow won during his 16-year career with Leeds*

492

*The **number of appearances** Burrow made for Leeds, with his debut against Hull in 2001*

Scotland

Injury-hit Clarke urges caution over teenager Doak

Ewan Murray

Scotland's manager, Steve Clarke, has warned that a mini-crisis in attack before Euro 2024 should not fuel excitement over a prominent role for Ben Doak. The Liverpool teenager could make his Scotland debut from the bench during the friendly against Gibraltar today after receiving a surprise call-up last month.

The ankle injury sustained in training on Friday by Lyndon Dykes has left Clarke with two recognised strikers, Che Adams and Lawrence Shankland, for the finals in Germany. He will take a few days to decide whether to call up another forward – the Under-21 player Tommy Conway is the obvious candidate – but is aware Doak played through the middle for underage teams.

Pressed on whether Dykes's situation could open a door for Doak, Clarke urged caution. There has been considerable noise around the 18-year-old since he progressed



▲ *Ben Doak could make his senior Scotland debut against Gibraltar*

through youth teams at Celtic. "Ben is in the squad to gain experience, to work with us," Clarke said. "He has been out [injured] for four and a half months so let's not put too much on Ben. He will be available [for Gibraltar], maybe some minutes off the bench. But let's not overhype or overpush him. Let's do it properly."

Clarke seemed especially upset for Dykes, whom he convinced to play for Scotland rather than Australia, the country of Dykes's birth. "Nobody replicates what Lyndon brings," Clarke said. "Lyndon brings what he does, what his qualities are. One of the best phone calls I have ever made as head coach of Scotland was to Lyndon, at the very start when he had the option of Scotland or Australia. Since then we have had a great relationship. Lyndon is devastated he is not going. We will certainly miss him."

Dykes joins Aaron Hickey, Nathan Patterson, Lewis Ferguson and Jacob Brown as Scotland players who would be on the plane to Germany but for injury. "'I was reliably informed that every squad can expect two injuries," Clarke said. "I think five is a bit much, so hopefully that's the end of it."

Scott McTominay, John Souttar and Stuart Armstrong will not play against Gibraltar as they recover from knocks. Clarke hopes they can return for Finland's visit to Glasgow on Friday but the world's 203rd-ranked side will face an unfamiliar Scotland. "We have guys who need minutes on the pitch," Clarke said.

Clarke believes his squad has benefited from an extended training camp at home before the tournament. Scotland's last finals appearance, in 2021, was against the backdrop of the Covid pandemic. "We are around and can feel the excitement building, even just from the people watching from the hill behind Lesser Hampden as we train," he said. "There was a guy half-naked hanging out his window watching from one of the flats the other day. Not such a pretty sight, but everybody wants a little bit of it. You can feel that."

In brief

Everton

Campbell seriously ill in hospital, Blues report

Everton have sent their support to their former striker Kevin Campbell after it emerged the 54-year-old is seriously ill in hospital. It is understood Campbell, who became a fan favourite playing for the club between 1999 and 2005 having won a league title with Arsenal, became unwell last week. "Our former striker Kevin Campbell is currently very unwell," Everton said in a statement posted on X. "Not just a great footballer but an incredible person, Kevin is, and always has been, a fighter and we wish him and his family well at this challenging time." **PA Media**

Fenerbahce

'I do like challenges': Mourinho seals move

José Mourinho has been confirmed as the new manager at Fenerbahce. The club posted an image on social media featuring the 61-year-old former Chelsea, Manchester United and Tottenham manager with the words: "The Special One. Welcome to Fenerbahce." Mourinho was working as a television pundit at the Champions League final at Wembley on Saturday where he discussed the difficulty the club faces trying to qualify. "They have three rounds of qualifying and eight players at the Euros, so they are not back for pre-season before the first round. But you know that I do like challenges." **PA Media**

United States

New manager Hayes makes winning start

Emma Hayes celebrated a solid start to her reign as United States manager after a thumping 4-0 win over South Korea but conceded there was "lots of work to do". Doubles from Mallory Swanson and Tierna Davidson secured victory for the former Chelsea manager in front of a sold-out crowd of 19,010 in Colorado. The four-time Olympic champions are building towards this summer's Paris Games, which begin late next month. "I think you can see we're building something," Hayes told ESPN. "There's lots of holes in our play, no question, but it was a good start." **PA Media**



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No ifs, no buts, this Madrid team rank alongside Di Stéfano's as the greatest ever

Six European Cups in a decade is a feat to match even that seemingly untouchable golden age of 1956-60

Sid Lowe



Dani Carvajal laid the first stone and applied the final brush stroke. In May 2004, when he was a 12-year-old kid with floppy blond hair and a lifetime before him, he placed Real Madrid's white shirt into the foundations of their training ground, a new home for an institution that, the legend carved into that granite slab said, "respects its past, learns from its present and believes in its future". On the first day of June 2024, now a 32-year-old man with a greying beard and a history behind him, he was in Madrid colours at Wembley, leaping to head in the goal that helped secure their greatest work of all.

Twenty years had passed almost to the day, and it was done. How much longer before anyone witnesses this again, if they do? That day Carvajal, an *infantil* in the academy, stood alongside a 77-year-old Alfredo Di Stéfano, the most significant player whom club football has had, a symbol of their everything; the man whose arrival in 1953 changed Madrid and the game for ever, forging their legend, an identity. Now, when it comes to the European Cup, the competition in which they did it and feel as their own, Carvajal stands above him. Even saying it sounds absurd, a glimpse of what has just happened.

No one has won this competition more times. A tiny, select group have won it as many. Five men have lifted the European Cup six times and three of them are Carvajal's teammates: on Saturday he, Luka Modric, Nacho Fernández and Toni Kroos joined Paco Gento, whose seemingly impossible feat has taken 58 years, and one prodigious decade, to match. Carvajal is the only one of this generation to have started all six finals, although he was forced off early in two, his tears there adding poignancy to the goal that pulled them through here.

"I came as a kid and now I'm here," he said. "It is going to be very hard for this [record] to be taken away from us."

There were many images, words and moments to hold on to at the end of Real Madrid's 15th - *fifteenth* - European Cup. Kroos leaving like *that*. Vinícius Júnior scoring another Champions League final goal, at 23: "Ballon d'Or, no doubt," Carlo Ancelotti, the Madrid manager, said. Jude Bellingham, winning the trophy for the first time, aged 20, who said he was holding it together until he saw his mum's and dad's faces. Ancelotti intervening again, with calm clarity. "He knows what he is doing," Bellingham had said. There was the way they did it, which is their way, a story seen before. They had been let off alive, Ancelotti admitted, but they had done it.

'It seems that in these games we're not able to lose. To be level with Paco Gento is crazy'

You didn't seriously think they wouldn't, did you? They have not lost a final in the competition since 1981: played nine, won nine. "It seems that in these games, we're not able to lose," Kroos said. "To be level with Gento is crazy, something I never thought I am going to achieve."

Through all those images, those little vignettes, there was that basic fact, the thing it all built to, that expresses the enormity of this: Real Madrid had just won their 15th European Cup. Now they will ask for the 16th, Ancelotti was told, to which he started laughing. When he eventually stopped, he replied: "It is like that." As if to prove the point, the president, Florentino Pérez, then said exactly that and this week he will announce Kylian Mbappé's arrival. But it is a stock phrase. That's tomorrow and this is now, and always. Forget the next one, at least for a while. Stop. Take it in. Don't look forward, look back.

Because this is about emulating the eternal, surpassing it even, less perhaps about the 15th than about it being Madrid's sixth in 10 years: from Lisbon to London, 2014 to 2024. No one has ever done this, except them. Four of this team have won as many European Cups as Liverpool, never mind Gento, the only Madrid player who won their first five European Cups, from 1956-60, and their sixth in 1966.

The '66 team, known as the Madrid of the Ye-Ye, a transliteration of the chorus from the Beatles' *She Loves You*, stood apart, an outlier. Madrid had been knocked out for the first time in 1960 - by Barcelona - and lost the finals in 1962 and 1964. Di Stéfano had gone and economically they were not in good health. The team that beat Partizan in the 1966 final was made up entirely of Spaniards.

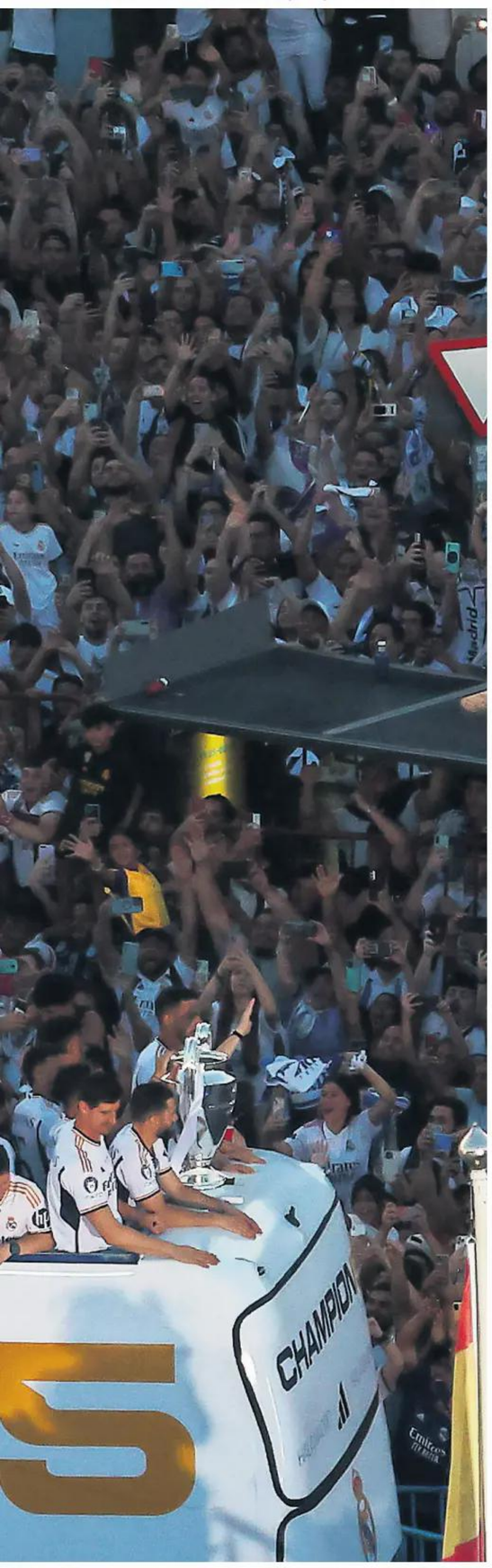
If that contributes to this current side perhaps not being seen as emulating Madrid's golden generation, embodied by winning the first five European Cups rather than six in the opening decade, there are other elements too. That team built Madrid's identity and comes with an aura of invincibility, of dominance, an imperious march to the title, that this generation may not match. Instead there is the implausibility of these successes: the miracles, the fortune, the goalkeepers suddenly losing their minds, the plain silliness of some of their wins. Even they agreed 2022 was pretty ridiculous. When they were defeated 4-0 by Manchester City the following year in the semi-final second leg, some saw it as justice and the end.

"There's always a 'but'," Ancelotti has said. Rodrygo admitted recently that Manchester City were "better" than them. In this final, again they were made to suffer. The run from 2014 began in the season in which Atlético Madrid



▲ *Alfredo Di Stéfano (right) scores Madrid's opening goal in the 7-3 final win over Frankfurt in 1960 - their fifth successive European Cup triumph* AP

▼ *Real Madrid show off the Champions League trophy to their fans in the Spanish capital*
PIERRE-PHILIPPE MARCOU/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



were domestic champions, and in the final it took a 93rd-minute equaliser and an extra-time barrage to beat them. In two of the three they won in a row between 2016 and 2018, Barcelona were La Liga champions and that, Madrid's then coach Zinedine Zidane admitted, was the most objective test, the title he most valued.

And yet as Kroos said after that elimination in Manchester: "It is not normal to win the Champions League all the time. The last time I heard it was the end of an era was 2019, so we're OK." He was right, they were OK; better than that, better than anyone. No buts, this is inescapable: six European Cups in a decade, an achievement to match any, even that one, untouchable in black and white. Sometimes you need to step back from the history you're making to see that you're making it. Time changes perceptions, of this era and that one; the past is seen differently and one day this will be the past and it will be glorious.

That Madrid of the 50s and 60s were not unbeatable either but nothing is taken from their achievements and nor should it be. Ferenc Puskas once recalled that Barcelona's Hungarians would wind him up because they seemed to be able to "do us whenever they wanted". During the first five years that Madrid won the European Cup, they were Spanish champions twice; Athletic and Barcelona won the league three times between them. When they won the sixth, Atlético won the league. Five teams - Athletic, Barcelona, Atlético, Deportivo, Valencia - have been champions of Spain when Madrid have been champions of Europe.

But so what? Six in a decade, for goodness' sake. And this Madrid have a *better* league record than the golden generation. Madrid: European champions. It's started to look obvious, feel inevitable, when it is not. After 1966, Madrid went 32 years without lifting the trophy that makes them. They won it again in 2000 and 2002, although from the seventh to the ninth, those were different looking teams and different eras, only Roberto Carlos, Raúl and Fernando Morientes starting all three finals, with Zidane scoring *that* iconic volley at the end of his debut season.

The *galácticos* had come, glory assured. But they got stuck. The 10th tortured them; the *décima* became an obsession and it resisted them for more than a decade. Six years in a row, they didn't manage to win a knockout game. Twelve years they waited, which felt like an eternity, and eventually reached the final in 2014. With the clock on 92.48 they were losing, and to Atlético of all teams: that Sergio Ramos header is surely the single most sliding-doors moment in their history. "Every morning when he comes in, I feel like kissing him," Paul Clement, Ancelotti's assistant, said. The most traumatic of ends awaited them, everything about to be ripped up.

Instead, it was the beginning. Madrid had the 10th. Two years later they had the 11th, then the 12th and the 13th in a row, which was extraordinary enough. That cycle appeared to be closing. Players went - Cristiano Ronaldo, Ramos, Gareth Bale, Casemiro, Raphaël Varane - and so did the coaches. Ancelotti had been sacked within a year and then Zidane - who had begun as his assistant and was now the competition's most successful manager - departed.

Madrid were struggling to find a replacement. One day José Ángel Sánchez, the director general, received a call from Ancelotti about the possibility of Everton taking Madrid players on loan. At one point the Italian asked him how the search was going. Not good, he was told. To which Ancelotti joked, well, there is one obvious candidate, the best coach in the world.

Within a day it was done; within three years, Madrid lifted the *decimocuarta* and the *decimoquinta*, the best decade the biggest club of all have had, opening and closing with the competition's most successful manager on the bench and four of its five most successful players on the pitch. The kid who had laid the first stone 20 years earlier provided the final touch, their work complete.

Real switch

Mbappé set to complete move to Bernabéu

Sid Lowe

Real Madrid intend to announce the signing of Kylian Mbappé on a free transfer early this week. The France striker confirmed last month that he was leaving Paris Saint-Germain after seven years - and his mother, Fayza Lamari, has admitted he will be going "where everybody knows" - but there has not been a formal announcement of his destination.

Madrid wanted to wait until their season was over before releasing a public statement. With a 15th Champions League title secured and the France coach, Didier Deschamps, saying he wanted his captain's future resolved before Euro 2024, Real Madrid are finally in a position to make the announcement, which the club hope will come today.

They do not anticipate being able to present Mbappé until mid-July because France are preparing for the European Championship. It remains to be seen whether Mbappé will also participate at the Olympics in Paris.

After the Champions League final at Wembley on Saturday, Carlo Ancelotti refused to be drawn on Mbappé's arrival, saying he would not talk about any players not in Madrid's squad, but Jude Bellingham said the forward would "take us to the next level". Mbappé's arrival will close a seven-year pursuit by Madrid, and has been the worst-kept secret in football. The 25-year-old forward has reached the end of his contract, meaning PSG will lose on a free transfer a player for whom they rejected a €200m offer from Madrid in 2021.

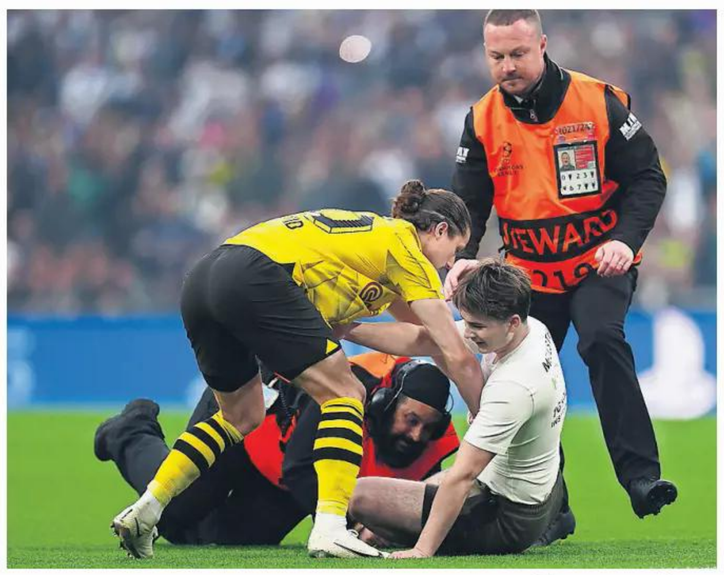
Mbappé departs PSG having not secured a Champions League title in France, and instead joins the record winners.

Florentino Pérez, the Real Madrid president, was delighted to see the club continue their "love story" with the Champions League after their win on Saturday. "This is a love story between Real Madrid and the European Cup," he told Movistar.

"It's a magnificent night because this competition is the one we like the most."



▲ *Kylian Mbappé is leaving Paris Saint-Germain on a free transfer*



◀ *A pitch invader is tackled by Borussia Dortmund's Marcel Sabitzer and stewards at Wembley*
MIKE EGERTON/PA

FA: security at final was a success despite incidents

Three charged after pitch invasion but ticketless fans said to have been kept out

David Hytner

The Football Association has insisted that the massive security operation for the Champions League final between Real Madrid and Borussia Dortmund on Saturday night was a success, particularly in terms of keeping out ticketless fans who tried to storm the Wembley gates.

The biggest game in European club football was marred at the outset by three men invading the pitch. The first got close enough to the Madrid forward Vinícius Júnior to take a selfie and the last was bundled away by stewards with the Dortmund midfielder Marcel Sabitzer lending a hand. The Metropolitan police said that three people have been charged with invading the pitch - Yevhenii Lubnenko, 29, David Carneckij, 28, and a 16-year-old boy are accused of going on to the playing area at a football match contrary to Section 4 of the Football (Offences) Act 1991.

In an echo of the Euro 2020 final at Wembley between England and Italy, there were coordinated attempts by groups of people to rush the turnstiles and gain entry without tickets. The FA invested £5m and oversaw an 18-month operation to beef up Wembley's infrastructure. More than 2,500 stewards were on duty and measures included opening the gates at 4pm - four hours before kick-off.

The major move was the introduction of a hard perimeter ticket check. Fans could get relatively close to the stadium, having maybe been stopped for spot checks because it is not possible to lock down the wider Wembley area. But the FA believes the perimeter worked, pointing to how the most aggressive elements were thwarted. The lessons of the Euro 2020 final were learned, even if tailgating remains a problem to solve.

> ***'The vast majority of fans had a great experience'***
> **Wembley statement**

"Before and during last night's Uefa Champions League final there were several incidents of groups of ticketless individuals trying to enter the stadium," a Wembley statement read. "Our enhanced security operations ensured that these incidents were dealt with robustly and swiftly."

The Metropolitan police updated their arrests figure to 56 yesterday; the majority remain in custody. A/Commander Louise Puddefoot said: "We are confident the overwhelming majority of attempts to unlawfully gain access to Wembley on Saturday were unsuccessful thanks to the efforts of officers, stewards and other stadium staff. Officers made 56 arrests - five for pitch invasion and the majority for attempts to breach security. Videos shared online showing groups running into entrances do not necessarily represent successful attempts to enter the stadium. There are typically multiple further levels of security beyond an initial entrance."

The FA was keen to promote an enjoyable experience for supporters, especially after the mayhem that tainted the 2022 Champions League final between Madrid and Liverpool in Paris and the logistical issues that clung to Istanbul's hosting of the showpiece last season between Manchester City and Internazionale at the out-of-town Ataturk Stadium.

There was a relaxed atmosphere for much of the buildup along Olympic Way and that extended to patience among the hordes who waited along the same stretch after the game for trains back into central London. An FA spokesperson said: "The infrastructure worked well. Transport, fan festivals and the general fan experience were all very positive."

The pitch invasions were a blow. The first two men ran unchecked before departing of their own volition and it seemed to take an age for stewards to apprehend the third. All three were wearing T-shirts which appeared to bear the name of the Belarusian streamer Mellstroy, who was reported to have offered £300,000 to anyone who ran on during the game with his name on their shirt. Additional stewards in hi-vis jackets were deployed around the perimeter of the pitch shortly after.

Dortmund are expected to be charged by Uefa after the club's Ultras created a pyrotechnic wall of flames in the end behind one of the goals at the start of the second half.

Southgate gets Shaw fitness boost before Euro 2024

Continued from back page

who was an unused substitute in Manchester City's defeat by United in the FA Cup final.

Southgate, who also has James Maddison in contention in attacking midfield, delayed after being asked whether the City playmaker was in danger of missing out. "I don't think we're defining that just yet," he said.

"I think we know where we're likely to be. It's hard to be quite so specific because we keep sitting down and saying: 'OK, if it's this or this …' But then somebody else in the room says: 'Yeah, but what about if we lose that player there, or that one doesn't come through with his injury? Do we need another one in this area?' Time is our friend this week."

Grealish's hunger was clear when he reported early for duty last week. "I haven't talked to him specifically about the Cup final," Southgate said. "But he has been really bright and he loves being here. He is a player we enjoy working with and a character we enjoy having within the group."

Southgate, who said he had not thought about using a back three, considered whether there were more threats to Grealish's position this time. "I don't know about more pressure because I think you always at this level are competing with good players. There are a lot of good players in that area of the pitch and they are all competing. We think we know who the best have been across the season. What we don't totally know is how many we need to take or how many we can allow ourselves to take."

The omission of Jordan Henderson and Kalvin Phillips has created an opening alongside Declan Rice and Jude Bellingham in midfield. Southgate is expected to use these friendlies to see whether Trent Alexander-Arnold deserves to start instead of Conor Gallagher, Kobbie Mainoo and the uncapped duo Curtis Jones and Adam Wharton.

"There are a few different options," he said. "Whatever they are is going to be slightly new, different, because we are talking about a player who doesn't play there regularly or a young player who is coming in there to play. We are actually looking forward to working through that."

John Stones, Bukayo Saka and Gordon are not in contention to face Bosnia. The game has come too soon for Stones after the Cup final and Saka and Gordon are being given time to complete recoveries from injury.



▲ *Gareth Southgate will be without John Stones (right) against Bosnia*



Trippier shrugs off injury scare story to lead England at home

Defender handed honour of captaining country at his club stadium tonight with no concerns over his fitness

David Hytner



Every England tournament countdown needs an injury scare story. The thing about the one which Kieran Trippier sparked on the Wednesday before last – from the other side of the world in Australia – was that he was oblivious to it.

Trippier had come off after 37 minutes of Newcastle's post-season friendly against Tottenham in Melbourne, a fixture widely derided for the strain it placed on the players after a gruelling campaign and with Euro 2024 looming. It was a planned substitution as Trippier felt his way back to fitness after only just returning from 10 weeks out with a calf problem, although he joked that his former Spurs teammate Son Heung-min had given him such a test the Newcastle manager, Eddie Howe, had no choice but to remove him. "It felt like I had played 120 minutes," Trippier says. Jet-lag can do this.

So Trippier took his seat on the bench, put some ice on and stuck his leg up. That was when the madness really started. "I got so many messages after the game," he says. "There was no knock. It was precautionary. Because of the flying [to Australia], we didn't train and then to play a high-intensity game against Tottenham …

"I'm not trying to put a bag of ice on, put my leg up and think: 'Right, I want to be in the media.' But the next minute everyone is messaging me saying I'm out of the tournament and this, that and the other. I'm like: 'Am I?!'"

What Trippier wants to make clear is that he is fine or, more likely, as fine as any player can be after a long layoff and only one week of competitive action at the end of the Premier League season in his legs; he played for a total of 73 minutes across Newcastle's final three games.

Which is just as well because England need him. Badly. When Gareth Southgate named his provisional 33-man squad for the European Championship, he included only one specialist left-back in Luke Shaw, who has not played since mid-February because of a muscle injury. Shaw is unlikely to be ready for the beginning of the finals – England kick off against Serbia on the Sunday after next – meaning that Trippier is in line to start at left-back; on his less favoured side.

All eyes will be on Trippier tonight when he leads out England as captain in the warm-up game against Bosnia and Herzegovina at St James' Park – his club stadium – with his son, Jacob, alongside him as the mascot. It will be an extremely special moment and very much of a piece with the recent extremes he has lived, with the timeline of his long-haul trip to Melbourne worth going over.

Trippier and his Newcastle teammates flew from London on Sunday 19 May after the game at Brentford, arriving in Melbourne on the Tuesday morning. It was a recovery day, then play against Spurs, another recovery day, another game against the A-League All-Stars – when Howe played his

'I got so many messages after the game. There was no knock. It was precautionary'



England

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Today 7.45pm

● England	● Bosnia and Herz.
Probable: 4-2-3-1	**Probable: 5-4-1**
Pickford; Konsa, Guéhi, Dunk, Trippier; Alexander-Arnold, Rice; Bowen, Maddison, Palmer; Watkins	Vasilj; Gazibegovic, Ahmedhodzic, Hadzikadunic, Katic, Omerovic; Gigovic, Tahirovic, Hajradinovic, Huseinbasic; Dzeko

Venue St James' Park, Newcastle
TV Channel 4

15°

◀ *England's Kieran Trippier (right) and Adam Wharton train in the buildup to tonight's match*
STU FORSTER/ GETTY IMAGES

youngsters, resting Trippier and the other first-teamers – and then back to the UK.

They arrived just after Manchester United had beaten Manchester City in the FA Cup final, a result that served to bump Newcastle out of next season's Uefa Conference League. Having played in the Champions League over this past season, they will have no European football next time out.

Trippier talked about how he had tried to stay on English time in Australia but it was "difficult". Cue the rueful smile. "It was a good trip," he insisted, even if it was hardly ideal. Trippier can cope. Resilience one of his key attributes. It is why Southgate has described him as a "warrior", why he knows he can count on him – even out of position at left-back where Trippier has played more for England in recent times than Newcastle.

"I would not say it is any different to playing right-back," Trippier says. "I am not left-footed but wherever I play or don't play, I will be ready. I am representing my country so that is the greatest thing and the honour."

At 33, Trippier is one of the squad's elder statesmen, a leader; like the other defenders who Southgate continues to rely on – Kyle Walker, John Stones and Harry Maguire. When the manager named his first tournament lineup – against Tunisia at the 2018 World Cup – he had all four in it, albeit in a back five rather than the four he has come to favour. Trippier started at right wing-back; it was Ashley Young on the left.

Trippier has no problem in saying England can emerge victorious at Euro 2024 and it was interesting to hear him talk about the visitor that the squad had to their training base in Middlesbrough on Saturday – England's 2019 World Cup-winning cricket captain, Ben Stokes. That team famously put the emphasis on taking positive decisions in attack and defence. Their mentality can be an example.

"Ben spoke to us and we took so much from it," Trippier says. "It is the same as we want to do. We want to attack every tournament and attack every game similar to the cricket. He has incredible stories about the setbacks he has had and we can relate that to ourselves."

Barbarez's Bosnia begin bold new era in Newcastle

Team have been in decline for 10 years but the new manager, the fifth since 2022, has a strategy to restore pride

Sasa Ibrulj

Sergej Barbarez has been all over the Bosnian media for the past 40 days. Newspapers, magazines, TV shows, podcasts – he doesn't decline any interviews. Nor does he avoid any questions. He regards this as the first and perhaps the most important part of his job as the new manager of Bosnia and Herzegovina: to make the national team relevant again.

Today the former Bosnia forward's team play England at St James' Park in his first game and his position is clear. "Of course, the results are important," he says. "But at this point, we want to change the perspective of the national team. We want it to be loved again. We want players to feel proud and excited again for playing for their country."

Bosnia and Herzegovina qualified for their first World Cup in 2014, but have been in decline for 10 years. From 13th in the Fifa rankings in August 2013, they have slipped to 74th, failing to qualify for a major tournament since Brazil. Poor performances have gone alongside even worse decisions in the corridors of power. In 2021 Vico Zeljkovic, then a 33-year-old environmental health and safety manager, took over as the football association's president. In his reign, there have been five national team managers.

Faruk Hadzibegic, who started the Euro 2024 qualifying campaign, lasted four games. The national team legend Meho Kodro was sacked after two. The former Aston Villa striker Savo Milosevic got his marching orders after a defeat by Ukraine in the playoffs, in his fifth match. Ivaylo Petev had secured a playoff place after his team won their Nations League group in 2022 but that achievement did not bring the Bulgarian a new contract. Allied to unhappiness over Zeljkovic's leadership style and the state of domestic competition, where there is often talk of corruption that has never been prosecuted or proven, there is a toxic atmosphere around Bosnian football.

Bosnia as a country is deeply divided along ethnic lines and grappling with economic challenges. Politicians, including Zeljkovic's uncle Milorad Dodik, a Bosnian Serb leader, exacerbate tensions with divisive rhetoric, denying genocide in Srebrenica and threatening secession by Republika Srpska. Critics of the Bosnian FA, its president and the way it is run have been many, and one of the loudest was a legendary captain and hero – Barbarez. The shock when Zeljkovic announced Barbarez as the manager in April was immense.

Barbarez had never worked as a coach, despite getting his coaching badges in 2010, two years after finishing his playing career in Germany. It was no secret that his goal was to coach the national side but Zeljkovic had said in 2021 that Barbarez "would not work with the team as long as I am president".

Barbarez, who did not travel with his players to England due to illness but is poised to join them, begins in difficult circumstances. His squad includes nine players with no caps and four with one or two. His options have been diluted by injuries, which contributed to nine players being unavailable, and by the retirement of veterans including Miralem Pjanic. The 38-year-old Edin Dzeko, who scored 25 goals for Fenerbahce this season, is the captain while Barbarez works to build a team around younger players. Sheffield United's Anel Ahmedhodzic, 25, and Red Bull Salzburg's Amar Dedic, 21, will be crucial parts of this process. The Bosnian league has provided only one squad member, the third-choice keeper Osman Hadzikic, so Barbarez's focus is on bringing in talent from the vast diaspora.

Barbarez has poached Sweden's Under-21 captain Armin Gigovic and the former Rangers defender Nikola Katic, who switched nationality from Croatia. The newest acquisition is Dzenis Burnic, who played for Germany's youth teams. Two-thirds of this squad have never played for a club in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Barbarez wants to use national pride as the foundation. Qualifying for the 2026 World Cup is an ambition but the goal is to be at the next European Championship. "We have a plan, we have an idea, and my team and I believe in it," Barbarez says. "The leaders and heroes are born in the most difficult battles."

'We want to change the perspective of the national team. We want it to be loved again'



Captain Edin Dzeko scored 25 goals for Fenerbahce this season



▲ *Julian Nagelsmann was shocked by the question asked in the survey*

Germany

Nagelsmann condemns survey about white players

The Germany head coach, Julian Nagelsmann, has said he is shocked that a public broadcaster asked survey participants if they would prefer more white players in the national football team.

Nagelsmann has agreed with the midfielder Joshua Kimmich, who said on Saturday that the survey for the German state broadcaster ARD was "absolutely racist" and that it was "madness for a public broadcaster to ask such a question".

The survey of 1,304 randomly selected participants were asked if they would prefer to see more players with white skin playing for Germany; 21% of respondents said yes.

"I thought about it briefly, and I have the feeling that we need to wake up a bit," Nagelsmann said at the team's training camp for Euro 2024, which is taking place in Germany and starts on 14 June.

"There are people in Europe who've had to flee because of war, economic factors, environmental disasters, people who simply want to be taken in.

"We have to ask what are we doing at the moment? We in Germany are doing very well, and when we say something like that, I think it's crazy how we turn a blind eye and simply block out such things."

Nagelsmann also said Kimmich was correct when he said a football team can be a role model for how different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds can join in a group to work together for major goals.

"I always find it bizarre that we all go on vacation to get to know other cultures and then other cultures come here and we complain about it. It's bizarre," Nagelsmann said. "So, I can't go on vacation then. I always have to stay where I am.

"We're playing a European Championship for everyone in the country. And anyone who can play top football is invited to be a national player and give their all for their country. And that's what we're doing. And I hope I never have to read about such a survey again."

Germany will play Ukraine today in Nuremberg, in the hosts' first warm-up game for Euro 2024. They play Greece on Friday, before opening the tournament against Scotland on 14 June. Nagelsmann's side will also face Hungary in Stuttgart on 19 June and Switzerland in Frankfurt on 23 June in their other Group A games. **AP**

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Swiatek serves up 40-minute double-bagel win in Paris



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Rob Burrow 1982-2024
A flickering fire burned inside one of the most extraordinary men

Donald McRae



The diminutive former Leeds scrum-half was a giant in rugby league and an inspiring force after his MND diagnosis

I first interviewed Rob Burrow in April 2021. Rob, by then, could no longer talk and, in his wheelchair, he could barely move. Motor neurone disease had made him a prisoner in his own body. I was anxious before we began because it seemed an impossible task. Rob, however, had spent much of his life proving that he could overcome preconceptions.

He was the rugby league giant who, despite being 5ft 5in tall and weighing a shade over 10 stone, had played almost 500 games for Leeds Rhinos, and won eight Super League championships and 18 international caps.

He dazzled and tackled opponents who were often double his weight and stood more than a foot taller than him. From his earliest junior years right the way through to all those grand finals, Rob had ripped up doubts that he was too small to make it. Instead, he had left a huge mark on rugby league and become one of the most cherished players in Britain.



▲ *Kevin Sinfield helped Burrow raise MND in the national consciousness*



▲ *Rob Burrow won eight Super League titles with Leeds Rhinos* RICHARD SELLERS/PA

So Rob soon showed me how we might work together. He used a device called Eyegaze to answer my questions. Rob would pick out individual letters on a monitor and, by using his eyes, build words and then sentences. When he was ready to reply he would turn to me and his wife, Lindsey, with a smile. Lindsey and I knew that it was time for us to stop talking. In the sudden silence Rob would use his eyes to play a recording of his reply. It felt like magic to hear his voice, and that unvarnished Castleford accent, suddenly brought to life.

All this was possible because, in the months after his diagnosis for MND, he had read a book out loud so that a computer could store his voice and recreate the words he wanted to say when he was rendered speechless for ever. Despite the gravity of his condition, Rob still made me laugh.

He said that, even though he didn't like hearing himself, it was far better that his answers came in his own accent "rather than an American robot voice like Stephen Hawking". So,

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Grealish made to sweat while doubts grow over Maguire

Jacob Steinberg

Gareth Southgate has refused to give Jack Grealish assurances over his Euro 2024 place and has cast doubt over Harry Maguire being fit for England's opening game.

Southgate, who was more optimistic about Luke Shaw's chances of recovering from injury for the tournament, is putting together his final preparations this week. England's head coach is due to cut seven players from his 33-man training squad after assessing his side when they meet Bosnia and Herzegovina in a friendly at St James' Park tonight and Iceland at Wembley on Friday.

Competition for places is fierce and Southgate, who is considering handing Cole Palmer his first international start, has big concerns in defence. Maguire has not played since 27 April and Southgate said he did not know whether the Manchester United centre-back would be fit when England begin their tournament by taking on Serbia on 16 June.

Marc Guéhi is expected to start in Maguire's absence but replacements for Shaw are harder to find. Shaw is England's only recognised left-back and has not played since February. Encouragingly, though, Southgate struck a positive tone on the defender's rehabilitation. "He's progressing very well," Southgate said. "There's still a bit to do before he can get on the pitch in a game situation. But he's in with a good chance."

The attention turned to England's wealth of attacking options and the conundrum that Southgate, who has shown his ruthless side by omitting Marcus Rashford, faces over whether to pick Grealish. Jarrod Bowen, Anthony Gordon, Eberechi Eze and Palmer have had stronger seasons than Grealish,

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Jack Grealish did not enjoy as strong a season as others in the England squad

Billionaire wealth tax: a belated step in the right direction *Editorials, page 2*

Now, in South Africa, a healthier future can begin *Alexis Akwagyiram, page 3*

Sunakism may live on when Sunak himself has gone *Katy Balls, page 4*

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Journal

Opinion and ideas



Keir Starmer at a Labour event in Lancing, West Sussex, 27 May
PHOTOGRAPH: MAJA SMIEJKOWSKA/ REUTERS

Ignore the plight of the alienated voter at your peril

Nesrine Malik



Elections come with their own logic, a sort of sports analysis. It's a time that doesn't naturally lend itself to discussing events or agendas in terms of whether things are correct or decent, but whether they are tactically useful. When the election is between a Labour party trying to unseat a Tory one after what it considers to be its own failed leftwing experiment, that tendency to reduce politics to gamesmanship becomes even more pronounced. The result is that by hewing as close as possible to established economic and cultural norms as set by the Tories in order to win back voters, Labour disfranchises others and makes a calculation that they don't matter.

How else to view Labour's pronouncements on migration? "Read my lips - I will bring immigration numbers down," Keir Starmer told the Sun on Sunday at the weekend. We won't rule out sending asylum seekers abroad to have their claims processed, Yvette Cooper told the BBC: "We look at what works."

This strategy of tracking the Tories is potentially dangerous, both in terms of creating an increasingly vocal group upset with Labour, and in fomenting a negative, unstable political climate - one in which the party leadership and its supporters seek not to understand why some voters feel a certain way, but to condemn and dismiss them.

This is neither useful nor logical. And yet it is understandable to those for whom getting rid of the Tories is a goal in itself that at least opens up the possibility of change. There is a frustration with voters concerned that Labour does not have a sufficiently leftwing agenda because - well, have you seen the other guys? "Get rid and let's see" is not a compelling enough vision to the many who expect more from Labour. It doesn't account for how, to Labour voters, the party's agenda is personal, and so engenders the sort of feelings that only run that sharp when they see its programme as an abdication by their own leaders. And it doesn't account for the fact that people make up their minds on what they see from Labour in the current moment, not on what it may do once in power. If there is some internal Labour leadership wink, no one outside that closed circle can see it.

They can also see that they are not being offered any meaningful change other than Labour won't be as bad as the Tories. It's a hostage situation where the stakes seem high - a Labour government, finally, after a calamitous

Ignore the plight of the alienated voter at your peril

Nesrine Malik

← *Continued from front*

rightwing reign – but are low on a personal level. On all the big issues – the funding of public infrastructure, the NHS, the cost of living crisis, a benefits overhaul – the world isn't set to look much different once the Tories are gone.

By any stretch, these are – to use a phrase the left is never allowed to enjoy – legitimate concerns. Disregarding them only sours things at a time when Labour claims to be embarking on a grand confidence-building exercise that cleanses politics of the Tory factionalism, bickering and infighting of recent years.

And worries about Labour's economic policies are not just quiet, tortured ones about what it can't promise in terms of quality of life. They are also about fundamental principles. Frustrations over how Labour has dealt with the war in Gaza, what seems to be an unfolding purge of leftwing candidates, and the message that Diane Abbott's humiliation sends to ethnic minorities are a recipe for active anger.

Such anger cannot be forced into the comforting stereotypes of those who won't support Labour any more. Luxury beliefs, indulgent strops, bitter remnants of the Corbyn era – these are all descriptions that classify dissenters as faulty voters, irrational narcissists acting against their own self-interest. If they won't be brought to heel, they should be ignored.

It's a neat story, if that's your thing. But it's a cop-out, because it's not how voting works. Democracy is an opt-in process. The onus is on parties to persuade people to choose them, rather than expecting voters to navigate the narrow range of choices with which they have been presented.

All voters are rational, in that their rationale makes sense to them. And that rationale is a complex mix of feelings, loyalties and impressions brewed by our immediate economic and political realities. If you feel your party does not represent you, does not align with your values, and does not provide you with a better vision for your future, these feelings affect your political behaviour. The threat of the alternative is remote, while your sense of marginalisation is immediate.

Over recent months, people I have spoken to who said they will not vote for Labour share one thing: not childish anger or silly idealism but relief. After giving the party several chances and grappling with their choices, the decision not to vote gave them a sense of congruence. Their political choices finally aligned with their values, and gave them a sense of autonomy in a system that felt totally out of their control.

Ignore that sense of empowerment at your peril: that was what Labour found out when it thought that Abbott could be defenestrated without a fuss. The outrage, mobilisation of constituents and high-profile black figures, and noise in the media when it seemed Abbott would not be allowed to run is an augur of the future. The same happened when Labour met with poorly managed outrage over its initial position on Gaza, turning previous safe seats into battlegrounds.

The scale of Labour's win may be undermined by that sort of volatility, and its mandate made shaky by a large enough cohort as furiously opposed to its policies as to an extreme rightwing opposition. Overall voting numbers matter, but so do those who refuse to live in what they increasingly feel is a monoculture and still protect their right to live in a pluralistic political system. They have voices and platforms.

And there is galvanising clarity, unifying across their disparate groups. They understand that the deepening consensus between the Tories and Labour on all the things that matter to them means there are fewer and fewer benefits to pinching your nose and voting for a party that appears to only take, and does not give. Again, dismiss their passions at your peril.

In a system without proportional representation, politics is indeed often the choice of the lesser of two evils. But as the space between the two shrinks, people might begin to feel that – as Ralph Nader once said – "if you always vote for the lesser of two evils, you will always have evil, and you will always have less".

The Guardian

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'Comment is free... but facts are sacred' CP Scott

Society

Proposals for a billionaire wealth tax are a belated step in the right direction

In his book The Society of Equals, the leading French sociologist Pierre Rosanvallon identifies the rise of the global super-rich as inimical to a shared social order. "The secession of the wealthy," writes Prof Rosanvallon, means that "the richest sliver of the population now lives in a world unto itself".

Tax avoidance is perhaps the most obvious and resented way in which this "separatism" of the rich manifests itself. Whether through silting their money away in tax havens, or exploiting loopholes and using creative accounting, the world's billionaires these days pay a far smaller proportion of their income to fund public goods than the rest of us. In the 1960s, the 400 richest Americans paid more than half their income in taxes. By 2018, it was less than a quarter.

At a time when governments around the world are struggling with high levels of debt, and facing dramatic challenges such as dealing with the consequences of the climate emergency, this crazy, upside down state of affairs should be seen as intolerable. Such glaring inequity undermines the bonds of reciprocity and trust that sustain healthy societies. But for too long reform has been judged too difficult and too complicated, despite being enthusiastically backed by voters.

Happily, there are signs that, at least at an international level, the political mood is shifting. In July, G20 finance ministers will discuss new proposals for an annual 2% global tax on the wealth of the world's 3,000 or so billionaires. According to the French economist Gabriel Zucman, the architect of the plan, the wealth tax could raise $250bn a year – more than the recently established global minimum tax on corporations, and roughly the cost of the economic damage wrought by extreme weather events in 2023. Ahead of the G20, the governments of Brazil (which holds the presidency), France, South Africa and Spain have expressed support for Prof Zucman's idea.

Despite such backing, the path to actually introducing such a tax is likely to be long and tortuous. Watertight criteria for assessing different types of wealth and assets would have to be worked out and, crucially, a way found to deal with non-participating tax jurisdictions. Prof Zucman believes neither of these problems to be insuperable; other sympathetic experts in the field have reservations. And as was the case with a proposed "Robin Hood" tax on financial transactions in the 2010s, there would inevitably be a ferocious resistance campaign on behalf of some of the world's most powerful individuals.

None of that should prevent a necessary and overdue debate from beginning in earnest in Brazil next month. In the UK, the refusal by both main parties to contemplate wealth taxes flies in the face both of popular sentiment and the needs of the country, following the economic shocks of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. But globally, the successful implementation of the minimum corporation tax suggests that an age in which footloose, mobile capital could please itself may be coming to an end.

States provide the healthcare, education and infrastructure that allow the very wealthy to make their money. Dodging the obligation to pay a fair share of the costs involved should not be an option. In seeking a declaration to that effect in July, Brazil will be doing the rest of the world a favour.

Social media

Online safety activists are right to push for more rules for big tech

Bereaved parents of children whose deaths have been linked to social media are crucial voices in the debate over how to ensure that under-18s are not harmed by their experiences online. Two years ago, a coroner's verdict that the death of Molly Russell was contributed to by "the negative effects of online content", including algorithmically delivered self-harm material, was a watershed moment. Now Ellen Roome, whose son Jools Sweeney took his own life for unknown reasons in Cheltenham in 2022, has become the latest campaigner for changes to the law in this area.

Her petition calling for parents whose children have died to have a right of access to social media accounts has attracted 120,000 signatures and is likely to be debated by MPs early in the next parliament. While the online safety bill, which received royal assent in October, significantly strengthened a weak and outdated regulatory framework, Ms Roome and the other families in the Bereaved Parents for Online Safety group are right that more needs to be done.

Big efforts have already gone towards ensuring that parents are not left in the dark in situations where young people have taken their own lives, and there is believed to be a connection to online interactions or material. A new power for coroners to access children's data was agreed when the online safety bill was debated. But rather than being incorporated in that bill, it was added to data protection legislation instead. That bill fell when Rishi Sunak called the general election. The amendment and the work that went into it were lost.

It now seems likely that it will fall to a Labour government to take this broken pledge to parents forward. Given the anguish of their losses, they should not be kept waiting longer than necessary. Campaigners including Ian Russell, who chairs the Molly Russell Foundation – which aims to prevent suicides by young people – and Esther Ghey, the mother of the murdered teenager Brianna Ghey, have shown extraordinary courage.

So far, the tech companies have proved uncooperative and resistant to pressure. Michelle Donelan, then culture secretary, said the Molly Russell inquest had demonstrated a "horrific failure of social media platforms to put the welfare of children first". Experts believe many people would be astonished to learn that, even in cases where a young, vulnerable teenager has tragically died, parents have no automatic right to access their accounts, or to find out what material they have been viewing. Concerns that the tech platforms take reputation management more seriously than children's safety are added to by decisions such as the one Meta took last month, to rescind a job offer to a cyber-intelligence analyst immediately after he criticised Instagram's safeguarding failures.

In recent weeks MPs have indicated their willingness to consider a smartphone ban for under-16s. The Molly Rose Foundation and specialists including Lady Kidron believe proactive regulation and enforcement, not prohibition, is the road to take. But there is wide agreement that, as it stands, more web protections are needed. Rules barring under-13s from social media platforms must be made to work by Ofcom. Businesses must be publicly accountable for their design decisions, and compelled to engage with bereaved parents in a humane way. Last year's online safety act was just the beginning.



Activists listen during Cyril Ramaphosa's speech at the final ANC rally in Soweto, 25 May

PHOTOGRAPH: JEMAL COUNTESS/UPI/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

With the ANC's total supremacy over, a healthier future can begin

Alexis Akwagyiram



The results are in, and the message is stark: the ruling African National Congress has been humbled in South Africa's general election. The country is going through the biggest shift in its political landscape since the end of apartheid 30 years ago. Counting of Wednesday's poll shows the ANC has fallen below the 50% required for a parliamentary majority for the first time since the end of minority white rule in 1994. For the first time too it must share power, and its leaders will have to suffer the ignominy of scrambling to forge a coalition with opponents.

It's a new low for the ANC. This is the party, born out of Africa's most famous liberation movement, which freed Black South Africans from white minority rule, avoided a descent into civil war and, in Nelson Mandela, gave the country its first Black president.

On the face of it, the election result is a tragedy. For those of us of a certain vintage, the ANC evokes memories of Mandela emerging from prison with his clenched fist held aloft. Four years after his release, the 1994 election in which Black people cast their votes for the first time sealed the ANC's triumph over a vile system of racial segregation.

But look again: the reality is that this election result is good for the country. It shows that South Africa's democracy is giving citizens the ability to hold the government to account. Voters had plenty of options to chose from- a record 51 opposition parties were on the national ballot. That level of choice, combined with a system of proportional representation, means South Africans will end up with a government that better reflects the will of voters than countries dominated by two parties with more arcane voting systems, such as the UK and US.

South Africa's government has had a lot to answer for. The continent's most industrialised economy has been run into the ground. One in three South Africans of working age are unemployed, rising to nearly half - 45.5% - for those aged between 15 and 34.

Such high levels of joblessness help to explain why people born after the end of apartheid - the "born free" generation - have turned their back on the ANC. They drove this change. Many feel economically disfranchised in a country ranked by the World Bank as one of the most unequal in the world. And, with no personal recollection of apartheid, they don't feel the pull to vote for the ANC out of loyalty.

> **A slew of scandals involving party figures highlighted the difference between the haves and the have-nots**

High unemployment was just one of a long list of grievances South Africans shared with me in the run-up to the election. Rolling electricity blackouts caused by power rationing, known as "load shedding", have frustrated people for years and have strangled businesses. Access to clean water has become harder for the poorest people, and violent crime has become pervasive in some neighbourhoods.

A slew of scandals involving ANC figures highlighted the difference between the haves and have-nots. Jacob Zuma, the country's president from 2009 to 2018, has been accused of overseeing systemic corruption, known as state capture, in which he allegedly allowed businessmen close to him to loot state resources and influence government policy.

Even the current president, Cyril Ramaphosa, an ANC veteran and successful businessman who was part of the negotiation team that brokered the deal that ended apartheid, was nearly impeached over a scandal involving between $500,000 and $5m in cash that was stolen from his private game farm.

The ANC's decline can be traced in its waning popularity at the polls. It won the first post-apartheid election with 62.6% of the vote and hovered near the 70% mark in subsequent polls, but its share of the vote fell to 57.5% in 2019. The corruption and economic rot that has set in are the product of South Africa having been a de facto one-party state for the past 30 years. The lack of oversight allowed the worst elements of corruption to take hold within the party itself.

Coalition government will give other groups the chance to impose checks and balances on the ANC. And fresh blood in government - after decades in which liberation fighters became corrupt fat cats - could provide the diversity of ideas needed to generate effective policies on key issues. Of course, coalition government won't be painless. South Africa is entering uncharted territory. And we know just by looking at Europe that coalition governments can fall apart easily.

An irony of the election is that the architect of the ANC's downfall was Zuma. Having fallen out with the party, he was involved in the formation last December of uMkhonto we Sizwe, a party named after the armed wing of the ANC in the apartheid days. MK, as it is known, took 15% of the vote. It means Zuma could have a say in the makeup of the government.

But, on balance, the shift to coalition government will benefit South Africa. It's also an opportunity for the ANC to rebuild itself. It will still be the biggest party in government, having won the largest vote share - 40% compared with about 20% won by its closest rival, the main opposition Democratic Alliance.

Seemingly believing that their party was destined to govern South Africa in perpetuity, ANC grandees were shocked by the outcome of the election. The party has learned that it can be punished at the ballot box and must not take the electorate for granted.

It's the start of a new era for South Africa. And it's hard to imagine that what lies ahead could be worse than the causes of this great reset.

* **Alexis Akwagyiram** *is managing editor at Semafor Africa*



Sunakism may live on when Sunak has gone

Katy Balls



Tory politicians who cut their teeth on the 1997 general election campaign have a story they like to tell. They watched John Major get up every day and suggest to his team that the Tories could win, and then fight – despite all the polls suggesting otherwise. It convinced the then young aides that Major might know something no one else did – that there was hope. Then, on polling day, they went up to the Downing Street flat to find everything packed to move out. It turned out that in the weeks before, Major's wife, Norma, had been quietly moving out most of her clothes so there was less to do after the result.

The point is that even a prime minister who was aware it would take a miracle to stop a landslide defeat could not say so out loud. While there have been plenty – perhaps too many – Major-Sunak comparisons over the past two years, this is something both politicians will now understand. No leader has called an election from 20 points behind and won, and the polls so far suggest Sunak has made little visible progress. An Observer poll suggests that rather than close the gap, Labour has opened its biggest lead since Liz Truss was prime minister.

More than a week after the election was announced, Sunak is not the only one having to grapple with the unsayable. While the Tory candidate Robert Largan, in the marginal seat of High Peak in Derbyshire, has been accused of not wanting to even say he is a Conservative, for most the problem is what they want to say but can't. "The message we need to land is that we're stuffed – but Labour don't deserve a huge majority and can't be trusted with one. But we can't say the first bit out loud," says a senior minister.

Yet the campaign so far tells its own story about the calculations being made. At the weekend, Jeremy Hunt unveiled another policy aimed at winning over the grey vote. In an interview in which he warned Labour would betray pensioners, he promised a new "pensions tax guarantee" – that a Tory government would not raise any taxes on pensions in the next parliament. On the back of the mandatory national service and "triple lock plus" announcements, it forms a pattern – with the campaign prioritising trying to shore up their core vote, the over-55s, rather than opt for a wider message that could appeal to younger voters. It's one of the reasons there is a focus on trying to squeeze the Reform vote – the party has been making inroads with elderly people.

It means MPs are starting to see a logic to the campaign, albeit one that seeks to reduce losses. The campaign focus is on making the best of a bad hand and avoiding a historic wipeout. In what has been called the "Dunkirk strategy" by one pollster, MPs and some close to the Conservative campaign see a result that would bring home 200 or more Tory MPs come polling day as a sign that things have improved. Most in the party think the polling suggests they would get a little more than 100 MPs on current trends.

If the Conservatives managed to win 200 seats or more, they would be in a similar position to that which Labour was in 2019. "If we can hit 200, that is where we can have Tory renewal and hopefully be back within one term," says a cabinet minister.

So, if Sunak has his mission, how many of the party's candidates or its grassroots members are on board to help make it happen? Several MPs feel as though they have been put up as sacrificial lambs.

"A lot of the usual activists are on holiday or just unenthusiastic, coming straight from tricky locals into an election no one wants," says one MP. "The party machinery is very rusty," complains another minister. "It just feels like the car is stalling."

As for Sunak's potential successors, most are keen for him to own this election campaign, viewing it as a poisoned chalice. "By picking a summer election, the blame will all be on him if it's worse than 1997," adds the minister. But there is still a hunger among some Conservative candidates to pull out the stops and fight. Some older MPs are staying on in a bid to keep the party from veering to the right in defeat.

Polling suggests Sunak's premiership may not be long for this world, but Sunakism could live on. Former cabinet ministers are on high alert for Sunak's team getting "their mates" into the few remaining safe seats. Late last week, Sunak's former aide David Goss was picked for Wellingborough and Rushden, and more like that could follow. The Sunakites who make it could be key to shaping where the party goes next.

* **Katy Balls** *is political editor of the Spectator*

Letters

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Established 1906

Country diary
Inkpen, Berkshire

It begins with a battering at the glass, as if someone is flinging gravel. Someone wanting me, calling me outside into the night. I willingly go. But first I turn off the porch light. I'd wondered if they would come this year, and as soon as I open the door, the distinctive drone of a heavy insect zooms in and it collides with my hair.

I have walked, seemingly invited, into a maybug's June wedding. Here are the cockchafers, our largest chafer beetles, also known as doodlebugs (from which the German V-1 bombs got their name in the second world war). Disentangling the hook and combs of its legs from a ringlet of hair is a careful process and given the extremely loud buzz, its 3cm size and a thorn-like appendage, actually an egg-laying "pygidium", I'd be forgiven for reacting differently, particularly as another hits my chin and falls down my top.

But I love a cockchafer and as it crawls up towards the light, I admire it. Most striking are the trembling, fox-fur fans of feathers on each antenna, in a silver-furred face. These projections of luxuriant false eyelashes around such big dark eyes lend a Marlene Dietrich glamour. I unhook its hind legs from my bra and try to hold it in one hand. It pushes against my closed fingers with the insistence needed to push through soil, after four or more years in the dark as a grub.

Sensing freedom, it separates its hard wing cases, like two halves of a nut, unfurls amber film-roll wings and lifts off like a clumsy chinook.

In the briefly held light of my torch, I can see them flying around the top of the oak. The females settle to eat leaves, but the tree releases green leaf volatiles in response to this stress, acting as an attractant to the males. The field edge is bridal with waterfall-veils of hawthorn plunging into a lacy froth of cow parsley. I can hear more zooming up from the pasture in the horses' field, causing them to start and snort. A big cream-pot of a moon rises through the oak leaves.
Nicola Chester

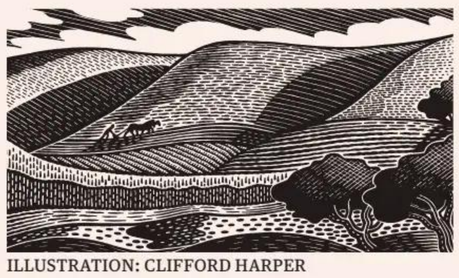


ILLUSTRATION: CLIFFORD HARPER

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No point in marching on with national service

I agree, national service is a very silly policy and only likely to appeal to niche voters (What's sure to get out the youth vote? National service, 28 May). But is that niche pensioners? Perhaps Polly Toynbee has forgotten that she is a pensioner – as am I at 69. The old cliche of Colonel Blimps and Alf Garnetts is wearing thin. You'd have to be over 85 to actually remember the war, and over 100 to have served. Not a big voting cohort.

Pensioners these days are much more likely to be baby boomers – old hippies, lefties, ex Greenham Commoners, Vietnam protesters and ban-the-bombers (like Polly and me?) And those old souls who do remember the war have reconciled themselves to the dreadful reality of conflict these days. My old Ma – born 1926 – used to say that any war was a crime.
Wendy Shillam
London

● There's something of the kneejerk in the dismissal of the proposal to reinstate national service. Although of course we need a properly funded professional military, we would be blithe to assume we are not now also going to need a skilled and motivated reserve. Might not a freshly elected Keir Starmer take a leaf out of Attlee's book and reintroduce it himself? It is communitarian, inclusive and patriotic. It may prove a timely remedy for the dreadful isolation imposed on the young by the lockdowns and "chosen" by them in the cynically marketised smartphone universe whose damaging effects are increasingly recognised and documented.

And perhaps a few years of such purposeful and mutually dependent social integration would render the egregious income differentials that increasingly divide the rich and "successful" from the rest distasteful and implausible, as well as unjust.
Lorne Denny
Oxford

● The Tories' view of all young people seems to be that they lack skills, opportunities and social cohesion. As well as being unfair to the many young people for whom those things are untrue, it is also a damning indictment of the government in charge of education, economic and social policy for most of the last 18 years.
Daniel Owen
Torrington, Devon

● Talking of national service, how about a law that no one can become an MP unless they work for a year in a care home? It would give them valuable life-experience to inform their subsequent lawmaking, and would be for their own good by counteracting the deracinating career path of university-spad-MP that leaves so much of their human nature underdeveloped.
Paul Brownsey
Bearsden, East Dunbartonshire

● As a teacher for many years, I know that the vast majority of young people do have the discipline, respect and understanding of team-playing that Jonathan Longstaff thinks they need national service to instil (Letters, 28 May). What Longstaff needs is a less prejudiced attitude to young people.
Elaine Luke
Fairlight, East Sussex

● Discipline, respect and an understanding of team-playing – the benefits ascribed to national service by Mr Longstaff from Buxted – could just as easily be gained by learning bellringing, and these benefits are open to recruits of all ages.
Bruce Purvis
Ringer, Winchester Cathedral

● £2.5bn on bringing back national service? Let's spend it on the NHS instead. Write that on your bloody bus.
Michael Gray
Lincoln

Coping with the loss and burial of babies

Re your report (Families trying to find burial sites of stillborn babies 'still face barriers', 28 May), in 1958 our first baby was among six tiny ones who died, when she was only five days old, in St George's hospital, London, due to a virus in the maternity wing.

We never knew where she was buried because it was a Jewish tradition that if a baby dies under a week old it will be buried with another unknown Jewish adult. This practice was to encourage us to look forward to having more children, rather than forever grieve for the loved one we lost. We never forgot her – I can still remember her face to this day, although I am now 92, but we did go on to have four more beloved children. The pain never completely left us, but this tradition helped us come to terms with it.
Margaret Owen
London

● The tragedy of bereaved parents being separated at birth from stillborn children is obviously real. I was kept away from my brother's funeral (he was seven and died in the 1949 polio epidemic) and subsequently I've realised it was damaging. However, I'm not sure about MPs jumping on the bandwagon and demanding the government apologise.

It is probably quite true that professionals at the time believed that the policy was the right one, just as my parents thought it was best if I was protected from my brother's death. Why should we apologise for what was a genuinely well-meaning mistake? What mistakes are we making today for which future generations will feel free to blame us?
Jeremy Cushing
Wiveliscombe, Somerset

A caffeine-free life will give you a buzz

I loved Nell Frizzell's inspirational article on being caffeine-free (I quit coffee – and everything changed, 27 May). I'm in month 11 of no caffeine and I'm enjoying a bit more sleep and much less agitation and rage all round.

My caffeine-fuelled prickly sweats are noticeably gone. My fortnightly chats with a friend are now redesigned as the last time she insisted buying our drinks ("yes, of course I've ordered you a caffeine-free cappuccino") mine fired me up into a trembling, jibber-jabbering mess, feverishly scribbling down to-do lists on a napkin. I now sip cool, clear, bottled water instead. The chats are less animated and excitable, but I feel pleasantly less exhausted afterwards.

Caffeine-free has been a bit of a slog at times, particularly when the cafes provide outdoor seating, but I'm very much enjoying my gradually rehydrating, dewy skin and more peaceful thoughts, all due to a caffeine-free lifestyle. Frizzell's wonderful article reaffirms my choice.
Vickie Hunt
Horsley Woodhouse, Derbyshire

● It's a wise decision by Nell Frizzell not to recommend matcha as an alternative to coffee and tea for those avoiding caffeine . Matcha is powdered green tea and high in caffeine since you consume the leaves, not just the water they are steeped in. It's been long favoured by Japanese monks who need to stay awake during meditation.
Lynne Edwards
New Quay, Ceredigion

Corrections and clarifications

● Tuition fees in England have risen from £3,000 to £9,350 under the Conservative government, not from £1,000 as an opinion piece said (At 17, I don't want to be demonised. I want to vote, 30 May, Journal, p3). Also, in Scotland, 16-year-olds can vote in local and Scottish parliamentary elections but not in a general election.

● A review of the horror film Sting (31 May, G2, p8) incorrectly described Kiah Roache-Turner as a "first-time feature director"; he has previously directed three feature films.

Editorial complaints and corrections can be sent to guardian.readers@theguardian.com or The readers' editor, **Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU.** You can also leave a voicemail on **020 3353 4736**

At least Trump is a man of conviction

It was Margaret Thatcher who, just a few months before being elected as prime minister in 1979, declared: "I am not a consensus politician, I am a conviction politician." Following his recent trial (Report, 31 May), Donald Trump can now certainly be described as the latter, and unfortunately this bodes ill for the forthcoming US election.
Adrian Brodkin
London

● Karl Sabbagh's letter (29 May) reminds me of a time I took my mother, who had been blind from birth, to hospital. She and my blind father brought me up and he worked as pianist and piano tuner. The nurse said to me: "Can she feed herself?" I wish I'd had a camera. My mother's face was a picture.
Joyce Blackledge
Formby, Merseyside

● Let me defend your Quick Crossword setter against Pete Wolstencroft's criticism (Letters, 29 May). He seems to think "Ceylon, as was" should mean "what Ceylon used to be called", but surely it means, as the setter intended, "what used to be called Ceylon", that is, Sri Lanka.
Michael Bulley
Chalon-sur-Saône, France

● The best put down for a beer served short is to point out that if they filled it to the top they'd sell more beer (Letters, 1 June).
Colwyn Lee
Swarkestone, Derbyshire

● I fit the bill perfectly as a Guardian-reading pensioner with a Waitrose card who has never voted Tory (Letters, 1 June). Too old to change my spots.
Helen Royle
Tideswell, Derbyshire



Ian Gelder

Actor with an illustrious stage career who found TV fame in the fantasy drama Game of Thrones

The actor Ian Gelder, who has died of cancer aged 74, was a notable supporting player at the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, in the West End and in leading fringe theatres for decades before finding television fame as Kevan Lannister, brother of the feared patriarch Tywin (Charles Dance), who planned a Shakespearean power grab in Game of Thrones (2011-16). He also exercised the devious side of his acting personality as the villainous Mr Dekker in Russell T Davies's Doctor Who spin-off, Torchwood, across five episodes in 2009.

Gelder could be louche and outrageous: as the leery-eyed Ed in Joe Orton's Entertaining Mr Sloane in a 1993 revival by Jeremy Sams, which featured his future life partner, Ben Daniels, as the object of his warped affections; or as a paunchy, leather-clad biker in a 1981 Birmingham Rep revival of Michel Tremblay's Hosanna, bitching away with his partner, a drag queen played by Jim Hooper.

Mostly, though, his default modus operandi was that of a nuanced moral rectitude and deftly conveyed charm. He was as eminently watchable as he was unfailingly audible.

He could even make something substantial of a boring character, notably so, twice, in the role of Titus Andronicus's brother Marcus in Shakespeare's goriest play – first with the RSC in 2003 (David Bradley as Titus); then at Shakespeare's Globe in 2014 (William Houston in the lead) – emanating a moderating presence in a world of wild excess.

There was always something controlled and stealthy about his acting, always a joy to behold. He never spoke about it much; he just got on with the job. One of his most significant associations was with the mordant, brilliant playwright Peter Nichols, whose younger self in fictional disguise he played twice – in the beautiful, autobiographical family memoir Forget-Me-Not Lane (1971), at the Greenwich theatre and the Apollo on Shaftesbury Avenue; and as the callow private Steven Flowers in the glorious Privates on Parade (1977), joining Denis Quilley, Joe Melia and Nigel Hawthorne in a military concert party in south-east Asia for the RSC in Stratford-upon-Avon and the Aldwych, where it ran for more than 200 performances.

Gelder with Rula Lenska, left, and Abigail McKern, centre, in Lingua Franca by Peter Nichols at the Finborough theatre, London, in 2010. Gelder had a particular affinity with the work of the mordant and brilliant playwright
TRISTRAM KENTON/ THE GUARDIAN

The youngest child of Raymond White, an engineer, and Clare (nee Gelder), an office manager, and a keen participant in amateur dramatics when the family moved to Wokingham, Berkshire, in the early 1960s, Ian took his mother's maiden name on becoming an actor.

She involved the whole family in the activities of the Wokingham Players – Raymond did the lighting – and it soon became apparent that Ian had found his vocation. After attending Forest grammar school in nearby Winnersh, he won a place at the Bristol Old Vic theatre school, where his contemporaries included Jeremy Irons, Tim Pigott-Smith and Christopher Biggins.

On graduating, he played Antonio in The Merchant of Venice on a British Council tour and, either side of Forget-Me-Not Lane, performed in seasons at the Northcott in Exeter, the Young Vic in London and the RSC in Stratford (Silvius in As You Like It and Talbot in Terry Hands' production of Henry VI, with Emrys James and Helen Mirren).

He was a regular on television from 1972, appearing as Prince Alfred in five episodes of Edward the Seventh (1975), starring Annette Crosbie and Timothy West; and as Rumpole of the Bailey's son, Nick, a sociology professor in Miami described by his father (Leo McKern) as "the brains of the family". Christine Edzard's remarkable six-hour film of Little Dorrit (1987) was cast to the nines way down the list, from Derek Jacobi, Joan Greenwood and Alec Guinness to Robert Morley and Alan Bennett; Gelder was the Rev Samuel Barnacle.

> **His default modus operandi was that of a nuanced moral rectitude and deftly conveyed charm**

In the mid-80s, he was a regular leading player with the Cambridge Theatre Company, then led by the director Bill Pryde, and played Lockwood, the storyteller in Wuthering Heights; the aristocratic fortune hunter, Archer, in George Farquhar's Restoration comedy The Beaux' Stratagem; and multiple roles in the complete five-play cycle of George Bernard Shaw's Back to Methuselah, a futuristic fantasia once described by the biographer and critic Michael Holroyd as a masterpiece of wishful thinking.

Gelder was always a popular company member, not least in Nancy Meckler's touring Shared Experience – as a frosty Karenin melting in deep wells of desire and pain in Anna Karenina (1997), and as a puzzled, anxious and finally bereft Fielding in A Passage to India (2003). Also with Nicholas Hytner's National Theatre (2004-05) – in David Hare's Iraq war analysis, Stuff Happens (as Paul Wolfowitz); Hytner's splendid production of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials, adapted by Nicholas Wright; and as a deft double of noble politician ("saucy" Worcester) and country bumpkin pot boy in the epic panoply of Henry IV, led by Michael Gambon's Falstaff.

In a fine, meticulous revival of Arnold Wesker's Roots by James Macdonald at the Donmar Warehouse in 2013, Gelder found ways of cutting straight through to our emotions as Beatie Bryant's father, and for Michael Attenborough at the Almeida in the same year was a loyal and stoic Kent opposite Jonathan Pryce's coiled and furious King Lear. Again, he made goodness compelling.

In 2015 he produced an electrifying performance at the Southwark Playhouse as the predatory British film-maker James Whale in Gods and Monsters, frolicking with a bare-buttocked young gardener in Hollywood and superbly communicating, said Paul Taylor in the Independent, "the waspish, fastidious wit and the dread of mental disintegration" after a recent stroke.

There was more "remembrance of flings past" (David Jays in the Guardian) in Something in the Air (2022), a lyrical short play for two old men in a care home – Gelder was partnered by Christopher Godwin – written and co-directed by Peter Gill at the Jermyn Street theatre.

He and Ben entered into a civil partnership in 2008. For the last five years they lived in a cottage in East Sussex, with a lovingly cultivated garden.

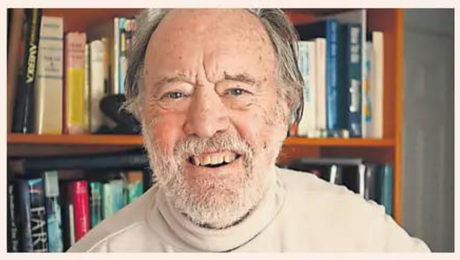
He is survived by Ben and by his brother, Keith.

Michael Coveney

Ian Gelder (Ian Denbigh White), actor, born 3 June 1949; died 6 May 2024

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Other lives



Brian Haywood

Nuclear physicist whose research was undertaken at the UK Atomic Energy Authority at Harwell

My grandfather, Brian Haywood, who has died aged 91, spent his career working as a nuclear physicist, mainly at the UK Atomic Energy Authority at Harwell in Oxfordshire.

He was born in Birmingham to Vi and Hal, who ran a haberdashery shop. An only child, Brian lived through much of the blitz and spent the evenings in an air-raid shelter. He attended Bearwood Road school, then obtained a scholarship to King Edward VI Five Ways grammar school, and in his first year was evacuated to Monmouth with his classmates. He stayed here for a year.

After returning to Birmingham, Brian took an undergraduate degree and then a PhD in physics at Birmingham University. He also met my grandmother, Anne James, who worked in the department. The couple married in 1956, and when he got his first job, at Harwell, they moved to Wantage.

In 1960 they went further afield, to Deep River, Ontario, after Brian was offered a job at Chalk River laboratories, a nuclear research facility. They had a daughter (my mother) and took road trip adventures through Canada and the US with baby in tow, before returning to the UK in 1963.

They went on to have a second daughter and the family settled in Abingdon, Oxfordshire. For the rest of his career Brian continued his nuclear research at Harwell, particularly, in the 1960s and 70s, in neutron scattering. Later he moved to the material physics and metallurgy division, where his work included research on gas pipes for British Gas contracts.

In 1993, Brian and Anne moved to Christchurch, Dorset. Brian was passionate about learning and could speak French, German and Russian, and dabbled in Spanish and Welsh. In his retirement, he attended French conversation classes, volunteered at the Red House Museum in the town and was treasurer of his local branch of Probus, the club for retired people. He enjoyed a daily walk to the sea and spending time with his family.

Despite bowel cancer, a triple heart bypass and a stroke, Brian lived independently with Anne until last year. His love of education stayed with him even when he developed dementia, but he struggled after his stroke in 2017 deprived him of one of his greatest joys: reading.

He is survived by his daughters, Helen and Elizabeth, and his grandchildren, Tom and me. Anne died two weeks after him.

Laura Pettitt



Brian Haywood in the 1960s at Harwell, where he worked on neutron scattering

Bernard Thurlow

Teacher and counsellor in schools and the founder of a charity aimed at helping female asylum seekers

My father, Bernard Thurlow, who has died aged 83, was a teacher, a school counsellor and the founder of a charity for asylum seekers.

He had an unstoppable passion for positive change, rooted in the Catholicism that he was brought up with and loved; for him, this translated into a hands-on commitment to social justice and socialism. He had the rare ability to get on with everybody he met, even while suffering from dementia.

Bernard worked as a teacher in Manchester (1960-69), including at Our Lady's Roman Catholic high school in the town of Royton. He was then a school counsellor at Stanfield technical high school in Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, and part of a team of counsellors who worked across schools in Dudley, West Midlands (1970-85).

From 1992 to 2003, he helped to find accommodation for ex-offenders within the probation service in north Staffordshire, as well as being a volunteer and a member of the national executive and social justice group for the St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP).

He was born and grew up in Selby, North Yorkshire, the third of the four children of May (nee Chard), a housewife, and Ernest Thurlow, an engine driver who drove the Mallard and the Flying Scotsman. Family life was overseen by a statue of the Sacred Heart in the kitchen corner, brought home in a wheelbarrow by Bernard and his brother from a decommissioned church.

After Drax grammar school, near Selby, Bernard went to St Mary's teacher training college in Twickenham, west London. He completed a counselling diploma at Keele University in 1969 and later a degree at Manchester Polytechnic (now Manchester Metropolitan University).

At a folk music club in Manchester, he met Jane Howarth, also a teacher; they married in 1968. When Jane died in 2002, Bernard retired to Yorkshire to be much closer to his grandchildren.

There, he did arguably the most important work of his life, volunteering with destitute refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds from 2004 to 2020.

He founded St Monica's Housing in 2011, a charity for female asylum seekers, and



undertook casework supporting individual asylum claimants.

Bernard had a passion for cycling, beginning in 1991 when he started taking children in residential care mountain biking, culminating in a coast-to-coast ride with them. In 2009 he cycled from London to Paris, raising money for the SVP.

Bernard is survived by his children, Debs, Richard and me, his grandchildren, Annwen, Gethin, Euan, Murray and Mollie, and his brother, Jude. His sisters, Rita and Mary, predeceased him.

Cath Thurlow

Birthdays

Wasim Akram, cricketer and commentator, 58; **Jill Biden**, US first lady, 73; **Sir Peter Bonfield**, former chief executive, British Telecom, 80; **Raúl Castro**, former president of Cuba, 93; **Susannah Constantine**, broadcaster, 62; **Angela Crawley**, SNP politician, 37; **Jonathan Djanogly**, Conservative politician, 59; **Bethany England**, footballer, 30; **Sir Simon Fraser**, deputy chair, Chatham House, 66; **Anita Harris**, singer and actor, 82; **Ian Hunter**, musician, 85; **Kelly Jones**, musician, 50; **Harriet Lamb**, chief executive, Waste & Resources Action Programme, 63; **Cherilyn Mackrory**, Conservative politician, 48; **Clive Mantle**, actor, 67; **Rafael Nadal**, tennis player, 38; **Dame Sue Owen**, former senior civil servant, 69; **Bill Paterson**, actor, 79; **Imogen Poots**, actor, 35; **James Purefoy**, actor, 60; **Suzi Quatro**, singer and guitarist, 74; **David Richards**, motor racing entrepreneur, 72; **Julian Sturdy**, Conservative politician, 53; **Deniece Williams**, singer, 74; **Dame Penelope Wilton**, actor, 78.

Kusuma Barnett

Head of volunteering at the British Museum who helped bring new life to its public involvement programmes

My friend Kusuma Barnett, who has died aged 77, played a key role in promoting the use of volunteers to help enhance the visitor experience at the British Museum in London.

As head of volunteer programmes from 2001 to 2010, Kusuma was able to transform every aspect of the volunteer provision at the museum, with the support of the then director, Neil MacGregor, and staff right across the institution.

This included the Hands on desks policy, in which people were encouraged to engage with visitors by offering them the chance to handle real as well as replica artefacts and to learn about and feel the connection with the past.

When Kusuma first began volunteering in the late 1980s, there were only a handful of participants, rising to 50 or 60 by 1992. At the end of her time as programme head the total was nearer to 500.

She could never have imagined the trajectory her life would take when she arrived in Britain from Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in 1964. Born in the city of Colombo, she was the only child of Kaluhath Rajapakse, a post office worker, and Walasingha Gunawardena, a housewife.

After attending a Roman Catholic secondary school she decided to travel to Britain at 17, spending a year serving at the Ceylon Tea Centre in London before enrolling as a student nurse at St Mary's hospital in Paddington, qualifying in 1968. Nursing was not to be her vocation for long, however; she left in 1971, taking on various office jobs until in 1974 she began working on telesales for Haymarket publishing.

In 1976 she became an office manager at the Reliance Service employment bureau, later rising to be an area executive in charge of several offices. After leaving that position in 1988 she became a part-time consultant to Reliance, while also taking an art history degree at Birkbeck, University of London, followed by a master's at the Courtauld Institute of Art in 1998.



By that time she was closely involved with the British Museum volunteers, taking over as head in 2001, a full-time job for which she refused any payment. She was appointed MBE in 2006, stepping down as head in 2010, but continued to volunteer herself until early in 2022.

The internationalism of the British Museum's collections and audiences mattered hugely to Kusuma, placing her at the heart of a worldwide community, epitomised by the museum's international training programme, where her sessions were greatly valued. Her advice was sought by many other museums and historic sites that were keen to introduce or expand their volunteer training.

Kusama had a vivid and vibrant personality who lit up many people's lives. She is survived by her husband, Michael Barnett, a consultant anaesthetist, whom she met when she was a nurse and married in 1972.

Frances Carey

Letter

Richard Sherman

In the mid-1970s, I was, as a film trade paper journalist, invited to meet the brothers Robert and Richard Sherman (obituary of the latter, 27 May). They had provided the score for The Slipper and the Rose, Bryan Forbes's Cinderella musical, then in production at Pinewood. To my surprise I was ushered into the ballroom of a large London hotel and found them draped round a grand piano, extremely amiable and infectiously enthusiastic.

Rather than a conventional interview, they gave me a preview of some of their score, which they played and sang for this privileged audience of one. I wish I could report that the composers of some of musical cinema's greatest hits had come up with something, anything, to rival their enduring work on the likes of Mary Poppins, The Jungle Book or Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. Sadly, for me anyway, their tunes were, this time round, sweet but entirely unmemorable.

Quentin Falk

Saturday's solutions

Sandwich sudoku

4	9	2	8	3	7	5	1	6	25
8	5	3	6	4	1	7	9	2	7
1	7	6	5	9	2	8	4	3	18
9	3	7	1	8	5	2	6	4	10
5	2	4	3	6	9	1	7	8	0
6	8	1	2	7	4	9	3	5	13
3	1	5	7	2	6	4	8	9	32
2	4	8	9	1	3	6	5	7	0
7	6	9	4	5	8	3	2	1	22
0	25	13	12	23	7	0	0	7	

Killer Sudoku 920

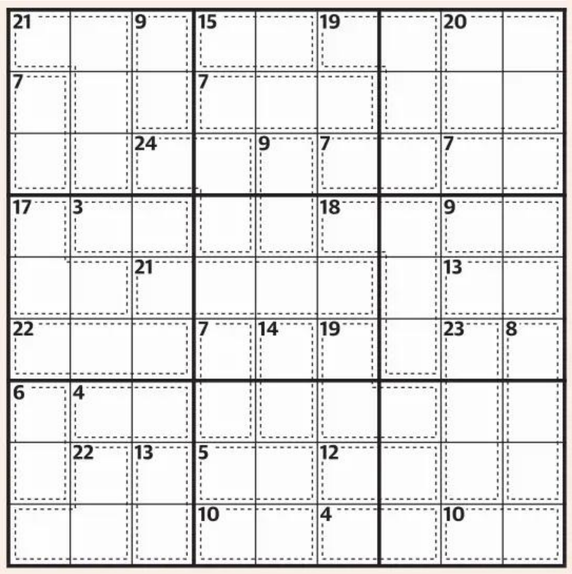
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5	6	2	9	3	8	1	7	4
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8	4	7	2	5	3	9	6	1
3	1	9	8	6	4	5	2	7
2	5	6	3	8	1	7	4	9
9	8	1	4	7	2	6	3	5
7	3	4	5	9	6	8	1	2

This week's winners of The Language Lover's Puzzle Book are:
Jenny Jones, Kenilworth
L Greenwood, Stockport
Eve Austen, Worcester
Jim Jones, Birmingham
M Le Helloco, Bournemouth
Please allow 28 days for delivery

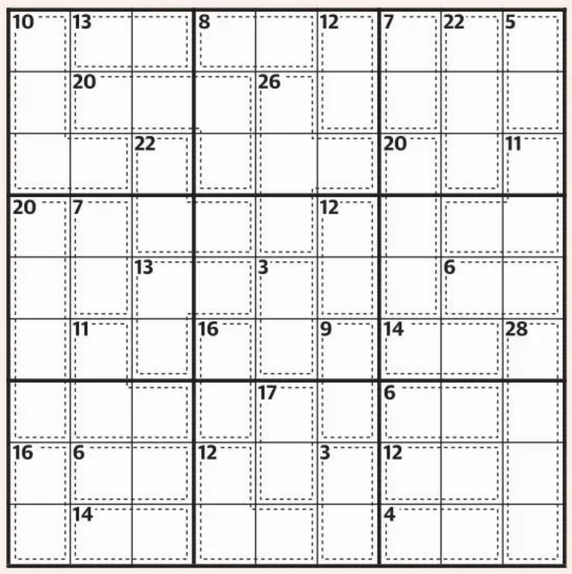
Killer sudoku

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

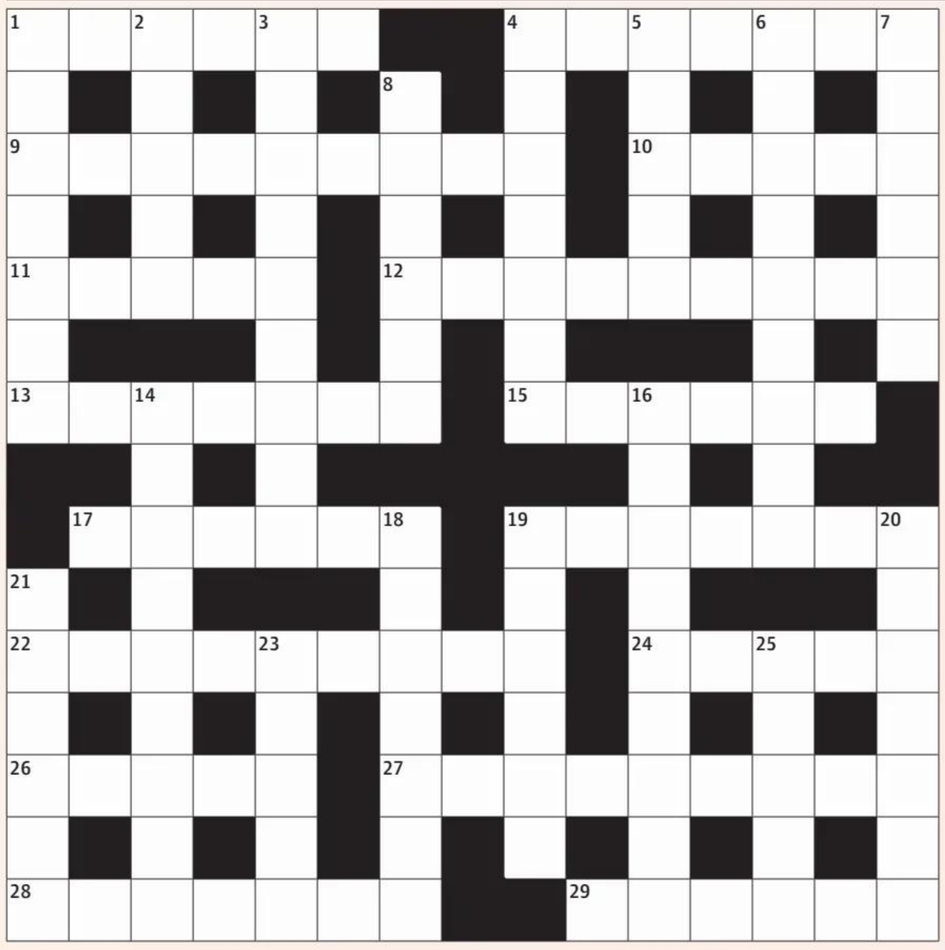
Each letter of the alphabet makes at least one appearance in the grid, and is represented by the same number wherever it appears. The letters decoded should help you to identify other letters and words in the grid.

25	23	4	17	5	■	13	14	9	23	6	11	15
14	■	19	■	11	■	20	■	6	■	25	■	11
4	18	13	11	12	17	13	■	15	6	26	26	24
23	■	■	■	24	■	20	■	4	■	■	■	24
23	4	24	20	16	4	■	22	26	26	4	7	4
9	■	3	■	22	■	8	■	24	■	1	■	17
■	3	20	22	12	13	20	16	■	8	4	26	13
20	■	22	■	■	■	6	■	■	■	17	■	24
12	20	26	26	■	13	9	23	22 A	12	13	24	■
26	■	26	■	24	■	24	■	21	■	4	■	2
22	12	24	25	4	23	■	17	6	12	15	6	23
25	■	■	■	22	■	11	■	17	■	■	■	22
19	22	19	19	24	■	24	6	22	2	8	6	18
20	■	4	■	6	■	26 L	■	15	■	20	■	11
26	6	10	4	12	7	4	■	6	20	24	13	24

~~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	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22 A	23	24	25	26 L

Guardian cryptic crossword No 29,399 set by Vulcan



Across

1 Remind actor to be punctual (6)
4 Tasteless dip is in preparation (7)
9 Mark that shows one has passed (9)
10 Appropriate evidence from ballot paper one has voted for princess? (5)
11 Conclude wearing mink will be picked up (5)
12 Bit of luck perhaps after finding this on the hoof (9)
13 Such a wealthy family unlikely to be Republicans? (7)
15 Page I'm to edit, a flyer in black and white (6)
17 After massage on back go for physical exercise (6)
19 Content indicator has husband horribly aghast (7)
22 Brazen, say, you steal an outhouse (9)
24 Somewhat inappropriate to buy on this (5)
26 Grey with worry that's serious (5)
27 From an earlier age one has moved into Chile (9)
28 One out of work on Scottish island (7)
29 A particular method to make such a mirror (3-3)

Down

1 Inhaling one, smoker becomes more bloated (7)
2 Switch positions without consistency (2-3)
3 One is responsible for gripping pages (9)
4 Provisional team I am to join (7)
5 Auction includes hard rock (5)
6 I have many gods, a nature one above all? (9)
7 Daughter at cathedral city losing some energy: nothing sinister about this (6)
8 Hit gym for exercise to get strong (6)
14 What to do for new baby? Anything (3,4,2)
16 Grand Eastern terminus in development? (9)
18 Struggling, hence an upgrade needed (7)
19 Hound is down regularly in this bay (6)
20 Rather like Marx to be bad-tempered (7)
21 Townsman drops hot snack (6)
23 Looking for roof-beam to be shortened at one end (5)
25 Contemptuous expression putting pressure on playwright (5)

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“What am I going to do with my life?!

Mhairi Black on power, lies and quitting the ‘poisonous’ Commons aged 29

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Life & Arts

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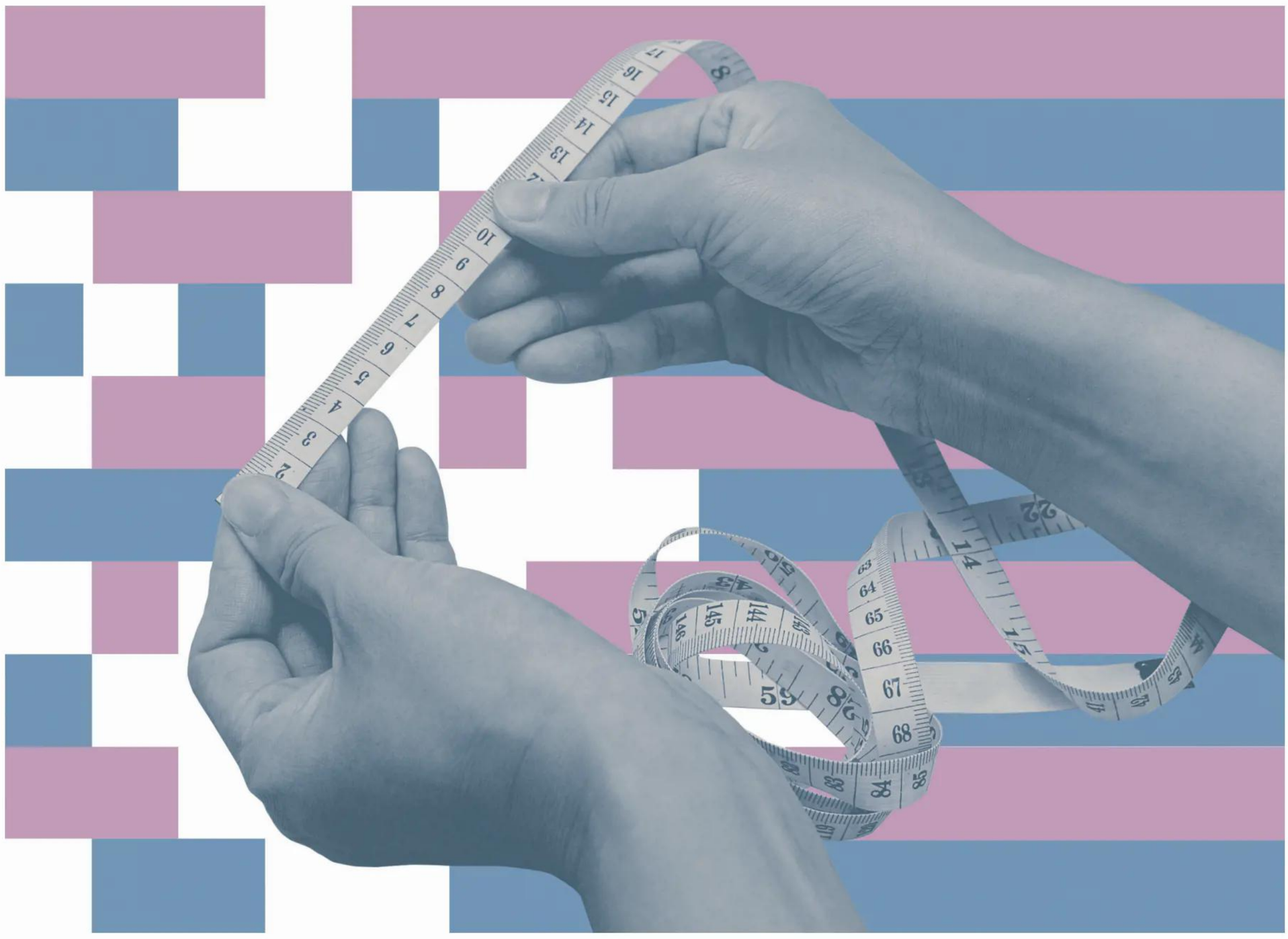


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How to build a better life

Let go of perfectionism and embrace 'good enough'

Pursuit of perfection is a prison, says **Moya Sarner**. Indulging it drains a person's colour, light and spontaneity



When I was planning my wedding, I was absolutely determined not to get caught up in the "perfect day" of it all, and to have a relaxed, informal celebration. I more or less managed, and my husband and I ended up having a lovely time. But I can't say the same for our honeymoon.

Perfectionism has a weird reputation; the only confessable "weakness" in a job interview, an eccentric character trait and the secret of Steve Jobs' success.

But I think it's much darker than that. It's a kind of psychological fascism that can take over the sufferer's mind, draining their world of colour and light, spontaneity and joy. Deep down, I think many of us are driven by the unconscious wish that if we could just have the perfect body, the perfect kitchen, the perfect job, the perfect wardrobe, the perfect family – if we could just rid ourselves of every flaw – then we would, finally, be happy. For that reason, it can be one of the most significant obstacles to happiness we encounter in life.

The psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott wrote about the importance of the "good enough mother" who meets enough of her infant's needs in a timely fashion, but is not perfect. This can often be understood as meaning that mothers should forgive themselves for falling short of perfection, because good is good enough. But what he was saying is far more radical than that: he was telling us that perfect is harmful.

To be so precisely attuned and knowing, to meet every desire immediately, to pass the toy straight away every time it is demanded stifles a baby's growth, robbing them of the opportunity to feel frustrated and learn to crawl to get the toy for themselves.

"Good enough" doesn't mean worse than perfect, and it's not simply that perfect is unachievable; it's that perfect is not even desirable. In fact, it can be dangerous.

> **The successful aura that surrounds a perfectionist can mask the truth: they are suffering**

We can learn from Winnicott that while perfection is not a virtue, tolerance of imperfection is. If we cannot develop the capacity to tolerate imperfection in ourselves and in those around us then we can have no self-confidence, no sustainable relationships, no fulfilling career. We will be endlessly trying on clothes, partners, jobs and sending them back because they're not quite right. Perfectionism makes for a thin and brittle life, spent mostly waiting for the Evri delivery and in the returns queue at the post office. If you're always trying to build something called a perfect life, you aren't really living the one you're in.

Of course, there are some benefits brought by perfectionism. If Nasa rocket scientists did not have a fastidious approach to their work, for example, I can imagine they would not go far (and nor would their rockets). But the successful aura that surrounds a perfectionist can mask the truth: they are suffering. The praise and admiration their symptoms attract make this way of being all the more seductive and insidious, which is why it can be so hard to break free.

How do I know all this? I am a perfectionist in recovery. I've started, with the help of my psychoanalyst, to recognise my intolerance of imperfection – my need for certain things to be exactly as I would like them to be, from the way my husband chops his onions to my terror of being late – and it has made a huge difference to my relationship, to my friendships, to my parenting. How can you be a good partner or friend if you expect everyone else to fit your own narrow expectations of how they ought to be? How can you help your child grow into their own person if they sense that they always need to colour precisely inside the lines you've drawn out for them? How can you ever experience anything like happiness if the conditions you've created for yourself mean it is defined solely by meeting a set of impossible standards?

My perfectionism unleashed itself on our honeymoon. I planned everything so carefully, spending hours searching for the perfect villa with the perfect views. When we arrived, nothing was how I imagined it to be, and instead of appreciating what was in front of me, I could only feel disappointed by what wasn't. Halfway through, a fire meant we had to evacuate our villa, driving through flames – my idealised honeymoon literally went up in smoke. I saw the damage the fire caused, and felt grateful for our lucky escape. I was liberated from perfectionism's grasp, and was finally able to appreciate being on holiday with my husband.

I think we need to go further than tolerating imperfections. We need to learn to appreciate their humanity, to see their beauty and their grace. Imperfections are why people will pay a calligrapher to hand-write invitations when a computer can produce a flawless version of the same script for less money and in less time. It's the crooked seam on the hand-knitted baby hat, the wobbly pastry crust on the homemade pie. So for a more delicious life, and ultimately a better one, I choose imperfectionism.

If only it were that easy.

Moya Sarner is an NHS psychotherapist and the author of When I Grow Up

ILLUSTRATION: GETTY/GUARDIAN DESIGN

Emma Beddington



The new midlife crisis look is hot, female and tattooed

I'm not having a midlife crisis. Any actuary would tell you I'm well over halfway, plus the years 30-40 were one long, undignified, slightly premature MLC (I won't apologise for abbreviating; time is short – see first point) that I refuse to revisit. But I'm interested in that moment when mortality ceases to be a vague, polite murmur and becomes a screaming alarm. My cohort is now traversing Dante's dark wood, so I feel surrounded if not by midlife crises (I'm experiencing disappointingly few vicarious ones), then by culture exploring them.

Of course, each generation rediscovers and makes a fuss about universal experiences, but it feels like the MLC is in the midst of a makeover. First, it's female. The new MLC queen is Miranda July, whose new novel All Fours is reframing perimenopausal turmoil as urgent, sensual, even "hot". July has managed to make midlife angst feel fresh, but positing All Fours as a singular overdue examination of the crystallising, life-upturning effect of the end of fertility is a bit unfair to many who came before. What about Bridget Christie's brilliant menopause sitcom The Change, for a start? I also think you don't need to explicitly articulate the physical and emotional reckonings of perimenopause to create art informed by it. Rachel Cusk has been dissecting aspects of female midlife turmoil since her divorce memoir Aftermath, surely; Fleishman Is In Trouble is, in large part, a female MLC novel, and Deborah Levy's Living trilogy became a lodestar for a generation of women navigating the shifting sands of middle age (I solemnly gave it to my sister for her 39th birthday, as if transmitting a sacred text).

Regardless, the female midlife crisis is having a moment. The menopause/MLC intersection has been comprehensively memeified recently and new online mag, Jenny, launched in January offering compellingly messy midlife content (dating younger men, getting 10 tattoos, taking Ozempic and more). The sports car and affair with a personal trainer are out; creative flowering, new ways of living and sexual rumspringa are in. That's welcome and overdue. But there are other MLC 2024 elements that are generational and situational, not gendered.

> The sports car is out; new ways of living and sexual rumspringa are in

As New York magazine explored recently, millennials are hitting their 40s and their experience is very much not your mama's midlife. Traditionally "a midlife crisis was born out of a complacent sense of security"; now, many midlifers haven't been able to acquire the previous generation's signifiers of stability: home, job security, pension, possibly kids. On the contrary, they face "a distinct lack of comfort, of resources". A midlife crisis? In this economy?

Then there are the existential challenges of life in 2024. Every day, I read at least one headline that scares me silly. Are we even going to get the lifespan we thought we could expect? When you're living through paroxysm after paroxysm of a polycrisis, indulging in the midlife variety could feel a little surplus to requirements. Who on earth, in 2024, feels that the rest of their life is so comfortably, predictably mapped out that they're compelled to kick against it?

That suggests the MLC might be becoming irrelevant, but actually, I think it might be becoming more radical. A generation reaching midlife without the security it was promised is questioning the systems and structures that failed to deliver. I'm not hearing about old school midlife drama from friends, but I am hearing plenty from people sick of unfulfilling and unstable work, profound inequities and inaccessible housing, childcare and healthcare. They aren't questioning their individual life choices so much as the way these have been curtailed and threatened, the paucity of political alternatives on offer and how all of that could – and must – change.

Conventionally, midlife crises ended in a sheepish realisation of how much you could lose by setting fire to your life, a renewed appreciation for comfort, possibly a settling into caution and conservatism. At least in a world already on fire, there's little chance of that happening.

Taylor Swift millipede? Naming nature must change

Unsurprisingly, numerous species of animal (including a flightless weevil and a parasitic flatworm) are named after David Attenborough – but were you aware of the existence of a Shakira wasp (aleoides Shakira) and the Taylor Swift millipede (nannaria swiftae)?

It's not just fauna. Spring on middle-aged-lady Instagram is a riot of people posting pics of their Gertrude Jekyll (a formidable horticulturist) roses and there are hundreds of others named for everyone from Judi Dench to Jimmy Greaves. We name the natural world for people we admire and want to honour, and always have; even asteroids, which makes me wonder if anything out there has named us. (The dismissive alien equivalent of "flightless weevils" perhaps?)

But for birds at least, the American Ornithological Society (AOS) has had enough. Late last year it announced that, from 2024, it "will change all English bird names currently named after people within its geographic jurisdiction" and reassess how it attributes new names.

This feels really positive. Sure, the Taylor Swift millepede is getting on with its life just fine without knowing its name, but I think what we call things matters for our relationship with and impact on the natural world. The AOS policy is part of a wider "decolonising" movement in taxonomy. There's a new acceptance that many eponyms are a legacy of empire and oppression, attributed by or honouring those who "discovered" species already well-known to Indigenous people.

But how should we name new flora and fauna, assuming we're lucky enough to still discover biodiversity rather than destroy it? There's a move to use local languages and reinstate Indigenous names, according to a paper in the science journal Nature, and thank goodness, because in the history of humans naming species, celebrity wasps are the least of our problems. Exhibit 1: numerous examples of what the internet has termed "birds named by people who clearly hate birds": "drab seedeater"; "monotonous lark". Exhibits 2 and 3: the SpongeBob SquarePants fungus and Hot Wheels spider. What next? An Uber shrew? A Tesla tit? Or just calling everything Species-y McSpecies-face? Make it stop.



The pet I'll never forget
Herbie the dog

It goes without saying that Herbert Hound's arrival just a few weeks after our daughter left home to go to university was a total coincidence. Empty-nest syndrome? No thank you. He chose us every bit as much as we chose him. When we first came to visit him at his mother's home in Essex – not Barking; Herbie gets fed up with that gag – he pushed his siblings out of the way, rolled on to his back and demanded to have his tummy rubbed. We were more than happy to oblige. It was love at first sight.

Herbie has always been very much his own dog. Initially, we bought into the tough love programme. That lasted about two nights as we tried to get him to sleep downstairs in a crate. Neither he nor we got a wink of sleep as he howled for hours on end, only stopping when we came downstairs to comfort him. On the third day, we gave him his own cushion in our bedroom. He has been blissfully happy ever since.

You could say Herbie was a trailblazer. Back in 2011 he was just about the only cockapoo on Tooting Bec Common in south London. Now you can't move for them. But he's happy to muck in with any dogs. He has more friends than we do. Above all, he is a gentle soul. He's just happy being an equal member of the family. Even strangers can't help falling in love with him. He's had a love letter from a friend's four-year-old grandson.

> **I have a tattoo of Herbie on one arm. On the other, a stick**

All this is more than enough for me never to forget him. But there is more. On my left arm I have a large tattoo of Herbie. Herbie is unimpressed. He thinks the tattoo makes him look fat. He can be quite vain. With good reason. There is also a companion tattoo on my right arm of a stick. I thought he would like to have something to chase. This one didn't go so well. It caused an infection in the bone near my artificial knee. I needed surgery. Herbie uncomplainingly kept me company on the bed during my recovery.

And soon I hope you also will not forget Herbert Hound. Because he has had an amazing career and his biography, written by me, will be published this autumn. Think how bad the last 13 years has been. Now imagine if that was your entire life and you were now an old dog. Ed Miliband, David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss, Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer: Herbie has worked for them all – from special adviser to No 10 staff. He was even at Balmoral when Queen Elizabeth died. Ever thought your dog could do a better job than those clowns in Westminster? Well, Herbie did, and does. John Crace

The Adventures of Herbert Hound by John Crace will be published by Little, Brown (£18.99) on 3 October.

COVER: MURDO MACLEOD/THE GUARDIAN

G2 The Guardian
Monday 3 June 2024

25 fitness lessons for late starters

Phil Daoust spent most of his 60 years out of shape. Then, bit by bit, he began to change. Here is everything he's learned

There's no getting away from it: I come across as smug. In March, kicking off what I hope will be a very long series of articles, I wrote that I was in "great shape" for a 60-year-old, with plans to make it to 100. I ran 30-40km every week, I added, on top of yoga and high-intensity interval training. In April, I celebrated my "freakishly strong" core; in May, my "remarkably youthful" brain. And that's just what I put in writing. At home, I can barely pass a mirror without pulling up my shirt to admire the faint beginnings of a six-pack. When I'm running and I overtake someone decades younger, I get such a bounce in my step that even I think I deserve a slap.

But here's the thing: what's mostly going through my mind is not: "I'm amazing!" but: "I'm amazed!" For three-quarters of my life there was nothing to suggest I might ever get into shape. I don't come from a sporty family, and as for school (with its rugby, cricket, football, gymnastics, swimming, etc), I remember precisely one game that I *played* rather than endured: a hockey match at 14 or 15, when I was in goal and, for once, found myself blocking shot after shot instead of watching them whiz into the net. This was the only time any of my teammates looked at me with something other than sympathy or scorn.

Other than that, it was afternoon after afternoon of standing around bored, or running around uncomfortably, or being yelled at by an angry adult who had once dreamed of becoming a professional athlete.

I'm not saying I was traumatised, but I definitely wasn't inspired. Over the next three decades, vaguely aware I should do something to look after my body, I had brief flirtations with rowing, swimming, cycling and kayaking, but mostly I concentrated on eating, drinking and sitting my way into an early grave.

By the late 2000s, as I wrote at the time: "Not only was I clinically obese; I was in denial. I had broken a neighbour's bench just by sitting on it. My mother would nod at my stomach and ask when 'it' was due. One so-called friend shouted 'Thar he blows!' when I joined him on a beach. I told myself I just needed to lose a few pounds, and it was normal for my thighs to rub holes in my jeans." My cholesterol was far too high, and when I was on edge or miserable, the only remedy I knew was to open another bottle. And there always was another bottle. I was living in France, so even good wine was cheap - and I had a cellar.

I was 45 before I made a real effort to improve my diet, 50 before I started the NHS's "Couch to 5k" plan and discovered that running could structure my attempt to reshape myself; and 57 before I finally gave up booze. There was a lot of slippage on the way, but in my - no, seriously? - seventh decade it feels as if I've settled into a healthy relationship with my own body. And I've learned a few things worth sharing with other late starters.

Just because you loathed PE, you will not necessarily hate all physical activity

This time there won't be some blowhard whistling at you, or a supposed friend who would rather die than have you on his team. Now, you can choose how hard you push yourself, how long you spend doing it, and whether or not you do it when it's raining, you're on your period or you just woke up aching.

That said, don't count on any kind of transcendental experience

It took me *years* of running before I got anything like a high.

But don't write off the possibility either

Last week's yoga class was coming to an end, we were lying with our eyes closed in "corpse" pose and the instructor began massaging my temples with essential oil. I felt like a cat does when you rub it behind the ears.

Don't underestimate the power of walking

It will shift weight (if that's what you're after), condition you for something more strenuous and give you space to think or listen to your favourite music or podcast. Although most of the world seems to have forgotten this, it will also get you places - and more reliably than any other form of transport. Your feet will never go on strike, get stuck in a jam or be held at a station while an engineer arrives to reset the emergency alarm.

Start with something you may enjoy, not something that people swear is good for you

Your starter exercise does not have to provide an all-body workout or stretch your mind as well as your muscles. Your priority should be to get moving, and become comfortable with your body so you can branch out when you need to. Which you will, because ...

Even if cardio is your thing, you can't ignore resistance

The older we get, the more muscle we lose, making it more likely that we will "have a fall" - and struggle to recover from it. To build it back, you will have to lift weights, learn how to use those frightening machines in the gym, or leverage the weight of your own body with push-ups, planks, lunges and squats.

> **Walking will shift weight, condition you for something more strenuous and give you space to think**



Phil with his girlfriend (now wife) Hannah in 2014



Even if resistance work *is* your thing, you can't ignore cardio

For a long, active life you need to stretch your heart, lungs and circulation as well as your abs, glutes and traps.

This world is nothing but hills!

You'll just have to suck this up once you start running, cycling or even walking. Living at the bottom of a long, steep slope, I'm reconciled to starting most runs with a six-minute climb. There are lovely parks at the end of it, and a nature reserve, and more bloody hills.

Sweating like a pig doesn't mean you're unfit

Sample size of one here, so it's not exactly scientific, but I still get red and drippy as soon as my pulse is raised. If I'm exercising outdoors, I'm happiest in drizzle; if I'm doing hot yoga, with the room at 37C, there are puddles of brine around me. Sorry, yoga-mates. But also, if we're 15 minutes in and you're not even glowing, I hate you.

If you're not enjoying yourself, try to narrow down why

Is it the activity that's rubbing you up the wrong way, or the environment? If you're swimming, you may discover that you hate pools but love open water. If you're running, you may far prefer roads, the treadmill or forest trails - with or without company, or music, or a target time and pace.



PHOTOGRAPHS: LINDA NYLIND/THE GUARDIAN

When you exercise matters – just not in the way that most people say it does

Maybe you work out best at 6am on an empty stomach, a few hours later when you've had breakfast and given it time to settle, or even late at night. Whatever you choose, someone on the internet will tell you that you're doing it all wrong for maximum gains, and have the scientific studies to prove it. Tell them to get stuffed. They're talking about average or typical humans. You are you; you do you.

You will rarely regret paying for an instructor or personal trainer. Gyms, however ...

If you find a trainer or teacher that you click with, and can afford a few classes, it will do wonders for your confidence and technique. When it comes to gyms, however, investing money in a membership is no guarantee you will invest time and effort. Do not sign a long-term contract unless you are 100% sure it is right for you.

If you're still working, your company may have arranged what looks like a fantastic 12-month deal with a local gym – but will you have time to use it in your lunch break, or the inclination to visit before or after work? Do you really want to be wiping your thigh-sweat off the hip adductor machine so your boss can use it after you? Come to think of it, do you even like being in a gym?

You will move better if your hands are empty

If you really can't run without your mobile phone or water bottle, get a belt, armband or a backpack that will hold it. Some shorts and leggings even have things called pockets.

If it's hurting, stop

A little soreness is usually fine, especially after you've exercised. If all you have to worry about is blisters, the squishy, expensive "healing" plasters are worth every penny. But don't ignore anything stabbing, grinding, shooting or knee-buckling. Stop what you're doing and take at least a week off. If you feel confident about resuming without seeing a doctor, physio (etc), start slowly and be prepared to stop again.

In fact, if you're hating it, stop too

Sometimes a workout just doesn't work out – you're more tired than you thought, or you can't focus, or you are unexpectedly hating every minute. Give yourself a little longer; then, if you're sure this isn't something you can push through, cut the session short and

Do not sign a long-term gym contract unless you are 100% sure it is right for you. Do you even like the gym?

tell yourself you're making sure you're in better shape for next time. Particularly at the start, you're training your brain as much as your body. Try not to teach it that exercise is horrible.

That said, the 'second wind' really is a thing

I often find myself struggling for the first 6km of a run, then finally hit my stride. I don't pretend to understand why.

Don't expect exercise alone to fix your body

It's part of the puzzle, but how you eat and feel and sleep are equally important. Also ...

If you've got a monkey on your back, maybe give it a little shake every now and again to see if it will let go

All the push-ups, pilates and ping-pong in the world won't make up for a problem with drink, drugs or nicotine. I have no first-hand experience of the last two. All I know is that sometimes you can outlast what seemed like an integral part of life. In 2020, at least 40 years after my first ever alcoholic drink, I had what I hope and expect will be my last. It was the first time I'd managed to give up for more than a few weeks. By the time of that final glass, I was drinking at least a bottle of wine most nights. I have no idea how I stopped this time, or why I have since felt nothing more than mild longing for a mouthful of red when I am cooking. Maybe I was just ready? Maybe it was time? My drinking was never purely about stress, but it must have helped that exercise gave me another way to cope.

If you're fit enough to exercise with young people, go for it

Sure, you're old enough to be everyone's father. But no one is looking at you – not with that wrinkly skin. Or, if they are, it's because they're so impressed with your side plank. You, meanwhile, are being pushed a bit harder than you would with a bunch of over-55s.

Embrace the cheerleaders, ignore the others

Someone, somewhere is aching to tell you that you're wasting your time, or even heading for a heart attack. Try to remember you're doing this for you, not for some idiot who never got over the fact that the man who popularised jogging died while – oh, my aching sides! – jogging. The last bloke who gave me some "friendly" advice was about my age and looked 20 years older. He was selling flowers outside a cemetery, which I guess was some kind of message.

You should probably try yoga

Leaving aside what it does for flexibility and balance, there's something about it that chips away at your cynicism. I started out curling my lip at the "third eye" and the talk of gratitude; now I can bow my head and namaste with the best of them. If you're a yogi looking for a slogan, could I suggest "I can sweeten even the sourest old fart"?

If you're on a long run or cycle ride, make sure you know where the toilets are

Especially first thing in the morning – once you get your body moving, your bowels will also spring into action.

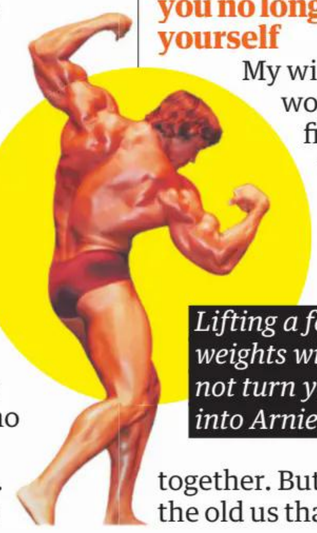
Lifting a few dumbbells will not suddenly turn you into another Arnie

Even Schwarzenegger had to work incredibly hard at it. This is either very good news or very bad, depending on your #fitnessgoals.

You'll change your taste in music

One minute you're listening to the Smiths and the KLF, the next it's all Dua Lipa and Rihanna. Blame those exercise classes with their poppy earworms, and the fact that it's more enjoyable to run to RiRi's We Found Love than Morrissey's Meat Is Murder.

There may come a point where you no longer recognise yourself



Lifting a few weights will not turn you into Arnie ...

My wife, who has also worked hard on her fitness, often jokes that the Phil and Hannah of 10 years ago would despise the Phil and Hannah of today. "What a couple of tossers," she said the other night, as we headed off to a class together. But that says more about the old us than the new.

‘Any perceived weakness is weaponised in politics’

When Mhairi Black was sworn in, aged 20, she was the youngest MP to be appointed since 1832. **Libby Brooks** looks back with the outgoing SNP star on 10 years of hard work and ‘hellish’ travel

For some MPs, the general election announcement came as a shock; for others, a starting pistol. But for Mhairi Black it was the end of “a sort of purgatory”, as she prepared to step down as MP for Paisley and Renfrewshire South, a position she has held for almost a decade. She will turn 30 in September. “I’m about to be exactly where I was 10 years ago, asking: ‘What am I going to do with my life?’”

The Scottish National party’s deputy leader at Westminster announced last summer that she intended to leave the Commons, a place she has variously described as “defunct”, “depressing”, “sexist”, “poisonous” and “one of the most unhealthy workplaces that you could ever be in”.

But as the finish line approaches, she adds an essential clarification: “I genuinely don’t regret any of it. That’s not to say I’ve enjoyed every single second, but I would still rather have done it than not.”

When she was sworn in, aged 20, she was the youngest MP to be appointed since the Reform Act of 1832. In many ways, Black was the distillation of all that the Westminster establishment feared most about the SNP’s landslide victory in the 2015 general election, when it won all but three of Scotland’s 59 constituencies: she was young, fierce and a lesbian with an unmodulated accent who had unseated a Labour veteran – the former secretary of state for Scotland, Douglas Alexander. The photograph of their awkward election night handshake became a visual shorthand for Labour’s bloody demise north of the border.



Black with her fellow newly elected SNP MP Gavin Newlands, 2015

> **It’s a long game of chess for many politicians, but for me it’s either right or wrong**

Her extraordinary maiden speech was a withering attack on the then chancellor George Osborne, in which she declared herself to be the only 20-year-old in the country whose housing bills he was prepared to help with, just after he’d abolished housing benefit for the under 21s. It got 10m views online in its first week. She was being talked about as a future leader of her party. She still gets effusive emails from people who have just discovered the speech today, a contrast to the torrent of online abuse she receives on a regular basis. Black took the dubious honour of first member to use the C-word in the Commons when she read out excerpts – “dyke, rug muncher, dirty bitch, ugly cunt” – in a 2018 debate on hate crime.

She says she is not standing again in part for personal reasons: “I want to have more calmness and also more structure to my life, rather than having it dictated by Westminster.” But cynics suggest she is leaving before she is pushed by the electorate, with the SNP predicted to lose a swathe of seats to a resurgent Scottish Labour. There is also the fact, which may come as something of a surprise, that she doesn’t consider being a politician to be a job for life: “I’ve genuinely never worried about a career,” she says. “I can see how politicians game play – it’s a long game of chess for many of them. For me, it’s either right or wrong, sensible or stupid.” Black insists that she doesn’t see party politics “in my immediate future” but, she caveats: “Politics is everywhere – even the Barbie movie was political – so whatever I end up doing, I don’t think I can ever be free of politics or would want to be.”

The weekly travel back and forth to London, last-minute schedule changes and constant uncertainties of timing are “hellish”, affecting not only her constituency work but also her home life. Her partner, whom she married in 2022, “the rampant feminist that she is, cannot wait to have a housewife”, she jokes. “I’m aware of how depressing and how critical I sound, but I do think it’s important for people to know the reality of what day-to-day politics is like.”

What would she change? “Practical stuff like the voting system, how we conduct the timings of business” – by which she means not only late-night votes but archaic rules about amendments and who will be called to speak in a debate. “So much time is wasted and it serves nobody other than the folk who view parliament as a private club.”

I meet Black today in her constituency office, which sits between a dog grooming parlour and a branch of Subway, in the centre of Paisley. A former textile town, Paisley has seen millions of pounds of cultural investment in recent years, but is too often still defined by industrial decline. Ferguslie Park, a housing estate that was once the site of thriving mills, is now the most deprived area in Scotland.

She says she is most proud of the successes with individual constituency cases during her time as an MP. “It might seem like a small win but for the person involved it was massive,” she says. It was at one of her first surgeries as a new MP that she was alerted to the Waspi campaign – the scandal affecting women born in the 1950s, who lost out after changes to the state pension age. She has campaigned on the issue since, and later sat on the work and pensions select committee.

In person, Black is funny and unfussy, open enough for someone who plainly does not like talking about herself to a relative stranger. She’s also sharply intelligent, as you would expect from someone who started university at 16 and secured a first-class degree while still out on the campaign trail. She took her final exam after she was elected.

While Black has always insisted that her age is the least interesting thing about her, it is hard to forget that she has spent most of her adult life as a member of parliament. Nor the impact this must have had on her.

She recalls one night out in Glasgow to celebrate a friend’s 21st birthday, not long after her maiden speech. The group ended up at the Garage nightclub, a sticky-floored student hangout in Glasgow city centre, when suddenly a message came up on the projector: “Anybody who gets a photo with Mhairi gets a free drink.”



I remember her telling me about this incident soon after it happened – how her close-knit group of friends made a ring around her to stop people taking pictures of her, and later turned down other lucrative offers from newspapers to tell tales of her bad behaviour.

“Because I was so protected by the folk around me, I don’t feel I missed out on that much,” she says now. “I still had the social life. I just had to be a bit more careful about who I celebrated with.”

Black grew up in Paisley with her older brother and their parents, who were teachers. She remembers hearing them talking at school or political campaign meetings – both were involved in protests against the Iraq war. “They weren’t public speakers, but if we were at a meeting and my dad made a point it was always very eloquent and thought through,” she says.

PHOTOGRAPHS: MURDO MACLEOD/THE GUARDIAN; JESSICA TAYLOR/PA; AFP/GETTY IMAGES





Black speaking during Prime Minister's Questions, May 2023

It always makes me laugh when people say I talk like a ned. This is me really trying

This was the genesis, she believes, of her talent for oratory. In 2014, she got involved in the independence campaign and ended up debating alongside the former SNP deputy leader Jim Sillars. He recognised her raw talent and asked her to join him touring the "Margo mobile" – a converted van named in honour of his late wife and nationalist heroine Margo MacDonald – around housing estates and working-class communities in the final weeks before the vote.

"One time he had me on the back of the van where the PA system was," she says. "He just handed the mic to me in the middle of this [housing] scheme. I was awful, but it was a real learning curve."

While her uncompromising speaking ability continues to draw praise – in 2022 she declared that the UK was "sleepwalking towards fascism" during the Queen's speech debate and she has recently made powerful demands for a ceasefire in Gaza – she has faced criticism and ridicule.

One parliamentary sketch writer complained he couldn't understand her accent. She is variously described as "thuggish" or a "ned" (Scottish slang for a hooligan), or else castigated for overplaying her accent to appear more working class. "It always makes me laugh when people say I talk like a ned," says Black. "This is me really trying."

The former SNP MP Eilidh Whiteford – who was an unofficial mentor to Black, occupying the office near hers when she first arrived in parliament – says: "I was appalled by the grief she got for her accent, but she refused to moderate it. There was an anger that she wouldn't go back in her box."

After the 2017 general election, Black was signed off work for several months, initially for a physical complaint but "then my mental health started to deteriorate as well. It was a domino effect."

She is circumspect about the support she received from her own party. Individual colleagues were helpful, she says, but on a formal basis "there could have been more support … I do feel lessons could be learned." The response from her political opponents was even worse. She describes some Labour MPs "going to town on it, saying that I just deliberately wasn't turning up … It was right dirty politics." She shakes her head. "Any perceived weakness is weaponised immediately.

"I spoke to the Labour whips about it, I spoke to the Labour MPs. I said: 'You know what the script is here, you're supposed to be the party of looking after workers' health and you're having a pop at me.'"

It is extraordinary, I say, that in the midst of a period of significant mental ill-health, she was fronting up to her critics in the lobbies. What does that say about her, I ask? "Scrappy-Doo," she snaps back, and laughs. "Even when I first went in the door, I thought, everybody in here's equal because you all got elected the same way I got elected."

Since then, have there been other moments when her mental health has suffered? "Definitely. There can be lots of different factors. When your body's telling you 'I need a holiday', but you've got another two months. Folk manipulating you being ill or briefing against you."

Family and friends have helped her maintain her mental equilibrium. "I've always been one foot out of Westminster, and I've never allowed it to become my life. I rely so heavily on my support network and my loved ones that once I come out of that place, I'm able to switch off and come back down to earth."

She came out to her family when she was about 15. "But my family knew, and I never felt the need to pretend. Again, it speaks to the love and nurture I always had around me that I find it really hard to not be myself."

In the Commons, this has translated into how she presents herself. In the early days, her mum took her shopping for smart suits from Primark and Next. "But I didn't feel comfortable, so I switched back to wearing my black jeans and put a suit jacket over that. And even cutting my hair. I just felt so much better."

Her own party is still reeling from rows over gender recognition and hate crime reforms – and the axing of the governing partnership with the Scottish Greens, which led to Humza Yousaf's dramatic resignation and the unexpected return of the SNP veteran John Swinney to the leadership.

Swinney took up his position as first minister with a pledge to "govern from the mainstream" and many of Black's colleagues have expressed concern at a growing perception among voters that the SNP is distracted and divided over gender issues at the expense of their doorstep concerns.

With a general election looming, Black is a pragmatist. "I think that progressing trans rights is absolutely the right thing to do, but during a cost of living crisis I can understand why people get frustrated with it," she says. While she provoked anger when she dismissed gender-critical feminists as "50-year-old Karens", she says she is proud for "sticking up for trans people. I think that I will look back on it in years to come and think: 'Fair play to you, that wasn't easy, it wasn't popular, but it was the right thing.'"

While she says it is the responsibility of politicians to challenge "people whipping up hatred and spreading disinformation", it is also "part of the genius of the culture war tactic that then it just looks like we're talking among ourselves about nothing other than trans issues … It's certainly not a bad thing for the Scottish government to be drawing a line in the sand and going: 'Look, we need to talk to people where they're at right now.'"

Swinney is "what the party needs at the moment", Black says, because of "the wealth of experience that he brings and the authority that he can command over all different parts of the party". She is less effusive about the appointment of Kate Forbes as his deputy first minister. Black has previously hit out at Forbes's conservative evangelical beliefs, describing her "incredible hurt" at Forbes's statement that she would not have supported equal marriage legislation at Holyrood when she ran for leadership of the party last year. "Had a candidate said they do not believe in racially mixed marriages we would rightly be horrified – so why is my marriage still considered fair game?" she tweeted. "Of course I still have a problem with those issues," says Black today.

She will be knocking on doors for the SNP for the election, and after that she will let the pieces fall where they may. "Ask me again in a year when I can't pay bills," she laughs. "Until then I'm ready to close that chapter and look to new adventures."



'Outrageous fun' ... Anna Nicole

'Eva-Maria was game for all of it – even the pole-dancing'

From the expletive-strewn Anna Nicole to the utter savagery of The Minotaur, **Antonio Pappano** picks his heart-stopping highs from 22 years as music director of the Royal Opera House

Ariadne auf Naxos (2002)

Deciding on the piece with which to inaugurate my Royal Opera tenure kept me up nights. I chose Strauss's Ariadne auf Naxos in collaboration with director Christof Loy. It is a chamber opera, thus giving me the opportunity to get to know my first-chair players really well, and it addresses so many issues around creativity, composing, putting on a show, improvisation, the myriad obstacles, sponsorship – all clothed in wondrous-seeming chaos. A comedy and a tragedy, together. My own personal tragi-comedy started on day one of rehearsals when I had to have an emergency root canal dental procedure. If you could have seen what I looked like at that first rehearsal ...

We had several heart-stopping moments in rehearsal with a visible stage lift continually giving up the ghost, costing precious rehearsal time. I thought we'd never open. When we did, after my entrance bow, I turned around to the orchestra and my electric-powered music stand popped up by itself to neck level. It was hysterical for sure, the musicians were in stitches, but I had to figure out in seconds (though it seemed like minutes) how to fix it, which I did. Phew.

Wozzeck (2002)

For my second new production, I invited Keith Warner to direct an opera I had been longing to conduct: Berg's Wozzeck. Wozzeck is a poor, pathetic, downtrodden soldier, mentally unwell, treated abusively by his Captain, exploited by the army Doctor who does psychological and physical experiments on him, and cuckolded by the Drum Major who sleeps with his partner Marie. Though the opera has the tight dramaturgy of Büchner's original play, its scenic structure is laid out musically using traditional dance forms, much like a Bach partita.

Keith, like me, was doing Wozzeck for the first time, and as his productions often have dark set designs, I said to him and his stage designer: "Why don't you do something in white instead of black?" They came up with a space that couldn't have been whiter, a laboratory where the Doctor – a very menacing character – does his experiments on Wozzeck. There were glass cases filled with earth, plant life, what looked like animal life and other more gruesome images. Wozzeck suffers from severe hallucinations, and these are embodied in what he sees in those cases – he sees both what is actually there and what he imagines to be there.

Keith carried this idea forward later in the opera after Wozzeck has murdered Marie. The lake is represented by a huge glass case full of water over which Marie is killed. Wozzeck returns in search of the murder weapon, but the allure of the water and his intensely fraught state of mind lead him to give up and drown himself. Matthias Goerne, who sang the title role in the premiere run, had been a champion swimmer for East Germany, and said to us: "If you give me an oxygen pump and you are able to hide it, I'll stay underwater with my eyes open for the six or seven minutes." This is what the audience was to stare at, a horrific sight and wrenchingly uncomfortable, yet underpinned by some of the most moving music ever written for the theatre. This scene was one of the greatest *coups de théâtre* I have ever seen.

> **Matthias Goerne had swum for Germany – and did six minutes underwater for the Wozzeck drowning scene**

The Minotaur (2008)

Sir Harrison Birtwistle's The Minotaur – with a libretto by the poet David Harsent, a retelling of the Greek myth of the Minotaur (half man, half bull), Theseus and Ariadne – was tailor-made for Birtwistle who had been preoccupied with myth for decades. The music he drew forth was not only primal and dreamlike, but also vividly human. It churns as the sea



'Coup de théâtre!' ... Wozzeck

PHOTOGRAPHS: TRISTRAM KENTON FOR THE GUARDIAN; BILL COOPER



'Truly scary' ... The Minotaur

churns, wave on wave, but slowly, menacingly, keeping you aware of the terrible depths below. Harry orchestrated using every possible combination of bass instruments to create a thick molasses of musical matter that acts as an unstable foundation. It is eerie and hypnotic, but then there are flecks of light.

Drama abounds in the ritualistic chorus scenes. The music becomes unrelentingly rhythmic and barbaric. The Innocents are sent to be sacrificed to the Minotaur, the drama demands music of the utmost savagery. It was up to me and my second conductor (we needed another one) to achieve a level of precision that made sense of it all. It was a truly scary ride. Though the chorus and orchestra were sharing the same basic rhythmic groove, which was complicated enough in itself, a group of drummers placed around them on stage was at the same time hammering out at full volume a completely different set of ritualistic and attention-seeking rhythms.

Harry sat next to me during all the preparatory music and staging rehearsals. Can you imagine what an inspiration that was for a conductor? I had myriad questions for him as I felt almost lost at the beginning. A couple of weeks in, he paid me the greatest possible compliment: "You know, you conduct this like music!"

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk (2004)

From the moment Lady Macbeth was first performed it caused controversy. Stalin himself was scandalised and set out to ruin Shostakovich – even putting his life in danger. Richard Jones's 2004 production had all the bravado and daring the piece begs for.

The difficulty of the score and the great challenge it presents for performers is a vital part of the theatrical experience. For the conductor, the challenges include very tricky ensembles, testing everyone's rhythmic sense; dealing with often huge forces; and the need for a film-score conductor's precision of timing even in the intimate scenes.

In Lady Macbeth, Richard ingeniously used robotic elements for parody, most especially when he was working with the chorus: for instance, the stupidly mechanical movements of the police, rendering them automaton-like, emphasising this cynically ironic and biting vignette by Shostakovich on the ineptitude of the police in Russia.

Richard loves creating laughter at the most seemingly inappropriate moments. Katerina (the Lady Macbeth of the title) and her lover Sergei kill her husband, Zinovy – in Richard's production she gives Sergei an axe to finish the job. After the grisly act, a shift in lighting reveals Katerina carrying a plastic supermarket bag dripping with blood. Obviously Zinovy's head is in it, and although the moment is beyond terrifying, every night it got the hugest wave of laughter from the audience.

Anna Nicole (2011)

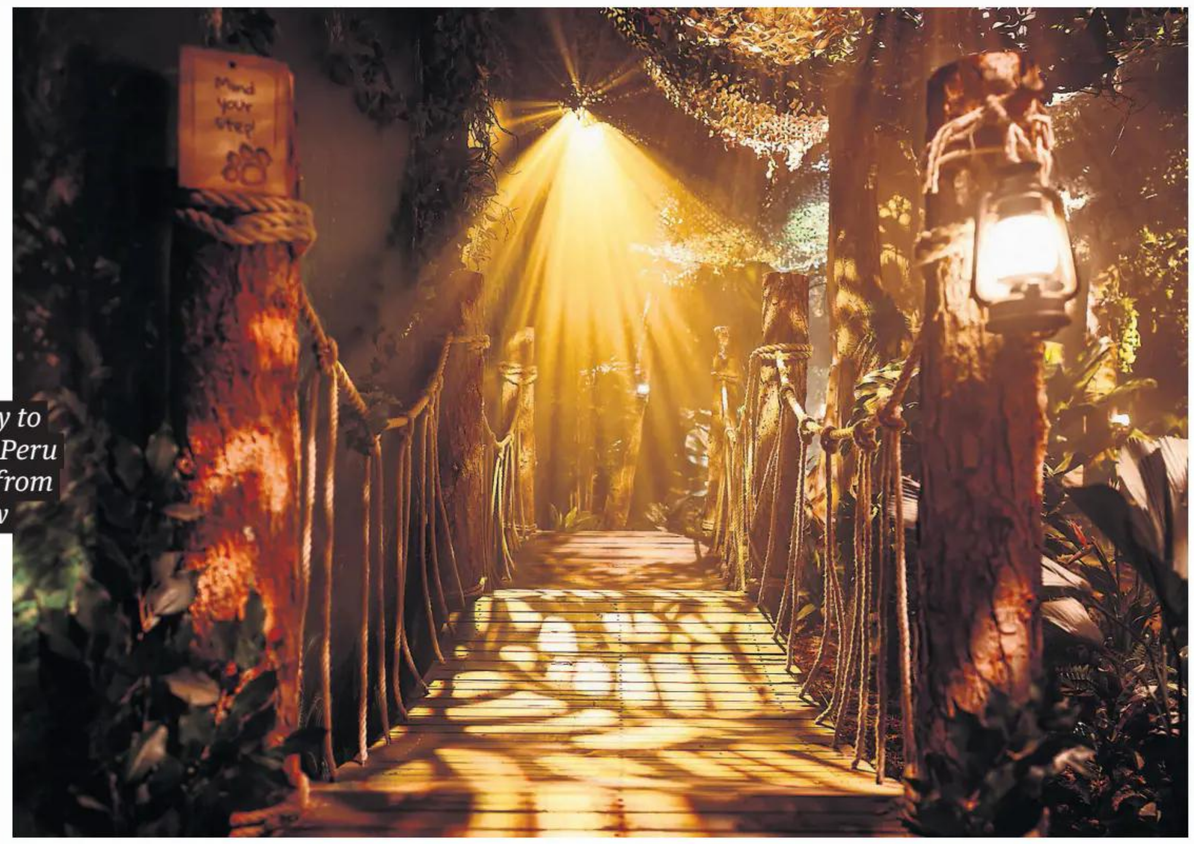
When Mark-Anthony Turnage and his librettist Richard Thomas pitched Anna Nicole to us, we were at first taken aback. It certainly offered an opportunity to bring to the stage subject matter that was still very much in the news. I will admit that it took half of the rehearsal period before I was able to jettison those "What were we thinking?" thoughts.

Several months before rehearsals started, workshops were held to sing and read through the piece, provoking lively discussion about structure, tempo, length and language. This last item was hotly debated. Richard had written a no-holds-barred text full of expletives, and though it was hilarious fun to hear such outrageous words sung by opera singers, it was also a bit embarrassing, at least at the start.

How do you cast a title role such as this? There was never any question; it had to be Eva-Maria Westbroek. The real Anna Nicole was reportedly a very sweet person, but she made some bizarre choices, driven by the rebel within her. A dream role, I think. Though some of the part is written "operatically", vocally speaking large chunks of it are written in a quasi-pop-music idiom. Eva-Maria was game for all of it, even the prosthetic breasts and the pole dancing. She was radiant in the role, and was hugely sympathetic, as she is in real life.

This was as close to a West End or Broadway musical as the Royal Opera House was going to get, and the rehearsals, though fun, were punishing. The timing of everything had to be spot on. The orchestra were a turbo-charged pit band and we had to be all razzle-dazzle, meeting the obscene patter coming from the stage punch for punch. The trajectory of the piece leads us on a more distressing journey. The opera becomes darker, desperation creeping in. Though it became a difficult watch, it was an opportunity for all of us to find other colours, other tempi – a relief from the relentless sleaze. The ending, though inevitable, was devastating.

This is an edited extract from My Life in Music, published by Faber on 6 June. Pappano conducts Andrea Chénier at the Royal Opera House, London, from 30 May to 11 June



This way to darkest Peru ... a set from the show

Those bear necessities

Hide the marmalade! Paddington has gone immersive. **Kate Wyver** goes behind the scenes at a magical new 'experience' dedicated to everyone's furry favourite

An almighty crash sounds from above. "Everything's fine, Mrs Brown!" a voice calls out. I peek my head round the door of 32 Windsor Gardens. On the winding stairs sits a pair of little red wellies, as if someone rather small and accident-prone has just slipped them off and scampered upstairs.

This is The Paddington Bear Experience, which has just moved into London's County Hall, next to the Sea Life aquarium on the banks of the Thames. A cross between a film set, a theatre show and a party, the 70-minute experience presents a rose-tinted world spun from Michael Bond's beloved stories about the bear from darkest Peru, slightly heightened and slightly magical.

"It's all about the warm Paddington welcome," says director Tom Maller, who is collaborating with designer Rebecca Brower. The pair previously made Peaky Blinders: The Rise, recreating the world of the TV crime drama. Maller, who spent years working with immersive experts Secret Cinema, took on this project because he wanted to make a show his three-year-old son would enjoy. When he goes home from rehearsals, he takes back messages from his friend Paddington.

With the site build still in progress, hard hats are required when I visit some of the team at Mr Gruber's antique shop, the entryway to Paddington's world. A toy train runs around the walls and a tumble of old suitcases is piled in one corner. Inside, we're whisked to Paddington station, where our sweet bear is waiting to be found – although the appearance of Paddington himself is something they are eager to keep secret.

Bond's bear goes back more than 65 years, but the team have drawn heavily upon the recent movies. Half of the props and dressing are from Studio Canal's hit films. "We want people to feel they're at the heart of the story," Maller says. Having secured the lease for 15 years, everything is being built to last. They've even created their own marmalade, for sale at the end.

This may be an enormous commercial venture, but the details show how much heart has gone into it. We stop at the blossom tree on the wall at the base of the Browns' stairs. "You use your fingers," designer Brower beams, pressing her thumb into a painted petal. She asked the film's original artist how it was done and copied the same effect. "All the little blossoms are fingerprints."

When audiences travel through an immersive experience, purpose is key. "Mrs Brown said to Paddington, 'Why don't you invite your friends for Marmalade Day?'" producer Nathan Brine explains, of the imaginary festival that gives us a reason for being here. "But of course everybody Paddington ever meets are his friends," he smiles, "so he's invited everybody."

The roles are shared across 49 performers who play the various characters. The experience is guided by actors, but there's space to rummage and roam. Maller says the audience fit into different types, including The Fresh Face ("Nathan had a spare ticket, I've never seen Paddington or been to an immersive experience, what's going on?"); The Narrative Player ("They want something completely new they can't get from the books or movies"); and The Explorer ("When you say turn left, they'll turn right.")

"We don't want everything screwed shut," says Brower, sweeping sawdust off a table as we move into the living room, where detritus indicates Paddington has found himself in another pickle. "We love making everything tactile and free to explore." Much of the space is designed to give the impression of Paddington having just been there – meeting a hero requires patience. "It's all about anticipation," Maller cautions.

When I visit again, a few weeks later, it's a tech rehearsal and the three floors are bustling with busy hands, saws and cardboard now replaced by computers and wires. With groups of 30 starting the experience every seven and a half minutes, there is an extremely strict schedule. As we pass through to the nearly finished kitchen, you can almost smell the cake Mrs Bird will be baking.

Just as the books were originally written for children but loved by all, there is no age limit here. "I want people to have a good time whether you're five or 105," Maller says. "We want to treat children how they want to be treated and not talk down to them. But if we have a group of 30 adults, the script allows the actor to change their tone." As he speaks, London vanishes and we emerge into a Peruvian jungle of mostly real trees.

Soon, visitors will arrive for audience testing, invited to push the experience to breaking point before the public pours in. "Our audiences don't just go home and say they saw something," says Maller proudly. "They leave and go, 'I made marmalade in Peru!'"

The Paddington Bear Experience is booking at County Hall, London, until 30 March



PHOTOGRAPHS: ALEX BRENNER; STUDIOCANAL/ALLSTARS



Royal Marine Commandos coming ashore in D-Day: The Unheard Tapes

Review D-Day: The Unheard Tapes, BBC Two

The full horror of war's 'greatest day' brought brilliantly to life

★★★★★

Stuart Jeffries



Eighty years ago this month a young bloke from south London called Wally Parr was floating through the night in a flimsy wooden glider a few thousand feet over the Channel. He wasn't alone. Jammed alongside him in one of six such craft were his mates from the British army's 6th Airborne Division. On the night before the D-day landings, they were heading behind enemy lines to capture a bridge from the Germans. Some wouldn't see the dawn.

If the 181 men on these gliders were afraid, adrenaline and delusion may have helped still their nerves. "The thing that keeps most men going in battle," reflects one, "is despite seeing people die left right and centre, they always get this idea that it's not going to be them." These were words of the late Pte Parr, who died in 2005, recorded during an interview after the second world war. Here, those words are brought to life by being lip-synced in a characterful performance by Samuel Lawrence, a young actor dressed in 1940s civvies.

This heartbreaking three-part series commemorates what British, US and Canadian soldiers did one day in June 1944, but also includes the testimonies of French civilians and resistance fighters – as well as considering the experiences of young Germans in their bunkers as they awaited the attentions of about 150,000 incoming allied troops. In each case, actors in period dress are used to bring decades-old audio interviews to life.

It's an overwhelming success. Ever since Lord of the Rings director Peter Jackson's 2018 film They Shall Not Grow Old, which colourised black and white footage of squaddies in the first world war trenches – and thereby made century-old sacrifice up close and personal – the bar has been set high for TV making old soldiers' sacrifice emotionally resonant to 21st-century viewers. The series director of D-Day: The Unheard Tapes, Mark Radice, along with the lip-syncers, film crews, historians and re-enactment groups, do just that, however. The simple device of having late men's recorded words performed by living actors rivals what epic wartime films such as Saving Private Ryan or Dunkirk did, namely ensuring that age shall not wither their memory.

As the glider, released from the Halifax bomber that had towed it skyward from Dorset, levelled out, we hear that someone opened the door to reveal the darkling French fields below. "It was so quiet," recalls Maj John Howard. Sitting nearby him and Parr in the glider was Lt Den Brotheridge, whose wife was due to give birth two weeks after D-day. The silence was interrupted as the glider crash landed. Maj Howard recalled checking that his men were uninjured and then realised they were only 50 yards from the Benouville Bridge they had been tasked with seizing to halt any advance by German tanks. Seconds later, his men were in a gunfight with Nazi troops, during which Lt Brotheridge was shot – making him one of D-day's first casualties, and meaning his daughter grew up never knowing her dad. Parr knelt over him as he died. "All the years of training he'd put in," we hear him tell us. "He only lasted 20 seconds, 30 seconds."

D-day: The Unheard Tapes brims with such beautifully realised vignettes – making clear the sorrow and pity of war. As 6 June dawned, we hear how thousands of US troops were 13 miles off Omaha Beach bobbing in choppy waters in high-sided landing crafts, familiar to anyone who has ever seen Saving Private Ryan. Often seasick, strafed with incoming fire, some of these men talk about being keyed up to fight, others nervously voicing their fears about dying – an understandable fear, given mass deaths had been factored into the plans for Operation Overlord. As one of the men, Pte Harry Parley from the US army's 29th Infantry Division, puts it: "We were told they expected about 30% casualties in the invasion."

What did it feel like to arrive at Omaha Beach? Parley, sympathetically interpreted by Ethan McHale, tells us: "The ramp went down, your asshole puckered up, you took a deep breath and you started to pray."

The chaos and carnage that was these Americans first experience of France is summed up eloquently in this exchange. "What did they tell you to expect?" an interviewer asks an African American solider? "Expect hell. They didn't lie to us about that."

Not for a second have I ever been resentful about paying the BBC licence fee, but I've hardly ever been as happy to do so as when watching D-Day: The Unheard Tapes. It's one of the best pieces of public service broadcasting I've seen in years.

Lost Boys & Fairies
9pm, BBC One



Adoption is a long, hard road for most people. For a same-sex couple, one of whom is barely concealing deep trauma, it is longer and harder still. Daf James's loosely autobiographical drama follows Sion Daniel Young's performance artist, Gabriel, and his partner, an accountant called Andy (Fra Fee), as they start the process. It is funny, emotionally acute and at times heart-wrenching. It becomes clear that the journey represents a complete, skeleton-revealing personality audit, with the highest stakes imaginable.

Phil Harrison

What's On

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Football Cops
10pm, Channel 4
It is often assumed that football violence is a thing of the past, but this four-parter shows that the UK's Football Policing Unit are still kept busy. Filmed across the 2022-23 season, it follows officers as they try to keep rival fans apart. Expect punch-ups, pyro action and an unpleasant incident with some metal barriers. **PH**

Panorama: The Missing Cryptoqueen – Dead Or Alive?
8pm, BBC One
The Bulgarian-German fraudster Ruja Ignatova has been on the run since 2017, when her OneCoin cryptocurrency scheme imploded. Since then, the mystery surrounding her case has only deepened. Has she, as rumoured, been murdered by a narco boss living in Dubai? If so, why are the FBI operating under the assumption that she is still alive? **Ellen E Jones**

Love Island
9pm, ITV1
The glossy reality show's ratings may be dwindling, but it is back for an 11th series of sexy, sunburnt, villa-based action. There is £50,000 on the table for the winner, but it's all about the friends the contestants make along the way … or not. Maya Jama presents. **PH**

Vasa: The Ghost Ship
9pm, BBC Four
The sinking of a Swedish galleon on its maiden voyage in 1628 provokes a film that is several documentaries in one. We get historical analysis of Sweden in the 17th century, followed by an exciting wreckage-salvaging operation. Then, the discovery of human remains leads to some anthropological sleuthing. **Jack Seale**

The Sympathizer
9pm, Sky Atlantic
After the fall of Saigon, the focus shifts to Los Angeles in this slippery but stylish adaptation of the Pulitzer-winning novel about a conflicted North Korean spy (Hoa Xuande) embedded with loyal South Korean expats. We also meet Japan-obsessed Prof Hammer, one of the many eccentric side characters played by Robert Downey Jr. **Graeme Virtue**

BBC One

6.0 **Breakfast** (T) **9.30** Rip Off Britain (T) **10.15** The Moment of Proof (T) (R) **10.45** Expert Witness (T) (R) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **12.15** Bargain Hunt: All About D-Day (T) **1.0** News (T) **2.0** Doctors (T) **2.30** Clean It, Fix It (T) (R) **3.0** Escape to the Country (T) **3.45** Garden Rescue (T) (R) **4.30** The Finish Line (T) **5.15** Pointless (T) (R) **6.0** News and Weather (T) **6.30** Regional News (T) **7.0** The One Show (T) **7.30** EastEnders (T)

8.0 **Panorama: The Missing Cryptoqueen – Dead Or Alive?** (T) Investigation.
8.30 **The Bidding Room** (T) (R) Five dealers vie for items brought in by the public.
9.0 **Lost Boys & Fairies** (T) New series. Queer performance artist Gabriel and his partner long to adopt a child. Drama, with Sion Daniel Young.

10.0 **News** (T)
10.30 **Regional News** (T) Weather
10.40 **Have I Got a Bit More News for You** (T) (R) Victoria Coren Mitchell hosts the show.
11.25 **I Kissed a Girl** (T) (R) The women decide whether to continue their relationships.
12.15 **I Kissed a Girl: The Reunion** (T) (R) **1.05** Weather(T) **1.10** News (T)

BBC Two

6.45 **Bargain Hunt** (T) (R) **7.30** Clive Myrie's Caribbean Adventure (T) (R) **8.0** Our Changing Planet: Restoring Our Reefs (T) (R) **9.0** News (T) **12.15** Politics Live (T) **1.0** Impossible (T) (R) **1.45** Mastermind (T) (R) **2.15** Great Coastal Railway Journeys (T) (R) **2.45** Five Bedrooms (T) (R) **3.30** The Farmers' Country Showdown (T) (R) **4.15** Monkey Planet (T) (R) **5.15** Flog It! (T) (R) **6.0** House of Games (T) (R) **6.30** Clive Myrie's Caribbean Adventure (T) **7.0** Your Garden Made Perfect (T) (R)

8.0 **Springwatch** (T) Iolo sees orchids and turtle doves in Dorset and Megan is on the banks of Loch Lomond.
9.0 **D-Day: The Unheard Tapes** (T) Hundreds of thousands of allied troops land on five beaches along the Normandy coast, a story told by those who were there in interviews lip-synced by actors.

10.0 **Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing** (T) (R) Paul and Bob are in the Surrey Hills.
10.30 **Newsnight** (T) Weather
11.05 **Hidden Treasures of the National Trust** (T) (R)
12.05 **Race Across the World: The Reunion** (T) (R) **1.05** Sign Zone: Countryfile (T) (R) **2.0** The Great British Sewing Bee (T) (R) **3.0** 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) **3.59** Local News and Weather (T) **4.0** Tipping Point (T) (R) **5.0** The Chase for Soccer Aid (T) (R) **6.0** Local News and Weather (T) **6.30** News and Weather (T) **7.30** Emmerdale (T)

8.0 **Coronation Street** (T) Bethany sends Craig on a wild goose chase, Abi fears her life is ruined, and Adam accuses Bobby and Carla.
9.0 **Love Island** (T) New series. Maya Jama hosts the dating challenge as a new batch of single people enter the villa, with a £50,000 prize up for grabs for the winners.

10.30 **News** (T) Weather
11.0 **Local News** (T) Weather
11.15 **Instagram's Worst Con Artist** (T) (R) Part two of two.
12.05 **Shop on TV 3.0** My Mum, Your Dad (T) (R) **3.50** Unwind With ITV (T) **5.05** Gino's Italy: Like Mamma Used to Make (T) (R) **5.35** Gino's Italy: Secrets of the South (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) **1.10** Car S.O.S (T) (R) **2.10** Countdown (T) **3.0** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.0** A Place in the Sun (T) **5.0** Sun, Sea and Selling Houses (T) **6.0** Four in a Bed (T) **6.30** News (T)

7.0 **Live England International Football** (T) England v Bosnia & Herzegovina (kick-off 7.45pm). Jules Breach presents all the action from the friendly match at St James' Park in Newcastle. This is the first of two friendlies before England's Euro 2024 campaign gets under way in Germany.

10.0 **Football Cops** (T) New series.
11.05 **Kingpins** (T) Last in series.
12.05 **England International Football** (T) **1.0** Ramsay's 24 Hours to Hell and Back (T) (R) **1.50** The Simpsons (T) (R) **2.15** FILM Swan Song (Todd Stephens, 2021) (T) **4.0** Iris Prize Best British Shorts (T) **4.15** FILM Shankar's Fairies (Irfana Majumdar, 2021) (T)

Channel 5

6.0 **Milkshake! 9.15** Jeremy Vine (T) **11.15** Storm Huntley (T) **12.45** Friends (T) (R) **1.10** Friends (T) (R) **1.40** News (T) **1.45** Home and Away (T) (R) **2.15** FILM Murders to Die For (Nicholas Humphries, 2023) (T) **4.0** Bargain-Loving Brits in the Sun (T) (R) **5.0** News (T) **6.0** Police Interceptors (T) (R) **6.55** News (T) **7.0** Traffic Cops (T) (R) **7.55** News (T)

8.0 **Motorway Cops: Catching Britain's Speeders** (T) PCs Jan Simlesa and Marc Crammond spot a driver with his foot down, weaving in and out of lanes.
9.0 **The Hospital: Life on the Line** (T) New series. A look inside Clydebank's NHS Golden Jubilee University National Hospital.

10.0 **Serial Killer Wives** (T) (R)
11.05 **999: Critical Condition** (T) (R) Medical documentary.
12.05 **Ultimate Police Interceptors** (T) (R) **1.0** Live Casino Show (T) **3.0** Secrets of Your Supermarket Food (T) (R) **3.50** How to Give Up Sugar (& Lose Weight) (T) (R) **4.40** Wildlife SOS (T) (R) **5.05** House Doctor (T) (R)

BBC Four

7.0 **Great British Railway Journeys** (T) (R) Michael Portillo catches a rare glimpse of Edwardian life on celluloid. **7.30** War Walks (T) (R) Richard Holmes visits the beaches of Dunkirk.

8.0 **Britain's Lost Masterpieces** (T) (R) In Belfast, the experts assess what were thought to be low-value imitations. Last in the series.
9.0 **Vasa: The Ghost Ship** (T) Following the work of archaeologists, divers and historians as they make new discoveries about a Swedish naval flagship built in 1628.

10.0 **D-Day: The Untold Story – Journeys to the Bottom of the Sea** (T) (R)
11.0 **Double Cross: The True Story of the D-Day Spies** (T) (R)
12.0 **D-Day: The Last Heroes** (T) (R) **1.0** Great British Railway Journeys (T) (R) **1.30** War Walks (T) (R) **2.0** Britain's Lost Masterpieces (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm Phoenix Rise **7.30** Phoenix Rise **8.0** Shark Tank **8.0** The Catch Up **8.40** Becoming: Dumbledore **9.0** Peacock **9.25** Peacock **9.55** Peacock **10.20** Dubai Hustle **10.50** Dubai Hustle **11.20** I Kissed a Girl **12.10** I Kissed a Girl: The Reunion **12.55** Peacock **1.25** Peacock **1.50** Peacock **2.15** Mobility **2.25** Dubai Hustle **2.55** Dubai Hustle **3.25** Doctor Who: Unleashed

Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.10** Cop Car Workshop **8.0** The Force: Behind the Line **8.30** The Force: Behind the Line **9.0** James May's Cars of the People **10.0** Top Gear **11.0** Top Gear **12.0** Storage Hunters UK **12.30** Storage Hunters UK **2.0** Gadget Man **3.0** Top Gear **5.0** Hairy Bikers' Best of British **6.0** Rick Stein's Mediterranean Escapes **7.0** Would I Lie to You? **7.40** Richard Osman's House of Games **9.0** QI XL **10.0** Mad Dogs **11.10** QI **12.15** Mock the Week **12.55** Would I Lie to You? **1.35** Live at the Apollo **2.35** Meet the Richardsons **3.05** Whose Line Is It Anyway? USA **3.30** Whose Line Is It Anyway? USA

E4

6.0am Hollyoaks **7.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **9.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **10.0** Young Sheldon **11.0** Modern Family **12.0** The Big Bang Theory **2.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **3.0** Modern Family **4.0** Young Sheldon **5.0** The Big Bang Theory **7.0** Hollyoaks **7.30** Come Dine With Me **8.0** Dance Moms **9.0** Made in Chelsea **10.0** Gogglebox **11.05** First Dates **12.10** The Big Bang Theory **1.10** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **1.40** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **2.05** Dance Moms **2.55** Made in Chelsea **3.50** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **4.40** Modern Family **5.05** Modern Family

Film4

11.0am FILM 40 Guns to Apache Pass (1967) **12.55** FILM A Lawless Street (1955) **2.30** FILM Ten Tall Men (1951) **4.30** FILM Dr Who and the Daleks (1965) **6.20** FILM First Knight (1995) **9.0** FILM Gangs of New York (2002) **12.20** FILM 47 Metres Down (2017) **2.05** FILM Downhill (2020)

ITV2

6.0am CITV: Craig of the Creek **6.15** Teen Titans Go! **6.25** Teen Titans Go! **6.40** Jurassic World Camp Cretaceous **7.05** Mr Bean: The Animated Series **7.20** Scooby-Doo! Mystery Incorporated **7.45** Be Cool, Scooby-Doo! **8.10** What's New Scooby-Doo? **8.35** Scooby-Doo and Guess Who? **9.0** World's Funniest Videos **9.30** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **9.40** Love Bites **10.40** Love Bites **11.45** Dress to Impress **12.50** Wheel of Fortune **1.55** Family Fortunes: Gino's Best Bits **2.25** Veronica Mars **3.25** Britain's Got Talent: The Final **6.0** Catchphrase **6.45** FILM Pitch Perfect 2 (2015) **9.0** Love Island **10.30** Family Guy **11.0** Family Guy **11.30** American Dad! **12.0** American Dad! **12.30** Bob's Burgers **1.0** Bob's Burgers **1.30** Hey Tracey! **2.30** Unwind With ITV

Sky Max

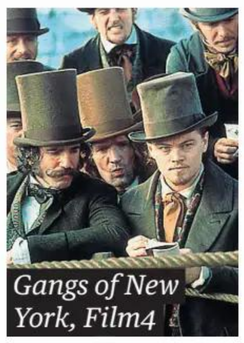
6.0am NCIS: Los Angeles **7.0** DC's Legends of Tomorrow **8.0** The Flash **9.0** Stargate SG-1 **10.0** Stargate SG-1 **11.0** NCIS: Los Angeles **12.0** The Flash **1.0** SEAL Team **2.0** SEAL Team **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** DC's Legends of Tomorrow **6.0** Stargate SG-1 **7.0** Stargate SG-1 **8.0** Flintoff's Road to Nowhere **9.0** FILM Game of Death II (1980) **11.0** The Walking Dead **12.0** Hold the Front Page **1.0** SEAL Team **2.0** A League of Their Own: Mexican Road Trip **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** Highway Patrol

Sky Arts

6.0am HMS Pinafore With ENO **8.0** The Joy of Painting **8.30** The Joy of Painting **9.0** Tales of the Unexpected **9.30** Tales of the Unexpected **10.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **10.30** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **11.0** Discovering: Daniel Day-Lewis **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** Cold War & Cinema **3.0** Lenny Henry's Got the Blues **4.0** Discovering: Robert Donat **5.0** The Joy of Painting **5.30** The Joy of Painting **6.0** Tales of the Unexpected **6.30** Tales of the Unexpected **7.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **7.30** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **8.0** André Rieu: Falling in Love – Live in Maastricht 2016 **11.0** Shakespeare: Macbeth **1.10** Will's Book **2.25** Bring Me the Head of Alfred Hitchcock **3.50** Cheltenham Literature Festival **4.50** Auction: David Bowie Collector **5.20** Auction **5.50** Arts Uncovered

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Urban Secrets **7.0** Urban Secrets **7.55** True Blood **9.0** True Blood **10.05** Billions **11.10** Billions **12.15** Game of Thrones **1.20** The Sopranos **2.25** The Sopranos **3.30** True Blood **4.35** True Blood **5.45** Billions **6.50** Billions **7.55** Game of Thrones **9.0** The Sympathizer **10.15** Succession **11.30** The King **12.30** The King **1.30** The Newsroom **2.40** Game of Thrones **3.40** In Treatment **4.10** Urban Secrets **5.05** Urban Secrets


Gangs of New York, Film4

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.30** Essential Classics **1.0** Classical Live. Live at Wigmore Hall, pianist Angela Hewitt plays Haydn's Variations in F minor, Hob XVII:6, Mozart's Rondo in D major, K485, and Fantasia in D minor, K397, Schubert's Impromptu in G flat major, Op 90, No 3, and Beethoven's Sonata No 14 in C sharp minor, Op 27, No 2. Plus, Stravinsky's Agon by the BBC Symphony Orchestra. **4.0** Composer of the Week: Amanda Maier-Röntgen (1/5) **5.0** In Tune **7.0** Classical Mixtape **7.30** In Concert. Martyn Brabbins conducts the BBC SO and Chorus, soprano Erika Baikoff, mezzo Marta Fontanals-Simmons, tenor Joshua Stewart and baritone Ross Ramgobin in Nunes Garcia's Missa de Santa Cecilia and Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition (orch Ravel). **9.45** The Essay: EarthWorks. Rose Ferraby explores traces of human history in British landscapes, starting in the Yorkshire Wolds. (1/10) (R) **10.0** Night Tracks **11.30** 'Round Midnight **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

6.0am Today **9.0** Start the Week. A discussion on indigenous stories of the natural world. (10/14) **9.45** Oliver Burkeman's Inconvenient Truth (R) **10.0** Woman's Hour **11.0** The Tourist Trap. Rajan Datar explores Paris's transition to a greener city. (3/3) **11.45** Book of the Week: Night Train to Odesa. By Jen Stout. (1/5) **12.0** News **12.04** You and Yours **1.0** The World at One **1.45** Thief at the British Museum (6/9) **2.0** The Archers (R) **2.15** Fags, Mags and Bags. Comedy, written by and starring Donald Mcleary and Sanjeev Kohli. (1/6) **2.45** Gambits. The Board, by Eley Williams. (R) **3.0** A Good Read. With Kathryn Hughes and Dan Schreiber. (1/9) **3.30** History's Secret Heroes. The story of an elite secret unit of Jewish commandos. (10/10) **4.0** The Beaches (R) **4.30** The Kitchen Cabinet (R) **5.0** PM **6.0** News **6.30** I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue (4/6) **7.0** The Archers **7.15** Front Row **8.0** The Briefing Room (R) **8.30** Inside Science (R) **9.0** Start the Week (R) **9.45** Assume Nothing: The Shankill Gold Rush (R) **10.0** The World Tonight **10.45** Book at Bedtime: Long Island. By Colm Tóibín. (6/10) **11.0** Harland (R) **11.30** Soul Music (R) **12.0** News **12.30** Book of the Week: Night Train to Odesa (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.20** Shipping Forecast **5.30** News Briefing **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45** Farming Today

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am Hercule Poirot: Mrs McGinty's Dead (1/5) **6.30** The Great Impersonation (1/5) **7.0** Minor Adjustment (1/6) **7.30** Steptoe and Son (7/8) **8.0** Mark Steel's in Town (3/3) **8.30** These Days (1/10) **8.45** D-Day Minus 6: Putting You Through **9.0** I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue (3/6) **9.30** A British History in Weather (6/10) **9.45** Daily Service **10.0** The Moth Radio Hour **10.55** Inheritance Tracks **11.0** Hercule Poirot (1/5) **11.30** The Great Impersonation (1/5) **12.0** Minor Adjustment (1/6) **12.30** Steptoe and Son (7/8) **1.0** Mark Steel's in Town (3/3) **1.30** These Days (1/10) **1.45** D-Day Minus 6: Putting You Through **2.0** Just a Minute (10/10) **2.30** The Nimmo Twins In (4/6) **3.0** Blood Count **3.45** Madame Zilensky and the King of Finland **4.0** The Moth Radio Hour **4.55** Inheritance Tracks **5.0** Hercule Poirot (1/5) **5.30** The Great Impersonation (1/5) **6.0** Minor Adjustment (1/6) **6.30** Steptoe and Son (7/8) **7.0** Mark Steel's in Town (3/3) **7.30** These Days (1/10) **7.45** D-Day Minus 6: Putting You Through **8.0** Just a Minute (10/10) **8.30** The Nimmo Twins In (4/6) **9.0** Blood Count **9.45** Madame Zilensky and the King of Finland **10.0** I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue (3/6) **10.30** Goodness Gracious Me (2/4) **10.55** The Comedy Club Interview **11.0** Dead Ringers (6/6) **11.30** Dave Podmore's Cricket Night (2/4) **12.0** The Moth Radio Hour **12.55** Inheritance Tracks **1.0** Hercule Poirot (1/5) **1.30** The Great Impersonation (1/5) **2.0** Minor Adjustment (1/6) **2.30** Steptoe and Son (7/8) **3.0** Mark Steel's in Town (3/3) **3.30** These Days (1/10) **3.45** D-Day Minus 6: Putting You Through **4.0** Just a Minute (10/10) **4.30** The Nimmo Twins In (4/6) **5.0** Blood Count **5.45** Madame Zilensky and the King of Finland

Friday's solutions

Wordsearch



Sudoku no 6,498

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

Suguru

2	4	1	3	1	2
1	3	2	4	5	3
2	5	1	3	2	1
1	4	2	5	4	3
2	5	3	1	2	5
4	1	4	5	3	4

Word wheel

AUTOCRACY

Saturday's Quick crossword

Solution no 16,871



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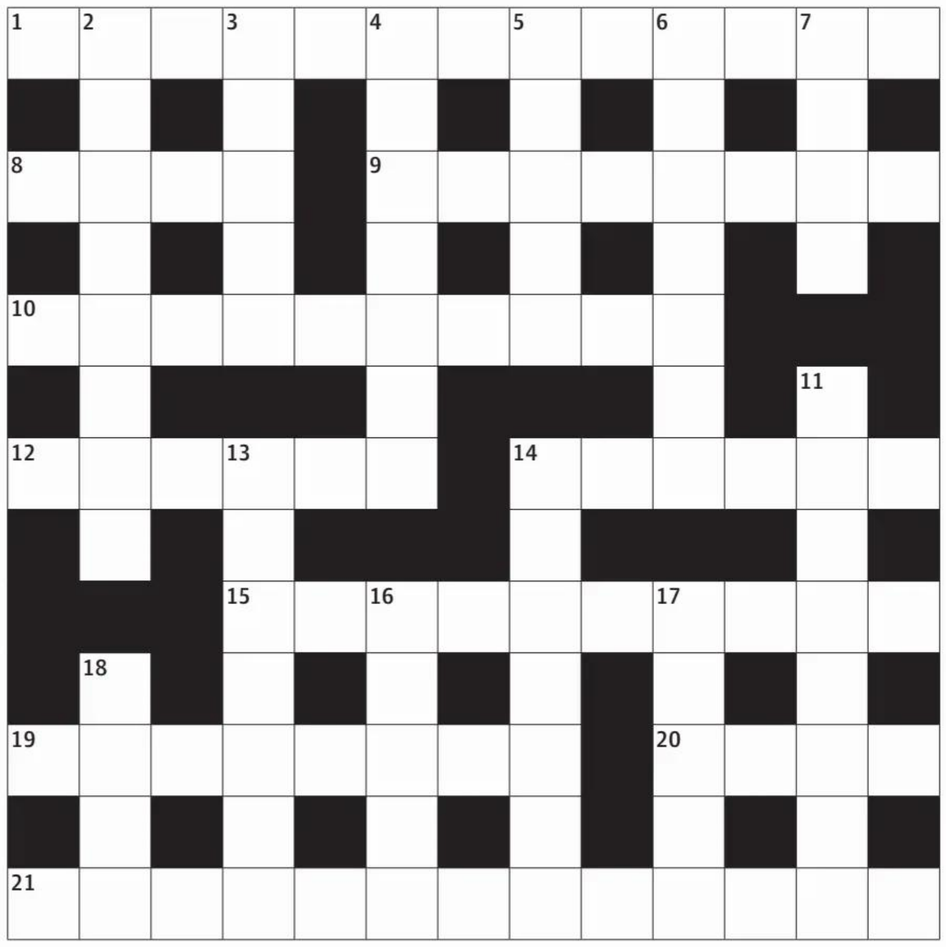
Quick crossword no 16,872

Across

1 Tale of woe (4-4,5)
8 Ditch - derisive or amused expression (2-2)
9 Dormant (8)
10 It put an end to Louis XVI (10)
12 The __ Cometh, O'Neill play (6)
14 Anise-flavoured drink (6)
15 Eccentric or dozy person - escaped cat (anag.) (5,5)
19 Perform an aquatic sport (5-3)
20 Prank (4)
21 Insect that practises sexual cannibalism (7,6)

Down

2 Mexican resort (8)
3 Speak slowly (5)
4 Mythical beast - highly profitable new business (7)
5 Military uniform material (5)
6 Walks unsteadily - stretto (anag) (7)
7 Wild party (4)
11 Cultured folk (8)
13 Baffling phenomenon (7)
14 Insurance payment (7)
16 Incendiarism (5)
17 Deathly pale (5)
18 Hippy musical (4)



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Sudoku no 6,502

Easy. Fill the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9. Printable version at theguardian.com/sudoku

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

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.

5					
4	1		3		
	3				
			5		4

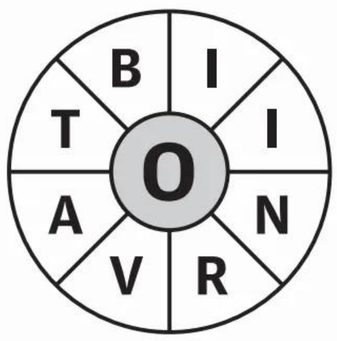
Wordsearch

Can you find 15 gemstones in the grid? Words can run forwards, backwards, vertically or diagonally, but always in a straight, unbroken line.

E	M	E	R	A	L	D	U	K
R	T	J	R	B	A	L	A	S
I	H	E	Y	E	S	T	A	C
H	T	E	N	X	B	E	E	I
P	O	S	L	R	T	M	T	T
P	P	C	Y	I	A	D	A	R
A	A	L	Z	H	O	G	G	I
S	Z	N	X	N	T	D	A	N
U	U	Y	I	L	G	E	O	E
K	N	O	C	R	I	Z	M	R
O	N	J	A	S	P	E	R	A

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-32. Good-27. Average-20.



Trivia corner

Anne Hathaway won a Primetime Emmy award for her voice role in The Simpsons - but what was her character's name?
a. Princess Penelope
b. Porky Pig
c. Edna Krabappel
d. Princess Kashmir
Answer top right

