

A week in the life of the world | *Global edition*
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The Guardian Weekly

How violence became a feature of US politics ¹⁵

Michael Kiwanuka on faith, family and fulfilment ⁵¹

THE

HUNT

FOR

YAHYA

JULIAN BORGER ON ISRAEL'S ELUSIVE PRIME TARGET

SPECIAL REPORT ¹⁰

SINWAR





Eyewitness Guatemala

PHOTOGRAPH:
JOHAN ORDÓÑEZ/AFP/GETTY

📷 Lift off

High school students perform in a parade in Guatemala City during celebrations for the 203rd anniversary of Guatemala's independence. The 15 September festivities mark the day in 1821 when the territory then known as Central America - which included present-day Guatemala - broke away from Spanish rule.



The Guardian Weekly
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SPOT ILLUSTRATIONS:
MATT BLEASE



On the cover The last sighting of Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas leader who unleashed the Gaza war, was from a retrieved Hamas security video recorded three days after the 7 October attack on Israel. Since then some 41,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, have been killed in a devastating Israeli response. Yet the prime target has remained at large and apparently unscathed.
Illustration: Guardian Design

Original photographs: Jihad Alshrafi/Anadolu/Getty; Ali Jadallah/Anadolu/Getty

Global report

Headlines from the last seven days

1 UNITED STATES

Trump assassination attempt suspect charged

The suspect in the second apparent assassination attempt of Donald Trump in as many months was charged in federal court on Monday with two gun-related crimes, as urgent investigations began into how he was able to get so close to the former president.

Ryan Wesley Routh, 58, a pro-Ukraine activist from Hawaii who is registered to vote in North Carolina, was detained after a secret service agent spotted the barrel of an AK-47-style rifle poking through a chain link fence on the outskirts of Trump International Golf Club West Palm Beach last Sunday, where the former president was playing. Routh was later arrested speeding north from Palm Beach in his car.

As the US continued to react in shock to the latest apparent attempt on Trump's life, the Republican presidential nominee added to the already tense atmosphere around the US election campaign by making inflammatory remarks, explicitly blaming Joe Biden and Kamala Harris for inciting the attack and calling them "the enemy within".

The White House said Biden had called Trump, "and conveyed his relief that he is safe".

Spotlight Page 15 →



2 GERMANY



Berlin brings back checks at all nine land borders

Temporary checks were introduced this week at all nine of Germany's land borders in a move that has drawn criticism from several of the country's European Union partners but praise from the far right.

Olaf Scholz's embattled coalition government said last week that checks already being carried out on borders with Austria, Poland, the Czech Republic and Switzerland would be extended to France, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark.

The decision came after a series of deadly knife attacks in which the suspects were asylum seekers, and historic successes by the far-right Alternative für Deutschland party (AfD) in two state elections.

Opinion Page 48 →

3 UNITED STATES

Reagan-era Republicans give their support to Harris

More than a dozen former Ronald Reagan staff members joined other Republican figures endorsing the Democratic nominee and vice-president, Kamala Harris, saying their support was "less about supporting the Democratic party and more about our resounding support for democracy".

The letter obtained by CBS News came as more than 230 former Republican administration officials also backed Harris including Karl Rove, George W Bush's campaign strategist and senior adviser. Bush has said he has no plans to endorse any 2024 candidate.

4 UKRAINE

Words of war from Putin over Storm Shadow missiles

US officials and lawmakers shot back after Vladimir Putin said that Nato's potential lifting of restrictions on Ukraine to launch long-range strikes over the border into Russian territory would mean Nato countries were "at war" with Russia.

The view, dismissed by Washington as "sabre rattling", was repeated by Moscow's UN ambassador to the security council.

The UK prime minister, Keir Starmer, met President Joe Biden last Friday at the White House, where the two discussed a loosening of restrictions on Storm Shadow missiles that would allow Ukraine to strike targets as far as 250km inside Russia.

The missiles are jointly produced in the UK and France, and both countries appear to have sought Biden's go-ahead to loosen restrictions on the use of the long-range missiles. Western officials indicated that the US is not planning to allow its own missiles to be used to strike targets deeper inside Russia. Washington and London indicated they do not plan to announce any change in policy.

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5 ENTERTAINMENT

Shōgun is Emmys first foreign language TV win

Shōgun made Emmys history as the first non-English language series to win for best TV drama. The historical epic, based on the 1975 novel, picked up four awards, including for lead stars HiroYuki Sanada and Anna Sawai, the first Japanese actors to win their respective awards.

It is the second Emmys in this year after last year's ceremony was postponed as a result of the dual Hollywood strikes. In January, the final season of Succession dominated the awards. Hacks was the surprise winner of best comedy series with its star Jean Smart winning lead actress.

GW

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6 VENEZUELA

US rejects claims of CIA plot to assassinate Maduro

The US state department rejected accusations of CIA involvement in an alleged assassination plot against President Nicolás Maduro after Venezuelan officials announced the arrest of three Americans, two Spaniards and a Czech.

The claims of a plot against Maduro - whose recent re-election is contested - were made on state television by Diosdado Cabello, the interior minister. Washington confirmed the detention of a US military member.

The claims followed US sanctions on 16 allies of Maduro, accused of obstructing voting during the disputed 28 July Venezuelan presidential election and human rights abuses.

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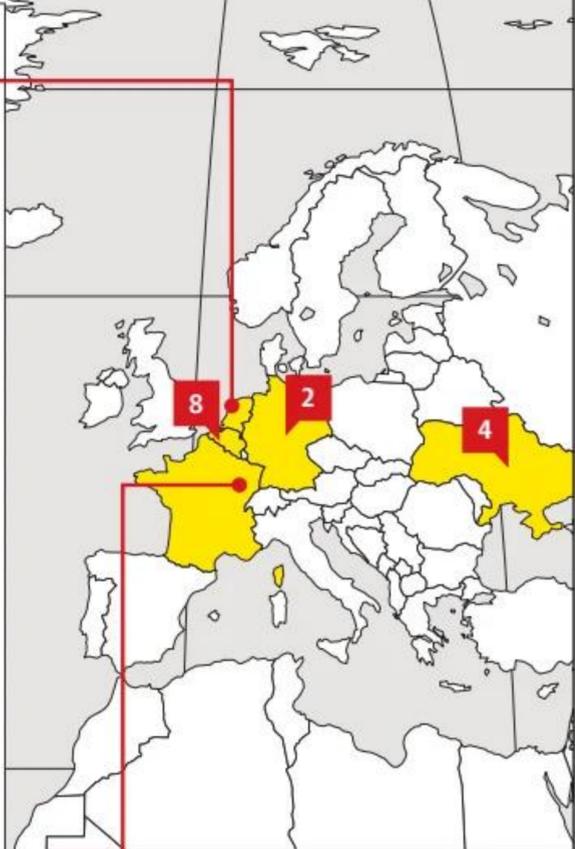


9 NETHERLANDS

The Hague becomes first city to ban fossil-fuel ads

Legislation passed by The Hague spells the end of publicly and privately funded advertising for petrol and diesel, aviation and cruise ships in the streets of the Dutch city, including on billboards and bus shelters.

It is the first time a city has banned high-carbon advertising through local legislation. The decision follows a call by the UN chief, António Guterres, for governments and media to enact such bans, as they have done with tobacco. Some cities have tried to limit such products and services through council motions or voluntary agreements but The Hague's ban, which comes into effect next year, is legally binding.



10 FRANCE



Supermarkets surprised by cocaine hidden among fruit

Between 40kg and 50kg of cocaine was found in banana deliveries to four of a supermarket chain's stores. Staff at Grand Frais branches in the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté region in eastern France found drugs hidden under pallets of bananas and were anxious to reassure customers that the cocaine had not come into contact with the fruit.

Now detectives are attempting to solve the mystery of how the drugs, believed to have originated in Colombia, came to be in the pallets and - more importantly - for whom they were destined.

Similar finds were made in fruit shipments to Germany and Greece earlier this year.

7 CANADA



Wrong sleeping bags led to army's chilly Arctic nights

The Canadian military admitted that sleeping bags issued to troops last year were not suited to "typical Canadian winter conditions". In temperatures ranging from 5C to -20C, troops on a joint Canada-US exercise in Alaska reported being cold overnight, even when they heated their tents with stoves.

In a briefing note, an official recommended loaning the troops some of the army's original Arctic sleeping bags. The defence department spent more than C\$34.8m (\$25.6m) on the new sleeping bags.

8 EUROPEAN UNION

Commissioner resigns amid row with von der Leyen

France's European commissioner, Thierry Breton, resigned, citing "questionable governance" at the EU executive led by Ursula von der Leyen.

He was in charge of the EU's single market and industrial policy and had been appointed by President Emmanuel Macron to serve a second term in June. But Breton said in his resignation letter that von der Leyen had asked Paris to withdraw his name "for personal reasons that in no instance you [von der Leyen] have discussed directly with me".

The announcement adds to the disarray over the appointment of von der Leyen's top team, which is already running late.

Rebels are 'posting torture videos' on social media

Footage of rebel fighters appearing to glorify the burning of homes and the torture of prisoners could be used by international courts to pursue war crime prosecutions, observers have told the Guardian.

Fighters from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group, have been accused of waging a campaign of ethnic cleansing for the past year.

RSF fighters in the western region of Darfur appear to have filmed and posted evidence of their actions on social media.

Footage has been verified by the Centre for Information Resilience (CIR) and could become evidence for war crimes investigators, say observers.

14 ISRAEL

Netanyahu vows 'heavy price' for Houthi attack

Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Yemen's Houthi rebels will pay a "heavy price" after the group claimed its first ballistic missile strike on Israel and its leader warned of bigger attacks to come.

The missile triggered air sirens across the country and local media aired footage of people racing to shelters at Ben Gurion international airport south-east of Tel Aviv. According to reports, it hit an open area in the Ben Shemen forest, causing a fire near Kfar Daniel. There were no reports of casualties or damage.

The big story Page 10 →

13 TURKEY



Funeral held for activist killed in West Bank

Hundreds of people waving Turkish and Palestinian flags gathered last Saturday in the city of Didim for the funeral of Ayşenur Ezgi Eygi, 26, a Turkish American activist killed in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Her coffin was draped with a Turkish flag.

Eygi was killed on 6 September as she took part in a protest against settlement expansion. Israel has acknowledged that its troops shot the activist, but says it was an unintentional act.

Ankara said it will request arrest warrants for those to blame for what it calls an intentional killing.

12 DR CONGO

Death sentences handed out for attempted coup

Three Americans and a Briton were among 37 people sentenced to death last Friday over an attempt to overthrow the president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Six people were killed during the botched coup attempt led by the opposition figure Christian Malanga on 19 May that targeted the presidential palace and a close ally of President Félix Tshisekedi.

Armed men attacked the parliamentary speaker Vital Kamerhe's home in Kinshasa before Malanga was killed by security forces. The defendants can appeal against their convictions for charges that included terrorism and murder.

Global report

15 AFGHANISTAN

**Afghan women defy the Taliban to meet at summit**

More than 130 Afghan women gathered in Albania at an All Afghan Women summit, in an attempt to develop a united voice representing the women and girls of Afghanistan in the fight against the assault on human rights by the Taliban.

Some women who attempted to reach the summit from Afghanistan were prevented from travelling, pulled off flights in Pakistan or stopped at borders. Others travelled from countries including Iran, the UK and US where they live as refugees.

The summit was hosted in Tirana after other governments in the region refused, organisers said. The event came a few weeks after the Taliban published new laws that banned women's voices being heard in public.

16 INDIA

Supreme court grants bail to opposition leader

One of the country's most prominent opposition leaders has been granted bail after spending almost six months in jail for a corruption case he alleged was politically motivated.

India's supreme court ruled that Arvind Kejriwal's "prolonged incarceration amounts to unjust deprivation of liberty".

Kejriwal has been one of the most outspoken critics of the prime minister, Narendra Modi, and his AAP party has grown to be a significant electoral force.

His arrest a few weeks before the national elections sent shock waves across the country.

17 CHINA

Censors give go-ahead for sell-out Kanye West show

Ye, the artist formerly known as Kanye West, took to the stage in Haikou last Sunday, to the surprise of his fans.

Ye's only China show, on the holiday island of Hainan, had been announced just days earlier, and more than 42,000 tickets sold out within minutes. It was his first time in the country for 16 years. In that time the Chinese government's tolerance for western musicians has diminished, while Ye's reputation for controversy has grown.

The Communist party strictly censors domestic publications, performances and social media posts. It also controls the flow of art and content from foreign producers hoping to reach China's population of 1.4 billion people.

The decision to allow Ye to perform raised eyebrows in China, although his year living in Nanjing as a child while his mother taught at a university were noted. A string of incidents including antisemitic comments and suggestions that slavery in America was a choice made by Black people are among reasons that fans and brands have cut ties with him.

18 HONG KONG

Man jailed under security law for protest T-shirt

A man pleaded guilty to sedition for wearing a T-shirt with a protest slogan, becoming the first person convicted under the city's national security law known as Article 23, passed in March.

Chu Kai-pong, 27, pleaded guilty to one count of "doing acts with seditious intent".

He was arrested in June for wearing a T-shirt with the slogan: "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" and a mask printed with "FDNOL" - the shorthand of "five demands, not one less". Both slogans were frequently chanted in the huge pro-democracy protests of 2019.

19 NEW ZEALAND

Rare shy penguin awarded bird of the year title

One of the world's rarest penguins has been crowned the country's bird of the year, in an unusually sedate year for the competition, free from the foreign interference and voting scandals of previous events.

The endangered yellow-eyed penguin, or hoiho, is the largest of New Zealand's mainland penguin species. The hoiho, meaning "noise shouter" in Māori due to its shrill call, lives along parts of the South Island's east coast and in the sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands.

There are believed to be roughly just 4,000 to 5,000 of the shy, fishy-smelling species left, according to the department of conservation, and numbers are declining. The number of mainland breeding birds has fallen by 78% over the past 15 years.



20 AUSTRALIA

Offer to Scotland to save Commonwealth Games

Commonwealth Games Australia (CGA) is offering Scotland a multi-million dollar investment to help save the 2026 Games.

The Scottish government had been expected to rubber-stamp an offer to host from the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) after Victoria withdrew last year, but has since warned of the financial risks.

The CGF is offering Scotland almost \$A200m (\$135m) from the \$A380m compensation that Victoria paid for pulling out. This week, a Scottish government minister confirmed that he was due to hold talks with CGA..

DEATHS

**Michaela DePrince**

Groundbreaking Sierra Leonean-US ballet dancer. She died on 10 September, aged 29.

Alberto Fujimori

Former president of Peru. He died on 11 September, aged 86. *Spotlight*, page 18 →

Tito Jackson

Member of the US pop group the Jackson 5. He died on 15 September, aged 70.

Frankie Beverly

US singer with soul and funk band Maze. He died on 10 September, aged 77.

Pravin Gordhan

South African government minister and anti-apartheid activist. He died on 13 September, aged 75.

Gary Shaw

English footballer who helped Aston Villa to European Cup glory in 1982. He died on 16 September, aged 63.

Francisco Lopera

Colombian neurologist known for Alzheimer's research. He died on 10 September, aged 73.


MIGRATION
Starmer explores Italy-style irregular migration plan

Keir Starmer has shown “great interest” in the Italy-Albania migration deal, the Italian prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, has said, as the UK vowed to send £4m (\$5.3m) to support her crackdown on irregular migration.

Speaking at a press conference in Rome, the UK prime minister indicated that he was more interested in Italy’s strategy for stopping migrants from reaching the country than its deal with Albania, which is a few weeks away from completion.

The money the UK will send to Italy will contribute to the Rome process, which is the Italian government’s project to tackle the root causes of irregular migration.

A Downing Street spokesperson said Starmer and his new border security commander, Martin Hewitt, had “agreed to take immediate steps to enhance our cross-border collaboration, learning from Italy’s success at reducing illegal migration by 60% in the last year through upstream work and enforcement”.

Italy has faced accusations of violating the human rights of asylum seekers. Meloni rubbished the claims, saying: “I don’t know what human rights violations you’re referring to, to be totally frank.”

The meeting came after eight people died last weekend trying to cross the Channel from France to England. The French maritime prefecture said 59 people were onboard the boat off the coast of France, and 51 of them were rescued. An investigation has been opened by the Boulogne-sur-Mer public prosecutor’s office.

Spotlight Page 19 →

HEALTH
Junior doctors accept pay offer to end dispute

Junior doctors in England voted to accept the government’s pay offer, ending a long and bitter dispute. Just under two-thirds (66%) of the 45,830 junior doctors who voted backed the deal, which will see them receiving an average salary increase of 22.3% over two years. It ends 18 months of strikes during which junior doctors stopped work on 44 days.

The offer was less than the 35% rise the British Medical Association’s junior doctors committee had been seeking as “full pay restoration” for the fall in their earnings they have experienced since 2008.

Wes Streeting made settling the dispute a priority when he became health secretary on 5 July.

The Guardian View Page 49 →

CULTURE
Doubts cast over new statue’s likeness to queen

The unveiling of a bronze statue of Queen Elizabeth II at Antrim Castle Gardens in Northern Ireland was greeted with mockery.

Antrim and Newtownabbey borough council professed itself delighted by local artist Anto Brennan’s work, saying it reflected the queen’s “grace, steadfastness and dedication to public service”.

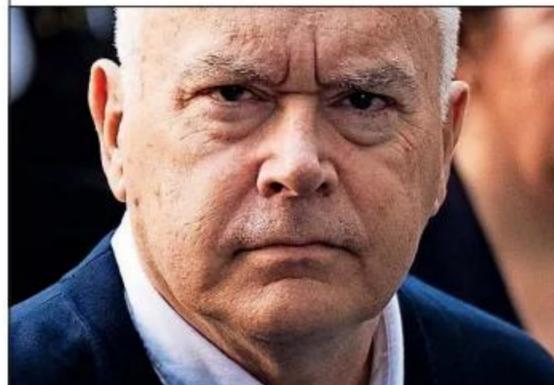
But one critic said it made the late queen look like Mrs Doubtfire.


MEDIA
Former BBC newsreader given suspended jail term

The former BBC presenter Huw Edwards was given a six month suspended prison sentence, after admitting accessing indecent photographs of children as young as seven.

Edwards, 63, who spent four decades at the BBC, was told during sentencing that he had been “perhaps the most recognised newsreader/journalist in the UK” but that his “long-earned reputation is in tatters”.

Chief magistrate Paul Goldspring said he accepted evidence that Edwards had no recollection of viewing the indecent images due to his mental health issues at the time.

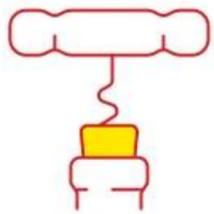

EDUCATION
Schools chain with 35,000 pupils to go phone-free

A national academy chain is to become the first in England to be phone-free, removing access to smartphones from its 35,000 pupils during the school day due to their “catastrophic” impact on children’s mental health and learning.

The Ormiston academies trust, which runs 44 state schools including 32 secondaries, has begun phasing out access to phones at all its schools, after liaising with parents.

The move comes as school leaders and policymakers across the world are considering tougher restrictions on how children use smartphones, including a recent French government report recommending a bar on internet-enabled phones for under 13s.

Tom Rees, Ormiston’s chief executive, said the policy in most schools - allowing pupils to keep phones during the school day - was an inadequate response to the disruption they caused to learning and wellbeing.


27%

The proportion of UK 18- to 24-year-olds who own a corkscrew - compared with 81% of over-65s - according to the annual trends report by household goods retailer Lakeland



Reader's eyewitness Playground
I was hiking along Dunraven Bay near Cardiff, Wales, on a cloudy day. Just when I reached a viewing spot above a cliff, the sun came out briefly. I was fortunate to capture this amazing moment comprising beautiful strata, shiny sand and a joyful father with his son.
By James Tang, Wales



SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT



NEUROSCIENCE

Lockdowns aged teenage girls' brains faster than boys'

Adolescent girls who lived through Covid lockdowns experienced more rapid brain ageing than boys, according to new data. University of Washington researchers found evidence of premature brain ageing of 4.2 years more than expected in girls, compared with 1.4 years in boys.

It is unclear whether the changes, reported in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, have negative consequences, but the findings raise concerns that they might affect adolescents' mental health and potential to learn.

SPACE

Billionaire astronaut makes giant leap in new spacesuit

Two astronauts completed the first commercial spacewalk and tested slimmed-down spacesuits designed by SpaceX, in one of the boldest

attempts yet to push the boundaries of privately funded spaceflight.

The billionaire Jared Isaacman, 41, who chartered the Polaris Dawn mission, exited the space capsule last Thursday, followed by Sarah Gillis, a senior engineer at SpaceX who conducted movement tests to assess the new SpaceX suit - a much less bulky equivalent of the Nasa equipment.

MEDICAL RESEARCH

Epilepsy drug breathes new life into apnoea research

An epilepsy drug could help prevent the breathing of patients with sleep apnoea from temporarily stopping, according to research presented at the European Respiratory Society Congress in Austria.

Obstructive sleep apnoea affects about one in 20 people. Patients often snore loudly, endure pauses in breathing and wake several times.

An international study found the drug sulthiame reduced such symptoms, potentially helping those who are unable to use mechanical breathing aids.

Prof Jan Hedner, from Sahlgrenska university hospital and the University of Gothenburg in

Sweden, said many people find these machines hard to use, so there was a need for alternative treatments.

MICROBIOLOGY

Microbes survive windy rides across continents

Microbes that cause disease in humans can travel thousands of kilometres on high-level winds, scientists have revealed. The winds studied carried a surprising diversity of bacteria and fungi, including known pathogens, some with genes for resistance to multiple antibiotics.

The researchers said this intercontinental transport was unlikely to cause disease directly, because the microbe concentration was low. But they said it was a cause of concern that microbes could be seeded into new environments and that antibiotic-resistance genes could travel this way.

The Institute for Global Health study published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, showed the microbes hitched a 2,000km ride on dust particles blown from farm fields in north-eastern China to Japan. Other microbes not yet known to science were thought to be present.



8.7

Age in millions of years of marine fossils, including a sabre-toothed salmon and a megalodon prehistoric shark, found beneath San Pedro high school, Los Angeles

The big story
Israel-Gaza war

Israel is using a network of spies, advanced technology and brute force to pin down the elusive leader of Hamas in Gaza. But experts doubt whether his eventual death or capture would stop the war



Gone to ground
The hunt for
Yahya Sinwar

📍 Yahya Sinwar at a rally in Gaza City in October 2022; left, the entrance to a Hamas tunnel in Rafah, part of a network said to be 500km long

MAHMUD HAMS, SHARON ARONOWICZ/AFP/GETTY



A GROUP OF ISRAELI HOSTAGES were huddled in a tunnel in Gaza a few days after they had been dragged from their homes on 7 October, when the man who had plotted their abduction appeared out of the subterranean gloom.

His hair and beard were grey and his dark-ringed eyes stared out from under thick black brows. It was a face familiar to them from a thousand broadcasts and newspaper stories: Yahya Sinwar. The Hamas leader in Gaza was the most feared man in Israel, even before he ordered the October raid in which 1,200 people - two-thirds of them civilians - were killed and 250 taken hostage.

In fluent Hebrew, perfected over more than 22 years in an Israeli prison, Sinwar reassured them that they were safe and would soon be exchanged for Palestinian prisoners. One of the hostages, Yocheved Lifshitz, an 85-year-old veteran peace campaigner from the Nir Oz kibbutz, had no time for his show of concern for their welfare and challenged the Hamas leader to his face.

"I asked him how he wasn't ashamed to do something like this to people who had supported peace all these years?" Lifshitz told the Davar newspaper after her release following 16 days in captivity. "He didn't answer. He was quiet."

A video recorded on Hamas security cameras at about the same time, on 10 October, and found by the Israeli military some months later, shows Sinwar following his wife and three children through a narrow tunnel and disappearing into the murk.

That was the last sighting of the man who unleashed the Gaza war. According to Gaza health officials, 41,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, have been killed in a devastating Israeli response that has flattened much of the territory, driving 90% of the population from their homes and bringing 2.3 million

people to the edge of famine. Through all this, the prime target of the Israeli bombardment has remained at large and apparently unscathed.

The nearly year-long hunt for Sinwar has involved a mix of advanced technology and brute force, as his pursuers have shown themselves prepared to go to any lengths, including causing extremely high civilian casualties, to kill the Hamas leader and destroy the tight circle around him.

The hunters are a taskforce of intelligence officers, special operation units from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), military engineers and surveillance experts under the umbrella of the Israeli Security Agency, more widely known by its Hebrew initials or the acronym Shabak.

Personally and institutionally, this team is seeking redemption for the security failures that allowed the 7 October assault to happen. But despite their motivation, they have so far failed to pin down their quarry.

"If you'd told me when the war began that more than 11 months later he would still be alive, I would have found it amazing," said Michael Milshtein, a former head of the Palestinian affairs section in Israeli Military Intelligence (Aman). "But remember, Sinwar prepared for a decade for this offensive and IDF intelligence was very surprised by the size and length of the tunnels under Gaza and how sophisticated they were."

The IDF estimates there are 500km of tunnels under Gaza, an entire underground city. A second important challenge, according to at least some in the defence establishment, is that Sinwar is likely to have surrounded himself with human shields.

Ram Ben-Barak, a former deputy director of the Mossad, said: "Because of the hostages, we are very careful with what we are doing. I believe if there were no such restrictions, we would have found him easier." →

'War has taken our future' *Another school year without lessons, page 14* →



▲ Palestinians inspect the scene after an Israeli raid on tents of displaced people in al-Mawasi in July
HAITHAM IMAD/EPA

Whether or not Sinwar has a ring of human shields around him, the potential presence of hostages has not prevented the IDF from dropping hugely powerful 900kg bombs on suspected Hamas hideouts in recent weeks. Out of its two primary war aims, the Netanyahu government puts the destruction of Hamas above the rescue of the hostages.

There is no shortage of expertise among Sinwar's hunters. Targeted killings have been a core tactic of Israel's military since the founding of the state. Since the second world war, Israel has assassinated more people than any other country in the western world.

Yahalom, a special section within the Combat Engineering Corps, has more experience in tunnel warfare than any of its counterparts in western armies, and has access to state-of-the-art US-made ground-penetrating radar. The clandestine signals intelligence unit 8200 is a global leader in electronic warfare and has been eavesdropping on Hamas communications for decades.

The internal security agency Shin Bet lost many of its sources in Gaza after Israel pulled out of the territory in 2005, but worked hard to rebuild its network of informants after Israel launched its ground invasion last October, recruiting from among the desperate flows of Palestinians fleeing the onslaught.

Despite the capabilities of this formidable taskforce, it has come close to catching Sinwar just once, in a bunker beneath his home town of Khan Younis in late January. The fugitive warlord had left behind clothing and more than 1m shekels (more than \$266,000) in wads of banknotes. This was seen by some as a sign of panic, though the Hamas leader was ultimately estimated

to have left a few days before Israeli forces raided the bunker.

The assumption made by Sinwar's trackers is that he has long since abandoned using electronic communication, well aware of the skills and technology possessed by his pursuers. It was not only Hebrew that Sinwar studied in Israeli jail but also the habits and culture of his enemy.

"He really understands the basic instincts and the deepest feelings of Israeli society," said Milshtein, now at the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University. "I'm quite sure every move he makes is based on his understanding of Israel."

Sinwar still communicates with the outside world, albeit with apparent difficulty. The long negotiations over a ceasefire in Cairo and Doha have often been paused while messages are sent to and from the subterranean commander. One strong possibility is that Sinwar uses couriers to remain in command, drawn from a small and shrinking coterie of aides he trusts, starting with his brother Mohammed, a senior military commander in Gaza.

It is the hope of the team hunting Sinwar that the need for contact with couriers, to issue orders and control the hostage negotiations, will ultimately prove his undoing, just as a courier led American trackers over several years to Osama bin Laden's hideout in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

It is believed that it was a courier who led the Israeli hunters to their biggest scalp of the war so far. At 10.30am on 13 July, Mohammed Deif, Hamas's veteran commander who had topped Israel's most wanted list since 1995, emerged from a hiding place near a camp for displaced people at al-Mawasi to take in some air with a close lieutenant, Rafa'a Salameh. Within an instant, both men were killed by bombs dropped by Israeli jet fighters - at least, according to IDF accounts - along with scores of Palestinians. Hamas insists Deif is still alive but he has not been seen since.

Many in the Israeli security establishment rued what they saw as a missed historic opportunity in September 2003 when they had planes ready to bomb a house where the entire Hamas leadership was holding a meeting. After furious argument in the military chain of command, the air force used a precision missile fired into the presumed meeting room, rather than flattening the whole building with a hail of bombs, out of concern for civilian casualties. They picked the wrong room and the Hamas leaders survived.

B

Y JULY THIS YEAR, the risk of killing large numbers of civilians was no longer an obstacle. In targeting Deif, the air force used 900kg bombs, the very weapons the Biden administration had stopped sending in May because of their indiscriminate destructive force. Israel reportedly dropped eight of them on 13 July. Ninety Palestinians in the vicinity were killed and nearly 300 injured.

"It seems that the main source for the attack on Mohammed Deif, that actually gave the information about his location, was a human source - one of these messengers that go from one tunnel or shelter to another and bring messages between one commander to another," Milshtein said. "So maybe there will be an opportunity to follow one of these messengers [to Sinwar], or if one of them is an agent of Israel's Shin Bet."

Yossi Melman, a co-author of *Spies Against Armageddon* and author of other books on Israeli intelligence, said Deif may have made a mistake that Sinwar was unlikely to repeat.

"Deif was maybe more arrogant or maybe he told himself they tried to kill me so many times, and I lost an eye and an arm but I still survived, so maybe God is with me," Melman said.

"The Shabak and the army were waiting just for this opportunity. All these targeted killings are about waiting for the one minor mistake

Israel has come close to catching Sinwar once, in a bunker in Khan Younis

by the other side. But Sinwar is more cautious. He is not a military commander who has shown himself to be among his people.”

On Tuesday last week, the air force again dropped 900kg bombs on al-Mawasi, designated by Israel as a “humanitarian zone”. At least 19 people were killed and 60 injured. The IDF said it had carried out “precision strikes” on Hamas targets, but did not specify the target.

It is possible that a deal will be made in which Sinwar goes into exile, and some suggest he may already be across the border, hiding in a tunnel on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border. That would cut against the conventional wisdom about the ideological zeal of a man who rose through Hamas ranks as the executioner of suspected informers.

“My personal assessment is that the likelihood of this option is very low,” said Milshtein, whose job in the Aman military intelligence service

‘If Sinwar is killed, there will be someone else. You cannot create a fantasy’

was to study Sinwar and other Hamas leaders. “It is in his basic DNA to stay in Gaza and to fight until death. He will prefer to die in his bunker.”

Ben-Barak, the former Mossad deputy chief, agreed: “I don’t think he will cross into Egypt, because the moment that people know he is not in Gaza, the whole [Hamas] operation will collapse - its morale and so on. That’s why I don’t think he would do that. He’s not a coward.”

Sinwar’s death or capture would undoubtedly be hailed as a major military success by Benjamin Netanyahu’s government, which has made

▼ Sinwar with the child of an al-Qassam Brigades fighter, killed in clashes with Israel, in Gaza City in 2021

EMMANUEL DUNAND/
AFP/GETTY

the destruction of Hamas’s “military and governing capabilities” a primary war aim. Whether it would stop the war is quite another question.

“When we catch him, the situation will be much better, maybe for a couple of weeks,” Ben-Barak said. “After that, someone else will come. It is an ideological war, not a war about Sinwar.”

Milshtein said: “After almost 50 years of assassinations, we understand this is a basic part of the game. Sometimes it is necessary to assassinate a very prominent leader. But when you start to think it will be a gamechanger and that an ideological organisation will collapse because you kill one of its leaders, that is a total mistake.

“I’m quite sure that someone will replace, or actually has already replaced, Mohammed Deif, and if Sinwar is killed there will be someone else ... You cannot create a fantasy. It will not end the war.”

JULIAN BORGER IS THE GUARDIAN’S
WORLD AFFAIRS EDITOR



GAZA

'War has taken our future'

Children begin school year with no lessons

Small initiatives try to maintain some learning, but resources are scant and many children have to go to work

By Bethan McKernan JERUSALEM

Every evening, for two hours, Asma Mustafa sits down with the small children of Nuseirat camp in central Gaza for what now passes as school in the beleaguered strip. Sometimes there are pens and paper for basic maths and literacy, but most of the time is taken up with storytelling, singing and play. "I've been doing this since November," said Mustafa, 38, who taught at a girls' high school in Gaza City before the war. "Many children are now working or helping their families find basic things like food during the day, but I try to give them a little bit of structure and normality in the evenings."

Last week was supposed to mark the beginning of the new school year, but in Gaza 625,000 children are now entering a second year in which they have been denied the right to education because of the Israel-Hamas war. More than 45,000 six-year-olds were due to start school this year.

In the 11 months since Hamas's 7 October attack on Israel, almost all of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have been displaced from their homes, and some of the territory's schools have become shelters. But about 90% of Gaza's 307 public school buildings and all 12 universities have been damaged or destroyed in Israeli attacks, according to the Education Cluster, a collection of aid groups led by Unicef and Save the Children.

"Education has totally stopped since 7 October and the future is still unclear," Mustafa said. "There's no vision for how we start again because we are still under attack. Everything and everyone is targeted - the tents, the shelters, the schools, the streets. It's a very dangerous situation."

According to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, whose data the World Health Organization has found to be broadly accurate, 25,000 school-age children have been killed or injured in the war.

For those who are clinging on, daily life has become a nightmarish struggle. There is no reliable data but it appears that many children have been put to work, collecting firewood or building makeshift shelters and gravestones. Younger children are sent to queue at water and food distribution stations.

Yara al-Shawa, 22, from Gaza City,

found out last September she had won a full scholarship towards a master's programme in human rights law in Qatar. Unable to leave the territory because of the Israeli blockade, she and her school-age siblings now spend morning to night trying to keep their family alive and well.

"My younger brother now takes on responsibilities that no child should bear: gathering supplies, fetching water, tending to our household needs," she said of 15-year-old Ayman. "School is a distant memory for him now. He's been forced to grow up too fast under these circumstances."

She added: "I'm always struck by how much he has changed. The war has stolen our future. What once seemed like achievable dreams - me becoming a lawyer, my brother finishing school - now feel like fantasies."

Studies show that the more school time children miss, the more difficult it is to catch up on lost learning. Younger children's cognitive, social and emotional development suffers; girls are more likely to be married off at younger ages, and boys forced into work or militancy.

Small-scale initiatives to keep children learning and engaged are present all over Gaza, and last month Unrwa, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, managed to launch a "back to learning" programme in 45 shelters across the strip, which includes games, drama, arts, music and sports activities to try to mitigate the war's impact on children's mental health.

For Mustafa, the teacher in Nuseirat, the Unrwa programme is welcome but highlights how much more needs to be done. "There is only so much local or international organisations can do when sometimes five notebooks cost \$50," she said. "There is nowhere safe, schools and shelters are targeted. These challenges can't be solved except by ending the war."

For now, as internationally mediated talks founder once again, no ceasefire that could help restore normality is on the horizon. Like so many in Gaza, Mustafa has little choice but to cling to the hope that the war will end soon and the children of Gaza will be able to go back to a more normal life.

"The kids of Gaza are the future. They give me hope," she said. "They give me the power to keep standing, to keep going."

BETHAN MCKERNAN IS THE GUARDIAN'S JERUSALEM CORRESPONDENT

◀ Asma Mustafa with children at the Nuseirat refugee camp in Gaza

ASMA MUSTAFA



UKRAINE

Power outages
put tropical
oasis in peril

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Spotlight



ANALYSIS
UNITED STATES

Trump attack How violence became a feature of US political life

By David Smith WASHINGTON



It has happened again. Another serene and sunny weekend. Another lone suspect wielding a rifle. Another apparent bid to assassinate Donald Trump. And a nation hurtling into uncharted territory 50 days from a presidential election.

Last Sunday, Secret Service agents opened fire after seeing a man with a rifle near Trump's West Palm Beach golf club in Florida while he was playing. The suspect fled and was later apprehended by local law enforcement.

The FBI found in the bushes two backpacks, an AK-47-style firearm with a scope and a GoPro camera - suggesting a plan to kill the Republican presidential candidate and film it for the world to witness. On Monday, federal prosecutors brought charges against the suspect, Ryan Wesley Routh, related to improperly possessing a gun.

The incident was the latest shocking moment in a campaign year marked by unprecedented upheaval and fears of violence and civil unrest. It came nine weeks after Trump was shot during an

▲ A supporter of former president Donald Trump stands near his Mar-a-Lago residence in West Palm Beach, Florida, last Sunday

CRISTOBAL HERRERA-
ULASHKEVICH/EPA

Continued





assassination attempt at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, when a bullet grazed his ear and a supporter was killed. The former president's bloodied, defiant response, urging supporters to "Fight!", prompted headline writers to ask: Did Donald Trump just win the election? But a week later, Joe Biden withdrew from the race and was replaced by Kamala Harris. The assassination attempt faded from a hectic news cycle and earned only a passing mention at last Tuesday's debate.

What happened that day in Pennsylvania should be remembered, not for partisan reasons, but because of what it resurfaced: a nation with a long history of political violence bracing for what has been dubbed "a tinderbox election".

Danger and instability have become a feature of US political life. A white supremacist march in Charlottesville, Virginia, that led to the death of a civil rights activist. A mob of Trump supporters storming the US Capitol on 6 January 2021. A hammer attack on House speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband Paul in their home. Threats of violence to members of Congress and judges.

A new documentary film, *The Last Republican*, features sinister voicemails left for congressman Adam Kinzinger, a Trump critic who sat on the House January 6 committee. One said: "You little

cocksucker. Are you Liz Cheney's fag-hag? You two cock-sucking little bitches. We're gonna get ya. Coming to your house, son. Ha ha ha ha!"

As the election draws near, the temperature rises. False accusations that Haitian immigrants are eating cats and dogs in Springfield, Ohio, have led to bomb threats and school closures. Just as at Trump's rally nine weeks ago, innocent people are the collateral damage of reckless propaganda.

The normalisation of violence crosses partisan boundaries. In 2017, a man with anti-Republican views opened fire during a practice session for the annual congressional baseball game, injuring five people including House majority whip Steve Scalise. There is more support for violence *against* Trump (10% of American adults) than for violence in *favour* of Trump (6.9%), according to a



▲ White nationalists clash with counter protesters in Charlottesville in 2017

STEVE HELBER/AP

Trump has polluted the political climate and created a permission structure for violence

◀ An image released by police on Monday allegedly shows a rifle and a backpack left outside West Palm Beach Golf Club

STEPHANY MATAT/AP

University of Chicago survey in June.

But only one of the two major parties is actively fanning the flames. Trump encouraged strongarm tactics against protesters at his rallies. He mocked Pelosi over the hammer attack. He warned of a "bloodbath" if he is not elected and claimed undocumented people in the US are "poisoning the blood of our country".

It is enough to fill any concerned citizen with foreboding about the election - and what comes next in a nation that has more guns than people. Trump, a convicted criminal with more cases looming over him, is in a desperate fight to stay out of prison. Having never acknowledged his 2020 loss, he has refused to commit to accepting the outcome in 2024, promising "long-term prison sentences" for anyone involved in "unscrupulous behaviour".

With Republicans focused on "election integrity" efforts, poll workers could face intolerable levels of violence and intimidation. Opinion polls suggest the election will be perilously close, giving plenty of scope to sow doubt, likely to be turbocharged by Elon Musk's X social media platform.

As the Axios website recently noted: "A perfect storm has been brewing for years now - fueled by extreme polarization, election denial, political violence, historic prosecutions and rampant disinformation. Mayhem is bound to rain down in November."

A Reuters/Ipsos poll in May found more than two in three Americans are concerned about extremist violence after the election. Last month Patrick Gaspard, a former White House official, told reporters the US faces "multiple January 6th-like incidents" at state capitols if Harris ekes out a narrow victory.

Biden and Harris rightly condemned both assassination attempts and said they were glad Trump is safe. But it is inescapably true that Trump has polluted the political atmosphere and created a permission structure for violence.

His response to Sunday's close call? Emails and text messages declaring: "I will not stop fighting for you. I will Never Surrender!" - and asking supporters for money.

DAVID SMITH IS THE GUARDIAN'S WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF

UNITED STATES

After debate, Trump and Harris pivot to crucial swing states

By Chris McGreal

As gleeful Democrats spent days circulating video clips of Kamala Harris ridiculing and riling Donald Trump in last week's presidential debate, the candidates got back to the brutal grind of winning over the tiny proportion of voters who will decide November's election in a clutch of swing states.

Last weekend, Harris continued her tour of pivotal areas to exploit the momentum from her humiliation of Trump. At the end of last week she was in Pennsylvania, perhaps the most crucial state, to push the themes she hit hard in the debate in painting the former president as a threat to democracy, women's rights and the US's international standing.

Trump was in Arizona before heading to Michigan, both states he narrowly won in 2016 then lost four years later, as he tried to recover from what was seen as a damaging performance.

The White House contest remains on a knife-edge. Before the debate, Harris's narrow lead was being chipped

away by a Trump campaign trying to claw its way back after Joe Biden withdrew. After Trump's poor debate showing, Harris appears to be edging up again. But neither campaign is taking anything for granted.

A CNN poll showed that 63% of debate watchers thought Harris won as Trump made outlandish claims about immigrants eating pets and Democrats wanting to abort newborn babies. A focus group of undecided swing-state voters said Harris came out on top.

Even Fox News conceded the defeat. "Trump had a bad night," said its political analyst Brit Hume.

The CNN poll showed, however, that confidence in Harris to handle the economy fell by two points to 35% after she failed to address inflation in the debate, or even to acknowledge the hardship it caused, while trust in Trump on the issue rose by two points to 55%.

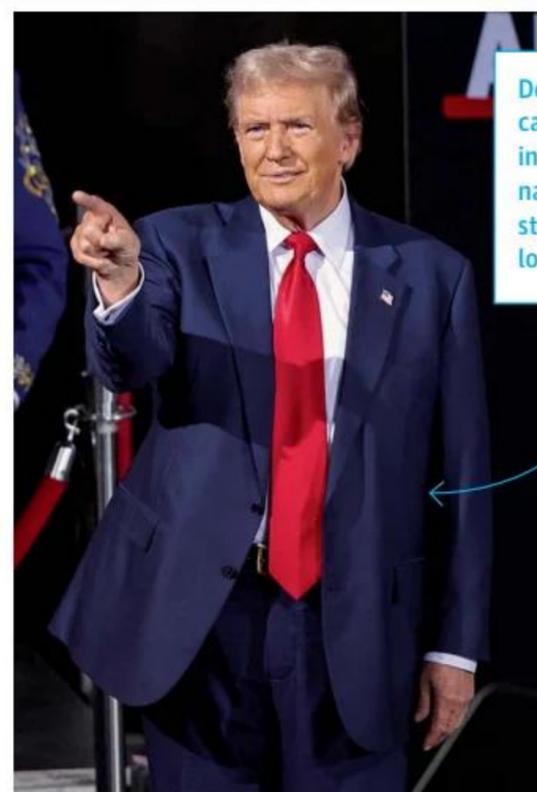
And while a YouGov poll put Harris nine points above Trump in favourability ratings, the race is still neck and neck with each candidate claiming the support of 45% of the electorate.

Charles Franklin, director of the Marquette law school poll of voters in swing state Wisconsin, where only about 20,000 votes separated Trump and his opponent in the last two presidential elections, said that while Harris won the debate, he doubted that would shift the dial much in the states where the election will be decided.

"Our [Wisconsin] electorate is highly polarised even by national standards and so moving it much seems a little far-fetched," he said.

Polling says that about one in 20 voters in swing states has yet to decide who to vote for. But analysts doubt the reality of such indecision.

Nicholas Valentino, a political scientist at the University of Michigan, said that even though Harris's positions are



Donald Trump campaigning in Arizona. He narrowly won the state in 2016 but lost it in 2020

not well known, few could be in doubt about the differences between the contenders on key issues from abortion to immigration and healthcare.

"When those undecided voters say we need more substance from either of the candidates, it doesn't necessarily mean that they don't know the differences or that they're really waiting for some key piece of information. That's ambivalence," he said.

The YouGov poll showed Harris has the opportunity to make headway with voters who say they favour a candidate but are open to changing their minds. About 4% of Trump supporters would consider voting for Harris, while just 1% of Democrats would switch.

For all that, Harris's combative approach to the debate was informed by the recognition in both campaigns that the key to victory almost certainly lies in turnout and generating enthusiasm among ambivalent supporters.

In 2016, Trump beat Hillary Clinton in Pennsylvania by fewer than 45,000 votes. Four years later, Trump increased his vote there by more than 400,000. But he still lost Pennsylvania in 2020 because Biden was able to boost Democratic turnout by 530,000.

That was a pattern repeated across swing states that delivered Biden's victory and that Harris almost certainly must now win. Probably no state is more pivotal than Pennsylvania.

"It's very likely that this election in Pennsylvania will be decided by fewer than 100,000 votes, just like it has been in the last two elections," said Valentino.

CHRIS MCGREAL IS A WRITER FOR GUARDIAN US

Key numbers
Voters' verdict on candidates

63%

Portion of audience who thought Harris won TV debate, according to a CNN poll

55%

Level of trust the audience had in Trump's handling of the economy. The figure for Harris was 35%

5%

According to polling, the number of voters in swing states who are yet to make up their minds



Kamala Harris in Pennsylvania, which looks set to be perhaps the most crucial of crunch states

LEV RADIN/ZUMA/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK; MIKE BLAKE/REUTERS

PERU

Fujimori's death offers omen for a brighter new era

By Dan Collyns LIMA and Sam Jones MADRID

At 11.45 last Thursday morning, six white-gloved pallbearers carried a coffin holding the body of the most divisive, beloved and reviled Peruvian politician of the past four decades.

Behind the coffin, dressed in black under a pale but warm spring sky, came its occupant's eldest daughter and youngest son. A crowd of ministers, political allies and military top brass awaited them at the double doors of Lima's culture ministry.

So began three days of national mourning to honour Alberto Fujimori, the upstart who served as president of Peru from 1990 to 2000 and who, nine years later, was ordered to serve

a 25-year sentence for authorising kidnappings and murders during his government's "war against terrorism".

Last Saturday, after a state funeral at the ministry, supporters gathered as he was buried at the Campo Fe de Huachipa cemetery in the city.

Fujimori, who died of cancer aged 86 last Wednesday, was afforded the kind of send-off not seen since the 2020 funeral of the Peruvian former UN secretary-general Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. But Fujimori - who was pardoned and released from prison just 10 months ago - is perhaps the most bitter and disputed topic in contemporary Peru.

Fujimori, the son of Japanese immigrants, was the little-known candidate who ran against the Peruvian novelist - and future Nobel prize-winner - Mario Vargas Llosa in the 1990 election, which was held after almost a decade of the Shining Path's Maoist terrorism and years of economic upheaval.

With Vargas Llosa perceived as another candidate from the country's white, Lima-centric elite, Fujimori, an agricultural engineer and mathematician schooled in France and the US, capitalised on his appeal to ordinary Peruvians by riding a tractor and pledging "honesty, technology, work".

Fujimori's drastic market reforms and deregulation appealed to the business elite, while programmes to build schools, roads and bridges won him votes and lifelong support.

But, faced with economic and terrorist turmoil, Fujimori governed with an increasingly authoritar-

On an official trip to Asia, Fujimori fled to Japan and resigned by fax

ian hand in connivance with his spymaster, Vladimiro Montesinos, a corrupt lawyer and former soldier.

Fujimori embarked on the "war against terrorism" that eventually crushed the Shining Path insurgency and then the smaller Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement.

Desperate for an end to the bloodshed - the country's truth and reconciliation commission would later establish that 69,280 people were killed between 1980 and 2000, 54% of them by the Shining Path - many Peruvians supported Fujimori's "by any means necessary" tactics.

In the early 1990s, Fujimori holed up in the intelligence service headquarters from where he directed a dirty war using a death squad, the Grupo Colina, to carry out massacres for which he was eventually convicted and jailed for 25 years in 2009.

These crimes, which included the murder of an eight-year-old boy, turned a large sector of public opinion against Fujimori. Things finally began to fall apart towards the end of his second term. Protests against his regime grew until they became daily in Lima, and an election in 2000 was beset with allegations of ballot-rigging.

Soon after, on an official trip to Asia, Fujimori fled to Japan, his parents' homeland, and resigned the presidency by fax. But Peru's congress rejected his resignation and, instead, stripped him of the presidency, arguing that he was "morally unfit".

Today, Keiko, Fujimori's daughter who has finished second in the past three presidential elections, is the standard bearer for the political force known, after her father, as *fujimorismo* - a viciously divisive movement.

Fujimori may be dead, but experts say his shadow lingers. Hundreds of thousands of women and men are still seeking justice after being forcibly sterilised under his presidency.

In a quirk of fate, Fujimori died exactly three years to the day after his terrorist nemesis Abimael Guzmán, leader of the Shining Path, also at the age of 86.

"Let's hope this is an omen for an era with neither terrorists nor dictators," the Peruvian writer Santiago Roncagliolo wrote on X. "Let's hope the universe is saying that Peru can be a democracy." *Observer*

DAN COLLYNS IS A JOURNALIST BASED IN LIMA; SAM JONES IS THE GUARDIAN'S MADRID CORRESPONDENT

▼ Alberto Fujimori's state funeral in Lima last Saturday

ANDRES VALLE/
PERUVIAN PRESIDENCY/
GETTY





◀ Migrants in an iron boat near an NGO rescue boat south of Lampedusa in the Mediterranean Sea

JUAN MEDINA/REUTERS

EXPLAINER
MIGRATION

Policy lesson Will UK copy Italy's stance on migrant crossings?

By Angela Giuffrida

Keir Starmer travelled to Rome this week for bilateral talks about immigration with Italy's prime minister, Giorgia Meloni. The British prime minister, under pressure to tackle irregular migration across the Channel from France, wanted to examine how Meloni's hard-right government has cut the number of people arriving in dinghies across the Mediterranean.

What policies has the Meloni government pursued?

Last September, Lampedusa was once again inundated with people after more than 11,000 arrived on the tiny southern Italian island, mostly from Tunisia, within a week.

The emergency highlighted Meloni's struggles to keep her election campaign pledge to curb

irregular migration to Italy, but it also marked a turning point. With Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, by her side, the Italian leader vowed to get tough. She passed measures extending the amount of time people can be held in deportation detention centres to 18 months and ordered the construction of new centres.

Meloni was the key protagonist in a deal signed in July 2023 between the EU and Tunisia that meant the former paying the latter millions of euros to stop migrant boats from leaving the north African country, but also to invest in businesses and education, all with the aim of deterring migration.

The policy bore little fruit at first, but now the deal, along with another - first struck by Italy in 2017, that equips and trains the Libyan coastguard to stop people leaving - is credited with reducing inflows.

This year, Meloni travelled to Tunisia and Libya to put pressure on their leaders to reinforce those pacts and curb irregular migration further.

In addition, Italy made a deal with Tirana under which men arriving on boats from north Africa would be taken to centres in Albania to have their asylum claims processed. However, there has been no tangible progress on the complex scheme, which, if it takes effect, would cost Italy €670m (\$745m) over five years.

The Meloni government has also enacted draconian policies against charity ships in the Mediterranean, with captains facing huge fines if they carry out more than one rescue operation at a time.

Small boats Italy and migration

18
Number of months migrants can be held in Italian detention centres

44k
Number of migrant arrivals to Italy so far this year, down from 125,806 in 2023

1.4k
Number of people who have died or gone missing in the central Mediterranean since January

What has happened to immigration figures since the Meloni government took power?

During Meloni's first year in power, the number of people arriving in Italy by boat rose sharply, with the total reaching 125,806 in 2023, almost double that of 2022. But arrivals so far this year have dropped to 44,465, according to the latest data Italian interior ministry data.

Meloni will point to the Tunisia and Libya deals for this achievement. Given that Italy is hosting the G7 presidency this year, there are suspicions of additional payouts to what Francesco Gallieti, the co-founder of Policy Sonar, a political consultancy in Rome, called "the logistical springboards".

How have rights groups and others reacted to Italian measures?

Italy's approach has long been criticised by humanitarian groups. The deal with Libya, which essentially pushes people back to detention camps where they face torture and other abuses, was first struck by a centre-left government in 2017 and is renewed every three years. Similar concerns have been raised about Tunisia.

Despite the policies, people still attempt to cross the Mediterranean and many die along the way. Figures from the international organisation for migration show more than 1,400 people have died or gone missing in the central Mediterranean since January. At least 11 were confirmed to have died in two separate wrecks close to Italy's shore in June.

How applicable is the Italian approach to the UK situation?

Starmer can "learn" about the Italian approach, but it won't be so easy to apply.

"The immigration challenge faced by both countries is different," said Wolfgang Piccoli, a co-president of political risk advisory at the London-based research company Teneo. "Rome can throw money and some kind of assistance to Tunisia and Libya, hoping it will reduce the inflow. This is not an option for London. Immigrants arrive from France. More than anything, the visit shows how sensitive the matter is to Starmer."

ANGELA GIUFFRIDA IS THE GUARDIAN'S ROME CORRESPONDENT

A hard rain *Scientists warn on damage as deadly floods wreak havoc*

By *Ajit Niranjana*



Picturesque towns across central Europe were inundated by dirty flood water this week after

heavy rains turned tranquil streams into raging rivers that wreaked havoc on infrastructure.

The floods killed at least 16 people and destroyed buildings from Austria to Romania, and came amid devastating floods elsewhere around the world. Entire villages were submerged in Myanmar, where at least 113 people have died and hundreds of thousands more were displaced. In Nigeria nearly 300 prisoners escaped a collapsed jail following flooding caused by a dam burst after heavy rain, which affected more than 1 million people.

Climate scientists say they are troubled by the damage but not surprised by the intensity. “The catastrophic rainfall is exactly what scientists expect with climate change,” said Joyce Kimutai, of Imperial College London’s Grantham Institute. She said the death and damage across Africa and Europe highlighted “how poorly prepared the world is for such floods”.

Scientists take care when attributing extreme rains to human influence because so many factors shape the water cycle. Although it is well established that hotter air can hold more moisture, whether violent downpours occur also depends on how much water is available to fall.



As long as the world burns oil, gas and coal, weather extremes will intensify

Sonia Seneviratne, a climate scientist at the university ETH Zürich, said immediate analyses of the central European floods suggested most of the water vapour came from the Black and Mediterranean seas, both of which have grown hotter as a result of human-induced climate breakdown, resulting in more water evaporating.

“On average, the intensity of heavy precipitation events increases by 7% for each degree of global warming,” she said. “We now have 1.2C of warming, which means that on average heavy precipitation events are 8% more intense.”

Data indicates that bursts of September rainfall have become heavier in Germany, Poland, Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia since 1950, Kimutai said.

In Poland, the floods collapsed a bridge and washed houses away, according to local media. In the Czech Republic, helicopters rescued stranded citizens from rising waters. In Austria, one firefighter was reported to have died in rescue efforts. In the capital, Vienna, the rain flooded a motorway and closed metro lines.

Erich Fischer, a climate scientist at ETH Zürich, said scientists at the conference used to discuss how climate change increases rainfall intensity over lunch on the banks of the New Danube. “It is ironic to see these banks, where we were sitting discussing extreme precipitation, now being flooded.”

Death tolls from floods hinge on how well communities prepare for the rain and respond to its effects. Scientists have urged governments to invest in early warning systems, more resilient infrastructure and support schemes for victims, while ending their reliance on fossil fuels.

“Even highly developed countries are not safe from climate change,” said Friederike Otto, a climate scientist at the UK’s Grantham Institute. “As long as the world burns oil, gas and coal, heavy rainfall and other weather extremes will intensify, making our planet a more dangerous and expensive place to live.”

AJIT NIRANJANA IS THE GUARDIAN’S EUROPE ENVIRONMENT CORRESPONDENT





◀ An elderly resident is rescued from flood waters in the Romanian village of Slobozia Conachi last Saturday

DANIEL MIHAILESCU/
AFP/GETTY

▶▶ A man drying items in a flooded area at Inle Lake, in Myanmar's southern Shan state, after Typhoon Yagi

STR/AFP/GETTY

▶ The flooded village of Rudawa in southern Poland on Sunday

SERGEI GAPON/
AFP/GETTY

▶ People help an elderly man wade through flood water in Maiduguri, Nigeria, last Thursday

AUDU MARTE/AFP/GETTY





UKRAINE

Power grid attacks endanger botanical treasures

Appeal for help as Russia's destruction of energy network places Kyiv collection of rare and exotic species in danger

By Luke Harding KYIV

Zhanna Yaroslavskaya showed off a barrel-shaped stove in the middle of a tropical greenhouse. Nearby was a pile of logs. "It's a pretty neanderthal arrangement," she said. "When the power shuts off, we feed the stove with wood. In winter we do this round the clock. Our plants require constant temperatures. They don't like cold and hot."

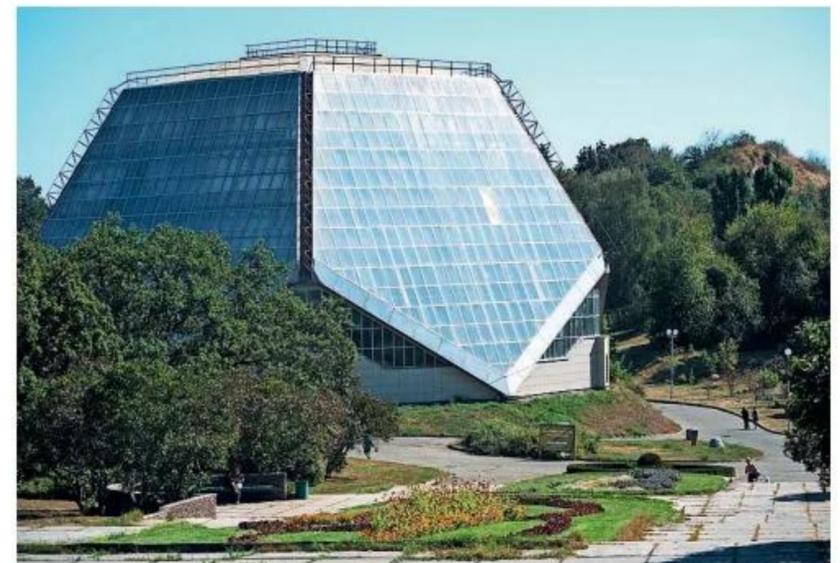
Inside the glass nursery were dozens of rare specimens. All were bromeliads native to the Americas. Silvery wisps of *Tillandsia* descended from a pipe. A pineapple poked out of a stem. A screen next to the stove protected a group of starfish-like earth stars. The collection needed a minimum temperature of 10C, Yaroslavskaya - a senior researcher - said. Below that everything would die off.

The greenhouse is one of eight in the Mykola Hryshko national botanical garden in Kyiv. Founded in 1935, it is Ukraine's biggest garden and one of the largest in Europe. It is home to about 13,000 species of trees, flowers and other plants from around the world. The 52-hectare site has scientific departments and two laboratories. With its roses and camellias, it is a popular venue with wedding photographers.

But the park is now staring at

▲ Zhanna Yaroslavskaya in a greenhouse at Mykola Hryshko botanical garden

Photographs by Anastasia Vlasova



disaster. In recent months, Russia has systematically destroyed most of Ukraine's energy infrastructure. Power cuts across the country are common. The city authorities have said they will not be able to guarantee supply in the freezing months ahead. Prices for electricity have doubled, as the garden's funding has shrunk.

"Worst-case scenario is we lose a big part of our collection," Roman Ivannikov, the head of the tropical and subtropical plant department, said. Money is so tight he and his colleagues recently took a pay cut. Last winter, \$72,000 in donations kept the garden going, allowing the purchase of 242 tonnes of fuel pellets. Volunteers chopped firewood. The garden is appealing for help, under the hashtag #greenhousewarming.

Before the first chilly night of October arrives, Ivannikov said his team urgently needed additional generators. The orchid house had a unique collection and was especially vulnerable. Last year, three heat pumps were fitted to maintain temperatures at 20-22C. But there was no back-up in the case of a prolonged shutdown.

The garden collaborates with international partners. In 2014, it sent plants to Vietnam, after their original habitat was destroyed to make way for crops. "I travelled with 45 orchids," Ivannikov recalled. "I watched on TV, as Russia took Crimea." Scientific conferences with Moscow stopped. When Russia launched its full-scale invasion, Ivannikov took his family out of Kyiv and returned a week later.

The Kremlin continues to fire missiles at the capital. From time to time, falling debris breaks glass in the hothouses. Blast waves from explosions have dislodged a chunk of wall and knocked over red-listed plants. "We haven't had a direct hit. But we

'When the power shuts off, we feed the stove with wood. They don't like cold and hot'

Zhanna Yaroslavska

4k

The number of tropical and subtropical plants in the garden - among a total collection of 13,000 species of trees, flowers and other plants

◀ The 52-hectare garden, founded in 1935, is one of Europe's largest

suffered a lot of damage," Ivannikov said. In January, a rocket flew above the main orangery.

Iryna Yudakova, an engineer, was inside. "I didn't hear the air alarm. I went out and saw a streak in the sky," she said. "There was an explosion. A piece of shrapnel fell next to me. Another hit a window. I was lucky." Yudakova said she enjoyed her job but that the pay - 8,000 hryvnia (\$190) a month - was measly. "Previously I was a psychologist. When the war started I lost my clients. Without my husband I couldn't survive," she said.

Yudakova's duties include looking after the rhododendrons and azaleas. In February, one of her favourite plants - an old specimen bred in Germany in the 1930s - lost most of its leaves during a blackout. "It got too cold," she said. "The younger, smaller plants survive better." Standing next to the denuded shrub, she reflected: "It's like losing a relative or a pet. I think of them as my kids. I water them, care for them, talk to them."

Many employees have worked at the garden for decades. Others fled Russian occupation. Among them are a father and daughter in charge of the bonsai collection, who escaped from Mariupol. About 1,000 volunteers do tasks such as pruning and watering juvenile plants.

"It's gardening therapy. The volunteers do useful work. They go home feeling better," Ivannikov said. On my visit, dog walkers and young couples visited the alpine garden and sat in a pleasant outdoor cafe. A sale of succulents was going on. Proceeds went to Ukraine's armed forces.

Back at the bromeliad house, Yaroslavska said she would like to replace the building - constructed in 1976 - with a more heat-efficient version. She recognised there was no point in making improvements while the war rumbled on. For now, the objective was for the garden and its 4,000 tropical and subtropical plants to get through the coming winter.

There were also smaller challenges, she said. A bold squirrel had climbed in through a ventilation window and made off with the figs from a rare tree. Apart from getting rid of the squirrel, what else did she want? "If I had a magic wand, I would wish there was no Russia," she replied. "No Russia means no problem. We could live normally."

LUKE HARDING IS A GUARDIAN FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

EXPLAINER
UKRAINE

Crossing a line Could deeper range of Storm Shadows alter war dynamic?

By Archie Bland and Dan Sabbagh

When Keir Starmer met Joe Biden at the White House last Friday, the war in Ukraine - and an expected move to lift restrictions on Ukraine's use of long-range Storm Shadow missiles - were top of the agenda. Ukraine has for months been asking for restrictions on the use of western-supplied Storm Shadow missiles to be loosened, but Kyiv's allies have been reluctant to give the green light. Owing to the significance of such a decision, no official announcement was made.

What are Storm Shadow missiles, and why does Ukraine want them?

Storm Shadow missiles can hit targets up to 250km away - so could strike deep into Russian territory. They can penetrate bunkers and damage airfields, and can be precisely targeted.

They were developed in an Anglo-French collaboration, and made by a joint venture involving Italy, using US components. All four countries would have to sign off on any change to conditions attached to their use.

Ukraine has Storm Shadow missiles but it is permitted to use them only within its own territory. While it has drones and cruise missiles that can strike within Russia, it does not have enough of them to make a significant impact.

Why has the west not allowed Ukraine to use the missiles in Russia?

The US and its allies have sought to strike a balance between giving Ukraine weapons to defend itself while avoiding any move that could

be viewed as a provocation and lead to direct involvement in the war.

Last Thursday, Vladimir Putin said any western decision to let Kyiv use such longer-range weapons against targets inside Russia would mean Nato would be "at war" with Moscow - a dramatic escalation of his rhetoric about the war that began with the Russian invasion in February 2022. "This would in a significant way change the very nature of the conflict," the Russian president told a reporter. He added that Russia would take "appropriate decisions based on the threats that we will face" as a result.

What has changed?

Ukraine is facing a lot of pressure on the frontline, and fears a difficult winter. Its surprising cross-border incursion into Kursk last month has reframed thinking on the use of weapons on Russian soil and acted as a reminder that Ukraine is at its most effective when it is changing the dynamic of the conflict.

Matthew Savill, the director of military sciences at the defence thinktank Rusi in London, said Ukraine had not briefed allies in advance about its incursion into Kursk. "It changed the debate about escalation and the use inside Russia of long-range weapons," he said.

There was also news last week that Russia had received a new batch of ballistic missiles from Iran, which the UK foreign secretary, David Lammy, said had changed strategic thinking in London and Washington.

What are the benefits and risks of allowing Storm Shadow to be used within Russia?

There is an inherent tension in how Ukraine believes the weapons can be effective: by degrading Russia's ability to strike against targets in Ukraine, but also by bringing the war further on to Russian soil, in theory thereby making the costs to Putin more acute. Despite having lost between 68,000 and 150,000 soldiers, according to some estimates, and with hundreds of thousands more wounded, Putin does not appear to have paid any significant political cost.

ARCHIE BLAND IS THE EDITOR OF THE GUARDIAN'S FIRST EDITION NEWSLETTER; DAN SABBAGH IS DEFENCE AND SECURITY EDITOR

COLOMBIA/PANAMA

Darién Gap migration rush creates a pollution emergency

Communities voice alarm over poisoned rivers and cultural erosion as half a million people a year attempt crossing

By Luke Taylor BOGOTÁ

The Darién Gap's isolation and formidable reputation has shielded the Indigenous communities who live there from the outside world for centuries. Spanish conquistadors died trying to settle in the sliver of dense rainforest connecting Colombia with Panama, and in recent decades only the most intrepid outsiders have undertaken the 100km trek.

Now, however, with half a million people slogging through the rainforest on migration routes to the US each year, Darién's Indigenous groups say their ecosystem and way of life are under threat.

"It's something that we did not expect, as the migration took off from one day to the next and suddenly we found ourselves flooded with trash," said Yenairo Aji, a community leader, or "noco", in Nueva Vigía, a village close to the Darién's northern frontier where about 1,400 Emberá people live. "It's worrying because we depend on our local ecosystem for everything."

Estimates differ, but at least 8,000 people live in the Darién Gap, mostly from the Emberá-Wounaan and Guna Indigenous groups. The rainforest's inaccessibility had protected it but a surge in migration since the Covid pandemic has quickly changed that. In 2019, 24,000 people undertook the week-long trek. By 2022, that number had reached 250,000. It doubled in 2023, surpassing half a million.

Human rights groups such as Médecins Sans Frontières and Amnesty International are sounding the alarm about the humanitarian crisis as dozens of poorly equipped, malnourished people succumb to the jungle's natural perils each year, and armed bandits rob, exploit and sexually abuse many more.

Less reported is the environmental damage in one of the world's best preserved forests, which communities say includes unprecedented waste and contamination. When it rains, the once pristine stony banks of the Turquesa River in Nueva Vigía are now lined

▼ Migrants walk through the Darién Gap in Acandí, Colombia, on their journey to the US border
ADRI SALIDO/REUTERS

'The trash can be cleaned up but the rivers might take decades to restore'



with discarded drinks cans, T-shirts and plastic food containers, local people report.

Gasoline leaking from the influx of boats and the human waste of the hundreds of thousands who make the journey have poisoned the rivers on which several communities depend, said Tania Chanapi, a community leader in Nuevo Vigía. The bodies of those who did not survive are often found decaying in the waterways.

“Before, we used the river for everything: drinking, washing our things and bathing. Now we can’t really do any of that because it causes a lot of sickness, like diarrhoea and vomiting,” Chanapi said.

The main business for the armed groups who control the rainforest used to be pushing cocaine north towards the US, but crime analysts estimate the boom in migration has turned people-smuggling into a multimillion-dollar industry.

In addition to the hundreds of dollars the paramilitary group the Gulf Clan (also known as the Gaitanistas) charges each person for passage, they have set up shops selling travel kits, including cheap camping mats and tents that often wash up downstream.

Local communities were initially excited by the new cash coming into the region and many men from the area now work in the people-smuggling trade as it pays more than agriculture. The money has helped villagers build better houses and install electricity, and even have Starlink, the satellite internet service.

But now they are counting the cost of the changes. People in Nueva Vigía say they must buy bottled water as the rivers are poisoned, and the fish smell and taste of gasoline.

Most families have stopped producing staples such as plantain, rice and corn, which used to sustain them, in favour of working in the migrant trade. “I am seeing more children who have been abandoned as their parents leave for days to work with migrants,” said Esilda Tunay, a teacher at Nueva Vigía’s school. “And there is a lot more alcoholism, I suppose because of the influx of money.”

The US has been pressuring regional governments to halt migration through the Darién but has so far failed to find a viable solution.

Panama’s new president, José Raúl Mulino, who took office in July and promised to deport all migrants by air,



has since conceded he cannot force people to take planes back home.

The government has erected fences in an effort to funnel people through a single route, which it can monitor more closely. It also sent 29 Colombians with criminal records home on a plane on 20 August - the first deportation flight paid for with US funds intended to stop the rising footfall.

The human tragedy has obscured the environmental damage to one of the world’s richest ecosystems, said Global Conservation, a small US-based NGO that protects national parks by financially supporting Indigenous groups and park rangers.

The Darién national park is the largest protected area in Central America and the Caribbean. Its vast expanses of forests, mangroves and sandy beaches have some of the greatest biodiversity on Earth. Many species living in the 575,000 hectares of rainforest, such as the brown-headed spider monkey, are vulnerable or endangered.

“People have turned a blind eye to this because they think it’s some place over there where no one lives. In reality, 8,000 people are living there, whose rivers are getting polluted by



▲ Path through wild Darién jungle near the Colombia and Panama border, Central America.

ALAMY

Tree routes
Unsustainable numbers

8k
Number of people estimated to live in the Darién Gap

500k+
Number of migrants who trekked through the area in 2023

9kg
Amount of rubbish that each person is estimated to leave behind

◀ Migrants prepare to start their walk across the Darién Gap

IVAN VALENCIA/AP

the shit of half a million people,” said Global Conservation’s founder, Jeff Morgan. “The trash can be cleaned up, but the rivers might not come back, or take decades to restore.”

The region’s inaccessibility has prevented detailed studies of the environmental damage, but Panama’s environment ministry estimates that everyone using the route leaves behind about 9kg of rubbish.

“With 2,000 people crossing a day, you can imagine the damage this generates,” said Kherson Ruiz, who heads Global Conservation’s Darién programme.

The NGO said a plan including some form of toilets for those attempting to cross needs to be implemented urgently. “The ideal would be that they take trash with them and deposit it at the end, but realistically, we are talking about a place [with such desperation] that even children and elderly people are left behind,” Ruiz said.

Mulino has described rivers as “natural oases” becoming “contaminated by faeces, even by corpses”. Panama’s new environment minister, Juan Carlos Navarro, said that his government has requested to use \$3m of the \$10m pledged by the US to manage the migration crisis and clean up the forests.

The government wants to set up a US-funded, community-led project, which it estimates would take about a year to clean up the Darién. Irregular migration must first be “reduced to a minimum”, Navarro said.

Stopping migration through the Darién will be difficult as it requires regional cooperation. However, most countries in the region want the route to remain open, said Orlando Pérez, an expert in Panamanian politics at the University of North Texas. “Countries like Colombia are interested in seeing the flow continue as they don’t want additional Venezuelans or Ecuadorians to stay in their own country.”

The government should act quickly, said Ismael Isarama, a teacher in the community of Villa Caleta, who noted that some communities were far more affected than others. “We have lost our tradition of bathing in the river,” he said, showing a rash on his forearm, which he blames on the pollution. “But we are plugged into the water grid. I worry about the future of all those who are not.”

LUKE TAYLOR WRITES ABOUT LATIN AMERICA

ETHIOPIA

Money tree

How rich westerners exploit the resin trade

By Fred Harter
TSEYKEME

A lucrative race to supply the wellness industry could be driving wild frankincense trees towards extinction

In a corner of Covent Garden, well-heeled Londoners and tourists browse the range of frankincense products sold by a leading cosmetics brand. Amid the aromatic resin sheathed under glass, shoppers can buy “age-defying” serums, creams and essences, and tablets to strengthen brittle nails and hair.

At one counter, a sales assistant is

advising customers on how much of the essential oil to add to their nebuliser to make guests feel relaxed “without overwhelming them”. Another explains frankincense’s “hydrating and rejuvenating” properties. In terms of popularity, she says, it outstrips lavender, tea tree and other botanicals.

It also fetches high prices. Here, a 50g bottle of frankincense firming cream costs upwards of \$100.

Frankincense has been harvested in the Horn of Africa and across the Red Sea in the Arabian peninsula for millennia. In ancient Egypt, it was prized for its deep, woody fragrance. The magi are supposed to have brought a gift of it to the baby Jesus along with gold and myrrh, and many churches still burn it during services.

Until about 20 years ago, “the demand for frankincense was mostly from churches”, said Frans Bongers, professor of forest ecology at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. Recently, however, this ancient resin has become a hot commodity as its alleged health benefits catch the attention of the wellness industry, a sector worth about \$5.6tn a year.

“Now big companies are buying up everything they can,” Bongers said.

Frankincense extraction, however, remains firmly rooted in its ancient past. Supply chains are murky, often marked by exploitation and violence, and dominated by middlemen. Although most western wellness companies claim to source their products ethnically and sustainably, it is often impossible to trace frankincense sold in New York and London back to the people who harvest it.

And there is mounting evidence that the substance’s newfound popularity could be driving wild frankincense trees to the brink of extinction.

In Tseykeme, a village of stone farmsteads in northern Ethiopia, a small copse of frankincense trees clings to a rocky hillside. Their twisting branches are gnarled, and the flaky, paper-like bark resembles that of a birch. The trees’ trunks bear scars: raw red patches where the bark has been crudely hacked away.

Frankincense thieves come here almost every night, said Demstu Gebremichael, a local farmer. Usually, they work by moonlight, but Demstu can sometimes see the flash of torches as they scrape away the valuable white sap oozing from cuts in his trees.

For decades, 78-year-old Demstu harvested the frankincense himself, loaded it on to camels, and sold it in the nearest town, Abi Adi. The small sums of money it generated supplemented his income as a subsistence farmer. “This is how we bought things like clothes and school materials for the children,” said Demstu.

These days, however, he harvests “almost nothing”. The resin is stolen before he can collect it. Standing beneath one of his 36 frankincense trees, Demstu tells of beatings meted out to neighbours who confronted the thieves, mostly local young men who have lost their livelihoods to war and drought.

As more people extract the resin, the future of the species - and of local farmers - is under threat. One of the first warnings that frankincense was teetering towards extinction came in 2011: a study of *Boswellia papyrifera* in northern Ethiopia predicted that 90% of the trees could disappear by 2060.

This is the main variety of frankincense tree, accounting for two-thirds of global resin production. In another paper, published in *Nature* in 2019, scientists found forests of *Boswellia papyrifera* were not regenerating and estimated frankincense production

▼ Frankincense trees near Tseykeme village, northern Ethiopia



► Demstu Gebremichael by one of his frankincense trees on his farm in Tseykeme

would halve within two decades before forests died out altogether.

The trees are being hit by fires and droughts, but the biggest culprit is over exploitation. Like maple syrup, frankincense is harvested through “tapping” - making shallow cuts in the bark and allowing 10 to 15 days for the resin to ooze out and harden. If too many cuts are made, beetles and fungi get inside, killing the tree.

Researchers found that frankincense trees in Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea were subject to “reckless” over-tapping to meet soaring international demand. It has produced a vicious cycle: fewer trees means existing ones are tapped more and more intensively.

Bongers, a co-lead author of both studies, said the warnings have largely been ignored. “People say, ‘I don’t see the problem,’” he said. “They just don’t believe me and go on harvesting.”

There are five main varieties of frankincense-producing *Boswellia* trees. All are found in rocky, dry places such as northern Ethiopia. Anjanette DeCarlo, a scientist and founder of the Save Frankincense project, describes them as “the ultimate alchemists”.

The largest concentrations of frankincense trees are found in Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Yemen and Oman, many of which are countries ravaged by poverty, the climate crisis and internal conflicts.

In Tseykeme, there is no electricity or running water. This part of northern Ethiopia was already one of the world’s poorest regions when civil war broke out in 2020-22, killing hundreds of thousands of people. Burnt-out military vehicles still litter the road and the local government building has been gutted by looters.

A crushing drought has compounded the destruction, transforming the area into a dust bowl; farmers have harvested nothing for four years. In January, local officials pleaded with humanitarian organisations to increase aid urgently.

Buruh Temeke, a forestry lecturer at Mekelle University, last visited Tseykeme 20 years ago as a postgraduate student. “When I came here, it



was dense with frankincense trees, but they have been cleared for farmland,” Buruh said. “You can’t really call it a forest any more.”

On one small copse of frankincense trees, large strips of bark have been scraped away, probably with an axe. As sticky pearls of white frankincense form in cut areas, parts of the surviving bark have turned black. “Doing it like this is extremely damaging and will eventually kill the trees,” said Buruh.

Twenty-six-year-old Meaza and his friend are sitting in the shade of another group of frankincense trees as they take a break in the afternoon heat. Battered tins of sticky resin by their feet still bear faint US flag logos; previously they contained emergency food aid.

Before the war, Meaza was a furniture maker, but orders disappeared and today he scrapes a living by illicitly collecting frankincense.

“This is better, makes more money and requires less energy,” said Meaza, adding that the price for frankincense has shot up in recent years.

Meaza estimates it will take him three days to fill his tin. In Abi Adi,

‘There is a massive disconnect between consumers and events on the ground’



▲ A farmer in Abi Adi holds a sack of frankincense resin and bark

◀ White resin oozing out of a frankincense tree bearing the scars of overtapping

a day’s walk away, he can sell it for 700 Ethiopian birr (\$6).

“There is a massive disconnect between consumers and western companies on one hand, and what actually happens on the ground,” said Stephen Johnson, an ecologist and director of FairSource Botanicals. A wellness company in New York might make \$200 a kilo, compared with \$2 a kilo paid to harvesters, he said.

Discussions are under way on whether to protect *Boswellia* under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Cites) - a move that could lead to an outright ban on collecting frankincense.

However, DeCarlo is against listing the trees, arguing this would only drive the trade underground, fuel corruption and destroy the livelihoods of vulnerable people. In two areas of Somalia, for example, 225,000 people derive between 57% and 72% of their income from the frankincense trade. Instead, DeCarlo calls for more support for farmers who harvest frankincense.

Tesfaye Merasa, a frankincense wholesaler in Abi Adi, will take his stock to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia’s capital, 1,000km away. There, it will be sorted and graded by hand and then shipped abroad. As he showed us around, Tesfaye took out a large chunk of frankincense resin weighing several kilograms. Business is good, he said. “We can’t get hold of enough. Demand is far greater than the supply.” *Observer*

FRED HARTER IS A REPORTER BASED IN EAST AFRICA

Photographs by Fred Harter

90%

The proportion of frankincense trees in northern Ethiopia that are predicted to disappear by 2060



► Supporters celebrate the election of Bassirou Diomaye Faye in March

CEM OZDEL/
ANADOLU/GETTY

SENEGAL

Leaders face harsh reality check after promises of reform

By Eromo Egbejule DAKAR

Within a week of being inaugurated in April as Senegal's youngest president, Bassirou Diomaye Faye named his political mentor, Ousmane Sonko, as prime minister and announced his 25 cabinet appointments.

Faye had swept to power on a leftist, anti-establishment and pan-African agenda promising radical reform, and said in his victory speech that his administration would focus on national reconciliation, easing the cost of living crisis and fighting corruption.

His first-round victory in March over Amadou Ba, who represented the ruling administration, was all the more remarkable because Faye and Sonko were released from prison only 10 days before the vote, under an amnesty announced by the previous president, Macky Sall.

Sall, in power for 12 years, had tried to delay the vote, and left office with his country facing widespread poverty and almost a third of Senegal's youth unemployed.

"We fought body and soul to protect [Sonko] because the project represents hope for the young Senegalese," said Moustapha Sano, 28, a law and political science student at Cheikh Anta Diop University (UCAD) in Dakar, who helped Sonko's Patriots of Senegal (Pastef) party organise campus protests against the Sall administration when it started jailing opposition members.

Six months on, however, the promises of sweeping change have not come to fruition. Faye and Sonko blame parliament, where Sall's supporters still hold a majority won in 2022.

Sonko has refused to present his policy agenda to parliament, on the grounds that parliament does not recognise the role of prime minister. Sall scrapped the position in 2019 and reinstated it in 2022, but MPs did not apply the reinstatement to parliamentary regulations until late August.

Aminata Touré, a former prime minister and ex-ally of Sall who joined the opposition camp three years ago, says the parliament no longer has legitimacy. "We have to align the legitimacy of 24 March when **President Faye won by 54%**, with the representation of the parliament," she said.

Other parties in parliament think Sonko is stalling until he can gain parliamentary control.

On 4 September, Sonko said Faye would dissolve parliament in the coming days, which would pave the way for elections. Senegal's parliament cannot be dissolved by the president until it

has sat for two years. This threshold was due to be reached last week.

Accusations of cronyism, which dogged the Sall administration, have resurfaced. Almost half of Faye's cabinet appointments - generally picked on merit, not party affiliation - are Pastef members or people linked to the party. Hopes of more gender equality have also been dashed: only 46 of the 300 new appointments are women.

In July, the United in Hope coalition led by Sall's Alliance pour la République party said Senegal had been on pause since the election. A month later, privately owned news outlets staged a one-day nationwide blackout to protest against the state freezing media companies' bank accounts and seizing their equipment over alleged non-payment of taxes.

On the campaign trail, Faye vowed to achieve sovereignty, including by abandoning the West African CFA franc, the currency used by eight states in West Africa. He also promised to review Senegal's relationship with its former colonial master, France. But his first visit outside the continent was to Emmanuel Macron, the French president.

"Once you are in a position of responsibility, you have a much more complex view of things," said Bou-bacar Ba, associate professor of public law at UCAD. "So this difference in discourse is perfectly understandable."

In April, Faye pledged to review deals with foreign partners in the extractive sector. Two months later, production began at the country's first offshore oil project, a partnership with an Australian firm.

Touré does not think the new leader is backtracking on his promises. He said: "The point is, whoever we are partnering with, we're going to make sure that it's on a win-win situation. The new generation of leaders made it very clear that they want [a] more balanced relationship and that's what the people of Africa have been longing for."

Indeed, many younger people like Sano who rooted for Pastef believe the party can still change the country's fortunes. "We want all young Senegalese to be able to benefit from Senegal's natural resources ... because we don't want to continue to see so many young people perishing in the Atlantic Ocean, perishing in the Sahara desert," he said, referring to those who have left for Europe in recent years.

EROMO EGBEJULE IS THE GUARDIAN'S WEST AFRICA CORRESPONDENT



Building bridges Bassirou Diomaye Faye, above, has been active on the diplomatic front since taking office, mediating between the Economic Community of West African States and three countries - Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger - whose military rulers split from the bloc in January to form the Association of Sahel States. The government's critics say Faye's diplomacy is a distraction from the domestic scene, where debt is more than 72% of its GDP.

SPORT

Spoiler alert Young fans clamour for return of F1 to Africa

By Rachel Savage

Sandile Banks Ngwenya was flicking through Netflix when he came across the series *Drive to Survive*, which chronicled Formula One's 2018 season. It was March 2019 and he was immediately hooked - so much so that he flew from South Africa to Bahrain at the end of March for that year's grand prix race.

"I just couldn't believe how interesting the sport was," said Ngwenya, 31, who lives in Johannesburg and works for his family's hospitality business. Ngwenya, who has also travelled to races in Brazil, Hungary, Italy, Singapore and Abu Dhabi, is part of a new wave of F1 fans in Africa, fuelling calls for the sport to return to the continent for the first time since the 1990s.

Lewis Hamilton has led those calls. He said in August that an African race is long overdue. "We can't be adding races in other locations and continue to ignore Africa," the seven-time F1 champion said, adding that he had been working with people in Rwanda and South Africa on potential races.

Hamilton, F1's first black driver, was many African fans' route into the sport, including Tshepi Tlathlogi in 2017. "I was searching everyone at the Met Gala, because I was obsessed with rich people that year," she laughed. "When I saw Lewis, I went down the Formula One rabbit hole."

Tlathlogi, 21, who lives in Bloemfontein, a smaller South African city, created an F1 TikTok account in late 2022. She now has 46,000 followers on TikTok and Instagram on her @fastcarsgirl handle, and a private group chat with other young female fans from South Africa and Botswana.

"The fandom has created such a loving environment for me," she said.

While *Drive to Survive* was often credited with creating a new generation of F1 fans globally, social media was accelerating this growth, said Matthew Kanniah, a South African automotive content creator.

"It's amazing to see people who weren't interested before making an effort to watch it," said Kanniah, 32, who works with the Red Bull team.

In Nigeria, Kamal Onyedika-chukwu, 32, created F1 Naija in 2020. Each race weekend it hosts Spaces discussions on X, with anywhere from 250 to 1,400 attendees from across anglophone Africa and its diasporas.

In-person viewing parties are booming in Kenya and South Africa. Simphiwe Dlungwana's Paddock Viewing events attract about 550 people in Johannesburg and he is in talks to expand to Cape Town and Durban.

"Restaurants are now playing Formula One, as opposed to just football and rugby," said Dlungwana.

Paddock Experience's Nairobi events attract up to 600 people for races, about 40% of them women, said Mbalu Makau, the team principal of the company he founded in 2021. "I don't think Formula One is ready for Africa yet. I don't think they know how many fans they have," said Makau.

David Coulthard, a retired Scottish F1 driver, showed off a Red Bull car on Cape Town's streets in 2019 and will drive in Johannesburg for a Red Bull event on 6 October. "We've been well received and there's always been an appetite for more," he said. Africa needs a race for F1 "to be a true world championship".

F1's chief executive, Stefano Domenicali, visited South Africa



▲ The Kyalami circuit last hosted the South African Grand Prix in 1993
PETER HASSAL/KYALAMI

in 2022 for talks about returning to Johannesburg's Kyalami circuit, which hosted the South African Grand Prix from 1967 to 1985 and then 1992 and 1993 after apartheid ended.

Warren Scheckter, the nephew of Jody Scheckter, South Africa's F1 1979 world champion, had worked since 2017 as the potential promoter for a renewed South African Grand Prix. His uncle blamed Kyalami's owner, Toby Venter, for the race not returning.

Other media reports blamed US disapproval of South Africa's close ties with Russia. None of the parties would comment on why talks fell through.

"National and provincial government departments need to work in concert with a well-funded promoter to realise a Formula One in South Africa," a spokesperson for Venter said. "We remain keen to engage with other stakeholders to realise the dream of hosting a Formula One event again."

South Africa's new sports minister, Gayton McKenzie, said on X that his term would be a failure if he did not bring F1 to South Africa. Meanwhile, Domenicali told *Autosport* magazine that he would meet Rwandan officials in late September to discuss their "serious" plan for a race on a permanent track. "We want to go to Africa, but we need to have the right investment, and the right strategic plan," he said. Rwandan authorities did not respond to a request for comment.

For African fans, the wait goes on. Kevin Matla, a 28-year-old microbiologist who makes TikTok videos about the sport, said a race in his country, South Africa, was the dream. "I don't know if I'd cry or get all emotional, but it would be amazing. Not only for me alone but for people in the country, who have been longing for such an event to come."

RACHEL SAVAGE IS THE GUARDIAN'S SOUTHERN AFRICA CORRESPONDENT

▼ Tshepi Tlathlogi, TikTok influencer: 'The fandom has created such a loving environment for me'



MEDICAL RESEARCH

By Ayisha Sharma

Maybe baby

Can diabetes jabs boost fertility?

As surprise pregnancies multiply, experts are examining the possible links between weight loss drugs and the chances of conceiving

Kathryn started taking Ozempic “off label” in April 2023 on her doctor’s advice. The Illinois resident had been diagnosed with gestational diabetes while pregnant and was struggling with her weight after the birth of her daughter. Following a short break from the drug in July because of side-effects, she started taking it again in August. In September, she found out she was pregnant.

Although Kathryn wasn’t using contraception, the pregnancy still came as a surprise. She had been told by doctors that she was unlikely to conceive naturally, and had been through several unsuccessful rounds of intra-uterine insemination (IUI) before giving birth to her first child via IVF. “It was completely unexpected,” Kathryn

told me. “We hadn’t really planned to grow our family quite so soon - my first daughter was only 13 months old.”

Ozempic is a type 2 diabetes medicine, not a fertility treatment. But stories like Kathryn’s aren’t rare. In fact, there’s a whole registry dedicated to monitoring women who have fallen pregnant while taking Wegovy, a weight loss medicine that contains the same active ingredient as Ozempic. Other women are sharing their stories on X under the hashtag #OzempicBabies.

The weight loss triggered by this class of drug is likely to be driving these surprise pregnancies, said Adam Balen, consultant in reproductive medicine at Leeds teaching hospitals. Carrying extra weight negatively affects women’s fertility in several ways, including inhibiting ovulation and reducing the quality of their eggs and womb lining, he explained. So when overweight or obese women lose weight, their chances of conceiving tend to get better.

But there’s also another theory that posits that drugs such as Ozempic may interfere with the efficacy of birth control pills. These new diabetes and weight loss medicines mimic a natural gut hormone called GLP-1 that has three main functions - boosting insulin, slowing the emptying of the stomach and acting on parts of the brain that regulate hunger. It’s the second function that could hamper the body’s absorption of oral contraceptives, leading to surprise pregnancies.

One big pharma company, Eli

Carrying extra weight negatively affects women’s fertility in several ways. When overweight or obese women lose weight, their chances of conceiving tend to get better

One theory is that the way weight loss drugs mimic GLP-1, a natural gut hormone that slows the emptying of the stomach, which could hamper the absorption of oral contraceptives.

Lilly, is advising women to switch to non-oral contraception or a barrier method when starting off on its drugs Mounjaro or Zepbound - which contain the GLP-1 agonist tirzepatide - or when moving to a higher dose.

However, there is no evidence that this theory also applies to Ozempic and Wegovy, which are made by Novo Nordisk and contain a different compound called semaglutide. A spokesperson for Novo said its drugs didn't change the overall exposure to the active ingredients in the combined pill "to a clinically relevant degree" in the company's clinical trials.

This phenomenon has led some researchers to speculate that GLP-1 drugs could improve fertility in relation to the most common cause of anovulation in women - polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). The condition affects around one in 10 women and symptoms include irregular periods and weight gain. It was one of the reasons Kathryn struggled to become pregnant with her first child.

PCOS patients are often prescribed the birth control pill to regulate their periods, but this doesn't address the root mechanisms of the condition and it certainly doesn't help with fertility.

Melanie Cree, director of the University of Colorado's PCOS multidisciplinary clinic, is the main investigator on a clinical trial sponsored by her university testing semaglutide in 80 obese girls and women with PCOS aged 12 to 35. She explains how

Birth pains The impact of PCOS

1/10
The proportion
of women with
polycystic ovary
syndrome

1.2bn
Cost in pounds
of treating PCOS
in the UK in 2019

**'My partner
could just
see how
much of
a smile the
benefits
of Ozempic
put on
my face'**

GLP-1 drugs are thought to encourage ovulation in the condition.

In around 80% of women with PCOS, the finely tuned system of hormone secretions needed for ovulation is off sync, Cree says. This hormonal imbalance is driven by two mechanisms - problems with the brain's hypothalamus and insulin resistance. The latter occurs when the body's cells don't respond well to the hormone that regulates blood sugar.

Insulin resistance can get better if patients lose weight, which is why women with PCOS are often advised to do so at diagnosis. The idea is that the weight loss triggered by GLP-1 drugs can improve insulin sensitivity and thus restore the right hormonal balance for egg release.

There could also be another mechanism at play, according to Cree. In pilot MRI studies, her team noticed changes in brain connectivity in women with PCOS taking semaglutide. "The part of the brain that senses calories, the hypothalamus, was better connected to the parts of the brain that do decision making," she said. "We don't know neurologically what exactly that is - is that just related to appetite or is there something more there?"

Mostly, however, weight loss seems to be the main driver, Cree says. She says semaglutide probably won't have an effect on patients who are at an ideal weight. While 80% of women with PCOS have BMI values above normal or high, the rest present with what is known as a lean phenotype.

This prompts the question: do these drugs do anything special in women with PCOS that they don't do in overweight or obese women generally?

There's probably more of an effect on insulin levels in women with PCOS than in overweight or obese women who don't have PCOS, says Colin Duncan, principal investigator at the MRC centre for reproductive health at the University of Edinburgh, who is not involved in the Colorado trial. The fertility improvement could therefore be more dramatic in women with PCOS, he says.

Furthermore, PCOS patients could stand to benefit more from a medicated approach to weight loss because they have metabolism problems that make shedding pounds more challenging.

Afua, who lives in the UK, also struggled with her weight and fertility. Her first son was conceived a year

and a half into her journey working with PCOS-specific nutritionists to optimise her diet to help her ovulate. While she didn't lose any weight, she did manage to get pregnant naturally in 2020.

Two years later, Afua started taking Ozempic at the recommendation of her private endocrinologist and lost 30kg in less than nine months "like it was nothing". When she was ready for another child, Afua stopped taking the drug and found herself pregnant with her second son just four months later. "Ozempic totally changed my life," she said.

The problem is that GLP-1 drugs aren't recommended for women trying to conceive because of safety concerns about the potential for abnormal development of the baby, Balen says.

The US Food and Drug Administration advises women to stop taking Ozempic at least two months before a planned pregnancy.

But even if they are used correctly, access to GLP-1 drugs is another challenge. Novo has recently got its supply of Ozempic and Wegovy back on track after several years of intermittent shortages in the US. More importantly, these drugs are approved only for a handful of conditions, and PCOS is not one of them. But GLP-1 drug-makers are working to unlock new indications for their drugs in other weight-related conditions.

"It would be nice to think that PCOS might be one of those things over and above obesity that would allow access to these medications," Duncan said.

In the meantime, the syndrome is taking its toll on health spending. An article published in July in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism by researchers at Cardiff University shows more women are being diagnosed with PCOS. They estimated that the cost of treating the condition in the UK was more than £1.2bn (\$1.5bn) in 2019.

For Afua, Ozempic is a no-brainer. "Even my partner said to me, as soon as you're done breastfeeding, if you're ready, we'll put you back on Ozempic, because he could just see how much of a smile the benefits put on my face," she said. "I think doctors, the NHS, everyone, just need to be more aware of what is out there and what can actually help." *Observer*

AYISHA SHARMA IS A HEALTH AND SCIENCE JOURNALIST



◀ BC United leader Kevin Falcon, left, and John Rustad, BC Conservative leader

CANADIAN PRESS/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

CANADA

British Columbia's progressive policies at risk in vote

By Leyland Cecco

Canada's westernmost province has been gripped by a chaotic provincial election campaign, rife with political backstabbing, abrupt resignations and unexpected allegiances.

As an unpopular premier squares off against a climate crisis sceptic, the 19 October vote could have profound consequences for British Columbia, a province seen as being in the vanguard for progressive climate policy.

Until recently, voters were split between the governing New Democratic party (NDP, a left-leaning party in power since 2017) and the insurgent British Columbia Conservative, or BC United, a rebranded incarnation of a party that has long dominated the province's politics.

But the campaign has descended into chaos after the BC United leader, Kevin Falcon, announced he would

withdraw his party from the election, over fears it could split the rightwing vote with the separate Conservative party of British Columbia.

The move, which shocked both candidates and party insiders, was a grim admission that attempts to remake the party had failed - and signalled a dramatic reshaping of the province's political landscape.

BC United was for decades known as the BC Liberal party, a centre-right faction that governed from 2001 to 2017 and, in one election, crushed the opposition by winning 76 of 79 seats in the legislature. But in 2023, Liberals voted to rename the party, a goal championed by Falcon in his leadership bid.

The party spent C\$1m (\$740,000) on a rebranding campaign, but recent internal polling found about 30% of party members were not familiar with the new name, according to the CBC. In late July, the party even asked electoral authorities for its old name to be included in brackets on the ballot for the October provincial election.

"In decommissioning the BC Liberal brand, [Falcon] killed what had once been the natural governing party of British Columbia politics," said Shachi Kurl, executive director of the Angus Reid Institute, a non-profit public opinion research organisation.

And so on 28 August, Falcon announced he was suspending his party's campaign and endorsed the Conservative Party of British Columbia leader, **John Rustad**, for premier - a man he had accused days earlier of running a party "at risk of becoming a conspiracy party, not a Conservative party".

Although they have no relation with the federal Conservative party, Rustad's

Conspiracy lure
Rustad, a former BC Liberal, was expelled from the party by Falcon over controversial social media posts about the climate crisis. Rustad then took the helm of the ailing Conservatives, a party that rivals suggested was "downright weird" for the conspiracy theories peddled by members, including that 5G wireless technology was a cause of the coronavirus pandemic.

BC Conservatives have harnessed an anti-incumbent sentiment, swept up by support for so-called "commonsense" policies from the federal Conservative leader, Pierre Poilievre.

Rustad has also courted unlikely alliances in his long-shot bid to take the province's top job. In early July, former Green party leader Andrew Weaver, a climate scientist, praised Rustad as a "listener", arguing that the current premier, David Eby, "surround[s] himself with people who will help him control government through his office ... and that is not healthy for democracy".

Weaver, lead author for the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that won a Nobel prize, said he didn't agree with Rustad on climate, but the two shared a view that the rhetoric around the climate crisis was "alarmist".

Eby called the comments "very bizarre" given Weaver's expertise. "I would have assumed, given his life's work, that Dr Weaver would have no difficulty making a decision about which side to choose," Eby said.

Kurl said recent polling from the Angus Reid Institute shows the Conservatives tied with the NDP.

Since Falcon's surprise resignation, the Conservatives have moved quickly to absorb what they see as the top BC United candidates who they can run under their own party banner.

Despite the tumultuous nature of the campaign, advocacy groups fear a Conservative victory would undo years of work to safeguard biodiversity and Indigenous rights.

Torrance Coste of the environmental advocacy group Wilderness Committee said that while decades of "milquetoast, incrementalist, half-measure" climate policies had produced few results, recent landmark policies were at risk.

Rustad called recent legislation that would initiate co-management of public lands with BC's 204 First Nations "an assault on your private property rights and our shared rights to use crown land" and pledged to repeal plans to protect 30% of the province's land and water by 2030.

"Losing either would be a huge blow to efforts to fight climate change and biodiversity loss and shift authority and jurisdiction to Indigenous titleholders," said Coste.

LEYLAND CECCO WRITES ABOUT CANADA FOR THE GUARDIAN

ANALYSIS
VENEZUELA

Game over? Opposition insists Maduro can still fall – but others are less convinced

Despite the exile to Spain of their presidential candidate, pro-democracy activists are refusing to give up hope

By Tom Phillips



Against all the odds, they pulled off a once-inconceivable democratic victory against one of the world's most unyielding authoritarian

regimes. Even more astonishingly, Venezuela's opposition activists managed to prove it, gathering a vast cache of voting data that offered concrete proof of their success.

Yet six weeks after Venezuela's presidential election, it was the candidate widely believed to have won, Edmundo González, who flew into exile in Spain, while the apparent loser, Nicolás Maduro, looks set to keep power.

"Is this game over?" one of the country's top journalists, Luz Mely Reyes, asked of the opposition challenge in *El País* – a question now on many people's lips.

Opposition leaders are adamant their campaign to remove Maduro – widely blamed for leading the oil-rich country into economic turmoil and autocracy – is very much alive, even now the man they believe should replace him is stuck in Spain.

"28 July was a definitive blow to Maduro. I don't know if it's going to be a slow end or if it's going to be quicker, as we want," said activist Roberto Patiño, who backed González's campaign. "But ... it's very difficult to sustain a regime when everybody – including your closest collaborators and the military – knows you lost badly."

During an online forum last Monday, political and civil society leaders urged opposition supporters not to lose hope. "I'm a man of great faith and I'm convinced that victory will come," declared Lorenzo Tovar, from the Venezuelan Christian Front.

María Corina Machado, the banned opposition leader in whose place González ran in the election, continued to insist that

her substitute would become president on 10 January 2025. "All of us know that 28 July represents the end of a political cycle and the start of a new era," claimed Machado.

Yet González's hopes of taking office now look remote, given Maduro's determination to cling on through a harsh political crackdown that has seen nearly 2,000 people jailed and more than 20 killed.

"I can understand the political reasons for maintaining an optimistic message, but I don't think that there's more than a sliver of a chance that Edmundo González will be sworn in as president on 10 January," said Phil Gunson, a Caracas-based political analyst for the International Crisis Group.

"If the opposition strategy is to hold the occasional rally and to insist that Edmundo is the president-elect and will – by some act of God – be installed in the presidency in January, then that's not going to work. There's a need for another strategy that keeps their movement alive," Gunson said.

Quite what that strategy might be is unclear, although for now it still appears to hinge on persuading members of Venezuela's armed forces or regime members to abandon their boss and negotiate a transition.

"I think the international community should make a very substantial offer ... for people in the regime to consider a better alternative for the country," Patiño said.

But such carrots have not worked in the past. The US reportedly offered Maduro amnesty during secret talks in Doha last year but he has yet to bite. Nor has there been any hint of a military uprising.

The leftwing presidents of Brazil and Colombia, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Gustavo Petro, have been trying to stimulate dialogue between the two sides. But Maduro had shown little interest in the initiative.

Beyond the South American diplomatic push it was unclear what the democratic world could do. Nor was there any appetite to recognise a parallel administration, as happened in 2019 when more than 50 governments backed Juan Guaidó's failed attempt to topple Maduro.

All of which suggested Maduro would remain in power.

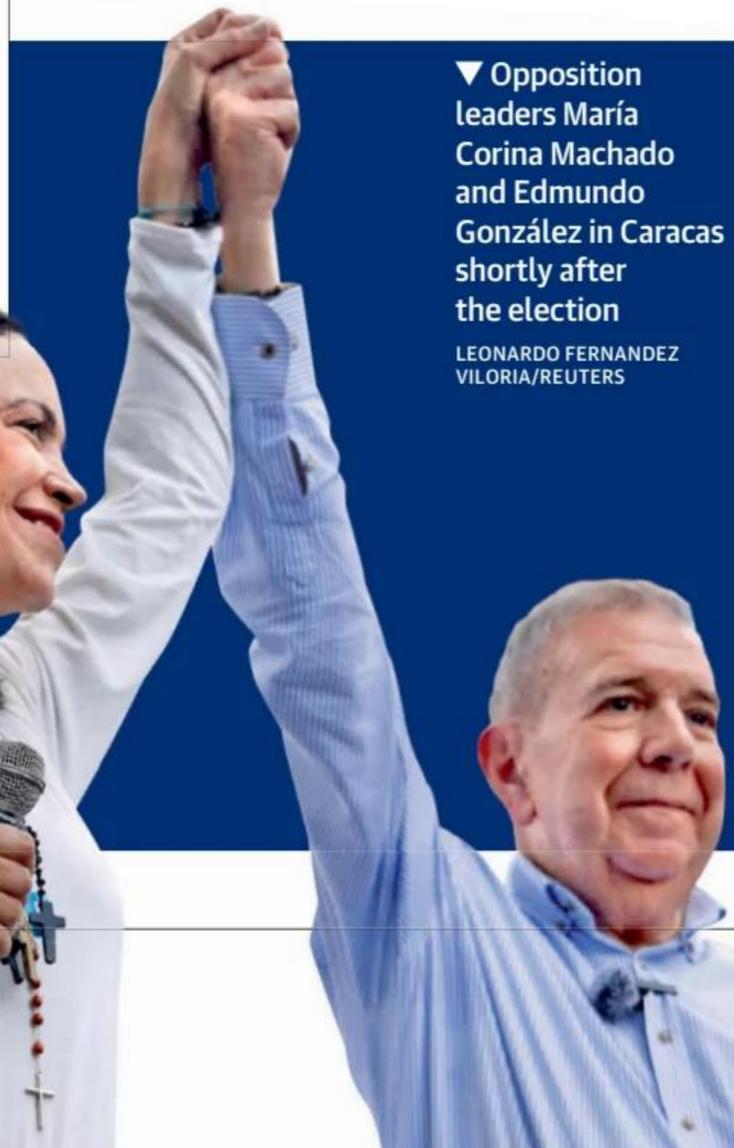
Patiño recognised there was sadness and frustration that Maduro had refused to budge.

"In Venezuela we had a watershed moment when Venezuelan people voted massively against the regime – and everybody knows that the regime lost," he said.

"Nobody can predict when [the regime will fall]. But the conditions for Venezuela to transition to democracy are there."

TOM PHILLIPS IS THE GUARDIAN'S
LATIN AMERICA CORRESPONDENT

There's a need for
another strategy
that keeps their
movement alive



▼ Opposition leaders María Corina Machado and Edmundo González in Caracas shortly after the election

LEONARDO FERNANDEZ
VILORIA/REUTERS





'For me, there was no other way'

The global organ trade thrives on chaos and desperation, with brokers poised to exploit those driven to donate by war and debt

By Seán Columb



Illustrations by DEENA SO'OTEH

‘There was no other way’

THEY TRAVELLED AT NIGHT, for what seemed

like hours, but it was difficult to tell. Yonas was blindfolded and drowsy from the Xanax he had been given. He wasn't sure where he was, but he could smell salt in the air when the car stopped. Yonas heard Ali, the other passenger, wind down his window and light a cigarette. The driver sat, breathing heavily. Several minutes passed in silence. Then Yonas heard a pinging noise. Someone's phone had received a message.

The door next to Yonas was opened, and two men escorted him into a building. After they took off his blindfold, the men walked down a long corridor and took the stairs to the basement. There, Yonas entered a room where a man dressed in blue scrubs was talking to Ali, the broker who had brought him here. He assumed the other man was the doctor who would perform the surgery. Before Yonas could ask any questions, he was taken to another room where he was told to change into a surgical gown and wait for a medical attendant to prepare the anaesthetic. As he waited, Yonas thought of his parents at home in Eritrea, his younger brother conscripted into military service, his sister destined to a life of servitude. He hoped his sacrifice would help them. The attendant came in. The needle scratched his arm; fluorescent lights gave way to darkness.

Yonas had made three attempts to reach Europe, twice from Libya and once from Egypt. But each time he was detained and forced to pay large sums of money - between \$3,000 and \$7,000 - for his release. Destitute and already in debt, Yonas borrowed money from lenders in Cairo. He was under pressure from his creditors, who were threatening to call in their debts, with force if necessary. And he was desperate to send money back to his family in Eritrea. Trapped in a spiral of debt, he traded the only thing of value that he had: one of his kidneys.

It is illegal to buy or sell an organ anywhere in the world, with the exception of Iran. Nevertheless, estimates suggest that around 10% of organs for transplantation come from illegal sources. Most cases, however, go unreported, so the true number is likely to be much higher.

Several countries, including Pakistan, Egypt, Bangladesh, India, Turkey, the Philippines and China, have been identified as centres of organ trafficking, but the trade in organs is a transnational operation. In its 2018 Global Report for Trafficking in Persons, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime identified more than 700 cases of organ trafficking, the majority in the Middle East and north Africa. A 2021 Interpol report claimed that organ trafficking was of particular concern in north and west Africa, "where impoverished communities and displaced populations are at greater risk of exploitation".

According to the Global Observatory on Donation and Transplantation (GODT), only 10% of the global demand for transplants is met each year. Increased demand for kidney transplants, in particular, has been exacerbated by a shortage of altruistic donations and limited access to transplant services. This has led to an increased dependence on criminal networks that obtain organs from vulnerable individuals.

There is a black market for organs including kidneys, corneas and liver lobes. Rising demand for kidneys is partly a result of the spread of so-called diseases of affluence - diabetes, hypertension, obesity - and the subsequent rise in kidney failure. According to the charity Kidney Care, in the UK, the waiting list for a kidney transplant has increased dramatically since the pandemic. Consequently, more people are travelling overseas for transplant surgery. In many countries that attract transplant tourists, kidneys are sourced from the bodies of the poor and disenfranchised.

As a legal academic, I have been investigating the global trade in organs since 2014. Over the past 10 years, I have spoken to 43 people from Sudan, South Sudan and Eritrea who sold a kidney out of economic necessity. In most cases, people were targeted by criminal groups because of their precarious status as asylum seekers, refugees or undocumented migrants. Most were not paid what they were promised. Some were paid nothing. Doubly criminalised, as illegal migrants and organ sellers, they were in no position to negotiate a price, or to ensure they got paid the agreed amount. Because of their precarious legal status, they were also less likely to report abuse to the authorities.

In the absence of legal pathways to migration, many had sold their kidneys after they had been arrested, detained and in some cases deported back to countries where their lives were under threat. Most had opted to avoid refugee camps, describing them as "prisons" and "death camps" where people go to die. They were disillusioned with the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR). It was better to risk crossing the Sahara, Yonas told me, than to live under permanent surveillance, captive and dependent on a broken asylum system. Many had expended all their resources trying to reach Europe and claim asylum. Categorised as illegal and pushed to the margins of society, they were exposed to exploitation of different kinds.

The illicit networks that supply organ markets depend on the close cooperation of medical doctors. Criminal intermediaries are involved in the negotiation of fees, and the preparation of official-looking paperwork presented as evidence of informed consent to an altruistic donation. These brokers, who connect sick patients with impoverished and vulnerable "donors", also form long-term partnerships with medical professionals. Without the involvement of surgeons who perform illegal transplants for profit, the trade in organs would cease to exist.

In March 2023, the UK tried its first organ-trafficking case. A Nigerian politician, his wife and their broker were found guilty of conspiring to bring a man to the UK from Lagos to obtain his kidney for transplant. The judge said in sentencing: "The trafficking of people across international borders to harvest their organs is a form of slavery. It treats human beings, and their body parts, as commodities to be

Without the surgeons who perform illegal transplants for profit, the trade in organs would cease to exist

bought and sold. It is a trade that preys on human poverty, misery and desperation." Unfortunately, as war and climate crisis displaces more people, there is no shortage of desperate people to prey on.

YONAS WAS CONSCRIPTED INTO NATIONAL SERVICE IN ERITREA at the age of 14. He was sent for educational training at the Sawa Defence Training Centre, a sprawling military complex notorious for its discipline, physical punishments and forced labour. "My brother was with me," Yonas said. "They tried to brainwash us. They don't want people to have political ideas, thoughts. I had to escape."

One night in September 2012, Yonas made a break for freedom. His family had paid a smuggler to take him across the border into Sudan. To reach a truck waiting for him on the far side of the compound, Yonas had to crawl under wire fencing avoiding the searchlights. He knew that if he was caught, he would be shot. Outside an old garrison town near the border, Yonas climbed on to another truck heading to the Sudanese capital, Khartoum. In Omdurman, the twin city of Khartoum on the opposite side of the Nile, he was introduced to a smuggler who, he was told, could organise transport across the Mediterranean.

After a long and difficult journey across the Sahara, between Sudan and Libya, Yonas was delivered to the Mediterranean coast, outside Tripoli, as agreed. In April 2018, he was shoved on to a small boat

along with about 100 other migrants. They were from different parts of Africa - Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Chad and Nigeria. One of the passengers, with no experience of sailing, was handed the responsibility of manning the boat. After an hour, the engine cut out.

Men, women and children sat helpless, dehydrated and fatigued, as the boat floated idly. Six hours passed before the Libyan Coast Guard intercepted the vessel and took them back to the mainland. They were told they would be detained for attempting to enter Europe illegally. After the engine had cut out, Yonas recalled, the passengers thought they might die. "And when the coastguard came," he said, "some of us wished we had, because we knew where we were going."

Libya's immigration detention centres, partly funded by the EU, are notorious. Detainees have been subjected to torture, harassment, physical violence, sexual exploitation and forced labour, with no formal registration and no access to lawyers or any judicial authorities. Yonas never spoke to anyone from the UNHCR or the International Organization for Migration (IOM). "I think someone like this came to visit," he said, "but they just look[ed] around."

The only way to escape the punishing conditions of detention centres is to pay the officers a bribe. "When the guards receive the money, they leave you in the desert. Then you just try not to get picked up [arrested] again," Yonas said.



Yonas had left some money with friends in Egypt in case of an emergency. He also had relatives living in Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK, who raised funds to help him pay his way out of detention in Libya. “The money was sent to a Libyan bank account via Western Union,” he said. He said he paid the prison guards around \$7,000. After he was released, Yonas travelled to Cairo.

By the time he had bought his way out of detention in Libya, Yonas had exhausted the funds he received from friends and family. Once in Cairo, he borrowed 30,000 Egyptian pounds (around \$620) from lenders – a temporary measure, he thought, to cover the cost of food and accommodation while he searched for work.

Two months went by. Yonas could not find reliable employment. He knew that if he missed his next payment, there would be serious consequences. “This guy [a debt collector] told me that he would take a tooth for every payment I missed.”



YONAS HAD ALL BUT GIVEN UP HOPE of reaching European shores when he was approached by a Sudanese man, who gave his name as Ali, at a street market in Cairo. Yonas told him his story. Ali said that he knew a way that Yonas could pay back all his debts and secure a place on a more reliable fishing vessel crossing from Egypt to Italy. He told Yonas he could sell his kidney, make a lot of money and save a life in the process.

Yonas had his doubts. “This is the last thing you want to do,” he explained. “But for me there was no other way.” Ali, the broker, was personable and seemed genuine. Yonas was promised \$10,000 for his kidney. The money, he hoped, would be enough to cover his debts and pay for his onward journey across the Mediterranean.

The surgery took place at a medical facility near Alexandria in November 2018. “I remember waking up and feeling confused,” said Yonas. The first thing he was aware of was a buzzing noise coming from a loose lightbulb. Next came pain, then fear, panic, anger. “I was shouting as loud as I could. I just wanted to get out of there.”

Hours passed. Finally the door opened and a man holding a clipboard came in. The man told him that Ali would be coming soon, at which point he could leave. He handed Yonas two painkillers and a glass of water, and slid out before Yonas could ask any questions.

When Ali finally appeared, he told Yonas to get dressed. His voice was hard, all his old charm gone. A nurse removed the drip and two heavy-set men escorted him back to the car. Yonas spent the next two weeks in an apartment in Cairo convalescing. He was closely monitored, in case he should decide to leave the apartment. If someone were to see him, they might report his presence to the police.

Yonas had been promised \$10,000, but he was given just \$6,000 in notes. This would just about pay off his existing debts, but it was not enough to cover the cost of smugglers’ fees (\$3,500) for the next stage of his journey, across the Mediterranean. Yonas went to the police and reported Ali for trafficking. He was trying to explain that he had been deceived into selling a kidney when another officer entered the room. The second officer informed Yonas that it was a criminal offence to sell a kidney. He took out a notebook and asked Yonas for his papers. Yonas fumbled in his pockets, searching for documents he knew he didn’t have.

The officers joked that Yonas didn’t look like an Egyptian, remarking on his dark skin and curly hair. If he was a refugee, they suggested, he should complain to the UNHCR. But maybe he was an illegal migrant. The second officer reminded Yonas he could be arrested or deported for failing to produce his identification papers.

Yonas was regretting going to the police. He looked around nervously. The second officer smiled scornfully and told him to leave.

In my research, I wanted to learn more about how the trade in organs was organised, and how brokers rationalised what they were doing. Certain brokers were aware of my work. Some of them wanted to meet me, to ask me about it, and to explain their perspective.

The brokers I interviewed did not necessarily see what they were doing as wrong. If anyone was to blame, they said, it was the doctors who knowingly performed illegal transplants. For the most part, they saw themselves as service providers, part of a supply chain for an already corrupt medical system. To them, it was just business.

I met Hakim in Egypt in February 2020. He had been introduced to the brokerage business after getting into financial difficulties. “My uncle took me under his wing,” Hakim told me. His family was from Khartoum, and his uncle had connections to doctors and transplant units in Egypt and overseas, mainly in Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE. Hakim said that his uncle introduced him “to all the top guys, the doctors and other mediators [brokers] who work with the clients”. The clients were transplant patients, some from Egypt, and others from across Europe, the Middle East and North America.

When I met him, Hakim was based in Cairo and was responsible for recruiting donors and referring them to his uncle. At the time, March 2004, the central government in Khartoum, supported by the Janjaweed militia, had launched a brutal counter-insurgency campaign against rebels in Darfur. Amid the chaos, Hakim saw an opportunity for recruitment. He contacted smugglers in Khartoum, many of whom had connections with border officials on the Sudan-Egypt border. The brokers started to solicit people fleeing the fighting who might be desperate enough to sell a kidney. “I thought: they are in a very difficult position,” Hakim said. “Maybe they will sell a kidney for \$5,000. Someone in Cairo will ask for more.”

Around the world, the cost of a transplant on the black market ranges from \$20,000 to \$200,000 – the higher price generally reflecting better treatment and care. The “donor” typically receives a fraction of this cost. The amount they receive varies from country to country. In the Philippines and Columbia, impoverished farmhands and bonded labourers have been documented as receiving less than \$2,000 for a kidney. In contrast, kidneys have been sold for between \$10,000 and \$20,000 in Israel and Turkey.

In Egypt a kidney can sell for anywhere between \$5,000 and \$20,000. Patients, or “transplant tourists”, pay between \$50,000 and \$100,000 for a kidney transplant, including travel and accommodation. The price generally depends on market demand. For a kidney, the price paid to the seller can be anywhere between \$5,000 and \$20,000. Part of the broker’s job is to find out just how wealthy the buyer is, and to establish the absolute minimum the seller is prepared to accept. An impoverished seller with no legal status is in no position to negotiate. For this reason, illegal migrants make valuable targets.

A series of conflicts in the region have supplied a steady flow of people whose desperation can be commodified: bodies to be smuggled, sold or harvested. Hakim said that he referred between 20 and 30 sellers a week, who are themselves referred to him by his contacts in Khartoum. “They agree the deal [organ sale] in advance, and I call my uncle to receive them. After the operation, they continue to the coast to try and make the crossing,” he said. Most, he said, don’t make it across the Mediterranean.

I asked whether he felt any remorse for the people he was exploiting. “Yes, I feel bad for them. But I always give them their money. There are other brokers who would agree with you on a price, then disappear

after the surgery without paying you,” Hakim said. “This happens at least 40% of the time.”

Most people are not paid what they are promised, but because it is illegal to sell a kidney, there is little they can do. Brokers and the medical professionals they work with are aware of this, using the threat of criminal prosecution to silence their victims.

I met Hiba, a young single mother from Sudan, in Cairo in March 2020. She sold her kidney to help support her daughter. She had been promised \$10,000, but was paid \$4,000. After she recovered from the surgery, she went back to the hospital to get her money. But prior to the surgery, she had signed documents that stated she was donating her kidney for free. This was enough to give those involved with the surgery legal cover. And now, if Hiba chose to report them to the police, she could be arrested for the criminal offence of selling a kidney. She was powerless to get the full fee she’d been promised.

One reason that convictions for illicit organ removal are so rare is that victims are reluctant to come forward. Another is systemic corruption. Hakim suggested that doctors pay bribes to protect themselves from police investigations. But he added: “The doctors are not controlling the business. The people who control this business take a commission from the doctors ... they control the business [the organ trade] - otherwise, no doctor would be able to work [performing transplants].”

When I asked Hakim if he meant government officials, he simply replied: “They are people higher up.” The threat of arrest, Hakim claimed, acts as a form of official extortion. Corrupt medical professionals, performing illegal transplants, who pay for protection will not be investigated, while those who refuse to pay could be arrested.

THREE YEARS LATER, IN MARCH 2023, I met Hakim in Khartoum. I was following up on reports that people, mostly from Darfur, were being trafficked from Khartoum to Cairo for organ removal. They were being promised safe passage across the Mediterranean, part of a “go now, pay later” scheme. But when they arrived in Cairo, they were forced to give up a kidney as the price for continuing their journey.

I wrote to Hakim on WhatsApp to see if he knew about this. He replied: “If you want to talk, I am in Khartoum now. I don’t speak about this on the phone.”

I don’t know if it was for dramatic effect, but he arranged to meet me at a graveyard. We discussed the mounting tension between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The following month, violent street battles would break out between these two factions, a conflict that quickly exploded into a devastating civil war. According to figures released by the IOM, more than 10 million people have been displaced in Sudan. All are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance.

“How has business been?” I asked Hakim.

“More people are coming now, with the fighting,” he said. “Some will try to go to Libya. Others will try and make it [across the Mediterranean], but this is more difficult. So, they can sell their kidneys,”

‘This guy, a debt collector, told me that he would take a tooth for every payment I missed’

he said. Hakim denied any knowledge of human trafficking for organ removal, saying that in times of conflict people are forced to do things they would normally never do.

The war in Sudan and the ensuing humanitarian crisis has pushed people to the brink. At the borders of conflict zones, selling a kidney is becoming a currency of last resort. In June 2023, I managed to contact two young Sudanese women who had fled Khartoum. In April 2023, Rania was with her friend Fatima, both students at the University of Khartoum, when the RSF raided the main campus. “We were trying to hide from the fighting,” Rania told me. “There were a lot of [female] students there who were afraid to leave. We thought we would be safe, but they found us and forced us to have sex with them.”

Soon after that they packed up their belongings and took a bus towards South Sudan. They had heard the route south was cheaper than trying to go north to Egypt, and Rania had a brother living in Kampala, Uganda, whom they hoped to join. It was a seven-day journey from Khartoum to Renk, a small town in South Sudan close to the border where thousands of people had set up temporary camps in bleak conditions. A lack of food, water, healthcare and sanitation had left people at increased risk of disease, malnutrition and violence. There were hundreds of new arrivals each day. “People are crammed together under tarpaulins,” Rania said. “There are mosquitoes everywhere. There’s not enough food, water, soap. It’s chaos.”

When Rania and Fatima arrived at a makeshift camp on the outskirts of the town, they were approached by soldiers in plain clothes selling tickets for flights from a small airstrip outside Renk to South Sudan’s capital, Juba, and the city of Nimule. The flights, which should form part of the humanitarian corridor, are being controlled by armed militias charging exorbitant fees to board them. “They wanted a lot of money,” Rania said. “The price would go up every day. They said if we didn’t have any money we could have sex with them.”

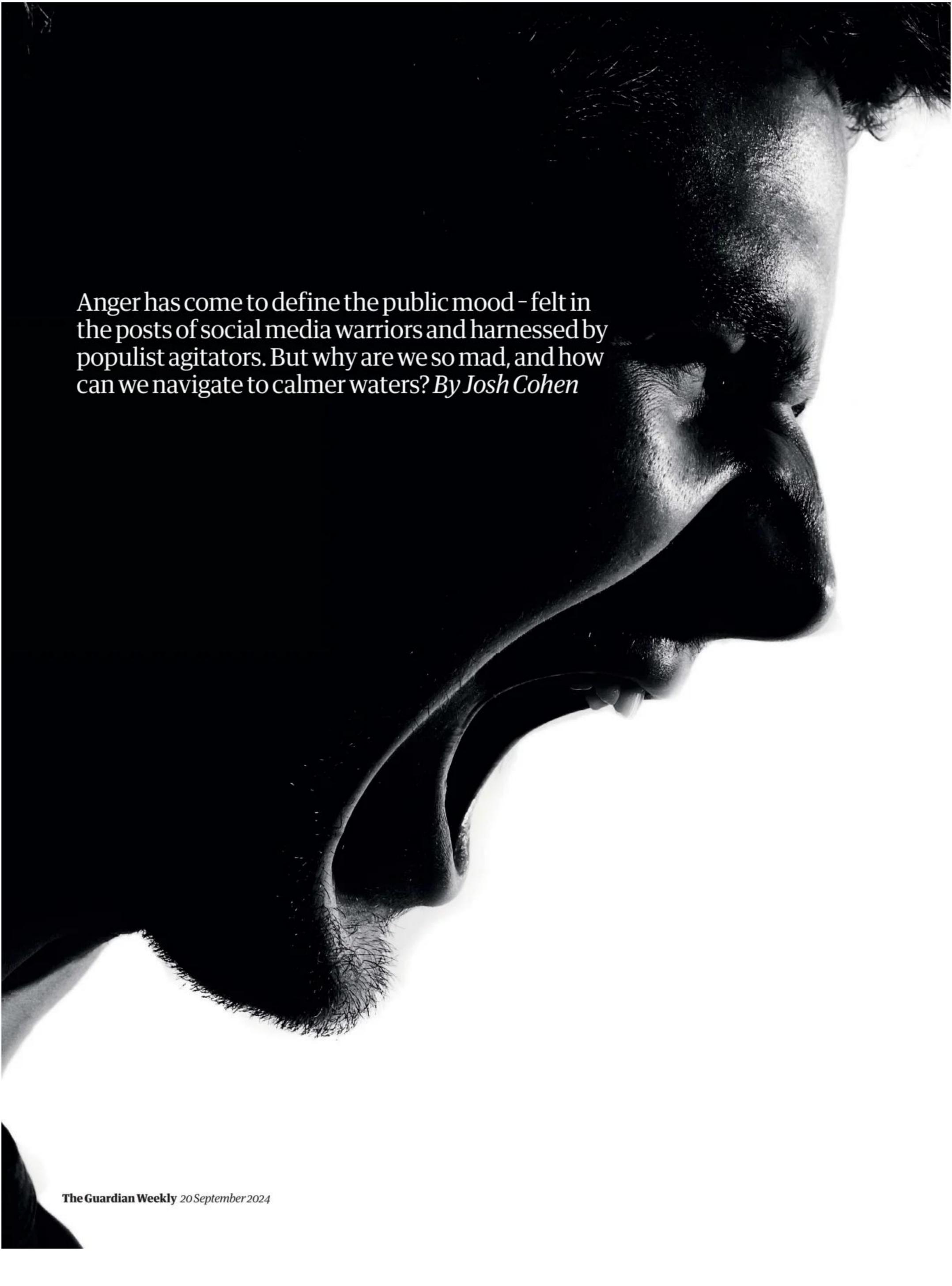
When they refused, they were told there was something else they could sell: a kidney. “They said that this was the only way we were going to get a flight,” Fatima said. “There were two men who had agreed, but I don’t know what happened to them. I was worried that they would kill me and take my kidney.”

Two weeks after Rania and Fatima first arrived in Renk, they messaged me from Kampala. “We received some money from family members in Uganda. They paid a smuggler \$500 to take us to Kampala,” Rania said. In Renk, they had watched as large trucks carried hundreds of people further south to transit camps that were rumoured to be less crowded. Others boarded cramped and overcrowded boats in an attempt to reach Juba, 970km to the south.

“We are telling you this for a reason,” Fatima said. “We desperately need more support for people trapped in Sudan. In Darfur, there is genocide. But no one is talking about it. Women are being raped every day. Children have been killed and abducted. People are desperate. This is when you sell your kidney.” ●

DR SEÁN COLUMB IS A READER IN LAW AT LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY. HE IS WRITING A BOOK ON THE ORGAN TRADE

All names have been changed



Anger has come to define the public mood – felt in the posts of social media warriors and harnessed by populist agitators. But why are we so mad, and how can we navigate to calmer waters? *By Josh Cohen*

THE AGE OF RAGE



EVERY MORNING, MY INBOX HEAVES with a new tranche of email alerts from Nextdoor, the social networking service for neighbourhoods where people in the area post recommendations, inquiries, requests, offers, information. The tone can be chummy, jocular, kindly, anxious, but mostly the posts are angry. They include vituperative warnings about dodgy tradesmen; outraged reports of cruelty to animals witnessed by neighbours; snatches of grainy Ring camera footage purporting to show actual or attempted burglaries; complaints of junkies splayed on park benches and of predatory lone men approaching young girls; reports of vandalism, fly-tipping, phone scammers, poor restaurant service and late-night noise.

My heart sinks at each new set of notifications, festooned with rage emojis and opprobrium for *lowlifes*, *SCUM*, *animals!* Yet I've never been

tempted to unsubscribe - and not only because the service is also a surprising showcase for human solidarity, reuniting desperate owners with their cats and wallets, offering help and advice to the hungry and infirm. Much as I appreciate these outbreaks of decency, it's the rage that continues to draw me. A batch of Nextdoor updates is a live window on the vexations of modern urban living, an electric chorus of sighs, growls and screams from the frontline of everyday reality.

The anger on Nextdoor strikes me as different in quality from the triumphal rage that characterises so much content on X. I stay off the platform because I can't look at it without being struck by the trolling, shaming and piling on, the atmosphere of free-form hate and fury.

The social media giants foster the grandiose illusion that your smartphone is a global megaphone, blasting out your furious convictions on the social, ethical and geopolitical dilemmas of the moment to a potential audience of millions (even if your actual followers number in the low hundreds). It cultivates a mode of anger that is both impersonal and self-important, a style of sloganising that is grindingly repetitive, each post an echo of the last.

The anger voiced in Nextdoor posts seems endearingly human in contrast. Posts will reach (and likely interest) only those in your own neighbourhood, meaning there is less incentive to engage in performative provocation. Posters speak of wanting to vomit, to scream, to cry, to punch their thieving, fly-tipping, noisy tormentors. They remind us that anger, like all significant feelings, is experienced first at a bodily level, as a pressure towards discharge through the mouth or limbs.

In his 2006 book, *Rage and Time*, the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk makes a distinction between two kinds of rage that casts some light on the mood and colour of our own moment. The first kind, which Sloterdijk calls "banked" rage, refers to the rage gathered and directed by popular, sometimes revolutionary leaders who achieved power by harnessing and "banking" the rage of the "humiliated and offended" victims of injustice and oppression across generations. Such leaders seek to gather a mass of anger into a "rage bank", a reservoir of emotional and political capital that could power a long-term transformation of society for better or worse.

"Dispersed" rage, in contrast, lacks a sense of shared project or leadership, of a common understanding of what is wrong and how to put it right. The feeling of dispersed rage is intrinsically frustrating, insofar as it provokes bodily and psychic agitation that it can't remedy. In this state of mind, we may feel injured or mistreated but can identify neither the source of the injury nor the cure. It's from this agitated zone of feeling, I suspect, that so many Nextdoor users speak.

Recent events suggest that this raw and undirected kind of anger is prone to manipulation and exploitation, not least by X warriors. The recent UK riots after the stabbings at a children's dance class in Southport were largely triggered by online demagogues and provocateurs

who spread the false rumour that the suspect, in reality a 17-year-old boy named Axel Rudakubana born in Cardiff to Rwandan parents, was a Muslim immigrant named "Ali al Shakati".

The former GB News presenter Laurence Fox said the incident was evidence that "We need to permanently remove Islam from Great Britain", while Nigel Farage, more lethally artful than the pedlars of blatant lies and calumnies, asked whether "the truth" - that the incident was really terror-related - "was being withheld from us".

Fox will have been fully aware that his objective of the removal of Islam from the UK was as impracticable as it was dehumanising, just as Farage knew that his idle speculations offered no focus or direction for the anger of their intended addressees. For the populist agitator, the aim seems to be not to identify a real injustice and set out the appropriate relief but, on the contrary, to stoke a rage for which there can be no relief, to induce a kind of permanent mass enervation.

Doesn't this come close to describing the mood of our time? For at least the past decade, and perhaps especially since 2016, with its flashpoints of the Brexit vote and Donald Trump's election victory, anger has felt like the defining emotional texture of our daily social and political lives, giving rise to a pervasive atmosphere of mutual fear, suspicion and accusation, in which any perception of difference - cultural, ideological, racial, sexual, class - shades quickly into the assumption of enmity.

THIS PUBLIC MOOD HAS SEEPED INTO OUR PRIVATE LIVES and relationships. At the most immediate level, we can point to the well-documented divisions and resentments that Trump, Brexit, Covid restrictions, "the boats", Gaza and so many other markers of cultural and political alignment have insinuated into the lives of families, friends, couples and communities. In my psychoanalytic consulting room, irritable talk of these sources of division runs alongside more slippery emanations of anger, perceptible in one person's clipped diction and flared nostrils, in another's stiff, tightly guarded compartment on the couch, in still another's coiled, withholding silence.

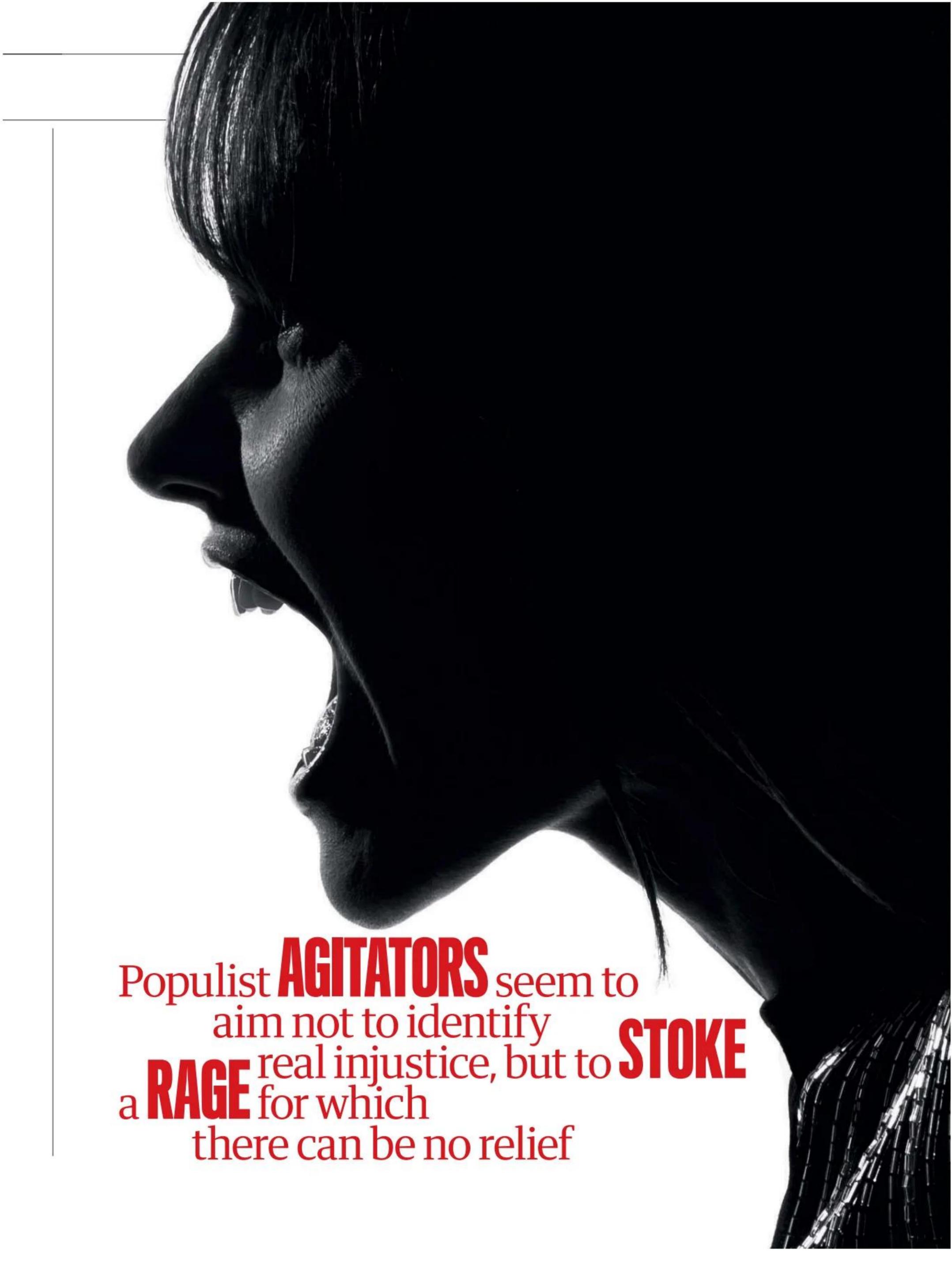
In her work on psychosomatic disturbances such as addictions and eating disorders, the psychoanalyst Joyce McDougall observed that such patients seem unable to experience feelings. Instead, they are "constantly engaged in immediately *dispensing in action*" whatever affects them emotionally. Rather than find images or words for their feelings of emptiness and isolation, they discharge their distress in the quick fixes of "medication, food, tobacco, alcohol, opiates and ... frantic sexual exploits".

McDougall wrote this during the 1980s. The symptoms she was ascribing to relatively circumscribed groups have spread exponentially wider with the advent of the internet and social media. To those compulsions she lists, all of which ultimately exacerbate the feelings of despair they seek to relieve, we can add the permanent itch of provocation and reaction on social media platforms.

Then there are the general conditions of what we might call malign public care: governments and other political actors that manipulate information, democratic institutions and class differences to foment division, fear and mistrust - between "native" citizens and migrants, leavers and remainers, red and blue states, workers and shirkers; internet and TV news media that distort, deny and invent facts in order to stoke the rage of their viewers and listeners; big tech corporations that place us under permanent surveillance and harness our private data to direct our private lives. The psychosomatic patient McDougall describes as "feeling empty, misunderstood" starts to sound eerily like any of us. An angry society starts to seem almost inevitable.

When nervousness and insecurity become the dominant mood of a society, anger is given licence to spread and grow. Mistrust has become a dominant feature of our everyday lives, as we find ourselves trapped in informational bubbles, in which disagreement and difference breed antagonism and mutual cancellation from





Populist **AGITATORS** seem to
aim not to identify
a **RAGE** real injustice, but to **STOKE**
for which
there can be no relief

inside an echo-chamber. It's from this soil that the anger of social media warriors grows; the anger of countless virtual citizens trying to cancel out their own felt vulnerabilities and doubts, to brandish a clarity and certainty they crave but can never really achieve.

What makes the anger that drove Brexit and the election of Trump, or Russia's war on Ukraine, or the current devastating conflict in Israel and Palestine, if not its dogged commitment never to question or examine itself? We assume we're right so as to evade the risks of others' - or even our own - curiosity, questions or uncertainty.

IT IS ESSENTIAL IN THIS CONTEXT TO DISTINGUISH ANGER FROM AGGRESSION, as well as to acknowledge how easily the one shades into the other. Where aggression involves the impulsion to act, to impose oneself on people and things, anger is a feeling. The neuroscientist and philosopher Antonio Damasio distinguishes feelings from emotions, defining the latter as automatic stimulus responses, like freezing in fear or retching in disgust.

Feelings are a way of mapping these reactive responses to produce images and ideas about them. Feelings creatively process what emotions respond to blindly, facilitating what Damasio calls "the possibility of creating novel, non-stereotypical responses". Anger, in this perspective, is of a higher order than aggression, a transformation of reactive behaviour into a kind of self-reflection.

But anger doesn't always feel like a triumph of reflective feeling over reactive aggression. There is, after all, a certain satisfaction in the coupling of anger and aggression. Anger sharpens our sense of clarity and righteousness in taking action, whether that means a physical attack, a street protest or a marital row.

The uncoupling of anger from aggression often has the opposite effect. It deprives us of an immediate outlet for action, leaving us with an unrelieved pressure on our nervous system. I'm so angry, we often say, I don't know what to do with myself. At which point, anger can take us down many different paths. It can lead us to the raw frustration of suppressed rage, or to presenting our anger in the guise of some other attitude (exaggerated politeness, over-friendliness, moroseness). It can also induce us to repress it.

One of the most basic premises of psychoanalysis, known as transference, is that the patient's relationship to the analyst is repeating a much older pattern of relating. Clinical work tries to bring the patient to awareness of this tendency, without which they're likely to perpetuate this repetition instead of resolving it.

In transference, the analyst will come to be experienced, sometimes consciously, more often not, as an avatar of key figures from earlier stages of life: a parent, a teacher, a sibling, a friend, a lover, a colleague or a composite of two or more of these. "You'll end up totally fed up with me, just like every other man I meet," a patient may tell

When **NERVOUSNESS** and insecurity become the dominant mood of a society, **ANGER** is given licence to spread and **GROW**

me, or "That's exactly the kind of snarky thing my father would say!" Transference often arouses unruly intensities of feeling in a patient, rendering the analyst an object of love, hate, trust, mistrust, fear, comfort, reverence or contempt, sometimes within a single session.

Underlying these feelings is a profound sense of dependency, derived from the earliest period of life, when our very survival depended on the ministrations of our carers. The basic scenario of psychoanalysis is fraught with power and all its attendant anxieties; a person brings the most vulnerable and hidden region of their psyche and places it in the care of the analyst, in the hope that this gesture of trust won't be abused or exploited.

But the anxiety implied in this hope can never be fully dispelled. What if their show of benignity is a subtly disguised form of control and manipulation? Thought about this way, the risks of the psychoanalytic relationship bear a striking resemblance to the risks of the relationship between citizens and rulers. The erosion of trust in politicians is, we might say, transference. Citizens are saying, in effect: "If we put ourselves in your hands and trust you to look after our best interests, you'll only betray us." It's this kind of wariness that oils the wheels of the demagogue's ascent.

The Italian psychoanalyst Massimo Recalcati suggests that in our age of moral chaos and loss of meaning, the younger generation are not so much managing the desire to kill and replace their fathers - as the idea of the oedipal complex suggests - than the urgent need for an absent parent to return and restore order and justice. Recalcati calls this the "Telemachus complex", referencing the son of Odysseus, who in *The Odyssey* must endure and hold off the attacks of the menacing Proci invading and usurping his family home, while searching over the horizon for his father to return and right these wrongs.

Doesn't this state of mind capture precisely the nature of the anger animating the younger generation of climate protesters? Their demand isn't expressing an urge to kill and usurp the older generation, but a desperate cry across the horizon to the parents who have gone quiet or missing while their planetary home has been violated or ransacked. The anger is directed not towards disposing of the parents but bringing them back to where they are most needed.

Where young climate protesters are using the transference to serve the interests of social and political justice, rightwing populism manipulates the transference to erode autonomy of mind and promote a parody of justice. Trump and Farage take the trust and belief their followers place in them, and their rage against traditional politicians, not to restore justice but to keep their constituencies in a state of permanent anger. Trump's long campaign of election denial sustains a mass rage that can't be assuaged. For Trump, anger is the political gift that keeps on giving; his task is to keep it flowing. To achieve redress would risk switching off the tap.

What might happen if we didn't default to automatic rage at the point we felt personally or politically provoked, if our debate relied less on a repertory of predictable stimulus responses? Some may argue that it would make way for the restoration of a political culture impelled by fact-based reason and the best interests of its citizens.

But after Brexit and Trump, it has become clear that the appeal to facts and best interests is an inadequate basis on which to resist far-right populism. Perhaps it is not so much the rational appeal to facts we need to be making so much as contact with the depth and complexity of our feelings. The politics of "Stop the boats!" and "Build the wall!" feeds off a reactive, defensive rage. Lurking under that coiled anger is a rich and complex seam of emotional experience. Perhaps it is time we started listening to this teeming life of feeling, instead of to the noisy slogans drowning it out ● *Observer*

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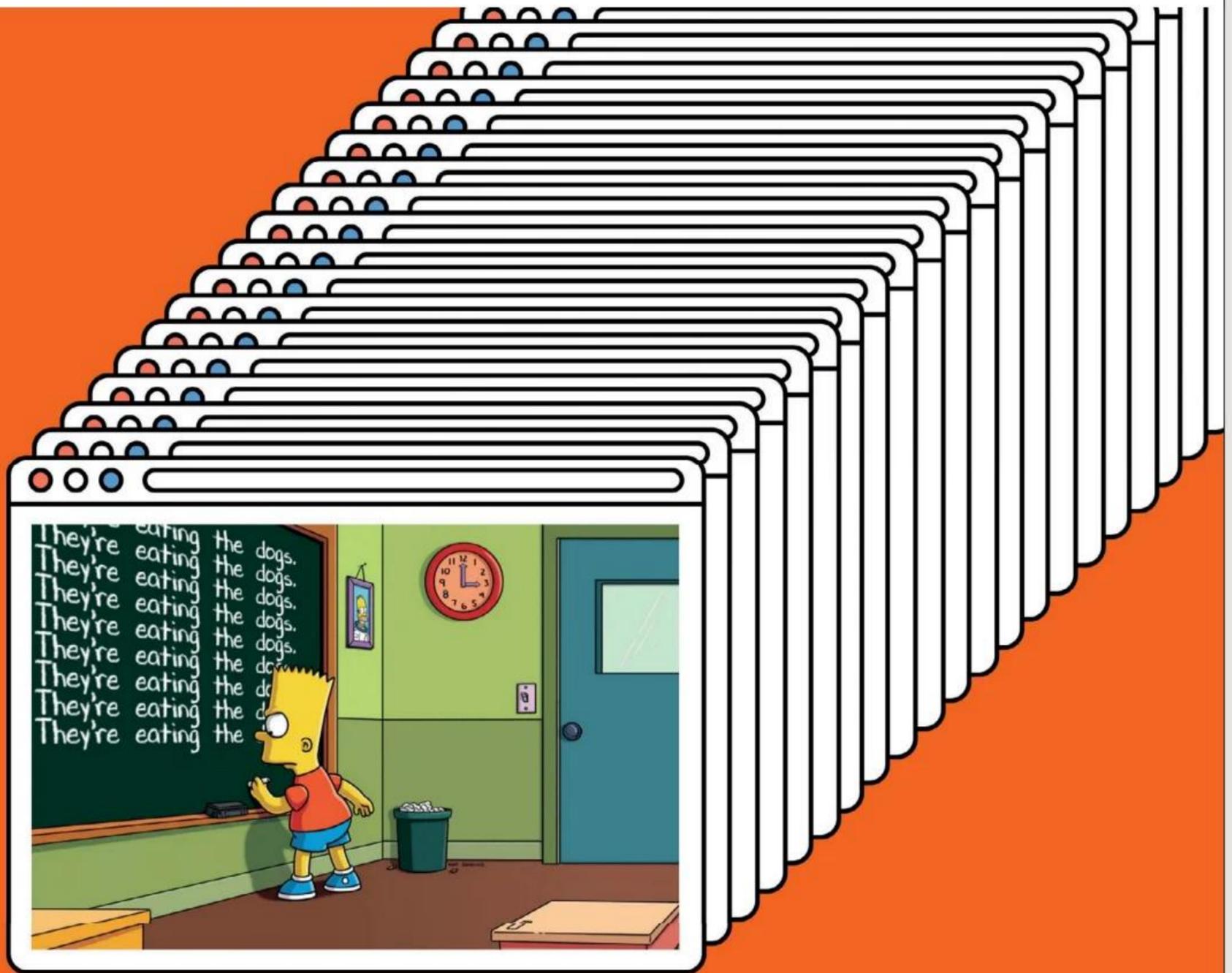
All the Rage: Why Anger Drives the World, by Josh Cohen, is published on 10 October

MAURICE STIERL

Germany's border move is threat to EU

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Opinion



UNITED STATES

Trump's migrants fantasy proves memes prevail over real politics

Kenan Malik

@ANAHEIMSPORTS1/X/MATT GROENING;
GETTY IMAGES; GUARDIAN DESIGN



If one town could be emblematic of the vicissitudes of blue-collar life in America, Springfield, Ohio, might be as good a pick as any. At the heart of the midwest, Springfield's prosperity was built on manufacturing and publishing. But its decline began early. The giant Crowell-Collier publishing plant closed on Christmas Eve 1956. Three decades later, in 1983, Newsweek dedicated an issue to Springfield. Entitled "The American Dream", it concluded sadly: "The times have not been hospitable to dreaming."

The years that followed proved even less hospitable as manufacturers deserted the town and wages plummeted. A 2016 Pew Research report found that Springfield had lost more high-income earners and gained more low-income earners than any other metropolitan area in America. The town became stalked by the diseases of despair, from soaring alcohol and opioid addiction to rising numbers of suicides.

Then, a decade ago, the city council crafted a programme to draw in new employers, including food-service firms and logistics companies. Thousands of jobs were created, though most remained poorly paid. The problem now became not too few jobs for the workers, but too few workers for the jobs. And, so, migrants came in to fill the gap, mainly Haitians living legally elsewhere in America.

The influx of migrants helped revive a dying city. It also created tensions, as access to housing and health services became more strained. Racist and far-right groups seized upon the issue, attempting to turn tension into hatred with talk of an "invasion" destroying the town. The claims became ever wilder, leading eventually to denunciations of Haitians for eating people's pet dogs and cats, a claim turned into a national issue by Donald Trump in his presidential debate with Kamala Harris last week. "In Springfield, they're eating the dogs," Trump said. "The people that came in. They're eating the cats." Even before Trump's outburst, leading Republicans, including the vice-presidential candidate JD Vance, Texas senator Ted Cruz, the House judiciary GOP and Trump supporters such as Elon Musk, had all perpetuated the myth, giving it legitimacy. Many, including Musk, have pushed another far-right conspiracy theory that the Democrats are deliberately "importing millions of illegal immigrants" as voting fodder to entrench "single party rule".

The case of Springfield could have been an occasion for a fruitful debate about the policies and resources needed both to encourage economic growth and to

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Mainstream politicians and public figures have used Springfield to sponsor sordid far-right conspiracy theories

absorb large numbers of outsiders. Instead, mainstream politicians and public figures have used it to sponsor sordid far-right conspiracy theories.

The debate over Springfield illustrates the continuing "memeification" of politics - the turning of politics more into a collection of signals and symbols than discussions of content or policy. Trump has always insisted on dragging politics into the gutter. He is only able to do so, though, because the desire to feed the outrage machine rather than engage in nuanced discussion has become such an integral feature of politics.

This is a characteristic not merely of American politics. As far as I know, no British politician has accused asylum seekers of eating pets, but mainstream politicians routinely regurgitate far-right conspiracy theories such as "the great replacement" and fears of whites losing their homeland. Policymaking, such as the now-abandoned Rwanda deportation scheme, is often designed to be more performative than practical.

Nor is it just with immigration that signalling has become all-important. Rachel Reeves's "iron chancellor" shtick, for example, and Labour's refusal to back down over, or even ameliorate, the removal of the winter fuel allowance from all apart from those on pension credits, stems from a desire to signal toughness on economic policy even at the cost of leaving millions of pensioners shivering. Symbolism and signalling has always been part of politics. Today, though, it often seems as if it is politics. The meme has become the message.

In Springfield, despite the town's Republican mayor and Ohio's Republican governor both calling out the falsehoods about Haitians, many not just continued with the lies but doubled down on them. Feeding the outrage machine has inevitable consequences. Springfield's city hall and two schools with large numbers of Haitian children had to be evacuated last week after bomb threats that "used hateful language towards immigrants and Haitians in our community".

Shortly before the presidential debate, Nathan Clark spoke at a meeting in Springfield. Clark's 11-year-old son, Aiden, was killed last August when his school bus was hit by a minivan driven by a Haitian migrant, Hermanio Joseph, who has since been convicted of involuntary manslaughter and imprisoned for a minimum of nine years. It was one of the few crimes thrown at Haitian migrants in Springfield that is true. Clark began his speech with what might seem a shocking comment: "I wish that my son was killed by a 60-year-old white man." Why? Because then "the incessant group of hate-spewing people would leave us alone". For Clark, the tragedy of his son's death had been magnified by "morally bankrupt politicians" using his son to "vomit all the hate" about Haitians. "Please stop the hate," he said.

Clark's speech showed that even amid a personal tragedy, it is possible to command extraordinary empathy and compassion that reaches out across the fissures of race and identity. If only our politics, too, could be imbued with such humanity and moral integrity ● *Observer*

* **Kenan Malik** is a writer, lecturer and broadcaster

INTERNET

Can gen Z save an ageing Wikipedia from an existential crisis?

Stephen Harrison



Established in 2001, Wikipedia is an “old man” by internet standards. But the role it plays in our collective knowledge of the world remains astonishing. Content from the free internet encyclopedia appears in everything from high-school term papers and pub trivia questions to search engine summaries and voice assistants. Tools like Google’s AI Overviews and ChatGPT rely heavily on Wikipedia, although they rarely credit the site.

And therein lies the problem: as Wikipedia’s visibility diminishes, reduced to mere training data for AI applications, it also loses prominence in the minds of readers and potential contributors. When someone notices a topic that is poorly described on Wikipedia, they might feel motivated to correct it. But this can-do spirit goes away when the error comes through an AI summary, where the source of the information isn’t clear.

In Katowice, Poland, at last month’s Wikimania conference - an event that feels a bit like an international summit of librarians crossed with Comic-Con - many speakers highlighted how Wikipedia faces an existential threat. But there was also talk of a solution that may help secure Wikipedia’s future, or at least prevent its premature demise: recruiting more younger editors from generation Z and raising their awareness of how widely Wikipedia content is used across the internet.

Wikipedia operates on a model of unpaid and independent volunteers who create, update and

maintain the content. Casual editors may make minor stylistic edits to a page, while others devote substantial time to creating full-fledged articles. A significant number of Wikipedia contributors are already gen Z; according to a 2022 survey, about 20% of Wikipedia editors are between the ages of 18 and 24. Although this is roughly reflective of the global population, there is a clear desire to increase this percentage.

I have often heard the same handful of issues that dissuade the younger generation from joining the cause. First, the smartphone is gen Z’s preferred internet access device, but it’s not an easy tool for editing Wikipedia.

There are exceptions. Hannah Clover, a 22-year-old Canadian, was the youngest ever winner of “Wikimedian of the Year” at Wikimania. She also happens to be a rare breed: a highly prolific Wikipedian who has made more than 75% of her edits using mobile devices. A lot of those were edits she made on the go. For Clover, adding to the global encyclopedia helped provide a sense of purpose. She has recommended improvements to the Wikipedia mobile app, including the ability to create new articles and a visual editor that doesn’t require any coding skills.

Another obstacle is that today’s Wikipedia is simply more established. *** Stephen Harrison is a tech journalist and author of *The Editors*, a novel inspired by Wikipedia** Steven Pruitt is a Wikipedia legend, with the largest number of edits made to English Wikipedia, at more than 5m. Now 40 years old, Pruitt said that when he first started editing 20 years ago, the project felt like uncharted territory: he had significant

freedom to create new articles. Today there are fewer opportunities to add new content. That means gen Z must approach Wikipedia not as an exciting wild west, but as an institution they can gradually improve.

Yet it’s harder for new editors to find their way in. Previous generations often began by making small edits, such as fixing typos or spotting vandalism, but nowadays many of these tasks are handled by automated tools. Experienced Wikipedians aren’t known for being nicey-nice: if an old-timer posts curt, pointed feedback on a new user’s talk page (where editors discuss improvements to articles), the public nature of the critique can be shameful enough to discourage the newcomer from continuing as a regular volunteer.

Compiling an encyclopedia requires making judgments that are best understood by humans, who know the social context. Fortunately, gen Z doesn’t seem inclined to immediately surrender Wikipedia to AI. During an online debate last year about whether Wikipedia editors should incorporate chatbot-generated content, several young contributors urged caution, pointing out how large language models often produce errors and fail to cite sources accurately.

There is a great human benefit to young people’s increased participation in the world’s most important knowledge platform. As a generation that is cynical about media and institutions, contributing to Wikipedia allows them to channel their concerns into something constructive. Gen Z may still criticise old institutions like Wikipedia, but at least they will have got involved ●



GERMANY

Border clampdown puts entire European project under threat

Maurice Stierl

The far right across Europe used to dream of seeing their countries leave the European Union. In France, they called for a Frexit; in Germany, it was Dexit. But recently these calls have quietened. The reason is not that far-right parties have become enamoured of the EU, but rather they now understand that instead of quitting, they can reshape the EU into a collection of “strong” nation states that will each enact their own rightwing anti-migration agenda.

As Jordan Bardella, president of the National Rally (RN) in France, recently remarked in explaining why his

party no longer called for France to quit the EU: “You don’t leave the table when you are winning the game.”

That the far right is being allowed to “win the game” is abundantly clear in Germany, where the governing coalition has announced systematic border controls, which came into force on 16 September. Tighter checks at all of Germany’s nine land borders are an attempt by the government to curb immigration by preventing people, especially asylum seekers who have already crossed other EU states, from entering Germany.

This opens the way for serious human rights violations and racial profiling. Germany’s Council for Migration warns that the plan risks violating EU law.

The border checks are due to be in place for an initial six months. They were announced amid a febrile debate about what the leader of the conservative opposition Christian Democratic Union (CDU) called a “national emergency” after a Syrian asylum seeker who, under EU asylum regulations, should have been returned from Germany to Bulgaria, was charged with a fatal stabbing in Solingen. Since the far-right Alternative für Deutschland’s (AfD’s) electoral success in Thuringia and Saxony on 1 September, the debate has reached boiling point.

The German government is on a dangerous path. The country holds a central position in the EU and is its largest economy, meaning that this plan, which goes

Illustration Eleanor Shakespeare

against one of the central tenets of the EU, threatens to undermine the European project.

A cornerstone of that project was the ambition to make national borders disappear by creating the passport-free Schengen area, which now includes 25 of the 27 EU member states. It was one of the reasons why the EU received the Nobel peace prize in 2012 - although even then, thousands of migrants were dying at the EU's external borders every year. At the time, a representative of the union declared: "Over the past 60 years, the European project has shown it is possible for peoples and nations to come together across borders. That it is possible to overcome the differences between 'them' and 'us'."

No wonder the Polish prime minister, Donald Tusk, has criticised Germany's unilateral plan as a systematic suspension of Schengen and a contravention of European law. Austria has said it is not prepared to receive any migrants turned back from the border with Germany.

The German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, claimed last week that the government had already "achieved a great turnaround in reducing irregular migration". But his plan risks causing a chain reaction that could lead to the unravelling of the "post-national" idea itself. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders, leader of the far-right Freedom party, which is part of the government, asked:

"If Germany can do it, why can't we?"

* **Dr Maurice Stierl** is a migration and border researcher at the University of Osnabrück, Germany

Other parties on the far right are celebrating. By caving in to anti-migration sentiment, supposedly "centrist" political parties are doing the far right's bidding and legitimising its vision of a Europe with hardening borders. It is no great surprise that Hungary's authoritarian leader, Viktor Orbán, congratulated

Scholz, tweeting: "@Bundeskanzler, welcome to the club! #StopMigration."

German asylum statistics show that the number of asylum applications is actually decreasing this year. However, the three parties of the ruling coalition want to regain lost electoral support by joining with the far and centre right. Both the AfD and the CDU are aggressively pushing for repressive migration policies.

Police chiefs say they may lack capacity to carry out the border checks. But whether Germany can actually control its 3,700km of frontiers is beside the point. The coalition is signalling to voters that it is prepared to act to address what CDU leaders hyperbolically call a "loss of control" at Germany's borders.

The German government's belief that it can tackle migration and regain electoral support by ramping up border controls is misguided. The truth is, migration will continue in a world that fails to address the reasons why people flee their countries: wars and conflict, persecution, the climate crisis and resource exploitation.

Besides stoking up racist resentment in society and undermining the rights of vulnerable groups, the German government risks putting the EU itself in jeopardy. The idea of a political community that enshrines the right to free movement across borders is crumbling. And it is not migrants who are to blame ●

The NHS has received its diagnosis. Now Labour must prescribe a cure

Lord Darzi has delivered to Keir Starmer's government a clearly argued account of the NHS's woes in England. Some findings, such as those about waiting lists, are familiar. Themes and conclusions - for example, the underfunding of primary care and rise of obesity and chronic illness - are as expected. But this is a valuable piece of work by a respected doctor, and an important step towards the 10-year plan that Labour has promised next year.

It sets out how record-high public satisfaction with the NHS in 2009 was reduced by austerity to a record low. It explains that the funding promise made on the service's 70th anniversary, in 2018, was broken. And it describes how inequalities in healthcare mean that poorer people, ethnic minorities and those with mental illnesses are particularly poorly served.

Underfunding is not the NHS's only problem. Midwives in England deliver fewer babies than in other European countries, yet outcomes are worryingly uneven. Here, and on patient safety, Darzi points to serious concerns around leadership and culture. But the report does not shy away from the destructive consequences of the Conservatives' failure to fund buildings and equipment. It describes this refusal to invest as "capital starvation" and notes a "staggering gap" with other nations.

On the chaos unleashed by a radical restructuring, imposed in spite of a promise by David Cameron to avoid top-down reorganisations, the report does not hold back. It finds that the NHS is still

recovering from the dissolution of its management and calls this "a calamity". Even after the mistake was recognised, and reforms partly unwound, Conservative ministers abolished the main public health body in the middle of the pandemic. Coming so soon after the Grenfell inquiry's attack on Cameron's deregulatory agenda, this review is further evidence of the harm caused by 14 years of Tory government.

The new, regional structure is judged more sensible. But problems are identified, with integrated care boards not clear about their role. Nor is regulation working. In the worst cases, oversight distracts from clinical focus, while different accountability measures in hospitals and community services are one reason why resources flow away from the latter. Like the minister of health, Wes Streeting, Darzi believes the Care Quality Commission is unfit for purpose.

Starmer's soundbite, that the NHS must "reform or die", was crass. The country will always need its health service. Workforce challenges including absence rates are among the sector's pressing problems, and morale must be addressed.

This review's terms of reference did not include the making of recommendations. But Darzi makes one: that financial flows must be "hardwired" if community care is to receive an increased share of the health budget - as Mr Streeting has said he is determined that it should. Ministers will have to take this on board as they craft their response to the report ●



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Social media titans are poised for their invasion

The 21st-century showdown between social media networks has taken us back to a world of nations v empires (Big story, 6 September).

The rise of the nation-state, which disrupted, dislodged and replaced empires, religion and feudalism, provided a framework for the emergence of democracy, enlightenment values and science. The rise of Telegram, X and the rest provides a framework to disrupt, dislodge and replace all of the above.

The power of the emperor and the army using the strategy of territorial invasion is now in the hands of social media titans and algorithms using the strategy of the invasion of privacy, time and minds.

We still await a 21st century revolt, effective national regulations and a comprehensive global treaty to deal with the intensifying showdown between nation states and the social networks.

Stewart Sweeney
Adelaide, South Australia

Trump's false claims help Harris in her election bid

You report the campaign team of Vice-President Kamala Harris has raised three times as much money as the Donald Trump campaign (Global

report, 13 September). Ms Harris's performance in the televised debate will increase that difference and improve her chances.

Donald Trump, as usual, made a series of outrageous statements and false claims. These included the assertion: "People don't leave my rallies, the most incredible rallies in the history of politics." He also claimed that Kamala Harris's rally crowds were not real, but AI-generated. Is this man fit to be president of the United States?

Dr Douglas Mackenzie
Canberra, Australia

The perilous future is due to blind pursuit of growth

I appreciate Gordon Brown's appeal for a new era of global cooperation, but his vision falls short of what is needed (Wake up! We're heading into a perilous future without a map, Opinion, 30 August). In my view, all the fires, floods and droughts are the beginning of humanity paying the penalty for 200 years of industrial capitalism externalising environmental costs.

We have come to global limits to growth and must recognise that GDP growth is an illusion based on sweeping environmental costs under the carpet.

We need realistic eco-fees on everything produced. We need an economy not based on

consumerism. But then we also need to find the funding for restoration of as much as possible of all the damage done, all the historic pollution of land, water and air. And where else to look for such funds but in the pockets of the uber-rich, who have benefited the most from our degradation of the planet?

Edward Butterworth
Victoria, BC, Canada

The community benefits when new people move in

To Brian Stewart's letter (Don't fear immigration - it offers opportunities, 6 September), I would add that whenever a significant number of new people from elsewhere move in to an established community and its environment, changes happen within that community. Newcomers have no awareness of the changes their arrival has brought, because they didn't know that community as it was before they arrived.

New people bring benefits to a community: and communities that experience this kind of change are generally adept at putting the past aside and making the most of the present.

Local councils around the UK host hundreds of community festivals, celebrating local diversity and cohesion. Each of

these festivals could add to the celebrations by appreciating the host community, perhaps through remembering the past manifestations of community in that locality.

Anne Morris
London, England, UK

How long do police need to digest Grenfell report?

If TV, radio and newspaper journalists can read, digest and report the findings of the Grenfell inquiry within 24 hours, why will it take the Metropolitan police 18 months to do the same (Police under pressure in wake of inquiry into Grenfell fire, Spotlight, 13 September)?

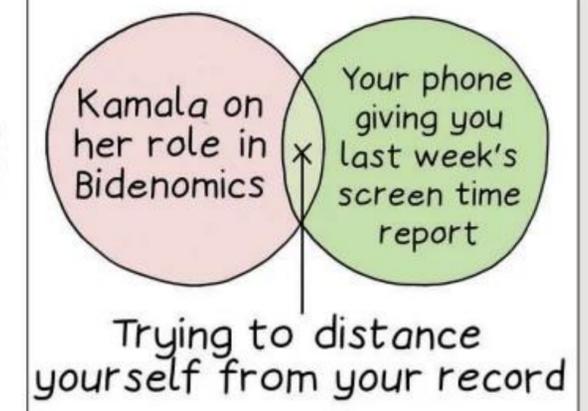
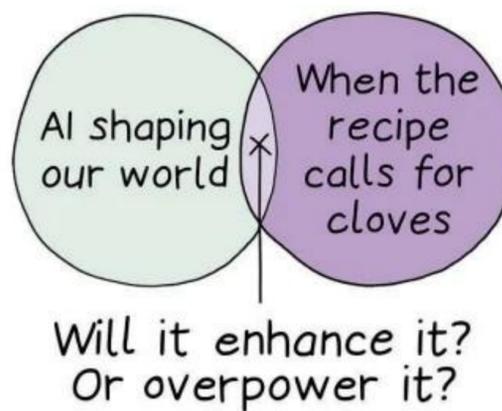
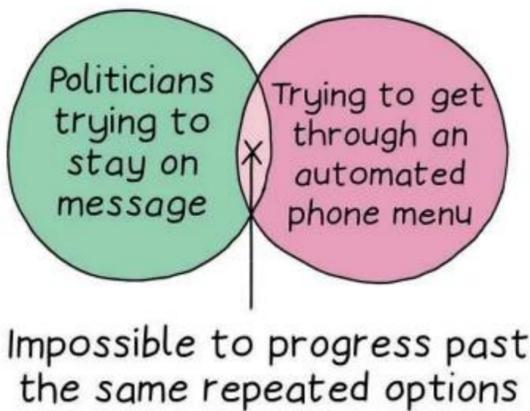
Mick Beeby
Bristol, England, UK

CORRECTIONS

The late mathematician Alexander Grothendieck (*A beautiful mind?*, Feature, 6 September) left his wife Mireille Dufour in 1972, not 1970; his house is not "the only two-storey house in Lasserre" but rather one of few three-storey buildings; and "the mathematics of vibration", should have instead said "fibration".

Mustafa Suleyman was not a former head of DeepMind (*Never summon a power you can't control*, Feature, 30 August); nor was he personally responsible for developing the AlphaGo program.

A WEEK IN VENN DIAGRAMS
Edith Pritchett





FILM
Lee Miller's life
during wartime
becomes a biopic

Page 55 →

Culture

INTERVIEW

Michael Kiwanuka



Soul searching

The singer-songwriter talks about his faith, his new album, and how he went from 'slight weirdo' to wowing Glastonbury



INTERVIEW
By Alexis Petridis
COVER
PHOTOGRAPH
Anselm Ebulue

At the start of the summer, Michael Kiwanuka played at Glastonbury. A warm-up show in Halifax aside, it was the first gig he had played in Britain for a couple of years, a chance to debut songs from his forthcoming fourth album, *Small Changes*. A malfunctioning vintage synthesiser notwithstanding, it all went perfectly, the sunshine and a cool breeze somehow potentiating the soft power of the music that floated from the stage: an idiosyncratic cocktail of soul, psychedelia, rock and singer-songwriter introspection that Kiwanuka has honed and reshaped over the 12 years since his debut album into something completely his own.

Kiwanuka and his band sounded as striking as anyone familiar with his back catalogue might expect. But they looked striking, too: Kiwanuka wore a Ugandan kanzu robe with the word “MEANING” emblazoned down the front. This came as more of a surprise. He may have been painted in regal style on the cover of his previous album, the Mercury prize-winning (in 2020) *Kiwanuka*, but the singer-songwriter is usually as understated as one of his musical heroes, Bill Withers - a man who appeared on the cover of his own debut album outside the factory where he installed aeroplane toilets for a living, holding his packed lunch.

Despite a succession of Top 10 albums and hit singles (the biggest, *Cold Little Heart*, was boosted to transatlantic platinum status by its use in the US drama *Big Little Lies*) Kiwanuka can walk into a crowded London bar on a Thursday afternoon without attracting any attention, a state of affairs he seems absolutely delighted by. “I think I’ve been lucky because I haven’t sold, like, millions of albums. I’m not someone who can improve a country’s economy by 5% by doing shows there,” he says, and smiles. “No one really thinks they can make that much money out of me, so you’re left to your own devices a bit.”

Yet there he was, on stage at the world’s biggest music festival, clad not in his familiar dressed-down denims and plaid shirt but a pretty eye-catching ensemble: Kiwanuka tells me a kanzu is the kind of thing you would wear “to a wedding or a posh event, with a jacket over the top” in

Uganda. His parents emigrated to Britain from there before he was born, fleeing Idi Amin’s regime.

“I was trying to describe and show who I am through clothes, and express my full self,” he says. “I wanted to show on this huge stage what it is I am, and that I’m proud of it. I thought it would be really cool to take something Ugandan and give it my own spin [with English lettering], that describes my heritage the way it really is. I’m Ugandan, but I’ve lived through the lens of the UK and the west, and I’m British. I wasn’t sure how it would be received. It was really cool that people noticed it.”

He wouldn’t have done this earlier in his career. “No way, man - I was too busy trying to fit in. If anything, I just wanted to talk about my western influences, and just be part of the club, you know? I just wanted to be accepted by my peers and people I respected. There weren’t that many Ugandan, African artists doing the music I was making.” But as Kiwanuka started putting out one great record, then another, he found “the confidence to be me. To be a Black British Ugandan playing an electric guitar or an acoustic guitar, playing some indie songs, but then also playing some soul, 70s-inspired songs, Pink Floyd-inspired songs, doing long songs, doing songs that talk about being Black, or that talk about love or faith ... there’s no boundary. But, you know, that took a long time.”

You can see why Kiwanuka might have exercised a degree of caution. He says he was initially encouraged by his label to release his music under a pseudonym, for fear that his surname would cause audiences to assume he was a traditional African artist - although, as he points out with admirable equanimity, this was “15 years ago, before Laura Mvula or Jalen Ngonda”, when there weren’t many African surnames visible in mainstream rock and pop. And you can see why the subject of identity keeps cropping up in his songs, most famously on 2016’s mantra-like *Black Man in a White World*. It’s there again, less directly, on *Small Changes*.

A track called *Lowdown* offers a semifictional depiction of the angsty, youthful Kiwanuka, a skateboarding “slight weirdo” in Muswell Hill, north London. He was trying to make his way in a succession of teenaged bands, aware that, as he puts it, “those type of bands didn’t have Ugandan kids in them. When I got home from school and put on MTV2, it was all white men, and the Black males were doing modern R&B. So when you’re making that music as a kid, you think: does this even make sense?” As if to underline the point, the song initially bears the distinct melodic influence of Blur, before unspooling in a burst of David Gilmour-esque guitar soloing. He would once have shied away from using influences like these in his music, he says, until he realised that “there’s space for everyone; that being more myself, there’s a place for that, as there is for everything. And if I’m trying to be someone else, there’s no point any more.”

After the teenage indie bands, he was accepted on to “quite a prestigious” jazz course at the Royal Academy of Music, but quit after realising that the staff “were looking at music in a very specific way that I thought was a little too rigid for me, a very European feel and rhythm and harmony that just didn’t prick my ear. I don’t think a lot of young Black British boys or girls would have been understood there.”

He worked as a session musician but was signed by a major label off the back of singing his own songs at open mic nights. Even with a deal under his belt, he felt unsure. Aside from the stuff about his surname, and narrowminded concerns about where a Black singer-songwriter who loved

▲ **Gig deal**
Michael Kiwanuka performing on the Pyramid stage at Glastonbury Festival in June

JONNY WEEKS

alt-rock as much as he loved classic soul fitted into the musical landscape, there was his label's surprising enthusiasm for a song he had written about his Christian faith: *I'm Getting Ready*. He only took it to them because he had run out of material for his debut album and was horrified when they suggested releasing it as a single.

"Singing about my faith and beliefs was scary," he says, "because if someone disagrees with it, it'll be hard. I want to be cool, I want to fit in. I thought it was something that would just turn everyone away, and you make music to connect." His worry was compounded by the fact that Christianity "hasn't always acted in the best way towards people. You don't want to bring up any of that pain, or make people feel like you agree with any of that. But as I got older ... you are who you are, aren't you? And if you know you're not hurting people and there's no hate or malice to it, it's OK."

Now Kiwanuka sees more people searching for a belief system. "Having a faith in things now is, I think, a lot more acceptable, whatever faith it is. There's no dogma, necessarily. We're connected by the struggles we have and I think that's what I'm singing about - being a human being and trying to overcome, which is what we're all doing in a way."

His 2012 debut album *Home Again* was a success, but there's a sense that Kiwanuka really began to find himself

when he teamed up with producers Brian "Danger Mouse" Burton and Dean Cover, better known as Inflo, for 2016's *Love & Hate*. The former was already a big name when Kiwanuka was introduced to him - "I thought, I probably can't afford him." The latter was virtually unknown, although he was formulating a fairly mad-sounding plan for a kind of anonymous, genre-smashing supergroup: Sault, which emerged in 2019 and helped to turn the enigmatic Inflo into a producer sought out by everyone from Adele to Belle and Sebastian. "He had it from the beginning, straight away; how it is now, that's how he envisaged it," says Kiwanuka, who appeared (uncredited) on Sault's albums and took part in the collective's wildly acclaimed show in London at the end of last year.

The trio hit it off, working together on Kiwanuka's songs, an arrangement he concedes is "very odd" but that somehow works "even when we don't even want to, or try". The relationship continues on *Small Changes*, an album Kiwanuka says is "way more understated ... more stripped back" than its predecessor, despite the presence of some heavyweight guest stars. At one point during its recording, Kiwanuka found himself fronting an ad-hoc band that featured legendary session bassist Pino Palladino and equally legendary producer Jimmy Jam, of Jam and Lewis fame - who dropped by the studio, regaled everyone with stories about his time working with Prince, then jumped in to play organ.

The album's airy, stripped-back sound is down to confidence, too, says Kiwanuka. He thinks this has something to do with becoming a father: he and his wife, Charlotte, have two young children. "You haven't got loads of time, so you have to make decisions ... you have to know who you are." And you have to be ready for the annoyingly insistent questions that kids ask. "You've got to answer to people about what you're saying - if that's going to young ears, 'I don't know' doesn't really cut it. So when you write, you've got to be really aware: do I really want to say this and can I stand by it?"

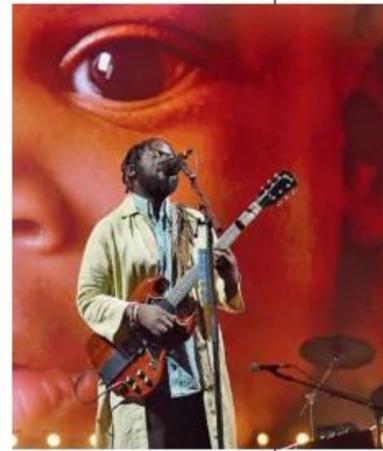
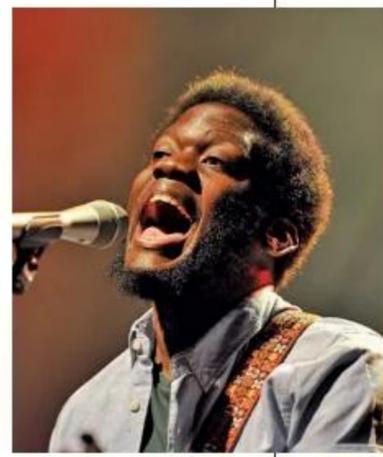
It's no bad thing, he says. "I wish I always thought like that, in my teens and 20s. If not, don't do it. It affects you musically, and especially lyrically. It goes across to videos, what you're wearing, what you want to say. Everything is heightened, which is good."

Perhaps having kids has also made him think about his own childhood. He has developed a philosophy based around the period before your teens, when you love music in a guileless, open way, unbothered by genre boundaries, or what your peers like, or what liking a certain kind of music says about you. "Then you get told what the boundaries are by the media or whatever is around you and you start to believe a lie, essentially. Think about impostor syndrome - for that to happen, you have to feel like there's a door that you're allowed to go in and out of. If you realise those doors shouldn't - or don't - exist, you can't impose any more. You're free to go anywhere. Stay inspired, stay vibrant - just be open, like an eight- or 12-year-old. It's the hardest thing, but that's how you keep yourself excited.

"And that," he concludes, "is how you make nice music."

ALEXIS PETRIDIS IS THE GUARDIAN'S HEAD ROCK AND POP CRITIC

Touring the US and Canada to October. Small Changes is released on 15 November on Polydor Records



Singing about my faith was scary ... I thought it would just turn everyone away

▲ **Staying power**

On stage in London, 2012, and the Wilderness Festival, Oxfordshire, UK, in 2024

MATT KENT/REDFERNS VIA GETTY; JIM DYSON/GETTY

◀ **Portrait mode**

'I found the confidence to be me'

ANSELM EBULUE



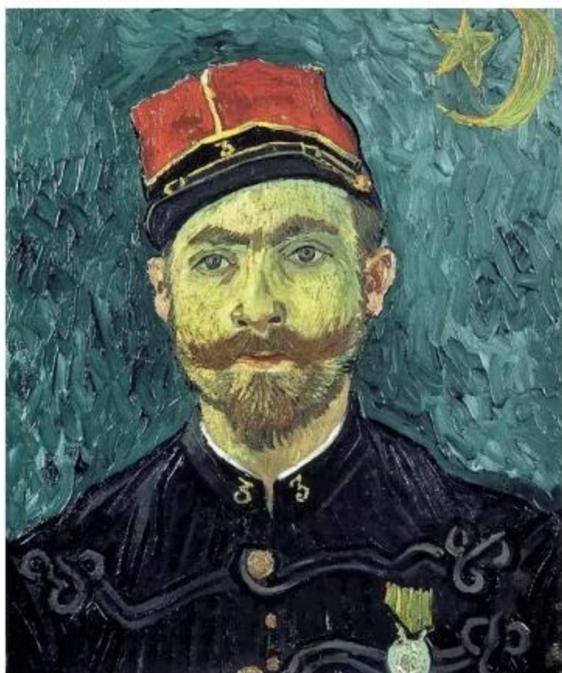


Pigments of imagination

Van Gogh's soul in Arles

This dazzling exhibition gives us a thrilling sense of the artist's genius, showing how he remade the world around him with beauty, hope and searing colour

By Jonathan Jones



Neither *The Poet* nor *The Lover*, whose portraits open this heart-stopping Van Gogh exhibition, were quite what they seem. *The Lover's* eyes gazes dreamily from a face of blue-green tints, wearing a red cap flaming against an emerald sky, in which a gold moon and star twinkle. In reality, he was an army officer called Paul-Eugène Milliet, whose affairs were less ethereal than the painting suggests. "He has all the Arles women he wants," wrote Van Gogh enviously. *The Poet's* face, meanwhile, is anxious and gaunt, its ugliness badly hidden by a thin beard. He was a Belgian painter called Eugène Boch, whose work Van Gogh thought so-so. But beggars can't be choosers. They were among the few friends Van Gogh had in Arles, after he arrived in February 1888 to renew himself.

Why does this exhibition start with these two paintings, instead of the blossoming trees or golden fields he painted that spring? The answer lies in the portraits' very lack of prosaic fact. We all know Van Gogh's turbulent story - that less than a year after arriving in Arles, he would cut off his ear, and be narrowly saved from bleeding to death - but we're not so clear what made his art so extraordinary.

The Van Gogh this great show explores, with moving and addictive aplomb, is barely an observer at all. He transfigures what he sees. It starts with those portraits of ordinary blokes in whom he sees eternal romance and poetry, proof of how utterly he remade the world around him. This is a journey not to the actual town of Arles, where if you go looking for *The Yellow House* you'll find just a plaque, but the Provence in Van Gogh's mind - or, I want to say, his soul.

Over the moon

The *Lover*, a portrait of Lieutenant Milliet, left; a detail of *Olive Grove, Saint-Rémy (1889)*, above

VIDIMAGES/ALAMY; NEIL HALL/EPA

It's a journey in which you snuffle through the undergrowth, hunting Van Gogh's truffles of genius. And you are suddenly no longer in Arles but the enclosed garden of the nearby asylum in Saint-Rémy where he became a patient in May 1889. In his great painting *Hospital at Saint-Rémy*, inmates walk sadly past the low yellow building while spiralling trees creep into the heavens, the sky becoming a deepening blue as it ascends.

In a conventional telling, Van Gogh's life in Provence was brutally split, as his first ecstatic months ended in self-harm and hospitalisation. Here, the translation to Saint-Rémy is not a tragedy at all. You see how his style got ever more free there. A later room is filled with landscapes he painted around Saint-Rémy that teeter on total abstraction: in *The Olive Trees*, the earth erupts in waves like the sea, trees dance, and a cartoon cloud is so free from rules it could be by Picasso.

Van Gogh, here, is the first completely rule-breaking modernist and he just gets ever more radical. He'd toiled for years doing brown studies of northern life before he met the avant garde in Paris: within weeks of his arrival in Arles, he took the impressionist ideas he'd encountered to the next level. Describing his painting of a man sowing, he wrote in June 1888: "There are many touches of yellow in the soil ... but I couldn't care less what the colours are in reality."

The Sower is here, silhouetted against a god-like sun in a field streaked with purple. Next to it hangs *Starry Night* over the Rhône, a painting that lifts you into the air and leaves you floating: the sheer brightness of the stars, which seem so close, make the earth below dreamy and vague.

These paintings take you outside yourself. They hang in the most extraordinary room of the show. Don't look too long at Van Gogh's 1889 *Self-Portrait*, in which he looks back at you with those sapphire eyes, in his blue smock in a wavy blue sky. This room does something an immersive Van Gogh "experience" would love to emulate: it puts you inside *The Yellow House*.

You see this little square house from outside in Van Gogh's painting of it. Then you enter through its green front door. *Vincent's Chair* is an aching, symbolic self-portrait: a wooden straw-seated chair, with his pipe and tobacco resting on it. Then you get to *The Bedroom*, Van Gogh's tender depiction with its welcoming wooden bed.

The ideals Van Gogh invested in his little home couldn't withstand the shock of sharing it with Gauguin, and he decided he was better off in an asylum. But here we experience not the sordid facts, but Van Gogh's dream of *The Yellow House*. It still exists out there among the painted stars.

We should really call him Vincent. That's how he signed himself and it's how close you feel to him in this show. You have to love him. He craved it - and this show loves him as he deserves.

JONATHAN JONES WRITES ON ART FOR THE GUARDIAN

Van Gogh: Poets and Lovers is at the National Gallery, London to 19 January 2025

Witnesses to history

A new film portrays the work of Lee Miller, who was among the female journalists forced to break sexist battlefield rules to deliver striking reporting of the second world war

By Judith Mackrell

▼ **Blitz spirit**

A Lee Miller photograph taken in Hampstead, London, in 1941

LEE MILLER

► **War story**

Miller wearing a borrowed helmet in Normandy in 1944

LEE MILLER

In August 1944, the photographer and war journalist Lee Miller was sent to France to report on conditions in the newly liberated port city of Saint-Malo in Brittany. But, as it rapidly became clear, some intelligence wires had got crossed. Far from being liberated, much of Saint-Malo was still a war zone, with US soldiers battling to dislodge the occupying Germans.

At this point in the second world war, around 200 women had, like Miller, gained military accreditation with the allied forces. Yet as Miller well knew, none were meant to be reporting on scenes of actual fighting, since their brief was simply to write the “softer” stories of war, about hospitals, air raid wardens and civilian heroism. If Miller chose to remain in Saint-Malo she would certainly be punished, yet it was too fabulous an opportunity for her to miss. “I was the only photographer for miles around,” she said, “and now I owned a private war.” For five exhilarating days, she observed and photographed everything.

Miller’s life, as told in Ellen Kuras’s new film *Lee*, had until then been a series of brief,



if brilliant, dead ends: her stint as a model for Condé Nast, her time as muse and collaborator to the surrealist Man Ray, her career as a photographer of fashion and celebrity. Now Miller understood that war was the subject for which she and her camera had been searching for years.

She had gained her accreditation as a correspondent for *British Vogue* and her editor was thrilled by the “great adventure” of her Saint-Malo story. The military authorities were not so impressed. When Miller was discovered, she was put under temporary house arrest and strict limits were placed on her freedom of movement, and those of her female peers.

The reasoning behind this protocol was, of course, the assumption that women were too fragile to cope with the blood and guts of war. But muddled along with that was the more banally practical issue of toilet facilities.

The small and valiant minority who did make their way to the fighting showed exceptional courage and cunning. Not only were they given no access to military transport and accommodation, they were even denied official press briefings, which meant they were frequently in unnecessary peril. But, operating below the official radar, these women could get to stories their more privileged male colleagues might miss.

Kuras has given Miller the glory in *Lee*, but two months before Miller had found herself a private war, Martha Gellhorn had acquired an even more gutsy story. On 6 June 1944, furious that she and every other woman had been banned from covering the Normandy landings, Gellhorn hid herself aboard a US hospital ship and crossed the Channel as a stowaway. She knew she was on the verge of an adventure when she came up on deck and realised her ship was in the middle of “the greatest naval traffic jam in history”. That adventure became more extraordinary still when she was sent ashore with the medical crew to help recover wounded soldiers.

None of the male press corps had yet been permitted onshore and the story Gellhorn filed was far more authentically dramatic than that of her husband, Ernest Hemingway. She was arrested and stripped of her accreditation, but after escaping her guards, she hitched a flight to Italy and for the rest of her war, sympathetic soldiers helped her to move from one frontline exploit to the next.

It was accepted, if not welcomed, by most female correspondents that they



sometimes had to trade on their looks. But Clare Hollingworth, who was sent to south-west Poland in late August 1939, got her first headline story through luck, timing and nerve. Not only was she in place on 1 September to phone through an eyewitness account of the start of the German invasion, she was also able to remain in Poland for the full three weeks it took for that country to fall.

Eventually, the number of intrepid war stories written by women became so conspicuous that it was hard for the authorities to maintain their ban. When the allies began their push into Germany, a very small number of female correspondents were finally permitted to travel as official press.

The experience was thrilling but terrible, as the horrors of Nazi Germany were revealed. When Miller entered Dachau, just hours after the concentration camp was liberated, it took all her professional control to document its incomprehensible evils, from its piles of skeletal corpses to its “medical” torture chamber and the place where its prisoners were murdered.

▼ Battle scars

Kate Winslet as Miller in *Lee*

KIMBERLEY FRENCH/SKY

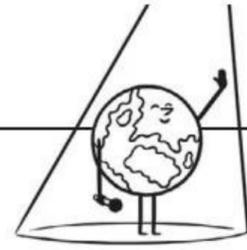
Afterwards, when Miller moved on to Munich, she ended up in Hitler’s apartment, where she was photographed scrubbing the filth of Dachau off herself in Hitler’s bath.

Once the fighting ended, many female correspondents lost their jobs, many struggled to adapt to peace, and Miller additionally suffered from what would now be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder.

In her effort to forget the death and destruction she’d witnessed, Miller simply stopped talking about the war, escaping into drink. Only after her death did her son Antony Penrose discover the boxes of photographs and writings she’d kept. He finally understood that his difficult, angry mother had actually been a heroic photojournalist - who had played a huge role in the battle waged by women for the right to report on war.

JUDITH MACKRELL IS A JOURNALIST AND THE AUTHOR OF *GOING WITH THE BOYS* (PUBLISHED AS *THE CORRESPONDENTS IN THE US*)

Lee is on release in the UK and Ireland, in the US from 27 September and in Australia in October



MUSIC

Jungle

Utilita Arena, Cardiff

★★★★☆

Begun a decade ago as a two-man bedroom outfit in west London that deployed samples, grooves and the twin falsettos of Tom McFarland and Josh Lloyd-Watson, Jungle have blossomed into one of the UK’s best-loved purveyors of good times.

Their fourth album, *Volcano* (2023), helped them win the Brit award for best British group this year; they are now touring arenas with a plush set that spans their very first hit, the excellent *Busy Earnin’* (2014), 2021’s ubiquitous *Keep Moving*, and a flurry of more recent disco-flecked retro bangers. With only a few pauses, it all plays out as a silken mix, keeping the sold-out crowd in happy shuffle mode throughout.

As pleasurable as Jungle’s crate-digger music is, the absence of the dancers who appear in their videos is a disappointment. Missing, as well, are the guest vocalists that increasingly crop up on their records. There’s no questioning that Jungle bring a party, but this show remains merely a good gig, rather than anything more ambitious, creatively risk-taking or three-dimensional. *Kitty Empire*
Touring the US to 18 October

TELEVISION

Into the Fire: The Lost Daughter

Netflix

★★★★☆

Netflix’s latest addition to the true crime genre is almost beyond belief. It is the story of Cathy Terkanian’s search for her adopted daughter Alexis (renamed Aundria by her new parents, Brenda and Dennis Bowman).

It is an extraordinary story of one woman’s determination but, while it clearly longs to lean into this and become a reverential paean to maternal instinct, the supranatural bond between mother and child, the actual facts are so terrible that the film-makers manage to restrain themselves and deliver an account that does them justice.

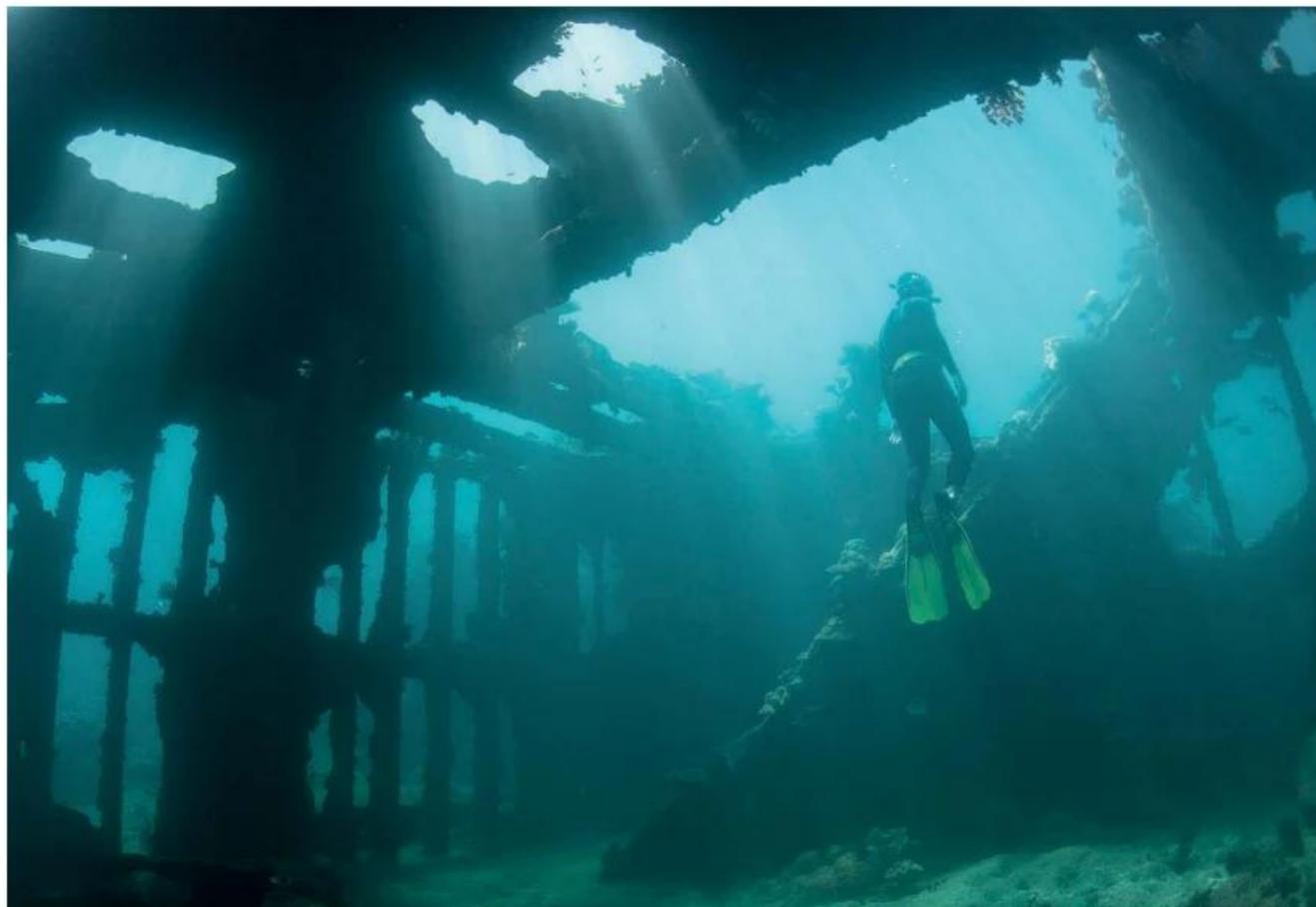
Aundria had not had the better life the 16-year-old Cathy had been promised adoption would provide. Gradually, the truth about Dennis emerges. Once again we find ourselves in a world in which a monstrous man is rarely caught after committing awful acts and when he is, never punished in a way commensurate with his crimes.

Into the Fire is also a portrait of a toxic marriage - how blind devotion and need, dependence and co-dependence can both make and facilitate monsters.

One of Dennis’s convictions - 40 years after the event - is for the 1980 murder of 25-year-old Kathleen Doyle. Her aunt Christine’s contribution should be etched on the minds of anyone setting out to make or watch these films: “Except for the fact that he took her from us, he is superfluous to her story ... Don’t let the people who did this awful thing be the people everyone remembers. Let them remember the young women who have died.” *Lucy Mangan*

Podcast of the week *Did Furbys Spy on Us?*

Why were 90s cuddly speaking toys Furbys banned from the Pentagon? Were they really a secretive listening device for the Chinese government? The latest fun “investigation” from comic Joanne McNally sees her calling up aviation authorities and meeting a Furby collector. An enjoyably daft yarn. *Alexi Duggins*



FICTION

Five fathoms deep
Underwater worlds and The Tempest inspire Richard Powers through a meandering and ambitious journey of discovery

By Xan Brooks

The oceanographer Evie Beaulieu stumbles on her heart’s desire while surveying the wreckage of a second world war naval battle. Thirty metres down in the waters of Micronesia’s Truk lagoon, past the Japanese submarines that have become kelp gardens and the sunken warships teeming with fish, she alights on the skeletons of two sailors that have long since become coral sculptures. Momentarily starved of oxygen, Evie foresees her own death and her ideal resting state. She decides she wants to die at sea, become a reef and thereby secure a rich and strange afterlife.

Themes of transformation, loss and regeneration abound in Richard Powers’ Playground, a transcendentalist deep dive of a novel that at times almost caves under the weight of its ambitions. Ostensibly, it spins the tale of Makatea, a Polynesian atoll that finds itself preyed on by a consortium of shadowy Californian investors who want to build modular parts for vast floating cities. But that’s only the surface narrative, a protruding rock to navigate by. Playground freely references The Tempest with its framing of Makatea, an island haunted by its past and ripe for exploitation, and cites Arthur C Clarke, who said that the planet we live on should by rights be named Ocean. What we think of as Earth is “the marginal kingdom”, an ancillary to a main stage that occupies 70% of the globe. The real story - the real treasure - can be found in the water.

The sea calls most urgently to Evie, a character loosely based on the marine biologist Sylvia Earle, who abandons dry land every chance that she gets and belatedly writes a best-seller, titled Clearly It Is Ocean, as a means of explaining herself to her kids. But the thrill of the unknown - of the world beyond the one we know

- is also what drives Rafi Young and Todd Keane, two childhood friends from Chicago. Rafi (a black honours student) and Todd (white, middle class) initially bond over games of chess, graduate to the Chinese strategy board game Go and then catch the first wave of generative AI; what Todd refers to as “the third industrial revolution”.

Todd, we gather, will go on to make billions from the launch of Playground, an early-noughties precursor to Facebook and Second Life, whereas Rafi ends up working as a school-teacher in Makatea, cut out of the profits from the site he helped brainstorm. But the story sashes between time frames and switches from first and third person to the point where the drama becomes clouded. While Todd serves as chief narrator, he now suffers from Lewy Body dementia, a condition that impacts his language, thoughts and motor functions. In the grip of his symptoms, he hallucinates vivid marine life scrolling across his bedroom wall at home.

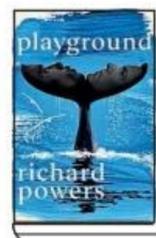
What a lush, opaque world Powers conjures for us here. Just as Evie Beaulieu longs to interpret the “liquid text” of the sea, so the reader has to regularly reorient themselves in order to keep track of the plot’s braided streams. Playground is the American author’s 14th novel, although it carries echoes of its immediate predecessors. Like 2018’s The Overstory, it’s a book bewitched by the concept of intelligent alien life in our midst (trees there, fish here). As with 2021’s dystopian Bewilderment, it’s drawn to the virtual frontier of generative AI and its potential to both raise the dead and draft an alternative present. If the tale’s disparate elements never entirely cohere, that’s probably as it should be. Playground works best as a fabulous exploration. It points out the sights, provides background and asks open-ended questions. After that, we’re largely on our own.

One has the distinct sense that the author is embarked on the same journey of discovery. Powers marvels at the seabed with wide-eyed fervour. He thrills to its “Bonnard gardens” and “Miro sculptures”, and the way an octopus can repurpose a jar to make a protective glass shell.

Back on Makatea, the residents vote on the island’s fate. The oceans are warming, the reefs have all bleached and the people are torn between the known and the unknown, unsure which way to jump and what the future might hold. And it is here, at its most superficially schematic and decisive, that Powers’ great, tidal story folds in

on itself - as Rafi and Todd are set on a collision course and 92-year-old Evie (“older than half the world’s current countries”) totters towards the ballot box. It’s a fitting finale for Powers’ rambling, rapturous tale in that it doesn’t feel as though it’s a finale at all; more like the hidden undertow of a breaking wave that only drags us further out to sea.

XAN BROOKS IS A FEATURE WRITER, CRITIC AND BROADCASTER



BOOK OF THE WEEK
Playground
By Richard Powers

▲ Wild waters

Seabed discoveries inspire Playground’s characters

VELVETFISH/ISTOCK/GETTY

BIOGRAPHY

Man of many myths

A splendid, balanced biography of the maverick scientist best known as the father of Gaia theory of life on Earth

By Philip Ball

▼ I spy

James Lovelock
in 2016

ADRIAN SHERRATT



Along the driveway to James Lovelock's remote house of Coombe Mill was a warning one might hardly expect amid the tranquil Devon hills: a radiation hazard sign. It was not there simply to deter unwanted snoopers, for what lurked in Lovelock's private laboratory adjoining his house was truly hair-raising: radioactive sources, TNT and semtex. If there had ever been a fire, Lovelock laughed, "it would've blown up the house".

For most of his career, this scion of the environmental movement conducted work for the British security establishment, including explosives research for the forces in Northern Ireland. When he met Elizabeth II to receive his CBE in 1990, he responded to her famous question "And what do you do?" with "I'm sorry, I can't talk about it". The incongruity of Lovelock and his second wife, Sandy, standing reverently in their garden before a statue representing the Earth goddess Gaia, metres away from research given to Lovelock by MI5 because it was too dangerous for official channels, exemplifies the contradictions of the man and his extraordinary life. In *The Many Lives of James Lovelock*, Guardian environment journalist Jonathan Watts does it justice.

Lovelock's Gaia theory has, ever since its inception in the late 1960s, been whatever one wants to make of it: a smokescreen for polluting industries, a clarion call for environmentalists, a revolution in the earth sciences, a conceptual framework for astrobiology, a spiritual movement for reconnecting to the living earth. Remarkably, Lovelock himself embraced each of these positions at some time or another during his 103 years on the planet.

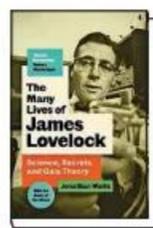
Having worked for the Medical Research Council at Mill Hill - which produced several Nobel laureates - during the war, Lovelock quit a comfortable academic position to become a freelance inventor and consultant for clients ranging from the Ministry of Defence to Nasa. In

the mid-1950s he invented an instrument called the Electron Capture Detector (ECD), which allowed substances in the air to be detected with unprecedented sensitivity.

Those studies led him to conceive of the atmosphere itself not as an aspect of the environment to which life adapts but as a component of the "Earth system" that life is constantly shaping. In collaboration with the American microbiologist Lynn Margulis, Lovelock shaped these ideas into the Gaia theory, which suggests that the whole planet functions rather like a living organism, stabilised by feedbacks between the biosphere, oceans, atmosphere and geosphere. Using simple theoretical models, Lovelock and his co-workers showed how this "geophysiology" might work. It was Lovelock's Devon neighbour, William Golding, who suggested naming the idea after the Greek goddess - a "poison gift", according to philosopher Bruno Latour, as the mythic associations alienated many scientists.

Much of this is well known, but Watts digs deeper to find the source of Lovelock's contradictory, maverick nature. At its heart was pain and tragedy. He was brought up by his grandparents, after being virtually disowned by his aspiring lower-middle-class mother. Lovelock, meanwhile, idolised his father, Thomas, a former farmworker and somewhat feckless ex-convict who was illiterate until adulthood.

This biography is authorised, Lovelock granting Watts access to documents and many hours of interviews (which began after Lovelock turned 101). But that has not compromised Watts' objectivity - and Lovelock probably wouldn't want it to be otherwise. Watts does not hesitate to challenge Lovelock's sometimes self-serving view of events, nor does he spare his subject from unflattering judgments. According to environmentalist Jonathan Porritt, "He could come across as downright insensitive"; his first wife, Helen, had to endure her husband's affairs even as she faded with



The Many Lives of James Lovelock
By Jonathan Watts

FICTION

The rotters' club

A vile millionaire dies mysteriously in this entertainingly sour tale of greed, class and family infighting

By Jenny Colgan

It's important to maintain a balanced diet in your reading, I find: plenty of roughage along with ultra-processed books. One way to ensure you get everything you need is to follow kitchen rules - salt, sweet, sour and bitter.

Few can compete with Bella Mackie when it comes to sour, and that is not an insult. Her spiky debut bestseller, *How to Kill Your Family*, proved a useful counterweight to the more saccharine end of the market, as well as being a post-pandemic chaser for those who had spent a little too much time in lockdown with their nearest and dearest.

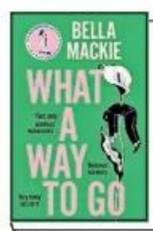
What a Way to Go is similarly unconcerned with relatable characters. A vile multimillionaire, Anthony

Wistern, dies in mysterious circumstances at his lavish 60th birthday party. He is shunted to a dull afterlife and made to watch what happens next. It's like an even more amoral *Lovely Bones*.

In true *Succession* style, Anthony has four children: Jemima, the scheming eldest; Freddy, the uninterested son; Paris-based Lyla; and Clara, the cheekiest and youngest. Ruling the roost is surviving first wife, the icy Olivia, who specialises in jewellery and snubbing.

The *Succession* shape is a little too neat. There's even a would-be Wambsgans, in the shape of Jemima's sycophantic husband, Will.

The novel is undeniably funny, with many class-bound barbs that



What a Way to Go
By Bella Mackie

multiple sclerosis. "His human skills lagged far behind his scientific acumen," says Watts. Lovelock was a "gullible genius", vulnerable to flattery and manipulation by those seeking to enlist his brilliance for their own agendas, from Lord Rothschild, head of research at Shell, who used the nascent Gaia theory to veil the environmental damage wreaked by the petrochemicals industry, to Nigel Lawson, who leveraged Lovelock's reputation in support of climate denialism.

The Gaian notion of the planet as a web of interconnected systems, at first ignored or reviled, has now entered the scientific mainstream. But Lovelock's own interpretation of these ideas - one moment suggesting the planet is resilient against our depredations, the next forecasting imminent climate apocalypse, and then back again - owed more to his own predispositions and to the audience who happened to be lionising him than to the kind of detailed calculations and assessments conducted by meteorological agencies or the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

He initially ridiculed the suggestion that CFC compounds in refrigerants and aerosols, useful as a tracer of atmospheric currents detectable by the ECD, might harm the ozone layer. "Despite his reputation as an independent, contrarian maverick, he was embedded in the military-industrial complex," writes Watts. "He relished being part of that club."

Watts evidently found Lovelock, who died in 2022, genial, inspiring, fun and sympathetic. It is to his great credit that he has not let that become the whole story. In the end this splendid, balanced biography testifies to the pros and cons of scientific mavericks. Only a self-proclaimed "awkward bugger" like Lovelock would have had the guts and vision to challenge old orthodoxies and upturn our understanding of planetary science. But contrarianism can veer in unreliable directions, especially when its author craves recognition and praise as much as intellectual independence.

PHILIP BALL IS A SCIENCE WRITER

reminded me of Jilly Cooper: Anthony is nicknamed "Goldcocks", a Rupert Campbell-Blackism if ever I heard one.

But Cooper always counterbalances her books with characters of great sweetness. What a Way to Go is rotters through and through; there isn't a single decent person in it. By default, the reader ends up Team Anthony, who at least made some kind of effort to enjoy his life.

Olivia is described as an impeccable party-thriller: Mackie could have gone more overboard on fancy parties and funerals for those of us not invited to so many that they start to seem dull.

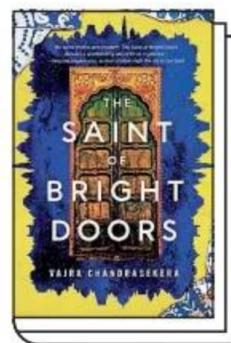
But the plot dances along, some twists highly guessable and some cleverly snuck in. It's an excellently tart addition to your reading buffet.

JENNY COLGAN IS A NOVELIST AND JOURNALIST

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

The best recent science fiction, fantasy and horror

By Lisa Tuttle



The Saint of Bright Doors

By Vajra Chandrasekera

This debut novel by a Sri Lankan writer has been garlanded with awards. Set in a world where demons and antigods prowl the streets, this is the tale of Fetter, a young man without a shadow. He was raised by his mother to be her weapon against his father, a revered prophet known as The Perfect and Kind. Leaving home for the big city, Fetter tries on new identities among actors, immigrants, scholars and revolutionaries. He is fascinated by the mystery of the "bright doors" that appear whenever an ordinary door has been left closed for too long. When he learns that The Perfect and Kind is on his way to the city, he realises he will have the opportunity to assassinate him. Neither the plot nor the tropes of fantasy develop in ways the reader could expect: thrillingly different, this bears comparison to works by Kafka and Samuel R Delany. An outstanding, genre-shattering work.

Withered Hill

By David Barnett

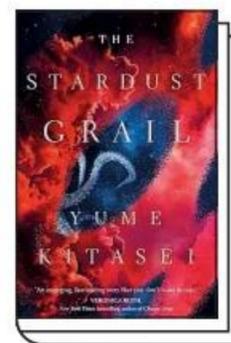
A young woman stumbles naked out of the woods, into the village of Withered Hill. She knows her name is Sophie, but she doesn't remember anything about her life. The locals are friendly

but strange. Attempts to escape meet with failure, but her new friends promise she will be able to leave when the time is right. The dual timeline moves between Sophie's life in London in the month before her arrival, and what happens in Withered Hill, as she adjusts to its odd customs and seasonal celebrations. At times this folk horror, while engaging, may seem a bit predictable, but there is a terrific unexpected twist.

Crypt of the Moon Spider

By Nathan Ballingrud

In this novella by the award-winning short story writer, Veronica is taken to an exclusive sanatorium where her melancholy might be cured with a simple, terrifying operation. It is 1923, but far from our own reality: the sanatorium is on the moon, and the operation involves a very special type of spider silk. A brilliantly original, unsettling blend of gothic madness, retro-science fiction and scenes that would make a great Hammer Horror movie.

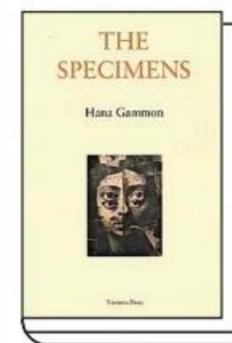


The Stardust Grail

By Yume Kitasei

Maya Hoshimoto was formerly an accomplished thief, taking artefacts stolen by humans to return them to the alien civilisations they came from, but now she's a graduate student learning

about ancient cultures. When her archival research reveals a clue to the whereabouts of a long-lost object, she is inspired to plan another heist to help her best friend, one of the last surviving Frenro. This alien race is dying out, unable to reproduce without the aid of the very object she intends to steal. But other humans want it for their own reasons, and the whole journey is fraught with danger. An enjoyable, richly imagined, space-faring adventure populated with intriguing characters.



The Specimens

By Hana Gammon

In brightly lit white rooms, a young man known only as BEC-04 is subjected to daily tests, restrained and sedated by his masked keepers. He has two sets of eyes and the ability to read minds, but he knows no more about his origins than the scientists who study him. Elsewhere in the facility is BEC-03, a female said to be his twin. The mysteries presented at the beginning of this remarkable first novel by a young South African writer are never resolved, but the tension and powerfully eerie atmosphere are sustained throughout in a compellingly weird tale involving doubles, masks and a search for understanding.

LISA TUTTLE IS AN AUTHOR AND CRITIC

ASK
Annalisa Barbieri



I'm childless and gay, and feel left out since my sister had a baby

I come from an emotionally close nuclear family. As we grew up or aged, our relationships were fed on good food, conversation, the arts, and talk of travel. A few years ago, my sister had her first child; I'm gay and childless. I'm happy for her; her kids are adorable - though I run out of things to say about every photo or sniffle. With friends who have begun starting families already, our friendships have evolved positively: I feel part of their lives. Within my family, it has worked out differently. We still chat frequently and meet up. I know they love me. But my sister's family is now the centre of our wider one. Not just practically, but also in terms of what's immediately asked about, how we talk about life, which conversations are the most successful.

I never felt like the outsider in my family before, and I'm sure they'd object to that description: I am not consciously left out. They ask about things, but homeliness and daily routine is the default when it comes to conversation. With friends,

I don't feel the same way, despite children also being the centre of their own lives. If I withdraw from my family, I feel guilty for creating precisely the perceived distance that bothers me. If I speak about my feelings, my parents try to understand, but assume that I'm jealous; my sister sees it as lack of empathy. Perhaps it is indeed a natural transition, though a change where I grieve a closeness I remember. I know that only I can alter the situation in the way that I think about it, but I go round in circles. Any suggestions?

It's really interesting that despite your friends also having families, you don't feel pushed out by them, but with your own family, you do. So what's the difference? Maybe you miss your sister being there for you. If this is the case, or if you feel left out, this is nothing to feel ashamed of.

Babies shake up a family in ways that are hard to imagine. Everyone's role is different, and there is sometimes a subconscious jostling for position. It doesn't help when people dominate the conversation with things that aren't inclusive to all. Over time it can feel exactly what it is: excluding, isolating and quite boring. Empathy, by its very nature, is a two-way emotion.

I contacted AFT-registered family psychotherapist John Cavanagh. He wondered about you "describing yourself being gay and childless and how that sat in terms of expectations

If you would like advice on a family matter, email ask.annalisa@theguardian.com. See theguardian.com/letters-terms-for-terms-and-conditions

in your family, how that's led you to view yourself, perhaps as 'othered' in your own family? And whether your relationship to not being a father is planned or unplanned?"

Cavanagh explained that when you're gay, your life cycle may not follow the curve of a heteronormative family, and that can take some adjusting to. Sometimes a baby can bring up all sorts for everyone. We wondered what it brought up for you.

There was such a sense of loss in your letter. It sounds like you and your family were so close. I wondered how much effort they make to create space for you now. Perhaps it's worth a conversation. If your parents say you're jealous, would it be terrible if you said: "You know, I am a little"?

You and your friends probably have a more rounded relationship, and one that is constantly evolving, in a way that perhaps your parental/sibling relationships haven't. Maybe you can be more honest with them. Could you try to find some new, common ground with your family? It's tiresome that you have to be the one to do this, but it may be worth it.

Finally: parenthood is pretty all encompassing, but the landscape changes. Your nieces/nephews will grow up, there will be new relationships there to be forged, you could end up being the centre of their lives. Your sister will also want to flex her muscles outside of matrescence again. Family dynamics change and change again.

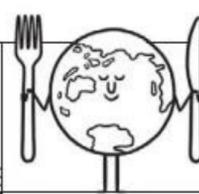
Could you find some common ground with your family? It may be worth it

STEPHEN COLLINS

Cheery Keir's Guide to Autumn



Stephen Collins COLLILLO.COM



Top that! What are the best things to elevate a humble slice of toast?

Sometimes, only toast will do, whether it's thickly cut and slathered with butter, popped under a mound of sauteed mushrooms (take Guardian Feast columnist Meera Sodha's lead and stir in some brown and white miso), or bulked up with cheesy curried butter beans à la Yotam Ottolenghi. Toast can do it all, and at any time of day.

That said, I think we can all agree that toast is often best under some lovely, bubbly cheese. Patrick Williams, chef-owner of Kudu Collective in south-east London, does this "the South African way, to snack on with a beer at a *braai* [barbecue]". It's serious business, too: "There's competition between my brother and I about who makes the best," Williams says, and success relies on using only "decent stuff", which means good-quality cheddar and tomatoes, and Mrs HS Ball's chutney: "It's South African and tarter than Branston pickle, and you can get it in the world food aisle of big supermarkets." Everything then gets stuffed between two slices of bread along with a few crushed coriander seeds, salt and pepper, sometimes sliced red onion, and then goes into a pan to crisp up.

Theo Randall, chef/patron at Theo Randall at the Intercontinental in central London, meanwhile, is more likely to be found rubbing toast with garlic, and topping it with slow-roasted tomatoes, burrata, torn basil, good olive oil, and

black pepper and sea salt. "Other favourites are ciabatta cut in half, toasted, buttered and topped with a couple of good salted anchovy fillets," he says, plus a squeeze of lemon for good measure.

In his book *Cooking*, Jeremy Lee lightly oils and seasons butterflied fresh sardines, fries them skin side down until the flesh turns pale, then flips and cooks for another minute. Pile the fish on to toast with some chopped blistered spring onions, crown the lot with a fried egg, and you'll want for nothing more. (Of course, eggs, whether scrambled, poached, boiled or fried and basted in oil/butter and turmeric or harissa, are another no-brainer with toast.)

On the sweet side, Dom Fernando, founder of Sri Lankan restaurant Paradise in London, whips up a batch of cashew butter: "It's creamier and a bit more mellow than peanut, and it's easy to make" - just toast cashews in a low oven for 10 minutes, then blitz. "The secret to making it super-smooth is to add a little coconut oil," Fernando says, and you could sprinkle in sea salt, too. When he's short on time, however, he often turns to simple cinnamon sugar: "Blend a little cinnamon and sugar, and sprinkle on buttered toast. That's almost French toast without the effort of actually making it."

ANNA BERRILL IS A FOOD WRITER
Got a culinary dilemma?
Email feast@theguardian.com

THE WEEKLY RECIPE

By Yotam Ottolenghi

Nº 285

Olive oil courgettes and eggs with potatoes



Prep 15 min

Cook 40 min

Serves 4-6

● DAIRY FREE

This is inspired by mfarakeh, a Levantine dish. It's usually made with courgettes or a mixture of potatoes and courgettes. If you prefer, omit the potatoes altogether to shorten the cooking time.

Method

Put the potatoes in a large saute pan, add well-salted water and bring to a boil. Cook for 10 minutes, until the potatoes have softened, then drain and steam-dry for five minutes.

Wipe out the pan, add 60ml oil and put it on a medium-high heat. Once the oil is hot, return the potatoes to the pan with a quarter-teaspoon of salt and a good grind of black pepper, then saute, shaking the pan occasionally, for 10 minutes, until the potatoes are crisp and golden. Tip the potatoes and any oil from the pan into a bowl.

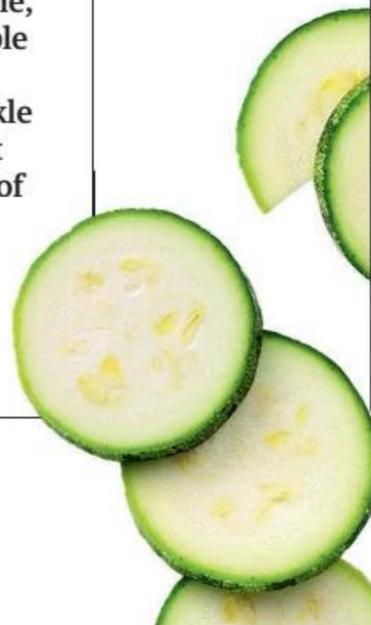
Return the pan to the heat, add the remaining 120ml olive oil and, once it's hot, add the courgettes and a half-teaspoon of salt. Cook for 20-25 minutes, stirring occasionally, until caramelised - some courgette slices should still hold their shape and the rest will have collapsed slightly. Stir in the garlic, cook for a minute, then add three-quarters of the spring onions and coriander, and cook for a minute more.

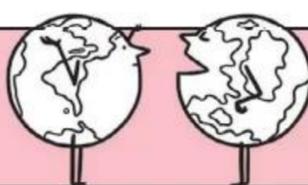
Whisk a half-teaspoon of salt and a good grind of black pepper into the eggs, then pour them over the courgettes. Leave to cook for 30 seconds, until the eggs start to set, then gently fold over the contents of the pan to encourage them to set in soft curds. Take off the heat and transfer to a shallow, lipped platter.

Stir the remaining spring onion and coriander, the chilli and a tablespoon of lemon juice into the potato bowl, then spoon half this mix on top of the eggs. Serve with the rest of the potatoes in a bowl on the side, pittas, if using, and an extra squeeze of lemon over the eggs.

Ingredients

500g king edward or other floury potatoes, peeled and cut into 2cm pieces
Fine sea salt and black pepper
180ml olive oil
600g courgettes, trimmed and cut into ½cm-thick rounds
5 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
7-8 spring onions (110g), trimmed and finely sliced
80g coriander, finely chopped
6 eggs, beaten
1 red chilli, finely chopped
1 lemon
4-6 pittas, to serve (optional)





Notes and Queries
The long-running series that invites readers to send in questions and answers on anything and everything

QUIZ

Thomas Eaton

- 1 Which three crops provide just under half of global calories?
- 2 What is the UK's tallest bird?
- 3 Which group were tried at York Castle in 1813?
- 4 Which South American country lost its last glacier in 2024?
- 5 Where was the papacy based for most of the 14th century?
- 6 Which single-issue party was founded by James Goldsmith?
- 7 Which surname connects Proust and Pirates of the Caribbean?

8 Which Roman roads meet at High Cross, Leicestershire?

- What links:**
- 9 Forrest & Reid; Hodges & Peacock; Moore & Prater; Pettigrew & Chacon?
 - 10 Aberystwyth; Dublin; Cambridge; Edinburgh; London; Oxford?
 - 11 Balloon; bishop; dolman; juliet; raglan?
 - 12 Giroud; Kane; Klose; Riva; Villa?
 - 13 The Truths We Hold; The Art of the Deal and Hillbilly Elegy?
 - 14 Bessie Bellwood; Marie Lloyd; Lily Morris; Vesta Victoria; Nellie Wallace?
 - 15 Byker Wall; Falowiec; Karl-Marx-Hof; Park Hill; Pruitt-Igoe?

PUZZLES

Chris Maslanka

- 1 Wordpool**
Find the correct definition: **BARBITON**
- a) Wels catfish
 - b) somnifer
 - c) many-stringed lyre
 - d) bitter medicine
- 2 E pluribus unum**
Rearrange **CITY PAINTER** to make another word.

- 3 Cryptic**
Distinguished particle physicist detectable in cornflakes? An open and shut case! (5, 5)
Daily bread, cut from coalfields (6, 4)
Strange island drink (3)
- 4 Same Difference**
Identify two words that differ in the letters shown:
- ***** cut
*P**** join
- © CMM2024

CINEMA CONNECT

Killian Fox

Name the films and the female actor who connects them.



Answers Quiz 1 Rice, wheat and maize. **2** Crane. **3** Luddites. **4** Venezuela. **5** Avignon. **6** Referendum party. **7** Swann (in Search of Lost Time and film series). **8** Walling Street and Fosse Way. **9** Surnames of pop duos: Althea & Donna; Chas & Dave; Sam & Dave; Charles & Eddie. **10** Location of legal deposit libraries. **11** Types of sleeve. **12** Leading men's national football goal scorers: France; England; Germany; Italy; Spain. **13** Books by 2024 US election candidates: Harris; Trump and Vance. **14** Music hall stars. **15** Social housing projects: Newcastle; Gdansk; Vienna; Sheffield; St Louis; Cinema Connect Don't Look Up, The Deer Hunter and Little Women all star Meryl Streep. **Puzzles 1** Wordplay c) 2 EPU PERTINACITY. **3** Cryptic FRANK CLOSE, SLICED LOAF, RUM. **4** Same Difference SLICE, SPLICE.

COUNTRY DIARY

ABERYSTWYTH
Ceredigion, Wales, UK

Sitting at the end of the wooden jetty, I watch the line of longboats ease out of the harbour towards the start of the race. I don't envy the crews - each with four rowers and a cox - who will tackle this triangular open-sea course of about 5km. They are an amiable bunch who have travelled with their longboats, all built to the same basic design, from coastal settlements across west Wales.

The support for the exhausted crews is enthusiastically vocal. Many of the folk here know each other well and the sport seems more collaborative than competitive - often loaning gear, boats or even crew members to other teams. I chat with a friend, who asks if I had seen the otter that was spotted weaving between the moored fishing boats. I had missed it, of course, but resolved to return on a day when there is less activity in the river.

Some days later, I am back at the harbour. Heading out determined to see an elusive mammal such as an otter is clearly an act of folly, so I tell myself it is just a walk - but I keep my eyes open nonetheless. The stone quayside opposite the raft of fishing boats provides a good vantage point, and I sit in the sunshine with my feet dangling over the wall. It is much cooler now, with a hint of the turning season.

A cormorant preens itself on the top of a marker post, gulls stand around on the edge of the weed patches waiting for the tide to fall, but of the otter there is no sign - except that everywhere I look I imagine I can see one.

Each puff of wind disturbing the water, every swirl of the current or rise and fall of weed at the edge of the stream is for an instant a moving, living creature. With a sigh, I continue my walk. Next time, I tell myself, next time. *John Gilbey*



ILLUSTRATION: CLIFFORD HARPER

CHESS

Leonard Barden

Magnus Carlsen, the world No 1, competes for one of the few missing honours in his career at the Olympiad in Budapest, where he leads sixth-seeded Norway. Carlsen's Olympiad record is surprisingly modest. He has averaged just 70% in seven appearances, with his best performance a bronze medal in 2022. The Olympiad got off to an uncertain start last Tuesday. Forty teams, 20 each from the Open and Women's contests, were missing due to visa

problems, the opening ceremony could not be broadcast live, and some early arrivals were charged triple the normal rate for hotel rooms. The Fide congress, held during the Olympiad, will include a controversial motion to restore full

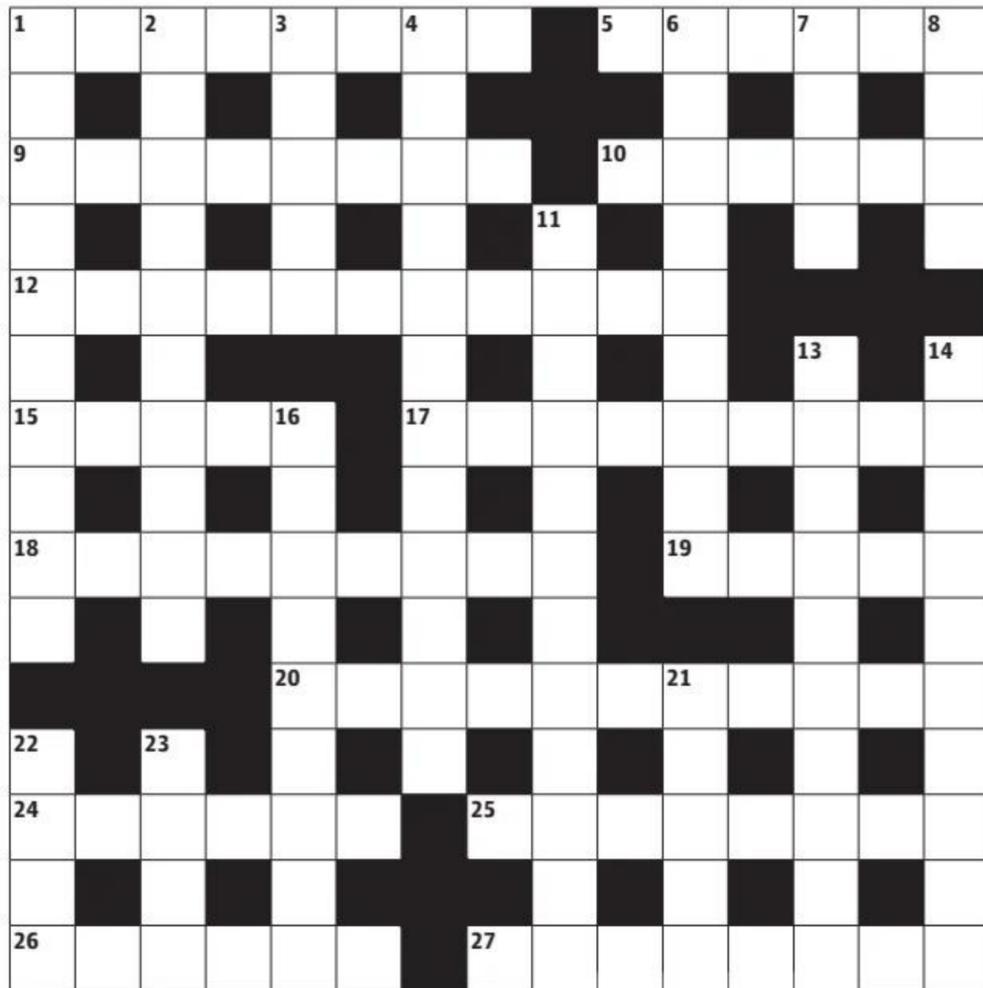
3937 Gade Sharanya v Lakshana Deepak, world junior girls 2024. Black to move and win



voting and participation rights to Russia and Belarus, who were banned in 2022 after the invasion of Ukraine. That year's Olympiad was switched from Moscow to Chennai at short notice.

Reports say that the motion already has enough votes to be carried. If it happens there could be consequences similar to 1939, when war broke out in the middle of the Olympiad, France and Poland refused to play Germany, and those matches were scored 2-2.

3937 1...Qa3+ 2 Ke2 Qb2+ 3 Rd2 Bb5+ 4 Rxb5 Rxd2+ 5 Qxd2 c3! 6 Qxb2 cxb2 when Black queens her b2 pawn and wins with queen v rook.



* All solutions published next week

The Weekly cryptic

No 29,484



By Anto

Across

- 1 Criticism of crowd after benefits rejected (8)
- 5 Boo trio of women barking - like this (3,3)
- 9 Steep harbour with three sides (8)
- 10 One who fuelled interest in central European bloodsucker (6)
- 12 Damaged label on load? It goes down like this (4,7)
- 15 Wipes unduly costly lists from the centre (5)
- 17 Praise a fight that's reportedly close enough (2,2,5)
- 18 Immediately left home when opposed (5,4)
- 19 Tennis champion is fifty-fifty to clinch final (5)
- 20 Obscure definition of ignorance (6-5)
- 24 Harsh having American agents return to arrest British detectives (6)
- 25 Barred us frolicking and being more silly (8)
- 26 Part of course raised facilitating removal of lab's waste? (3-3)
- 27 Distressing condition includes evidence about director being obstructed (8)

Down

- 1 Light mineral sat on by silly wizard (10)
- 2 Ultra cheap part - in non-medical terms - it lets one breathe (3,7)
- 3 Music label second rate from top to bottom (1,3,1)
- 4 Intellectual challenge if two tablets must be reconfigured (6,2,4)
- 6 Dismissed over scoop revealing criminal's temporary release (3,2,4)
- 7 Came to being appreciative of injustice (4)
- 8 Charge for conflict diamonds? (4)
- 11 This clue is a bit like that (12)
- 13 Acquired from the net when depressed and drunk (10)
- 14 Old city girl sat and cooked (10)

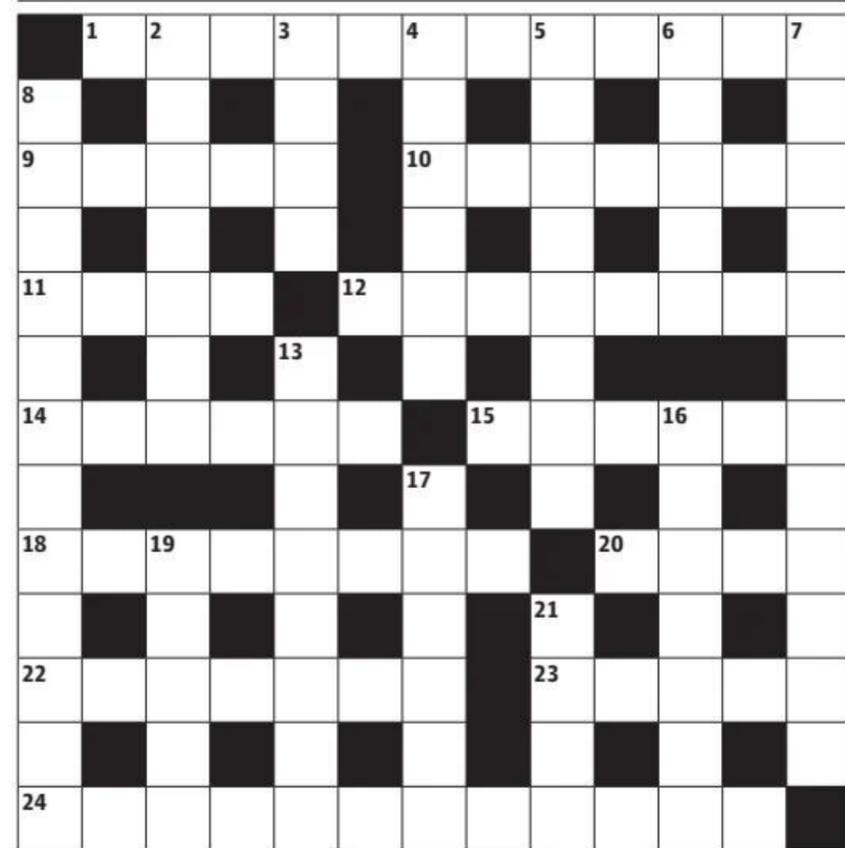
- 16 Heavenly body modelled by learner in cream (9)
- 21 Knob heads on kerb never use red lights (5)
- 22 Class given B+ (4)
- 23 Send quick message showing good support for bank security measure (4)

Solution No 29,478

B	E	R	E	F	T		M	I	S	C	H	I	E	F
A	E	L					N	L	D					A
S	U	P	P	E	R		E	S	C	A	P	I	S	M
H	R	E					E	M	O					I
	V	E	N	T	U	R	E	C	A	P	I	T	A	L
	S	I	H	I	T		S	I						Y
D	I	S	I	N	H	E	R	I	T		S	C	U	M
I			G	T			C	M						A
S	O	D	A		M	O	T	I	V	A	T	I	O	N
S	E		I	R	D		G		L					
I	N	C	O	N	S	I	D	E	R	A	B	L	E	
P	R	D		C			Z		B					I
A	P	E	R	I	T	I	F		T	I	E	R	E	D
T	E		G		A			N		E				L
E	N	D	T	O	E	N	D		P	E	D	D	L	E

Quick crossword

No 16,957



Across

- 1 Dickens novel serialised in the 1850s (6,6)
- 9 Bulbous plant (5)
- 10 Perfumed liquid (7)
- 11 Von Bismarck, e.g. (4)
- 12 Worker (8)
- 14 Drink of the Olympian gods (6)
- 15 Like this clue? (6)
- 18 Mediterranean islander - chess opening in which black's first move is pawn to c5 (8)
- 20 Level (4)
- 22 Moves faster than (7)
- 23 Inferior (5)
- 24 Performer of a folk art with e.g. handkerchiefs and sticks (6,6)

Down

- 2 Asinine (7)
- 3 Strong flavour - Chinese dynasty (4)
- 4 Pitch one's tent (6)

- 5 Disaster at sea (3,5)
- 6 Sport named after a school (5)
- 7 Something wonderful (3,4,5)
- 8 Get a hugely enthusiastic reception (2,4,1,5)
- 13 Cypriot cheese (8)
- 16 'Heads' side of a coin (7)
- 17 Gave rise to (6)
- 19 Provide e.g. food (5)
- 21 Pen or cob (4)

Solution No 16,951

R	A	V	A	G	E		S	W	I	V	E	L	
E		A		A				I		A			I
M	I	N	I	M			C	O	N	D	U	I	T
O		I		M			R		G		N		T
V	O	L	C	A	N	O		N	A	T	A	L	
E		L					Q		U				E
			A	I	R	G	U	I	T	A	R		
A			U				E				E		B
B	I	D	E	T			T	O	B	A	C	C	O
A		R		L			T		O	R			W
C	H	A	R	A	D	E			M	O	U	S	Y
U		M		N					B		I		E
S	H	A	N	D	Y		H	E	C	T	O	R	

Sudoku

Medium

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

Last week's solution

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

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

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