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Why the French don't get fat at Christmas

Features



Guinness shortage or genius stunt?



Features

The Daily Telegraph
PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR

ECHR lets heroin kingpin stay in UK

Dangerous crime boss 'fears persecution in Turkey' despite visiting there eight times

By **Charles Hymas** HOME AFFAIRS EDITOR

A TURKISH crime boss said to be one of Britain's biggest drug dealers will not be deported after judges ruled it would breach his human rights, *The Telegraph* can reveal.

The man, who was jailed for 16 years for plotting to supply heroin across the UK, won the right to remain in the country on the basis that it would breach his human right to a family life, even though he had an extra-marital affair with a woman in Turkey.

The 70-year-old drug dealer, who has been granted anonymity, also claimed that, as an Alevi Kurd, he would be persecuted if he was deported to Turkey.

However, the immigration tribunal was told that he had returned to his homeland eight times since he came to Britain without facing any persecution.

The man's claim to remain was backed by the UN Refugee Agency, despite the Home Office saying that he was a "danger to the community" whose continued presence in the UK was "not conducive to the public good".

The tribunal was told that he was believed to be the head of a crime gang responsible at the time for 90 per cent of the UK heroin trade. He had also been charged twice with assault causing actual and grievous bodily harm after his release, but was acquitted both times.

Immigration judges backed his claim and rejected an appeal by the Home Office against him remaining in the UK. They ruled that it would breach his right to a family life based on Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and that there was a risk of persecution over his Kurdish birthright.

The tribunal was told that he was a "reformed" character, that his wife had stood by him over the affair and that his deportation would split the family.

The case will reignite calls for the UK to leave or reform the ECHR. Chris Philp, the shadow home secretary, said: "This decision defies common sense. The man has repeatedly returned to Turkey – even getting a Turkish passport – so is clearly unconcerned about his safety there.

"Human rights shouldn't be about protecting dangerous criminals. A fundamentally different approach is needed to ensure human rights legislation is not abused by criminals and illegal immigrants. That is not what the framers of the ECHR originally intended but judges have now stretched it far beyond its original purpose."

Richard Tice, the deputy leader of Reform UK, said: "The UN Refugee Agency have just disgraced themselves. They are defending a violent mafia-style drug overlord, not some genuine refugee... We must pull out of the ECHR and transform our laws to deport all foreign criminals and illegal overstayers."

Robert Jenrick, the shadow justice secretary, said: "This decision is a sick joke. Our human rights laws have been turned against the British public. How can anyone defend this?"

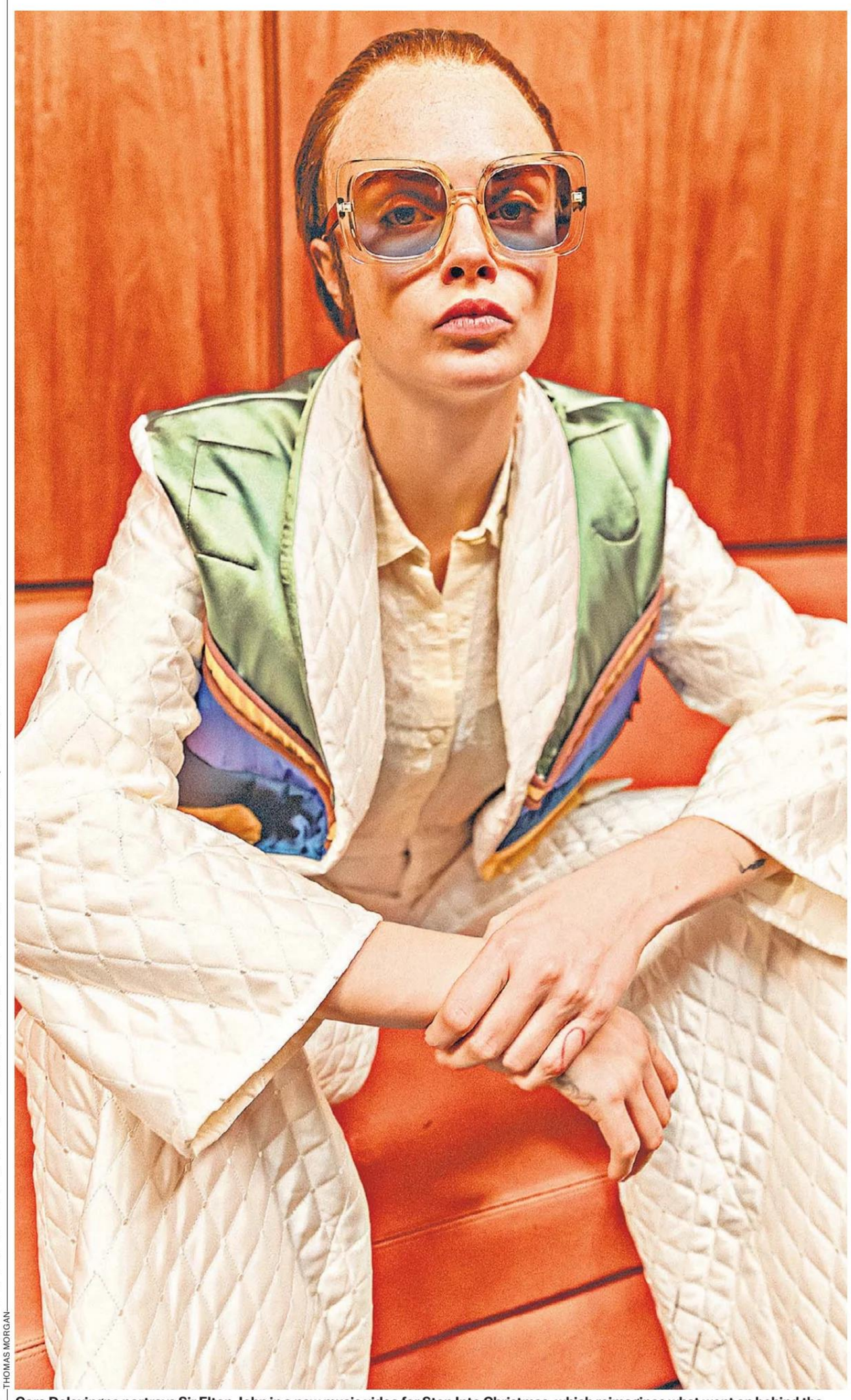
The man entered the UK in May 1988 and claimed asylum. He was deported after four days but returned in July 1991 so that his claim could be considered. It was refused in March 1993 but he was given exceptional leave to remain and was given refugee status. He was granted indefinite leave to remain in 1997.

However, in 2004, he was jailed for 16 years for a major plot to supply heroin. After his release on parole in 2014, he was charged twice with violent assaults but was acquitted. Press reports, which he denied, named him as the leader of a criminal gang called Agu.

During visits to Turkey in 2001 and 2002 he "had an affair" with a Turkish woman. He took part in a traditional wedding ceremony to preserve her family honour but said it was "not a serious relationship".

A Home Office spokesman said: "This is an incredibly disappointing ruling. However, we will not give up on our pursuit of doing all we can to remove dangerous foreign criminals in order to keep our streets safe."

Cara steps in for Christmas



THOMAS MORGAN

Cara Delevingne portrays Sir Elton John in a new music video for Step Into Christmas, which reimagines what went on behind the scenes when filming the original 51 years ago. The actress and model said it was a dream to play Sir Elton, 77, her idol and friend.

US prepared rebels weeks in advance for Syrian coup

By **Adrian Blomfield** *in Palmyra*

THE United States prepared a rebel force to join the offensive that overthrew the regime of Bashar al-Assad, fighters have claimed.

Three weeks before Assad was ousted, British and American-trained fighters in the Revolutionary Commando Army (RCA), a group aligned against Islamic State, were told "this is your moment" by US special forces.

In the first indication that Washington had prior knowledge of the offensive, the RCA said it had been told to scale up its forces and "be ready" for an attack that could lead to the end of the Assad regime.

"They did not tell us how it would happen," Capt Bashar al-Mashadani, an RCA commander, told *The Telegraph* from a former Syrian army air base used by Russia near Palmyra. "We were just told: 'Everything is about to change. This is your moment. Either Assad will fall, or you will fall.' But they did not say when or where, they just told us to be ready."

Having worked with the RCA to dismantle IS's Syrian caliphate, the US still pays fighters to prevent the terror group's resurgence.

In the weeks before the briefing at the US-controlled Al-Tanf air base on the border of Iraq, Capt Mashadani said the RCA's ranks were strengthened by smaller freelance units.

> 'They did not tell us how it would happen, they did not say when or where, they just told us to be ready'

It indicates not only that Washington knew about the offensive led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which toppled the Assad regime on Dec 8, but that it had precise intelligence about its scale.

Two months before the operation, Capt Mashadani was second-in-command of the Abu Khatab brigade. This small unit of 150 men was created by US special forces and trained by their British counterparts in Jordan until 2016, to hunt down IS fighters in eastern Syria.

There were several such Sunni desert units operating out of Al-Tanf. They fought separately from the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Kurdish-led militia that controls much of the country's north-east. But, in early October, Capt Mashadani and his fellow commanders said American officers brought the Abu Khatab brigade and other units under the joint command of the RCA.

The RCA's ranks grew from about 800 to as many as 3,000 as a result, he said. Capt Mashadani said that communication between RCA and the fighters of HTS, which is led by Syria's interim leader Mohammed al-Jolani, was being co-ordinated by the Americans at Al-Tanf.

Among the chief targets of the US-backed operation was Palmyra, fabled for its Greco-Roman ruins, which was occupied by IS between 2015 and 2017.

Dispatch: Page 15

Starmer's chief of staff sent on secret mission to woo Trump

By **Ben Riley-Smith** POLITICAL EDITOR

SIR KEIR STARMER'S chief of staff held secret talks with Donald Trump's senior White House team in America earlier this month, *The Telegraph* can reveal.

Morgan McSweeney travelled to Florida on Dec 2 to meet Susie Wiles, the political strategist who masterminded Mr Trump's re-election campaign and will be his chief of staff.

Mr McSweeney also had policy discussions in Washington with Mike Waltz, the congressman who has been named as Mr Trump's next national security adviser. The Prime Minister's decision to send his most senior aide to woo Team Trump suggests there is anxiety at the heart of the Government about the need to build bridges with the incoming US president.

Sir Keir and Mr Trump held a phone call yesterday and discussed the possibility of the Prime Minister visiting the US next year, possibly in February.

Mr McSweeney was criticised by the Trump campaign over Labour's ties to the Democrats during the US election campaign, when it emerged he attended the Left-wing party's convention. No10 is also trying to smooth over past criticism of the president-elect by Cabinet ministers and seeking to counter Nigel Farage, the Reform leader, who is considered a "friend" by Mr Trump.

A senior Downing Street source said: "The mood music was very warm. President Trump is nothing but warm about the UK." They added: "As the year closes, Team Starmer is confident the UK is in a good position for a strong bilateral relationship with the new presidency."

Also on the US trip was Jonathan Powell, Sir Keir's national security adviser and a former chief of staff to Sir Tony Blair. His presence was notable given that he negotiated the deal to give away the Chagos Islands to Mauritius – an agreement now hanging in the balance, with Mr Trump's position unclear and the new Mauritian government criticising the deal.

Yesterday, Mr Farage told the Commons that during a visit to Mr Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate earlier this week, he had encountered "very deep disquiet" in the president-elect's team about the agreement.

During the Labour charm offensive, Mr McSweeney and Mr Powell discussed working with the US on policy towards Ukraine, China and the Middle East – points of difference between their leaders.

There was also a conversation about the UK-US trade relationship. Sir Keir hopes to strike a trade deal with America, while avoiding any import tariffs imposed by Mr Trump.

Plans are also being drawn up for a speedy visit from the Prime Minister to meet Mr Trump, who returns as US president on Jan 20 after the inauguration ceremony. Commenting on yesterday's call between the two leaders, a Downing Street spokesman did not confirm that a February visit was on the cards, but said that Sir Keir and Mr Trump "agreed to keep in touch" and "looked forward to working together on shared priorities, including international security and delivering economic growth and prosperity".

During the call, Sir Keir also "reiterated the need for allies to stand together with Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression and to ensure Ukraine is in the strongest possible position", the statement added. No10 also said

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NEWS

Water bosses' bonuses grow as bills rise 20pc

The majority of water company bosses received increased bonuses last year, *The Telegraph* can reveal as the public faces a 20 per cent rise in bills. An analysis of company accounts has found that six of the 10 water and sewerage firms in England and Wales increased chief executive bonuses last year, with an average rise of £180,000. It comes as Ofwat, the industry regulator, is expected today to announce a 20 per cent rise in water bills over the next five years.

Page 4

NEWS

100mph crash killer high on laughing gas

A 19-year-old driver who killed three teenage passengers after inhaling nitrous oxide and travelling at more than 100mph has been jailed for nine years and four months. Thomas Johnson crashed into a tree moments after he was filmed using a balloon to inhale the gas while driving last year. Oxford Crown Court was shown several video clips from the passengers' phones in which a balloon, typically used to inhale the gas, could be seen "in the mouth of the defendant".

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MATT



"Don't use that swear word. Say 'river water'. It means the same thing"

BUSINESS

Bank to hold rates as inflation hits new high

The Bank of England is poised to keep interest rates on hold after inflation surged to an eight-month high and households were told to brace for further price rises. Hopes that the Bank could deliver interest rate cuts were all but abandoned after the ONS said the consumer price index increased for the second month in a row to 2.6 per cent in November. It means inflation is now at its highest level since March and drifting further from the Bank's 2 per cent target.

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SPORT

Saudis seek signature of wantaway Rashford

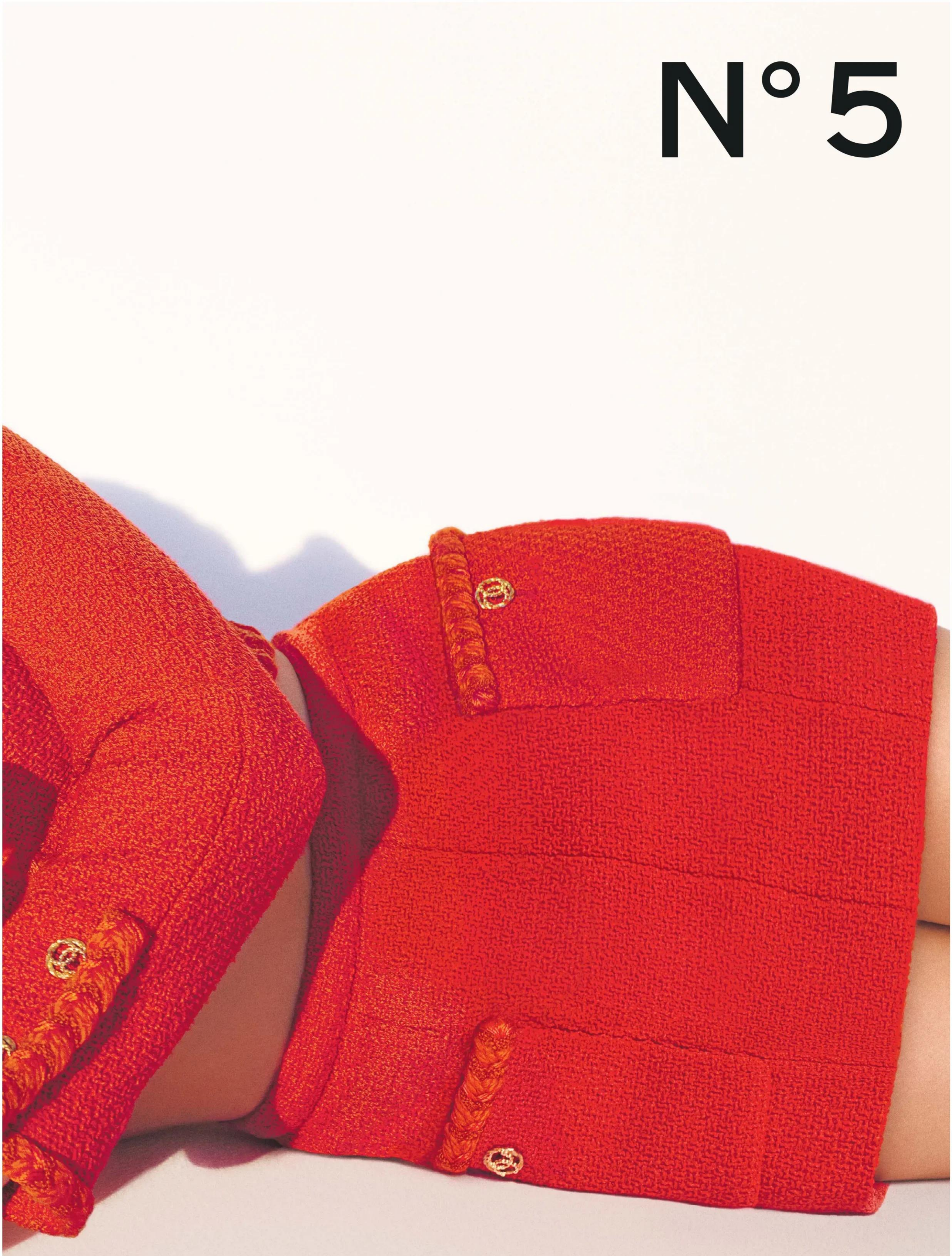
The Saudi Pro League will offer Marcus Rashford a way out of Manchester United. It is understood that the 27-year-old's best hope of securing a move to a European club is on loan with an obligation to buy, but it remains to be seen whether that would be of interest to United. However, Rashford is on a list of SPL targets that also includes Mohamed Salah and Kevin de Bruyne. Both of those players are out of contract at the end of the season, however, while Rashford is not.

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Water chiefs in bonus boost as bills rise 20pc

Bosses' reward scheme called a scandal by critics who insist that regulator Ofwat is 'not fit for purpose'

By **Tim Sigsworth** *and* **Nick Gutteridge**

THE majority of water company bosses received boosted bonuses last year, *The Telegraph* can reveal as the public faces a 20 per cent rise in bills.

An analysis of company accounts has found that six of the 10 water and sewerage firms in England and Wales increased chief executive bonuses last year, with an average rise of £180,000.

It comes as Ofwat, the industry regulator, is expected today to announce a 20 per cent rise in water bills over the next five years.

Britain's water firms have been heavily criticised for damaging the quality of the country's waterways in recent years through illegal sewage spills.

Tim Farron, the Liberal Democrat environment spokesman, told *The Telegraph* that the "multi-million pound bonuses for sewage dumpers" were a "scandal".

"It is high time that the Government takes action on a regulator that is not fit for purpose," he said. "Ofwat must be abolished, without doing so we will never tackle the crisis of water companies destroying our beautiful environment with disgusting pollution.

"We need a new regulator with the powers to end the scandal of multi-million pound bonuses for sewage dumpers."

Steve Reed, the Environment Secretary, said the Government's Water (Special Measures) Bill, which is working its way through the Commons, would ban bonuses for bosses in charge of companies that "fail to meet high standards to protect the environment".

"We will outline further legislation to fundamentally transform how the water industry is run, and speed up the delivery of essential infrastructure to clean up our waterways," he said.

Water firms argue that they have not been allowed to invest to upgrade their infrastructure by Ofwat, the financial regulator, which limits how high bills can be set.

But the size of bonuses, which the companies maintain are paid by shareholders and not customers, has been criticised as excessive.

Six of the 10 water and sewerage companies increased the bonuses paid to their chief executives last year.

The largest increase was at Yorkshire Water, where chief executive Nicola Shaw received a £371,000 bonus – up from nothing the year before when she turned one down.

The company, which has been given a two-star "requires improvement" rating by the Environment Agency, was found to have had the third highest level of sewage spills in England and Wales last yearl.

Severn Trent Water paid chief executive Liv Garfield a bonus of £584,000, 63 per cent higher than the £358,000 paid in 2022-23.

Starmer takes cue from May in trying to get Trump on side

Continued from Page 1

that Mr Trump "warmly recounted his meeting" with the Prince of Wales earlier this month at the ceremony in Paris to mark the reopening of Notre-Dame cathedral.

The below-the-radar visit by Sir Keir's aides has echoes of how Baroness May attempted to deepen ties with Mr Trump's team after his first victory in 2016 – efforts that failed to stop the pair having a fraught relationship. Lady May dispatched her co-chiefs of staff, Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill, to America to meet figures in Mr Trump's orbit.

A similar drive is under way as Sir Keir and his team attempt to both smooth over differences with Mr Trump and seek ways to shape his thinking. Many of Sir Keir's Cabinet ministers, not least David Lammy, the Foreign Secretary, have been critical of Mr Trump in the past which No10 hopes he will look beyond.



Sir Keir Starmer spoke to Donald Trump on the phone last night as he attempts to build bridges with the incoming president

During the US presidential campaign, Mr Trump accused Labour of election interference after the party's former head of operations said on LinkedIn that 100 current and former staffers were helping his rival Kamala Harris.

It later emerged Mr McSweeney had been paid by Labour to attend the Democratic National Convention. The party always denied it was formally supporting Ms Harris.

The two Republicans chosen for meetings offer a glimpse of how Sir Keir's team hopes to open channels of communication in Mr Trump's White House. Ms Wiles is widely seen by US commentators as being a more traditionally mainstream Republican rather than a figure on the populist, disruptive wing of Mr Trump's support base.

Mr Waltz, a former US army colonel and China hawk, is expected to play a pivotal role in Mr Trump's foreign policy as the national security adviser.



MAX MUMBY

Royal hands make light work The Duchess of Edinburgh helps out at The Lighthouse in Woking. The charity, of which she is patron, has hubs in Surrey and Hampshire, with creative projects to support those who find themselves in need.

NEWS BULLETIN

Police given recognition cameras for instant ID

Bobbies on the beat are for the first time using body-worn facial recognition cameras to identify wanted suspects and missing people almost instantaneously.

South Wales and Gwent police have issued front-line officers with the cameras, which use AI to cross-reference images they take with those of wanted criminals.

Police chiefs say it will enable them to identify a person who is wanted, at risk or missing if they are unable to provide their personal details, refuse to do so or give false information. It operates through a facial recognition app that can reveal someone's identity at the touch of a button.

Welby greetings card in aid of exploited children

The Archbishop of Canterbury's final Christmas card before he quits over his handling of a sex abuse scandal includes a donation to a charity for exploited children.

The Most Rev Justin Welby and his wife Caroline told recipients of their greetings card they were donating to the Children's Society, which works with neglected and abused children.

The couple said they had chosen a charity "that empowers young people by tackling the adverse conditions that prevent them from flourishing".

The card has been sent three weeks before the archbishop steps down over his failure to report prolific serial abuser John Smyth to police.

White Christmas? Dream on. It's going to be grey

Dreams of a white Christmas have been dashed after forecasters said Dec 25 will be mild and grey.

Christmas Day is likely to be settled, cloudy and dry with light winds for most of the UK, the Met Office said.

There is a small chance of rain across north-west Scotland, although temperatures are expected to be widely mild, dashing any hopes of snow.

For the Met Office to declare a white Christmas, a single snowflake has to be observed falling in the 24 hours of Dec 25 anywhere in Britain. Dan Harris, of the Met Office, said: "Current indications are that more settled conditions are likely to develop."

Welsh theatre 'plays second fiddle to drag'

Arts Council Wales has been accused of letting the National Theatre collapse while funding "controversial" drag shows.

The National Theatre of Wales was founded in 2009 and enjoyed early successes, including a three-day *Passion Play* with Michael Sheen.But last year the Arts Council made the "difficult decision" to pull the entirety of its funding.

Senedd member Gareth Davies said: "It is completely wrong that the National Theatre of Wales has been sidelined by the Arts Council of Wales, in order to fund drag shows and other similarly controversial subject matters." He called the funding loss a "blow that could have been avoided".

Rayner funnels billions more into Labour towns and cities

By **Nick Gutteridge**
CHIEF POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

RURAL voters face higher council tax increases next year as Angela Rayner funnels billions of pounds into Labour backing towns and cities.

The Deputy Prime Minister unveiled a new package which will see huge funding increases for urban areas to help them cope with spiralling costs.

But countryside councils warned that they are facing a real-terms cut under the plans and will be forced to put up their taxes as a result.

The Tories said the announcement, which comes amid a furore over the inheritance tax raid on farmers was the latest example that Labour is "at war with rural areas".

Ms Rayner unveiled a £69 billion funding package for councils across England which will see an average 3.5pc real terms boost to their budgets.

Her department insisted the countryside would be protected, saying that areas with "a significant rural population" would get an extra 5pc.

But the County Councils Network (CNN), which represents 37 rural authorities, said that its members will now be in a worse position than before.

It accused the Government of "cherry-picking" urban councils, which are typically Labour held, for extra cash whilst leaving them short of money.

Barry Lewis, the vice-chairman of the network, said: "The Government is unfairly cherry picking which councils deserve the greatest financial support next year.

"With rising demand and additional costs, county authorities will effectively be in a worse position than before the Autumn Budget. Consequently, county and rural councils will have little option but to reduce services next year, including in social care, while increasing council tax in order to balance our budgets. With very little fat left to cut, we will have to make some extremely difficult decisions."

Mr Lewis said the extra cash rural councils are receiving will be wiped out the 6.7 per cent rise in the minimum wage announced at the Budget.

The CCN said more than half of a £600 million "recovery grant" to help councils is going to 34 out of 36 metropolitan borough councils.

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Sex for sale on school's out of control ski trip

Head struck off after girl slept with three boys, pupil filmed two others and they stole 10 bottles of spirits

By **Daily Telegraph Reporter**

A FORMER headteacher has been struck off over a ski trip in which one girl said she slept with three boys and was paid for sex by one of them.

Justine Drury was principal at the CP Riverside School in Nottingham, which caters to children with behavioural and social problems, when the excursion took place in 2017.

The trip to Switzerland was attended by 10 boys and two girls alongside Mrs Drury herself, another staff member and an apprentice staff member.

A Teaching Regulation Agency panel heard one child, known only as Pupil A, said she had had sex with three of the boys, including one in exchange for £30. One pupil filmed two others having sex and was using the footage in an attempt to blackmail Pupil A into having sex with him, the panel heard.

Mrs Drury said she "found out later" that sexual activity had been videoed and that she was "picking up a vibe that Pupil I had recorded some footage" as she was "capturing snippets of information from the students.

On the third day almost all the pupils broke down the door of the restaurant in the hotel and stole around 10 bottles of spirits, it was said.

One pupil was found with a knife on another occasion, some shoplifted and some of the children attended nightclubs unsupervised, the panel was told.

The agency panel found the pupil-teacher ratio was "entirely inappropriate". Mrs Drury also did not have written consent from the parents of all pupils for them to attend the trip and risk assessments were not completed sufficiently.



The Riverside School in Nottingham from where 12 pupils were dispatched on the ski trip to Switzerland

It was known that of the 10 pupils with special educational needs, eight were known to be sexually active, seven were known to have substance misuse problems and three were involved with the justice system at the time. Mrs Drury had initially taken sufficient steps to try to prevent initial sexual activity, the panel found.

She had then allowed pupils to be left unsupervised for long periods and not taken action after she knew that pupils were engaging in sexual activity. The lack of supervision also led to stealing, it was said. After the trip had ended, Mrs Drury did not tell the school's trustees and the local authority about what had happened on the trip.

The teacher agency cited evidence from witnesses who said she showed "no understanding of why her actions were not appropriate and seemingly had no regard for anyone other than herself".

Mrs Drury, who did not turn up to her hearing, was banned from teaching in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children's home in England indefinitely. She is able to appeal against the ruling after five years. The panel said it saw "no evidence as to Mrs Drury's ability as an educator".

'I was picking up a vibe that one of the pupils had recorded some footage'

It added: "Therefore, the panel considered that the adverse public interest considerations above outweigh any interest in retaining Mrs Drury in the profession, since her behaviour fundamentally breached the standard of conduct expected of a teacher, particularly in her role as head teacher."

CP Riverside School and the East Midlands Education Trust said in a statement: "The school worked with the police and the local authority designated officer and carried out an investigation. Ms Drury left the school in July 2017. The school takes safeguarding responsibilities extremely seriously."



PICTURE CREDIT

Head Justine Drury neglected to obtain consent forms from parents and failed to tell bosses what happened



BBC bias claim over not playing anti-Starmer Christmas No1

By **Amy Gibbons**
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

THE BBC is under pressure to play a Christmas number one contender parodying Sir Keir Starmer's winter fuel cuts.

The track by Sir Starmer and the Granny Harmers, which mocks Labour's decision to strip millions of pensioners of the benefit, is topping music downloads charts with a week to go before Christmas Day.

However, the musicians behind the hit claim their campaign to get it to number one is being thwarted by radio stations refusing to play it.

The BBC is now being urged to prove it is free of bias by giving airtime to the charity single, which is raising money for causes supporting the elderly.

Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg, the former Tory MP, said: "The BBC is always happy to refer to Thatcher milk snatcher but dare not offend its Labour paymaster."

Greg Smith, the Tory MP for Mid Buckinghamshire, said it was "an absurdity that the BBC who like to present themselves as being allegedly impartial should not play a song that is selling so well – and could even be number one".

He told *The Telegraph*: "Satire is often the most powerful check on power – and this song is highlighting the seriousness of Labour's political choices to give bumper pay deals to their union paymasters whilst stripping some of our poorest pensioners from vital funds to heat their homes this winter."

The track, *Freezing This Christmas*, is based on Mud's 1974 festive number one *Lonely This Christmas*. It was created by Chris Middleton, a 33-year-old freelance writer and marketer, with the help of Dean Ager, a 51-year-old Rat Pack tribute singer.

The single is topping the EE Big Top 40 and is expected to hit the official chart tomorrow.

Mr Ager has claimed it is being neglected on the radio. He told *The Telegraph*: "I've not heard it one time – I get being impartial, but surely that contradicts freedom of speech."

Mr Middleton added: "If the rules of your chart are that you play the number one every week, and you choose not to play it, that is bias."

A BBC spokesman said decisions on what stations play are "always made with the relevant audiences and context in mind".

Families play 'buffet roulette' by leaving festive food out too long

By **Daily Telegraph Reporter**

THE food safety watchdog has urged households to be more careful over Christmas after finding many are taking "unnecessary and avoidable risks" with festive fare.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) found that 45 per cent of people are playing "buffet roulette" by admitting they would be likely to leave food from the fridge out for hours before eating it.

More than a quarter said they would be likely to store food that should be refrigerated in another cool place such as a garage, porch, or cool box owing to a lack of space in the fridge.

Just under a quarter said they would be unlikely to ask if their guests had any food allergies or intolerances.

Some 46 per cent said they did not always check use-by dates before cooking or preparing food at home, while 39 per cent admitted that they at least occasionally cook raw meat, such as turkey or sausages, past its use-by date.

A third of those surveyed said they did not always wash their hands before cooking or preparing food at home.

Robin May, chief scientific adviser at the FSA, said: "Don't be a turkey – our new data shows that people are taking unnecessary and avoidable risks in the way they cook, prepare and store food.

"Whether your Christmas meal is a chicken for two or a goose for 22, make sure it is cooked until steaming hot all the way through.

"Although we are talking about this in a light-hearted way, there's a serious message underlying the data. No one likes being ill over the holidays, especially at a time when friends and family come together, including people who are more vulnerable to food poisoning, such as older relatives or those who are pregnant.

"If you're cooking for a crowd, there's lots to think about and maybe not much room in the fridge. We have lots of easy tips at food.gov.uk about cooking turkeys, storing food, chilling and reheating leftovers so you and your loved ones stay well and enjoy the celebrations."

The FSA urged those buying a fresh turkey, duck, or goose in advance of Christmas day to check the packaging to make sure it is suitable for home freezing.

Other tips included freezing any leftovers for future dishes and chilling food between meals if you want to eat it later and keeping the fridge at 5C or below.

Festive favourite is 'future-proofed' as scientists genetically modify roast potatoes

By **Joe Pinkstone**
SCIENCE CORRESPONDENT

POTATOES have been future-proofed against global warming and made more resilient to heat.

A Desiree potato was genetically modified by scientists to be better at making energy from photosynthesis with trials at a farm in Illinois over two growing seasons revealing that when there is a heatwave the modified plant grew a third more potatoes.

Scientists at the University of Essex and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) added two genes to the plant to alter a process called photorespiration.

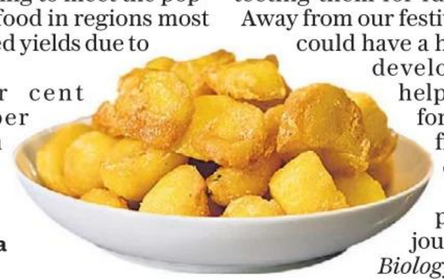
This improved efficiency of the plant and left more energy to be dedicated to growing tubers.

Authors of the paper described the work as "a promising avenue for yield increases in the face of a warming planet". Multi-location field trials are needed to confirm the team's findings in varying environments, they added.

A team led by Dr Katherine Meacham-Hensold worked on the project.

Dr Meacham-Hensold, of the Realising Increased Photosynthetic Efficiency project led by the UIUC, said: "We need to produce crops that can withstand more frequent and intense heatwave events if we are going to meet the population's need for food in regions most at risk from reduced yields due to global warming.

"The 30 per cent increase in tuber mass observed in our field trials shows the promise of improving photosynthesis to enable climate-ready crops." Dr Amanda Cavanagh, of the University of Essex, said: "Our major food crops are under threat from climate change and our work has now confirmed that strategies to increase thermotolerance will translate from model to food crops.



Roast potatoes are a staple festive dish

"For many families, roast potatoes are the best part of a Christmas dinner, and this work goes a long way to protecting them for future generations. Away from our festive plates this work could have a huge impact in the developing world and help safeguard crops for the people on the frontline of climate change."

The study was published in the journal *Global Change Biology*.



MAX WILLCOCK/BNPS

Fit for a queen Longleat House, in Wilts, pays homage to its Elizabethan heritage with a Christmas tree in the form of the Tudor monarch's dress.

Farage hopes Trump tactics can mobilise the youth vote

Tice seeks to energise young people after Musk's cash giveaway in US boosted voter numbers

By **Jack Maidment**

REFORM would use Elon Musk's millions to recruit an army of young voters ahead of the next election, the party's deputy leader has said.

Richard Tice revealed that a large donation from the world's richest man would be put to use encouraging young people to sign up to vote.

His remarks come after Nigel Farage, the party's leader, revealed Mr Musk, the Tesla owner, is actively considering making a large donation.

Reform hopes to emulate the success that Donald Trump's recent US election campaign had in getting previous non-voters to the ballot box.

Mr Tice told *The Telegraph*: "Young people are very energised about what we're doing and we've got to make sure they're on the electoral roll.

"That's something Musk did brilliantly. It takes skill, expertise and money and that's a big opportunity.

"If we get lots of young people who may not have voted at all and who are voting Reform you'll see us potentially leading the polls."

During the US election, Mr Trump's team heavily targeted non-voters in seven swing states, with the Republican going on to win all of them.

To encourage people to sign up Mr Musk gave away $1 million (£790,000) each day to people who become "spokespeople" for the campaign.

Reform has given no indication that this tactic is under consideration.

Reform is also hoping to learn from the parties in France, Italy and Germany which have tapped into youth disillusionment.

Polling during July's election campaign found that almost a quarter of 16 and 17-year-olds would have backed Reform if able to vote.

At the election the party was the third-most popular among men aged 18-24.

Mr Tice said that Mr Musk is considering making a sizeable donation because he wants the UK to avoid an economic "catastrophe".

Mr Farage held talks with Mr Musk at Mar-a-Lago, Donald Trump's Florida resort, this week and "the issue of money was discussed".

There has been speculation that he could donate as much as $100 million (£78.8 million).

Asked about the possibility of a donation, Mr Tice told Sky News: "Let's wait and see. I don't know. The reality is he has indicated very strong support for Reform.

"He recognises that Britain, the UK economy, is in a terrible state. He has got significant business interests here with regard to Starlink, X, Tesla.

"He wants Britain to do well. At the moment Britain is doing badly, we have got an economy that is flatlining, going down, we have got job vacancies reducing, business confidence collapsing, so Mr Musk supports Reform. He knows that Britain needs Reform."

Mr Tice claimed the UK will go "bankrupt if we carry on like this under this Labour Government".

He said: "Higher taxes, higher wasteful spending, lower growth. It is a catastrophe and we have got to change course. We have got to reform the way we run our economy, the way we run our public services, the way we run this country."

Asked again about the possibility of a donation from Mr Musk, Mr Tice said: "Is he going to donate? It would be great if he does."

Foreign donations are not allowed in UK politics, but donations can be made through a "UK-registered company which is incorporated in the UK and carries on business in the UK", according to Electoral Commission rules.

There has been speculation that a donation could therefore be made through the UK branch of X, Mr Musk's social media company.

Mr Musk has been a vocal critic of Sir Keir Starmer and the Government.

In August, he attacked the Prime Minister's response to the summer riots and accused him of going "full Stalin" after the inheritance tax raid on farmers.

Mr Musk appeared to back a petition calling for a fresh general election at the end of November.

Last month he also predicted that "all establishment parties in the UK will get crushed in the next election".



Nigel Farage, right, with JD Vance



Rory's story Social media influencer Kai Trump, 17, granddaughter of the US president-elect, managed to snag an interview with Northern Irish golfer Rory McIlroy, 35, for her Instagram. The keen amateur also interviewed other golf professionals.

Starmer faces mounting Labour backlash over Waspi 'betrayal'

By **Nick Gutteridge**
and **Natasha Leake**

LABOUR MPs accused Sir Keir Starmer of "betraying" Waspi women as they mounted a rebellion to try to force him into a U-turn.

Backbenchers pledged to carry on the fight for a payout for the 3.8 million women who were affected by changes to the state pension age.

The Prime Minister was hit with a growing backlash to the decision as the number of his own backbenchers publicly criticising it hit double figures.

Anas Sarwar, the leader of Scottish Labour, also laid into the "deeply disappointing" verdict and said that a "different way could have been found".

Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor, was unrepentant about the move, insisting the compensation was unaffordable and most women knew about the changes. Sir Keir was also directly challenged about the decision by two Labour MPs at Prime Minister's Questions in a damaging blow to his authority.

Diane Abbott, a former shadow home secretary, accused him of a "betrayal" after he promised in opposition to support the Waspi women' s cause.

She told Sir Keir: "The Waspi women fought one of the must sustained and passionate campaigns for justice that I can remember year in year out.

"We did promise them we would give them justice. I understand the issue about the cost but does the PM really understand how let down Waspi women feel today?"

Ian Byrne, another Labour veteran, said the Prime Minister should grant Parliament a vote so that MPs can have their say on the decision.

"Alongside a great many members in this house I believe these women are owed compensation for the injustice done to them at the hands of the state," he said.

Liz Kendall, the Work and Pensions Secretary, announced on Tuesday that the Government would not be paying out compensation to the Waspi women.

The Women Against State Pension Inequality campaign claims 3.8 million women born in the 1950s were not made aware of the raising of the state pension age.

In a 2021 report the parliamentary ombudsman found the Department of Work and Pensions had failed to properly communicate the change to them.

But ministers have ignored its recommendation to pay them up to £2,950 each because it would have cost the taxpayer up to £10.5 billion.

Healey: British troops may be sent to Ukraine to train forces

By **Gwyn Wright**

THE Defence Secretary has opened the door to British troops being sent to Ukraine to help train the country's soldiers.

John Healey said Britain needs to "make the training a better fit for what the Ukrainians need" during a visit to Kyiv.

He told *The Times*: "We [need to] make it easier to the Ukrainians to access and we [need to] work with the Ukrainians to help them motivate and mobilise more recruits."

When asked if this meant extending training of Ukrainian recruits inside the UK to Ukraine itself, he said: "We will look wherever we can to respond to what the Ukrainians want. They are the ones fighting."

Last year Grant Shapps, the former defence secretary, expressed his support for such a move in an interview with *The Sunday Telegraph*.

Mr Healey is believed to be the first government figure to float the same proposal.

He made the comments as he committed Britain to a £225 million package of support for Ukraine as the country comes under growing pressure to enter peace talks with Russia.

During his re-election campaign, Donald Trump promised to end the war in Ukraine on his first day in office while, JD Vance, the incoming vice-president, has said Ukraine should cede land to Russia in exchange for peace.

By contrast, Mr Healey said Kyiv should enter talks "from a position of strength not weakness" in an apparent rebuke to the president-elect.

He added that Ukraine needs to continue to build up its ability to fight and deter Putin and added: "We can't take the eye off the ball."

£225m

Value of support package for Ukraine which the Defence Secretary announced yesterday

Announcing the support package, he said: "Nearly three years after (Russian President Vladimir) Putin launched his illegal full-scale invasion, the depths of his miscalculation are clearer than ever, as the brave people of Ukraine continue to defy all expectations with their unbreakable spirit.

"But they cannot go it alone – which is why the UK will step up our international leadership on Ukraine throughout 2025." He also told LBC yesterday that now is a "critical period for Ukraine".

He added: "Russians are putting Ukraine under pressure on the front line, but Putin himself is showing signs of weakness, calling in North Korean troops to reinforce his own army, walking out on Assad and failing to defend his own positions in Syria."

It comes after the former foreign minister of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, accused Sir Keir Starmer of watering down Britain's support for Kyiv.

He suggested Labour had simply followed the Americans, while the previous government had taken more of a leadership role.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister said during a visit to Norway that it would be a "big mistake" if the allies did not maintain their support.

In Westminster, the Financial Assistance to Ukraine Bill cleared the Commons without any opposition yesterday afternoon.

The Bill allows the Government to provide loans and other financial assistance to Ukraine.

Britain's contribution to the G7 group of nations loan package is £2.26 billion.

Other contributors include the United States, the European Union, Canada and Japan.

Ghost of Labour's Christmas past returns to haunt our pig in blankets

Sketch



By **Madeline Grant**

TWAS a week before Christmas and all through the House, not a brain cell was stirring, there was no show of nous.

Christmas was historically a time for ghost stories. If Charles Dickens could see the current bunch of ghouls on the government benches he would have kicked himself and said: "I wish I'd thought of that." Seasonal flu or terminal incompetence? Either way Rachel Reeves looked like she'd been moonlighting as a cadaver in *Silent Witness*. Along from the Playmobil Chancellor squatted the Foreign Secretary, the Sage of Tottenham himself, though tellingly, when an urgent question was granted about the Chagos Islands he scuttled out like a turtle in mating season. Yvette Cooper looked like she was sucking a lemon. And not a candied one. It was a veritable advent calendar of ineptitude.

Only two people looked even faintly beatific on the government benches: Big Ange and Uncle Wes. Given they're the two people most likely to end up taking charge and sacking the rest of these pygmies, one can forgive them both a Christmas dream or two.

Worst of all though was the PM himself. Sir Keir was, and I say this with – regrettably – some knowledge of the subject, on his worst form in years. Question after question from Mrs Badenoch, about the WASPI women, about winter fuel, about taxes on charities was greeted with the same stock response. As in panto, you know the lines by now, repeat after me: "£22 billion black hole", "fixing the foundations", "14 years". Not a single question answered, no point of any relevance made: our resident pig was wrapped too tightly in the blanket of his own smuggery to be held accountable, thank you very much.

> 'Only two people looked even faintly beatific on the government benches: Big Ange and Uncle Wes'

In the midst of this Mrs Badenoch scored a few hits. "He needs to misrepresent me to make his points, I don't need to misrepresent him." This was delivered with a purr, like the cat who'd got the brandy butter. She wasn't the only one to deploy the WASPIs with a sting. Backbenchers, including MPs from the Tories and Plaid Cymru brought it up. Sir Keir repeated the same guff.

Some of the most effective interventions came from unlikely places. Diane Abbott reminded him that Labour MPs had been elected on a promise to do the opposite of what the government proposed to do. Decked in black, every inch a Ghost of Christmas – or Labour – past, she held Sir Keir's feet to the fire. If the Mother of the House went for the "killing me softly" approach, Dave Doogan of the SNP gave the PM a much harder barracking. Accusing Sir Keir of being a "one trick phoney" Prime Minister, he asked whether he had any idea why people viewed him with contempt. Behind, the row of Reform MPs nodded sagely.

Starmer replied to both with bristling arrogance. To Abbott he made faint promises delivered in a patronising tone. To the latter question he repeated his snark about the SNP previously asking questions from where the Lib Dems now sit. "He's carping from up there, we can hardly hear him!", he snarled.

This sort of bluster can only carry him for so long, and as I looked upon those sitting next to him in the Chamber of Horrors, I suspect they realised the same thing.

New MasterChef host is 'part-time vegan'

Replacement for Gregg Wallace once wrote about preferring to eat 'things that didn't have a face'

By **India McTaggart**
ENTERTAINMENT CORRESPONDENT

GREGG WALLACE'S *MasterChef* replacement has been revealed as a "part-time vegan".

Restaurant critic Grace Dent, 51, will judge the next series of *Celebrity MasterChef* alongside John Torode, the BBC announced.

The author and podcaster has previously described herself as maintaining a "mainly vegan" diet, but also suggested she preferred not to identify as a "flexitarian".

In a 2018 column for *The Guardian*, she wrote: "I merely adore vegetarian food and have always preferred to eat things that didn't ever have a face."

She will now judge the popular BBC cooking programme's 20th series after it was announced last month that Wallace would be stepping away from the role amid a review into allegations of misconduct.

Dent has regularly appeared as a guest on *MasterChef*, and last year was a contestant on *MasterChef: Battle Of The Critics*.

She said: "I've been watching *MasterChef* since I was a girl sitting with my dad on the sofa. My whole family watches it. It's all about uncovering and championing talent – and to have ended up in this position, is more than a dream to me.

"I'm so excited that I can't eat, which is severely detrimental to a restaurant critic. I feel very lucky to be stepping in for the next *Celebrity MasterChef*.

"I can't wait to meet the fresh celebrity faces for 2025."

Dent writes a restaurant review column for *The Guardian* and hosts celebrity food podcast *Comfort Eating*.

Writing about her diet in 2022 and the "backlash" it had caused, she said: "The vegans aren't happy with me because I'm not fully vegan and the meat eaters say I'm trying to destroy the farming industry.

"Any nuance seems to get lost. It does seem to fascinate people, though, that I'm a food critic who doesn't love foie gras. Stereotypically, those guys love a kidney, bone marrow, sweetbreads. Not me."

Dent's book *Comfort Eating: What We Eat When Nobody's Looking* was published last year, while her memoir *Hungry* was published in 2020.

Torode, who has presented *MasterChef* since 2005, said: "I have loved working with Grace on *MasterChef* over the years. She has been an excellent guest, an inspiring critic and also set some incredible challenges.

"Expertise is what *MasterChef* is all about, from the contestants to our wonderful production team, to us as judges.

"The love of food, the love of *MasterChef*, and that unquestionable expertise makes Grace the perfect person to step in alongside me as [a] judge for the forthcoming *Celebrity MasterChef* series."

Kalpna Patel-Knight, the BBC's head of entertainment, said Dent was the "perfect choice" for the role. She added: "Grace is not only an energetic and well-established member of the *MasterChef* team but is also a world-renowned food critic, so she will certainly keep the next batch of celebrities on their toes."



BBC/PA

The most recent series of *MasterChef: The Professionals* continued to air amid a storm of allegations against Wallace, with two *MasterChef* celebrity Christmas specials, a *Celebrity MasterChef Christmas Cook-Off* and a *Strictly* festive extravaganza pulled from the BBC's schedule. At least 13 women have accused him of multiple instances of sexually inappropriate behaviour, although his lawyers have strongly denied that "he engages in behaviour of a sexually harassing nature". Earlier this month, Wallace caused outrage by claiming the allegations against him came from a "handful of middle-class women of a certain age".

He later apologised for the remarks, saying he was under a "huge amount of stress". A spokesman for Banijay UK, which produces *MasterChef* for the BBC, previously said it was conducting "an immediate, external review to fully and impartially investigate". Wallace has reportedly told friends he expects to be sacked from the show following its conclusion.

Earlier this week, it was alleged that he told Gizzi Erskine, a television chef, that she was not a "real chef" because she was a woman. She told the *Go To Food* podcast: "It's really interesting seeing what's going on with Gregg Wallace, because me and him had a huge argument. He told me and Sophie Michell that we weren't real chefs, and we couldn't possibly be because we were women."

Grace Dent, a restaurant critic and food writer, will replace Gregg Wallace, left, and join John Torode on Celebrity MasterChef

'Grace will certainly keep the next batch of celebrities on their toes'

She added: "It might have been through direct messages ... Something started, so we jumped in and then it all went really aggy. There is an insidious side to that side of it. I definitely get treated differently to the men in the room."

Wallace's representatives were approached for comment. Wallace's lawyers previously told BBC News: "It is entirely false that he engages in behaviour of a sexually harassing nature".

MP accused of helping dictator in Bangladesh embezzle funds

By **Max Stephens**

A LABOUR minister faces being caught up in a reported investigation by the Bangladeshi government over allegations of embezzlement.

Tulip Siddiq, the Labour MP for Hampstead and Highgate, is accused of helping her aunt Sheikh Hasina, the recently ousted dictator of Bangladesh, embezzle funds, according to reports in Bangladeshi media.

Labour Party insiders characterised the allegations as "spurious claims" and said Ms Siddiq had not been contacted over the matter.

If confirmed, it risks sparking a diplomatic row between the UK and Bangladesh. Bangladesh's Anti Corruption Commission reportedly told local news outlets on Tuesday that it had opened an investigation into allegations the family had illegally siphoned a total of £5.2 billion for building of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project and eight other large-scale building projects.



Tulip Siddiq is the Labour MP for Hampstead and Highgate

All were implemented by the Awami League, the country's former ruling party of which Ms Siddiq's aunt was the leader.

Sheikh Hasina, 76, the longest-serving prime minister of Bangladesh, is now in India, having been ousted after 15 years in power. During her tenure, opponents were attacked, arrested and secretly imprisoned as the regime carried out extrajudicial killings.

A new government has since taken over and is now pursuing the former ruler and her family.

Ms Siddiq did not respond to repeated requests from *The Telegraph* for comment on the investigation.

The Telegraph previously reported on how Ms Siddiq's family home was ransacked after Hasina fled the country in August following violent protests against her 15-year-long rule.

According to analysis by local news outlets, more than 300 people were killed in clashes between students, government supporters and armed police, at least 32 of those were children.

A murder investigation has been opened into Hasina over a police killing of a grocer during the deadly protests.

Groucho club to reopen – but with staff watching lavatories

By **Daily Telegraph Reporter**

THE Groucho Club is to reopen after the venue's licence was reinstated on condition that staff monitor the lavatories.

The London private members' club, popular with A-list celebrities, had its licence temporarily suspended following allegations that a woman was raped inside the venue on Nov 13.

A 34-year-old man was arrested in Hertfordshire on suspicion of rape and has subsequently been bailed.

Yesterday, a Westminster city council licensing sub-committee lifted the licence suspension with immediate effect, provided the club complies with new conditions that will be decided in the coming days.

This includes 13 recommendations from the Metropolitan Police on properly supervising lavatory areas, proper staff welfare training, and a tightening-up of "previously lax procedures" relating to members and their guests.

Groucho staff cried as the committee made its ruling. An announcement on its next steps was due last night, a club representative confirmed.

Discussions over the police investigation were held in private.

'It became apparent that there were breaches of the licensing conditions at the time of the trigger offence'

Gary Grant, representing the force, said: "The police investigation led to meetings between police licensing officers of Westminster and the management of the Groucho Club.

"As a result of those decisions it became apparent that there were a number of breaches of the licensing conditions at the time of the trigger offence." The force launched a summary-review application that led to a sub-committee hearing on Nov 26, after which the club's licence was suspended.

Mr Grant said the proposed updated conditions were particularly related to the "prevention of future crime and disorder". They included that all lavatories which were not for disabled customers should be "monitored by a CCTV operative", and a trained welfare officer should be at the venue.

For six months, the same lavatories would be supervised by an attendant.

These three stipulations would be in place from 7pm until the club closes on Tuesday to Saturday, and on a "risk-assessed basis" if there was a pre-booked private function.

Further proposals stated there would be a one-person limit in each cubicle at any time and anyone in breach of that would be "immediately ejected".

Pitt 'body double' jailed after rape by removing condom

By **Daniel Sanderson**
SCOTTISH CORRESPONDENT

AN ACTOR who claimed he worked as Brad Pitt's body double has been jailed for 16 years for a campaign of sexual and physical abuse against women.

Luke Ford, 35, was found guilty of abusing nine female victims, including the rape of six of them and the attempted rape of another.

The High Court in Edinburgh heard how one of the attacks included so-called "stealthing", defined as the intentional removal of a condom during sexual intercourse without the consent of the sexual partner.

It is the first prosecution in Scotland for a crime that has become more prominent in the past week after Megan Barton-Hanson, a reality television star, revealed that she had been a victim.

Yesterday, Ford was given a 21-year extended sentence with 16 years in custody. His name has been added to the sex offenders register indefinitely. The jobbing actor and model from Stirling claimed to have featured as a stand-in for Pitt in the film *World War Z*, which was shot in Glasgow in 2013.

He targeted women on dating apps, first showering them with affection before financially exploiting, controlling and abusing them. One of Ford's victims, who spoke to STV News on the condition of anonymity, said he had been "quite obsessed with Brad Pitt".

"I honestly believe that he's a serial perpetrator and a master manipulator and there's many more victims out there," she said "He genuinely thought he was going to be the next Brad Pitt.

"I think there were multiple stunt doubles, but the way that he spun it, it looked like he was Brad Pitt's one-and-only stunt double. But he became fixated with that time, and then he modelled his hair on Brad Pitt."

In the stealthing case, Ford met a female psychologist on Tinder in 2017



Luke Ford said he was a stand-in for Brad Pitt, right, in the Glasgow-shot *World War Z*

and after a few dates they discussed having sex. She messaged Ford stipulating that he use protection because she did not want to risk pregnancy and he responded, "good idea".

When they were in bed, she handed him a condom, but he later told her that he had not used it. She said: "I was shocked and upset. I would not have had sex with him without a condom. I asked him to leave. I felt completely violated." When she confronted him the next day with concern that she could be pregnant, he angrily dismissed her as paranoid, saying it was "no big deal". He texted: "Just get the [morning after] pill and if you are pregnant get rid of it."

There have only been only two previous successful prosecutions for stealthing in the UK, in England in 2019 and earlier this year.

Katrina Parkes, Scotland's procurator fiscal for High Court sexual offending, said: "Luke Ford is a serial offender who demonstrated no respect for the consent of his victims. He was prepared to use manipulation, force or threats to carry out his abuse. He showed disregard for the importance of consent between partners.

"I hope that the many victims in this troubling case find some relief in Ford being held accountable for his offending. I commend them for their courage and strength."



Labour accused of U-turn over single-sex spaces for females

By **Fiona Parker** *and* **Michael Searles**

TRANSGENDER women can use some single-sex spaces intended for females, the Government has said.

Sir Keir Starmer previously said it was very important to "protect female-only spaces" in a debate with Rishi Sunak during the election campaign. But Labour has been accused of breaking that pledge after releasing a response on a consultation, which confirmed that public and private bodies can write policies that allow transgender women into female-only places.

The Women and Equalities Unit indicated that such a circumstance would be legally acceptable under the Equality Act 2010, as long as the organisation did not "incorrectly" claim that the Equality Act obliged it to do so. Branding the response "deeply worrying", Claire Coutinho, the shadow minister for women, told *The Telegraph* that this was "yet another promise" that Labour had "broken to the electorate".

The row centres around a consultation that was launched by Kemi Badenoch, the then minister for women and equalities, in May. This was launched because of concern about trans women, who are born male, accessing women's lavatories and other single-sex spaces.

The call for input was made to "understand how public bodies and organisations which advise public and private organisations" may be "misinterpreting the law on providing single-sex spaces". Mrs Badenoch requested examples of guidance that suggested that people had a legal right to access single-sex spaces and services, according to their self-identified gender. Under the Equality Act, organisations can exclude trans people from single-sex spaces where such a decision would be deemed a "proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim".

This could be for reasons of privacy, decency and to prevent trauma. Yet, although the call for input closed in June, the Government only provided a response this week.

A government spokesman said: "This Government is absolutely steadfast in its commitment to protecting single-sex spaces which are protected in the Equality Act. We are taking action to give all providers assurances about the rights protected by the Act."

Trans laird sues NHS for refusing third sex change

Lady Samantha Kane taking legal action after undergoing 'botched' operation in Serbia

By **Daniel Sanderson**
SCOTTISH CORRESPONDENT

A TRANSGENDER laird is suing the NHS after it refused to carry out a third sex change surgery.

Samantha Kane, who was born male and now styles herself as Lady Carbisdale after buying a £5 million Scottish castle, is thought to be the only person in Britain to have changed gender three times.

Ms Kane, who was born male, had surgery in 1997 to become Samantha, before having it reversed and taking on the identity of Charles Kane in 2004.

She claims doctors at University College London Hospital NHS Foundation Trust then refused a request for a third surgery to revert to a woman in 2017, leading Ms Kane to have a private procedure in Serbia in 2018, which was allegedly "botched". Ms Kane, a trained engineer, barrister and business tycoon, alleges that the NHS then refused treatment again after the Serbian procedure allegedly resulted in "infected" surgical devices being left inside her body, which she said caused agony lasting three years.

UCLH medics finally agreed to help in 2021, Ms Kane said.

In the legal claim, the 64-year-old said the refusal to provide treatment relating to the third gender reassignment amounted to negligence, discrimination and a breach of human rights.

Representing herself at a short pre-trial hearing last week, Ms Kane told High Court judge Deputy Master Ruth Fine that she was suing UCLH partly because of the "negligence of causing me to seek surgery in Serbia rather than here".

Criticising the NHS trust as in effect being responsible for the "botched Serbian op", she told the judge: "The negligence of them not treating me has caused the botched surgery. It was negligent of the defendant not to treat me in 2017.

"The defendants are the only people who are qualified to provide this treatment in the UK.

"They treat everybody else, then discriminated against me."

The second part of the claim relates to an allegation that UCLH medics refused to help correct the "botched " operation, telling Ms Kane to return to Serbia to get help there instead.

She added: "They left me in pain for three years before offering me treatment. They subjected me to unnecessary pain for three years."

Ms Kane had complained of "chronic left groin and genital area pain", the court heard.

"They were the people qualified to treat me and they refused. This was discrimination against me because I had made a [previous] complaint," she claimed, telling the judge that it was "foreseeable" that she would go to Serbia after being refused an NHS operation.

The court heard that Ms Kane is claiming £162,000, according to the schedule of loss, but told the judge that the case was not so much about the money, "but more about achieving justice".

Sam Burrett, for the NHS trust, told the judge that they would fight the claim.

'They were the people qualified to treat me and they refused. This is discrimination against me'

A full trial is set to take place at a later date.

In 2000, Ms Kane, then Sam Hashimi, spearheaded a Saudi Arabian attempt to buy Sheffield United Football Club.

She dubbed herself Lady Carbisdale in 2022 after buying Carbisdale Castle, a 19-bedroom clifftop Scottish castle near Ardgay in Sutherland. In 2024, the property was valued at £5 million.

Earlier this year, Ms Kane announced plans to sell the castle, claiming that the rural community was "not ready" to accept someone who had changed their gender.

She said in September: "I really have been quite hurt by comments on my gender identity, so now I think it just needs someone, for a better word, 'normal' to take over."

"It is such a special place but I did suffer some prejudice and I think probably the Highlands is not ready for a transgender owner of the castle.

"It needs someone else to protect its future."



CHAMPION NEWS

Samantha Kane dubbed herself Lady Carbisdale in 2022 after buying Carbisdale Castle, near Ardgay in Sutherland

Christmas is coming but not your parcels as port stays shut

By **Tom McArdle**

PARCELS will not be delivered in time for Christmas after the closure of Holyhead port, haulage bosses have said, amid warnings many customers will be left disappointed as dozens of trailers have been left stranded in Anglesey, north Wales.

Holyhead Port announced it would remain closed until Jan 15 "at the earliest" following damage caused by Storm Darragh 11 days ago.

It is one of the busiest departure and arrival points for goods and freight between the UK and Ireland, with approximately 1,200 lorries and trailers making the crossing daily.

The port has been closed to all marine traffic since the storm, but Tuesday's announcement saw this extended into 2025.

The closure has caused logistics chaos in the run-up to Christmas, as companies scramble to redirect parcels to alternative ports such as Liverpool.

Darren Murphy, managing director of BM Transport haulage company, described the port as now resembling "a big car park".

On what goods would be impacted, he told BBC Radio 4's *Today*: "Everything that we have. We have supplies for supermarkets, white goods, cleaning products, building products – a variety of goods.

"We are trying to prioritise parcels

'We are trying to prioritise parcels by speaking to our customers and seeing what can wait and what has to go'

and items like that for Christmas by speaking to our customers and seeing what can wait and what has to go."

Mr Murphy said his company still had 50 trailers "sitting there" full of goods at the port.

"It's just not simple now," he continued. Everything we have will not [be delivered] in time for Christmas.

"There's nothing moving at the moment, it's virtually empty because most of the freighters got their traffic moved. It's a dust bowl at the moment.

It's not easy because the rest of the ports, especially Liverpool, Birkenhead and Heysham are overwhelmed with traffic."

David McRedmond, the chief executive of An Post, Ireland's national postal service, said more than half a million parcels had been redirected to other ports amid Holyhead's closure.

"As we stand we don't have anything waiting in Holyhead, but of course it means the supply chains are very delayed," he said.

"It's much longer to go via Pembroke or Fishguard but there's no doubt this puts pressure on supply chains. And it just shows the reliance we have on what is now a single point of failure."

Tractor tax will hit more farms as HMRC has 'undervalued' them

By **Amy Gibbons**
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

THE impact of Labour's "tractor tax" has been underestimated because HMRC did not consider the full value of British farms, an industry leader has warned.

The true number of farmers who will be hit by the inheritance tax (IHT) raid is feared to be five times as high as claimed by the Treasury because the businesses have been historically undervalued.

Jeremy Moody, the secretary and adviser to the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers, said that the discrepancy was down to people not taking into account the true value of things such as machinery and livestock when going through the probate process, on the advice of HMRC.

Because they were covered by business property relief, he said this would not have affected their liability for inheritance tax.

But now that Labour has cut tax breaks for farmers on assets over £1million, those goods will need to be properly factored in when calculating the "market value" of the land.

This means that far more farmers than thought could end up having to pay the "tractor tax".

Until now, farmers have been able to claim up to 100 per cent relief on IHT on their land and buildings through agricultural property relief, and up to 100 per cent relief on their operational equipment and livestock through business property relief.

However, from April 2026, only the first £1 million of both their land and business combined will qualify for these tax breaks.

Speaking to BBC Radio 4's *Farming Today*, Mr Moody said farmers claiming business property relief have historically based their returns on the balance sheets in their annual accounts, which are based on cost, rather than the "market value" that is actually required by inheritance tax laws.

"The taxpayers have done what HMRC has said in its guide to filling in the inheritance tax [form] they should do, so they have followed official government guidance," he said.

"The Act strictly requires market value. But I assume here that HMRC has said this is the pragmatic way to save everybody time and cost and effort in a process where getting probate can take long enough anyway, without needing something that doesn't alter the answer, because there's been full relief."

As a result, he said assets such as machinery, livestock and silage will have been undervalued on paper.

He added: "I think the obvious and easy example is something like a dairy herd, where, if it's been run by the farm for decades, that might have had a historic value of £400 or £500 a cow, that might now be £1,800 or £2,200 were it on market value today."

Over a generation, Mr Moody said 75,000 farmers will be hit by the change. By contrast, the Government has said that fewer than 500 estates a year will be affected by the Budget. This is based on data from HMRC showing the number of estates claiming agricultural property relief each year.

Making prenups legally binding would hit 'stay-at-home wives' says top law adviser

By **Charles Hymas**
HOME AFFAIRS EDITOR

PRENUPTIAL agreements should be made legally binding despite fears they could hit stay-at-home wives, the Law Commission has said.

The commission, which advises ministers on legal reforms, has proposed an overhaul of matrimonial law arguing that the decades-old rules for determining how financial assets are split after divorce are unpredictable and "promote dispute".

Judges have tended to split the combined "matrimonial" wealth of divorcing partners equally, even if one partner is the breadwinner, under the principle that each spouse made an equal contribution to the marriage.

But they have broad discretion on interpreting the law, including which assets are deemed "non-matrimonial".

Nuptial agreements – documents signed before or during the marriage specifying how assets are to be carved up if it ends – have been recognised by the courts since a 2010 Supreme Court ruling involving Katrin Radmacher, the German paper-industry heiress, but they are not automatically binding.

Ms Radmacher won the right to protect her "non-matrimonial" fortune and hundreds of millions of pounds controlled by her family from Nicolas Granatino, her ex husband and banker turned academic.

Ms Radmacher, 55, fought a four-year court battle after Mr Granatino claimed the contract was unfair as he had not realised the true extent of his wife's fortune.



Katrin Radmacher won her court case

The commission said the law should be changed so that such prenuptial agreements were legally binding provided they had been entered into freely without duress and met the needs of the spouses and any children.

But senior judges and academics warned such a change in the law could disadvantage the less wealthy partners in a marriage - particularly women - who might sacrifice their careers to bring up a family.

Police can seize £2m from Andrew Tate and his brother in unpaid tax, judge rules

By **Fiona Parker**
SENIOR NEWS REPORTER

POLICE have been granted permission to seize £2 million from Andrew Tate and his brother Tristan in unpaid tax.

At Westminster magistrates' court yesterday, Senior District Judge Paul Goldspring ruled that the pair had failed to pay a penny in tax on £21 million of revenue from online businesses.

Devon and Cornwall Police made a legal bid to seize the money, which was held in seven frozen bank accounts, from the Tates and a woman who can only be legally identified as "J".

Andrew Tate, 38, a former professional kickboxer, rose to fame by broadcasting anti-feminist views online.

He has been banned from TikTok, YouTube and Facebook after the platforms accused him of posting hate speech and misogynistic comments. He remains popular on X, formerly Twitter. In a statement after the ruling, Tate said: "First, they labelled me a human trafficker, yet they couldn't find a single woman to stand against me.

"When that narrative crumbled, they turned to outright theft – freezing my accounts for more than two years and now seizing everything they could.

"This is not justice; it's a co-ordinated attack on anyone who dares to challenge the system."

Westminster magistrates' court previously heard how Tate and his brother failed to pay tax on revenue from War Room, Hustlers' University, Cobra Tate and OnlyFans between 2014 and 2022.

Sarah Clarke KC, for Devon and Cornwall Police, quoted from a video posted online by Tate in which he said: "When I lived in England I refused to pay tax."

The court was told the brothers paid just under $12 million into an account in the name of "J" and opened a second account in her name, though she had no role in their businesses. In his judgment yesterday, Senior District Judge Goldspring said what appeared to be a "complex financial matrix" was actually a "straightforward cheat of the revenue".

The Tate brothers face separate, criminal allegations in Romania and are set to be extradited to the UK once those proceedings are concluded to face further accusations here.

They are accused of human trafficking and forming a criminal gang to exploit women in one case in Romania, in which Tate is also accused of rape.

Bedfordshire Police secured an international arrest warrant for the brothers relating to allegations of rape and human trafficking dating back to 2012-2015, which they deny.

After the ruling, a spokesman for Devon and Cornwall Police said that "we have aimed to demonstrate that Andrew and Tristan Tate evaded taxes and laundered money through bank accounts located in Devon ... We will refrain from further comment until the 28-day appeal period has concluded".



JORDAN PETTITT/PA; PAUL GROVER FOR THE TELEGRAPH

Red Bull gives you gongs
Christian Horner, boss of Red Bull Racing Formula 1 team, receives his CBE from the King at Buckingham Palace, after which he celebrated with his wife, Geri, the former Spice Girl. The honour recognises Mr Horner's services to motorsport.

Duke to stay home after Duchess's quiet word

Ex-wife convinces Andrew to avoid Christmas lunch at the Palace, leaving the King 'very grateful'

By **Victoria Ward**
DEPUTY ROYAL EDITOR

THE Duke of York will not attend the Royal family's Christmas lunch at Buckingham Palace today because of "deft family diplomacy" by Sarah, Duchess of York, *The Telegraph* understands.

The Duke has pulled out of the annual private event, a highlight in the royal calendar, after becoming embroiled in a scandal over an alleged Chinese spy.

The decision was made in close consultation with his former wife, who intervened to persuade her husband that the family's pre-Christmas lunch was not be the right occasion for him to step back into the spotlight.

The King is understood to be "very grateful" for her intervention.

However, palace aides had been kept in the dark as the couple thrashed it out behind the scenes, seemingly unaware as early as yesterday morning about what they might decide to do.

The furore surrounding the Duke's close links to Yang Tengbo prompted palace sources to urge him to "do the decent thing" and step back from high-profile family events so as not to further embarrass the King.

The Duke has also decided not to join his family for Christmas at Sandringham in Norfolk, a decision that will come as a relief to Buckingham Palace aides. It means he will not be photographed with family members as they walk to church on Christmas morning.

The intervention suggests that the Duchess has become a valuable ally for the King as one of the few who can influence her former husband. It is also a further example of how the tide has turned for a woman who was once very much an outsider herself. Since his accession, the King has made a point of bringing the Duchess in from the cold, inviting her to the past two family Christmases at Sandringham for the first time in three decades and allowing her to join the high-profile walk to church last year.

Revelations about the Duke's relationship with Yang have heaped renewed pressure on the beleaguered Duke. It emerged on Dec 12 that the alleged spy, described as a "close confidant" of the Duke in court documents, had been banned from the UK on national security grounds.

When an anonymity order was lifted on Monday, it was revealed that Yang was a founding partner of the Duke's Pitch@Palace initiative in China and invited to meetings and events alongside the Duke, who is feared to have been targeted and courted over a number of years.

It has put pressure on the Duke to reveal how much he earned from the *Dragons' Den*-style partnership and whether any other money changed hands. Earlier this year, it emerged that he now privately funds his 30-room home at Windsor and security, but the source of the funding is not known. The maintenance costs, as well as his private security bill, are thought to add up to millions of pounds a year.

Earlier this year, the King cut off his funding for the Duke, in the hope it would encourage him to move into a less expensive property.

The Royal family's annual Christmas lunch offers a chance for the monarch to celebrate with the extended family.

Royal aides were concerned that had the Duke attended, it might have appeared as if he had the King's support, causing further negative headlines.

The Duke and Duchess of York are likely to spend Christmas at Royal Lodge, the home they still share in Windsor.

It had already been decided that their daughters, Princess Beatrice and Princess Eugenie, would not go to Sandringham this year.

Since his accession in 2022, the King has allowed the Duke to join the family on the traditional stroll from Sandringham House to St Mary Magdalene church on Christmas Day.

However, the Duke was banned from taking part in 2019, weeks after his disastrous *Newsnight* interview prompted him to step back from public duties.

Switching roles Andrew's ex-aide now works for Chinese company

The Duke of York's former right-hand woman, Amanda Thirsk, is now working for a Chinese company that tried to take over a large British firm. The former banker, who was the Duke's closest aide for 16 years, has a business development role with JD.com, an online retail group operating more than 1,600 warehouses in China. She is said to have been involved in the company's evaluation of a possible bid for Currys, the electrical retailer, earlier this year. Hired as the Duke's office controller in 2004, she was responsible for his public and private finances but was later promoted to the role of private secretary, acting as the Duke's gatekeeper and most senior aide for the rest of his public working life.



Amanda Thirsk, left, was the Duke's closest aide for 16 years and now works for a Chinese online retail company

As such, the mother of three was at the heart of the Duke's Pitch@Palace initiative, running the profit-making international arm for more than three years from 2017 and its charitable arm for five years from 2015.
Ms Thirsk is said to have been deeply involved in the start-up of Pitch@Palace China. It was co-founded by Yang Tengbo, the alleged spy. One source suggested that she all but ran the Pitch "China Club" on the Duke's behalf.

Beauty cream is the bee's knees as Queen awards Royal Warrant

By **Victoria Ward** DEPUTY ROYAL EDITOR

THE QUEEN has awarded a Royal Warrant to the beauty consultant behind her bee venom facials.

For the first time, Her Majesty has granted a handful of new warrants to her go-to team of fashion designers and beauty experts that have worked alongside her for decades.

They include trusted dressmakers Anna Valentine and Fiona Clare as well her favoured milliner, Philip Treacy.

The Queen has also given the royal seal of approval to Heaven Health and Beauty, run by Deborah Mitchell, the beauty expert to whom she has turned for bee venom and collagen facials for 18 years and Jo Hansford, the London hair stylist who has been maintaining her locks for three decades.

Couturier Roy Allen, who has been creating outfits for the Queen, as well as senior royals such as Diana and Princess Margaret, for decades, has also been awarded a warrant.

Ms Mitchell, 59, said it was an "incredible" accolade that would prove a huge boost to business, and in particular, foreign exports.

She said the Queen, then the Duchess of Cornwall, had first contacted her shortly after she married Charles in 2005, and was the first person to try her Bee Venom Mask. It has since become a cult favourite. "The Queen was the first to try it when I made it," she said. "I handmake the products and do her treatments as well. Her new favourite is collagen drops – which you drink – and she is still using the bee venom."

Ms Mitchell, whose Shropshire-based company employs just 14 people, is understood to be a regular visitor to the Queen, travelling to wherever she is asked to provide facials. Her bee venom mask can be used as a moisturiser or overnight treatment. Made with organic oils, Manuka honey and patented blend of bee venom, it tricks the skin into thinking it has been stung, sending collagen and elastin to the area to repair itself.

Anna Valentine, who designed the gown worn by the Queen when she married the King in 2005, said she was "honoured" to have been granted a warrant. "It is a wonderful recognition for the 16 highly skilled artisans employed at the Anna Valentine atelier in Marylebone, and a testament to Her Majesty's loyalty, which is greatly appreciated," she said.

The King and Queen have granted royal warrants to almost 400 companies that supply the Royal household. From piano tuners to fine art dealers, plasterers to tree surgeons, they represent the final slew of grants to be awarded following a major review after the King's accession.

The list of recipients includes Champagne manufacturers Bollinger and Veuve Clicquot as well as popular household favourites such as Weetabix and John Lewis.

Royal warrants are granted for up to five years at a time as a mark of recognition for the ongoing supply of goods or services to the royal household and senior members of the Royal family.

In May, it was announced that 145 companies that previously held warrants from the King as Prince of Wales, had been renewed. In addition, the Queen granted her own set of seven warrants, including Corney & Barrow, the London wine merchants, and Fortnum & Mason, the grocers.

The new warrants granted by the Queen represent the first time she has been able to give a public vote of confidence to her most trusted suppliers.



Heaven bee venom is a favourite of the Queen

Drug firm linked to spy suspect subject to five-year fraud probe

By **Will Bolton** *and* **Connor Stringer**

A COMPANY linked to the alleged Chinese spy was investigated by the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) over foreign bribery claims, *The Telegraph* can reveal.

Yang Tengbo, who was unmasked on Monday as the suspected foreign agent at the centre of the Prince Andrew scandal, was the director of Newland UK Ltd when it was embroiled in a fraud probe with drugs giant GlaxoSmithKline.

The SFO launched a five-year investigation into the pharmaceutical company's "commercial practices" over allegations of foreign bribery in 2014.

The probe was dropped in 2019 because there was "either insufficient evidence" or it was "not in the public interest" to continue.

By that time, Newland UK had become Hampton Group International, a lobbying firm that has extensive links to China. The disclosure raises yet more questions about Yang, 50, who was banned from Britain on national security grounds, and his businesses.

A spokesman for Yang told *The Telegraph*: "In the context of its lengthy investigation into GSK, the SFO looked into GSK's supplier relationships, of which Hampton Group was one.

"In its work for GSK, Hampton Group did nothing wrong, and following the conclusion of the SFO's exhaustive enquiries over two years, this was also the SFO's conclusion." In the same year the SFO launched its investigation into GlaxoSmithKline, China fined the drugs giant $490 million (£297 million) after a court found it guilty of bribery.

The penalty followed allegations that the pharmaceutical firm paid bribes to doctors and hospitals to have its products promoted.

Mark Reilly, GSK's former head of Chinese operations, was handed a three-year suspended prison sentence and deported during the one-day trial at a court in Changsha.

The Home Office decided to exclude Yang from the UK in July last year after MI5 deemed him to be an agent who had engaged in "covert and deceptive activity" on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party, and that he posed a threat to national security.



Yang Tengbo pictured with then prime minister Baroness May in 2019

Yang, 50, challenged his ban, but yesterday the Special Immigration Appeals Commission ruled that Suella Braverman, the home secretary at the time, was justified in her decision to ban him from the UK.

The judges described Yang in their ruling as a "close confidant" of Prince Andrew. He was a founding member of the Duke's venture Pitch@Palace China and mixed with figures from across the British establishment including Lord Cameron, Baroness May and George Osborne.

Lisa Osofsky, then director of the SFO, stepped down in 2023 after serving her full tenure that contained a series of high-profile errors and scandals. At the time of the investigation, a spokesman for Glaxo said the company was "pleased that the SFO have closed their investigation and concluded that no further action is required".

The Serious Fraud Office said: "We conducted a thorough investigation into GlaxoSmithKline, its subsidiaries and associated persons. In line with established practice to protect our operations, we can neither confirm nor deny any individuals or entities subject to a closed investigation."

The Duke of York, Buckingham Palace and GSK were asked for comment.

O2

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1 Apple Intelligence coming fall 2024 with Siri and device language set to U.S. English. Some features and languages will be coming over the next year.

Representative example	Duration of Device Plan	Upfront Cost	Monthly Device Payment	Credit Amount	Total Amount Payable for Device	Interest Rate	Representative APR	Cash Price	Airtime Plan	Airtime Plan June 2024 – April 2025	Airtime Plan May 2025 – March 2026
iPhone 16 Pro Max	36 months	£30	£35.30	£1,270.80	£1,300.80	0%	0%	£1,300.80	£29.99	£29.99 + RPI% announced in Feb 2025 = Price A	Price A + RPI% announced in Feb 2026 +3.9%

RPI rate is Retail Price Index rate of inflation announced in February each year. £35.30 Device Plan for 36 months and £29.99 monthly rolling Airtime Plan. £30 upfront. £144 saving consists of a £4 per month discount on the 150GB, Unlimited & Unlimited Plus Airtime Plans over 36 months. Airtime discount applies until you change tariff, leave or upgrade. Data allowances must be used within the month and cannot be carried over. Subject to availability. Ends 8 January 2025. Sale now on. Great deals on selected phones, tablets, laptops, sims and accessories when bought directly from O2. Subject to availability, while stocks last. Terms apply, see o2.co.uk/terms, or ask a member of staff for details. Ends 8 January 2025. O2 Refresh custom plans: Direct purchases only. Pay the cash price for your device or spread the cost over 3 to 36 months (excludes dongles). The device cost will be the same whatever you choose. There may be an upfront cost. You can pay off your Device Plan at any time and choose to keep your Airtime Plan, upgrade it, or leave. If you are in the first 24 months of your Device Plan and you cancel your Airtime Plan you will have to pay the remainder of your Device Plan in full. After 24 months you can keep your Airtime Plan, upgrade it, or end it without affecting your Device Plan. 0% APR. Finance subject to status and credit checks. 18+. Direct Debit. Credit provided by Telefónica UK Ltd, RG2 6UU. Telefónica UK is authorised and regulated by the FCA for consumer credit and insurance. Terms apply, see o2.co.uk/terms

100mph killer driver high on laughing gas

19-year-old motorist jailed for nine years after his search for 'teenage thrills' causes the deaths of three

By **Tom McArdle**

A 19-YEAR-OLD driver who killed three teenage passengers after inhaling nitrous oxide and travelling at more than 100mph has been jailed for nine years and four months.

Thomas Johnson crashed into a tree moments after he was filmed using a balloon to inhale the gas while driving on the A415 in Marcham, Oxfordshire last year.

After admitting three counts of death by dangerous driving, Johnson was sentenced to nine years and four months at Oxford Crown Court.

Yesterday, Neil Moore, prosecuting, showed the court several short video clips recovered from the phones of those who had been travelling in the car in which a balloon, typically used to inhale the gas, could be seen "in the mouth of the defendant", he said.

Mr Moore said: "It's quite clear on the evidence that the defendant had been taking nitrous oxide from the canister with the assistance of a balloon to inhale it for some considerable time before the collision." One canister of nitrous oxide was found in the driver's footwell and a further eight were found in the boot of the car, the court heard.

Elliot Pullen, 17, Ethan Goddard, 18, and Daniel Hancock, 18, were killed in the crash on June 20 2023.

The force of the collision "ripped the roof off" the car. All three victims suffered "unsurvivable injuries" and were pronounced dead at the scene.

Johnson's facial disfiguration as a result of the crash will be a "permanent reminder" to himself and others that he killed his friends, Judge Emma Nott said as she passed sentence. The judge listed some of the injuries suffered by Johnson as she jailed the 19-year-old, including traumatic brain injuries, a collapsed lung, cracked ribs, permanent loss of sight in one eye and "visible facial disfiguration".

'It's quite clear on the evidence that the defendant had been taking nitrous oxide'

She also said Johnson had been in an induced coma after the crash and that he suffers from amnesia, "moderately severe" depression and anxiety.

"The severity of your brain injuries mean you have no memory of that night," the judge told him.

A forensic investigation found that, at the time of the crash, the car was travelling at up to 87mph along the stretch of road where the speed limit was 30mph, and no mechanical defects, road or weather conditions contributed to the accident, the prosecution said.

Possession and sale of nitrous oxide, also known as "laughing gas", for recreational purposes is illegal. Mr Moore told the court its effects include "disorientation" and "general impairment". An expert who provided evidence concluded that "taking the drug is not compatible with driving a car safely and the concurrent use while driving is very dangerous due to the rapid onset of the effects".

Addressing Johnson, the judge said his actions were "all for teenage thrills" and as a result "your three passengers will never see beyond their teenage years and you move out of yours significantly and permanently disabled".

After the sentencing, Bill Khindey of the Crown Prosecution Service said: "Thomas Johnson's disregard for the safety of others that night was clear.

"His dangerous driving had devastating consequences, tragically cutting short the lives of three young men.

"This is a responsibility he must reflect on as he serves his time in prison.

Johnson was also disqualified from driving for 11 years and 11 weeks. After the hearing, Det Sgt Tony Jenkins, the senior investigating officer, said: "This was without a doubt one of the most catastrophic and tragic collisions I have ever investigated.

'The speeds at which Johnson was driving were staggering, particularly given the road he was driving on'

"The speeds at which Johnson was driving were staggering, particularly given the road he was driving on."

Members of the victims' families were tearful as they read out impact statements to the court. Elliot's sister said the day her brother died, "everything stopped" and the grief of losing "my only sibling and life-long friend" would "stick with me forever".

Mr Goddard's mother told the court her son was studying to be an engineer and was waiting to hear back from a job interview when he died. She sobbed as she said: "Ethan has left a massive hole in our lives that can never be filled, and we miss him every single day."

Mr Hancock's father said his statement could "never convey the horror, trauma and devastation" that the defendant caused.





DRIVER
THOMAS JOHNSON, 19



VICTIM
ETHAN GODDARD, 18



VICTIM
ELLIOT PULLEN, 17



VICTIM
DANIEL HANCOCK, 18





Clockwise from main: CCTV cameras catch Johnson inhaling from a balloon while driving; what was left of the car in which the four were travelling; mobile phone footage from one of the passengers shows Johnson inhaling from a balloon

Stalking background of man who killed random woman on beach

By **Will Bolton**

A CRIMINOLOGY student who killed a stranger in a random attack on Bournemouth beach was accused of stalking three months before the murder, it can now be revealed.

Nasen Saadi, described by his grandfather as a "clever young man", has been found guilty of fatally stabbing Amie Gray, 34, and attempting to murder a second woman following a nine-day trial at Winchester Crown Court.

The 20-year-old, from Croydon, was "inspired" by high-profile stabbings and had made a series of "provocative statements" to female students on his course at Greenwich University, including telling one that "women are weaker than men".

Saadi, who is of Iraqi-Thai heritage and moved to the UK when he was four, killed physical trainer Gray and attempted to murder her friend Leanne Miles, 38, in Bournemouth on May 24 this year.

The two women were sitting on the sand on Durley Chine beach when Saadi, who had been prowling the promenade for victims, approached them and began a frenzied attack.

Ms Miles said he only fled after she begged him to spare her life, saying: "Please stop, I've got children."

Three months before the attack, an allegation of stalking was made against Saadi. The Metropolitan Police has referred itself to the police watchdog as a result.

It can now be revealed that while in custody, Saadi asked a female prison officer how much press attention his case was getting before touching himself in his cell. A male officer was also said to have witnessed the incident.



Nasen Saadi, 20, asked a female prison officer how much press attention his case was getting

Prosecutor Sarah Jones KC tried to persuade the judge that the jury should hear this evidence as it showed a motive for Saadi carrying out the stabbing, namely excitement and press attention.

Charlie Sherrard KC, defending, explained that Saadi was on a 24-hour watch at the time for safety reasons and claimed it was normal for a male prisoner in his position to do that in his cell. The judge ruled in favour of the defence saying the evidence was "more prejudicial than probative" and it did not help the prosecution prove his motive.

Dr Lisa-Marie Reiss, Saadi's lecturer at Greenwich University, provided a statement to the court in which she said he would make controversial remarks during seminars relating to "women being weaker than men" and how "they shouldn't work in certain jobs".

She said Saadi would "repeatedly make very provocative statements" during lessons and this had "upset" his fellow students.

The trial heard Saadi had asked his lecturer so many questions about the criminal defence to murder that she had asked him: "You're not planning a murder, are you?"

Sian Gray, Amie Gray's wife, had watched proceedings from the public gallery throughout the trial. Yesterday she said Amie could "rest in peace" after Saadi was convicted of murder.

The jury took five hours and 36 minutes to reach its verdict.

The judge, Mrs Justice Cutts, adjourned the case for a psychiatric report to be prepared on the defendant before sentencing on March 28.

Terror suspects' online search histories 'pick and mix of horror'

By **Timothy Sigsworth**

COUNTER-TERRORISM police are seeing a rapid increase in the number of suspects whose online search histories are "a pick and mix of horror", a senior officer has said.

Vicki Evans, a Metropolitan Police dept asst commissioner, and the senior national coordinator for counter-terrorism policing, said the youngest in her team's caseload were 10-11 year-olds.

Police and security services have stopped 43 late-stage terror plots since 2017. This included three in the past 12 months, some of which were "goal line saves", Ms Evans said.

She added: "Becoming far more common and more prevalent is this rapidly increasing fascination with extreme violence and extreme content that we're seeing throughout our case work.

"The type of material that we're encountering, and my officers and staff are encountering in casework, is absolutely staggering and horrific.

"So we are seeing search histories which contain violence, misogyny, gore, extreme pornography, racism, fascination with mass violence, school massacres, incel, and sometimes that's coupled with terrorist material.

"Sometimes it's not, but what it absolutely is, is a pick and mix of horror, horrific content.

"These sorts of grotesque fascinations with violence and harmful views that we're seeing are increasingly common."

Investigators see a lot of young people accessing extreme material, which is "hugely worrying", Ms Evans warned.

'We are seeing search histories which contain violence, misogyny, gore, extreme pornography'

"We most definitely need to think differently about how we stop that conveyor belt of young people who are seeing and being exposed to this type of material, and unfortunately, sometimes then going on to commit horrific acts," she said.

Two of the most recent three plots stopped by the police and security services were Islamist operations and one extreme Right-wing, all of them aimed at causing mass casualties.

At a briefing for journalists at Scotland Yard, Ms Evans described the terror threat as "smouldering".

She said: "I use the word smouldering really, because we have some really deep, dark hot spots, some pockets where we cannot leave the activity and the groups unattended, and we need to continue to maintain our focus on them to keep the threat at bay."

Counter-terrorism police are reviewing their caseloads after events in Syria, Ms Evans added.

The group that has taken control of the country, HTS, remains banned as a terrorist organisation in the UK, and expressing support for it is a crime.

Ms Evans said: "In light of events in Syria, I can confirm that we're proactively reviewing our casework, proactively identifying whether there are any new risks in our system that have been inspired or committed by the events, and we'll continue to do that."

The caseload faced by counter-terrorism police linked to hostile state activity has risen by four or five times in the past few years, Ms Evans also revealed.

As a result, these investigations plus inquiries into war crimes make up about a fifth of their workload.

News

Russian ship's toxic dump is 'eco-terrorism'

Reform MP criticises 'Government-sanctioned' discharge of 300 tons of fertiliser into North Sea

By **Steve Bird**

A "FLOATING megabomb" cargo ship with links to Russia unnecessarily dumped 300 tons of toxic fertiliser into the North Sea in an act of Government-sanctioned "environmental terrorism", an MP has claimed.

Rupert Lowe, a Reform MP, will tell Parliament that "errors" were made after the ship docked at Great Yarmouth with 300 tons of ammonium nitrate potentially contaminated with fuel.

A confidential Department of Transport (DfT) document, seen by *The Telegraph*, reveals how the authorities considered evacuating the town fearing a "catastrophic" explosion. The MV Ruby vessel, with its 200,000 tons of fertiliser cargo, was thought capable of killing or injuring 30,000 people and destroying three-quarters of all buildings within three miles of the blast.

But the 18-page dossier stresses how the "worst case" scenario was a "theoretically low probability".

On Nov 16, the vessel sailed 10 miles off the Norfolk coast and dumped the 300 tons of potentially contaminated fertiliser at sea.

DfT "modelling" concluded the chemical would "disperse relatively quickly", but was "toxic to marine life ... affecting the gills and overall metabolism of fish" and capable of triggering an algae bloom that can "smother the seabed", causing "death of marine life".

Mr Lowe, the Great Yarmouth MP, said: "The fertiliser was dumped in its polypropylene double-skinned bags, which was an act of environmental terrorism. Those bags will float and wrap themselves around propellers. That's quite apart from the untold damage plastic does to the environment.



MV Ruby arrived at Great Yarmouth with 200,000 tons of fertiliser raising fears of a deadly explosion

"As a farmer, if I dumped one such bag in a river, I would be prosecuted to kingdom come."

He will tell an adjournment debate today that Health and Safety Executive (HSE) experts conducted a "remote inspection" before the decision was made to dump the cargo.

Representatives of the Norfolk fishing industry and the Great Yarmouth borough council leader have written to the DfT demanding "transparency and engagement" about the handling of MV Ruby. Paul Lines, who represents the town's fishermen, said: "Dumping fertiliser and plastics in the ocean is disgusting. It could have been put ashore and reprocessed. They went off half-cocked and we weren't informed."

The Maltese-flagged ship and its cargo destined for the Canary Islands set sail from a port in Russia before suffering storm damage and becoming technically stranded in the North Sea as ports refused its berth for repairs.

The ship was nicknamed a "floating megabomb" because it contained seven times more fertiliser than that which caused the 2020 Beirut port blast, which killed 200 people.

MV Ruby's owners eventually diverted the ship to Great Yarmouth to unload before a planned diversion to Newcastle for repairs.

Peel Ports Staff, which runs the port, spotted seawater contamination and "small quantities of hydrocarbon [fuel] contamination" on some bags, a DfT file says, adding that unloading was halted.

The report, marked "sensitive", continues: "At this stage an explosion is considered low probability but with potentially high-risk consequences.

"Modelling projects 30,000 people potentially impacted, and 75 per cent of buildings within a 5km radius destroyed if a worst-case explosion were to occur.

"Evacuations of this area are an option currently under consideration."

A government spokesman said: "These claims are incorrect. The port and ship operator safely carried out an operation with advice from the MCA, the HSE and environmental regulators.

An HSE spokesman said it is not required to inspect cargo or test ammonium nitrate, but it did speak to Peel Ports-appointed experts, who advised "they could not confirm the ammonium nitrate was not contaminated".

BROWNSEA CASTLE GARDENS

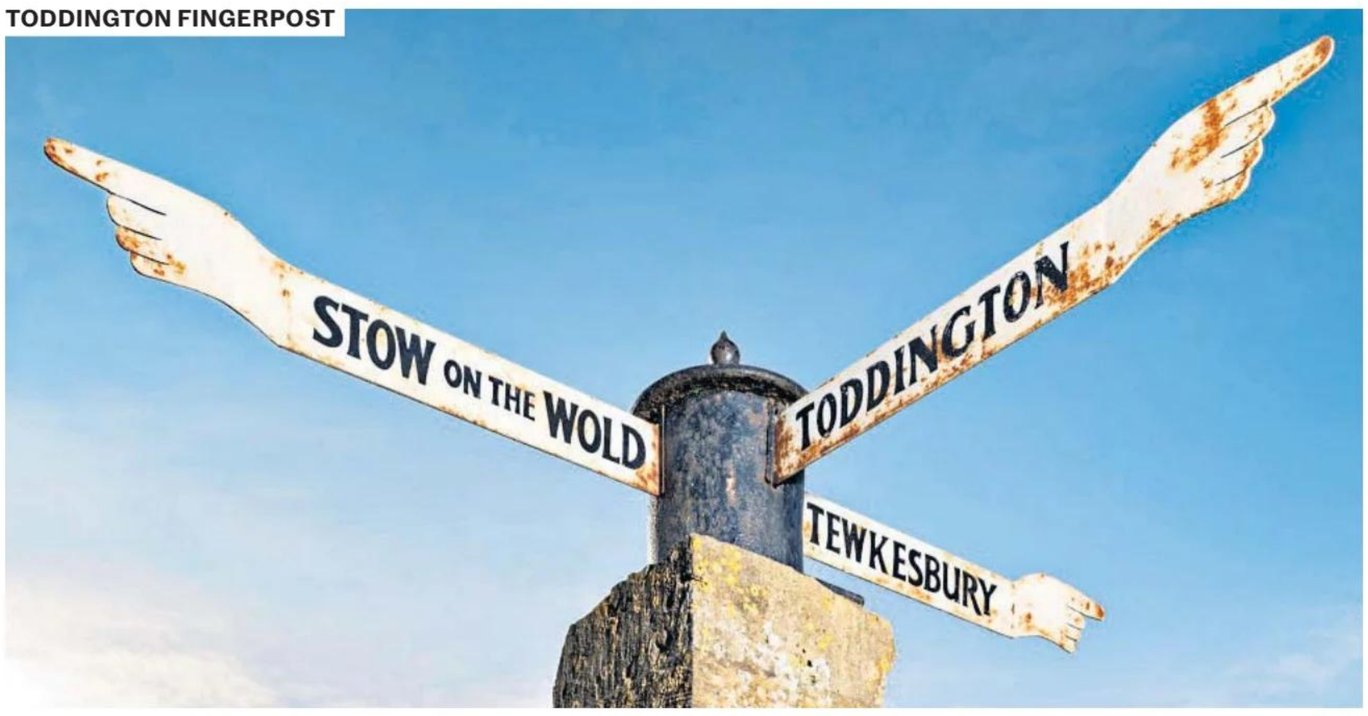


Protected The 19th century Arcadian gardens and pleasure grounds laid out around Brownsea Castle in Poole, Dorset, are among 256 sites that have been awarded listed status by Historic England this year. The Mitre in Stourbridge, West Midlands, an example of a Tudor revival-style pub, constructed in the 1930s has also been given protected status, along with the Toddington Fingerpost in Tewkesbury, Glos. Unlike many surviving examples, this early 20th-century signpost is not built to a standardised design and was probably crafted by a local blacksmith.

THE MITRE



TODDINGTON FINGERPOST



Fear of deepfake porn puts women off political roles, suggests Baroness Owen

By **Natasha Leake**

YOUNG women are being put off public life because of the threat of deepfake porn, Baroness Owen has suggested.

Lady Owen, the second youngest member of the House of Lords, is spearheading efforts to make the creation or solicitation of deep fake porn – where explicit photographs or videos of a person are created using artificial intelligence – illegal.

While it is illegal to share or threaten to share deep fake porn, it is not illegal to create it or ask for it to be created. It is one of many loopholes Lady Owen calls "gaping emissions in our legislation where women are being failed".

Asked if the threat of this kind of technology was putting off young women from taking on public roles, such as going into politics, Lady Owen said: "I think there's no doubt that this does have a silencing effect."

She added: "The number of victims I've worked with who have been given advice by the police saying, 'Just don't post on social media.' It's outrageous, because we can't have a situation where women feel like they can't post because of this threat."

Lady Owen, a former intern and subsequently a special adviser to Boris Johnson from 2017 to 2021, warned that deep fake porn is a very real worry for all women. She said: "It used to be public figures [targeted], but now it's not. The majority of it is of non-public figures."

The private members' Bill had its second reading in the House of Lords last Friday, but the Government said it would not back the Bill and instead was "going to try to meet the objectives of the Bill through other legislation". Lady Owen's Bill is therefore unlikely to pass in the House of Commons. She said: "I actually felt so devastated seeing [victims] so upset in the gallery about this. Looking up and seeing the campaigners and the victims who had come to watch this in tears, shaking their heads, was absolutely devastating."



Baroness Owen is fighting AI porn

Lady Owen said that she was inspired by Jodie, a survivor of deep fake porn abuse who contacted her after she raised the issue in the chamber in February.

For five years, Jodie found that her images were being stolen from her private Instagram page and posted on forums by someone she counted as her best friend, and then made into sexually explicit images. One image depicted Jodie as a schoolgirl being raped by her teacher.

Despite the Bill not being backed by the Government, Lady Owen said she is determined to keep fighting.

Labour council that spent £25million on eco schemes will dim street lights to save money

By **Tom McArdle**

A CASH-STRAPPED Labour-run council has announced plans to dim street lights in a bid to reduce energy bills, despite having spent £25 million on eco-friendly initiatives.

The decision by Lambeth council, in south London, has been criticised for treating women's safety as an "afterthought". But the authority said turning down the lighting "mostly during the middle of the night" was required after "years of austerity".

At the end of the last tax year the council had debts nearing £1 billion. To combat this, it plans to increase parking charges, and is weighing up changes to council tax support and children's centre provision.

These measures come despite the council paying 40 members of staff salaries of £100,000 or more – including a "director of climate and inclusive growth" who is on £160,000.

An investigation by *The Times* earlier this year found that the council had spent more than £25 million on climate and "active travel" initiatives since 2019.

Money was spent on rain gardens, low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs), cycle lanes and meeting the council's net-zero ambitions as it aims to deliver on its pledge to become net zero by 2030 – 20 years before the UK national target.

Critics have previously said that the council is "ideologically fixated" on anti-car policies at the expense of performing the basic functions of local governance.

> 'It will allow the council to tackle light pollution and energy use, ensuring our streets... remain safe'

In last week's financial strategy report, it predicted a budget deficit of nearly £70 million over the next four years. The council said plans to dim street lighting would "allow the council to strengthen its environmental record by tackling light pollution and energy use, whilst ensuring our streets and green spaces remain safe".

However, the charities Our Streets Now and the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, which campaign against public sexual harassment and stalking, have both reportedly raised concerns about the measure, adding that councils now considered women's safety as an afterthought.

It comes as the latest development in a series of controversies for the council. In September, residents took it to the High Court over its "flawed" consultation of an LTN plan. Campaigners accused the authority of "'riding roughshod over wishes of majority of residents" as 63.5 per cent said they were "very unhappy" with plans.

Opposition was strong following the council banking up to £50 million from seven other similar LTNs.

The Telegraph previously revealed it handed out a record 392,341 penalty charge notices (PCNs) to drivers and motorcyclists who entered roads closed to traffic since the Government roll-out of LTNs in 2020. The council also came under fire for cutting black bin collections from weekly to fortnightly in its bid to hit net zero.

Flesh-eating squirrels with taste for voles shock experts

Understanding of animals 'fundamentally changed' by sighting of carnivorous behaviour in California

By **Sarah Knapton** SCIENCE EDITOR

FLESH-EATING squirrels which hunt down and devour voles have been spotted for the first time in the wild.

Until now, squirrels were thought to be primarily vegetarian, cramming their cheeks full of seeds and nuts, which they often bury in underground stores to get through the colder months.

But biologists were amazed to see Californian ground squirrels chasing and killing voles in predatory behaviour never before recorded in the animals.

Experts say it fundamentally changes their understanding of squirrels, which clearly have a more omnivorous and flexible diet than had been assumed.

Dr Jennifer Smith, a squirrel expert of the University of Wisconsin, said: "This was shocking. We had never seen this behaviour before.

"Squirrels are one of the most familiar animals to people. We see them right outside our windows; we interact with them regularly.

"Yet here's this never-before-encountered-in-science behaviour that sheds light on the fact that there's so much more to learn about the natural history of the world around us."

Researchers have been following squirrel populations at Briones Regional Park in Contra Costa County, California, since 2010, but this is the first time that they have observed carnivorous behaviour.

Out of 74 observed interactions with voles between June and July, 42 per cent involved active hunting of these small rodents by ground squirrels.

Dr Sonja Wild, who helped set up the California Ground Squirrels Project with Dr Smith, said she was astonished when undergraduate students first came to her saying they had filmed the strange new behaviour.

"I could barely believe my eyes," said Dr Wild, of the University of California. "From then, we saw that behaviour almost every day. Once we started looking, we saw it everywhere."

Ground squirrels generally live on the ground or in burrows, in contrast with British tree squirrels, such as the red and grey, which make their homes in trees.

Tree squirrels have large bushy tails unlike ground squirrels and measure between 12in and 20in long, compared with ground squirrels who average about 8in to 12in in length.

The term is most often used for medium-sized animals, with larger varieties being known as marmots or prairie dogs and larger ones known as chipmunks. Ground squirrels are known for their burrowing behaviour, creating intricate tunnel systems which they use as escape routes from predators.

As well as nuts and seeds, the animals are also known to occasionally eat insects, bird eggs and nestlings.

In new research, published in the Journal of Ethology, the authors documented California ground squirrels of all ages and genders hunting, eating and competing over vole prey.

The squirrels' carnivorous summer behaviour peaked during the first two weeks of July, coinciding with an explosion of vole numbers at the park.

This suggests the squirrels' hunting behaviour emerged alongside a temporary increase in the availability of prey, the study said.

The scientists did not observe the squirrels hunting other mammals.

Dr Wild added: "The fact that California ground squirrels are behaviourally flexible and can respond to changes in food availability might help them persist in environments rapidly changing due to the presence of humans.

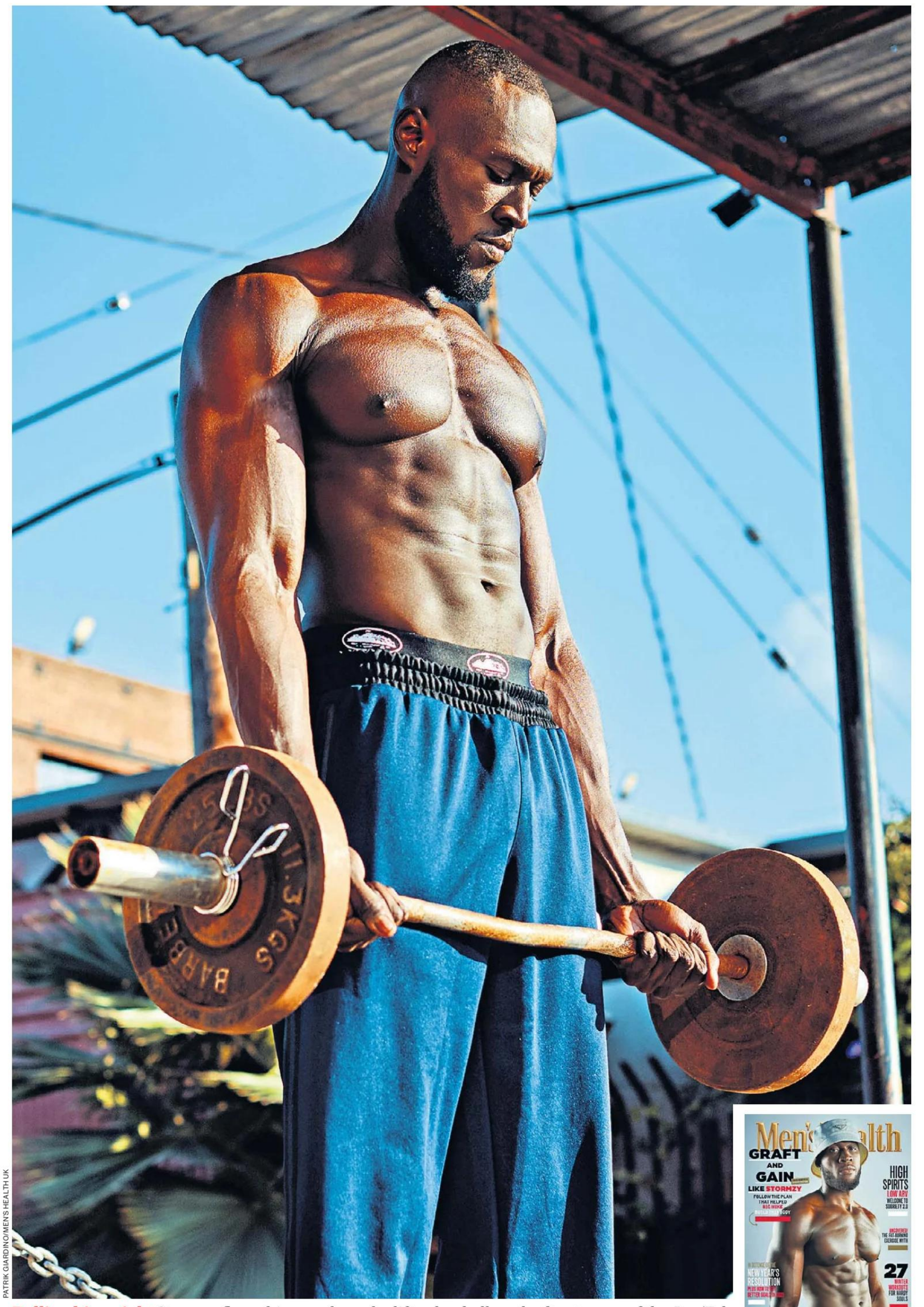
Dr Smith added that many species, including the California ground squirrel, are "incredible opportunists".

But they said many questions remain unanswered, including how widespread hunting behaviour is among squirrels, whether and how it is passed down from parent to pup, and how it affects the environment.

The authors are planning to return to the same spot next summer to see what impact, if any, this year's vole hunting may have on squirrel reproduction compared with the past decade.



The Californian ground squirrel was seen killing and eating a vole. Experts said it was the first time this had been recorded



PATRIK GIARDINO/MEN'S HEALTH UK



Pulling his weight Stormzy flexes his muscles as he lifts a bar bell on the front cover of the Jan/Feb edition of *Men's Health UK* which the rapper also guest-edited. The magazine is on sale tomorrow.

Columbus didn't take syphilis to Americas ... he brought it back

By **Sarah Knapton** SCIENCE EDITOR

WHEN a mysterious flesh-rotting disease broke out in Europe in 1495, two years after Christopher Columbus returned from the Americas, suspicion fell on his crew.

Syphilis was soon rampant across the Continent and beyond, but its origins continued to be fiercely debated, with some historians claiming it was actually home-grown.

Now, scientists have carried out genetic testing on the bones of infected people from Chile, Peru, Mexico and Argentina, who lived between the 13th and 15th centuries and died before Columbus arrived.

They found that ancestral forms of syphilis were present in the New World before it was discovered by Europeans, suggesting the bacterium did indeed hitch a lift back with the explorers.

Historical documents show that Columbus' crew "carried off" native women, acquiring sexually transmitted infections.

Kirsten Bos, the group leader for molecular paleopathology at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, said: "The data clearly support a root in the Americas for syphilis and its known relatives, and their introduction to Europe starting in the late 15th century is most consistent with the data.

"While indigenous American groups harboured early forms of these diseases, Europeans were instrumental in spreading them around the world."

'The data clearly support a root in the Americas for syphilis and its known relatives'

The disease was first recorded in French soldiers fighting in Italy for Charles VIII. Dubbed "the great pox" or "the French disease", it killed five million in Europe at the end of 15th century and beginning of the 16th.

The sexually transmitted infection starts with painless ulcers on the genitals, before bringing rashes, flu-like fatigue, headaches and eventually foul-smelling oozing pustules.

Joseph Grunpeck, a German physician who contracted the illness, described it as "so appalling, that until now, nothing more terrible or disgusting has ever been known on this earth".

Syphilis can lie dormant for years, meaning often people do not realise they are infected and pass it on to loved ones. In the final stages, the skin begins to rot and disintegrate and victims succumb to heart failure or brain damage.

The disease had largely been eradicated in the Western world by the mid-20th century, but has recently had a resurgence. In 2022, UK syphilis cases reached their highest level since 1948.

Many communicable diseases moved westward during the early colonial period, bringing devastating consequences for indigenous people.

Syphilis is one of a few that possibly made the reverse journey, although the "Columbian hypothesis" also has its critics. The disease leaves lesion marks on bones and teeth, and some archaeologists pointed out that these are found in European remains dating from long before the Columbus voyage.

Other diseases can leave similar marks, so researchers studied DNA from the pathogens which were left in the bones of sufferers in the Americas.

'Syphilis-like infections occurred in the Americas for millennia'

Dr Casey Kirkpatrick, a paleopathologist at the Max Planck Institute, said: "We've known for some time that syphilis-like infections occurred in the Americas for millennia, but from the lesions alone it's impossible to fully characterize the disease."

The team analysed five ancient genomes of the syphilis "disease family" and found lineages that predate strains in Europe. Now they hope similar studies on European bones which predate the outbreak can find out which infections were circulating. The research was published in the journal *Nature*.

Editorial Comment: Page 19

Google Street View catches murder suspects with 'body'

By **James Badcock** *in Madrid*

A SPANISH couple have been arrested on suspicion of murder after Google Street View cameras appear to have caught the man loading a body into the boot of his car.

The images posted online renewed an investigation in the disappearance of a Cuban man from the hamlet of Tajueco last year. Last week, they discovered a male torso in a nearby cemetery and confirmed it was the missing man's, named only by his initials, JPLO.

In what is being reported locally as a love triangle, it appears that the victim, 33, visited the area to find his former partner, only to discover that she was in a relationship with another man.

The man, Manuel Isla Gallardoa 48-year-old known by the 56 residents of Tajueco as "the Wolf" has been arrested alongside the woman.

In the images released by Google, a man is seen unloading a large bundle wrapped in a white sheet into the back of his maroon Rover car. In another image from the same Google camera a man can be seen in the distance pushing a wheelbarrow with a bundle inside.

The Street View images were published two months ago, almost a year after the Cuban had been reported missing from his home in Soria.

A cousin of the victim who also lives in Spain reported him missing in November 2023 after he had received strange text messages in which the victim said he had met a woman and would not be using the same mobile number anymore as he was leaving the country.

The cousin told police officers that he knew immediately that the messages were not written by the missing man as they were completely out of character.

Within weeks of the Google pictures going live the police arrested the two suspects, who have been remanded in custody on suspicion of kidnapping, failure to report a missing person and murder. Last week a police search of a cemetery in a village called Andaluz, about a six-mile drive from Tajueco, turned up the buried torso of the missing man, with officers continuing to look for the other parts of the body.



Street View cameras caught a man putting a large bundle wrapped in a sheet in his car

Police are trying to ascertain when the victim was killed and his body dismembered, as well as his exact relationship to the two suspects.

The judge in charge of the investigation had ordered the details of the case to remain secret, but Spain's National Police force revealed information on the alleged killing yesterday, including the role played by Google Street View.

Call to end internships that exclude white candidates

By **Nick Gutteridge**
CHIEF POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

DOWNING Street is under pressure to ban "race-based" internships that exclude white applicants.

The Tories have called on ministers to tell public bodies to end the practice, which has grown in recent years.

It follows controversy over the intelligence services opening a summer internship programme that excludes white British students. The paid opportunity to work at MI5, MI6 and GCHQ is available to people from a "Black, Asian, mixed heritage or ethnic minority".

Claire Coutinho, the shadow equalities minister, challenged the Government to ban the practice during a debate in the Commons yesterday.

She said: "Equality in this country must mean equality of opportunity, not putting some people in society on a pedestal above others.

"So will the minister write to all public bodies to make it clear that the state should not be sanctioning race-based hiring policies?"

Seema Malhotra, the equalities minister, replied that it was "illegal to discriminate in the way that she has described". She added: "I will certainly ensure that the question she has raised will be followed up with my relevant colleagues."

Under the Equalities Act, companies and public bodies can take "positive action" to "address disadvantage or under-representation".

A spokesman for GCHQ, MI5 and MI6 said the rules meant its summer internship programme was a "lawful measure" to boost participation.

But Suella Braverman, the former home secretary, said: "British taxpayers fund MI5 and MI6, yet white Britons are excluded from internships.

"Discrimination in the name of 'diversity' has gone too far. Equality means fairness for all."



BAV MEDIA/GEOFF ROBINSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Room at the inn Christmas might be a squeeze for Molly Ruder, who works at Watatunga wildlife reserve in Norfolk, as she is hand-rearing a baby water buffalo. One-month-old Winnie was rejected by its mother hours after being born and the calf now spends its evenings sleeping in front of Molly's fire.

NHS to roll out daily cancer tablet after Nice volte-face

By **Laura Donnelly** HEALTH EDITOR

A ONCE-A-DAY tablet for advanced breast cancer will be rolled across the country out on the NHS.

More than 1,000 women will be eligible for the drug elacestrant after a U-turn by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice).

The drug is the first targeted treatment available for advanced breast cancer, with a particular mutation in the oestrogen receptors, to become available on the NHS.

In October, Nice provisionally rejected the drug, saying there was too much uncertainty in the evidence to support its use.

But after working with manufacturers, Nice backed a rollout of the drug, with trials finding it could halt disease progression by an extra six months, compared with standard treatments.

Nice said the drug, also known as Korserdu and made by Menarini Stemline, could help about 1,100 patients who were failing to respond to other forms of treatment.

Nice has been under fire for rejecting two breakthrough drugs for Alzheimer's disease and agreeing a limited NHS rollout of weight-loss jabs.

Genetic testing for the ESR1 mutation will be required to determine who is eligible for the breast cancer drug.

Claire Rowney, the chief executive of Breast Cancer Now, said: "Elacestrant will bring eligible patients hope of more precious time before their condition progresses to do the things that matter most to them." Peter Clark of NHS England said: "It is fantastic news that... women living with secondary breast cancer will start receiving this treatment on the NHS soon, which could offer them precious additional time with their families and loved ones."

600,000 degrees for students yet to visit UK

Number of 'distance learners' enrolled in British institutions rises by a third over three years

By **Poppy Wood** EDUCATION EDITOR

ALMOST 600,000 students gain UK degrees each year without stepping foot in Britain, a report has found.

The number of people studying at British universities overseas has risen by a third over the past three years, according to the Higher Education Policy Institute (Hepi). In total, 576,705 students were enrolled "offshore" last year, up from 432,500 in 2019/20. The figure has also risen 8 per cent since 2021/22, when 532,460 people were studying for UK degrees while based overseas.

It means 16 per cent of all UK higher education students are now taking their degree abroad.

A quarter of those were classed as "distance learners", meaning they were registered at British campuses but studying from another country, while 7 per cent were enrolled at British universities' overseas branch campuses.

It follows an increase in the number of UK universities opening international campuses in recent years, with about 30 British institutions now offering degrees through their foreign branches.

The UK University Overseas Campus Network includes institutions such as the University of Westminster's branch in Uzbekistan, the University of Salford's campus in Bahrain, and De Montford University's outposts in Dubai and Kazakhstan.

Many UK universities have also set up partnerships with foreign institutions, allowing them to "validate" degrees based on local curricula as long as they meet British standards. Experts have suggested "transnational education" will likely become more popular in the coming years as UK universities grapple with a drop in lucrative international students enrolling in Britain.

Although often cheaper than degrees offered to foreign students who study on UK soil, "transnational" degrees still contributed around £2.4 billion to the UK economy in 2021, according to Government estimates.

Hepi found UK degrees obtained in other countries are also more accessible for overseas students, while boosting "British influence abroad". However, the think tank warned that there is currently sparse data available about the quality of such degrees, meaning "we know very little about these students".

It called on the Office for Students (OfS), the higher education watchdog, to publish more information about the subjects studied by "transnational" students, how many finish their degrees, and if they go on to successful careers.

According to data from the Higher Education Statistics Authority, China, Sri Lanka and Malaysia accounted for more than 30 per cent of "offshore" students enrolled at British universities between them in 2022/23. Nick Hillman, the director of Hepi, said: "It is vitally important both for the students and for our wider reputation that qualifications delivered overseas are of a similar quality to those delivered here in the UK, with robust feedback loops and trustworthy regulation."

Josh Fleming, the director of strategy and delivery at the OfS, said: ""We are planning to make substantial improvements to the data we collect on transnational education. We're looking forward to working with the sector to ensure this results in effective regulation that protects students and minimises burden for institutions."



Afghan refugees to stay in hotels despite Labour vow to end use

By **Investigations Team**

AFGHAN refugees and their families are to be housed in hotels despite Labour pledging to end their use.

Temporary accommodation will be provided for citizens who worked with the UK during combat operations in Afghanistan, under MoD plans. More than 19,000 Afghans and their families have been relocated to Britain under a government scheme introduced following the West's withdrawal from the country in August 2021. Since October 2023 more than 7,000 citizens have been resettled under the programme.

The MoD has been tasked with moving some of these refugees into unoccupied military housing around the UK – a mission known as Operation Lazurite.

However, *The Telegraph* understands there is not enough military accommodation available to house them all, so officials have discussed moving them into hotels. A small number of them are already staying in hotels, but the Government plans to ramp up their use.

The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy was launched in April 2021 for those who worked for or with the UK government in "exposed or meaningful" roles. Those eligible have indefinite leave to remain and can relocate to the UK with a partner, dependent children and additional family members.

There are potentially more than 34,000 Afghans still waiting to be relocated, according to the latest estimates.

The MoD did not respond to questions about how many hotels will be used and at what cost to the taxpayer.

£2.28bn

The amount spent by the previous Tory government on hotel accommodation for asylum seekers in 2022-23

Labour pledged to end the use of hotels for asylum seekers in its general election manifesto. The previous Conservative government spent £2.28 billion on hotel accommodation for asylum seekers in 2022-23, according to the National Audit Office, equivalent to about £6.2million per day.

While Afghan citizens eligible for housing in the UK are not classed as asylum seekers, the continued use of hotels to house new arrivals will probably be an expensive option. In an Operation Lazurite briefing delivered last week and leaked to *The Telegraph*, a senior British Army officer said: "It looks like MoD will lead on the contracting of the hotels working very closely with colleagues in [the] Home Office and [the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government] around the on-the-ground delivery and local authority support. The Secretary of State for Defence has agreed to lean very heavily on the communications for all this to help the Home Secretary make a very clear distinction between the hotels and transition accommodation for the Afghan pipeline."

An MoD spokesman said: "We continue to work across government, including with our partners in local government, to ensure we deliver our commitment to resettle those eligible in the most effective way."

John Healey, the Defence Secretary, announced yesterday said those who come to the UK under the Afghan refugee scheme will, from spring, be able to spend a maximum of nine months in transitional accommodation before having to find their own place to stay.

Streeting 'up for a debate' about scrapping hospital targets to give bosses freedom

By **Laura Donnelly**

LABOUR may scrap some NHS targets and give more freedom to hospital bosses, Wes Streeting has said.

The Health Secretary said he was "up for a debate throughout the NHS about which targets are useful and which ones are not". It comes after the Government embarked on a "national conversation" about the future of the health service, ahead of the expected publication of a new 10-year plan in May.

Mr Streeting MPs on the health and social care committee that the direction could involve a narrower focus on targets. Earlier this month, Sir Keir Starmer signalled that the main priority for the NHS was cutting waiting times to 18 weeks for 92 per cent of patients by the end of Labour's current term.

The message sparked concern that this could mean that other goals, such as tackling long delays in A&E, might be neglected. Mr Streeting said yesterday that cutting waiting lists could not be achieved without improvements across the board, including better access to GPs and betier ambulance response times.

He said the Government would consider cutting the number of targets, especially for the best-performing hospitals.

He told MPs: "What I want to see over the course of the 10-year plan implementation is earned autonomy for our best performers, where we are not looking over their shoulders so much."

He said this would mean dictating fewer targets, adding: "I think we can let go of some of the control. And I'm actually, I'm up for a debate throughout the NHS about which targets are useful and which ones are not, because if you're measuring everything, you're actually measuring nothing."

Mr Streeting said he was keen to see less red tape for GPs, and "more freedom and autonomy" for the best-performing hospitals. However, he added: "I would not feel confident letting go of control for poorly performing providers and poorly performing systems. That's where you need more performance management, not less."

He said: "As well as thinking about how we spend the new money we're being given by the Chancellor, we spend a huge amount of money on our health and care services today.

"And I'm not convinced, neither are the front-line staff and neither are patients, that all of that money is being well spent ... It's not being well spent."

Mr Streeting said one of the reasons he previously claimed the NHS was "broken" was to create a culture which was honest about its failings.

He told MPs: "A political culture that is geared around sparing political blushes and the reputations of government is one that very quickly bleeds into back-side-covering by senior leaders, thinking that if they surface problems and challenges or acknowledge problems within their organisations, that they are going to be finding themselves in news headlines or getting a punishment beating from the Secretary of State via the telephone."



EDUARDO SOTERAS FOR THE TELEGRAPH

‘IS forced me to watch a beheading – I’d rather die than let them return’

Dispatch



By **Adrian Blomfield**
in Palmyra

BATHED in the glow of the winter sun, the colonnades of ancient Palmyra are perhaps Syria’s most precious sight.

Yet the days when awestruck tourists would clamber through the ruins of Queen Zenobia’s third-century city are long in the past.

In the 13 years since the last coachload of tourists trundled through the desert from Damascus, 150 miles to the southwest, Palmyra has been a place of destruction and barbarism, haunted by recent ghosts rather than those of yesteryear.

Mahmoud al-Btman, like any Palmyran, is extremely proud of his city’s heritage. Returning to the ruins for the first time in more than a decade yesterday, he wandered through the old, familiar places, caressing the stones and pointing to features that might escape the novice’s eye.

But as he came to the Roman theatre, his eyes darkened.

It was here, in 2015, that Palmyra’s new Islamic State (IS) overlords forced 25 bound and blindfolded prisoners to kneel in front of the proscenium and then had children younger than he was shoot them in the back of the head as a horrified assembled audience looked on. Mr Btman was 14 at the time.

Such horrors, he says, were far from unusual in the two years that IS ran the city as an outpost of its self-declared caliphate that extended through the Syrian desert and into Iraq.

His most chilling memory, he says, was watching the beheading of Khaled al-Asaad, the bespectacled 81-year-old archaeologist who had dedicated decades of his life to studying Palmyra’s storied stones.

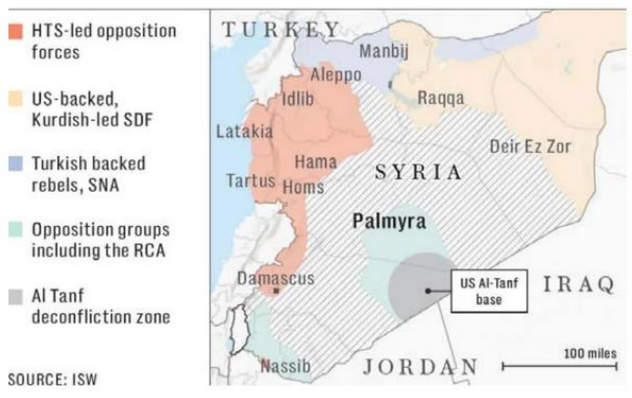
With his younger sister in tow, Mr Btman was among those forced by IS to watch Asaad’s execution.

The archaeologist’s killers, standing behind their victim on the roundabout in the centre of Palmyra town, gave their reasons for their bloody act: Asaad, they said, was a protector of “idols”; he had attended “blasphemous” conferences and was a supporter of the regime of Bashar al-Assad, Syria’s fallen president.

They failed to add what many believe was the real reason: Asaad had refused to reveal the location of some of the Palmyran antiquities he had managed to hide before IS took the town.

“They knelt him down and the executioner raised his sword high in the air,” Mr Btman said. “They told him to rest his head on the ground, but he refused. He said to them, ‘I am like a Palmyran palm tree. It is impossible for me to bow my head.’ So they cut off his head as he knelt.”

Military control across Syria



After the beheading, his executioners strung up Asaad’s decapitated body, leaving his head and spectacles at his feet before finally allowing the crowd to go home.

“They did that all the time,” he said. “They would force you to come and watch executions and then leave the body there for a week to terrorise the population.

“The dogs and cats would eat the corpses and the streets smelt of death.”

A few days afterwards, IS came from Mr Btman’s father, Taysir. A week or two later, they received a message from IS that he was dead.

That night the family fled, first for Raqqa, the city IS had made its capital and the only route out of Palmyra, and months later, towards the Iraq border. As soon as he was old enough, Mr Btman approached US special forces at their base in Al Tanf on Syria’s border with Iraq and asked to join a brigade fighting IS.

> ‘They would force you to watch executions and leave bodies there for a week to terrorise the population’

Last week, for the first time, he made an emotional return to the city of his birth as a rebel fighter in the US-backed Revolutionary Commando Army (RCA), clutching an M16 the Americans had given him.

The joy of coming home was tempered by painful memories, the further agonies Palmyra has suffered since he fled and the threat of a resurgent IS, whose fighters are in the hills around the city and quite possibly closing in.

IS wrought great damage to the city’s ancient ruins, blowing up temples to the Phoenician god Baal, destroying the Arch of Triumph, Palmyra’s crowning glory, felling the columns of its tetraplyon and cutting of the heads of the statues of Athena and other Roman deities.

But the modern town was laid waste not by IS but by the Russian air force in 2016 and 2017, which paved the way for the eventual return of Syrian government forces.

The Russians hailed the liberation of Palmyra as a triumph over evil. The Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra was flown in from St Petersburg to perform Bach and Prokofiev on the same stage where IS had carried out its executions, a symbolic display of Russian civilisation overcoming barbarism.

Until last week, Palmyra became an outpost of the new Russian empire. Fighters from Hezbollah and other Iran-backed militias took up positions in the town, storing weapons and ammunition there, but it was the Russians that ran the town, the few locals allowed to remain there said.

The vast majority of Palmyra’s population were not allowed to return. Its suburbs were almost entirely destroyed and lie abandoned. No rebuilding was attempted at all, nor was there any restoration of the damage done in the ruins, despite pledges to the contrary by both Russia and Assad’s government.

Just a few hundred people remained in the centre of the town, where few had fond memories of the Russians, who forced Syrian children to learn Russian in schools while treating their parents with quiet contempt, one teacher said.

The Russians, like Hezbollah, have now fled.

Abandoned Russian field guns and trucks litter the airbase on the outskirts of town, now under the control of the RCA, bearing witness to their hurried departure.

The Cyrillic markings on a 23mm field gun and other pieces of abandoned ordnance show that most of the equipment dates back to the Soviet Union.

Palmyra may have been Russia’s bridgehead against an IS resurgence, but it was clear that its generals were not going to spare modern weaponry from the battlefields of Ukraine to hold it.

In the base’s command centre, Bashar al-Mashadani, the RCA officer now in charge of the area, had turned a board bearing a poster of Vladimir Putin and Assad shaking hands to the wall. Outside, a cocker spaniel abandoned by his Russian owners, looked on sorrowfully.

For Capt Mashadani, the capture of Palmyra was a sweet moment, but he was well aware how tenuous the rebel hold on the town was.

“At this moment we face several threats,” he said. “Isis are in the hills around the town and they are looking for the opportunity to stage a resurgence. Palmyra is a strategic prize for them.

Rebel fighters find a place to rest in Palmyra yesterday, above; Mahmoud al-Btman stands in the ruins of a Roman theatre where he was forced to watch a beheading, below; IS destroyed many of the city’s ancient sites which were being excavated, bottom



“There is also the possibility that there are remnants of Hezbollah and Iranian militia units in the desert. We need to be on our guard.”

While US-backed units held the airbase and the outskirts of town, the centre was held by the Falcons of the Levant Brigade, a Turkey-backed group whose leaders said they were now taking orders from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the rebel movement now running Syria.

While HTS has taken control of the main cities in western Syria, where most of the country’s population live, it has no real presence in the desert, something that has deeply worried the United States, which has 900 troops in the southeast of the country to prevent a resurgence of IS.

In recent months, those worries have reached a crescendo. IS militants may have been defeated in 2019, but they have retained a foothold in the desert and have regrouped sufficiently to double the pace of attacks in Syria and neighbouring Iraq this year.

They have detonated car bombs, attacked US-backed rebel positions and erected flying checkpoints along the roads near Palmyra, shooting dead a number of motorists in recent days, fighters in the town said.

The big fear of US special forces at Al Tanf is that IS will attack jails holding 9,000 of its members in areas of northeastern Syria controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which is supported by the American military.

Both Capt Mashadani’s men and those of the Falcons are aware of the threat and say plans are underway to counter IS in the coming weeks. For the moment, though, the importance is to hold the town.

Volleys of gunfire echoing from the outskirts suggest that things are not fully under control.

There are other dangers, too.

Scattered books and papers on the floor of the Russian headquarters in central Palmyra, among which were yet more pictures of Putin, as well as one of Stalin, pointed to yet another frenzied departure.

But the Russians left nastier surprises, too, as evidenced by the anti-personnel mines placed on the street outside the building.

Other sites in the city were booby-trapped, as the Falcons discovered when five of their men were killed on Tuesday as they were entering one building.

“We have sent in engineers but it will be slow work,” said Abdulrazzaq Abu Khatib, a Falcons commander.

“Once we have secured the city and brought back some services like water and electricity, we will turn our attention to Isis.”

It is not, the rebels say, an idle boast. Many, like Mr Btman, are Palmyrans.

“We have come back home after nearly a decade,” he said.

“We would rather die than let Isis take Palmyra again.”

Kyiv's new laser weapon 'based on UK design'

Ukraine unveils cutting-edge system capable of downing aircraft from more than 2km away

By **Iona Cleave** *and* **Lilia Sebouai**

UKRAINE has developed a cutting-edge laser weapon that is ready to shoot down Russian jets, a military commander has revealed.

The weapon is known as Tryzub (Trident), and is thought to have been modelled on a UK prototype after designs were shared with Kyiv earlier this year.

Col Vadym Sukharevskyi, the commander of Ukraine's Unmanned Systems Forces, said that the advanced laser system is capable of downing aircraft at distances of more than 2km.

"It really works; it really exists," he said at a defence industry conference, in Ukraine's first official acknowledgement of the existence of Tryzub.

The commander noted that Ukraine was the fifth country to possess a high-power laser weapon, which uses an intense light beam to cut through its target.

Trident, which is also a symbol featured on Ukraine's coat of arms, was "already" ready to shoot down Russian jets, Col Sukharevskyi claimed, adding that efforts are under way to improve its capabilities.

He did not elaborate further on its specifics, and *The Telegraph* cannot independently verify his claims.

Grant Shapps, the former defence secretary, said in April that the UK's DragonFire laser, which is due to be deployed in 2027, could be used in Ukraine to counter Russian drones and missiles.

He said the laser guns, also known as directed energy weapons, could have "huge ramifications" for the conflict, adding that the British military was rushing to get it into service.

The DragonFire, built by British scientists, is a revolutionary £10-a-shot laser said to have enough precision to hit a £1 coin more than a kilometre away. Originally slated for production in 2033, the electrically powered system is now scheduled to be deployed on Royal Navy warships six years earlier than expected.



The damage by a British DragonFire laser is shown by a gaping hole in mortar casing

"It didn't have to be 100 per cent perfect in order for Ukrainians perhaps to get their hands on it," Mr Shapps said at the time. The UK Ministry of Defence has been asked for comment.

Trident could soon help defend Ukraine's skies. Russian hypersonic missiles, which can travel as fast as 3,800mph, are difficult to target with physical weaponry but could be more easily shot down with a laser beam.

It could also provide an inexpensive means to counter Russia's constant drone attacks.

Martin J Dougherty, a weapons expert and author of *Aircraft, Tanks and Artillery of the Ukraine War*, told *The Telegraph*: "The big deal with lasers is that they provide a way of downing cheap weapons such as drones without using something costing vastly more."

Mr Dougherty added that the Ukrainian conflict had helped to usher in a new dawn of arms development, which he described as "cheap rubbish" – weapons designed to "overwhelm the expensive defence systems everyone has in place".

"Low-capability weapons are being deployed in huge numbers. Lasering them seems to be a promisingly low-cost counter once the lasers themselves are in place," he said.

> 'Lasers provide a way of downing cheap weapons such as drones'

Western militaries have been increasingly intrigued by laser guns as a cheap alternative to using expensive drones and missiles to shoot down and hit targets.

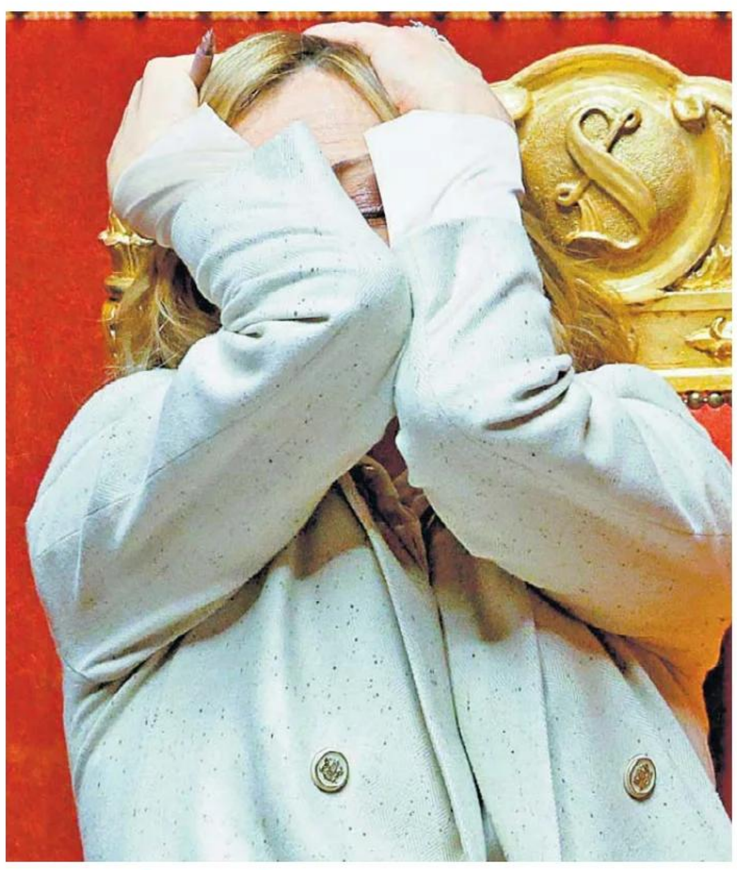
Speaking at the European Defense Industry: Prospects for Cooperation with the Ukrainian Defense Industry event on Monday, Col Sukharevskyi also discussed the development of so-called "queen drones", which lead a flock of FPV (first-person view) attack drones.

These unmanned aerial vehicles, he said, are capable of flying more than 70km into enemy territory to hit deep targets. He described them as a "breakthrough" in Ukrainian drone technology.

The Unmanned Systems Forces was established less than six months ago in response to Ukraine ramping up its domestic drone production.

It includes combat and research units operating across air, land, and sea.





Italian politics in three easy steps
Giorgia Meloni, the Italian prime minister, cannot hide her feelings during a debate in the Italian Senate on the upcoming European Council in Rome. EU leaders will attend a meeting of the council in Brussels today.



FABIO FRUSTACI/EPA-EFE; SHUTTERSTOCK

Assassin offered EU passport and £78k to kill Putin's nuclear chief

By **James Kilner**

AN UZBEK national was offered $100,000 (£78,650) and a European passport by Ukraine to assassinate the head of the Russian army's chemical weapons unit, Moscow has claimed.

Russian police have arrested a 29-year-old suspect, who they say had been "recruited by Ukrainian special forces" and offered the money for the assassination of Lt Gen Igor Kirillov.

"On their instructions, he arrived in Moscow, received a powerful improvised explosive device and placed it on an electric scooter, which he parked near the entrance of Kirillov's home," Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement.

Investigators said the suspect set up a camera in a rental car that broadcast live footage to a Ukrainian SBU intelligence service control centre in the city of Dnipro.

There, an SBU agent "remotely activated" the IED before dawn on Tuesday when Kirillov walked out of his apartment block, killing him and his assistant.

Kirillov, the head of Russia's Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Forces, is the highest-ranked military commander assassinated by the SBU. The SBU has been waging a sophisticated assassination campaign throughout the near-three-year war in Ukraine that has killed dozens of Ukrainian collaborators, Russian military officers, Kremlin propagandists and scientists both in Russia and occupied areas of Ukraine.

Later, in an FSB interrogation video, the arrested Uzbek man confessed that the assassination plot was several weeks in the making. He said that he had arrived in Moscow on the "instructions of the Ukrainian special forces", bought a scooter and then waited a "few months" for the bomb to arrive.



Lt Gen Igor Kirillov was chief of Russia's Nuclear, Biological and Chemical unit before being assassinated

"They promised me $100,000 and a European passport," he said in the video, wearing handcuffs and a torn jacket.

The suspect also appeared to contradict the statement from the Investigative Committee by saying that he triggered the IED, rather than an SBU agent in Ukraine.

It is unclear under what conditions the Uzbek man made his confession. Russian forces are known to torture crime suspects into confessions.

Russia's RIA Novosti news agency reported that the Uzbek man was arrested in the Balashikha district of Moscow, only a few miles from Ryazansky Prospekt, where Kirillov was killed.

Kirillov was hated in Ukraine, which on Monday called him a war criminal for greenlighting the use of tear gas and other chemical weapons against its soldiers.

He was also a Kremlin propaganda mouthpiece, regularly accusing the United States of setting up secret chemical weapons factories in Georgia and Ukraine.

Washington has already dismissed the claims as being "fake lies".

Uzbekistan has said that it has no information on the FSB's suspect.

Since March, the Kremlin has cracked down on migrant labour from Central Asia, a traditional source, after four Tajiks were arrested for killing more than 140 people at a concert venue on the outskirts of Moscow.

Russians burn faces of N Korean troops to 'hide' battlefield losses

By **Samuel Montgomery**

NORTH KOREAN soldiers have been filmed storming Ukrainian trenches as reports emerge of Kim Jong-un's troops suffering significant losses.

Volodymyr Zelensky published a series of clips showing North Koreans on the battlefield in Kursk and accused Moscow of trying to "hide" growing casualty numbers.

In drone footage shared on the Ukrainian president's Telegram channel on Monday, North Korean troops were seen sheltering behind a tree after allegedly advancing on Ukrainian positions in Kursk.

Another video appeared to show Russian forces trying to conceal the presence of North Korean soldiers, covering their faces with masks and using a campfire to burn the faces of the dead.

"Russia is not only involving North Korean soldiers in assaults against Ukrainian positions, but also trying to hide the losses of these people," Mr Zelensky said. He added: "The Russians are also trying to literally burn the faces of the killed North Korean soldiers."



Ukraine released a video of troops who claimed they were North Koreans taking cover

He called it a clear demonstration of Russia's "contempt for everything human".

A senior US military official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said this week there had been "several hundred" North Korean casualties in Kursk, with soldiers of "all ranks" among them.

Oleksandr Syrskyi, commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces, said on Tuesday that Russia was "actively" using North Korean troops, and that they were taking on heavy losses.

Ukraine's military intelligence said on Monday that at least 30 North Koreans had been killed or injured at the weekend in the front-line villages of Plekhovo, Vorozhba and Martynovka.

Pat Ryder, the Pentagon spokesman, confirmed that North Koreans had entered combat in Kursk and suffered their first casualties, "both killed and wounded".

He said they were being used in infantry roles limited to Russia's Kursk region, where Ukraine launched a surprise incursion in August to create a foothold in Russia but is believed to have since lost 40 per cent of the territory it once controlled.

The woman who brought victim shaming to an end



Special report

By **Henry Samuel**

As Gisele Pelicot's husband and rapists are sentenced, the trial's impact is obvious in France and further afield

WITH her instantly recognisable red bob, Gisèle Pélicot smiles beside a message graffitied on a wall in large capital letters: "Justice for Gisèle, justice for all women!"

The photograph perfectly captures how the grandmother of seven has embraced her role as a national and international feminist icon.

Since September, the 71-year old has often walked past these words on a wall in Avignon, southern France on the way to the trial of her husband and 50 other men of all ages and walks of life accused of raping her as she lay drugged in bed in her Provence home.

Another wall opposite the entrance to the courthouse has been daubed: "Gisèle, women thank you." On it has been scribbled: "All our respect" and "Spain, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Brazil, England … are with you."

She posed in front of this too. There have been calls for Ms Pélicot to be officially rewarded with a Nobel prize, the Legion d'Honneur, or the cover of *Time* magazine for her bravery in turning the tables on her tormentors after waiving her right to anonymity. She has been cited of late as one of the world's 100 most influential women.

Her ex-husband Dominique, meanwhile, this morning faces 20 years in prison for "aggravated rape", not just for recruiting strangers online to sexually abuse her while she lay comatose but for filming them all in the act. The other men face sentences of four to 18 years. Most deny rape, saying they were unaware she hadn't consented and they thought it was all part of a sex game. Rather than hiding in humiliation, Ms Pélicot chose to hold a mirror up to the accused in the courtroom as she shook her head at their lame excuses. "I wanted all woman victims of rape – not just when they have been drugged, rape exists at all levels," she has said, "I want those women to say: Madame Pélicot did it, we can do it too."

"It's up to them to feel ashamed," she said looking at the accused men in court. "I'm not expressing anger or hatred. I'm expressing a determination to change society."

Indignation and support has snowballed at home and abroad. Ms Pélicot's arrival for the initial hearings were met with silence, bar the clicking of cameras. Now, every time she strides into the entrance hall, head held high, it is to applause and cheers of "Bravo."

She started wearing a patterned scarf from the Older Women's Network (OWN), which has been working for almost 40 years to help promote the rights, dignity and wellbeing of older women in Australia. "We hope that when she wears it, she knows that she has the backing and solidarity of women who are thousands of kilometres from the courtroom," said Yumi Lee of the OWN.

"What she has done is help us to take a big step to change the status quo," she said. "She's a champion. We hope that once the trial is over, she will be able to feel the sun on her skin and know that she is treasured by many, many women around the world." "I'm very honoured to wear it," said Ms Pélicot.

There have been shows of support across France. In September, thousands of women and some men took part. Signs read: "We are all Gisèle", "Rapist, we see you, victim we believe you", "Not all men, but always a man".

Tens of thousands more took to the streets in November. Many called for French law on rape to be changed to include the word "consent".

"A law about consent must be put in place very quickly. Just because someone doesn't say something, doesn't mean that they agree [to sexual contact]," said Marie-Claire Abiker, 78, a retired nurse who marched in Paris. There have been vigils and, earlier this month, feminists performed a Maori haka outside court, yelling: "Tremble, rapists!"



CHRISTOPHE SIMON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES/CLEMENT MAHOUDEAU



Gisele Pelicot, above, has become the focus of women's rights groups and enjoys widespread public support, left

In street art, Ms Pélicot's haircut and round sunglasses with fringe have become iconic.

Among the first to go global was a mural in Gentilly, near Paris, by graffiti artist Maca, who said she had deliberated depicted Ms Pélicot "with her chin up, facing us".

"She's facing up to what's happening to her, she's facing up to her husband, the 50 other co-defendants, the gaze of the world's media," Maca insisted.

"We're moving away from the idea that rapists are monsters, extraordinary beings who pop up in a dark alleyway to assault women," she told France 3. "As we can see from this trial, they are our colleagues, our brothers, our neighbours, our friends, and the only thing they have in common is that they are men."

In mid-September, hundreds of people demonstrated in Brussels and Liège in Belgium, many holding up placards of a stylised portrait of Ms Pélicot drawn by a Belgian artist known as Aline Dessine, who renounced all rights to the image in an act of solidarity.

"As long as it is used to support Gisèle Pélicot you can do whatever you want with it," she told her 2.5 million followers on TikTok.

Further afield in Spain, members of Ca la Dona, a feminist centre that has operated in Barcelona since the 1980s, penned a letter of "absolute support".

They wrote: "Thank you for breaking the silence, for speaking out and sending this powerful message to the patriarchy and to all those assaulted by gender violence. Gisèle, we are with you."

Spanish signs have cropped up in Avignon and even Lyon, reading: *"Solo si es si."* (Only yes is yes.)

In Greece, 30 grassroots organisations recently penned a letter to Ms Pélicot thanking her for holding the trial in public. "This will allow society to become aware of the extent of the abuse suffered by women in France, Greece, and around the world," they wrote. "Our struggle is international, because violence against women is a global problem."

Anne-Cécile Mailfert, founder of the Fondation des Femmes, said. "She's a symbolic figure because she's a woman whose life was perfectly normal. She has three children, a husband, she's in her mid-sixties, she's retired.

"She can't be sexualised. You can't say it's because she's wearing a skirt, or because she's had too much to drink, or because she asked for it. In that sense, she's the perfect victim," she said.

The video evidence is irrefutable and all Ms Pélicot's testimony has been very well thought-out, Ms Mailfert said, adding that Ms Pélicot has made the case for all women from the outset, refusing a closed-door trial so that "shame changes sides". "That was very powerful because, all of a sudden, you could see her with her head held high and the rapists scuttling into the courtroom wearing caps, masks and glasses, bowing their heads, afraid of being photographed, ashamed and, above all, not wanting to be recognised."

"They're ordinary rapists of all ages, all ethnic origins, all professions and they're all within a radius of a few kilometres of the victim's home. So they're men she meets in the bakery, in the supermarket, who look perfectly normal, who had their children at school.

"What's more, they're not necessarily all men who were raped as children, who had unhappy children, not at all. We really do have it all."

Some feminists warn against beatifying Ms Pélicot.

Anne Bouillon, a lawyer specialising in women's rights and domestic violence, said the "rapist monsters, victim heroine" narrative is a mistake.

"I don't see the problem," retorts Ms Mailfert. "In all great struggles, you need figures you can identify with. Gisèle speaks for us, she allows other women to project themselves. We need heroines."

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Comment

We're winning the trans war. Let's not start playing the victim card

JEMIMA LEWIS



They say the trans wars are over. In 2024, common sense came surging back, with the publication of the Cass review, Wes Streeting's ban on prescribing puberty blockers to children, and a series of legal victories upholding the right of women to believe in biological sex.

Trans-rights activists have been the least successful "progressive" campaigners in modern history. They have managed to reverse the trajectory of public opinion: only 30 per cent of British adults now believe you should be able to change the sex registered on your birth certificate, compared with 53 per cent in 2019.

The rise of Right-wing populism, in America and elsewhere, is in part a reaction against the hectoring piety of the social justice warriors. People really don't like being told what to think, especially about something as basic as biology. In trying to impose their own feelings-based ideology onto a sceptical public, trans rights campaigners have created anger and alienation where once there was chiefly polite indifference.

The danger now, for gender-critical feminists, will be maintaining their long and admirable composure, even in the face of victory. The temptations of triumphalism are strong, not least because feminists have suffered real-world consequences for defending their beliefs.

Natalie Bird, a would-be Lib Dem candidate, sued her own party for discrimination after being barred from standing as MP for Wakefield. She had been accused of bigotry after wearing a T-shirt with the slogan: "Woman: Adult Human Female". The Lib Dems have admitted culpability, but Bird is not satisfied. She has gone back to court, demanding £90,000 for "injured feelings".

She's playing them at their own game, you see. I can't blame her, but I wish she wouldn't. The rhetoric of victimhood belongs to the other side. To the victors, only the sweet sanity of being right.

◇ Who is this handsome blonde in cricket whites, smirking sexily at us from a sun-tinted background of copper clouds? He looks just like the 1980s heart-throb Maxwell Caulfield. But why would Nigel Farage, Elon Musk and Nick Candy all be grinning in front of a portrait of the star of *Grease 2*?

Painted in 1989, for Donald Trump to install in the newly acquired Mar-a-Lago, *The Visionary* is a portrait in the classical mould. By which I mean, absurdly flattering. The artist, Ralph Wolfe Cowan, was proud of his ability to refine his subjects' features, douse them in celestial light, and present them to the world as they would prefer to see themselves. "Nobody ever dislikes my portraits," was his boast.

Once, that was the business model of every portrait painter. The history of British art, especially, is one of professional sycophancy. After the Reformation, when the market for religious art collapsed, artists relied on the patronage of the landed gentry.

But flattery – especially the flattery of powerful men – is out of fashion. The portraiture of high art now favours lumpen, mottled flesh and smeared, anguished faces.

To pay someone to make you look better than you are, and then to hang this false testimony in your home, suggests a failing of both taste and character.

I once had a brief romance with a man who commissioned a gorgeous, Trump-like portrait of himself. He hung it at the end of the bed, so that every time I woke up I was confronted by the lounging Adonis he either believed or wished himself to be. Which is why the romance was brief.



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From the Church to the Museums, institutions are betraying our trust

Reparations and returns are faddish Leftist causes that those running public bodies have no business pursuing

ROBERT TOMBS



How is it that major institutions do things that are against their own interests, immune from public scrutiny, and damaging to the nation generally? An obvious answer is that "woke" or "radical progressive" shibboleths have become pervasive. Espousing them gives career and publicity advantages. Or at least so it is hoped: the recent Jaguar rebranding fiasco shows that this may not always be so.

Public institutions should be different. Most people, I imagine, suppose that they have effective checks and balances, and legally or morally binding rules. Capture by a self-promoting clique – as in the Royal Society of Literature, exposed in an excoriating essay in the Left-of-centre monthly *Prospect* – could surely not happen to great public institutions.

Or so we might think. Yet strange things are happening. Two of our greatest – the British Museum and the Church of England – have been behaving in ways that are indeed against their own interests, immune from public scrutiny, and damaging to the nation.

The British Museum, through its chair of trustees George Osborne, is seemingly trying to give away one of its greatest treasures, the Elgin Marbles. This plan temporarily ground to a halt only because the Greek government refused to go along with Osborne's wheeze of making the handover theoretically a loan in order to get round British law. Instead, Athens demanded outright transfer of ownership.

It is now apparently being claimed that there is a "moral obligation" that overrides the law. I shall not discuss the pros and cons of a transfer. Suffice it to say that there might be an argument on cultural grounds for returning the marbles to the special museum in Athens, just as there is an argument for keeping them in London.

But such arguments are rarely explained or seriously discussed by those in power in Bloomsbury or Athens. Instead, dogmatic assertions are made as if they were self-evidently true. The Greek refrain is that Lord Elgin looted the marbles and therefore the British Museum is a receiver of stolen goods. Such accusations, and hence the idea of a "moral obligation", have been demolished in a report by the historian Sir Noel Malcolm, published by Policy Exchange.

Every curator and trustee in the museum should have digested this pamphlet. Have they? Their plain duty is to protect both the museum and the national interest. They should not acquiesce in Osborne's private diplomacy, never publicly justified.

What is its aim? To boost Greek tourist revenues and flatter national vanity at Britain's expense. We owe no such duty to the Greek government. If the issue is a grave diplomatic embarrassment, parliament should have the courage to act openly and change the law. Athens could then offer to buy the marbles: £300 million as an opening bid?

The Church of England, represented by the Church Commissioners who control its endowment, has pledged £100 million in reparations for supposed involvement in slavery.

Again, I shall not discuss the details of this decision, which is no stronger (to put it mildly) than in the case of the Elgin Marbles. In a nutshell, the commissioners stated that they possessed a historical fund of "tainted" wealth derived from the slave trade which it was morally obliged to use in the cause of "healing, repair and justice". This tainted wealth, however, was shown by acknowledged experts not to exist.

This made no difference: the commissioners had already appointed an activist "Oversight Group" committed to reparations. This group made numerous "recommendations", all obediently accepted in advance by the commission. A global online consultation was carried out, involving a tiny number of unknown participants. It predictably demanded more cash, and the commissioners docilely agreed to try to raise £1 billion.

What is so shocking in both cases is not only the policies themselves – which in my view show an inconceivable degree of irresponsibility – but the arrogant refusal to consult widely, the unconcealed disdain for opposing views, the unprincipled secrecy of processes, and the blatant indifference to at least the spirit of the law in the case of the museum, and in the case of the Church to the principles of governance required by the Charity Commission.

Those responsible for the policies of these institutions are their trustees. In many countries, major institutions would be directly administered by the State. Here we have long preferred to place trust in civil society. But trustees of too many institutions have shown recently that they cannot, in fact, be trusted; they act as if they were dealing with their private property – though I doubt they would be so open-handed if it were, indeed, their own.

READ MORE *at telegraph.co.uk/opinion*

What is so shocking is trustees' arrogant refusal to consult widely, the clear disdain for opposing views and the secrecy of processes

Trusteeships in major institutions are prestigious positions, dominated by the metropolitan elite. In the case of the museum, a remarkable number are overseas business people – perhaps Osborne's choice? The Church Commissioners, chaired by the Archbishop of Canterbury, are mostly senior clergy, with some lay people drawn mainly from business. Neither body is in the slightest degree representative of the wider society whose support sustains them.

The British Museum Act (1963) makes it the duty of trustees to ensure that its possessions "shall not be disposed of". The legal duty of the Church Commissioners is to provide for "the cure of souls in parishes where such [financial] assistance is most required". Are trustees insufficiently committed to their institutions' purposes to stand up to activists, too afraid of being called old-fashioned or worse? If unwilling to fulfil their legal duties, they should have the decency to resign.

In theory, final responsibility goes back to parliament and to ministers, who – also in theory – choose many of the trustees, though in practice they are largely nominated by the chair.

Some institutions, including the museum, are required to report to parliament, but this has become an empty ritual. Sir Keir Starmer, the Prime Minister (who recently rejected financial reparations), and Lisa Nandy, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, are ex officio Church Commissioners – another empty tradition. When nationally important institutions go off the rails, it appears that no one is responsible.

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We must learn from China's Hong Kong treachery

CHRIS PATTEN



On this day 40 years ago, the leaders of Great Britain and the People's Republic of China came to agreement on the future of Hong Kong. In the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Margaret Thatcher and Chinese premier Zhao Ziyang signed the Sino-British Joint Declaration, laying out the terms under which Hong Kong would be handed to China.

From July 1 1997, the city would be Chinese territory, albeit with a "high degree of autonomy" and a promise that Hong Kong's way of life would remain unchanged for 50 years.

Much of my five years as governor of Hong Kong was spent negotiating with the Chinese Communist Party on the implementation of the declaration.

Many, both inside and outside Hong Kong, were sceptical of the possibility of adhering to the promise of autonomy for 50 years. Even before the handover, Beijing was beginning to backtrack on the obligation to report to the UN on the application of human and civil rights within Hong Kong.

Still, in 1997 we left Hong Kong with the hope that the CCP would not be minded to immediately backtrack on its exhaustively negotiated commitments.

And the CCP did not backtrack – immediately. It took nearly a quarter of a century before Beijing moved to comprehensively crush Hong Kong's freedoms. When it did so, it was in the form of the 2020 National Security Law, imposed in retaliation against the massive pro-democracy protests in 2019 that saw more than two million Hong Kong residents take to the streets.

The Beijing government claimed that the National Security Law was necessary to clamp down on incidents of "black-clad violence" during the protests. Yet the text of the law, with its paranoid invocation of secession and foreign collusion, seems ill-suited to this purpose. It, instead, seems curiously adept at ensnaring journalists, legal scholars, former legislators and other peaceful pro-democracy figureheads.

Just last month, the largest single case prosecuted under the National Security Law came to a close, with 45 out of 47 activists imprisoned for as long as 10 years for organising unofficial primaries ahead of Hong Kong's 2020 district elections. This now constitutes "subversion", despite being explicitly allowed under Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law.

Like any Leninist institution, the CCP is obsessive about maintaining political and ideological control. In addition to arresting 10,000 individuals for protest-related crimes, it has "reformed" Hong Kong's electoral system, ensuring only vetted candidates are able to run, and created new powers to select "approved" judges to oversee national security cases.

It has also created organs of the mainland Chinese state within Hong Kong, extralegal offices whose decisions are not accountable to Hong Kong courts and which can apply mainland law in cases as they see fit. These reforms have rewired Hong Kong's political and judicial systems to suit the ends of the CCP.

Beijing treats the Sino-British Joint Declaration with open contempt, disparaging it as a "historical document". This characterisation aims to tar it by association with the infamous "unequal treaties" imposed on China during the age of imperialism. The Joint Declaration is, in fact, a legally binding agreement between equal parties, ratified by the UN in the 1980s, not the 1890s.

Beijing's flagrant disregard for the Joint Declaration should give pause to ministers as they pack their bags for Beijing, dreaming of trade deals. Sir Keir Starmer hopes to have frank discussion on areas of "disagreement", such as human rights and democracy.

Our Prime Minister did use a recent meeting with President Xi to raise the case of Jimmy Lai, a British citizen who has spent more than 1,400 days in solitary confinement due to his pro-democracy activism. But Xi hasn't allowed consular access to Jimmy Lai.

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Xi has made it clear that any talk of democracy and human rights crosses one of China's "red lines". The CCP will brook no criticism and honour no agreement on matters it deems "of importance to national security". This means just about anything which stands in the CCP's way. While Sir Keir was talking with President Xi in Rio, the courts in Hong Kong were imprisoning 45 pro-democracy activists.

To hold China accountable requires more than discussion and "agreeing to disagree". Where the Chinese government has broken its word, and violated international agreements, it must be met with sanction. The US government has sanctioned over 50 individuals responsible for human rights violations in Hong Kong. The UK government has sanctioned none.

Some politicians and diplomats try to avoid doing anything to anger Beijing, under the justification that to do so is prioritising "engagement" over point scoring. I encountered plenty of such thinking during my time as governor and, in my experience, this dynamic has only ever gone one way.

When Beijing violates its obligations, it is worth asking the fundamental question: what is the point of prioritising engagement over all else, if the result is just more agreements and more promises for Beijing to break?

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH
ESTABLISHED 1855

Return of stagflation takes us back to 1970s

The Bank of England monetary policy committee (MPC) meets today to decide on interest rates just as prices show signs of surging upwards once again. Other data indicates that the UK is heading for a recession.

The spectre now stalking the economy is stagflation, a phenomenon seen in the 1970s when Labour were in office. The second successive monthly increase in the consumer price index above the Bank's two per cent target brings echoes of that toxic mix of rising prices and falling growth.

Inflation is expected to keep going up in the next few months, largely because the tax-raising measures in the Budget will force businesses to raise prices. Experts believe it will rise above three per cent by April, which is low by historical standards – and nothing like the extremes of the 1970s – but is still a problem when the economy is contracting.

Figures show real GDP has fallen for the past two months in a row, shrinking by 0.1 per cent in both September and October.

What is the MPC to do? To avert further decline, the cost of borrowing needs to fall; but to bear down on inflation, interest rates might have to go up again. The expectation in the City is that rates will remain where they are at 4.75 per cent, with the possibility of cuts next year; but it is already apparent that the Chancellor's stewardship of the economy has caused uncertainty, hardship and retrenchment.

Since Labour's entire approach is supposedly aimed at encouraging economic growth, it is hard to imagine a worse set of figures in the first few months of a new administration. As was discovered with the last bout of stagflation, getting it out of the system is difficult precisely because it requires contradictory policy responses.

This is exacerbated by higher pay settlements in the public sector at the same time as employers are facing higher National Insurance contributions for staff, which will result in job losses and a reduction in consumer spending. It becomes a downward spiral.

Both Rachel Reeves and Sir Keir Starmer are adamant there will be no further tax increases, though since they said as much during the election campaign why should anyone believe them? But even if they are as good as their word, the damage has already been done.

The chances of Labour achieving the growth on which they have set so much store are disappearing by the day.

Outsourcing coal

This was the year when the last coal-fired power station in Britain closed, bringing to an end this island's association with coal dating back to the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. As recently as 2012, coal supplied more than 40 per cent of Britain's electricity. Now there are no working pits and no power stations. The reason given is to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Yet, as the UK shuts down its coal burning facilities, the rest of the world is doing the opposite. A new report from the International Energy Agency (IEA) says global demand for coal is continuing to grow, with China and India leading the way. Even Germany has opened new coal-fired power stations. Since Britain imports large quantities of goods from these countries, we are not using less coal, just outsourcing its use. This is true even in the building of wind farms, whose turbines are constructed largely from steel made by countries where coal is still used.

Ed Miliband, the Energy Secretary, says the coal ban is necessary as a "signal to the world". Except the world seems to be taking no notice. Climate-change zealots insist that even if Britain contributes a minuscule amount to global emissions, we need to atone for past sins as one of the great coal using economic powerhouses.

The net zero fanatics have to confront the realities of what is actually going on in the world, as opposed to what they would like. If renewable energy is cheaper, as they maintain, why are countries like China continuing to use a more expensive form of fuel to generate electricity? The grid upgrade alone will cost £35 billion and double household charges.

Might it be the case that the Government is not being entirely honest with the British public?

French innocence

Europeans may indeed be to blame for many of the world's ills – but not, it turns out, for all of them. Syphilis is said to have devastated the native populations of the New World – and the finger for bringing the contagion to the Americas has been pointed at Christopher Columbus's sailors. But the journal *Nature* now reveals that genetic tests on the bones of 13th- to 15th-century South Americans have shown the pox was already rife prior to Europeans ever reaching the continent. A then mysterious, syphilitic, flesh-rotting disease broke out in Europe in 1495, two years *after* Columbus's men returned. So the evidence suggests syphilis was an unwelcome American import, not the other way round. This early outbreak of "French disease", as it was dubbed, led to up to five million deaths. Our Gallic neighbours may have been blameless.

Letters to the Editor

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Traditional conservatives should be wary of donations from billionaires

SIR – Traditional conservatives will be instinctively inclined to applaud Elon Musk if he makes a huge donation to Reform UK (report, December 16). They should resist doing so.

The principle that a foreign billionaire should not be allowed to influence British democracy is of greater value than the benefits the party would receive.

What would stop a Left-wing billionaire donating to the Labour Party as a counterweight?

Sam Evans
Westbury, Wiltshire

SIR – I can see Elon Musk's potential donation to Reform UK backfiring. If there's one thing the British can't stand, it's being told what to do by Americans. Nigel Farage would be handing ammunition to his opponents, who'd claim he's just a mouthpiece.

Simon Mapp
Wrexham, Denbighshire

SIR – Nigel Farage seems to spend more time in America than he does in the constituency he is meant to represent. He loves to be seen around men with money, who have no right to get involved in British politics and should not be allowed to give millions to try to affect the running of this country.

M Streets
York

SIR – Nigel Farage fought successfully to remove us from a situation where our laws were being made by a foreign power, yet now he is contemplating accepting funding from an American who is so ill-informed that last summer he claimed "civil war" in the UK is inevitable.

What would Mr Musk be getting for his money? I think we should be told.

Sandra Jones
Old Cleeve, Somerset

SIR – We saw what happened when Labour activists went to America to help Joe Biden's election campaign. Americans were rightly annoyed about apparent interference from outside their country. Might not a donation from Elon Musk to Reform UK produce the same effect here?

Julian Gall
Godalming, Surrey

SIR – The Western world is suffering from stagnant economies and uncontrolled immigration. There is a growing consensus that the political class are so out of touch that they won't – or can't – tackle the issues that really matter to citizens.

This explains the volatility of voters and the election of political outsiders – in Italy, Argentina, America and elsewhere. It is why Reform UK is attracting new members at an astonishing rate, not only among the older, Right-wing part of the population, but among the young, too.

Perhaps, after many false dawns, we are finally seeing the reshaping of British politics.

John Stewart
Terrick, Buckinghamshire

Taxing second homes

SIR – I have just been hit with a 100 per cent premium council tax rate on my so-called second home. It sounds lovely – oh, he has two houses – but there are reasons for this, and surely I shouldn't be forced to share personal information on how I live with councils when trying to get the penalty removed.

Years ago, when I was a self-employed tradesman, there were no superannuation pension schemes available, so our accountants advised making provisions for retiring by way of a mixed portfolio, including property. These properties were and are part of our pension plans.

We have already sold a buy-to-let flat because legislation had made it unviable. Then we had to pay capital gains tax, which in essence was a loss from our pension pot, bearing in mind that tax was paid on the flat income.

Councillors are taking money out of my pension pot to pay themselves gold-plated pensions. It is scandalous.

Patrick Gosbee
Icklesham, East Sussex

Waspi hypocrisy

SIR – Labour's *volte-face* on the matter of compensating the Waspi women (report, December 18) is yet another instance of rank hypocrisy. That Liz Kendall, the Pensions Secretary, was prepared to support the campaign when she enjoyed the privilege of Opposition reveals her cynicism. Now that she finds herself with responsibility and tangible financial ramifications, the opportunism of her former stance is plain to see.

Labour ministers have form for making intemperate comments – about winter fuel payments, support for farmers, Donald Trump – which I suspect they now privately regret, and this latest episode is one more example of saying one thing and doing another.

I fear we are in for rather more of this adolescent behaviour, which will only serve to undermine Labour's fast-evaporating credibility.

Professor Jeremy Dibble
Durham

Staggered stocking

SIR – My husband and I still give each other a stocking – a pillow case, actually (Letters, December 17). They contain 12 small presents, and we open one on each of the 12 days of Christmas.

This extends the pleasure through the festive days. We stop short of continuing to February 2, which is the true end of the Christmas season.

Catherine Perry
Lincoln



POPPERFOTO

The long and the short of it: models posing for a shoot in London in December 1963

A Christmas present that's going out of fashion

SIR – I entirely agree with Boudicca Fox-Leonard that socks are the best present to receive at Christmas (Features, December 17).

Am I alone, however, in preferring to wear knee-length cotton socks under my trousers? I find them so much more comfortable, and warmer to wear, than those of the ankle variety.

Such socks are becoming harder to find. Fortunately, I still have a drawer full of them, but of course there is always room for one more pair – so if my husband notices this letter, he will hopefully get the hint in time to do some last-minute Christmas shopping.

Catherine Kidson
Bradfield, Berkshire

Labour's destructive plan for council reform

SIR – You describe how Angela Rayner, the Housing Secretary, "seeks to rationalise the current bewildering mosaic of different forms of governance" (Leading Article, December 17). Her reforms will do more damage to local democracy and government than you suggest.

Since the 1969 Redcliffe-Maud Report, successive governments have edged towards the magic number of 58 unitary councils across England that the report recommended, and which the then prime minister Harold Wilson enthusiastically supported.

Today, that would translate to an average population of well over 900,000 per council. As you report, (December 17), even under current proposals, "all areas covered by two-tier local government – generally district and county councils – will be required to submit proposals to merge into single, unitary authorities covering populations of at least 500,000". By any measure, that is not "local" government. Labour is determined to sacrifice the best-performing district councils in a centralising dash towards unitarisation.

Over 50 years' worth of international, independent academic research has shown that there is no conclusive or consistent evidence proving that bigger is cheaper, more efficient or more effective. In fact, the evidence shows that when local government gets bigger, electoral turnout falls, trust in councillors and officers declines, and citizen engagement suffers.

Councillors in England already have the largest representative ratios across Europe, and yet the Government is about to reduce the number of councillors and create huge, anonymous entities with no relevance to the real communities to which people feel loyal.

It is an evidence-free, ideologically driven destruction of the "local" element in local government.

Colin Copus
Emeritus Professor of Local Politics
Telford, Shropshire

Lockdown lesson

SIR – At last home-schooling is being reviewed, though it is regrettable that it is only because of the tragic death of a little girl (report, December 18).

Most parents send children to school to be taught by trained staff. Parents who home-school can decide to do so without having to show any aptitude or suitable education of their own.

While children were unable to go to school during the Covid pandemic, there was no alternative, and it is now accepted that this period without the discipline of school life has had an effect on educational attainment.

Children need to socialise to help their personalities develop. A child who is virtually confined to the home misses this opportunity, however well-intentioned the parents are.

All home-schooled children should be on a register, and their progress checked regularly. We must also accept that some parents are not capable of giving their children the education they deserve.

Ruby Gordon-Wilson
Newick, East Sussex

SIR – The television programme highlighting a research project in an Essex school was interesting (Review, December 12). During it, 12- and 13-year-old children gave up their phones for 21 days. Some of them had previously been on them for five or six hours per day. Improvement in sleep patterns, concentration in class and interaction with friends and family came after only one week.

The presenters seemed to blame the Government for this situation, pushing for a law to ban phones for under-16s, and were apparently shocked to discover that totally inappropriate content was easily found online.

My immediate response was to blame bad parenting. People should be accountable for their children.

Dr Bryan Goodrich
Poole, Dorset

The Sussexes' card

SIR – "On Christmas night, all Christians sing / To hear the news the angels bring". At least the Sussex Carol refers to Christmas. How predictable that there is no mention of it in the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's card from Montecito, but rather the woke "Happy Holiday Season".

Charles Foster
Chalfont St Peter, Buckinghamshire

Chagos Islands error

SIR – The rejection of the Chagos Islands agreement by Mauritius speaks volumes (report, December 18).

The country's new prime minister made no mention of what is best for the Chagossian people, who are after all the only injured party, but rather focused on the material "benefits" that Mauritius would get from a deal. It is an almost colonial land-grab.

The need to hand over the remote archipelago to Mauritius, which is 1,400 miles away and has never had sovereignty over the territory before, should be reviewed.

Admiral Lord West of Spithead (Lab)
London SW1

Wine intervention

SIR – The researchers who produced a study showing the benefits of introducing a small amount of wine to our diet (report, December 18) could have saved time if they'd been familiar with their Bible. In his letter, St Paul exhorts Timothy to "take a little wine", telling him that it is good for his stomach. This has always been one of my favourite verses – and one of the few biblical orders I find easy to follow.

Eve Wilson
Hill Head, Hampshire

Assassination remains a highly valid tool of war

The killing of specific individuals rather than troops en masse can be efficient and effective

CON COUGHLIN



In an age when drones and cyberattacks are all the rage on the battlefield, the art of carrying out the carefully-targeted assassination of a key individual is often underrated.

Even though the ancient trade of assassination dates back more than 2,000 years, and features in the military doctrine espoused in Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* in the 5th century BC, modern-day commanders tend to fixate on indiscriminate weapons such as air strikes, armour, artillery and missiles.

Yet, as this week's assassination of a senior Russian general in Moscow has shown, the removal of a key figure in the enemy's military hierarchy can have a devastating impact on its ability to wage war, as well as inflicting a profound blow to morale.

Senior commanders understood the potential value of assassinating key leaders during the Second World War. Winston Churchill was the target of numerous assassination attempts, including a bizarre Nazi plot to kill him by smuggling a bar of exploding chocolate into the dining room used by the War Cabinet. On the British side, an SAS team was despatched to kill Rommel in 1944. The conflict may have ended much sooner had the German officers who plotted to kill Adolf Hitler with a suitcase bomb that year succeeded in their quest.

Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, the Russian commander assassinated in central Moscow this week, hardly bears comparison with Hitler and Churchill in terms of importance to his homeland's war effort. But his demise, achieved by the relatively basic method of exploding a bomb strapped to an e-scooter parked outside his apartment, will nevertheless come as a major blow to the Kremlin at a time when the Russians are struggling to maintain their military momentum in Ukraine.

As the head of Russia's chemical and biological weapons programmes, Kirillov was accused of committing various war crimes, which included using drones to drop chemical weapons on Ukrainian front-line positions. Having already presented formal charges against the Russian officer, the Ukrainians then resorted to summary justice to neutralise a key figure in Russia's war effort.

Kirillov was also a close ally of Russian president Vladimir Putin, and frequently appeared on Russian television to propagate some of Moscow's wilder conspiracy theories, such as last year's bizarre claim that the US was planning to deploy drones "designed to spread infected mosquitoes" on Russian soldiers.

By carrying out the assassination in Moscow itself, the Ukrainians have sent a clear signal to the Kremlin that they have the ability to strike at the heart of the Russian state.

Kirillov's killing, moreover, comes amid a recent upsurge in targeted killings of key figures in Russia's war effort. Earlier this month, Russian missile expert Mikhail Shatsky was shot dead near his home in Moscow, while a Russian naval officer and prison chief have recently been killed in car bomb attacks carried out in Russian-occupied Ukraine.

The growing use of targeted assassinations by the Ukrainians comes at a moment when both sides in the conflict are trying to gain the upper hand before Donald Trump's return to the White House next month. Trump has made it clear that one of his first acts on taking office will be to bring hostilities in Ukraine to an end.

While it is too early to assess the detrimental impact the killings of Kirillov and other senior officials will have on Russia's war effort, other instances of carefully targeted assassinations have shown how effective they can be in disrupting the operations of hostile forces.

Israel, for instance, regularly targets specific individuals to achieve its aims without having to resort to the immensely more challenging alternative of engaging in direct military action.

Iran's nuclear programme, for example, which Western intelligence believes is trying to develop nuclear weapons, has suffered numerous setbacks due to the assassination of several prominent Iranian nuclear scientists.

More recently, the Israelis have resorted to assassinating key figures within Iranian-backed terrorist organisations such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

The killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, who died in an Israeli missile strike on his hotel in central Tehran, inflicted a serious blow against the terror group when it was struggling to withstand Israel's military assault in Gaza. Similarly, Hezbollah has struggled to recover following Israel's elimination of its leader Hassan Nasrallah, who died in a massive Israeli air strike on his Beirut headquarters in September.

The US military is also not averse to using assassination in certain circumstances. Many of the senior al-Qaeda leaders responsible for the September 11 attacks in 2001 were killed by missiles fired from US drones, as were Islamic State fighters. British forces used similar tactics in 2015 to eliminate the infamous Islamic State executioner "Jihadi John", the English-speaking terrorist responsible for the brutal murder of several Western hostages.

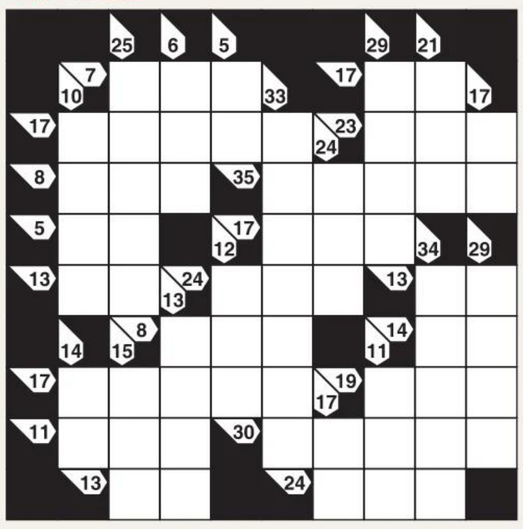
Targeted assassinations may be one of the oldest tactics in warfare, but they can be just as effective as the other options available in modern combat.

Puzzles, Mind Games & Telegraph Toughie

KAKURO

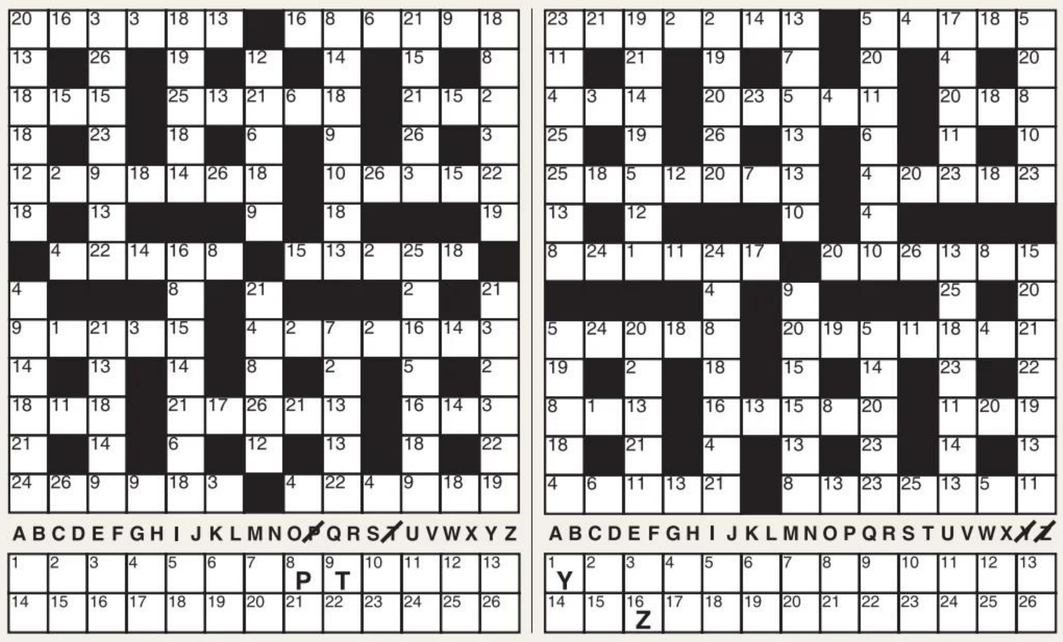
To solve kakuro you must enter a number between 1 and 9 in the empty squares without repeating a digit. The clues are the numbers on the black squares and are the sum of the solution numbers. The clue pointers indicate the direction of the answers. A block of two squares with a clue of 3 will solve as 2,1 and a 5 will produce 4,1 or 2,3. A 4 can only be 1,3, never 2,2. *Solution tomorrow.*

TOUGH NO 5239



CODEWORDS

Numbers are substituted for letters in this crossword grid. In the smaller key grid some letters are solved. Use these as clues to complete your first word. This will solve more letters that you can then enter in the grids. *Solutions tomorrow.*



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	P	9	T	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26		

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Z

1	Y	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	Z	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

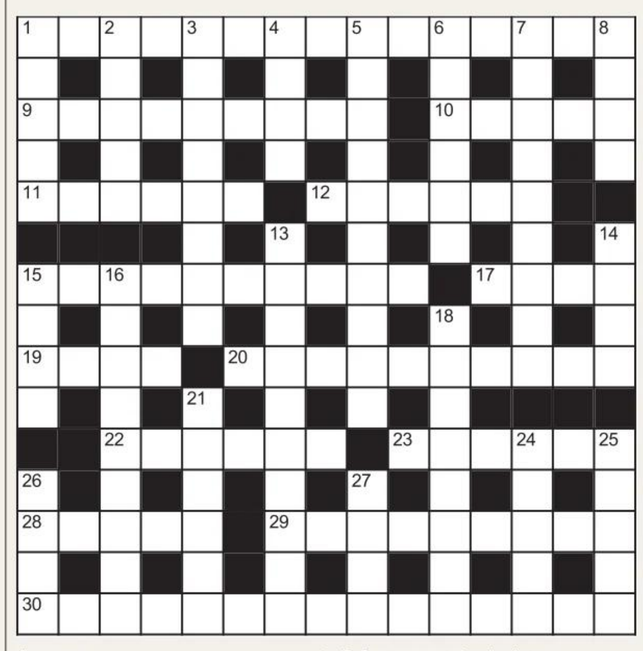
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Notes

TELEGRAPH TOUGHIE

NO 3395

KCIT



Across

1 Who'll straighten out any sliding teeth? (6,9)
9 Opening stage in kidnapping seeing sailor escaping (9)
10 Fine move, eliminating bishop, is a dodge (5)
11 Justification not acceptable in – say – backing bribe (6)
12 That guy in charge keeping court very busy (6)
15 Power and work accepted by active mortals – that's the stuff of life (10)
17 Equestrian initially coming in cross after losing a new horse (4)
19 Region about to be annexed by America repeatedly (4)
20 Returned amounts given to one London hospital? It's not an ideal look (10)
22 Prohibit circling sheltered area for stuff from whales (6)
23 Second recording including rock arranged for orchestra? (6)
28 Caught leaving illegal drink, leading to a fuss (3-2)
29 Discount not right when receiving a scholarship (9)
30 Following agreement, part of railway station is no place for buskers (7-8)

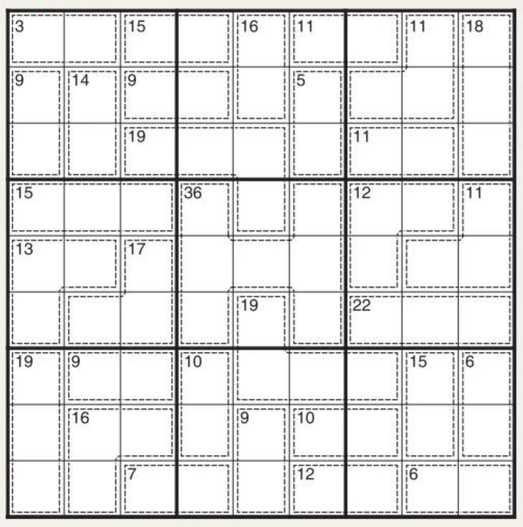
Down

1 Active wild dog moving tail (5)
2 Suggestion for one to solicit payment upheld (5)
3 Steps to right dodging daughter and grandmother? (8)
4 1960s musical: source of hippie attitude (4)
5 Busy singer not initially appearing in interval? One's a cracker (10)
6 Decadent celebration after Spain meeting France (6)
7 Impolite behaviour in English firm that's put in part of kitchen? (9)
8 Current name disdained by adolescents (4)
13 An entire Greek city beginning to transmit good wishes (3,3,4)
14 Watches end of game for sure (4)
15 Simple to rule out current scheme (4)
16 Exaggerated part of speech spoken quietly? Working to smother that (9)
18 A pitcher's thrown? Here's presentation of stats (3,5)
21 French area seeing son in a tie (6)
24 African animal I note in part of Greek writing (5)
25 The writer's supporting study of cotton fabric (5)
26 Smart military leader securing hospital (4)
27 Source of criminal web address providing twist (4)

KILLER SUDOKU

Your clues are the caged numbers that represent the sum of the numbers within the cage. As in standard sudoku, each 3 x 3 box, each row and each column must contain all the numbers 1 to 9. *Solution tomorrow.*

TOUGH



SUDOKU

To solve this puzzle each 3 x 3 box, each row and also each column must contain all the numbers from 1 to 9. There are numerous strategies to help you solve sudoku. *Solutions tomorrow.*

REGULAR NO 6809

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

TOUGH NO 6809

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

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PANAGRAM

Create words of four letters or more, always using the centre letter. Proper nouns and plurals are not allowed, and you can only use each letter once per word. Can you find the nine-letter Panagram? *Solution tomorrow.*



Up to 8 words - Word Finder, 9 - Wordsmith, 18 - Word Wizard, 28 - Word Master, 37 - Word Genius, 47 - Word Perfect

Toughie No 3394



Help with clues
Single clues 0905 757 0126.
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ANAGRAMS

Each of the anagrams below spells out a term related to publishing. *Solution tomorrow.*

PAP THY GYRO _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
ERODE FOR RAP _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
IN FOR DITTIES _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

MIND GYM

NO 4479

Start on the left with the given number and work your way across following the instructions in each cell. Target time: 30 seconds. *Solution below.*

BEGINNER									ANSWER
28	6/7 OF THIS	x2.25	÷9	X BY ITSELF	TRIPLE IT	3/4 OF THIS	DOUBLE IT	-66	5/8 OF THIS	
INTERMEDIATE										ANSWER
14	x6	x3.75	-81	HALVE IT	÷9	X BY ITSELF	DOUBLE IT	-226	11/14 OF THIS	
ADVANCED										ANSWER
468	÷3	11/12 OF THIS	TRIPLE IT	-93	6/7 OF THIS	DOUBLE IT	√	x11.5	+368	

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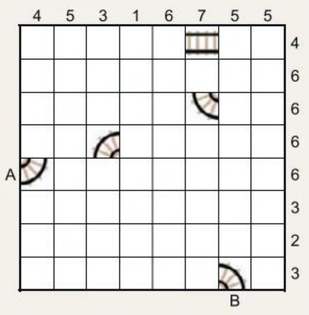


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TRAIN TRACKS

Lay down tracks to allow a train to travel from A to B. Only use straight and curved rails and the track cannot cross itself. The numbers indicate how many sections of rail go in each column and row. *Solution tomorrow.*



MINI SUDOKU

Fill in the grid in such a way that every row and column and every 2 x 3 box contains the numbers 1-6. *Solution tomorrow.*

MODERATE NO 4246

				3	
6					4
				1	2
	5			4	
3					1
	6				

PLUSWORD

NO 942

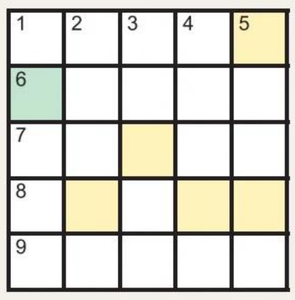
Solve the crossword, then use letters in the shaded squares to complete the additional PlusWord. A letter in a green square appears in the same column in the PlusWord as it does in the crossword; a letter in a yellow square appears in the PlusWord, but in a different column than it does in the crossword.
There is only one possible answer for the PlusWord; it may be that the PlusWord contains letters that aren't found in the crossword, but it can always be worked out logically without guessing.
Solution tomorrow.

Across

1 Noise made by a custard pie?
6 Swap
7 "The ___ has landed!"
8 Had dinner at home
9 Midlands city; type of hat

Down

1 Place
2 Talk foolishly; taper (anag.)
3 Stella Artois, e.g.
4 Say something off the cuff
5 Wee



Play PlusWord for free online at telegraph.co.uk/pw or scan the QR code

Notes

WORD LADDER

Change just one letter to go from the top word to the bottom word. Each step must be a valid word and you cannot change the order of the letters. There are clues below for each rung, but they are not in order. For an extra challenge, try to complete the puzzle without using the clues. *Solution tomorrow.*

APPLAUD, PREPARE, HACK, CAGE, FELLOW



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THE SOLUTIONS

Yesterday's solutions

Sudoku Regular and Tough No 6808

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

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

Word Ladder: Thin, then, teen, tern, tarn, warn, warp, wasp.

Anagrams: 1. Emulsion 2. Distemper 3. Undercoat.

Panagram: Propelled, loppered, redpoll, peopled, deplore, rolled, propel, poller, polled, polder, people, lopper, lopped, eloper, eloped, repel, prole, poler, poled, older, loper, loped, leper, elope, elder, droll, roll, role, reel, poll, pole, plop, plod, pled, pele, peel, orle, lore, lord, lope, lode, leer, doll, dole, dell, dele.

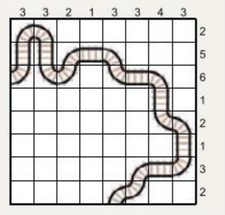
Today's Mind Gym
Beginner: 60 **Intermediate:** 88 **Advanced:** 644

PlusWord No 941

M	A	G	I	C
A	R	O	M	A
M	I	L	A	N
M	A	D	G	E
A	S	S	E	S

Gloom

Train Tracks



Killer Sudoku

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

Mini Sudoku No 4245

2	4	5	1	3	6
6	1	3	2	5	4
5	6	1	4	2	3
3	2	4	6	1	5
1	3	6	5	4	2
4	5	2	3	6	1

Codewords 1 and 2

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
K	S	B	O	Y	J	F	V	W	P	R	Z	X
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
I	H	E	D	L	M	A	U	C	G	N	Q	T

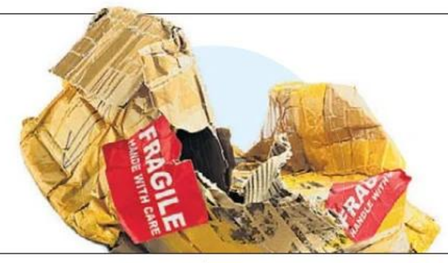
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
N	G	Z	H	R	V	S	U	O	I	X	Q	P
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Y	E	W	A	F	L	C	M	K	J	T	D	B

Kakuro No 5238

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

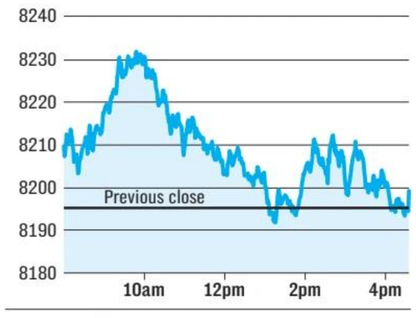
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Business



MARKETS

FTSE 100



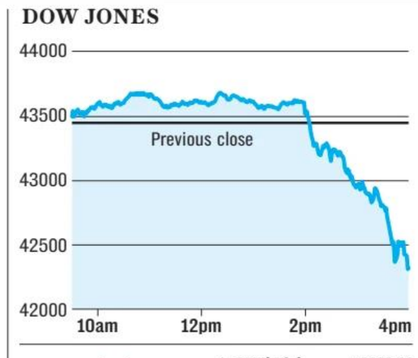
8199.11
+3.91 (+0.05pc)

52WkHigh	8474.41	
52WkLow	7404.08	
Yield	3.62pc	0.00
P/E Ratio	13.68	+0.01

BIGGEST RISER
Melrose Ind
553⅝p
+15⅝ (+2.90pc)

BIGGEST FALLER
Entain
732p
-20 (-2.66pc)

DOW JONES



42326.87
-1123.03 (-2.58pc)

52WkHigh	45073.63
52WkLow	37073.04

FTSE 250	20601.99	+59.13 (+0.29pc)
FTSE All Share	4478.99	+3.44 (+0.08pc)
FTSE All Share Yield	3.59	No Change
FTSE Eurotop 100	4036.52	+3.64 (+0.09pc)
Nikkei 225	39081.71	-282.97 (-0.72pc)
EURO STOXX 50	4957.28	+14.70 (+0.30pc)
S&P 500	5872.16	-178.45 (-2.95pc)
Nasdaq	19392.69	-716.37 (-3.56pc)

CURRENCIES

£$
Rate
1.2691
Change
-0.20¢

£€
Rate
1.2119
Change
+0.12¢

Page 26

COMMODITIES

GOLD
$2588.51
(£2039)
-56.03 (-2.12pc)

BRENT CRUDE
$73.39
(February)
+0.20 (+0.27pc)

Page 26

'Sorry we missed you'
As the Christmas post picks up, the strains within the UK's parcel delivery system are starting to show

Page 23

Big it up for big business
It does the most to employ people, drive productivity and growth and, yet, it is a persecuted community
Sam Ashworth-Hayes

Page 25

Bank to put rates on hold as inflation hits new high

Hopes of a pre-Christmas cut dashed – but Fed slashes borrowing costs for third time this year

By **Eir Nolsøe** *and* **Chris Price**

THE Bank of England is poised to keep interest rates on hold after inflation surged to an eight-month high and households were told to brace for further price rises.

Hopes that the Bank could deliver pre-Christmas interest rate cuts were all but abandoned after the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said the Consumer Price Index increased for the second month in a row to 2.6pc in November. It means inflation is now at its highest level since March and drifting further from the Bank of England's target of 2pc.

The rise means the UK now struggles with a higher rate of inflation than rivals such as the US, Germany and France. It came as the Federal Reserve slashed borrowing costs in the US for the third time this year, to a range of 4.25-4.5pc, just days after the European Central Bank lowered borrowing costs.

Economists warned that UK consumers face further inflation pain as businesses pass on the impact of Rachel Reeves's record tax-raising Budget. The Chancellor in October launched a £26bn raid on National Insurance contributions paid by employers, as well as raising the minimum wage by 6.7pc.

Sanjay Raja, at Deutsche Bank, said: "Price pressures are resurfacing again – with employers likely to start ramping up prices at the start of the year to account for the employer NICs increase.

"Put bluntly, the Monetary Policy Committee is some way away from declaring victory on inflation."

Responding to the figures, Ms Reeves said she recognised "families are still struggling with the cost of living".

She added: "I am fighting to put more money in the pockets of working people. That's why at the Budget we protected their payslips with no rise in their National Insurance, income tax or VAT, boosted the National Living Wage by £1,400 and froze fuel duty."

Mel Stride, the shadow chancellor, said the data showed "working people cannot afford Labour". He added: "These figures mean higher costs in the shops, less money in working people's pockets and risks keeping mortgage rates higher for longer."

The Bank of England is expected to hold rates at 4.75pc today, having cut only twice in 2024. The slow pace stands in stark contrast to the US and the eurozone, where policymakers have lowered borrowing costs respectively three and four times this year.

Financial traders also scaled back bets on the Bank's rate-setters bringing down borrowing costs at their next meeting in February.

It came after figures from the ONS showed private sector wages rising faster than expected this week, suggesting greater pressure on companies to raise prices.

The rise in inflation was driven by clothes and fuel prices, the ONS said. Inflation also rose in September to 2.3pc after a rise in the energy price cap. Britain's undesirable combination of a shrinking economy and rising consumer prices pushed the premium investors charge to buy UK government debt over German bunds to a 34-year high.

> 'Put bluntly, the Monetary Policy Committee is some way away from declaring victory on inflation'

Economists and business groups warned Ms Reeves there may be worse to come in the new year.

Anna Leach, the chief economist at the Institute of Directors, said: "There is a growing risk of stagflation arising from the response to the National Insurance measures. Particularly in the private sector, you have got activity slowing and prices rising."

Shop owners will "have to make difficult decisions, and one of those difficult decisions will likely be putting up prices", a spokesman from the Association of Convenience Stores said

Tina McKenzie, at the Federation of Small Businesses, warned firms would be forced to "raise their prices or cut hours, jobs, pay and investment".

Analysis: Page 22


TAYFUN SALCI

Rachel Reeves arrives in Downing Street yesterday. She is being blamed for a collapse in household and business confidence

Reeves blamed as factory output is worst since lockdown

By **Tim Wallace**

BRITAIN'S factories slashed output at the fastest pace since the first Covid lockdown as Rachel Reeves's Budget was blamed for triggering a wave of project cancellations.

Output in the three months to December fell at the fastest pace since August 2020, according to a survey of manufacturers published by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

Ben Jones, an economist at the CBI, said Ms Reeves's maiden Budget has crushed demand for manufactured goods. He added: "Manufacturers are facing a perfect storm of weakening external demand on the one hand, amid political instability in some key European markets and uncertainty over US trade policy.

"And, on the other hand, domestic business confidence has collapsed in the wake of the Budget, which has increased costs and led to widespread reports of project cancellations and falling orders. Manufacturers are heading into 2025 with no expectation of any near-term improvement."

The share of factories reporting falling production outweighed the proportion reporting an increase by a margin of 25 percentage points, the CBI's survey showed.

It marks the sixth consecutive month in negative territory and points to an accelerating downturn in the industry.

Manufacturers expect the situation to get worse, with almost a third of respondents anticipating a further fall in output in the next three months. It is the worst forecast for expectations since May 2020, when Britain was in the first Covid lockdown.

Factories reported a marked deterioration in their order books in December compared with a month earlier, with order levels at their lowest in more than four years. Almost every type of factory suffered, the CBI found, with those making furniture, glass and ceramics, and cars among the hardest hit.

Household and business confidence has collapsed in the wake of the Budget after Ms Reeves launched a £25bn raid on National Insurance contributions (NICs) paid by employers. Businesses have warned that the changes, combined with a 6.7pc increase in the minimum wage from April, will force them to freeze hiring and raise prices.

It came as official data showed inflation rose 2.6pc in November, the highest level since March.

The Prime Minister has admitted he needs to give businesses more certainty over tax, after the private sector was stunned by the surprise rise in NICs.

"I know that individuals, families and businesses want the certainty of knowing that the tax regime is not going to change very much," Sir Keir Starmer said in an interview with *The Telegraph*.

Ofgem to be handed stronger powers to tackle 'sky-high' energy bills

By **Alex Singleton** *and* **Matt Oliver**

BRITAIN's energy watchdog is to be handed stronger powers as Ed Miliband battles to lower bills as part of an election manifesto pledge.

Today, the Government launched a review into the future of Ofgem, which could result in the energy regulator being given powers to force companies to compensate customers directly when things go wrong.

The process for automatic compensation claims could also be simplified and response times for complaints could be shortened under the proposals.

The move comes amid a Government push to make energy cheaper for households. Mr Miliband, the Energy Secretary, last month pledged that average household energy bills will be £300 lower by 2030 because of the UK's switch to green power.

However, from January, prices are to increase by £21 under Ofgem's price cap – rising from £1,717 a year to £1,738.

Launching the Ofgem review, the Government said "sky-high bills" during the cost of living crisis in 2022 had forced it to act, adding that it wanted stronger protections for households and improved customer service.

It said that the regulator was "no longer fully equipped to protect consumers in today's market" and the review would beef up its powers.

"The review will ensure Ofgem is equipped to address these unacceptable outcomes for consumers, including the ability to order companies that are guilty of wrongdoing to refund or compensate customers directly," it said.

The comprehensive review, which runs until February, will examine how Ofgem "can better drive the Government's missions for clean power and economic growth by supporting the private sector to invest in the energy infrastructure we need".

It comes as Mr Miliband attempts to turn Britain into "a clean energy superpower" by intensifying public investment and imposing levies on energy bills. Jeremy Pocklington, permanent secretary to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, told MPs that billpayers face levies of three quarters of the cost of a wave of carbon capture schemes. Households could be forced to pay an estimated £517.

£300
Reduction in average energy bill by 2030 promised by Ed Miliband, the Energy Secretary, amid the switch to renewables

Jonathan Brearley, chief executive of Ofgem, said: "Proposed new measures to enhance Ofgem's consumer protection powers will include shortening the eight-week response time for complaints and strengthening the energy ombudsman.

"The review will also examine Ofgem's role in approving new infrastructure projects and improving the connections process."

The proposed shake-up came after new figures showed that household charges for the upkeep of Britain's power transmission grid are on course to double this decade as part of a £35bn upgrade to prepare for net zero.

The National Grid yesterday published detailed plans to upgrade, rewire or expand more than 2,000 miles of its network across England and Wales. This will cost up to £35bn from 2026 to 2031, almost triple the investment made in the previous five-year period, should regulators grant approval.

Consumers would pay for the work via network charges on their bills. National Grid said transmission network costs would rise from £23 per year to £44 during the upgrade.

Ministers have also confirmed that hydrogen is to play an "important role" in Mr Miliband's clean power plans as Britain looks to break its reliance on natural gas. Yesterday, the Government said it was moving forward with plans to get the country's first hydrogen-fired power plants up and running by the end of the decade.

Observer names Lucy Rock as editor

By **James Warrington**

THE Observer has appointed its first female editor in more than a century after its controversial sale to loss-making start-up Tortoise.

Lucy Rock, who is currently acting editor, will do the job permanently at the Sunday newspaper. James Harding, the ex-BBC News chief who leads Tortoise, will become editor-in-chief.

Ms Rock is a long-serving *Observer* and *Guardian* journalist who has spent the past three years in Seattle writing interviews, features, news and comment for the titles. She was deputy news editor at the *Daily Express* and also worked at the *Daily Mirror*.

She will oversee the print edition of the world's oldest Sunday newspaper, while a separate digital editor will build a new, separate online presence for *The Observer*, which was founded in 1791.

Ms Rock said: "It is a huge privilege to be entrusted with the editorship ... and to lead *The Observer*'s first-class team into a new era of its storied history.

"I am committed to preserving and protecting its liberal, independent, internationalist values."

The only other female editor of *The Observer* was appointed in 1891 when former owner Frederick Beer installed his wife, Rachel.



KitKat maker offers hunger-killing protein shots

By **Matthew Field**

THE company behind KitKat has launched a protein drink that it claims suppresses appetite in the same way as popular weight-loss jabs such as Wegovy.

Nestlé's new Boost protein shots, which are marketed as a "hunger support drink", are said to induce the natural production of the hormone GLP-1, which creates a feeling of fullness. It is similar to the action of weekly jabs such as Novo Nordisk's Ozempic and Wegovy, and Eli Lilly's Zepbound. These drugs are used as a weight-loss aid or to treat diabetes in the case of Ozempic and are based on GLP-1.

Some supplements and food types are believed to help bolster the body's production of GLP-1. However, Nestlé's protein drink is thought to be the first product from a major food maker that explicitly claims to boost the hormone in its marketing. The drink is not intended to replace weight-loss medication and its effects are much less powerful.

The launch of the protein shots, which are so far only available in the US, comes as food manufacturers scramble to respond to the launch of highly effective weight-loss jabs, which threaten to hit sales. Investment bank Morgan Stanley last year estimated that US sales of soft drinks, baked goods and salty snacks could fall by up to 3pc by 2035.

It is estimated that one in eight Americans have taken at least one type of GLP-1 drug. Analysts have estimated the market for obesity drugs could be worth $150bn (£118bn) over the next decade. Shares in Nestlé, which also makes products including Aero and Quality Street, are down 25pc this year.

The return of price inflation echoes a 1970s nightmare

A risk of stagflation, as the economy flatlines but prices continue to rise, is concerning, reports *Melissa Lawford*

INFLATION is back and the economy is contracting, raising the spectre of something economists and politicians dread: "stagflation". A portmanteau of stagnation and inflation, the concept describes a flatlining economy and runaway price rises.

It is the "worst of both worlds" scenario, according to Suren Thiru, of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW), where interest rates are kept high to tackle inflation and the economy suffers more as a result.

"There is certainly a live risk of the UK falling back into stagflation territory," he says.

The consumer prices index (CPI) rose by 2.6pc in November, up from 2.3pc growth in October, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

While still only marginally above the Bank of England's 2pc target, inflation is expected to keep rising in the months ahead as Chancellor Rachel Reeves's record tax-raising Budget measures push businesses to raise their prices.

"We look for CPI inflation to reach 3.1pc in April," says Rob Wood, the chief UK economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

At the same time, economic growth has slumped. Official figures show real gross domestic product (GDP) has fallen for the past two months in a row, shrinking by 0.1pc in both September and October.

The worrying combination means there is "certainly a risk" that Britain will fall into the stagflation trap, says Andrew Wishart, the senior UK economist at Berenberg.

"Data over the past month suggests that the kind of probability of that scenario is growing," he says.

Britain experienced an extreme version of stagflation in the 1970s. In 1974 and 1975, the UK economy shrank by 2.5pc and then 1.5pc, while inflation hit 16pc and then 24.2pc.

It was a decade when the country was racked by strikes, public debt soared and the Labour government was forced to seek a bailout from the International Monetary Fund in 1976. The outlook today is not as extreme but there are similarities, says Thiru. The UK has again experienced an energy shock and the budget deficit is high.

The crux of the problem with stagnation is that it is very difficult to get out of it, says Thiru.

Typically, inflation is fuelled by demand exceeding what the economy can supply. When this happens, central bankers raise interest rates to reduce demand and in turn cool inflation.

In a stagflationary scenario, however, inflation is rising not because demand is high, but because the economy's ability to create supply is falling back. In short, the country struggles to make what it needs and so prices climb.

This situation is much harder for the Bank of England to remedy with interest rate rises.

"The Monetary Policy Committee [MPC] is, once again, facing the dreaded trade-off between weak growth and higher inflation as the economy stagnates, but pay growth remains too hot for comfort and inflation is accelerating again," warns Thomas Pugh, economist at audit firm RSM.

The MPC will take its final interest rate decision of the year today, having cut the Bank Rate from 5.25pc to 4.75pc since the summer. Economists now think the prospect of a third rate cut this year is wholly off the cards.

"This inflation increase extinguishes any lingering hopes of an interest rate cut this year, while concerns over mounting inflation risks, including the recent spike in pay growth, mean that a February loosening is not a done deal," says Thiru.

Wishart says the Bank will "have to keep interest rates higher for long enough so that you're really certain that inflation is under control".

Wage figures published this week will worry officials. Year-on-year private sector wage growth jumped to 5.4pc in the three months to October, up from 4.9pc in the three months to September. From April, employers will also have to shoulder the increase in their National Insurance contributions announced in the Budget.

"That, too, is a big increase in costs, so there is cost pressure and that is raising prices, but it also means that some economic activity isn't feasible any more because some jobs will basically become unprofitable," says Wishart.

Inflation is only going to go up. The jump in the headline figure yesterday was driven by higher petrol prices, food prices and the Chancellor's decision to raise tobacco duties in the Budget. But it is next year when the Chancellor's Budget decisions will really start to push up prices.

Reeves's move to charge VAT on private school fees in January will add 0.12 percentage points (ppts) to inflation, while increases in vehicle excise duty will add 0.19ppts in April, says Wood.

"Fourteen other tax-driven, government-set or inflation-indexed price rises will add another 32bp [0.32ppts] to the CPI by next April," he says.

Higher employer National Insurance and the larger than expected increase in minimum wage announced at the Budget will heap extra costs on businesses.

Shops have warned the total extra cost for the retail sector will total £7bn, a bill that Kris Hamer, of the British Retail Consortium (BRC), says will "inevitably lead to price rises and job losses".

On top of the Budget measures, the UK economy will have to grapple with Republican president-elect Donald Trump's plans to introduce wide-ranging trade tariffs, which will drive up the cost of exporting.

Against this backdrop, Britain is grappling with an unexpected downturn in economic growth, which has taken forecasters aback.

"The big surprise has been the recent weakness in economic activity," says Thiru. Reeves says she is "fighting to put more money in the pockets of working people."

In a statement yesterday, she said: "That's why at the Budget we protected their payslips with no rise in their National Insurance, income tax or VAT, boosted the National Living Wage by £1,400 and froze fuel duty."

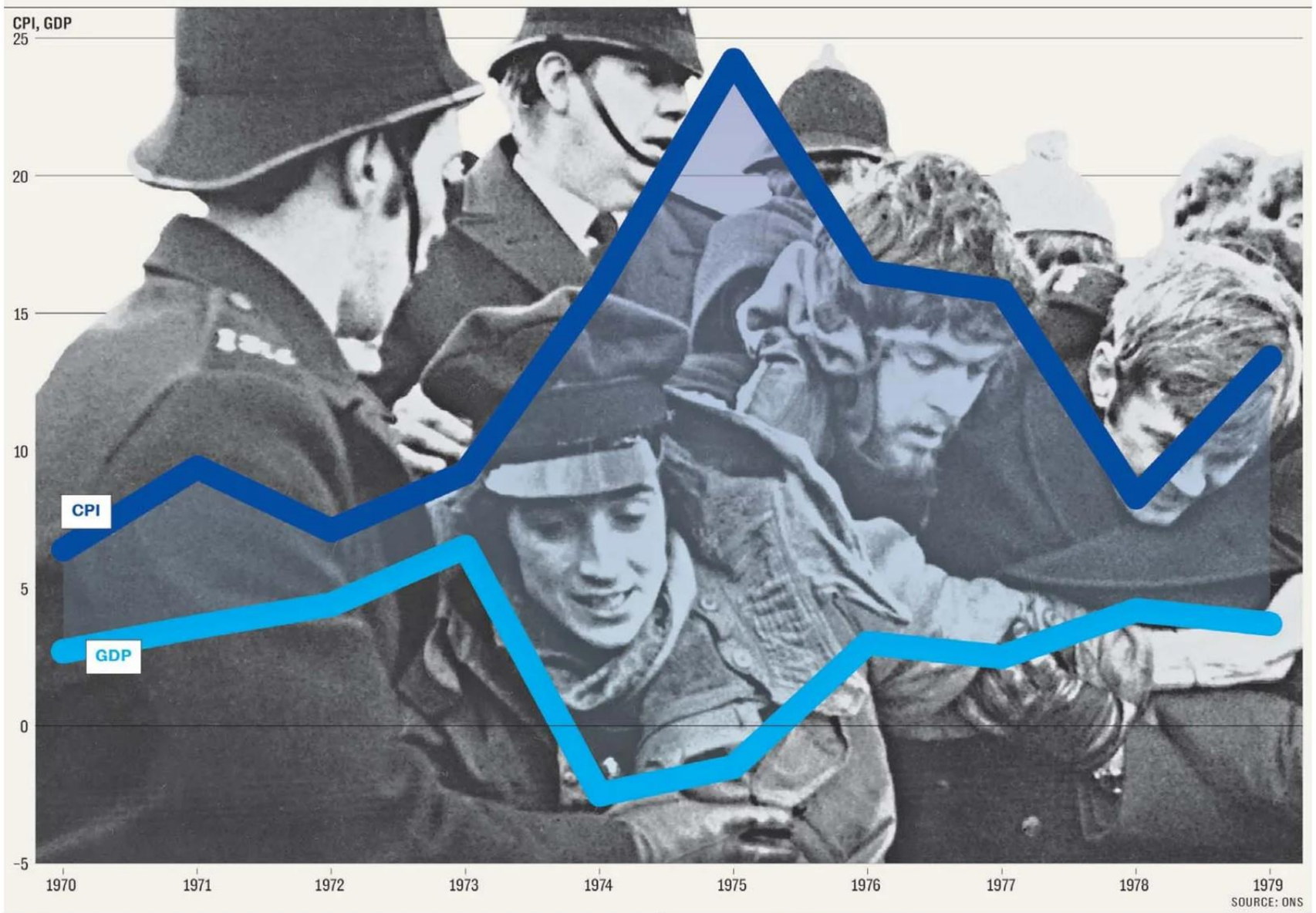
For now, the echoes of the stagflation crisis of the 1970s remain just that. While the economy may once again fall into stagflation, there is no sign that the crisis will be as bad as it was then.

However, policymakers and politicians alike will be fighting to avoid stagflation at all costs, wary of how bad it can be.

'This inflation increase extinguishes any lingering hopes of an interest rate cut this year'

'The big surprise has been the recent weakness in economic activity'

Seventies stagflation saw sharp price rises and low growth



Inflation on the rise



Monthly GDP fell in both September and October



Chinese Wi-Fi routers used in British homes investigated in the US

By **James Titcomb**

CHINESE Wi-Fi routers used in thousands of British homes are being investigated over concerns in America that they are at risk of being hacked.

The US government is considering banning routers made by TP-Link over national security concerns, according to reports.

Security experts say thousands of compromised devices have been used by Chinese hackers to launch large-scale cyber attacks on Western targets.

TP-Link had UK sales of £75.8m last year and is among the most popular manufacturers of routers and Wi-Fi devices used to boost internet signals in homes and offices.

Its devices are among the top ranked on Amazon.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the US commerce, defence and justice departments are investigating TP-Link ahead of a potential ban next year.

Security researchers from Microsoft said last August that TP-Link routers made up the majority of devices used by a Chinese hacking group to launch a series of "password spray" attacks targeting its customers – which include government agencies and defence companies.

Michael O'Rielly, a former commissioner at the US Federal Communications Commission, said earlier this year that TP-Link routers had "more than their fair share of citations" from security analysts.

Two members of the US Congress wrote to the commerce department earlier this year calling for it to investigate the company. The majority of British households use Wi-Fi routers provided by internet companies such as BT, Sky and Virgin Media, which are not made by TP-Link. Connect Fibre and Brsk, two smaller operators, use TP-Link routers.

£75.8m

TP-Link's UK sales last year. The US government is considering banning routers made by the Chinese company

However, the devices are popular for enthusiasts seeking to upgrade their Wi-Fi, or those buying range extenders or "mesh" networks to improve their home internet. It had a 40pc market share of mesh systems in the UK in 2021.

Accounts for TP-Link's British subsidiary showed it had sales of £75.8m in 2022, compared to £83.4m the prior year. The company has been ranked as the world's most popular provider of Wi-Fi products for more than a decade by research company IDC. Being banned from the United States, a move likely to happen after Donald Trump enters the White House on Jan 20, would represent one of the biggest crackdowns on a Chinese company by Washington since it blocked telecoms giant Huawei from US networks in 2018.

TP-Link was contacted for comment. It told *The Wall Street Journal*: "We welcome any opportunities to engage with the US government to demonstrate that our security practices are fully in line with industry security standards."

Austerity pay rise demands from officials advising PM

By **Lucy Burton**

OFFICIALS advising government on public sector pay have called for inflation-busting wage rises in the past to reverse the impact of austerity, it has emerged.

At least three members of public sector pay review bodies have previously lobbied for above-inflation pay rises to make up for weaker wage growth during the 2010s.

The comments have come to light amid a brewing row over the Government's push to hand public sector workers wage increases only marginally above inflation next year.

The Treasury submitted evidence to pay review bodies last week warning that it could only afford to hand teachers, medics and senior civil servants pay rises of 2.8pc.

The proposed rate is half of the 5.5pc awarded to teachers and nurses for 2024-25 by Sir Keir Starmer, the Prime Minister, after coming into office. It is just 0.2pc above projected inflation.

Unions have threatened to strike over the plans. Sharon Graham, the general secretary of Unite, last week said the "below-inflation pay recommendation is an insult to dedicated NHS staff".

Pay review bodies must now decide whether to side with the Government or recommend public sector wage increases at a different level. Ministers usually accept the advice but can ignore it. If pay review bodies recommend raises above 2.8pc and ministers ignore the advice, it will be controversial.

Paul Moloney, a member of the Armed Forces pay review body (AFPR), has in the past backed "above-inflation increases to enable a gradual clawing back [of] what was lost during the years of pay freezes".

The comments published in 2016 were made while representing the Society of Radiographers and referred to NHS jobs. The following year, Mr Moloney said there was an "urgent need" for pay rises that included "an additional catch-up element".

Mr Moloney joined the AFPR in 2021. Armed Forces personnel received a 6pc pay rise earlier this year, the largest in 22 years, following recommendations from the AFPR.

Mr Moloney declined to comment.

Nigel Cotgrove, another former union official and now a member of the Prison Service pay review body (PSPRB), has also in the past called for a salary rise that "provides for an increase in basic pay higher than inflation".

His comments were made in 2019, before joining the PSPRB, while working for the Communication Workers' Union and referred to jobs in the private rather than public sector.



PORSCHE

Net gains Tennis star Emma Raducanu poses in her latest advert for Porsche, for whom she is a brand ambassador.

Budget has forced us to close shops, claims Shoe Zone

By **Matt Oliver**

HIGH STREET retailer Shoe Zone has said it is shutting shops because of the Budget, after tax rises and an increase to the minimum wage made some locations "unviable".

In a trading update yesterday, the company said it faced "significant additional costs" following the Chancellor's decision to increase employer National Insurance contributions and the minimum wage in October's Budget.

As a result, Shoe Zone said it would have to close stores that had been rendered "unviable". The company did not say how many stores will close or where the closures would take place. A spokesman was contacted for comment.

While business chiefs have warned that the Budget will push up prices, deter investment and lead to job losses, Shoe Zone is one of the first companies to explicitly blame closures on Labour's tax raid. The retailer also said profits in 2025 were now expected to be half of previous expectations. Shoe Zone is forecasting profits of £5m in the 12 months to September 2025, compared with an earlier forecast of £10m.

As well as the increased costs, it blamed the slump in weakened consumer confidence, which it also pinned on Rachel Reeves's October Budget and "unseasonal weather" in the last three months of this year. An increase to employer National Insurance contributions was the flagship tax-raising measure announced by Ms Reeves in October, with the headline rate to rise from 13.8pc to 15pc from next April.

The earnings threshold at which companies start to pay the tax has also been lowered.

The British Retail Consortium (BRC) said the changes will cost retailers £2.3bn next year. A 6.7pc increase to the minimum wage – known as the National Living Wage – will also cost retailers another £2.7bn.

'It is inevitable that the Budget will also put pressure on jobs and hours in the coming year'

The BRC warned that the Chancellor's decisions would "hasten the reduction in retail jobs and particularly the recruitment of part-time roles, which have been falling in recent years".

Helen Dickinson, the group's chief executive, said: "It is inevitable the Budget will also put pressure on jobs and hours in the coming year, potentially affecting communities all over the UK that rely on retail as a vital provider of entry level, local jobs."

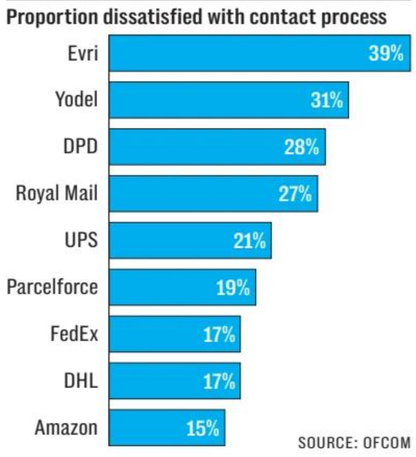
Why Wild West parcel industry is so unreliable

Driver shortages, worsened by pay rates per item and tough schedules, have taken their toll, finds *Matthew Field*



Evri tops the list for customer contact dissatisfaction

Proportion dissatisfied with contact process



SOURCE: OFCOM

"SORRY we missed you" – those four dreaded words that are all too common over the festive period. Everyone has a story of waiting diligently at home for a parcel to arrive only to spot a note on the doorstep or to see a text message claiming their delivery has gone awry.

The run-up to Christmas is the busiest time for package deliveries, with households now far more reliant on online shopping than just a few years ago. There were 3.9bn parcel deliveries in 2023-24, compared with 2.8bn prior to Covid.

Yet customer service levels have not kept pace with demand. Requests for help with lost packages were up 79pc in 2023 compared with 2019, according to Citizens Advice.

When things do go wrong, it can feel impossible getting a response out of delivery companies. Forty-eight per cent of people had a problem raising a complaint last year, the highest level in three years, Citizens Advice reports.

The charity has warned of a "worrying trend of worsening customer service" among delivery companies.

Across social media, stories abound of delivery companies sending photographic "proof" of delivery, only for parcels to disappear from porches. One Evri "delivery photo" shared with *The Telegraph* shows a pile of boxes in a sorting centre, rather than the package on the customer's doorstep.

Two thirds of shoppers experienced a problem with a package delivery in the six months to July, according to data from Ofcom published earlier this year, representing millions of parcels that were missing, delayed or dumped in the wrong place.

Among the worst offenders was Evri, with 44pc of parcel recipients reporting some kind of issue. Evri ranked particularly poorly when it came to complaints of drivers not knocking loud enough or leaving packages in random places.

In Ring doorbell footage, reported by MailOnline earlier this month, an Evri driver can be seen throwing two packages by a customer's doorstep before hurling a third over a nearby fence. An Evri spokesman said at the time: "This courier will no longer be delivering on behalf of Evri."

Other poor performers were Amazon, with 37pc of parcel customers experiencing an issue, TNT and Yodel. Royal Mail customers said they experienced a problem in 35pc of parcel deliveries. The companies with the least issues were DPD, Parcelforce – part of Royal Mail – and DHL.

On Facebook, there are multiple groups with thousands of members complaining about Britain's delivery companies. On the group "Yodel Delivery Are Utterly Useless", one customer writes: "Yodel 'pretended' to have attempted a delivery. I was home, and I had CCTV showing that Yodel wasn't even near my door. Totally shameless."

The group "Evri Complaints and Advice (Unofficial)" has 76,000 members. An Evri spokesman said the page dated back to 2020 and did not reflect significant investments made in the business since then.

Amazon's dominance has forced rivals to invest in their own infrastructure, piling financial pressure on their businesses.

Industry analysts say package delivery companies have been caught in a "boom and bust" cycle. Many did well out of the pandemic, but invested poorly in new capacity and warehouses.

At the same time, companies have been grappling with worker shortages. A report from retail technology business Esendex found there were 13,000 delivery driver jobs being advertised this Christmas along with 11,000 HGV driver roles, which are used to transport bulk packages to delivery hubs.

Citizens Advice, meanwhile, says overworked and overstretched drivers often have just minutes to try to reach consumers, before either abandoning a package or leaving a note.

With most couriers either on low wages or self-employed, there are few incentives to maintain high levels of customer service or hang around waiting for the door to open. In a 2021 report, Citizens Advice claimed: "Delivery drivers have high volumes of parcels to deliver each day and often encounter delays on the road. In addition, they're often given short time frames, such as one or two minutes to deliver each parcel."

The report added that many drivers see part or all of their salaries made up

> 'Our research shows alarming numbers of people have to chase lost, late or damaged parcels'

of "pay-per-drop" fees – in some cases less than 50p per package – meaning they only get paid for a successful delivery. Evri, which is owned by private equity giant Apollo, says its couriers earn an average of £17 per hour and this month it agreed a deal with the GMB union for parental leave, pensions, and holiday and sick pay for its self-employed drivers.

However, self-employed drivers still need to pay for their own fuel and provide their own vehicles – in many cases passenger cars rather than vans.

Other experts suggest retailers also have a role to play in letting down consumers. Many are eager to promise quick and easy next-day deliveries to compete with services like Amazon Prime. "Retailers, certainly over the Christmas period, are overpromising," says Jonathan De Mello, of JDM Retail.

Citizens Advice has called for tougher penalties for the industry when service falls short. It argues that current regulations are not up to scratch and Ofcom is failing to pressure companies into taking their responsibilities to customers seriously.

Anne Pardoe, head of policy at the charity, says: "Our research shows alarming numbers of people have to chase lost, late or damaged parcels – and those with accessibility needs are still being overlooked by delivery companies. Ofcom needs to start investigating companies whose complaints processes are still not up to scratch and take action if necessary.

Evri said it had invested £32m in its operations this year, including in making it easier to contact people.

A spokesman said: "The Citizens Advice survey shows we are one of the most improved parcel delivery firms over the past four years, while Ofcom recently stated high levels of consumer satisfaction with Evri's service.

"This year we will deliver around 800m parcels, with more than 99pc arriving on time, and we are proud to be the only parcel delivery company that mandates proof-of-delivery photos for every parcel. Customers and retail clients are voting with their feet and trust us with their deliveries."

A Yodel spokesman said: "The overwhelming majority of the 200m parcels we handled over the last 12 months were delivered correctly on the first attempt.

"We work tirelessly to make improvements, especially to the accessibility of our services, where we include options for customers to divert deliveries, encourage delivery preferences to be added and share any specific requirements or issues with us via the Yodel app."

An Ofcom spokesman says parcel delivery companies need to have a "transparent complaints process in place, if for example you need to complain about something you've sent, or the behaviour of a delivery driver".

Amazon declined to comment. TNT was approached for comment.

Despite claims of improvement, almost a quarter of customers are still dissatisfied with the level of service. Shoppers will be hoping for more Christmas cards than "sorry we missed you" cards this festive season.

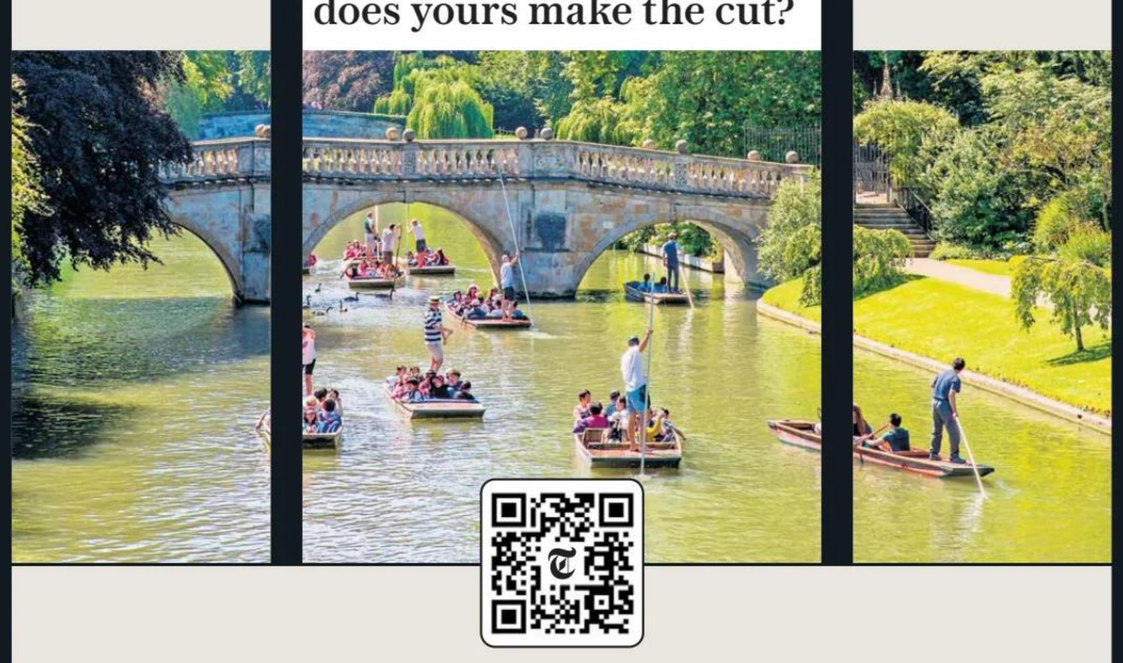
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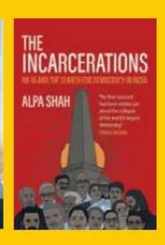
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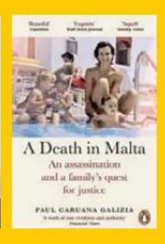


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Professor Alpa Shah describes the imprisonment without trial of 16 Indian activists working on behalf of the nation's minorities.

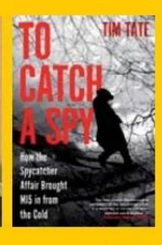
A DEATH IN MALTA
Journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia was killed in a car bombing in 2017 for revealing corruption and money laundering in Malta. Her son, Paul, has written an account of her life and campaigns.


Paul Caruana Galizia


Daphne Caruana Galizia




Tim Tate



MI5 AND THE SPYCATCHER SCANDAL
Journalist Tim Tate talks about the British Government's attempts to silence the whistleblower Peter Wright and his exposure of political elites.

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An MSF surgical team at Al-Shifa's burn unit in Gaza city cleans the wound of a child after a burn injury.
Photograph © Tetiana Gaviuk/MSF



DR JAVID ABDELMONEIM IS AN MSF DOCTOR RECENTLY RETURNED FROM WORKING IN GAZA.

"At Nasser hospital, we provide trauma surgery and burns care to patients. One Saturday early in my time there, we received hundreds of injured, as well as people who had been killed, following a missile strike.

It was chaos. Our team went to the emergency room. One of the injured was a three-year-old girl. She was breathing and looking at me – so she must be okay, I thought. But as I rolled down her dressing, I found that her entire left thigh was open to the bone.

Seconds later, the doors crashed open. Four to five injured people were brought in, most of them first-aid responders. Among them was a boy who wasn't breathing, so we tried to revive him, but the nurse looked at us and asked: 'Why are we responding to him if he can't breathe? We have to save other lives.' No one had the heart to call it and move on to the next person. He was someone's child. But we had to move on to the next, and then the next, and this continued for another four and a half hours.

In the emergency room, there was blood all over the floor. I had to kneel to see the patients, who were sprawled everywhere because there were no beds left. At the same time, more and more patients were coming in.

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MSFR0048

Can't win them all ... and what to watch in 2025



TOM STEVENSON

I predict more modest gains for shares, unless the market moves into full bubble mode akin to 1999

TWO years ago, in the week before Christmas, I rounded out 2022 with some economic and market predictions for 2023. I revisited these a year ago and had another look into the crystal ball for 2024.

So, I guess this is a Christmas tradition I'm committed to now, foolish as it feels. First, though, a quick look back at what I said 12 months ago.

Last December, I thought the recession that didn't arrive in 2023 would finally show up in 2024 on the back of higher-for-longer interest rates. From a UK perspective that wasn't a bad call. A shallow recession at the end of 2023 was duly confirmed early in the year and, after a mild recovery, UK GDP is now heading the wrong way again. However, when it came to the US, I was too cautious. The resilience of the American economy has been the biggest surprise of 2024.

As a consequence, my inflation and interest rate forecasts were too low but not wildly inaccurate. I predicted that interest rates on both sides of the Atlantic would be below 4.5pc. This week's cut by the Federal Reserve means I squeaked home over the pond.

But sticky inflation over here means that the UK still hovers just above that level. The expectation of higher-for-longer rates has kept government bond yields on either side of the Atlantic higher than my 3.5pc prediction. Inflation, as I expected, has remained near but only briefly at the 2pc target.

When it came to stock markets, I read a few well but badly underestimated the most important one. Predicting that the FTSE 100 would rise from around 7,600 to 8,200 was uncannily accurate. I also said that stimulus would benefit the Chinese market, which it duly did. A policy-fuelled spike in September pushed the CSI 300 index from 3,300 to 3,900.

But I was way too cautious on the S&P 500, which has risen nearly 30pc. With the US benchmark at 4,700 a year ago, I expected falling interest rates to support already high valuations but for the long run of US outperformance to come to an end.

In the end, valuation multiples continued to rise, magnifying the impact of greater than expected earnings growth. The "magnificent seven" continued to lead the way and the rally broadened out to smaller companies. My 5,200 year-end forecast was reached as early as March and the US's blue-chip index went on to clear 6,000 by November.

I got gold right, though. I said that a string of unpredictable elections would heighten political uncertainty and keep the precious metal above $2,000 an ounce. It actually went on to reach $2,600, despite the apparent headwind of a lack of income in an environment of persistently higher interest rates.

Oil did indeed stay below $90 a barrel, with the exception of a few weeks in April. I said sterling would flatline as rates fell on both sides of the Atlantic. It started the year at $1.27 and that is where it is today.

So, what do I expect to see in 2025? First, I don't believe that we can reasonably expect to repeat the strong equity market performances of 2023 and 2024 in the coming year. The combination of higher valuations and rising earnings has been unusual. I

> 'I think the dominance of the US tech giants will end this year, whether it happens slowly or abruptly'

expect 2025 to bring static or modestly lower valuations, taking the edge off still higher profits. The net result will be more modest gains for shares but probably a positive year overall.

If I am wrong, I would expect this to be because the market moves into full bubble mode and we experience a rerun of 1999. I hope this doesn't happen because, almost by definition, it will end badly. Investors could get fomo-ed into a frothy and unsustainable melt-up in markets.

Far better that the 15-year bull market since the financial crisis just runs out of steam. But I've seen this play out before and an over-exuberant blow-off is a distinct possibility.

I do think that the dominance of the US tech giants will end this year, whether that happens slowly or abruptly. Smaller US companies are more likely beneficiaries of Donald Trump's "America first" policy programme but big liquid stocks have enjoyed a pre-emptive sugar rush too.

The presidential cycle points to a slower next two years than we've enjoyed in the past two. And many other markets around the world are much better value than Wall Street. Putting year-end numbers on this, I'd say: 6,300 for the S&P 500 and 8,500 for the FTSE 100.

The under-appreciated risk for 2025 is that inflation refuses to lie down and that investors start to demand higher compensation for holding longer-dated fixed-income investments. The trajectory of inflation over the past couple of years has echoes of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when an initial spike was apparently tamed only to take off again when central banks took their eye off the ball. They won't want to repeat that.

So, while interest rates will ease a bit from here, I don't think they will go as low as we hoped. I'm looking for 3.75pc in the US this time next year and 4pc in the UK. I don't expect to see 10-year bond yields below 4pc in either country. Inflation will be 3pc on either side of the Atlantic.

Both gold and Bitcoin have enjoyed stellar runs this year and will pause for breath in 2025. My predictions are $90,000 for the cryptocurrency, having revisited $75,000 in between.

I think gold will end the year at $2,500 an ounce. Synchronised monetary policy provides little reason for the pound-dollar exchange rate to change much and oil, too, should stay within a $75 to $90 range. If my hit rate is as good next year as this, I will be both surprised and pleased.

Tom Stevenson is an investment director at Fidelity International. The views are his own

Angle of attack Japan's Space One terminated the flight of its Kairos small rocket shortly after lift-off yesterday. It marked the end of its second attempt in nine months to become the country's first company to deliver a satellite to space with a privately developed rocket. The Japanese government is pushing for an Y8 trillion (£41bn) space industry by the early 2030s. The rocket self-destructed three minutes into yesterday's flight after it detected abnormalities in the trajectory.



KYODO NEWS VIA AP

If we truly want to go for growth, we should be promoting the interests of big business



SAM ASHWORTH-HAYES

Large corporations play an oversized role in driving the economy, hiring staff and boosting productivity

WHEN politicians come out to bat for the interests of businesses, they are generally careful to talk about small businesses. This approach makes sense politically and rhetorically – plumbers and gardeners are probably more popular than tech companies and investment funds – but less sense economically. If we want to go for growth, we should be promoting the interests of giant corporations.

"Won't somebody please think of Google's profit margin" might be an unusual appeal, but in economic terms it's quite a starting point. Large businesses – defined as employing 250 or more people – make up just 0.15pc of the UK's business population.

At the same time, they account for 40pc of the employment, and 48pc of the turnover (and that's excluding the financial services and insurance behemoths, who inhabit a sector where "turnover" is a slightly hazy concept).

Giant businesses are, in other words, incredibly disproportionate in their impact on the UK economy.

This shouldn't be too surprising. Research has shown time and time again that large companies tend to be more productive than smaller ones: they benefit from economies of scale across their activities, have the funds to invest in new equipment or worker skills, access to finance when they can't pay for things out of their own capital, and of course can afford to sustain loss-making research projects that turn into new products. The resulting productivity differentials are so large that at one point researchers at the Bank of Canada estimated that half of the productivity gap between Canadian and American manufacturing companies could be put down to differences in size.

It's notable that the UK's productivity decline in the 1970s occurred at roughly the same time that the density of large companies started to fall.

Business size, in other words, matters. While some might argue that we've got the relationship backwards – companies become large because they're more productive – the research seems to suggest otherwise.

Small businesses, on the other hand, are rather more variable. Policymakers agonising over Britain's "productivity puzzle" noticed relatively early on that Britain has a "long tail" of relatively unproductive small companies. At one point, 90pc of the least productive 10pc of businesses employed fewer than 10 people.

Performance was particularly weak in manufacturing, where we've already noted that scale matters. As was probably inevitable, however, the policymakers proceeded to draw precisely the wrong conclusion from this evidence.

Confronted with survey findings that 15pc of SMEs didn't know what productivity was and 29pc didn't know how to measure it, they poured energy into schemes designed to improve productivity in small companies.

We should absolutely make life easier for start-ups seeking to become scale-ups, but we should also understand that this is about market entry and expansion rather than improving productivity in the long tail.

The problem is that small companies are a category that occludes more than it reveals. When we group firms together by the size of their workforce rather than their ambitions, we cluster together "Gary, your local plumber, no intention of expanding" with "two Stanford PhD students starting a search engine". One of these has the potential to unlock massive economic growth, one does not.

Small enterprises tend to be more like Gary the plumber than Sergey Brin and Larry Page. One-man enterprises make up around 74pc of the business population, but account for just under 7pc of turnover. The Conservatives shouldn't set out to make life hard for these people. But they also shouldn't look to these to be the engine of economic growth for the UK.

Over the period from 2019 to 2024, adjusted for inflation, the turnover of small businesses (0-49 employees) grew about 0.85pc. The turnover of large businesses – again excluding financial and insurance services – grew about 7.77pc. The 0.69pc of companies classed as medium businesses actually did better still, growing their revenue almost 21pc, albeit from a much smaller base.

To my mind, these distinctions in willingness and ability to scale, coupled to the productivity literature, suggest that it might make more sense to start talking about "large and medium enterprises" as our growth category. This isn't to say we should give big business everything it wants; it's not uncommon, for instance, for larger companies to quietly support growth-killing rules such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) because they can swallow the compliance costs and smaller competitors can't.

And we certainly shouldn't follow a dirigiste policy of promoting national champions in the belief that this will automatically lead to prosperity. But when we talk about growth, we should recognise its sources and design our policies accordingly.

This will take a change in attitude alongside a change of focus. In a recent *Telegraph* article, Andrew Griffith, the shadow business secretary, drew on Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* as he bemoaned the effect of Labour's policies on small businesses. He might have done better to draw on a different Rand quote describing the American businessman as "a persecuted minority, discriminated against and penalised for his achievements".

Adapt it slightly, and you have a pithy summary of the mood in British politics: scorn for large and successful corporations, care and attention for unproductive small businesses. If the Conservatives are serious about growth, they should aim to be the party that changes that.

Cost of renting in England hits record high

By **Chris Price**

RENTAL prices in England rose at a record pace last month, according to the Office for National Statistics.

London had the highest rent inflation in England in the year to November, hitting an unprecedented 11.6pc, up from 10.4pc in October. The average monthly rent was £2,206.

Average rents in England also rose at a record pace of 9.3pc in November to £1,362, a typical rise of £116 on a year earlier.

Across the UK, average private rents increased by 9.1pc in November, just shy of the record of 9.2pc. Andrew Montlake, of mortgage broker Coreco, said: "You have to feel for the UK's tenants as rents are rising at an astronomical and unsustainable rate."

Riz Malik, of R3 Wealth, said: "For many renters, the opportunity to own your own property will be a distant dream given the escalation in rents in the UK."

Analysis by Sky News found most people in the UK were renters and that mortgage holders were in the minority. Rent increases far surpass house price rises, mortgage rates and the overall rate of inflation.

People remortgaging at the end of November could secure a typical five-year fixed deal for 5.28pc or a two-year fixed deal for 5.52pc.

The rent increase comes as a result of there being more renters than properties available, the National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA) said.

"The biggest pressure on rents remains a chronic shortage of housing to meet demand," Chris Norris, NLRA's policy director, said.

He added: "According to Savills, up to one million new homes to rent will be needed by 2031 to meet growing demand. Despite this, government data shows that one in three landlords are now planning to sell properties they rent out over the next two years."

Yorkshire Post owner agrees to £65m sale

By **Daily Telegraph Reporter**

THE *Scotsman* and *Yorkshire Post* owner National World has agreed a £65.1m takeover by its largest shareholder, Media Concierge.

National World has given its backing to an all-cash offer worth 23p a share.

Media Concierge, which already owns a 28pc stake in National World, runs a broad selection of local newspapers in Ireland, as well as direct mail and advertising operations.

The recommended deal comes after National World rejected a previous potential offer from Media Concierge, worth £56.2m or 21p per share, which was put forward last month. Media Concierge has given assurances not to make "material" job losses across editorial and production teams, which account for around two thirds of employees at National World, or to close any local news brands.

The company, however, warned that there could be "material job reductions in areas of overlap" across the two companies as it looks to make savings following the deal.

It said: "Once National World ceases to be a listed company, a limited number of public company-related functions may become unnecessary and therefore be reduced in scope. However, Media Concierge has not yet developed any firm intentions in this regard."

It also plans to shift National World's headquarters from Leeds to London but to retain the office in Leeds and not shut any locations across the UK.

The potential buyer is among the original backers of National World, after it was set up as a media investment vehicle by former Mirror Group chief executive David Montgomery in 2020.

Later that year, National World snapped up regional newspaper publisher JPI Media for £10.2m, taking control of *The Yorkshire Post*, *The Scotsman* and dozens of other titles.

Markets

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Government securities

52 week High	Low (£)	Stock	Price (£)	+/-	Flat Yield	Rdm Yield
104.14	99.60	Treas 5% 25	100.05	-0.01	5.00	4.72
112.21	100.63	Treas 6% 28	106.39	-0.09	5.64	4.23
106.59	99.08	Treas 4¼% 32	99.16	-0.18	4.29	4.38
106.09	96.43	Treas 4¼% 36	96.59	-0.21	4.40	4.64
110.73	99.54	Treas 4¾% 38	99.74	-0.29	4.76	4.78
Index Linked Securities						
352.43	335.44	Treas 4½% IL 30	336.02	-0.33	1.23	0.83
247.05	238.68	Treas 2% IL 35	238.31	-0.38	0.84	1.21
10-year Government Bonds						

	Yield%	Spread vs Bunds	Spread vs T-Bonds
France	3.04	+0.80	-1.36
Germany	2.24	-	-2.16
Japan	1.05	-1.19	-3.35
Great Britain	4.55	+2.31	+0.15
United States	4.40	+2.16	-

The share prices, price-earnings ratios and dividend yields below are supplied by Interactive Data (Europe) Ltd. The yields are calculated using historic dividend payments divided by the closing share price multiplied by 100.

Aerospace & defence +0.72%

52 week High	Low (p)	Stock	Price (p)	+/-	Yld	P/E
594	373¾	Babcock Intl ●	500*	+8¾	1.1	15.2
1417	1051½	BAE Systems	1173½	+3½	2.6	19.1
491	302	QinetiQ ●	411	+3¾	2.1	17.0
599¾	287½	Rolls-Royce	586¾	+5¾	–	20.3
183	120	Senior ●	156¾	-¾	1.6	20.8

Banks +1.00%

273¼	138¾	Barclays	267	+2½	3.1	9.6
819	179¾	Close Bros ●	233	+¾	–	3.9
769½	572¾	HSBC	767¾*	+10¾	6.3	8.5
64¾	41	Lloyds Bk Gp	54¾	+¾	5.3	7.2
419¾	203¼	NatWest Group	403¾	+4¼	4.3	8.4
423	304½	Santander	373	+½	3.5	22.6
1010	571	Standard Ch	1000½	+10½	2.4	11.7

Beverages -0.69%

3056	2275	Diageo	2518½	-17½	3.1	–

Chemicals -0.91%

5154	3310	Croda Intl	3370	-1	3.2	27.5
1917½	1318	Johnson Mat ●	1351*	-27	5.7	23.1
1575	816	Victrex ●	1092	-30	5.5	55.2

Construction +0.39%

472¾	315¾	Balfour Beatty ●	447	+¾	2.6	12.7
582½	395	Barratt Redrow	437¾	+2	3.7	37.1
3384	2397¼	Bellway ●	2424*	+4	2.2	22.1
5560½	3886	Berkeley Grp	3974	+42	3.3	10.3

52 week High	Low (p)	Stock	Price (p)	+/-	Yld	P/E
245	173¾	Boot H	234	-1	3.2	11.9
113	61	Costain	109	–	1.1	13.5
1097	869¾	Grafton Gp ●	962¼	+17½	3.8	13.8
3970	2030	Morgan Sindall ●	3800	+85	3.1	14.9
1721¼	1204½	Persimmon	1222	-17	4.9	15.3
169½	121½	Taylor Wimpey	125	+¾	7.7	12.6

Electricals +1.27%

275½	94	Dialight	100¼	–	–	-1.7
816	561	discoverIE Grp ●	712*	+2	1.7	44.0
2815	2104	Halma	2809	+26	0.8	45.3
4500	3065	Renishaw ●	3415	+70	2.2	25.6
1758	884	XP Power	1420	+110	–	-31.3

Electricity -0.83%

692	407¾	Drax Group ●	629½	+3	4.1	4.4
1062	645	Nat Grid	926¼*	-10¾	5.9	16.3
2019	1543¾	SSE	1612½	-4½	3.8	10.3

Engineering / Industrial 0.00%

104¼	66¾	Coats Group ●	94⅛	+⅛	2.5	33.9
828	180	Cropper J	225	+10	–	-5.4
8860	4700	Goodwin ●	7440	+220	1.8	33.1
1911	1531	IMI	1852	+3	1.6	20.2
1719⅞	1149½	Mondi	1189	+4	5.0	13.4
89¼	39¾	Severfield	52¾	-⅜	7.0	10.1
1894¾	1514¾	Smiths Gp	1747	+3	2.5	24.2
601¼	270¼	Smith (DS)	544*	+½	3.3	19.4
4600	2827½	Smurfit Westrock	4232*	-21	2.3	–
11280	6350	Spirax Gp	7055	+35	2.3	28.3
2336	1758½	Weir	2240	+10	1.7	25.4

Food producers -0.66%

2765	2053¾	Ass Brit Fds	2090*	+18	4.3	10.8
2896	2173	Coca-Cola HBC	2702	–	2.8	18.9
5260	3728	Cranswick ●	4950*	+15	1.9	23.5
996	723	Hilton Food ●	911	+14	3.6	22.4
99	62½	REA Hldgs	72¾	-1½	–	-2.8
5034	3680½	Unilever	4608	-44	3.2	21.6

Gas & Water -0.71%

157¾	113	Centrica	126¼	-¼	3.3	1.8
775	518	Pennon Gp ●	585½	-12½	7.7	-162.6
2807	2310	Severn Trent	2550*	-24	4.7	50.0
1145½	950¾	Utd Utilities	1063½*	-6½	4.7	57.2

General financial -0.05%

234¼	158¼	Ashmore ●	161	+¾	10.5	11.5
391¼	202¾	Bridgepoint Grp ●	366	+1	2.5	40.7
1169	688	Hargreaves L	1095	+1	3.9	17.7
995¼	671	IG Group ●	971	+5	4.8	12.2
2448	1540¾	IntermediateCp	2134*	+14	3.7	12.9
627½	479¾	Investec ●	562*	+9	6.3	5.3
60¾	35¾	IP Group ●	51¾	+¼	2.5	-3.1
865	410	Liontrust	467*	-3½	15.4	-85.5
73⅛	33	Lon. Fin. & Inv.	66½*	+5½	1.8	4.9
11667½	8648¼	Lon Stock Ex	11495	-45	1.0	82.8
241¼	192¾	M&G	195	+⅝	10.2	15.4

52 week High	Low (p)	Stock	Price (p)	+/-	Yld	P/E
279¼	196⅝	Man Group ●	208¾	+2¾	6.1	13.3
158¾	93½	Quilter ●	150⅞	-2¾	3.6	48.7
2240	1230	S & U	1397½	-12½	8.2	6.7
445½	298¾	Schroders	315¼	+2¼	6.8	12.8
134¾	37⅞	Vanquis Banking Gp	47	+1	12.8	-19.6

Healthcare -0.16%

400⅝	308⅜	Haleon	383⅛	-⅜	1.6	33.7
1245¼	911	Smith & Nep	980⅝	+⅜	3.0	41.2

Household goods -0.39%

1535	555⅝	Burberry ●	956¼	-1⅝	–	12.9
145	67⅜	McBride	106½	+1	–	5.5
159	75¼	PZ Cussons ●	84⅛	-⅜	4.3	-6.2
5886½	4034	Reckitt Benck	4823	-20	4.1	21.0

Information technology +1.34%

390	276	Aptitude Sftwre	325	-1	1.7	45.0
1328½	954¼	Sage Gp	1323	+18	1.5	41.2
205	102¼	Spirent ●	179	+2	1.8	52.8

Insurance -0.31%

186	131	abrdn ●	138½	+1¼	10.5	–
3143	2383	Admiral	2609	+2	4.1	23.5
510¼	414¼	Aviva	463¼	-3¾	7.4	12.3
846	493¾	Beazley	818½	-13	1.7	6.6
257¾	147½	DirectLineIns ●	243	+⅜	2.5	15.3
1282	998	Hiscox	1104	-15	2.7	6.8
721	559	Lancashire Hldg ●	654	-2	11.8	6.1
259	211¾	Legal & General	225¼	-¾	9.1	30.7
581¼	475	Phoenix	505	+1	10.6	-36.6
887⅝	594¾	Prudential	634⅝	-1¾	2.6	13.0
937	393¾	St. James's Place ●	900½	+9	1.6	-500.3

Investment trusts +0.40%

52 week High	Low (p)	Stock	Price (p)	+/-	Yld	NAV
3779	2269	3i	3632*	+15	1.8	2242
360	307½	3i Infrastructure ●	318*	+2½	3.9	371
830	621¾	abrdn New India	818	+2	–	1000
1300	1076	Alliance Witan ●	1256*	+8	2.1	1319
427	283½	Allianz Tech Trust ●	425	+3½	–	468
445	321¾	Asia Dragon Trust ●	421*	–	1.6	471
255¾	175	Baillie Giff China	225	+3	0.9	256
101¼	83	Baillie Giff Euro Gwth	86¼	-¼	0.1	103
118¾	99¾	Bankers Invstmt Tst ●	115¾	+¾	2.3	132
1068¾	841	Biotech Growth	879	+3	–	987
215	177⅞	BlckRckAmInc	203*	-2	3.9	219
127	104	BlackRockEnrgy&Res	114*	–	3.9	127
160	137½	BlckRock FroInv	157½	+½	4.8	168
653	527	BlckRck Grt Euro ●	556*	–	1.3	604
210	175	BlckRck Inc&Grth	198	–	3.8	224
1622	1304½	BlackRock Small ●	1342	-6	3.2	1560
682	566¼	BlkRk Throg Tst ●	581	+3	2.6	670
634	470	BlackRock Wld M ●	480½*	-1½	7.0	525
1545¼	1125	Brunner ●	1440	–	1.6	1424
3730	3200	Caledonia ●	3505*	+10	2.0	5600
454	387½	City of Lon ●	428	+½	4.9	430
207	151½	CQS Nat Res G & I	193½	+¼	2.9	192

52 week High	Low (p)	Stock	Price (p)	+/-	Yld	NAV
263	224¾	CT Glbl Mgd G	263	+2	–	265
122	106	CT Glbl Mgd I	113½*	–	6.5	111
497	412	CT Priv Eq Ord	475	-4½	5.9	679
347	293	CT UK Cap & Inc	322*	-1	3.9	331
102	77⅛	CT UKHighIncTst	98	-1½	5.7	97
540	439¼	Dunedin Ent	458	-3	5.0	629
786	647⅞	Edinburgh Inv Tr ●	743	–	3.7	830
199¼	136¼	Edin Worldwide ●	194¼	+2¼	–	192
92¼	80¼	European Assets	81¼	–	7.3	92
1148⅝	918⅝	F&C Inv Trust	1124	+2	1.4	1223
549⅜	467¼	Fidelity Asian V	506	–	2.9	555
249½	170⅝	Fidlty Chna Sp Sits ●	217	+1½	2.9	254
412½	339	Fidelity Euro Tst ●	356	+2	2.4	391
186½	144¼	Fidelity Japan Tst	169½	–	–	198
335½	268	Fidelity Sp V ●	311*	+1	3.1	339
900	803¾	Finsbury Gwth ●	895	–	2.2	977
172¾	142	Glbl Small Co Trust ●	165⅜	-⅜	1.7	183
174	149½	Hend High Inc	162*	-1	6.5	175
172½	154½	Hend Intl Inc	163	–	4.7	186
987⅛	752	Hend Smaller Co ●	812	–	3.3	937
239	186	Hend Opp	233	-2	3.0	236
2513	1860	Herald Inv ●	2480	-10	–	2515
550	408	HgCapital ●	512	+2	1.3	521
140⅜	113⅝	HICL Infrastructure ●	113¾*	-⅜	7.3	156
1352	1150	ICG Enterprise Tst ●	1296	+20	2.7	1942
748	644	JPM Claverh'se	696	-2	5.1	745
110½	94	JPM Eur G&I	99¾*	+⅜	4.7	112
588	470	JPM Japanese ●	563	+2	1.2	649
729¾	565	Land Secs	576*	+4	6.9	–
135	112½	Lowland Inv	125½	+½	5.1	141
265⅞	215	Majedie	256	–	3.1	281
399	326¾	Mtn Currie Port	372	+2	1.1	376
269	205	Mercantile InvTr ●	233½	-½	3.3	265
605	512¼	Merchants Tst ●	549	–	5.3	563
1297⅞	997	Monks ●	1286	+6	0.2	1433
908	797½	Murray Income ●	813	+2	4.8	925
263½	236¾	Murray Intl ●	256	+2	4.6	283
56	50½	Northern 2 VCT	54½	–	5.3	57
86	80½	Northern 3 VCT	84	–	5.0	88
59	54	Nthn Venture	57	–	5.6	60
390	344	Pacific Assets	368	-3	1.1	428
341	297	Pantheon ●	319½	-2	–	491
130	87	PremierMitonGlb	92½*	-2½	8.5	101
2030	1698	RIT Cap Ptnrs ●	1942	+48	2.0	2600
289½	261	Ruffer Inv Pref ●	269½	-1	1.9	285
494	404	Schroder Asian TR	480	+4	2.4	510
540	481	Scot American ●	502	–	2.9	568
987⅞	733⅞	Scot Mortgage	957	+5¾	0.4	1108
1528	1334	Smithson Inv Tst ●	1488	+6	–	1665
240	207	STS Global Income	233	–	2.9	238
175¼	141	Tmpletn Em Mt ●	166¾	-¾	3.0	197
360	302½	TR Property ●	305½*	+2½	5.1	328
133	107½	UIL Fin ZDP 2026	130½	–	–	138
241	200	Utilico Emerg	211*	+2	4.3	257
372½	300½	Worldw HealthTr ●	322½*	+4½	0.9	373

Net Asset Values © 2024 Morningstar Estimated at previous day's close see www.Morningstar.co.uk.

Media +0.47%

52 week High	Low (p)	Stock	Price (p)	+/-	Yld	P/E
899	666	Auto Trader	801¼	-5¾	1.2	28.5
766	450½	Bloomsbury ●	682	+2	2.2	17.1
886	719¾	Informa	828	+12¼	2.2	27.5
89	55½	ITV ●	72¼	+¾	6.9	13.9
1286	923¾	Pearson	1278½	+2½	1.8	24.1
112¾	58½	Reach	84½	+¼	8.7	12.4
3796¾	3015	RELX	3730	+23	1.6	39.6
710	499¼	Rightmove	671¼	-3¾	1.4	27.4
903	678¼	WPP	854¼	-2¼	4.6	13.7

Mining -0.85%

2813	1657¾	Anglo Amer	2415	-15	2.7	–
2425	1538	Antofagasta	1638	-4½	1.5	24.5
2707½	1941¼	BHP Group	1988½	-22¼	5.5	16.2
81	81	Evraz #	81	–	–	0.5
782	435¼	Fresnillo	648½	-1½	1.3	26.0
506¾	360¼	Glencore	362¼	-¾	2.8	13.5
251⅛	84¾	Hochschild Mng ●	217	+2	–	-27.5
404	291	Kenmare Res	323	+3	13.1	2.9
5910	4509	Rio Tinto	4757	-63	7.1	9.7

Oil & Gas +0.37%

541	365¼	BP	383¾*	+3¼	6.2	5.5
17⅞	10	EnQuest	11⅛	+⅜	–	-8.8
465⅝	260	Hunting ●	293½	+2½	2.8	5.0
45	8¼	Petrofac	10¾	-⅛	–	-0.1
2961	2345	Shell	2419*	+5½	4.5	10.7
213¾	46	Wood Grp (John) ●	65¼	-¼	–	-5.1

Pharmaceuticals -1.03%

13388	9461	AstraZeneca	10352	-154	2.3	34.2
2378	1478	Genus ●	1554	+16	2.1	–
1823½	1282½	GSK	1334*	+½	4.6	11.0
2165	1722	Hikma	1928	+13	3.2	28.5
1770	554½	Indivior	945½	+14½	–	–

Property +0.18%

10⅝	6	Alina Hldgs	9¾	–	–	22
49⅛	37½	Assura ●	38⅞*	–	8.8	–
1344	956	Big Yellow Gp ●	965	–	4.7	–
467¾	342¼	Brit Land	363¾*	+6¾	6.3	–
2530	1874	Derwent Ldn ●	1979	+7	4.0	–
381	288	Gt Portland Est ●	295*	-1	3.7	–
276	218½	Grainger ●	224½	-1½	3.4	53.5
325	246	Hammerson ●	286⅞	+5	5.4	–
259	177¾	Helical	181¼*	-4	1.8	-1.2
949	695¼	Segro	695¼	-3¾	4.1	–
156¼	119	Shaftesbury Capital ●	128	+1¼	2.6	2.8
165	116	Town Centre	128	+5	3.9	–
173	130½	Tritax Big Box ●	131⅛	-⅛	5.7	182

Retailers +0.29%

39¾	13	Brown (N)	39	–	–	–
95¼	44	Currys ●	93	+⅜	–	6.2
1279	959	Dunelm ●	1080	+12	4.0	14.5
949½	604	Frasers Group	610	+3½	–	7.0

52 week High	Low (p)	Stock	Price (p)	+/-	Yld	P/E
3250	2454	Greggs ●	2794	+16	2.3	19.9
212	125	Halfords	137*	-1	5.8	17.6
982½	753¾	Howden Joinery	798	–	2.6	17.2
177¾	93¼	JD Sports Fash	97⅜	+1¼	1.0	9.3
333½	209¾	Kingfisher	253⅞	+1¼	4.9	14.0
415¼	229¾	Marks & Spen	391½*	+2¾	0.8	17.9
8½	2½	Mothercare	3⅜	+¼	–	6.6
11103¾	7952	Next	9900*	+94	2.2	17.3
798¾	278¼	Ocado ●	302¼	-2¾	–	-7.9
814	280½	Pinewood Tech	347	+10½	–	3.0
161½	93¾	Saga	125¾	-⅜	–	-1.6
311¼	237¾	Sainsbury J	275¼*	+¼	4.8	46.6
1499	1069	Smith WH ●	1181	+6	2.8	22.8
375¾	217½	Tesco	372⅝	-1¼	3.4	22.3

Support services +0.17%

6448	4711	Ashtead Gp	5166	+80	1.9	17.9
3732	2896	Bunzl	3324*	-32	2.1	21.2
23¼	12¾	Capita	14⅜	-¼	–	-1.4
20¾	12½	Carillion #	14¼	–	–	0.5
6075	4828	DCC	5300	-15	3.8	16.0
121	72	De La Rue	98¼	-4¼	–	-9.7
191¼	125⅞	Essentra ●	134	-1¼	2.7	74.4
3978½	3002	Experian	3609	+18	1.3	34.9
17810	14100	Ferguson Ent	14470	-50	1.8	–
5240	4054	Intertek Group	4720	-22	2.7	25.6
211	151¼	Int'l Workplace ●	153¼	-⅜	0.9	-7.2
172	117¼	Johnson Serv	139	+⅜	2.3	21.7
127	93	MITIE Gp ●	110¾	+1¼	3.9	11.3
517⅝	336¼	Rentokil	402½	-2¾	2.3	26.6
536¼	385	Ricardo Gp	430	+17	3.0	–
472	311	Robt Walters	326	–	7.2	16.2
196⅞	136¼	Serco Group ●	138¼	+1¼	2.6	7.6
34½	17½	SIG	17¾	-¼	–	-4.7
976	687	Travis P ●	720½	+9	1.5	39.8

Telecommunications -0.39%

162	101¼	BT Group	147⅛	-¼	5.5	16.9
1932	1356	Telecom Plus ●	1714*	-6	4.9	19.1
79½	62¼	Vodafone	67¼*	-⅜	8.3	19.4

Tobaccos +0.25%

3010	2252	Brit Am Tob	2950	+6	8.0	-4.6
2636	1662	Imp Brands	2558*	+11	6.0	8.5

Transport +0.08%

364¾	209¾	Int'l Dist Services ●	361¼	–	0.6	-24.8
445	316½	ZIGUP ●	321*	+1½	8.2	5.8

Travel & Leisure +0.57%

1936	965¾	Carnival ●	1858	+14½	–	-393.0
594	404¾	easyJet	581	+3¾	2.1	9.6
1034	498½	Entain	732	-20	2.5	-4.9
189	128⅝	FirstGroup ●	166¾*	+2¼	3.4	-69.5
22450	12250	Flutter Entrtmt	21560	+70	–	-39.7
780	540	Fullers 'A'	624*	–	3.0	41.2
305	130¾	IAG Intl Cons Air	302¾	+5½	0.8	6.8
10195	6990	Intercont Hotels	10050	+108	1.2	28.7

52 week High	Low (p)	Stock	Price (p)	+/-	Yld	P/E
320	220	Mitchells&But ●	240	+6½	–	9.6
93¼	45½	Mobico Group ●	79¾	+⅛	–	-2.6
775	401¼	Playtech ●	731	+5	–	25.5
99¾	63⅜	Rank Group	85¾	–	1.0	31.6
862½	590	Wetherspoon ●	601½	+1½	2.0	14.9
3714	2723	Whitbread	2911	-5	3.4	18.1

AIM +0.58%

62½	31½	Afentra	46¼	-¼	–	-48.9
1139¼	855	Arbuthnot	890	–	5.3	4.0
2140	1505	BrooksMacdonald	1690	+45	4.6	42.1
235	150¼	Central Asia Met	157¼	-¾	11.5	9.7
312	126¾	Ceres Power ●	175½	+6¼	–	-6.3
1495	560	Churchill China	675	-75	5.4	9.6
450	215¼	CML Micro	262½	–	4.2	20.2
1150	520	Cohort	1120	+5	1.4	29.6
¼	0	Deltex Medical	⅛	...	–	-0.7
150¼	80	Eleco	148	+4	0.6	46.2
47¾	23¼	Futura Medical	32¾	...	–	-14.8
41¼	15	Hornby	19	-1	–	-2.7
210	166½	James Halstead	179½	+3	4.7	17.9
65	31¼	LifeScienceREIT	38½	+⅜	5.2	76
590	236¾	Mpac Group	500	–	–	38.2
1180	785¼	MS Intl	940	-20	2.3	13.2
83	52	Premier Miton	60	-½	10.0	48.4
51¾	10¾	SRT Marine Sys	42½	–	–	-7.9
64	36¾	Tribal Gp	43½	–	3.0	17.4
28	9¼	Union Jack Oil	10½	–	2.4	13.3
1½	⅜	Xtract Resources	½	–	–	-7.1
1130	842	Young & Co – A	890	+10	2.5	47.1
830	580	Young & Co – N/V	628	-16	3.6	33.2

The Alternative Investment Market is for young and growing companies. Shares may carry higher risks than those with a full quotation, and may be difficult to sell.

Americans -0.15%

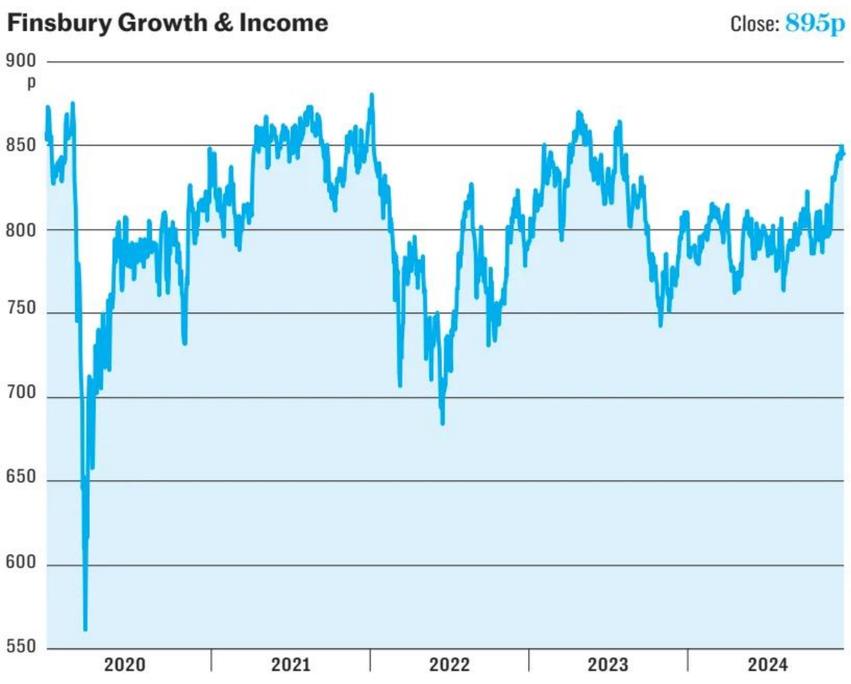
52 week High	Low	Stock	Price	+/-	Grs Yld	Cvr
47¾	24⅜	Alcoa $	39¼	+⅜	1.0	3.9
307⅞	177¾	Amer Express $	301⅝	+¾	0.9	4.9
48¾	31¼	BankAmerica $	45¼	+⅛	2.3	2.7
267½	137	Boeing $	177⅞	+4¾	–	–
418½	277	Caterpillar $	378½	+2¾	1.5	3.8
167⅛	135¾	Chevron $	147¼	-⅛	4.4	1.4
82⅝	64	Coca-Cola Euro $	77	-⅛	2.8	0.9
109¼	77	Colgate Palm $	94	+½	2.1	1.7
90	61¼	DuPontDeNemrs $	80¼	+⅛	1.9	0.8
126¾	95¼	Exxon Mobil $	108⅝	+⅝	3.6	2.0
35⅞	19¼	Foot Locker $	22¾	+½	–	–
194¼	123¼	Gen Electric $	165⅝	-¼	0.7	3.3
439⅜	323¾	Home Depot $	409¾	+1¾	2.2	1.6
242¼	189¾	Honeywell $	231⅛	-1¼	1.9	1.9
39¾	27¾	HP $	33⅜	-½	3.5	2.4
239⅜	157⅜	IBM $	226⅝	-2¾	2.9	1.0
51¼	18½	Intel $	20½	...	–	–
60⅜	32¼	Intl Paper $	55	-¼	3.4	0.6
254¼	164¼	JP Morgan Ch $	238	-⅜	2.1	3.6
168⅜	143¼	Johnson&John $	146⅛	-⅜	3.4	1.2
38¼	28⅝	Keurig Dr Pep $	33	...	2.8	1.8
80¼	58¼	Manpower $	58⅜	-⅜	5.3	0.3

52 week High	Low	Stock	Price	+/-	Grs Yld	Cvr
317⅞	243½	McDonalds $	297⅞	+1¼	2.4	1.6
134¾	94½	Merck $	100¾	+⅜	3.2	1.5
468¾	366½	Microsoft $	451⅛	-3	0.7	3.7
31½	24½	Pfizer $	26¾	...	6.5	0.4
180¾	143¼	Procter & Gamble $	170⅞	...	2.4	1.5
128¾	80¾	Raytheon Tech $	116⅞	-½	2.2	1.0
312¼	242¾	Rockwell $	295	+1¾	1.8	1.6
422	233¾	Trane Tech $	392½	+¾	0.9	3.3
181½	58¼	Wal Mart Strs $	95½	+⅛	0.9	1.4
123¾	83¾	Walt Disney $	114¾	+1¾	0.9	2.7
19¾	8	Xerox Hldgs $	8¾	+⅛	11.5	10.9

Europeans -0.05%

75¼	52¾	AkzoNobel €	56¼	-¾	3.5	2.3
115¾	65¼	BMW €	78	-⅜	7.7	3.1
16⅜	13¾	Carrefour €	13¾	...	6.3	2.1
78⅜	51	Continental AG €	65½	+¾	3.4	2.6
77½	50¾	Daimler €	54	-⅜	9.8	2.5
67⅜	56⅛	Danone €	64¾	-⅜	3.3	0.6
46	33⅛	Deutsche Post €	33¾	-⅜	5.5	2.4
30¾	20¾

It's a hundred years' old but can star fund manager Nick Train's trust survive a shareholder vote?



Key numbers

- **Market value: £1.4bn**
- **Year of listing: 1926**
- **Discount: 8.4pc**
- **Ave discount over past year: 8pc**
- **Yield: 2.2pc**
- **Most recent year's dividend: 19.6p**
- **Gearing: 1.7pc**
- **Annual charge: 0.6pc**

GAVIN LUMSDEN
QUESTOR
TRUST BARGAINS



Finsbury Growth & Income has a superb long-term record and Questor believes that the rebound at accounting software firm Sage vindicates its overall approach

Finsbury Growth & Income

HOLD

Shareholders should not lose hope and at least should postpone their final decision until early in 2026

WILL Finsbury Growth & Income, one of the UK's best-known investment trusts, and one with a superb long-term record, survive its centenary year or will its shareholders call time on the £1.4bn fund after a poor five-year spell?

That's the startling question facing investors in the Questor recommended UK equity income fund, which has been run by star fund manager Nick Train for 24 years. It follows a surprise decision by the company's board to hold a continuation vote at the annual general meeting in January 2026, the year it celebrates its 100th birthday.

It raises the prospect that shareholders, disappointed at a slump in performance that has resulted in the shares falling to the bottom of their sector with a total return of just 9.3pc over five years, compared with 27.2pc from the FTSE All-Share index, could vote to wind up the investment trust launched in 1926, the year of the general strike.

Relations between the Finsbury Growth board and its shareholders have not sunk to the bitter lows of the dispute between miners and mine owners that precipitated widespread industrial action nearly 100 years ago, which partly reflects Mr Train's strong overall record and the committed way in which he communicates with investors. His approach of holding a concentrated list of quality growth stocks achieved a 746.3pc total return for shareholders from his appointment as manager in December 2000 up to Nov 30 2024. That's three times more than the 249.4pc generated by the FTSE All-Share.

However, those sparkling returns feel increasingly distant and Simon Hayes, the trust's chairman, is aware that shareholder support cannot be guaranteed amid growing unrest at poor share price returns in the investment company sector.

Delivering the annual report this month, Hayes said: "While the company's long-term track record remains impressive, this will provide little solace to more recent investors for whom returns will be substantially below what they may have hoped for."

The results showed an underlying investment return of 8.2pc in the year to Sept 30, below the 13.4pc from the FTSE All-Share. Shareholders received just 3.4pc as the shares drifted to an 8.7pc discount below net asset value, despite the board spending £310m on buying back 18pc of the trust's shares. That follows £97.7m of share buybacks in the previous financial year.

Finsbury Growth's recent performance has not been disastrous, just not nearly as good as investors have grown used to. The share price is up 7pc over one year and has risen 12.9pc since we first tipped the trust in July 2022. To Mr Train's credit, he previously warned that his long run of outperformance would end eventually. The frustration is not that there was a downturn, but that the anticipated recovery has been delayed. That raises questions about the manager's "buy and hold" approach.

The company has annual portfolio turnover of 7.1pc, which means stocks are held for an average of 14 years, compared with the three to five years of many fund managers. That inactivity may minimise trading costs but does Mr Train fall in love with his stocks and find it hard to part with them?

Shareholders recall how long he backed education publisher Pearson when its shares struggled during the group's difficult digital transformation of the business, only to sell them shortly before they rallied. Similarly, big positions in "world class" companies such as Guinness brewer Diageo and Dove soap maker Unilever have not been justified by their lacklustre shares. The manager admitted he had held too much in consumer brands after the pandemic and had reduced them to 32pc of the portfolio.

'Finsbury Growth's recent form has not been disastrous, just not nearly as good as investors have grown used to'

These are valid questions, but Questor is reassured by another recent event: the 35pc leap last month by shares in Sage, the accounting software provider that is now Finsbury's second largest investment at 12.9pc. The rally followed results showing the £10bn company made record profits from the increased use of artificial intelligence and automation in its services. This raised hopes its AI-powered accounting co-pilot will be a success when launched, convincing the manager that at 30 times earnings the shares are still "meaningfully undervalued".

Only time will tell if Mr Train is right, but we believe that the rebound at Sage vindicates his overall approach. Shareholders should not yet lose hope, or at least should postpone their final decision until the vote. Hold.

Gavin Lumsden is editor of Citywire's Investment Trust Insider website

Read Questor's rules of investment before you follow our tips: telegraph.co.uk/go/questorrules

Zizzi owner to open new restaurants despite higher taxes

The company behind Italian chains Zizzi and Ask has said it plans to keep opening more restaurants despite extra costs facing the restaurant sector next year.

Steve Holmes, the chief executive of Azzurri Group, which also runs Coco Di Mama, said he is "cautiously optimistic" about the recovery of UK hospitality next year despite recent warnings from industry bosses.

The chief executives of Greene King and Whitbread told ministers last month that increases to National Insurance contributions would "lead to business closures and job losses within a year".

However, Azzurri said it plans to open "new sites across all the businesses" over the next year.

Reeves misses deadline to answer questions over CV

Rachel Reeves appears to have broken her own government's guidance by ignoring questions about whether she lied on her CV.

The Chancellor has refused to reply to a letter sent by Richard Holden, the former Conservative chairman, asking her to clarify her previous job at the Bank of Scotland amid accusations she exaggerated her role as an economist.

Mr Holden, MP for Basildon and Billericay, asked Ms Reeves to answer six questions on Nov 18 about her "edited CV" and said "anything less than a full explanation would confirm to the country that they cannot trust a word this government says".

Government guidance states ministers should respond to such correspondence in 20 working days.

VW takes £38m stake in Canadian lithium producer

Car giant Volkswagen has taken a stake in a Canadian lithium developer to help develop its battery capacity.

The German group has invested approximately C$69 million (£38m) for a 9.9pc stake in Patriot Battery Metals.

VW is paying C$4.42 per share, which is a 66.8pc premium to Patriot's share price. It values the developer at C$625.8 million.

Alongside the share acquisition, VW has agreed to supply Patriot with 100,000 tonnes of spodumene concentrate – a raw material for lithium batteries in electric vehicles. The deal is to run for 10 years.

Car manufacturers have been forced to explore ways to beef up their battery capacity because of the shift to electric vehicles.

Haulage company founder Eddie Stobart dies at 95

Eddie Stobart, the founder of the eponymous haulage empire, has died at the age of 95.

The former boss of the Cumbria-based company, recognisable for its green and red fleet of lorries adorned with his name, died on Nov 25.

Edward Pears Stobart was born in Cumbria in 1929 into a family of farmers. He started the operation as a small agricultural business in 1946.

The firm's growth accelerated sharply in the 1970s and 1980s after his second youngest child, Edward, took leadership of the group's logistics.

The company is now branded as Stobart Group and was taken over by the Culina Group in 2021. William Stobart, the fourth child of Eddie, is the deputy chief of Culina.

Germany asks EU to ease green reporting rules amid downturn

Germany has asked the European Union to soften its rules on sustainability reporting for companies as the bloc's largest economy grapples with a downturn.

Berlin is calling for the EU's corporate sustainability reporting directive to be postponed by two years and to exempt small and medium-sized businesses from those burdens, according to Bloomberg.

The push comes as the German economy is projected to shrink for a second straight year owing to dwindling demand from China and high energy prices since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Changes are needed "in order to avoid unnecessary burden for businesses", the letter from the German government said.

California's 2035 ban on petrol cars approved by Biden

The Biden administration has backed Californian regulations that compel the sale of zero-emission vehicles over the next decade and will ban the sale of petrol-powered cars in 2035.

US President-elect Donald Trump has pledged to "terminate" electric vehicle mandates but the move by the environmental protection agency adds to pressure on carmakers to comply with California's requirements.

The move is expected to more than halve greenhouse gas emissions from light-duty vehicles in California by 2040. It will also apply outside California, in New York, Washington and other states that have opted to follow the regulations, which together account for 30pc of the American vehicle market.

Sightsavers

Stop pain
Save sight
End trachoma



Happy, with advanced trachoma, and her mother in Uganda
© Sightsavers/Jason J Mulikita 2023

Imagine your eyelashes scratching against your eyes with every single blink. That's what trachoma can do if it's left untreated.

Trachoma is an agonising infection spread through touch and eye-seeking flies. It can cause scarring to your eyelids that pulls your eyelashes inward – eventually leading to blindness.

Happy had suffered from trachoma since she was a baby. By the time she was six, it was so severe that she'd spend hours with her eyes closed to stop the pain.

Happy needed sight-saving surgery, which we were able to provide together with our local teams and partners, changing Happy's life.

But trachoma is entirely preventable with antibiotics if caught early.

Nobody should be suffering from trachoma. And yet, globally, 41.8 million children are at risk.

Sightsavers has already helped six countries eliminate the infection, and we can't stop now. We urgently need you to join us, to help end the pain of trachoma for good.

£72
could deliver sight-saving antibiotics to a whole community



Donate now to help eliminate trachoma for good
Scan the QR code
Go online to www.sightsavers.org/stop
Call 0800 035 5478 or text EYES to 81400
Fill in the form and post it to Freepost SIGHTSAVERS

Standard network rates apply. By texting, you agree to us contacting you by phone and SMS about our work and how you can support it.

Yes I want to help eliminate trachoma for good

£72 could protect a whole community at risk

Global trachoma elimination effort • Global trachoma elimination effort •

1 I would like to give: ☐ £72 ☐ Other £

☐ I enclose a cheque/postal order payable to **Sightsavers** OR

☐ I would like to give by ☐ Credit card ☐ Debit card ☐ CAF CharityCard

Card no. ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ Expiry ☐☐/☐☐

Signature Date ☐☐/☐☐/☐☐

Title First name Surname

Address

Postcode

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2 Through Gift Aid, any donation you give will be worth 25% more

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3 Please return your completed form with your gift to: Freepost SIGHTSAVERS

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BUCKINGHAM PALACE
December 18th
The King held an Investiture at Buckingham Palace this morning.

The following were received in audience by The King this afternoon and kissed hands upon their appointment as His Majesty's Ambassadors: Mr Stephen Hitchen (the Republic of Iraq) and Mr Timothy Smart (the Republic of Uzbekistan). Mrs Hitchen and Dr Veronika Smart were also received by His Majesty.

The following were received in audience by The King upon their appointment as British High Commissioners: Mr Gareth Hoar (the Independent State of Samoa), Mr Philip Malone (the Kingdom of Tonga) and Mr Paul Turner (Solomon Islands and non-resident British High Commissioner to the Republic of Nauru).

Mrs Sarah Yee Whey Tan and Mrs Turner were also received by His Majesty.

The King held a Council at 4.30pm.

There were present: the Rt Hon Lucy Powell MP (Lord President), the Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP (Secretary of State for Transport), the Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP (Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport) and the Rt Hon Jonathan Reynolds MP (Secretary of State for Business and Trade, and President of the Board of Trade).

The Rt Hon Sir Antony Zacaroli made affirmation as a member of His Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council.

Mr Richard Tilbrook was in attendance as Clerk of the Council.

The Rt Hon Sir Clive Alderton (Principal Private Secretary to Their Majesties) was in attendance.

The Rt Hon Lucy Powell MP had an audience of His Majesty before the Council.

Later The Sultan of Brunei Darussalam, accompanied by Prince Mateen of Brunei Darussalam, visited The King.

The Princess Royal, on behalf of The King, held an Investiture at Buckingham Palace this afternoon.

ST JAMES'S PALACE
December 18th
The Duke of Edinburgh this afternoon arrived at Heathrow Airport, London, from Kuwait. Brigadier Alexander Potts was in attendance.

The Duchess of Edinburgh, Patron, this morning visited the Lighthouse, 8-10 High Street, Woking, and was received by His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey (Mr Michael More-Molyneux).

ST JAMES'S PALACE
December 18th
The Princess Royal this evening attended the London International Horse Show at ExCel London, One Western Gateway, Royal Victoria Dock, London E16, and was received by Mrs Sandra Cahill (Deputy Lieutenant of Greater London).

KENSINGTON PALACE
December 18th
The Duchess of Gloucester, Colonel-in-Chief, Royal Bermuda Regiment, this morning received Mr Andrew Murdoch (Governor designate of Bermuda and Commander-in-Chief designate of the Royal Bermuda Regiment).

Today's birthdays

The Marquess of Queensberry is 95; **Lord Weir**, a former Senator of the College of Justice in Scotland, 93; **Prof Christopher Smout**, historian, 91; **Ms Pratibha Patil**, President of India, 2007-12, 90; **Mr Tim Eggar**, former Conservative Government Minister, 73; **Prof Sean O'Brien**, writer, 72; **Mr Justice Roth**, 72; **Mr Steven Isserlis**, cellist, 66; **Ms Daisy Goodwin**, television producer, novelist and screenwriter, 63; **Mr Alberto Tomba**, former Alpine skier; winner of three Olympic gold medals, 58; **Mr Richard Hammond**, television presenter and journalist, 55; **Mr Ricky Ponting**, former cricketer; Australia Test captain, 2004-11, 50; and **Mr Richard Hounslow**, former slalom canoeist; Olympic silver medallist, London 2012, 43.

Today is the anniversary of the death of JMW Turner in 1851. It is also the anniversary of the publication of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens in 1843.

Forthcoming marriage

Mr E.C.L. Prior and Miss E.R. Byass
The engagement is announced between Edward, youngest son of Mr and Mrs Charles Prior, of Kintbury, Berkshire, and Eleanor, eldest daughter of Mr and Mrs Ben Byass, of Bishop Burton, East Yorkshire.
Online ref: WO031643

Week in Westminster

Thursday, December 19
Commons: Oral questions: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Attorney General. Business Statement: Business Questions to the Leader of the House. Select Committee Statement: Select Committee Statement on the First Report of the Defence Committee, Service Accommodation, HC 406. Backbench Business: General Debate on matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment. Adjournment: Safety of MV Ruby in Great Yarmouth.
Lords: Oral questions: Progress made with the Windrush Compensation Scheme in settling unpaid claims; Revising legislation around the use of e-scooters and e-bikes; Impact of the increase in National Insurance contributions for employers on gross domestic product growth. Debates: The importance of growing the rural economy; The policy towards China especially in relation to human rights and security issues arising from China's actions in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet, and the South China Sea, and against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

Friday, December 20
Commons: The House is not sitting and will next sit on January 6.
Lords: The House is not sitting and will next sit on January 6.

Clergy news

Appointments
Revv Matthew Lawes, ac, Christ Church Fulwood (Sheffield), to be int assoc v, Kilnhurst St Thomas (same dio); Maureen Bonsall, ac, Whitton with Thurleston and Akenham (St Edmundsbury and Ipswich), to be assoc p, Whitton with Thurleston and Akenham (same dio); Anita Matthews, ac (assoc p), Derby St Peter and Christ Church with Holy Trinity (Derby), to be p-in-c (v designate), Derby St Peter and Christ Church with Holy Trinity (same dio); Mark Nelson, assoc r, SAINT (London), to be p-in-c, Margate Holy Trinity and Margate Cliftonville St Paul (Canterbury).

Bridge news

Last week the highest score in the English Bridge Union's High Noon Fast Games was 61.67%, **writes Julian Pottage, Bridge Correspondent.** One pair achieved this score, Steve Cane partnering an Advanced BBO Bot on Sunday.

The highest score in the EBU morning Relaxed Games was 74.72%. June Homes and Stewart Kingaby achieved this on Monday. The highest score in the EBU evening Relaxed Games was 71.70%, achieved by Mary Edgar and Marjorie Swan on Tuesday.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

The Daily Telegraph.

LONDON, FRIDAY DECEMBER 19, 1924

"CAT" BURGLARS.

QUESTIONS IN THE HOUSE.

In the House of Commons yesterday questions were raised in regard to the recent robberies, attributed to the so-called "cat" burglars, and, in replying to Lieut.-Colonel Sir Frederick Hall (U., Dulwich), Sir William Joynson-Hicks, the Home Secretary, said:

The number of house-breakings and burglaries that have been committed during the months of October and November is not appreciably in excess of the number that was committed during the corresponding period of last year. Nor have these offences been more numerous during this month than they were during this time last year.

During the period of fog last week several cases of house-breaking occurred in the vicinity of Park-lane and Mayfair; these were effected by the thief or thieves gaining access to the premises by climbing a stack-pipe, or some other similar means. Some of the offences of this description have been committed with particular daring, and for this reason much has been made of them by the Press. This method of committing crime is not new. Three persons have been arrested, and two of them have been found in possession of a large quantity of jewellery and other articles, part of which has been identified as proceeds of five cases of house-breaking, &c., and some of these offences were committed by the person or persons who have been designated by the Press "cat burglars."

I may add that this morning a burglar in possession of house-breaking tools and operating in the same manner as the so-called "cat burglar" has been caught in Westminster, and will be duly charged.

J.P.'S HOUSE BROKEN INTO.

In the early hours of yesterday morning a daring burglary was carried out at 9, Grove-crescent, Kingston, the residence of Mr. C. G. Graves, J.P., and about £189 in Treasury notes was stolen from a bureau in the dining-room. About four a.m. Mrs. Graves thought she heard a man's voice in the house. Her husband looked out of the window, but could not see anyone about, and as everything was quiet in the house he returned to bed. About a quarter of an hour later a door banged loudly, and on going downstairs Mr. Graves found that the front door and two windows were open.

Entry to the house had apparently been effected through the window of the morning-room, which is on the first floor, and to reach it the thief would have to climb about 14ft to a flat roof. It is thought possible that the intruder climbed up a water spout, though no marks can be found on the wall. Three rooms, including a spare bedroom, had been ransacked, and a number of silver articles and clothing had been tied up in tablecloths ready to be taken away.

Whether the intruder was disturbed or was satisfied on discovering the money is not known, but the other articles were left behind, one bundle being found in the hall near the front door and another in the morning-room.

The money belonged to the members of the provident Fund connected with St. John's Church, Kingston, and was the balance of about £466 which was being distributed by district visitors. But for the burglary the distribution would have been completed yesterday.

THE OUTBREAK AT KHARTOUM.

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT. KHARTOUM, Dec. 3.

Although brief accounts of the evacuation of Egyptian troops from the Soudan, and the mutiny of the 11th Soudanese Battalion, cabled from Khartoum, have already appeared in The Daily Telegraph, no connected and authentic narrative has yet been published, and the following details will doubtless be found interesting.

Sunday, Nov. 23, the day following the presentation of the British Note by Lord Allenby to Zaghloul Pasha, is one which will live long in the memory of residents here. The full text had been received by wire during the night, and already at the break of dawn the Intelligence Department of the Soudan Government had broadcast English and Arabic versions throughout the city, and a little later in Omdurman and Khartoum North. By the usual early coffee hour the text, particularly item five (evacuation of all Egyptian units and officers from the Soudan), was the topic of conversation. The Soudanese unreservedly expressed their pleasure, and even jubilation, but the Egyptians, both the officers and the "effendi" classes, appeared to be more or less paralysed by the shock it gave them.

The fiat had gone forth; the Egyptian forces had to leave the Soudan, either by peaceful methods or by force, irrespective of the attitude adopted by the Egyptian Government. The evacuation had necessarily to be carried out immediately. On Sunday evening a mass meeting was held at the Egyptian Officers' Club for the purpose of discussing the whole question and of formulating a plan of procedure. The younger and more hot-blooded elements attempted to inveigle the older and senior officers into making a formal declaration of war; but the latter were adamant in their contention that war in the Soudan on such a pretext would serve no useful purpose. Being entirely unaware of the plans prepared by the General Staff, and not knowing how quickly it could or would act, the meeting finally decided that on the morrow they would adopt a policy of passive resistance.

LAST TROOPS OUT.

Early next morning (Nov. 24), and before such a policy could be further discussed or applied, the various Egyptian units stationed at Khartoum and Khartoum North, together with departmental details, received orders to prepare for evacuation within a very short period. The first to entrain was the 4th Battalion. It had shown a certain reluctance to comply with the order, and considerable time was lost; but the persuasiveness of the General Staff, assisted by an ominous display of British machine-guns, overcame this, and by early evening the battalion was en route for Port Soudan, where transport was in readiness to convey it to Egypt.

Relieved in their minds by the promise of their King that evacuation from the Soudan would in no way jeopardise their future career, the troops were prepared to entrain, and by the end of November all the units and almost all the details had left Khartoum.

Although the mutiny of the 11th Soudanese Battalion may be indirectly attributed to the removal of the Egyptian troops from the Soudan, no direct bloodshed resulted from the evacuation, and the full credit for this must be given to Huddleston Pasha, the Acting Sirdar, and his staff.

Bridge Hand

Triple crown for Buras

By **Tom Townsend**

Dealer South
Vulnerability None

	♠ K 10 9 7 5 2 ♥ A 5 ♦ A 10 7 6 ♣ 7	
♠ J 4 ♥ Q 10 8 4 ♦ J 8 ♣ A Q J 9 8	N W E S	♠ 8 3 ♥ 3 2 ♦ Q 9 2 ♣ 10 6 5 4 3 2
	♠ A Q 6 ♥ K J 9 7 6 ♦ K 5 4 3 ♣ K	

West	North	East	South
			1NT(1)
pass	2♥(2)	pass	2♠
pass	4♣(3)	pass	4♦(4)
pass	4♥(4)	pass	4NT(5)
pass	5♦(6)	pass	6♠
pass	pass	pass	

(1) Strong no-trump (sort of)
(2) Five-plus spades (transfer)
(3) Slam-try with shortage
(4) Control-showing (cue-bids)
(5) Roman Key Card Blackwood
(6) Three (including the ♠K)

Contract 6♠
Declarer South
Opening Lead ♠J

FROM the Olympiad final in Buenos Aires. This was six sets of 16 boards, played over two days. After two of these sets, Italy led Poland by 88 IMPs to 33.

The lead Italian pair, Alfredo Versace and Antonio Sementa, 2008 champions in Beijing, took a break in set three. By the time they got back to work the next day, the worm had turned. The Poles won set three 62-0, set four 56-16, and ran away with the match. The final score was 207-156.

This was Board 8 of set three. North-South for Poland were Przemyslaw Janiszewski and Wojciech Strzemecki. East-West were Giacomo Percario and Giovanni Donati. Did Strzemecki missort his cards, or approximate his hand to 15-17 balanced? He didn't have to say. His 4NT bid was pushy. Matching singletons are rarely useful, and the ♣K was clearly worthless.

"Six Spades is a very reasonable contract," declared Kit Woolsey on Bridgebase, "but with hearts lying badly I don't think it makes." David Burn concurred – even after the ♠J lead.

Strzemecki proved the pundits wrong. He won with the ♠A in hand, cashed ♥AK, and ruffed a third heart with the ♠10. The Kielce man drew trumps with the ♠Q, ruffed a fourth heart, returned to hand on the ♦K, and parked dummy's club on the ♥J. He then gave up a diamond and claimed.

In the replay, Kamil Nowak (East) led a club to North's 6♠. West was Krzysztof Buras, who completed the world bridge triple crown with this win. That's the Olympiad, World Pairs and Bermuda Bowl. It's been achieved by 12 players in the open game, cheats included, and only Great Britain's Rixi Markus in the women's.

Buras scored the ♣A at trick one, and got out with the ♠J. This gave declarer nothing. With the heart suit unfavourable, South lost a diamond for one down. The swing was 14 IMPs to Poland. Eleventh in the European Championships in June, missing out on the 2025 Bermuda Bowl, they'd come back to form in some style.

Poland 6♠ made, N/S +980
Italy 6♠ minus one, N/S -50

Chess

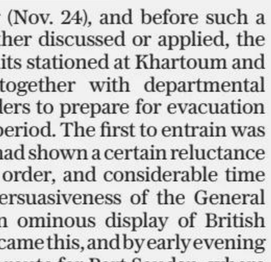
Jones's classic victory

By **Malcolm Pein**

GAWAIN Jones scored the finest victory of his career, as a last-round win over Women's World champion Ju Wenjun secured him the £25,000 first prize at the XTX Markets London Chess Classic, staged at the Emirates Stadium.

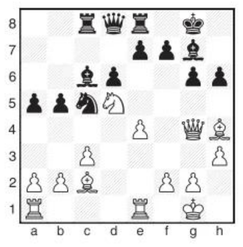
Michael Adams was briefly better against Andrew Hong, and Nikita Vitiugov was solid with black against Vidit Gujrathi; both games were drawn. Final scores: 1 Jones 5/7; 2-5 Adams, Vitiugov, Vidit, Mamedyarov 4; 6 Hong 3.5; 7 Ju Wenjun 2.5 8 Royal 1.

G Jones – Ju Wenjun
English Symmetrical
1.Nf3 d5 2.g3 c5 3.Bg2 Nf6 4.0–0 g6 5.c4 Bg7 6.cxd5 Nxd5 7.Nc3 0–0 8.Nxd5 Qxd5 9.d3 Nc6 10.Be3 Bxb2!? (10...Bd7 11.Nd4 Qd6 12.Nxc6 Bxc6 13.Bxc6 Qxc6 14.Rc1 Qe6 and if 15.Rxc5 Qxa2 is Black's most solid option) **11.Rb1 Bg7 12.Qa4** (12.Nd4 Qxa2 13.Nxc6 bxc6 14.Bxc6 Bh3! 15.Bxa8 Rxa8 16.Re1 Bc3 gives White nothing) **12...Qd6 13.Nd2!** (White has serious pressure on the queenside and will win back a pawn one way or another) **13...Nd4 14.Bxd4 Bxd4** (After 14...Qxd4 15.Qxd4 cxd4 16.Bxb7 White's knight will always be better than Black's bishop) **15.Nc4 Qc7 16.Qa3** (16.e3 Bf6 17.Rfc1 was also good) **16...Rb8 17.Qxa7 Bg4 18.e3 Bf6 19.Rfc1 Ra8** (19...Be2!? offered more counterplay) **20.Qb6 Qd7 21.Qb3 Be6** (21...Qa4! 22.Nb6 Qxb3 23.axb3 Ra6 24.Nd5 b6 25.Nxf6+ exf6 26.b4 Be2!= and even after the superior 25.b4 Kg7 26.bxc5 bxc5 27.Rxc5 Rb8! Black has good chances to draw) **22.Nb6! Qd6** (If 22...Bxb3 23.Nxd7 Bxa2 24.Rxb7 Black loses the c5-pawn) **23.Bd5!** (Once the light bishops come off, White's advantage becomes permanent)



23...Bxd5 24.Qxd5 Qxd5 25.Nxd5 Ra3 26.Rb3 Rxa2 27.Rxc5 Rfa8 28.d4 Rd2 29.Nc3 (Preventing Ra8–a2; the b7-pawn is going nowhere) **29...Ra1+ 30.Kg2 Rc1 31.Ne4 Rxc5 32.Nxc5 Ra2 33.Rxb7 h5 34.Ne4 Kg7 35.h3!** (g3-g4–g5 is coming and e7–e6 allows Ne4–d6) **35...Ra5 36.Rd7 Ra8 37.g4 hxg4 38.hxg4 g5 39.Rb7 Rd8 40.Rb5!** (Clinical!) **40...Kg6 41.Rf5 1–0** Black has no moves.

Zhang Pengxiang – Yang-Fan Zho, London Classic Masters, after **18.Qg4 b5?** White to play and win material:



Answer:
19.Nxe7+ Rxe7 20.Bxe7 h5 21.Qh4 Qd7 22.Rad1 Qe6 23.Bxd6 1–0
19.Bxe7 also works.

Announcements

Email: announcements.ads@telegraph.co.uk **Book online:** announcements.telegraph.co.uk

Deaths

ALLAN.—Ian Crawford, died peacefully on 16th December 2024 at the age of 92. Loved husband, father and grandpa.
Online Ref: WO031713

CLYDESDALE.—Deeply regretted by Richard, Karen and family. Rest in Peace Nathan - God Bless.
Online Ref: WO031765

FERRIS.—Diane Mary on 1st December 2024 aged 86 years. Much loved wife of the late Robin. Funeral at Poole Crematorium, 10th January 2025 at 2 p.m. Enquiries to Albert Marsh Funeral Directors. Tel: 01929 552107.
Online Ref: WO031735

GRIFFITHS.—Ann Walker (née Kerr) (Edinburgh) aged 95, on November 22nd 2024. Ann was predeceased by her husband Major John Duncan Griffiths, MC (Welch/RRW, GLO RAF). Loved by her children Neil (late), Alison, Rowena and Ewen, by her grandchildren, sons and daughter-in-law. Funeral Service at Wardie Parish Church, Edinburgh, on Thursday January 16th at 2 p.m. No flowers please.
Online Ref: WO031745

MILLNER.—William Frank "Tim" died aged 92 on November 19th peacefully at home. Service at 12 noon on Friday January 3rd at North Herts Memorial Park Crematorium, Ickleford, Hitchin. No flowers but donations to the RNLI if you would like. https://www.rnli.org/donate
Online Ref: WO031699

NICHOLL.—Hermione Mary, peacefully on 11th December 2024, aged 90 years. Beloved wife of the late Anthony, dearly loved mother of Charlotte, Lucy and the late William. Funeral Service at St Gregory's Church, Tredington, on Tuesday 31st December at 12 noon. Flowers welcome, or alternatively, donations in her memory for The Steward's Trust, St Gregory's Church and the Royal British Legion may be made via www.rlockeandson.co.uk or left at the service. Enquiries to R. Locke & Son, Brailes. Tel: (01608) 685274.
Online Ref: WO031760

SAVAGE.—Charles Albert, peacefully at home in Prestbury on 13th December 2024, aged 86. Loving husband of Janet, much loved father of Matthew and Simon and father-in-law of Beth and Helen. Proud Grandpa of Jack, Charlie, Joe, Emma, Kate and Mary. Private cremation at his own request.
Online Ref: WO031724

SPENCER.—Simon Charles, formerly of Greenhaugh, Redesmouth and Humshaugh. Died peacefully on 6th December aged 95. Greatly loved husband to the late Loveday, loving father of Charles and Andrew and proud grandfather. Private funeral.
Online Ref: WO031692

SPRIDDELL.—Joy Patricia. Died peacefully on 3rd December 2024, aged 93. Beloved wife of Peter who died in September. Loving mother of David, Pippa and Robert. Proud grandmother of Olivia, Samuel, Issie, Sophie and Georgina. Thanksgiving service on Friday 10th January 2025 at Christ Church, Chorleywood, WD3 5SG. No flowers please but donations welcome to Rennie Grove Peace Hospice Care at renniegrovepeace.org or c/o James Peddle Ltd, 51 Lower Road, Chorleywood, WD3 5LQ.
Online Ref: WO031754

TRISTRAM.—Joan. Sadly passed away unexpectedly on Thursday 12th December aged 78 years. Joan will be greatly missed by her devoted husband Stephen, sons Stevie and Stuart, daughter Claire and all her family and friends. A Thanksgiving Service will be held on Friday 3rd January 2025 at All Saints Church, Odiham at 1.30 p.m. after a private cremation. Family flowers only please. Donations, if desired, in favour of Hampshire Hospitals Charity, Twyford Stroke Ward c/o Jonathan Williams Independent Funeral Directors, 35-41 Essex Road, Basingstoke, Hants RG21 7TB.
Online Ref: WO031715

Personal

Text for the day

THIS WAS how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they were married, she found out that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was a man who always did what was right, but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly; so he made plans to break the engagement privately.
Matthew 1.18-19 (GNB)

General personal

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The Daily Telegraph and Sunday Telegraph

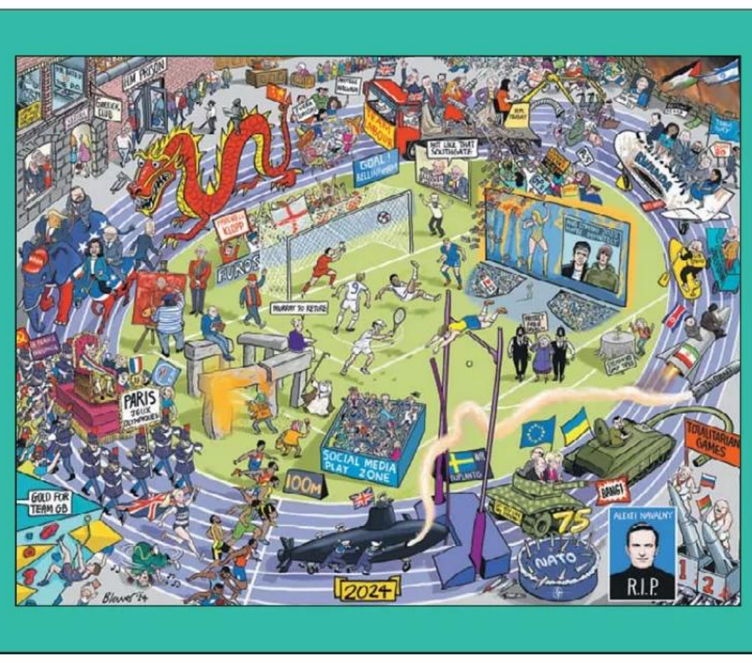
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The Telegraph

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Colonel Euan Houstoun

Outstanding Grenadier Guards officer who in the Falklands War led an SAS squadron on operations through enemy territory

COLONEL EUAN HOUSTOUN, who has died aged 78, served with the Grenadier Guards and the Special Forces and commanded a squadron of 22 SAS Regiment behind enemy lines in the Falklands War.

In April 1982, in an unprovoked attack, Argentina seized the Falkland Islands, the British Dependencies in the South Atlantic. Within days, a Royal Navy Task Force was assembled and dispatched. G Squadron, commanded by Houstoun, regularly trained in Norway in the winter months and they were cold-weather, Arctic mountain experts – so a natural choice for operations in the Falkland Islands. As the Task Force got within range, their reconnaissance teams were inserted by helicopter.

The role of G Squadron was to provide critical intelligence on which the land battle was based. The squadron was tasked with surveillance and reporting enemy locations, strengths, activities and capabilities. Houstoun's men, carrying packs, equipment and weapons weighing some 120lb, had to cross rugged terrain providing little or no natural cover, in darkness, without knowing where enemy forces were deployed or where minefields had been sited.

Chicken-wire camouflage and a poncho afforded poor protection against the bitter cold and driving rain for men lying in shallow scrapes in the rocky ground. Communications were difficult. Radio operators would move out of their observation post and march for an hour before transmitting, to avoid giving away their position to direction finders.

Patrols could be in the field for as long as 28 days in a totally hostile environment, with their skill and stealth the only protection against relentless ground- and air-search, and the knowledge that if they were compromised the chances of being extracted were remote.

Houstoun was an outstanding commander. A natural leader, he was at his best in the field and his briefings, given verbally and forcefully, were a model of clarity and concision. His patrols suffered no losses and their reports led to naval gunfire and air and artillery strikes which caused significant attrition to the enemy.

Intrepid, an amphibious assault ship, became the launch pad for operations, but on May 19 a Sea King helicopter ditched on its approach in darkness. All but nine of the 30 men were killed.

Lieutenant-Colonel (later General Sir) Michael Rose, the commander of 22 SAS Regiment, gathered the survivors of his two squadrons below deck aboard *Intrepid*. He told them that it was not the moment to grieve. The conflict was at a critical juncture.

Despite the losses, the pace of operations continued unabated. On June 14, Major-General Mario Menéndez surrendered all the Argentine forces in East and West Falklands.

Euan Henry Houstoun was born at home in Newcastle-upon-Tyne on January 2 1946. His father Lindsay served in the Fleet Air Arm during the Second World War and flew a Swordfish from *Victorious* in the search for the battleship *Bismarck*. He







Houstoun climbing out of his Hawker Hunter, above; with Prince Philip at the Guards Memorial in London, above right; and free-falling from 25,000ft, left

was subsequently attached to the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal*, which was torpedoed near Gibraltar in 1941.

Young Euan was educated at Bradfield College before going on to Mons OCTU. He went into the Grenadier Guards on a three-year Short Service Commission and joined the 1st Battalion in Wuppertal, BAOR, in 1964.

A fine athlete, on a six-month tour in Cyprus he broke the Near-East Land Forces record in the high hurdles. On returning to England he was involved in ceremonial duties; one evening, as Officer of the Guard, he was allowed to invite a few guests to the Tower of London for drinks.

It was a particularly good party. After a couple of hours, Houstoun sent his guests home and decided to have a short nap before attending the Ceremony of the Keys. This was part of the traditional ritual of locking up the Tower for the night and due to take place at 2200.

Houstoun slept right through it. The following morning, he was summoned by the Governor of the Tower, who was apoplectic. Did he not realise that he was the first officer in 359 years to miss the ceremony? Threatened with open arrest, and ordered to report to his CO immediately on return to barracks, he had to carry out extra duties for several months.

Before traffic in London made it impossible, the Picquet guarding the Bank of England marched from Wellington Barracks to the Bank in full ceremonial dress, and the officer in charge was allowed to invite one male guest to dinner. After an excellent meal, Houstoun and his guest, both mildly inebriated, decide to explore. They got lost in the labyrinthine vaults and passages and had to be rescued by the platoon sergeant.

He liked to tell the story of the occasion when a brother officer invited an attractive girlfriend to dinner there. She came dressed as a monk, enveloped in a cloak and hood, but she had to be introduced to the Bank official who remained on duty throughout the night. The officer explained that his companion belonged to a religious order and had taken a strict vow of silence. The young woman escaped detection.

Houstoun accompanied the 1st Battalion to Sharjah, UAE, on a nine-month tour. He learnt to fly a glider and volunteered to become Forward Air Controller, the man on the ground who controls the routes of jets and directs them precisely on to their target. In early 1969, on the way back to England, he took a month's leave in Cyprus and, based at Dhekhelia, learnt free-fall parachuting.

He was always on the look-out for a new adventure, the riskier the better, and the challenge of trying to get selected by the SAS became irresistible. He already knew the Brecon Beacons and, having booked into a farm near Monmouth, he spent 10 days in the Black Mountains on compass bearings, day and night, practising reconnaissance and infiltration, choosing complicated targets and difficult terrain.

Candidates were billeted in the SAS camp at Hereford. The selection process tested combat survival, resistance to interrogation, physical stress, endurance, orienteering, communications, weapons and medical skills. It included a long night-swim across the River Wye, marches averaging 25 miles a day in the mountains in full kit, and three ascents in a single day to the highest Beacon, a climb of 500-800ft each time.

Houstoun passed into 22 SAS and was posted to G Squadron. He commanded 24 (Air Assault) Troop and was soon selected for a job training President Jomo Kenyatta's bodyguard in Kenya. He and his team set up camp between Nairobi and Mombasa, where they were joined by members of Kenyatta's tribe for an intensive eight-week course.

It was in Nairobi that he met Joanna, the young woman who was to become his wife. She was working for the African Free Trade Coffee Association. Her father commanded the Kenyan Air Force.

After nine months on counter-insurgency operations with the SAS, commanding a group of British, Arab and Baluch soldiers in the southern Dhofar region of Oman, Houstoun rejoined the Grenadier Guards in Germany. The 1st Battalion was preparing for a four-month tour in Londonderry and the Creggan and Houstoun served as second-in-command of a company.

A staff appointment as GSO 3 (General Staff Officer Grade 3) (Ops) based at Duke of York's HQ in Chelsea followed. In the procession preceding the large state funeral for Lord Louis Mountbatten, Houstoun was given the job of leading an elderly group of sailors who had served under the great man in the destroyer *Kelly* in the Second World War.

The rehearsal for the march from Wellington Barracks to Westminster Abbey began at 0300. Led by the sound of carousing and the clink of glasses, Houstoun succeeded in assembling a motley collection of former chief petty officers, ratings and stokers, about 20 in number, and surrounded by almost as many empty whisky bottles. Fortunately, they took a circuitous route by way of Admiralty Arch and Whitehall, which gave them a chance to sober up.

In 1979 he was granted a Regular Commission and returned to Hereford to assume command of G (Guards) Squadron 22 SAS. At the conclusion of a challenging tour in East Tyrone, Northern Ireland, he was appointed MBE (Military) for gallantry. The medal ribbon was pinned on by the Queen at Buckingham Palace.

In 1980, counter-terrorism took centre stage. The Iranian Embassy in London was held by insurgents but it was B Squadron who had the task of raising the siege.

In the Sea King helicopter crash in May 1982, during the Falklands conflict, eight soldiers from G Squadron were killed. Six of them were married. Houstoun's wife, Joanna, was awakened at six o'clock in the morning and was asked to go to the office of the Families Officer. She feared the worst for her husband. She was expecting her third child and, halfway to the office, she stopped the car, knelt down on the grass verge and prayed to God to give her strength.

The wives of the soldiers had to live with the fear of their husbands being thrown into danger. Many of them had been young when they married and their husbands had gone away on four-to-six-month tours, leaving them to cope with whatever problems arose at home. Often they had to rely on hastily written scraps of airmail paper which usually arrived erratically or too late to help with decision-making.

The Families Officer told Joanna that Euan was not among the casualties, but when the bereaved wives saw her and the officer together at their door they knew that their worst fears had been realised. The wives of G Squadron, however, were a close-knit family. They shared the grief, and the outpouring of love and care sustained them through the hardest of times.

After two years with the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanised) of the US Army at Fort Carson in Colorado, Houstoun commanded a company of the 1st Battalion in Northern Ireland. In 1988 he assumed command of the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards at Munster, BAOR, shortly after the introduction of the new Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicle. He was advanced to OBE at the end of his tour.

This was followed by two three-year tours, first at Catterick, Yorkshire, in command of the Battlegroup Trainer (North) and then, on promotion to full colonel, as Commandant of the Combined Arms Training Centre at Warminster. With no prospects of further promotion, he joined the FCO as the Defence Attaché in Israel.

In 2001 he retired from the Army and ran crisis management training for civil servants before setting up a narrowboat cruise company with his wife. He was president of the Grenadier Guards Association for 10 years, and in 2013 he became president of the HMS Trincomalee Trust, a charity that maintains the *Trincomalee*, a restored frigate launched in 1817 and on display at Hartlepool.

Colonel Euan Houstoun married, in 1972, Joanna Rothwell; an unceasing support to him throughout their married life, she survives him with their son and two daughters.

Colonel Euan Houstoun, born January 2 1946, died November 10 2024

Merrily Harpur

Cartoonist who lampooned townies with rural pretensions and researched big-cat sightings

MERRILY HARPUR, who has died aged 76, was an illustrator, writer and poet, organiser of poetry and literary festivals – and an authority on big-cat sightings.

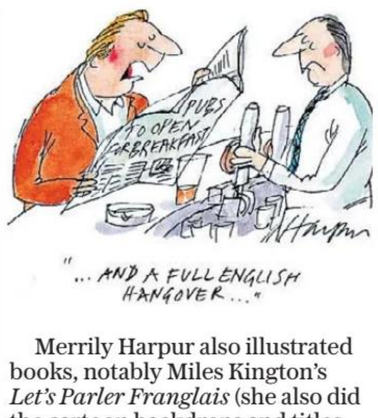
She was best known, however, as a freelance cartoonist with an eye and acute ear for social niceties. "What do you mean, grounds for divorce?" a husband protests to his wife in one offering: "Those are my idiosyncrasies!" Another cartoon has a woman advising a younger friend: "The secret of life is to snatch the fleeting moments of happiness between premenstrual tension and postcoital depression."

During the 1980s her *Sunday Telegraph* weekly back-page cartoon "The Chattering Classes", and cartoon strip "The Arcadians", in which she skewered the rural pretensions of urban emigrants to the countryside, introduced readers to her spiky drawings and quirky imagination. "I had a lot of fun at the expense of people who live in 'Ye Olde Pigsty', etc," she recalled.

She drew cartoons for most of the British broadsheets and various Irish newspapers as well as magazines including *Punch*, *The Spectator* and *The Listener*.

For the last of these she drew the strip "Unheard of Ambridge", later collected in a book, featuring *Archers* characters "who are spoken of but never speak". Jean-Paul, the volatile French chef at Grey Gables, starred, with big parts for "Herr" Rodway, the mysteriously German estate agent; Pru Forrest, the gamekeeper's wife; and such villains as the Horrobins and Snatch Foster.

Her joke was only mildly deflated when Jean-Paul found a voice and, in 2003, when Pru Forrest made a brief appearance in the unlikely shape of Judi Dench.





ROBIN MILLS

'I had a lot of fun at the expense of people who live in 'Ye Olde Pigsty''

Merrily Harpur also illustrated books, notably Miles Kington's *Let's Parler Franglais* (she also did the cartoon backdrops and titles for the television version) and works by Kingsley Amis and James Fenton.

In the mid-1980s she decided to become an Arcadian herself, swapping her West London flat for a tiny seaside cottage in the wilds of West Cork, near the town of Schull, where she looked after a nonagenarian aunt who lived nearby.

In the 1990s, to indulge a passion for fly-fishing, she moved to "a sort of hovel" near Strokestown, Co Roscommon, where she co-founded a successful poetry festival. A fine poet herself, in 2004 she won the Irish K250 International Poetry Prize.

In 2003 she moved to Cattistock in Dorset, where she organised "Mythic Imagination" weekends, attracting adventurous seekers from as far afield as the US to explore myth, folklore, poetry and the secret places of Dorset, and a "Fox Festival", for which she wrote the libretto for an oratorio, *The Fox that Walked on Water*, with music by Nick Morris.

The seeds of her interest in big-cat sightings had been sown during her Surrey childhood by what was known as "the Surrey Puma", the cause of much wasted police energy in the 1960s, and she soon found that Dorset was something of a "hot spot" for big cats – so much so that she claimed that sightings of large felines were more likely in the county than in the Serengeti in Africa.

She organised the first national Big Cats Conference in Market Harborough in 2006, established the Dorset Big Cats Register, ran an investigative website about sightings, and published two books on the subject.

In *Mystery Big Cats* (2006), she contended that "cat-flaps", as she called them, occur at the rate of 2,000 to 4,000 a year, while *Roaring Dorset* (2008) chronicled some 223 sightings across the county with grainy photographs of black creatures in fields.

"I could for all I know be a world authority," she conceded, "but the fact remains I've never actually seen one."

Merrily Harpur was born in Buckinghamshire on April 2 1948 and brought up with her three brothers in Surrey. Her father, the son of a Church of Ireland rector from Co Laois, moved to England to work in newspapers. Her mother was from a Scottish-English family who had been living in France, so, as she recalled, both parents had a "slightly foreign", humorous take on England and the English.

From Headington School, Oxford, she read English literature at Trinity College Dublin, where she edited the literary magazine *Icarus*, appeared in a photograph in *The Irish Times* wearing a stuffed hen as a hat – and, one evening, inspired by a few pints of Guinness, "borrowed" a Dublin bus with three co-conspirators for an impromptu tour of the city.

Having vowed "never to have to set my alarm to make myself get out of bed, ever again", she began her career as an apprentice picture restorer, living in a farmhouse in Herefordshire, before establishing herself as a cartoonist.

The *Punch* editor Alan Coren was an early admirer of her work and gave her a weekly double-page spread. On one occasion he commissioned her and the journalist Libby Purves to spend a weekend recreating Jerome K Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* with women. The former showgirl Mandy Rice-Davies, best known for her role in the Profumo affair, completed the trio. Libby Purves did the rowing, Mandy Rice-Davies was steerswoman and Merrily Harpur recorded their adventure in cartoons.

"The best moment was when, in our dishevelled camping dawn, Mandy was found on the riverbank delicately atomising Evian water on to her face," Libby Purves recalled. "Harpur's caption said: 'Could you just atomise some into the kettle?'"

Her newspaper work, apart from her cartoons for *The Sunday Telegraph*, included regular cartoons in *The Guardian*, "Merrily Harpur's Diary" and the strip "Flavia Corkscrew's Good Food Guide" for *The Times*, and cartoon illustrations for Rosalind Russell's column "The Diary of an Estate Agent" in the *Standard*, later turned into a book.

One of a select band of women cartoonists, Merrily Harpur was once asked why the field was so dominated by men. "Perhaps the answer to that one is that most women have got better things to do than spend their day thinking up jokes," she said, before adding, mischievously: "...But there are a few of us with big enough egos to sit down and think our own jokes are funny."

Her other books include *The Nightmares of Dream Topping* (1985), in which, as with The Arcadians, she enjoyed poking fun at metropolitans struggling to cope with rural ways, and *Pig Overboard! And other strange but true letters from The Field* (1984), which she compiled and illustrated.

She was a woman of wide interests. In Ireland, she indulged a love of traditional Irish music and became friendly with members of the Chieftains, writing sleeve notes for albums by Matt Molloy and John Carty.

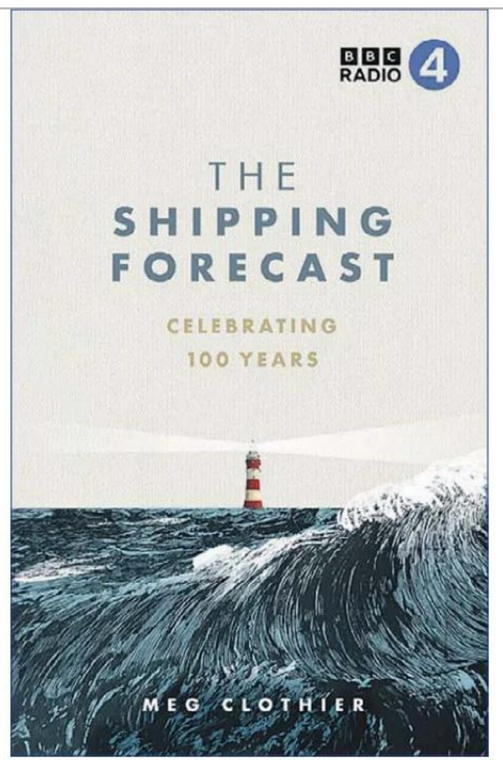
In Dorset she indulged her lifelong love of painting, chiefly landscapes in oils but also linocuts. She was a leading light of Dorset Arts Week and galvanised the artists in her village to form a group called "Tate Cattistock". In her latter years, she joined the church, serving on the PCC and helping to raise funds for roof repairs.

Although she received several proposals, Merrily Harpur was too much of an independent soul to marry. She is survived by her three brothers.

Merrily Harpur, born April 3 1948, died December 4 2024

READER SOLUTIONS BY TELEGRAPH MEDIA GROUP

Books hand-picked by our partners



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Television & Radio

Television reviews Anita Singh



Reliably simple tips from the queen of Christmas cookery



Mary Berry made festive flapjacks with presenter Nick Grimshaw

With the exception of Father Christmas, is there anyone more reliable at this time of year than Mary Berry? A while back, there was a fad for following Nigella's advice to brine their turkey in a plastic bin, then cooking a ham in two litres of Coca-Cola on Boxing Day. A couple of years ago, Jamie Oliver lost the plot by recommending a giant Yorkshire pudding filled with grapes as an accompaniment for Christmas dinner.

Stop this nonsense and do Christmas the Mary way, which means keeping things simple. In **Mary Makes Christmas** (BBC One), she issued a piece of advice that frazzled cooks should take to their hearts on Christmas morning. And it is this: "Think of the turkey as a big chicken and you'll never worry again."

Mary shared this advice with Amanda Holden, because the structure of the programme involved her cooking with various celebrities. With the exception of a fish pie, which she always serves on Christmas Eve (tip: put the peas in frozen, and they will keep their colour better), the recipes were for things that could be given to friends and family as presents. So we had very smart-looking mini-Christmas cakes topped with marzipan, almond snowballs and ginger flapjacks, apricots in brandy and a Stilton dip. Mary gently guided her guests through the process.

She and Holden met in Rye, East Sussex, the latter tottering up the cobbled street in a pair of ludicrously high heels. Oti Mabuse joined Mary outside the beach house where the show was being filmed, and where Mary walked her dog while looking extremely stylish in a bobble hat and cream gilet. When filming *Bake Off* on cold days, she had a hot water bottle up her jumper, so let's hope the same happened here.

They shared their treats with a group of hardy ladies who were sea swimming in Santa hats. Later, Mary and presenter Nick Grimshaw served flapjacks to RNLI volunteers. Despite, one presumes, the show not actually being filmed at Christmas, it was suitably festive and twinkly.

Between the cookery demonstrations, Mary chatted about her own Christmas, which involves delegating aspects of lunch preparation to family members. She shared an adorable picture of her three children in the 1970s, wearing jumpers she had made for them with their names on the front. And as she prepared the fish pie, topped with what her friend terms "heavenly potatoes", she explained that she makes it on December 23 "when nobody is about – in the kitchen, music on, and I love to just do it by myself. It's a peaceful time." A recipe for Christmas bliss.

Anyone missing Shayne Ward since his early exit from *Strictly Come Dancing* can find him in **The Good Ship Murder Christmas Special** (Channel 5). What a show. *Think Cruising with Jane McDonald* crossed with *Midsomer Murders*, but not half as good as that sounds.

Ward plays, improbably, a retired detective-turned-cruise ship crooner. The murder comes in two forms: the crime that becomes the basis of each episode, and the moment at the end when Ward breaks into song and murders a tune we previously held dear. In this case, being Christmas-themed, it was *The Power of Love* by Frankie Goes to Hollywood.

The show is credited as an original idea by Channel 5's very canny boss, Ben Frow. He knows that his viewers like cruising programmes with a song thrown in and they like cosy crime dramas, and I guess they also like Shayne Ward. But Ward comes at this with an acting style that could politely be described as relaxed, coasting along on the idea that everyone finds him handsome and charming. If he's not basking in the attention of first officer Kate (Catherine Tyldesley) he's nodding along as cruise director Bev (Claire Sweeney) says tearfully: "What I wouldn't give to have some hunky fella's shoulder to cry on…"

Everyone's acting is curiously sub-par, with the exception of this episode's guest star, *Call the Midwife*'s Cliff Parisi. He plays Buddy Elveden, a terrible stand-up comedian who lands a job as the ship's Father Christmas after overhearing Jack (Ward) discussing the vacancy while visiting a Christmas market in Dubrovnik.

Buddy soon ends up dead, and Jack sets out to investigate with the help of a local police chief. There are two or three suspects to be eliminated, and this murder-of-the-week plotting is perfectly serviceable. More suspect is a scene in which Jack visits a comedy club where Buddy had performed, and asks to view the CCTV footage. As an incentive, he offers to sing in the club. "You are really that good?" the proprietor asks. "I am. Trust me," replies Jack. Was this exchange scripted by Shayne Ward?

Mary Makes Christmas ★★★★
The Good Ship Murder ★★

What to watch

GREAT BRITISH SEWING BEE CELEBRITY CHRISTMAS SPECIAL
BBC One, 9pm



Judges Esme Young and Patrick Grant put celebrities, including Charlotte Crosby, to the test

Singer and actor Ian "H" Watkins, Kellie Bright from *EastEnders*, comedian Fatiha El-Ghorri and TV personality and *Geordie Shore* star Charlotte Crosby join host Sara Pascoe for the amateur sewing challenge; their tasks – assessed by judges Esme Young and Patrick Grant – are to design a pattern for an advent calendar, to turn onesies into a Christmas costume for a child and to create an outfit for their models that's inspired by their favourite Christmas No 1 single. One contestant nearly loses a finger in the sewing machine, one leans into long-unused needle skills and another discovers a hidden aptitude. The fourth is comically inept and stumps the judges with their onesie creation, as it's almost impossible to discern what character it's meant to represent. It's a very jokey edition all round, more focused on laughs and good-natured fun, with Christmas cracker gags galore – and even a bit of naughtiness as Esme and Patrick avow that everyone loves a Christmas sausage. The show proper, which returns for an 11th series in 2025, was described by *The Telegraph*'s reviewer as "the television equivalent of a palate cleanse" – and who doesn't need one of those among the festive season's overindulgence? ***Veronica Lee***

DRAMA

The Chelsea Detective Christmas Special 2024
U&Drama, 8pm
In a feature-length episode of the cosy crime series, DI Max Arnold and DS Layla Walsh (Adrian Scarborough and Vanessa Emme) investigate as a pop star is found dead in her Chelsea flat just before Christmas. The list of suspects includes her manager, a tabloid journalist and a Tory MP.

ENTERTAINMENT

Beast Games
Amazon Prime Video
Squid Game meets *Punk'd* as MrBeast, aka Jimmy Donaldson, one of the world's most successful YouTubers known for his elaborate stunts and expensive giveaways, makes his first foray into television. One thousand contestants are whittled down over 10 weekly episodes as they take part in physical, mental and social challenges – and the last one standing will win $5 million.



YouTuber 'Mr Beast' hosts gameshow Beast Games

First Dates at Christmas
Channel 4, 9pm
Christmas and romance are close companions, so Fred Sirieix and his team help some singletons who want to find "the one". Among those dining in the restaurant is Tee, looking for a fellow romantic who can rival her celebrity crush Anthony Joshua, when in comes martial arts instructor Kyroe; and 6ft 1in Louise, who has never dated a man taller than her. Will 6ft 6in Justin measure up?

Miracles
Sky Max, 9pm
Stephen Frayne, formerly known as Dynamo, has dropped that monicker, but the street magician is still up to his tricks. Over the past year he has been interacting with unsuspecting members of the public as part of a long-form trick that comes to fruition tonight with a death-defying stunt. Shocking, surprising, and always thrilling.

FACTUAL

The One Show
BBC One, 7pm
Alex Jones and Roman Kemp host this "One Big Thank You" festive special, as celebrities pay tribute to ordinary folk who try to make others' lives a little better at what can be a difficult time of year for so many. Bring tissues.



Magician Dynamo returns with new special Miracles

For the Love of Dogs With Alison Hammond at Christmas
ITV1, 8.30pm; not STV/UTV
Alison Hammond, having replaced the late Paul O'Grady last season, returns to Battersea Dogs and Cats Home at one of its busiest times of the year to help some more dogs find new abodes. Among them is seven-month-old spaniel Holly, who came in severely underweight and needing an eye operation, and Bauble, a cockapoo with separation anxiety. As ever, it's intended to tug on your heartstrings (and wallet: prepare to donate after falling in love with the cute furry pets). ***VL***

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Give a gift they'll enjoy all year

Radio choice

This Natural Life
Radio 4, 3pm

Martha Kearney meets Delia Smith at home in Suffolk. The TV chef explains how, early in their marriage, her husband, writer and editor Michael Wynn-Jones, ignited her abiding love of nature and the environment by buying a field adjoining their garden for her birthday, which they turned into a wildlife sanctuary. And in tonight's edition of the **The Essay: Full Moon on Progress St** (*Radio 3, 9.45pm*), Dr Rommi Smith focuses on a key moment in the life of the great jazz singer Nina Simone – a wonderful Carnegie Hall concert in April 1963, when she first turned her artistry towards civil rights activism. ***Gerard O'Donovan***

RADIO 1
FM 97.6-99.8MHZ

6.58am Newsbeat **7.00** Radio 1 Breakfast with Greg James **10.30** Newsbeat **10.33** Rickie, Melvin and Charlie **12.00** Radio 1's Christmas Live Lounge **12.45pm** Newsbeat **1.00** Matt and Jerry **3.00** Radio 1 Pop Anthems **3.30** Newsbeat **3.33** Going Home with Vick, Katie and Jamie on Radio 1 **5.45** Newsbeat **6.00** Radio 1's New Music Show with Jack Saunders **8.00** Radio 1's Rave-Up with Arielle Free **10.00** BBC Introducing Dance **11.00** Radio 1's Residency **1.00am** Danny Howard's Club Mix **2.00** Radio 1 Anthems **4.00** Radio 1's Workout Anthems **5.00 - 6.58am** Radio 1 Early Breakfast with Sam and Danni

RADIO 2
FM 88-90.2MHZ

6.30am The Zoe Ball Breakfast Show **9.30** Vernon Kay **12.00** Jeremy Vine. Current affairs chat **2.00pm** Radio 2 Early Afternoon Show. Music and chat **4.00** Sara Cox. Music and chat **6.30** Sara Cox's Half Wower. Sara plays the biggest and best tunes to get listeners dancing **7.00** Jo Whiley. With guests The Edge, Mackenzie Crook, Michael Kiwanuka and Laufey **9.00** The Country Show with Bob Harris. A Christmas holiday spectacular **10.00** Trevor Nelson's Rhythm Nation. Trevor plays his favourite soulful Christmas songs **12.00** OJ Borg **3.00am** Sounds of the 90s with Fearne Cotton **4.00 - 6.30am** Owain Wyn Evans

RADIO 3
FM 90.2-92.4MHZ

6.30am Breakfast **9.30** Essential Classics **1.00pm** Classical Live **4.00** Composer of the Week: Bach at Christmas **5.00** In Tune **7.00** Classical Mixtape. Music by Howells, Joanna Marsh, Vivaldi and Patrick Doyle **7.30** Radio 3 in Concert. Arcangelo perform Heinrich Schütz's depiction of the nativity **9.45 The Essay: Full Moon on Progress St** Dr Rommi Smith revisits Nina Simone's debut apolitical performance in 1963 **See Radio choice 10.00** Night Tracks. Sara Mohr-Pietsch presents an immersive soundtrack for late-night listening **11.30** 'Round Midnight **12.30 - 6.30am** Through the Night

RADIO 4
FM 92.4-94.6MHZ; LW 198KHZ

6.00am Today **9.00** In Our Time **9.45** Strong Message Here **10.00** Woman's Hour **11.00** The Infinite Monkey Cage **11.45** Book of the Week: Your Face Belongs to Us **12.00** News **12.04pm** You and Yours. Consumer affairs **12.32** Sliced Bread. Dependable insulation hacks. Last in the series **12.57** Weather **1.00** The World at One. Presented by Sarah Montague **1.45** One to One. Benji Webbe talks about his relationship with reggae **2.00** The Archers. Susan attempts to offer a solution and celebrations begin at Brookfield **2.15** Drama: Severus. Ancient Roman drama, co-written by and starring Paterson Joseph **3.00 This Natural Life** Celebrity cook Delia Smith explains her deep love of nature **See Radio choice 3.27** Radio 4 Appeal. On behalf of Groundwork UK **3.30** Feedback. Listeners' views with Andrea Catherwood **4.00** The Briefing Room. David Aaronovitch discusses a story in the news **4.30** BBC Inside Science. A look at 2024's most significant science stories **5.00** PM. Presented by Evan Davis **5.57** Weather **6.00** Six O'Clock News **6.30** Michael Spicer: No Room. Satirical comedy sketches **7.00** The Archers. Life becomes complicated for Helen **7.15** Front Row. Arts programme **8.00** The Media Show **9.00** Loose Ends **9.45** Mythical Creatures **9.59** Weather **10.00** The World Tonight **10.45** Book at Bedtime: Dark Tales **11.00** The Today Podcast **11.30** Today in Parliament **12.00** News and Weather **12.30am** Book of the Week: Your Face Belongs to Us **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.00** As World Service **5.20** Shipping Forecast **5.30** News Briefing **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45 - 6.00am** Farming Today

RADIO 5 LIVE
MW 693 & 909KHZ

6.00am 5 Live Breakfast **9.00** Gordon Smart **11.00** Adrian Chiles **2.00pm** Matt Chorley **4.00** 5 Live Drive **7.00** 5 Live Sport. Build-up to Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester United in the Carabao Cup **8.00** 5 Live Sport. Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester United (kick-off 8.00pm). Commentary on the Carabao Cup quarter-final at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium **10.00** Tony Livesey **1.00am** Dotun Adebayo **5.00 - 6.00am** Wake Up to Money

CLASSIC FM
FM 99.9-101.9MHZ

6.30am Classic FM Breakfast with Dan Walker **9.00** The Classic FM Hall of Fame Hour with Dan Walker **10.00** Alexander Armstrong **1.00pm** Anne-Marie Minhall **4.00** Margherita Taylor **7.00** Relaxing Evenings. Presented by Zeb Soanes **10.00** Calm Classics **1.00am** Bill Overton **4.00 - 6.30am** Early Breakfast

WORLD SERVICE
DIGITAL ONLY

8.00am News **8.06** The Inquiry **8.30** Business Daily **8.50** Witness History **9.00** The Newsroom **9.30** The Documentary: Srebrenica's Forgotten Refugees **10.00** News **10.06** The Media Show **10.30** Happy News **11.00** The Newsroom **11.30** The Global Story **12.00** News **12.06pm** Outlook **12.50** Witness History **1.00** The Newsroom **1.30** The Food Chain **2.00** Newshour **3.00** News **3.06** The Inquiry **3.30** World Business Report **4.00** BBC OS **6.00** News **6.06** Outlook **6.50** Witness History **7.00** The Newsroom **7.30** Sport Today **8.00** News **8.06** The Documentary: Srebrenica's Forgotten Refugees **8.30** Science in Action **9.00** Newshour **10.00** The Newsroom **10.30** World Business Report **11.00** News **11.06** The Inquiry **11.30** The Food Chain **12.00** News **12.06am** The Media Show **12.30** Happy News **1.00** News **1.06** Business Matters **2.00** The Newsroom **2.30** Tech Life **3.00** News **3.06** Outlook **3.50** Witness History **4.00** The Newsroom **4.30** Heart and Soul **5.00 - 8.00am** Newsday

RADIO 4 EXTRA
DIGITAL ONLY

6.00am Peter Pan **6.30** Agatha Raisin **7.00** Coming Alive **7.30** Parsley Sidings **8.00** Bridget Christie: Mortal **8.30** Will in the World **8.45** The Debrief **9.00** Yesterday in Parliament **9.30** A Cause for Caroling **9.45** Daily Service **10.00** Great Lives **10.30** The Sound of Soweto **11.00** Peter Pan **11.30** Agatha Raisin **12.00** Coming Alive **12.30pm** Parsley Sidings **1.00** Bridget Christie: Mortal **1.30** Will in the World **1.45** The Debrief **2.00** Who Goes There? **2.30** Nude with Violin **4.00** Great Lives **4.30** The Sound of Soweto **5.00** Peter Pan **5.30** Agatha Raisin **6.00** Coming Alive **6.30** Parsley Sidings **7.00** Bridget Christie: Mortal **7.30** Will in the World **7.45** The Debrief **8.00** Who Goes There? **8.30** Nude with Violin **10.00** Michael Spicer: No Room **10.30** Vent **11.00** The News at Bedtime **11.15** The Demon Cakestand of Beastley Chase **11.30** Party **12.00** Great Lives **12.30am** The Sound of Soweto **1.00** Peter Pan **1.30** Agatha Raisin **2.00** Coming Alive **2.30** Parsley Sidings **3.00** Bridget Christie: Mortal **3.30** Will in the World **3.45** The Debrief **4.00** Who Goes There? **4.30 - 6.00am** Nude with Violin

Today's television

Main channels

FV Freeview FS Freesat (AD) Audio description (R) Repeat (S) Subtitles (SL) In-vision signing

BBC One

6.00 am Breakfast (S) **9.30** Morning Live at Christmas (S) **10.45** Animal Park Christmas Special (AD) (S) **11.30** Homes Under the Hammer (R) (S)
12.15 pm Bargain Hunt Christmas Special (AD) (R) (S)
1.00 BBC News at One; Weather (S)
1.35 Regional News; Weather (S)
1.45 BBC News at One; Weather (S)
2.00 Nigella's Amsterdam Christmas (AD) (R) (S)
3.00 Escape to the Country (S)
3.45 The Vintage French Farmhouse (R) (S)
4.30 Antiques Road Trip (R) (S)
5.15 Pointless Celebrities (R) (S)
6.00 BBC News at Six; Weather (S)
6.30 Regional News; Weather (S)



Celebrity Escape to the Country

7.00 The One Show The inspirational people who help spread festive cheer **See What to watch** (S)
7.30 EastEnders Ian has a surprising suggestion for Peter (AD) (S)
8.00 Celebrity Escape to the Country Presenter Kaye Adams seeks to swap city life for the Scottish countryside (S)
9.00 The Great British Sewing Bee Celebrity Christmas Special Ian "H" Watkins, Kellie Bright, Fatiha El-Ghorri and Charlotte Crosby compete **See What to watch** (AD) (S)
10.00 News; Weather (S)
10.30 Regional News; Weather (S)
10.40 Kevin Bridges – The Overdue Catch-Up A stand-up performance by the Glaswegian (S)
11.40 FILM: Die Hard with a Vengeance (1995) Action thriller sequel starring Bruce Willis **1.45 - 6.00am** News

BBC Two

6.30 am Animal Park (AD) (R) (S) **7.15** Escape to the Country (R) (S) **8.00** Sign Zone: Gardeners' World Winter Specials (AD) (R) (S) (SL) **9.00** News (S)
12.15 pm Politics Live (S)
1.00 Impossible (R) (S)
1.45 FILM: Fiddler on the Roof (1971) Musical starring Topol **See Film choice** (S)
4.40 The Wonder of Animals (AD) (R) (S)
5.15 Flog It! (R) (S)
6.00 Richard Osman's Festive House of Games (R) (S)
6.30 Nigella: At My Table (AD) (R) (S)



Caroline Aherne: Queen of Comedy

7.00 Wild Tales from the Village Animals that live near a remote French village (AD) (R) (S)
8.00 Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing Bob and Paul head off for a fishing trip to Norway (AD) (R) (S)
9.00 Caroline Aherne: Queen of Comedy Celebrating the life and career of the comedy writer and actress (AD) (R) (S)
10.10 We Wish You a Mandy Christmas Mandy contemplates the true meaning of Christmas (AD) (R) (S)
10.30 Newsnight (S)
11.05 Renaissance – The Blood and the Beauty **12.05am** Sign Zone: MasterChef: The Professionals **1.05** Sign Zone: Clive Myrie's Caribbean Treasures **2.05** Sign Zone: Alan Bennett: 90 Years On **3.05 - 6.45am** This Is BBC Two

ITV1

6.00 am Good Morning Britain (S) **9.00** Lorraine (S) **10.00** This Morning (S)
12.30 pm Loose Women (S)
1.30 News; Weather (S)
1.55 Regional News; Weather (S)
2.00 Alan Carr's Epic Gameshow (AD) (R) (S)
3.00 Tipping Point: Lucky Stars (R) (S)
4.00 Deal or No Deal (S)
5.00 The Chase (S)
6.00 Regional News; Weather (S)
6.30 News; Weather (S)



For the Love of Dogs

7.30 Emmerdale The court day commences (AD) (S)
8.30 For the Love of Dogs with Alison Hammond at Christmas In a festive edition, the presenter meets a seven-month-old spaniel **See What to watch** (AD) (S)
9.00 Beat the Chasers Contestants take on a team of five Chasers (R) (S)
10.00 News; Weather (S)
10.30 Regional News; Weather (S)
10.45 FILM: Rocky V (1990) Boxing drama sequel starring Sylvester Stallone (AD) (S)
12.30 am Shop on TV **3.00** Gino & Fred: Emission Impossible **4.00** Unwind with ITV **5.10 - 6.00am** Deal or No Deal

Channel 4

6.25 am Cheers (R) (S) **6.55** Cheers (R) (S) **7.20** Cheers (R) (S) **7.50** The King of Queens (AD) (R) (S) **8.15** The King of Queens (AD) (R) (S) **8.45** The King of Queens (AD) (R) (S) **9.15** Frasier (AD) (R) (S) **9.45** Frasier (AD) (R) (S) **10.15** Frasier (AD) (R) (S) **10.45** Frasier (AD) (R) (S) **11.15** Channel 4 News (S) **11.20** FILM: Christmas in Love (2018, TVM) Romantic drama starring Brooke D'Orsay (S)
1.05 pm Jamie Cooks Christmas (AD) (R) (S)
2.10 Countdown (S)
3.00 A Place in the Sun (R) (S)
4.00 Chateau DIY at Christmas (AD) (S)
5.00 Four in a Bed (S)
5.30 Kirstie's Handmade Christmas (AD) (R) (S)
6.30 The Simpsons (AD) (R) (S)



First Dates at Christmas

7.00 Channel 4 News (S)
8.00 Secrets of the Christmas Market A look behind the scenes of Belfast's much-loved festive market (AD) (S)
9.00 First Dates at Christmas Singletons who are all hoping to find love at Christmastime **See What to watch** (AD) (S)
10.00 Gogglebox The armchair critics share their opinions on Squid Game: The Challenge (AD) (R) (S)
11.35 First Dates at Christmas **12.35am** Travel Man: 96 Hours in Iceland **1.30** Deck the Halls: The Luxury Christmas Decorators **2.25** Ramsay's 24 Hours to Hell and Back **3.15** Undercover Boss Canada **4.05** Frasier **4.30** Frasier **4.55** Frasier **5.20** Frasier **5.45 - 6.25am** Countdown

Channel 5

6.00 am Milkshake! **9.15** Jeremy Vine (S) **11.30** Storm Huntley (S)
12.55 pm 5 News at Lunchtime (S)
1.00 Friends (AD) (R) (S)
1.30 FILM: A Ring For Christmas (2020, TVM) Romantic drama starring Liliana Tandon (S)
3.15 FILM: Tying the Knot for Christmas (2023, TVM) Premiere. Romantic drama starring Jessy Holtermann (S)
5.00 5 News at 5 (S)
6.00 Christmas with the Bargain-Loving Brits In The Sun (R) (S)
6.55 5 News Update (S)



Inside the Tower of London

7.00 Air Fryers: Christmas Made Easy Alexis Conran and chef Miguel Barclay lift the lid on the air fryer magic (S)
7.55 5 News Update (S)
8.00 Inside the Tower of London Cameras focus on new Beefeater Barney Barnett (S)
9.00 Dalgliesh In Kent, the local community is rocked by a string of killings (AD) (S)
10.00 Prime Suspect: Who Killed Diane Jones? An investigation into the murder of a doctor's wife in Essex in 1983 (R) (S)
11.40 Killer at the Crime Scene **12.40am** Police Interceptors **1.30** PlayOJO Live Casino Show **3.30** Carol Drinkwater's Secret Provence **4.15** A Country Life for Half the Price with Kate Humble **5.05** Wildlife SOS **5.30** Entertainment News on 5 **5.35** Paw Patrol **5.50 - 6.00am** Fireman Sam

Film choice



Fiddler on the Roof *(1971)*
BBC Two, 1.45pm ★★★★★

Canadian film-maker Norman Jewison translates this classic Broadway musical into an equally enthralling family movie, following the life of Tevye (the Israeli actor and singer Chaim Topol, reprising his London stage role), a milkman who must juggle the toils of life with the harsh realities of being poor and Jewish in Tsarist Russia in 1905. Despite its jolly reputation, it has a tragic core.



Elf *(2003)*
Sky Showcase, 7pm ★★★★

Will Ferrell's humour may not be for everyone, but there are plenty of giggles to be had (and quotes to endure) from Jon Favreau's sweet Christmas comedy. Ferrell plays a human called Buddy who was brought up as an oversized elf at the North Pole. When Buddy finds out about his true origins, he travels south on a mission to find his birth family in a rather elf-sceptical New York City.



Everest *(2015)*
ITV4, 9pm ★★★

Baltasar Kormákur's vertigo-inducing adventure is based on the 1996 Everest disaster in which 12 climbers died. It tells the same story as Jon Krakaur's memoir *Into Thin Air*, but the impressive CGI and breathless high-altitude sequences justify the retreading. The rivalry between the two expedition leaders Rob Hall and Scott Fischer, played by Jason Clarke and Jake Gyllenhaal, is well-handled.

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FV Freeview FS Freesat (AD) Audio description (R) Repeat (S) Subtitles (SL) In-vision signing

BBC Four

FV 9 FS 173 SKY 116 VIRGIN 108

7.00 pm TOTP: Christmas 1993
8.00 FILM: The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2011) Comedy drama starring Judi Dench and Bill Nighy
9.55 FILM: Victoria & Abdul (2017) Drama starring Judi Dench
11.40 Judi Dench in Conversation with Richard Eyre
12.40 am Mark Kermode's Christmas Cinema Secrets
1.40 What We Were Watching: Christmas 1979
2.40 Three Salons at the Seaside
3.20 - 3.50am A Ghost Story for Christmas: The Mezzotint

ITV3

FV 10 FS 115 SKY 119 VIRGIN 117

11.05 am The Royal
12.10 pm Heartbeat
1.15 Classic Emmerdale
1.45 Classic Emmerdale
2.20 Classic Coronation Street
2.55 Classic Coronation Street
3.30 Inspector Morse
5.50 Downton Abbey
7.00 Heartbeat
8.00 McDonald & Dodds
10.00 The Long Shadow
11.00 Wycliffe
12.00 Wycliffe
1.10 am Kate & Koji
1.35 Kate & Koji
2.00 Wild at Heart
3.40 - 5.30am Inspector Morse

ITV4

FV 26 FS 117 SKY 120 VIRGIN 118

11.35 am BattleBots
12.35 pm The Champions
1.40 Magnum, PI
2.45 Kojak
3.50 Minder
4.55 The Professionals
6.00 BattleBots
6.55 The Chase Celebrity Special
8.00 River Monsters
9.00 FILM: Everest (2015) Fact-based adventure starring Jason Clarke **See Film choice**
11.25 EFL Carabao Cup Highlights
12.25 am FILM: Death Wish II (1981) Thriller sequel starring Charles Bronson
2.05 - 4.00am The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Sky Arts

FV 36 FS 143 SKY 130 VIRGIN 123

12.15 pm FILM: Take Me High (1973) Musical comedy
2.00 The Joy of Painting
2.35 Nutcracker
3.35 Battle of the Bagpipes
4.35 Bagpipes: A Celebration
5.35 FILM: Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon (1942, b/w)
7.00 Best of Portrait Artist of the Year 2024
8.00 The Nation's Favourite Christmas Carols
10.00 Mica Paris
11.15 Christmas in Ireland
12.35 am Pretenders: Music Icons
1.05 Guy Garvey: From the Vaults
2.05 Welcome to the Eighties
3.20 - 5.00am Classic Quadrophenia

Sky Atlantic

SKY 108

11.05 am Six Feet Under
12.05 pm Game of Thrones
1.10 Boardwalk Empire
2.15 Boardwalk Empire
3.20 The Sopranos
4.30 The Sopranos
5.35 The Sopranos
6.35 Six Feet Under
7.55 Game of Thrones
9.00 Dune: Prophecy
10.10 Accidentally Famous: The Story of 883
11.15 Accidentally Famous: The Story of 883
12.20 am Game of Thrones
1.25 Gomorrah
2.30 Gomorrah
3.40 - 5.00am Treme

Film4

FV 14 FS 300 SKY 313 VIRGIN 428

11.00 am The Red Turtle (2016) Fantasy with Emmanuel Garijo
12.40 pm The Mouse That Roared (1959) Comedy starring Peter Sellers
2.20 Mrs Doubtfire (1993) Comedy starring Robin Williams
4.40 One Million Years BC (1966) Adventure with Raquel Welch
6.45 Independence Day: Resurgence (2016) Sci-fi starring Jeff Goldblum
9.00 Prey (2022) Sci-fi thriller starring Amber Midthunder
10.55 The Last of the Mohicans (1992) Historical adventure starring Daniel Day-Lewis
1.10 - 3.55am Wings of Desire (1987) Fantasy

U&Drama

FV 20 FS 158 SKY 143 VIRGIN 116

Noon The Bill
1.00 pm Classic EastEnders
1.35 Classic EastEnders
2.10 London's Burning
3.10 Bergerac
4.20 Bergerac
5.25 The Upper Hand
6.00 'Allo 'Allo!
6.40 Last of the Summer Wine
7.20 Last of the Summer Wine
8.00 The Chelsea Detective Christmas Special 2024 See What to watch
10.00 New Tricks
12.00 Cardinal: Blackfly Season
1.00 am Bergerac
2.10 Bergerac
3.00 - 4.00am Holby City

U&Dave

Noon American Pickers **1.00pm** Our Guy in Colombia **3.00** Top Gear **5.00** Hairy Bikers' Best of British **6.00** Rick Stein's Far Eastern Odyssey **7.00** Would I Lie to You? **7.40** Richard Osman's House of Games **9.00** QI XL **10.00** Have I Got a Bit More News for You **11.00** 8 Out of 10 Cats **12.00** Mock the Week Christmas Special 2019 **12.40am** Would I Lie to You? **1.20** QI **2.00** QI XL **2.50-4.00am** Schitt's Creek

U&Gold

11.55am The Green Green Grass **12.55pm** Still Open All Hours **1.35** Keeping Up Appearances Xmas 1995 **2.15** Only Fools and Horses Christmas Special **2.55** Only Fools and Horses **4.15** Last of the Summer Wine **6.20** Dad's Army **7.00** Only Fools and Horses **8.20** Dad's Army **9.00** Mrs Brown's Boys Christmas Special 2015 **9.40** The Royle Family: The Golden Egg Cup **11.00** Live at the Apollo **12.00** The Office **1.00am** Mrs Brown's Boys **1.40** Dad's Army **2.25** The Royle Family: The Golden Egg Cup **3.30-4.00am** Only Fools and Horses Christmas Special

ITV2

Noon Dress to Impress **1.00pm** Supermarket Sweep **2.00** Family Fortunes **3.00** In for a Penny: Christmas Crackers **3.45 FILM:** Home Alone 3 (1997) Comedy sequel starring Alex D Linz **5.55** Celebrity Catchphrase Christmas Special **6.55** In for a Christmas Penny **7.35** The Masked Singer: Christmas Special **9.00** The 1% Club Christmas Special **10.00** Family Guy **11.30** American Dad! **12.30am** Celebrity Karaoke Club **1.35** The Stand Up Sketch Show **2.30** Deep Fake Neighbour Wars – Best Bust Ups **2.55** Deep Fake Neighbour Wars **3.20-4.45am** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records

More4

11.05am Find It, Fix It, Flog It **1.05pm** Car S.O.S **2.05** Four in a Bed **4.50** Narrow Escapes **5.50** Car S.O.S **7.55** A Very Royal Christmas: Sandringham Secrets **9.00** Devon and Cornwall at Christmas **10.00** 24 Hours in A&E **12.10am** Emergency Helicopter Medics: Farm Emergencies **1.15** 999: On the Front Line **2.15** 24 Hours in A&E **3.20-3.50am** A Place in the Sun

PBS America

11.50am The US and the Holocaust **1.00pm** Grand Tours of Scotland **1.55** The Lost Colony of Roanoke **2.50** The Dictator's Playbook **4.00** The American Vice President **5.05** The US and the Holocaust **6.20** The Lost Colony of Roanoke **7.20** The Dictator's Playbook **8.25** The American Vice President **9.35** The US and the Holocaust **10.50** The Dictator's Playbook **12.00** The American Vice President **1.10am** Grand Tours of Scotland **2.00-6.00am** Teleshopping

Talking Pictures TV

24 hours, including at:
11.05am FILM: Sea Devils (1953) Swashbuckling adventure starring Rock Hudson and Yvonne de Carlo **12.50pm FILM:** Genevieve (1953) Comedy starring Dinah Sheridan **2.30** The Stories Behind the Songs **3.00** Crown Court **4.30** Enemy at the Door **5.35** Hook, Line and Sinker **6.00 FILM:** The Halfway House (1943, b/w) A group of people are given the opportunity to reassess their lives while staying at a remote Welsh inn. Thriller, starring Mervyn Johns and Glynis Johns **8.00** The Brothers **9.05 FILM:** Across the Bridge (1957, b/w) An embezzler assumes another man's identity to escape justice - only to discover the man he is impersonating is a wanted political assassin. Thriller, starring Rod Steiger **11.10 FILM:** Live Now – Pay Later (1962, b/w) A smooth-talking salesman persuades clients to spend beyond their means, while cheating on his wife and stealing from his boss. Comedy drama, starring Ian Hendry and June Ritchie. **1.15am FILM:** Bullet Scars (1942, b/w) Gangster drama starring Regis Toomey **2.30-4.15am FILM:** The Night Holds Terror (1955, b/w) Fact-based crime drama starring Jack Kelly and Hildy Parks

U&Yesterday

Noon Great Continental Railway Journeys **1.00pm** Antiques Roadshow **2.00** Bangers & Cash **4.00** The World at War **5.00** Adolf Hitler's War **6.00** Antiques Roadshow **7.00** Great Coastal Railway Journeys **8.00** Bangers & Cash: Restoring Classics **9.00** Bangers & Cash **11.00** Abandoned Engineering **12.00** Great Continental Railway Journeys **1.00am** Great British Railway Journeys **3.00-6.10am** Teleshopping

Sky Sports Main Event

Noon Lunchtime Live **12.30pm** Live World Darts Championship. Coverage of the afternoon session on day five at Alexandra Palace in London **4.30** Sports Desk **5.00** Sports Centre **7.00** Live EFL Cup. Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester United (kick-off 8.00pm) **10.45** Behind the Ropes: Usyk v Fury 2 **11.15** Sky Sports News **12.00-5.00am** Live NFL. Los Angeles Chargers v Denver Broncos (kick-off 1.15am)

Sky Sports Premier League

Noon Gary Neville's Soccerbox **1.00pm** Premier League Years **3.00** PL Retro **5.00** Best PL Goals: Arsenal **6.00** Premier League 100: Dion Dublin **6.30** Premier League 100: Darren Bent **7.00** The Big Interview **7.30** Premier League Stories **8.00** Gary Neville's Soccerbox **9.00** The Big Interview **9.30** Premier League Stories **10.00** Premier League Icons **11.00** Premier League Years **1.00am** PL Retro **3.00-4.00am** PL Greatest Games

TNT Sports 1

Noon Premier League Reload **12.15pm** Women's T20 International Cricket **1.15** Live Women's International T20 Cricket. India v West Indies **5.15** What I Wore **5.45** Between the Lines **6.15** For The Love Of The Game With Laura & Ally **7.15** The Pioneers **7.30** Live Uefa Conference League. Chelsea v Shamrock Rovers (kick-off 8.00pm). Coverage from Stamford Bridge **10.30** Uefa Europa & Conference League Highlights. All the action from the sixth round of fixtures **11.30** NBA Tip-Off **12.00** Live NBA. Orlando Magic v Oklahoma City Thunder (tip-off midnight) **2.30-5.00am** Live NBA. Minnesota Timberwolves v New York Knicks (tip-off 2.30am)

Discovery

Noon Wheeler Dealers **1.00pm** Treehouse Masters **3.00** Gold Rush: Mine Rescue with Freddy & Juan **4.00** Aliens in Alaska **5.00** Border Control Poland **6.00** How It's Made **7.00** Outback Truckers **8.00** Wheeler Dealers **9.00** Sin City Tow **10.00** Mega Shippers **11.00** Border Control: Europe **12.00** Expedition X **1.00am** Sin City Tow **2.00** Mega Shippers **3.00-5.00am** Alaska: Homestead Rescue

Sky Cinema Premiere

24 hours, including at:
10.40am IF (2024) Fantasy adventure starring Ryan Reynolds **12.30pm** Wonka (2023) Fantasy adventure starring Timothee Chalamet **2.30** Girl You Know It's True (2023) Biographical drama starring Elan Ben Ali **4.35** The Night Before Christmas In Wonderland (2024) Animated adventure with the voice of Gerard Butler **6.15** IF (2024) Fantasy adventure starring Ryan Reynolds **8.00** Wonka (2023) Fantasy adventure starring Timothee Chalamet **10.00** Monkey Man (2024) Action thriller starring Dev Patel **12.05am** Abigail (2024) Horror thriller starring Melissa Barrera **2.05** Coup! (2023) Comedy thriller starring Peter Sarsgaard **3.50-5.30am** A Sudden Case of Christmas (2024) Comedy starring Andie MacDowell

Sky Documentaries

Noon Elvis Presley: The Searcher **4.00pm** The Directors **5.00** Discovering: Hugh Grant **6.00** Spector **7.00** McMillion$ **8.00** UFO **9.00** I Am Heath Ledger **10.50 FILM:** Lancaster (2022) **1.00am** Ren Faire **2.10-5.10am** The Golden Boy: Oscar De La Hoya

Sky History

Noon History's Greatest Myths **2.00pm** World's Greatest Treasure Mysteries **4.00** Pawn Stars **6.00** American Pickers **7.00** Forged in Fire **8.00** Flipping Bangers **9.00** Mountain Men **10.00** Rust Valley Restorers **11.00** Mission Unexplained **12.00** Storage Wars **2.00am** Egypt's Unexplained Files **3.00-4.00am** Flipping Bangers

Sky Max

Noon Supergirl **1.00pm** S.W.A.T. **3.00** Magnum P.I. **3.50** Stargate Atlantis **5.30** The Unofficial Science of Home Alone **7.00** A League of Their Own Christmas Special 2022 **8.00** Rob & Romesh vs Magic in Vegas **9.00 Miracles See What to watch 10.30** Never Mind the Buzzcocks Christmas Special **11.30** Based on a True Story **1.00am** Stargate Atlantis **3.00-4.00am** Magnum P.I.

Variations

Northern Ireland

BBC One: No variations
BBC Two: No variations
UTV: 8.30 - 9.00pm Hidden Northern Ireland

Scotland

BBC One: 11.30am The Travelling Auctioneers **12.00 - 1.00pm** First Minister's Questions **7.00 - 7.30pm** River City
BBC Scotland: 7.00pm Christmas Stories **7.30** Craft Christmas at Beechgrove **8.00** My Epic Camel Adventure with Gordon Buchanan **9.00** The Nine **10.00** Only Child **10.30** Two Doors Down Christmas Special 2017 **11.00** The Firm **midnight** Close
STV: 8.30 - 9.00pm Scotland Tonight Review **4.00 - 6.00am** Unwind with STV

Wales

BBC One: 8.00 - 9.00pm Wales' Home of the Year Christmas Special **10.40** Walescast at Christmas **11.10** Kevin Bridges – The Overdue Catch-Up **12.10 - 1.40am** FILM: My Week with Marilyn (2011)
BBC Two: 7.00pm Scrum V: The Warm Up **7.30** The Wonder of Animals **8.00 - 9.00pm** Celebrity Escape to the Country
ITV1 Wales: 9.00 - 10.00pm Coast & Country

ITV1 Regions

No variations

S4C

6.00am Cyw **12.00** Newyddion S4C a'r Tywydd **12.05pm** Adre **12.30** Heno **1.00** Ma'i Off 'Ma **1.30** Sgwrs Dan y Lloer **2.00** Newyddion S4C a'r Tywydd **2.05** Prynhawn Da **3.00** Newyddion S4C a'r Tywydd **3.05** Gwesty Aduniad **4.00** Awr Fawr: Y Pitws Bychain **4.05** Awr Fawr: Tomos a'i Ffrindiau **4.15** Awr Fawr: Ein Byd Bach Ni **4.25** Awr Fawr: Crawc a'i Ffrindiau **4.40** Awr Fawr: Awyr Iach **5.00** Stwnsh **6.00** Pampro Cwn Cymru **7.00** Heno **7.30** Newyddion S4C a'r Tywydd **8.00** Pobol y Cwm **8.25** Rownd a Rownd **8.55** Newyddion S4C a'r Tywydd **9.00** Llond Bol O Sbaen **10.00** Iwan Morgan: Un Gol **10.30 - 11.35pm** Sgorio

Weather & Crosswords

Forecast

General situation

Scattered showers, some wintry, will continue in Scotland and Wales today. Sunny spells across much of England and Northern Ireland, but cloudier in the morning over southeast England.

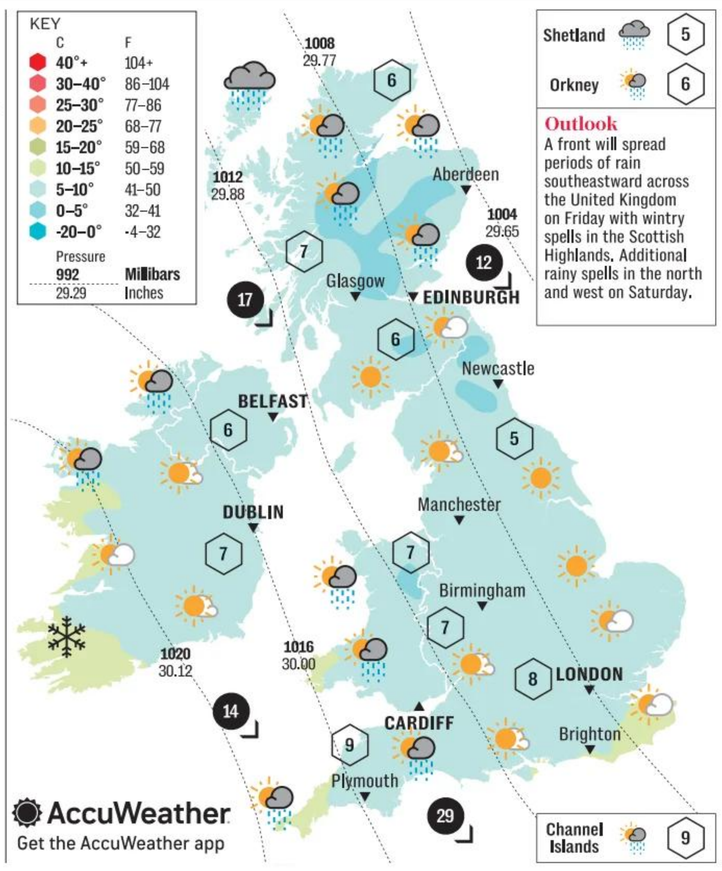
◆**London, Cent S England, Channel Is, SW England, E England, SE England, E Anglia, Midlands:** Morning cloud, then dry and cooler with sunny spells today. A gentle to moderate NW wind. Max 42-50F (6-10C). Clear spells and mainly dry tonight. Min 33-45F (1-7C).

◆**NW England, Lake Dist, IoM, Cent N England, NE England:** Sunny spells and mainly dry today. A gentle NW wind. Max 30-46F (-1 to 8C). The odd shower in the west late tonight. Min 25-41F (-4 to 5C).

◆**Wales:** Showers, some wintry, today. A gentle to moderate NW wind. Max 32-46F (0-8C). Dry tonight. Min 28-42F (-2 to 6C).

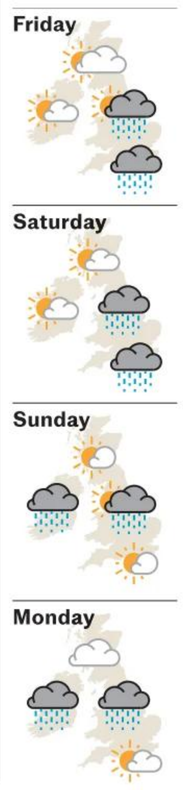
◆**N Ireland:** Sunny periods today. A gentle W wind. Max 34-46F (1-8C). Broken cloud tonight. Min 28-42F (-2 to 6C).

◆**SW Scotland, NW Scotland, Glasgow, Cent Highlands, Argyll, W Isles, SE Scotland, NE Scotland, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Moray Firth, Orkney, Shetland:** Scattered showers, some wintry, today into tonight. A gentle to moderate W to NW wind. Max 25-46F (-4 to 8C). Min 21-42F (-6 to 6C).



Outlook
A front will spread periods of rain southeastward across the United Kingdom on Friday with wintry spells in the Scottish Highlands. Additional rainy spells in the north and west on Saturday.

Four day forecast



European readings Last night's report for 24 hours to 6pm

	Max °C	Min °C	Daytime weather
Akrotiri	19	9	sunny
Alicante	22	6	sunny
Amsterdam	13	7	showers
Athens	18	4	sunny
Barcelona	18	6	sunny
Bari	14	4	haze
Belgrade	12	1	rain
Benidorm	23	6	p/cldy
Bergen	9	6	rain
Berlin	12	4	p/cldy
Biarritz	20	11	p/cldy
Bodrum	19	8	sunny
Bordeaux	18	7	sunny
Brest	14	13	showers
Brussels	13	6	showers
Bucharest	11	1	sunny
Budapest	9	-1	sunny
Cagliari	16	4	sunny
Chamonix	13	2	showers
Copenhagen	9	6	rain
Corfu	19	6	sunny
Cork	13	6	rain
Corsica	15	8	cloudy
Crete	17	9	sunny
Dublin	14	7	showers
Dubrovnik	16	4	haze
Faro	20	14	p/cldy
Florence	12	7	showers
Frankfurt	12	4	p/cldy
Funchal	24	18	cloudy
Gdansk	8	5	rain
Geneva	11	1	showers
Gibraltar	22	13	sunny
Hamburg	11	5	showers
Helsinki	1	-12	snow
Innsbruck	15	-1	p/cldy
Istanbul	13	8	sunny
Kyiv	3	0	p/cldy
La Rochelle	17	8	rain
Lisbon	18	10	cloudy
Locarno	11	2	showers
Luxembourg	9	2	showers
Madrid	12	0	p/cldy
Majorca	21	7	p/cldy
Malaga	24	7	sunny
Malta	18	10	sunny
Marseille	14	9	p/cldy
Menorca	16	10	p/cldy
Milan	11	3	showers
Monaco	17	8	p/cldy
Moscow	-8	-13	snow
Munich	11	0	p/cldy
Naples	16	6	p/cldy
Nice	19	8	p/cldy
Nicosia	19	6	sunny
Oporto	17	13	showers
Oslo	5	-4	ice
Palermo	18	8	sunny
Paris	13	7	cloudy
Perpignan	16	4	sunny
Prague	9	0	showers
Reykjavik	-1	-4	p/cldy
Rhodes	18	10	sunny
Riga	4	-1	snow
Rome	14	1	p/cldy
Saint Malo	15	12	showers
Salzburg	11	3	showers
Santander	19	15	windy
Santiago/Comp.	15	13	rain
Sofia	12	-1	p/cldy
St. Petersburg	-10	-17	p/cldy
Stockholm	7	-6	snow
Strasbourg	14	3	p/cldy
Tenerife	27	19	sunny
Tirana	18	1	haze
Toulouse	16	4	p/cldy
Valencia	23	5	sunny
Venice	8	1	haze
Vienna	10	3	p/cldy
Vigo	16	12	showers
Vilnius	3	-1	snow
Warsaw	9	4	p/cldy
Zagreb	10	-1	p/cldy
Zurich	10	0	p/cldy

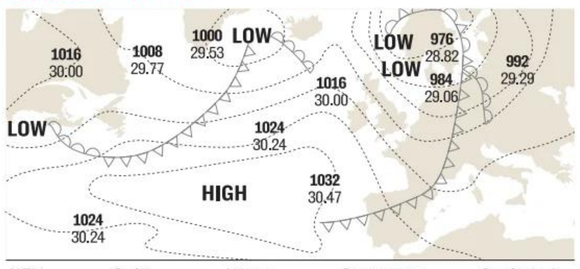


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British readings Last night's report for 24 hours to 6pm - *estimated readings

	Sun hrs	Rain in	Max °C	Min °C	Daytime weather
Aberdeen	0.0*	0.02	14	6	cloudy
Aberystwyth	1.0*	0.55	14	9	rain
Antrim	0.0*	0.02	14	6	showers
Aviemore	0.0*	0.20	13	3	showers
Barnstaple	0.0*	0.24	15	11	showers
Barrow-in-Furns.	1.3*	0.21	12	9	showers
Basingstoke	0.0*	0.17	13	8	showers
Bedford	0.6*	0.00	14	8	cloudy
Belfast	0.0*	0.73	15*	7*	showers
Berwick	0.0*	0.04	13	6	showers
Birmingham	0.3*	0.07	14	8	showers
Bodmin	0.0*	0.36	13	10	showers
Bournemouth	0.0*	0.29	14	9	showers
Braintree	0.6*	0.02	14	8	cloudy
Brecon	1.0*	0.50	12	8	rain
Bridlington	0.0*	0.02	14	8	showers
Brighton	1.3*	0.05	13	9	showers
Bristol	0.8*	0.42	13*	9*	rain
Camborne	0.0*	0.25	13	12	showers
Cardiff	0.0*	0.26	14	9	showers
Carlisle	0.9*	0.02	14	8	showers
Catterick	0.3*	0.03	13	8	windy
Cheltenham	1.1*	0.31	14*	8*	showers
Chester	0.4*	0.13	16	9	showers
Coventry	0.2*	0.15	13*	8*	showers
Doncaster	0.6*	0.35	13*	9*	showers
Dover	0.2*	0.00	12	8	cloudy
Dundee	0.2*	0.06	14	6	showers
Eastbourne	0.9*	0.13	13	8	showers
Edinburgh	2.5*	0.05	14	6	showers
Epsom	0.0*	0.11	13	8	showers
Falmouth	0.8*	0.11	13	12	showers
Farnborough	0.4*	0.24	13*	8*	showers
Fort William	0.0*	0.92	13	2	rain
Glasgow	0.7*	0.26	13	6	rain
Great Malvern	0.8*	0.07	14	9	showers
Grimsby	1.4*	0.00	14	8	cloudy
Guernsey	0.0*	0.04	13	9	showers
Hereford	0.6*	0.11	14	9	showers
High Wycombe	0.4*	0.26	14*	8*	showers
Holyhead	0.8*	0.36	12	8	showers
Huddersfield	0.7*	0.04	12	8	showers
Ipswich	0.0*	0.02	14	7	showers
Isle of Man	0.0*	0.14	13	9	showers
Isle of Skye	0.2*	0.63	12*	5*	rain
Isle of Wight	1.0*	0.06	13	9	showers
Isles of Scilly	0.0*	0.14	14	12	showers
Jersey	0.0*	0.02	14	8	cloudy
Keswick	0.0*	0.73	14	8	showers
Kew Gardens	0.5*	0.11	15*	9*	showers
King's Lynn	0.0*	0.01	14	8	showers
Leeds	0.6*	0.36	13*	8*	showers
Leek	0.9*	0.30	12	7	showers
Leominster	0.6*	0.16	14	9	showers
Lincoln	0.5*	0.04	13	8	showers
Liverpool	0.3*	0.13	16	9	showers
London	0.4*	0.10	14	8	showers
Manchester	0.0*	0.13	13	9	showers
Middlesbrough	0.6*	0.00	13	8	cloudy
Newcastle	0.9*	0.00	12	8	cloudy
Newquay	0.3*	0.25	13	12	showers
Nottingham	0.0*	0.04	13	8	showers
Orkney	0.3*	0.47	11	6	rain
Oxford	0.2*	0.28	14	8	showers
Perth	0.3*	0.20	14	5	showers
Peterborough	0.0*	0.00	14	8	cloudy
Plymouth	0.0*	0.26	13	11	showers
Portsmouth*	1.0*	0.17*	14*	9*	showers
Prestwick	0.0*	0.05	14	7	showers
Ramsgate	0.0*	0.01	14	8	showers
Rhyl	1.4*	0.25	14	8	showers
Rugby	0.2*	0.08	13	8	showers
Salisbury	0.3*	0.12	13	8	showers
Scunthorpe	0.4*	0.11	15*	9*	cloudy
Sheffield	0.6	0.35	13	9	cloudy
Shetland	0.0*	0.69	11	6	rain
Shrewsbury	0.0*	0.07	14	9	showers
Skegness	0.3*	0.03	14	8	showers
Southampton	0.7*	0.25	14*	9*	showers
Southend-on-Sea	0.0*	0.00	14	8	cloudy
Stockport	0.3*	0.13	13	9	showers
Stornoway	0.0*	0.81	12	5	rain
Swansea	2.2*	0.68	13*	10*	rain
Swindon	0.3*	0.02	13	8	showers
Thirsk	0.0*	0.09	14	8	showers
Tiree	0.0*	0.19	12	5	showers
Weymouth	1.1*	0.18	13	10	showers
Whitehaven	1.9*	0.42	11	7	showers
Windermere	1.3*	0.51	12*	8*	showers
Worcester	1.2*	0.07	14	9	showers
Yeovil	0.0*	0.10	14	9	showers
York	0.5*	0.20	13*	9*	showers

Atlantic front



Noon today: A front will produce rain and snow from Poland, Germany, France and northern Italy, while high pressure will hold in southeast Europe.

Sun & moon (Greenwich)

Sun rises	0804
Sun sets	1554
Moon rises	2030
Moon sets	1116
Last quarter	Dec 22

Yesterday

Warmest	Chester 16C (61F)
Coldest	Cairngorm Summit -3C (27F)
Wettest	Benbecula Island 1.07 in.
Sunniest	Ronaldsway 3.3 hr.

Lighting up

Aberdeen	1526 to 0847
Belfast	1559 to 0845
Birmingham	1555 to 0816
London	1554 to 0804
Manchester	1551 to 0822
Penzance	1621 to 0818

High water

Aberdeen	0353	4.0m	1553	4.1m
Belfast	0133	3.2m	1344	3.7m
Cardiff	0925	11.3m	2152	10.9m
Dover	0113	6.5m	1337	6.2m
Falmouth	0733	5.0m	1959	4.5m
Harwich	0148	3.8m	1416	3.8m
Holyhead	0038	5.2m	1250	5.5m
Hull	0845	6.9m	2045	7.1m
Liverpool	0120	8.7m	1335	8.8m
London	0405	6.5m	1630	6.8m
Portsmouth	0154	4.6m	1353	4.4m
Southampton	0341	4.4m	1330	4.3m

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Sea forecast

S North Sea: A strong to gale northwesterly wind today. Seas will be slight. Visibility will be good.

Dover Strait, English Channel: A fresh to near gale northwesterly wind today. Seas will be slight on the east and the west. Visibility will be fair.

St. George's Channel: A fresh to near gale northwesterly wind today. Seas will be slight. Visibility will be fair.

Irish Sea: A fresh to near gale northwesterly wind today. Seas will be moderate. Visibility will be fair.

World readings

	Max °C	Min °C	Daytime weather
Accra	34	26	sunny
Addis Ababa	27	10	sunny
Adelaide	29	11	sunny
Alexandria	21	10	p/cldy
Algiers	20	3	sunny
Amman	17	4	haze
Anchorage	-6	-8	sunny
Ankara	8	-3	haze
Ascension Is.	27	24	showers
Auckland	23	14	p/cldy
Baghdad	19	1	haze
Bahamas	27	22	rain
Bahrain	19	15	p/cldy
Bamako	32	17	p/cldy
Bangkok	31	23	p/cldy
Beijing	5	-6	haze
Beirut	21	13	sunny
Bermuda	23	20	p/cldy
Bogota	19	9	rain
Bridgetown	31	25	storms
Brisbane	28	22	storms
Buenos Aires	27	21	p/cldy
Cairo	23	12	p/cldy
Canberra	27	12	p/cldy
Cape Town	24	15	windy
Casablanca	26	7	sunny
Chicago	2	-1	flurry
Christchurch	16	4	windy
Colombo	31	24	rain
Damascus	18	1	sunny
Dar es Salaam	31	25	showers
Dhaka	27	14	haze
Dubai	24	19	cloudy
Falkland Is.	13	10	showers
Harare	30	18	storms
Havana	29	18	p/cldy
Hong Kong	18	15	sunny
Honolulu	24	21	p/cldy
Jakarta	32	24	storms
Jeddah	32	23	haze
Jerusalem	17	6	haze
Johannesburg	27	15	storms
Kabul	11	-1	haze
Karachi	27	13	p/cldy
Kolkata	26	17	haze
Kuala Lumpur	32	24	rain
La Paz	16	2	rain
Lahore	25	6	p/cldy
Lima	23	19	cloudy
Los Angeles	25	11	sunny
Maldives	30	28	rain
Manila	30	23	cloudy
Marrakesh	25	11	sunny
Melbourne	25	10	p/cldy
Miami	28	23	storms
Montego Bay	29	24	showers
Mumbai	33	22	haze
Nairobi	28	14	p/cldy
New Orleans	23	14	mist
New Delhi	24	8	haze
New York	12	6	rain
Ottawa	2	1	snow
Perth	32	16	windy
Port-of-Spain	29	25	storms
Rio de Janeiro	26	22	p/cldy
Riyadh	21	6	sunny
San Francisco	11	8	p/cldy
Santiago	29	12	sunny
Seattle	13	9	showers
Seoul	0	-8	sunny
Seychelles	28	23	showers
Singapore	29	26	storms
Sydney	24	18	windy
Taipei City	17	14	windy
Tangier	21	11	sunny
Tel Aviv	24	12	sunny
Tokyo	12	4	p/cldy
Toronto	3	2	snow
Tunis	17	8	sunny
Vancouver	11	7	p/cldy
Washington	14	3	rain
Wellington	17	11	windy
Winnipeg	-13	-25	p/cldy

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

Nature Notes

Sea slugs warm to British waters

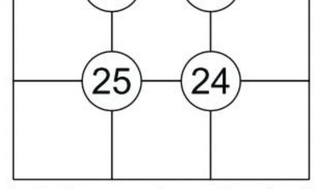
Sea slugs are making a home in the UK because of rising temperatures around the coast, the Wildlife Trusts said.

Sea monitoring by volunteers and conservationists this year also revealed invasive species such as Pacific oysters and showed some wildlife making a comeback, including St Piran's hermit crabs along the south coast – which were wiped out by the Torrey Canyon oil spill of 1967.

The Wildlife Trusts said volunteers clocked more than 46,000 hours of surveys and beach cleans in 2024, with numerous wildlife discoveries made during a national survey programme of shorelines and estuaries.

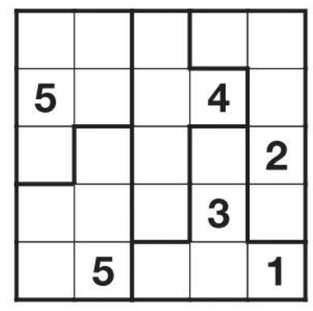
Species spotted included "climate indicators" such as the first record of a rainbow sea slug in Devon – found by a school student on a family day trip to Wembury Beach – and the first sighting of a warty Doris sea slug in Chichester Harbour, Sussex. Both sea slugs are normally found in warmer waters.

Sujiko® MODERATE NO 5031



To play Sujiko, enter the numbers 1 to 9 in the spaces so that the total in each circle is equal to the sum of the four surrounding squares. Today's solutions appear tomorrow.

Suguru NO 2119



The aim of Suguru is to fill the grid so that no same digit is touching. A two-cell outlined block contains the digits 1 and 2; a three-cell block contains 1, 2, 3; and so on. The same digit must not appear in neighbouring cells, not even diagonally.

Yesterday's solutions:

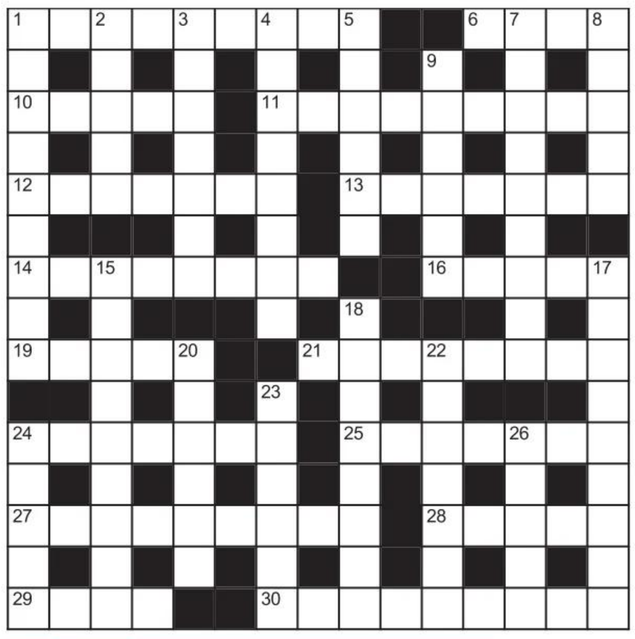
Sujiko 5030: 527 / 143 / 698

Suguru 2118:

4	2	1	4	3
3	5	3	2	5
1	2	1	4	1
4	3	5	3	2
2	1	2	4	1

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Crossword 30,801 telegraph.co.uk/puzzles



Across

1 Put off by man seeing soap? (9)
6 Spots around chin, nose, eyes, initially (4)
10 Revolution engulfing advanced country (5)
11 Endowment including male's private place (9)
12 Ace partner sure stripped in buff? (7)
13 Professional done in after aerobics, finally (7)
14 Central point overturned in litigation court (8)
16 Outing in charge of old characters (5)
19 Part of multiplex postponed shows (5)
21 Individual consumed by intense crazy genius? (8)
24 Cold look facing certain end (7)
25 Educated sweetheart ignorant about sex (7)
27 Fantastic character turning round our sphere? (9)
28 European ordered Xmas papers (5)
29 Film copper in case of sadism (4)
30 One in roughest pants getting saintly (9)

Down

1 Break down detective's cover (9)
2 Occasionally tribal, real headdress (5)
3 Pound or Auden poem (7)
4 From here, there, all is heavenly (8)
5 Hope to acquire hard butt (6)
7 Church and state split by new problem (9)
8 Rewrite pieces penned by journalist (5)
9 December's start, colder and more dangerous (6)
15 Unprepared rogue Trump roughly taking over (9)
17 Majority view of criminal count, reportedly (9)
18 Persistent criminal inside oddly lying (8)
20 Escort Lord protecting Queen (6)
22 Trainee boss on hospital department (7)
23 Incredibly remote object seen in space (6)
24 Direction in musical for acting troupes (5)
26 Yours truly's past adult stage (5)

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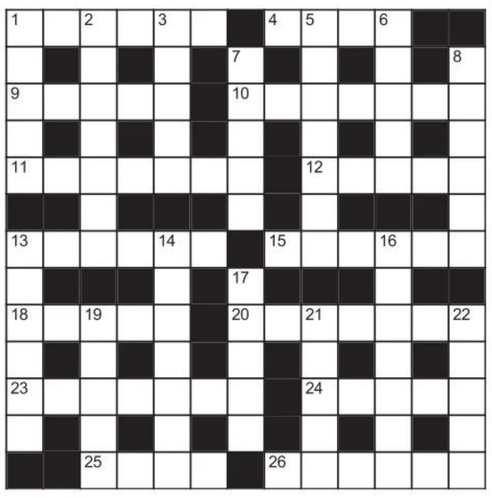
Quick Crossword

Across

1 *Trespassed* (6)
4 *Wander* (4)
9 Mistake (5)
10 Goodbye (7)
11 Superficial (7)
12 Frock (5)
13 Vulgar (6)
15 Container (6)
18 Publish (5)
20 Liaisons (7)
23 Greed (7)
24 Excessive (5)
25 Destroy (4)
26 Exit (6)

Down

1 Appears (5)
2 Paradise (7)
3 Register (5)
5 Unpaid (7)
6 Combine (5)
7 Glower (5)
8 Titbit (6)
13 Finale (6)
14 Distinctive (7)
16 Defraud (7)
17 Keen (5)
19 Stem (5)
21 Threw (5)
22 Outhouses (5)



Yesterday's Quick Crossword Solution

Across: 3 Sofa, 7 Soak, 8 Hood, *(So far, so good)* 9 Ideal, 10 Corn, 11 Secede, 13 Explicit, 15 Runt, 16 Iran, 17 Producer, 18 Amused, 21 Ajar, 23 Input, 24 Logo, 25 Epic, 26 Hymn. **Down:** 1 Polo, 2 Skinflints, 3 Shed, 4 Falsetto, 5 Doze, 6 Adventurer, 10 Creditable, 12 Circulated, 14 Cupidity, 19 Urge, 20 Spin, 22 Aria.

Solution No 30,800

I	M	P	E	T	U	S	■	P	O	T	H	E	R	B
N	■	L	■	R	■	U	■	R	■	A	■	Y	■	U
F	R	E	Y	A	■	P	R	O	V	I	D	E	N	T
O	■	D	■	N	■	E	■	T	■	L	■	T	■	T
R	E	G	I	S	T	R	A	R	S	■	S	O	A	R
M	■	E	■	I	■	■	■	U	■	A	■	E	■	E
■	■	■	P	T	E	R	O	D	A	C	T	Y	L	S
S	■	I	■	O	■	I	■	E	■	C	■	E	■	S
C	A	S	H	R	E	G	I	S	T	E	R	■	■	■
H	■	L	■	Y	■	H	■	■	■	P	■	L	■	S
E	L	A	N	■	S	T	R	E	E	T	W	I	S	E
D	■	N	■	E	■	E	■	X	■	A	■	T	■	N
U	N	D	E	R	F	O	O	T	■	N	O	T	E	S
L	■	E	■	S	■	U	■	R	■	C	■	E	■	E
E	A	R	N	E	R	S	■	A	V	E	R	R	E	D

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The Telegraph

Women's Sport



PA

How Keely Hodgkinson sealed Spoty's great female revolution

Plus 50 most influential women in sport

Women's Sport Monthly

2024
KEELY HODGKINSON

Hodgkinson ran nine 800 metres races in 2024 and won all of them, with her biggest triumph at Paris 2024 where she became only the 10th British woman to win an Olympic gold medal in athletics.

2023
MARY EARPS

The England goalkeeper delivered memorable performances at the Women's World Cup. She kept three clean sheets, winning the Golden Glove award, and saved a penalty against Spain in the final.



Reigning supreme: From Spoty

All-male shortlist in 2011 typified regard for female sport – yet recent success shows that has all changed, writes *Jeremy Wilson*

To appreciate the transformation accompanying a fourth consecutive female winner of the Sports Personality of the Year honour, it is necessary only to glance through the BBC archive.

Thirteen women had won in the first 66 years up to Emma Raducanu in 2021 – to be followed by Beth Mead, Mary Earps and now Keely Hodgkinson – but even those victories came against the backdrop of a near blackout of female achievements.

Take 1985 – the year Barry McGuigan, Ian Botham and Steve Cram filled the podium – and the entire review of the year passed without hearing from a single sportswoman who had competed.

Or go back to 1967, when the cycling community at least understood the significance of Beryl Burton's jaw-dropping achievements of breaking a men's world record and winning a seventh world title (female cyclists were banned from the Olympics until 1984) by unexpectedly voting her second. Her recollection of the big night inside BBC Television Centre was of being "on screen for about two seconds and then, following due honour to Henry [Cooper], the programme was filled with English football and cricket teams".

It remained a lopsided story even through much of the 1980s and 1990s when the more visible years for women generally coincided with either an Olympic Games or World Athletics Championships.

Otherwise, just about the most that could be hoped for was Laura Davies being invited to join Frank Bruno and Nick Faldo in swinging a golf club during one of the live sporting challenges.

Contrast all that to this year when Hodgkinson and Sarah Storey were rightly among those taking centre stage during an evening that also contained lengthy segments on women's football and cricket, as well as the exploits of other Paris heroes during a Games where, for the first time, as many medals were available to women as men.

Other than a lovely cameo by Sir Chris Hoy on that Paris section, Tuesday night's programme was presented for the first time by an all-female team of Clare Balding, Gabby Logan and Alex Scott, following news of Gary Lineker's impending BBC departure. It will be interesting to see whether that changes and, while Mark Chapman would be an obvious addition alongside his expected *Match of the Day* brief, it is hard to imagine the BBC reverting to the all-male team that was the standard for fully 40 years following the programme's launch in 1954.

The first female presenter was Sue Barker in 1994. Balding followed in 1999 and, while stressing the progress that needs to be made, she highlights London 2012 as the catalyst for change. The previous year's Sports Personality of the Year show had contained a 10-strong all-male shortlist for the main prize that sparked protests, some boycotts and a review of the voting procedure.

"I think 2012 was when women's sport staked its claim for equal attention," Balding told *Telegraph Sport*. "The point about profile is really important. Zara Phillips [the victor in 2006 before 14 successive male winners] had a profile that was bigger than just her sport. She was world champion, a fantastic winner to have had and utterly worthy, but, unless people have the profile, they can't be up there in people's thinking. And it is a public vote. So, it's really interesting that change. This is harder to establish all year round. But the profile is definitely raised across a multitude of sports.

"Women's football is the one that has been the big gainer, but I think women's cricket as well, and women's cycling. Where I think women's football has done a fantastic job is creating its own storylines. They really use social media intelligently. You feel like you know them as people. They are very much going for a community, building their own community. I still think there's a way to go in the coverage of women's sport. [But] I think there is an awful lot to celebrate."

It has undoubtedly been a media-wide issue historically, with *Telegraph Sport* among those at the forefront of enhancing coverage, particularly since 2019 when *Telegraph Women's Sport*, with its dedicated monthly



Zooming in: Keely Hodgkinson takes a close-up look at her trophy, watched by (from left) Alex Scott, Gabby Logan and Clare Balding



2022
BETH MEAD

Mead was crucial to England's Euro success as she became the only English footballer to win both the Golden Boot and Player of the Tournament at a major international competition.



2021
EMMA RADUCANU

A season to remember for Raducanu. The then 18-year-old won the US Open, becoming the youngest Briton, and the first qualifier, to win a tennis grand slam.

cold shoulder to four in a row

supplement, podcast and social-media channels, was launched.

Dame Jessica Ennis-Hill, who is a *Telegraph* columnist and was second in Spoty to Sir Bradley Wiggins during the golden summer of 2012, says that added recognition is a consequence not just of outstanding performance but a deeper appreciation of individual stories. "There is the understanding of those athletes, their journeys, their personalities; people are seeing their performances on TV and elsewhere, and that is having a knock-on effect," she said.

Hodgkinson is an authentic star who can clearly connect with a younger demographic far beyond the athletics community. She is launching her own event next February – the Keely Klassic when she will go for the world indoor 800 metres record but also aim to put on a show in Birmingham that will attract new audiences. After being crowned Sports Personality of the Year on Tuesday, she said: "I think it's always great when women get recognised in their sports – and the fourth one in a row – shows that women's sports in the UK is in a really good place in all different fields."

Among the judges who drew up this year's six-strong shortlist (including four men) was Stephanie Hilborne, the chief executive of Women in Sport, a charity co-founded in 1984 by Baroness Campbell.

"It's brilliant to see women finally being celebrated for their incredible athletic achievements, alongside men," Hilborne said. "For too long, women were undervalued and overlooked, even at the top of their game. As a result, little girls had very few women to look up to and couldn't dream of sporting glory in the way little boys always have. Equal recognition of male and female athletes is as critical as celebrating girls and boys equally in sport at school. We're making progress, but we're not there yet."

While also acknowledging improvements, Judy Murray urged women to keep pushing for change during her recent keynote speech to mark Women in Sport's 40th birthday. "We can't afford to be complacent," she said. "We have to keep our foot on the gas. So often, women in sport are like snowflakes. We float and we hit some kind of obstacle that forces us to melt away. But if we bond together and join with the allies, we can form snowballs. And snowballs can do a lot of damage."

Prize money and funding is still a contentious subject and, while Uefa and the Football Association announced increases for, respectively, the women's European Championship and the FA Cup, the numbers still lag behind the male equivalents. Euro 2025, for example, this week announced a prize fund of €41million (£34million), which is up from €16million and €8million in 2022 and 2017, but still a fraction of the men's €331million this year. Pressure is growing for sports to follow athletics, triathlon and tennis where, at the highest level, equitable reward has become the norm.

The International Ski and Snowboard Federation has announced equal prize money in all world championship events and called for other federations to follow suit. Interestingly, the FA's ban of women's football from 1921 to 1970 was highlighted in an article by ski leaders Asne Havnelid and Tove Moe Dyrhaug about the message that should be sent to "young women and business leaders".

The point about role models is echoed in research – which shows that an active parent or teacher can transform a child's view – and in real life.

Hodgkinson is coached by the husband-wife team of Trevor Painter and Jenny Meadows and they see daily the impact of her success even within the elite environment of their M11 Track Club. "Our training group is very female dominant – we have lads joining and they are saying, 'We know the women in our group are really strong… really strong mentally'," Meadows said. "A lot of them look at Keely and say, 'I know she is a brilliant athlete, but she kept her composure on the biggest stage'."

Meadows was herself a world and European medallist over 800 metres and, while athletics has always been one of the more inclusive sports, can feel the shift. "I've never had a situation in my life when I've thought, 'I can't do it because I'm a female'. [But] I look at what we've got, and what we have created in our group, and I think, 'I would have loved that'.

"I definitely remember watching Sports Personality of the Year and it was very male dominant. Keely being the fourth female in a row to win is a brilliant streak. It shows you that you can do it. You have got to believe and, if you see people going before you, you feel like 'that's possible'. I have seen a change and it's great."

Waiting game
Early female winners

1962	Anita Lonsbrough, swimming
1963	Dorothy Hyman, athletics
1964	Mary Rand, athletics
1969	Ann Jones, tennis
1971	Princess Royal, equestrian
1972	Mary Peters, athletics
1977	Virginia Wade, tennis
1984	Jayne Torvill, skating
1987	Fatima Whitbread, athletics
1991	Liz McColgan, athletics
2002	Paula Radcliffe, athletics
2004	Kelly Holmes, athletics
2006	Zara Phillips, equestrian



From boardroom table to Olympic

Inspirational athletes shining a light on issues and administrators who have the power to enact change – *Telegraph Sport* counts down the 50 most influential women in sport in 2024...

50
Mel Marshall
Swimming coach



Adam Peaty may have missed out – by 0.02sec – on a hat-trick of Olympic golds in the 50 metres breaststroke, but he still saw silver as significant, given his mental health struggles. Marshall, his long-serving coach, was integral to his comeback, with Peaty saying: "Mel knows that she has to look after the person inside the athlete." Post-Paris, Marshall took up a high-performance role in Australia having bemoaned the lack of support for female coaches in the UK.

Sarah Mockford

49
Kelly Simmons
Sports consultant



Formerly the Football Association's director of the women's professional game, Simmons is now a sports consultant, a board member of Women in Football and a board adviser for Premiership Women's Rugby. Having spent more than 20 years with the FA, Simmons still holds a great deal of influence in the game, working with the likes of Fifa and sports consultancy group Portas to help continue to drive change in women's sport.

Kathryn Batte

48
Lou Meadows
England rugby coach



Meadows has been a valuable addition to John Mitchell's coaching team. The Red Roses scored a phenomenal 75 tries in 10 Tests in 2024 and went unbeaten for a second consecutive year. Widely credited with making England's attack less formulaic and more multifaceted as the side builds towards an important home World Cup next year, the former Wasps and Saracens player also worked with the England A men's side for their Australia A fixture last month.

Fiona Tomas

47
Annamarie Phelps
BOA vice-chair



Vice-chair of the British Olympic Association, president of European Rowing, co-chair of the International Working Group on Women and Sport global executive... Phelps is an administrator who wears many hats but is one always focused on accessibility, equality and inclusion in sport. She lost out to another former British rower, Dame Katherine Grainger, in the vote to become the next BOA chair, but that will not dim her passion for driving sport forward.

Sarah Mockford

46
Rebecca Welch
PGMOL women's manager



Having made history as the first woman to referee a Premier League game last year, Welch retired to help bring through the next generation of female referees. Her last game came at the Olympic Games, where she was fourth official for the gold medal match between the United States and Brazil. In her new role, Welch is tasked with supporting and developing Women's Super League and Women's Championship match officials.

Kathryn Batte

45
Jodie Grinham
GB para athlete



Welshwoman Grinham made history at the Paris Paralympics when she competed at seven months pregnant. She won gold in the mixed compound alongside Nathan Macqueen – becoming the first pregnant woman to win a Paralympic medal – before claiming individual compound bronze. Grinham has been open about her fertility struggles but competing on the biggest stage of all sent an empowering message that pregnancy and elite sport are compatible.

Fiona Tomas

44
Julien Alfred
St Lucia athlete



Not many athletes have a national holiday named after them, but such was the historic feat of Alfred at the Paris Olympics, that her life has not been the same since. St Lucia had never won a medal of any colour before Alfred claimed gold in the women's 100 metres. The 23-year-old followed it up with silver in the 200 metres and has surely inspired the next generation of Caribbean sprinters and athletes across all disciplines.

Sonia Twigg

43
Yvonne Harrison
Women in Football CEO



Harrison helped to obtain an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) amendment to the Football Governance Bill. Clubs will now be required to publish what action they are taking on EDI as part of their corporate governance reporting. Women in Football's contribution to the Bill was its latest in a series of lobbying activities to support gender equality in the game. Harrison also addressed Football Association chair Debbie Hewitt at the House of Lords this year and continues to urge governing bodies to make changes to improve the game for women.

Kathryn Batte

42
Dame Laura Kenny
Former cyclist, broadcaster



Kenny's decision to retire this year brought the curtain down on the career of Britain's most successful female Olympian. But she remains a huge name in British sport. She was in Paris as a BBC pundit and recently hosted the *Telegraph Women's Sport Podcast*. She has also used her platform to speak out on a number of issues, including female-specific kit and health conditions such as relative energy deficiency in sport.

Tom Cary

41
Mai Fyfield
Premier League director



A non-executive directorship at the Premier League would once have been a comfortable sinecure. Now it is on the frontline of the biggest, most expensive legal dispute in the history of British sport. Fyfield was a key figure in the recent tribunal hearing in the forever battle with Manchester City. Under cross-examination by City's legal team, she explained why the league's compliance department, under her oversight, had rejected the club's commercial agreement with Etihad Airways. "Candid and engaged" said the tribunal. "A very good recall of the issues." This was high stakes for the Premier League, with every molecule of its process under examination. The rules, with a few minor exceptions, stood up to scrutiny.

Sam Wallace

40
Jessica Campbell
Seattle Kraken assistant coach



Campbell's appointment as the first female coach in the National Hockey League was reported across the globe. The path for women to take up coaching roles in men's sport is not well-trodden, and Campbell, 32, acknowledges her part in something bigger than herself. There has been a spotlight on her since she became the first woman to coach at the 2022 IIHF Men's World Hockey Championship with the Germany team.

Sonia Twigg

39
Laura Youngson
IDA Sports co-founder



"If we're not making stuff that's made for women, we're not optimising performance," Youngson told *Telegraph Sport* this year. Her footwear brand, IDA Sports, designs football boots for women and their physiology. For example, there is more arch support and a narrower heel than in men's boots because of how women's feet differ. Female-specific kit can be a game-changer and investors agree: IDA recently received $2 million (£1.6 million) in seed funding.

Sarah Mockford

38
Grainne Hurst
Betting and Gaming Council CEO



Betting underpins racing's finances, but in some parts of government it has become a bad word, and the Gambling Commission – "unaccountable and out of control" according to one major critic – has been blamed for a £3 billion black hole in those finances. Hurst's appointment at the betting industry's champion comes at a crucial time. She has to implement a government white paper, introduce regulatory certainty and, while ensuring problem gamblers are protected, drive growth.

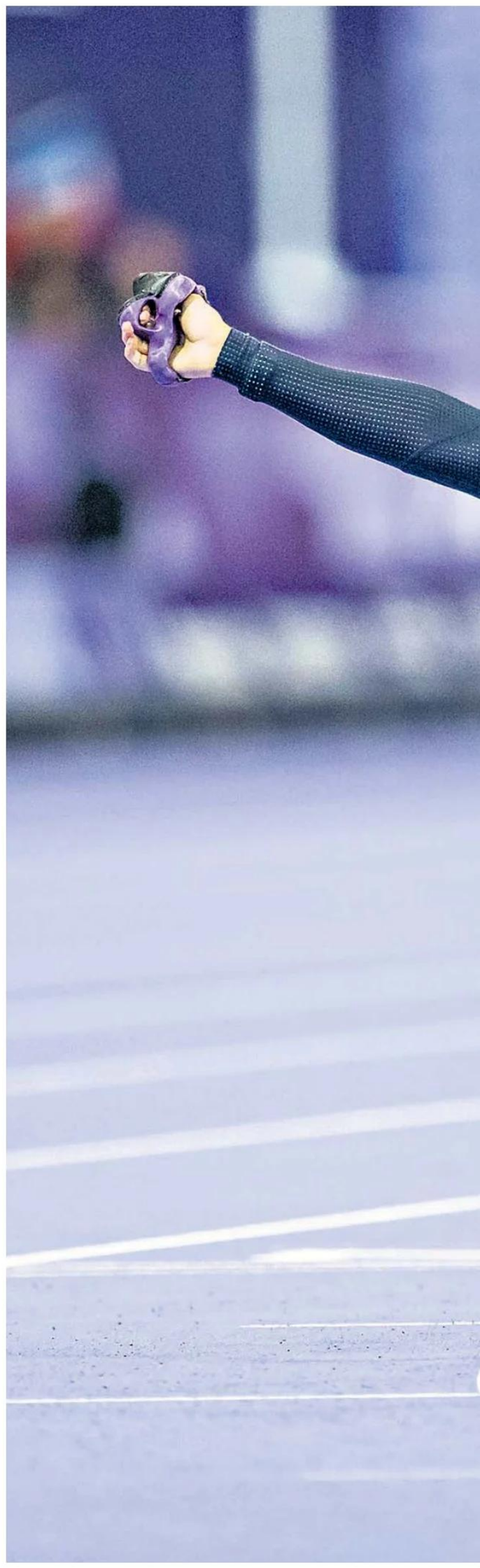
Marcus Armytage

37
Hannah Mills
GB sailor



Another big year for the two-time Olympic champion who finished runner-up in the inaugural Women's America's Cup in the autumn. Mills not only skippered and drove the British boat, she headed up the entire Athena Pathway Programme, which ran Britain's women and youth entries. Mills, 36, is not slowing down. A mother of one and a tireless environmental campaigner, she continues to push boundaries. Although she did not get the helm of Britain's SailGP boat, she continues to compete in that series as a strategist and is also pushing to get women on the main America's Cup boats next time.

Tom Cary



36
Kirsty Elliott-Sale
Prof of female exercise physiology



Professor Elliott-Sale, a member of Uefa's research panel, is leading a pioneering project investigating how the menstrual cycle affects footballers' performance. Her recent work has involved designing exercise interventions during and after pregnancy, as

track, meet sport's major players



GETTY IMAGES

On cloud nine: Hannah Cockroft celebrates after the 800m T34 final at the Stade de France in September as she wins a career ninth Paralympic medal

Cockroft has used her platform to call for financial parity between Olympians and Paralympians in light of the financial rewards offered by World Athletics

33
Gabby Logan
Broadcaster



Logan, 51, looks set to be one of three main BBC hosts to replace the outgoing Gary Lineker on *Match of the Day* next season. With Mark Chapman, she is viewed as the BBC's safest pair of hands, a versatile, assured and unfussy anchor across a host of sports. She has fronted Six Nations, Olympics and World Cup coverage. She also anchors the *Sports Agents* podcast and raises awareness of women's issues, including around the menopause and its impact.

Tom Morgan

32
Lisa Nandy
Secretary of State for DCMS



Appointed after Labour won July's General Election, the MP for Wigan's top sporting priority is overseeing the Football Governance Bill that will impose a statutory regulator on the English game. She will play a key role in the UK and Ireland's hosting of the next European Championship in 2028, and could be equally central to Glasgow's staging of the Commonwealth Games and any UK bid for the 2031 Women's World Cup.

Ben Rumsby

31
Felicity Barnard
Ascot chief executive



Barnard succeeds Alastair Warwick as chief executive on New Year's Day, having been commercial director at Ascot since 2021. Ascot and its key meetings – Royal Ascot, the King George and British Champions Day – no longer compete with British courses for the world's best horses but with other big events on the international stage. Her commercial acumen and drive will be essential to drive this forward.

Marcus Armytage

30
Hannah Cockroft
GB para athlete



Cockroft has enjoyed an almost unparalleled reign of success in wheelchair sprinting, winning nine Paralympic titles, and has lost only once in the 100 metres T34 event since London 2012. As well as securing two gold medals in Paris, she has used her platform to call for financial parity between Olympians and Paralympians in light of the financial rewards offered by World Athletics. She has also spoken openly of the barriers facing para sport and access to wheelchair events.

Sonia Twigg

29
Marie-Odile Amaury
Groupe Amaury president



Amaury wields considerable influence as president of Groupe Amaury, which presides over French sports daily *L'Equipe* as well as Amaury Sports Organisation, owner of the Tour de France and other famous bike races. Groupe Amaury is privately held, and secretive about its finances, but Bloomberg reported in June that its 2023 revenue was about $640 million (£507 million).

Tom Cary

Continued on page 6

well as exploring the effect of hormonal contraceptives and menstrual dysfunction on female athletes. She heads up the new Centre of Excellence for Women in Sport at Manchester Metropolitan University, too.

Fiona Tomas

35
Ebony Rainford-Brent
Former cricketer, broadcaster



Being a director on the England and Wales Cricket Board gives Rainford-Brent influence on all levels of cricket. Perhaps her most important work is as founder of the African-Caribbean Engagement Programme, which is grounded in her experience as a young black cricketer in London, and inspires children from a community the game has neglected.

Will Macpherson

34
Lynne Cantwell
SA Rugby women's manager



Cantwell's impact in South Africa has been described as "phenomenal", with Mark Alexander, the SA Rugby president, adding: "Our mission to elevate the women's game was clear, but that was only made possible by Lynne's unrelenting passion and vision to get that job done." Having overhauled South Africa's women's set-up over the past four years – 2024 was notable for the sevens team's first appearance at the Olympics – the former Ireland centre will start 2025 in a new role as head of women's strategy for Irish Rugby. Expect Cantwell, who is also on the Sport Ireland board, to use her expertise to implement big changes from top to bottom.

Sarah Mockford

28

Rafaela Pimenta
Football agent

Pimenta is often described as one of the few "super-agents" in football. The Brazilian's most famous client is Manchester City striker Erling Haaland and in the summer of 2024 she secured a big-money move from Bayern Munich to Manchester United for Dutch centre-back Matthijs de Ligt. For more than 20 years, Pimenta was the business partner of famed agent Mino Raiola. She became the head of the agency after his death in 2022.

Sam Dean

27

Kirsty Coventry
IOC committee member

The former Olympic swimmer is now one of the frontrunners to succeed Thomas Bach as president of the International Olympic Committee when his term ends next year. The Zimbabwean is only the second woman to seek the presidency and is understood to be the candidate most favoured by Bach, who has a history of hostilities with the other most likely successor, Lord Coe.

Tom Morgan

26

Debbie Hewitt
Football Association chair

The first female chair in the FA's 161-year history is one of the most powerful women in world football, now a year-and-a-half into her term as a Fifa vice-president. Hewitt has brought extensive experience and knowhow from a career in business to turn around perceptions after the Wembley sale row and Greg Clarke's resignation in 2020. She has played a major role in the FA board's transformation to majority independent. Visible, highly respected and approachable, her powers of diplomacy ensure there is at least one figure at the top table who will be determined to ensure Saudi Arabia keeps its human rights promises for World Cup 2034.

Tom Morgan

25

Nat Sciver-Brunt
England cricketer

In terms of sporting income, she is surely the best-paid individual sportswoman in Britain right now. She has a central contract with England, as well as a bumper Women's Premier League deal in India. Sciver-Brunt is a genius with the bat, a handful with the ball, and arguably English cricket's finest athlete. Off the field, she has spoken openly and impressively about her struggles with mental health and, alongside her wife, former England bowler Katherine, starting a family. Katherine is currently pregnant and Nat had her eggs frozen this year.

Will Macpherson

24

Sally Munday
UK Sport chief executive

Chief executive of UK Sport for just over five years, Munday is responsible for distributing the £344 million the Government said in October would be earmarked to fund Britain's Olympic and Paralympic athletes during the build-up to Los Angeles 2028. Munday has overseen two summer Games in which the country maintained its medal success, albeit with far fewer golds in Paris. She will soon answer to a new chair after Dame Katherine Grainger was appointed to the British Olympic Association ahead of the expiry of her second term at UK Sport.

Ben Rumsby

23

Katie Taylor
Boxer

Featuring on the undercard of Netflix's Jake Paul-Mike Tyson fight exemplifies the extent to which Taylor has lifted her profile, and that of women's boxing. Taylor-Amanda Serrano was the pick of the fights on a bill when the main event in October was subject to boos. It was the richest female fight in history and drew an average of 74 million, which makes it the most watched women's sporting event in history. Before turning professional, the Irishwoman helped women's boxing feature at the Olympics.

Sonia Twigg

22

Susie Wolff
F1 Academy managing director

In her role with F1 Academy, the all-female single-seater racing championship, Wolff is probably the leading women's voice in motorsport. Wolff has a direct line into F1 chief executive Stefano Domenicali, not to mention her husband Toto Wolff, the Mercedes F1 co-owner. She is holding the FIA's feet to the flames over its "misogynistic" short-lived conflict-of-interest investigation into her relationship with her husband. A court date is pending.

Tom Cary

21

Lise Klaveness
Norwegian FA president

It was no surprise that Norway decided to take a stand against Fifa regarding the awarding of the 2034 World Cup to Saudi Arabia by abstaining from the vote. With Klaveness as president (she was elected in 2022) the federation has consistently challenged and questioned world football's governing body when others have not been brave enough to do so. Around the Qatar World Cup, especially, Klaveness – a former international player and lawyer – was a strong and powerful voice.

Sam Dean

20

Lucy Bronze (main picture)
England footballer

Bronze won her fifth Champions League when Barcelona beat her former club Lyon as part of their historic quadruple this year. The defender returned to England to join Chelsea in the summer and boasts an unbeaten record thus far. Off the pitch, Bronze continues to use her voice to push for change. She was recently elected onto the Professional Footballers' Association players' board and is also part of Fifpro's "Project ACL" research group. Last month, she launched her own scholarship award that will fund a boarding school place for an aspiring young female footballer.

Kathryn Batte

19

Martina Navratilova
Former tennis player

On the awkward subject of Saudi Arabia, Navratilova took the opposite position to the other three tennis women on our list. Together with her old rival Chris Evert, Navratilova wrote an open letter calling on the Women's Tennis Association to resist the temptation of selling its Finals event to Riyadh, and suggesting that such a decision would represent "a significant step backwards, to the detriment of the WTA, women's sports and women". The letter went unheeded but their joint absence at the tournament was keenly felt, underlining the weight these legends carry as ambassadors with a political sensibility. Navratilova is also an outspoken critic of biological males competing in women's sports.

Simon Briggs

18

Beth Barrett-Wild
ECB director of women's game

One of the most influential and energetic administrators in world cricket, she has worked at the England and Wales Cricket Board for more than a decade. A major figure in founding of the Hundred – the women's arm of which has been a roaring success – she has been the key driver behind "Project Gemini", the overhaul of the women's domestic game that takes teams out of ECB control and handed back to counties. The big changes kick in next summer. She has been central to the ECB bringing in the same minimum starting salaries for men and women in domestic cricket from 2025.

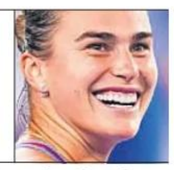
Will Macpherson

17

Nelly Korda
US golfer

A remarkable year, which included winning five events in a row, ensured that women's golf has the dominant world No1 it has craved for so long. But Korda's rise in the celebrity stakes seems just as important. Korda is not a publicity-hungry individual, yet she has accepted that she is the face of her sport and as the drive for exposure continues, there can be no doubt that the 26-year-old is at the vanguard. She earned more than $10 million (£7.9 million) in endorsements in 2024 – and that tells its own story.

James Corrigan

16

Aryna Sabalenka
Belarus tennis player

When Sabalenka takes a stand, her lack of artifice gives her words a sense of authenticity – as when she called for equal pay on the grounds that "guys are always going to be physically stronger than women but it doesn't mean we're not working as hard as they do ... From the TV point of view, from the ticket-selling, from every point of view, it's unfair". Some might have queried whether Sabalenka – who landed both hard-court majors to finish the season as world No 1 for the first time – is selling herself short on the physical front. She has been responsible for some of the most brutal ball-striking on either tour.

Simon Briggs

15

Dame Katherine Grainger
UK Sport chair, next BOA chair

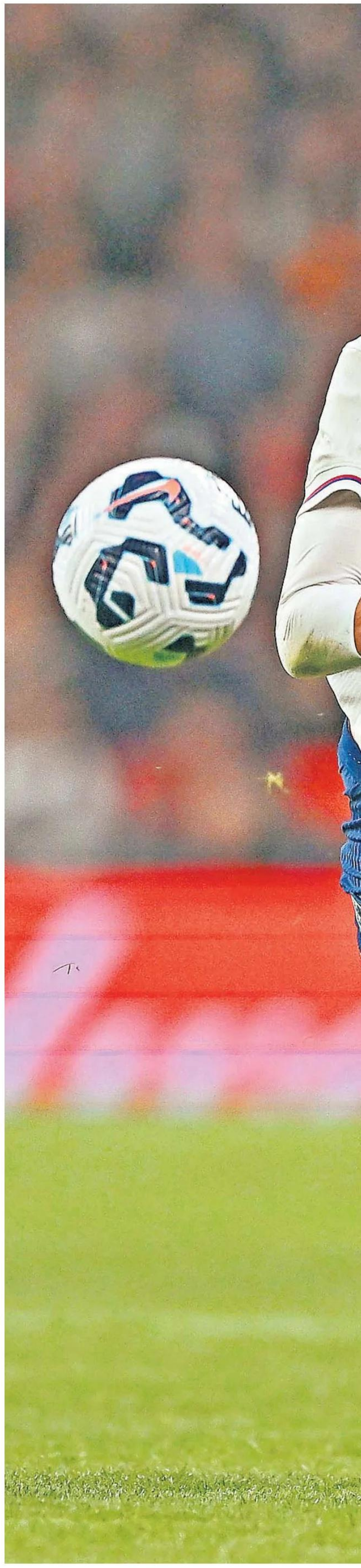
Grainger, who is the only British woman to win medals at five Olympics, was last month voted in as the first female chair of the British Olympic Association in its 119-year history and will start in the new year. The 49-year-old is in her final weeks as chair of UK Sport, where she relaxed the controversial "no compromise" approach that had led to some sports, such as badminton and wheelchair rugby, losing their funding after the 2016 Rio Olympics and Paralympics.

Tom Morgan

14

Sarah Storey
GB para athlete

Nineteen Paralympic gold medals in two disciplines (swimming and cycling) won across 32 years. Storey's numbers are





SHUTTERSTOCK

incredible – and she has not ruled out competing at Los Angeles 2028 aged 50. Upon being shortlisted for the BBC's Sports Personality of the Year award, she criticised the promotion and funding of disability sport. On top of that, she is leading much-needed research into sport and the menopause.

Sarah Mockford

13
Sifan Hassan
Netherlands athlete



The Dutch runner's feats are unprecedented. After becoming the first athlete to win Olympic medals in the 1500, 5,000 and 10,000 metres in Tokyo, she secured two bronze (5,000 and 10,000) and a gold (marathon) in Paris. She is the only woman to win Olympic golds in the three long-distance events. Yet arguably her most significant moment of 2024 came when she wore a hijab to receive her marathon medal at the closing ceremony. Given France's own athletes had been forbidden from doing so, it was a striking image with the world watching.

Sarah Mockford

12
Nikki Doucet
WPLL chief executive



The most powerful administrator in English women's club football. The Women's Professional Leagues Limited took over the running of the Women's Super League and the Championship from the Football Association in August. Doucet has helped negotiate a more lucrative broadcast deal, which will start from 2025-26 and run for five years. Barclays has also extended its WSL deal and Subway's sponsorship of the League Cup is worth £1million.

Kathryn Batte

11
Coco Gauff
US tennis player



Comfortably the most articulate and politically engaged player on the WTA Tour, Gauff bounced back from an indifferent season to land a record $4.8million (£3.8million) payday for her victory at the Finals in Riyadh last month. Her support for that event also offered a fig leaf for the WTA's leadership team, as they stood accused of selling out their ideals for Saudi Arabian riyals. "I would be lying if I said I had no reservations," said Gauff, adding that she would monitor the progress of women's rights in Saudi Arabia before deciding whether to return. "[But] I do feel to ignite change, you have to start little by little. That's how I've been taught growing up black in America, knowing our history."

Simon Briggs

10
Caitlin Clark
US basketball player



A cultural phenomenon, Clark set women's basketball alight in 2024, altering the sport's trajectory. She broke the National Collegiate Athletics Association scoring record and brought new fans to women's basketball, with her college championship game between Iowa and South Carolina attracting 18.9 million US viewers. The 22-year-old has used her rocketing profile to elevate the role black women have played in the WNBA. "I've earned every single thing, but as a white person, there is privilege," she told *TIME* this month after being named the magazine's Athlete of the Year. She, along with A'ja Wilson, Alyssa Thomas and Sabrina Ionescu, are the names that have helped the WNBA secure a $2.2billion (£1.7billion) broadcasting deal.

Fiona Tomas

9
Keely Hodgkinson
GB athlete



When she crossed the finish line at the Stade de France to win 800 metres gold, she became a household name and it was inevitable that a Sports Personality of the Year gong would follow. While some shy away from the limelight, she has embraced it; attending Burberry and Armani fashion shows, signing a Rimmel sponsorship deal and featuring on the cover of *Elle*. Her first athletics target of 2025 will be the Keely Klassic on Feb 15, when she will attempt to beat the indoor 800m world record.

Sonia Twigg

8
Billie Jean King
Former tennis player, activist



Arguably the most influential athlete of the modern era, King keeps innovating as she moves into her early eighties. She continues to invest in sporting enterprises and backed the launch of the Women's Professional Hockey League (the ice variety) in 2024. Her response to Donald Trump's election victory also tried to reassure those who feared the further erosion of women's rights. "I have fought many battles that at the time seemed daunting and unwinnable," she wrote on social media. "However, we must never stop working to create the future we want to leave for the next generation."

Simon Briggs

7
Baroness Grey-Thompson
Former para athlete, administrator



Paralympic icon turned crossbench peer whose post-athletics career most notably included authoring the 2017 Duty of Care in Sport Review triggered by the country's athlete welfare scandal. The 55-year-old was also parachuted into the board of Yorkshire County Cricket Club following the Azeem Rafiq racism scandal. A tireless campaigner for disability rights, she revealed this year that she had been forced to "crawl off" an LNER train and has spoken out against the Assisted Dying Bill.

Ben Rumsby

6
Emma Hayes
US Soccer coach



Hayes had been in charge of the United States for just 10 weeks when she led the country to their first Olympic gold medal since 2012. That victory in Paris came after she had won a record seventh Women's Super League title with Chelsea. Hayes has made the US a team to be feared again. She also continues to advocate for more opportunities for female coaches and advancements in women's health.

Kathryn Batte

5
Alison Brittain
Premier League chair



As chair of the most lucrative domestic football league in the world, Brittain is at the heart of the English game. Under her watch has come the 100-plus charges against Manchester City and the advent of the independent regulator. The Premier League is fighting on many fronts. There is always the possibility of political pressure in the case against City, with the jeopardy that the weight of regulation from the Government could discourage investment in the league.

Sam Wallace

Continued on page 8

4
Michele Kang
Kynisca Sports International founder

In 2019, Kang "did not know anything about soccer, let alone women's soccer". Now she owns three women's teams and in the past year alone has invested $85 million (£67 million) into female sports projects.

So, how has this 65-year-old businesswoman become one of the biggest players in women's sport worldwide in such quick time?

Her interest was piqued when being invited to join the ownership set-up of Washington Spirit in 2019 during a period of upheaval for the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) club. She soon became passionate about women's sport and its potential, while recognising the need for more financial investment. She has certainly delivered that. She bought a majority stake in Spirit in 2022 for $35 million, did the same with French club Lyon – eight-time Women's Champions League winners – in February 2023 and added English Championship side London City Lionesses to her portfolio at the end of that year.

"The gap between where it [women's football] was and where it could go was pretty significant, but I was convinced that the future could also be significant if there was appropriate investment and attention being paid to it," says Kang, who made her fortune by starting a healthcare technology company, Cognosante. "I'm all about equal opportunity, not equal outcome, so you have the environment that if you put your mind and soul into it you can succeed."

That desire to level the playing field has led her to expand beyond club ownership in 2024. She has invested in IDA Sports, a female football-boot brand, and donated $4 million to the USA Rugby women's sevens programme after being enthralled by the team's run to a bronze medal at the Paris Olympics. "When I heard about the conditions and environment they were in, it was very similar to where US women's soccer was four or five years ago, so I thought I could do something to help with resources and hopefully other people will join," Kang says. "And I want them to win gold at the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles."

Kang, who emigrated from South Korea to the US as a student, has pledged $30 million to US Soccer over the next five years. This money is not for the national team but to improve the "foundation blocks", as she puts it, in girls' and women's football. That means investing in youth set-ups and ensuring there are programmes in place to develop coaches, referees, nutritionists and so on who can bring through that next generation of players.



"We have to build a product that is going to be compelling, competitive and that is going to be entertaining," Kang says. "If it is not compelling, people are not going to come, so we have to make sure our product, which is the game of soccer played by women, continues to improve, which requires the best coaching staff, well-trained referees, the talent pipeline…

"You need all those things in the ecosystem to make sure our women's product is going to continue to grow. All those things need to be invested in, not just the ultimate – the professional team and professional leagues. If you don't have the pipelines in all the different categories, the product is not going to sustain."

Perhaps the most noteworthy announcement Kang has made this year, however, is the $50 million investment into improving the health of female athletes. Only six per cent of sports-science research has been conducted specifically on women but in unveiling the Kynisca Innovation Hub Kang has put the focus on understanding female physiology and how it impacts athletic performance, from puberty to menopause and in elite and recreational sport. As Kang said at the launch: "We have only begun to unlock the potential of female athletes on the pitch. KIH will become a pioneer of female performance research – so we can stop training women as if they are simply small men."

Ask Kang what inspires her to make such big investments and the answer is simple: the athletes she works with. "If you listen to our players' stories, and we have more than 80 players across three clubs, they are remarkable – where they came from, where they are and where they want to go," she says. "That is what keeps me going. I'm an immigrant and I'm very grateful that I had the opportunity to realise my American dream, so this is about allowing these young women to realise their dream."

Yet Kang's involvement is not entirely altruistic; she sees it as a valuable business opportunity and is quick to point to the figures that demonstrate how much growth there has been. NWSL teams were selling for less than $5 million five years ago; this year, Angel City were sold for a record $250 million. Last year the league secured a huge $240 million broadcast-rights deal, with nearly a million viewers watching Orlando Pride beat Spirit in the 2024 final, while regular-season attendances have passed two million for the first time.

"If you look at even the 2½ years since I've been here, the numbers are staggering," Kang says. "This is a very good business to invest in and the numbers prove the rate we're growing on every front. Women's football is not a charity or a DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion] project. Just look at the underlying trends in terms of attendance, viewership, the product, the players, the teams, the style of the play, all those things are phenomenal. That is why momentum has been building."

Does Kang believe she will get a return on her investment? "Absolutely. I can't tell you in what form but if you look at the men's world, they typically make money when they exit in terms of valuations and the media deals. I'm at different stages of development across my three teams, but our first goal is to break even and at some point we will be profitable."

It is little wonder that Kang has no plans to slow down. "It's been only 2½ years, so we've just got started."

Sarah Mockford

3
Aitana Bonmati
Footballer



After picking up both the Ballon d'Or and Fifa Best awards for two successive years, Bonmati is now an instantly recognisable face across the world of football, and she continues to be the lynchpin for club and country.

It is not just the midfielder's talent on the pitch, which helped Barcelona win a historic quadruple last season, but her determination to push for change off it which makes her an influential figure.

Bonmati has been a key voice in the Spanish national team's battle with their football federation over working conditions and spoke out in April over her belief that "nothing has changed" since their victory at the 2023 World Cup.

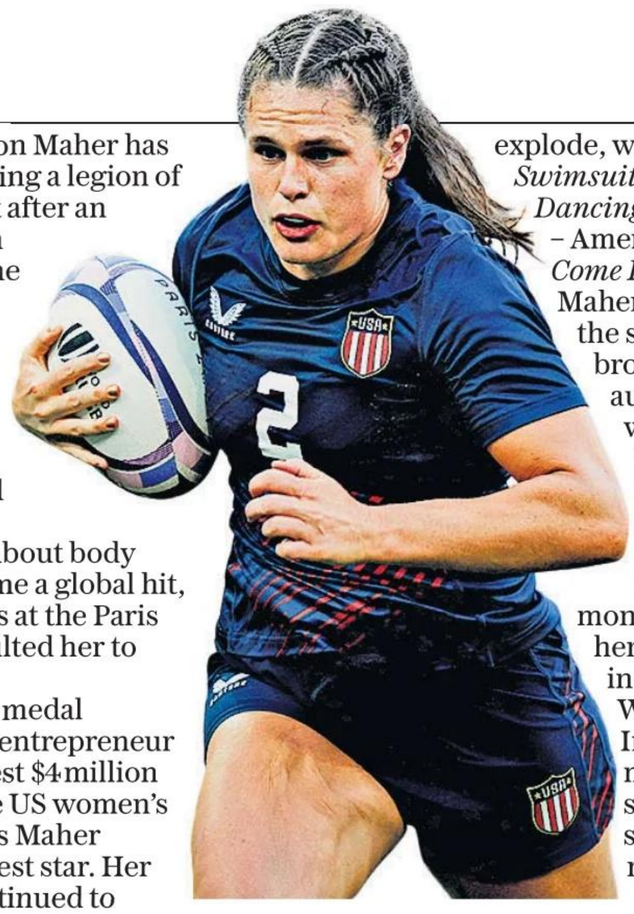
"I would like to say that everything has changed and the World Cup gave us more things, but I cannot say that," she told the BBC. "I compare [it to] when England won the Euros – everything changed.

"But we won the World Cup, which I think is bigger than winning the Euros, and no, it never changed. We are having the same problems as always. We have a lot of problems."

Last month, Bonmati also had harsh words for the women's domestic league in Spain. She believes the top-flight competitions in England and the United States – the Women's Super League and NWSL – are the "best" because they give women's football the respect and marketing it deserves whereas she said of Liga F: "I'm not happy how they treat us."

Kathryn Batte

2
Ilona Maher
Rugby player



Social-media sensation Maher has been pivotal in bringing a legion of new fans to her sport after an extraordinary year in which she has become one of the most followed sports women on the planet. She has amassed eight million followers across Instagram and TikTok, where her authentic messages about body positivity have become a global hit, but it was her success at the Paris Olympics that catapulted her to new heights.

The team's bronze medal prompted American entrepreneur Michele Kang to invest $4 million (£3.2 million) into the US women's sevens programme as Maher became rugby's biggest star. Her new-found fame continued to explode, with a *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit* cover and a place on *Dancing with the Stars* – America's version of *Strictly Come Dancing*. By the time Maher finished second on the show, she had already brought a whole new audience to rugby and was named on *Forbes*' "30 Under 30" list.

Within days of her being unveiled by Bristol Bears on a three-month deal this month having announced her ambitions to compete in next year's Women's World Cup, the club's Instagram following more than tripled and sparked record ticket sales for their first match of 2025.

Fiona Tomas

Simone Biles
Gymnast

The greatest gymnast in history, Biles made a spectacular return to the Olympic stage when winning four medals at the Paris Games to become the most decorated American gymnast of all time.

Three years after withdrawing from the Tokyo Games having suffered from the "twisties", her status as the GOAT – the greatest of all time – was confirmed when she executed the "Biles II", a move that was added to her Olympic repertoire this year and involves performing a backflip before rotating 1,080 degrees and then landing (it was the fifth gymnastics move named after her). She took gold in the vault, all-round and team events as well as silver in the floor.

Her success ensured her photographs were the most in demand of any athlete – male or female – by media organisations around the world using Getty Images. She also now proudly wears a diamond-encrusted goat necklace, which she decided to have made after fans hailed her as the greatest. "The haters hate it, so I love that even more," she has said in reference to those who have criticised her over the years.

Biles has transcended her sport not only through her spellbinding success and her Netflix documentary but for normalising conversations around mental health. After her experience in Tokyo – the twisties is when a gymnast has a mental block and loses their sense of space while in the air – her sensational showing in Paris empowered women all over the world to prioritise their mental wellbeing.

The 27-year-old knows the value of elevating other women, too – her idea to bow to Rebeca Andrade alongside US team-mate Jordan Chiles on the podium after the Brazilian won floor gold was one of the most heartwarming Games moments.

Fiona Tomas



Dame Laura Kenny



Five-time Olympic gold medallist

Biles is more than a sports star – she is an idol who speaks out

I was lucky enough to watch Simone Biles at the Olympics in Paris. I watched her in the vault and it was brilliant; the amount of air time she gets and the moves she can execute in such a short time… it is genuinely insane.

It was on the vault that she struggled in Tokyo with the "twisties". It is such an extreme environment for that to happen in, particularly when you are in the media and public eye, and I completely understood why she felt she needed to take time out. To then come back in Paris, and set such a high standard, winning three gold medals – and to do it when the whole world is watching – took some serious brain power and will.

Coming back from a mental health battle, and such a public one, as Biles did, makes her achievements even more significant. I did not read anything that was said about her after Tokyo, but I know the trolling was horrendous, so for her to deal with that and then have the mentality to come back, knowing that if it goes wrong those people are going to say, "I told you so", is incredible.

When you are a sportsperson in the public eye, you are supposed to seem like you are invincible, especially at the Olympics because you only see those athletes every four years, so having Biles or Adam Peaty come out and say, "It's not as easy as this, it's a struggle and I'm having to work on my mental health", is massive. It is a huge step forward in terms of realising that sports stars have issues, too, we're not these superheroes 24/7.

Biles has always been incredibly open, but it takes a lot to speak about the subjects she does. About the racism she has faced and the horrendous USA Gymnastics abuse scandal. When someone of her profile chooses to use their voice to shine a light on issues, it not only means people listen, it helps others in similar positions to feel comfortable to speak out on issues in their own lives.

Biles is so much more than a sports star. She is a role model and an idol to so many people. In a world where social media plays such a large part in young peoples' lives, it is so important to have role models.

I had Sir Chris Hoy growing up and then Victoria Pendleton, and Dame Kelly Holmes. After that, Dame Jessica Ennis-Hill became a huge idol for me. She was the face of London 2012 and performing under that pressure was huge. Jess is someone who has not been afraid to use her voice publicly, and she was also a huge factor in my own comeback after having Albie. She was there on the end of the phone every minute I could possibly speak to her. She helped me so much.

I think we gelled so well because our approach was not too dissimilar to what I had experienced in the team pursuit – everyone being on the same page, gaining confidence from one another, working towards a common goal. I think the same mentality is true of having the confidence to speak out on issues as Biles has. The more we use our voices, the more people we can invite into the conversation, and there is nothing stronger than a group of people working together for a common goal.



Talking sense: Alex Aljoe interviews Liverpool's Colombian forward Luis Diaz in Spanish before translating his answers into English

Interview

Why Aljoe is so fluent in language of football

Prime presenter has been talk of TV world with interviews of overseas players in their native tongue, writes *Fiona Tomas*

In footballing terms, Alex Aljoe is enjoying a breakout season. The presenter went viral last month for conducting bilingual interviews on the sidelines, adding a distinct European flavour to Amazon Prime's Champions League coverage.

Her chat with Luis Diaz after Liverpool's 4-0 win over Bayer Leverkusen, in which the Colombian had scored a hat-trick, made significant waves online. Artfully switching between English and Spanish as she asked questions and translated Diaz's answers, Aljoe turned to the camera at the right moments to keep viewers at home engaged. This rare display of versatility underlined the rewards that can be gained by conducting post-match interviews in a player's native tongue.

At the time, Aljoe thought nothing of it. She decided her interview with Diaz, which lasted around three minutes and 15 seconds, would probably be a major switch-off for viewers. It was, however, an instant hit.

"I was overwhelmed by it," Aljoe says. "I honestly didn't know how it would go down. I thought some people would go, 'Urgh, why can't we just hear from a player that speaks English?' To be honest, I don't know why it hasn't been done more in the past."

It is a valid point when you consider the Premier League has one of the highest percentages of foreign players compared to other European countries. Some 70 per cent are from overseas, with French and Spanish being the most common.

Players who have a poor command of English rarely make an appearance in front of the camera, but this is where Aljoe, a self-confessed language aficionado, has set new standards for sports broadcasting.

So, how does she do it? "Keep it as simple as possible," she says, smiling. "At the end of the day, you're talking about football. My style has always been to never ask long-winded questions. I always try to make it as natural a conversation as possible. My goal has always been to bring the viewer in as if they were there and give them that detail that you wouldn't normally get."

Modern foreign languages have been declining in schools in England at such an alarming rate that last year the Government unveiled a £15 million fund in an attempt to make Britain more bilingual. Aljoe, though, will attest that some of the best learning takes place outside of the classroom.

She began perfecting her art while working as a student for Real Madrid TV during her university placement abroad in 2013, where she conducted her first post-match interview in Spanish with one of the biggest names in sport.

"It was Cristiano Ronaldo," she says, laughing at the memory. "I remember standing outside the dressing room. It was the first day I was allowed to do my own interview because up until that point I'd been shadowing. He scored a perfect hat-trick: right foot, left foot, header. So, I was told: 'Right, we've got to get him.' And I was like: 'What do you mean we've got to get him?' We didn't have the luxury of someone like a press officer bringing the player to us – working for the club channel, you just grabbed players.

"He was amazing. Someone had told him: 'Be nice, this is her first-ever interview.' Watching it back now, the questions were like three words long, as I thrust a microphone in his face! It wasn't my best interview, but it was the start of everything. It's still on my mum's Facebook."

It proved to be an invaluable life lesson. "They were like: 'If you don't have the courage to do this now, forget a career in journalism. You have to be willing to step out of your comfort zone to try to get interviews."

We meet over Zoom, the morning after Aljoe has been pitchside for Aston Villa's 3-2 victory over Leipzig. She confesses to having eaten four bratwursts from the city's Christmas market, but the conversation quickly turns to viewers savouring another one of her bilingual interviews – this time with Jhon Duran – after the Colombian scored a 25-yard stunner.

"Duran notoriously doesn't give many interviews," Aljoe says. "The press officer was unsure, but I positioned myself on the side of the pitch where he had to walk past. Sometimes if you can just say, in their native tongue, 'Two questions?' [that's enough]. At Madrid, I even learnt how to say that in Croatian for Luka Modric, because they look up, it's in their language."

It caps some rise for the budding linguist who scrawled "I love languages" on one of her year-seven folders and was consequently branded a "geek" by a classmate. "Now I say to everyone, keep going with your languages, because lots of industries use them," Aljoe says. "I use them on a daily basis in this job."

Alongside being a fluent Spanish speaker, Aljoe is also competent in French and Italian and over the Covid lockdown, added Portuguese to her repertoire because "I was sitting at home thinking I needed to do something". Within months, she conducted her first sit-down interview with Bruno Guimaraes, the Newcastle United and Brazilian midfielder. "That's one of the best interviews I've done," she says. "He hadn't spoken to anyone because he didn't speak any English. His wife was in labour at the time – it was the weirdest thing ever – so he arrived two hours early.

"He got really emotional and said how he wears the number nine on his back because that's his dad's taxi number. Everything he does was for his father and he offered this insight into his life growing up in Brazil and how much Newcastle meant to him. We would never have got it if he wasn't in Portuguese. It's hard for anyone to do that in English, asking about someone's life and backstory in an hour. Those interviews absolutely have to be in your native tongue, there's no way you can express the emotion and talk about deep things, struggles growing up."

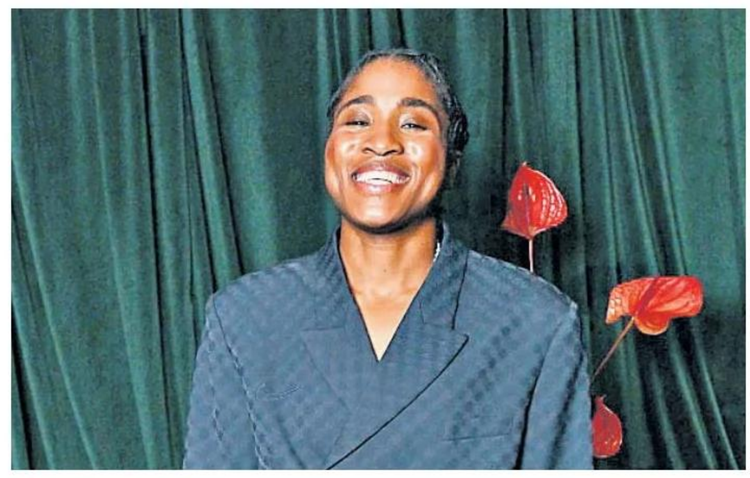
She also counts interviewing Alexis Mac Allister in an Argentine restaurant after the then-Brighton player won the World Cup as another of her career highlights, but she circles back to her Diaz and Duran work as being "up there". "Prime has really pushed for it," she says. "It is the perfect platform for me to do it."

So, what's next for this remarkable sports polyglot? "They want me to learn German," Aljoe says.

Prime will exclusively show 10 Premier League matches on Dec 26 and 27, with Alex Aljoe reporting at Arsenal v Ipswich.

'I didn't know how it would go down. I thought some people would go, "Urgh, why can't we just hear from a player that speaks English?"'

Inside Track
Cindy Ngamba



History-making boxer recalls Cameroonian beach barbecues with family and says her sport should address inconsistent judging

Who is the one person you would like to meet, dead or alive?
Martin Luther King. That man touched the lives of many people and he's someone who has always inspired me.

Describe yourself in three words.
Naive, hardworking and poker-face – because sometimes people think my smile is too nice.

What is the best compliment you have ever received?
Being called a history-maker when I won bronze at the Paris Olympics [to become the first member of the Refugee team to secure a medal]. Nothing will ever come close to topping that.

What is your worst habit?
I'm a workaholic – training is like an addiction – so I'd probably say that's my worst habit. But I guess it's a good habit to have because without that dedicated mindset I wouldn't be where I am today.

What is your most embarrassing moment?
There's a funny photo of me after winning my bronze-medal match. It's of me lifting one of my coaches, Darren, off the floor at the side of the ring. He's a big guy – he used to be in the Navy – and I didn't expect to lift him.

If you could switch lives with anyone in the world for a day, who would it be?
God. I'm Christian and my faith is important to me.

What is your favourite childhood memory?
I grew up in the coastal city of Douala in Cameroon and every Sunday my mum would take me and my brother swimming. Afterwards, we'd have a beach barbecue, grilling fish and chicken. I always looked forward to it because it was the perfect way to end the week.

What is your favourite WhatsApp group?
That's easy – my family group! There are a lot of members and it's constantly buzzing. Sometimes there are the most random videos that are posted there. I have a very big family – there are about 25 relatives in it.

What is your most prized possession?
It has to be my Olympic medal, simply because it's my greatest achievement. Making history as the first member of the Olympic Refugee team to stand on the podium is something I'll treasure forever.



Hitting new heights: Cindy Ngamba will turn professional next year

What is your dream three-course meal and dinner guests?
My mum, God and my brother. For starters, I'd choose pigs in blankets – I'm seriously addicted to them. I could probably eat about 20 in one go, which is why I try not to buy them. For the main, it has to be *ndole*, which is the national dish of Cameroon. It's a hearty stew made from nuts, *ndole* leaves – bitter leaves indigenous to West and Central Africa – with fish or beef. For dessert – and this shows how much of an adopted Brit I am – it would have to be apple crumble with custard.

What song gets you on the dance floor?
Work, by JME. It always gets my blood pumping.

If you could go on any reality TV show what would it be?
I'd love to go on *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here.* You're in the wild and have to survive and that's when you learn more about yourself. Although I don't see myself as a celebrity, so that might be a problem! I'm a boxer but you'd be shocked at how many things scare me. I hate snakes.

What is the best advice you received?
Natasha Jonas, the British boxer, once told me that whatever journey I'm on or whatever situation I find myself in, take emotion out of decision-making and try to be rational about it. It's something that's stuck with me.

What is your karaoke song?
Love on Top, by Beyonce. A real party song – I love how upbeat it is.

What is the most ridiculous thing you have ever bought?
I buy too many pairs of boxing gloves! It's my weakness. I'm quite particular about my gloves.

Do you have any hidden talents or a party trick?
I like to draw – and I'm reasonably good at it. I got a 'B' in the subject at school and I drew Martin Luther King for my final piece of work.

What is your biggest non-sporting achievement?
My degree. I studied Crime and Justice at the University of Bolton. I'm not sure why I chose that subject but when I moved to the UK aged 11, I barely spoke English. So, to do a degree here is something I'm pretty proud of.

What is the best book you have ever read? And what is your favourite TV show?
The Courage To Be Disliked by Fumitake Koga and Ichiro Kishimi. It shows you how to unlock the power within yourself to become your best and truest self, change your future and find lasting happiness. My favourite TV show has got to be *Gavin and Stacey*.

What is the one rule you would like to change in your sport?
It's not really a rule change, but I'd like there to be more consistency in the judging. Sometimes you wonder, "Are they watching a different fight?"

If you were not a sports person, what would you be doing?
I'd be a public speaker, sharing lessons I've learnt from my life growing up in Cameroon and starting a new adventure in the UK.

Three things to do in the weeks ahead

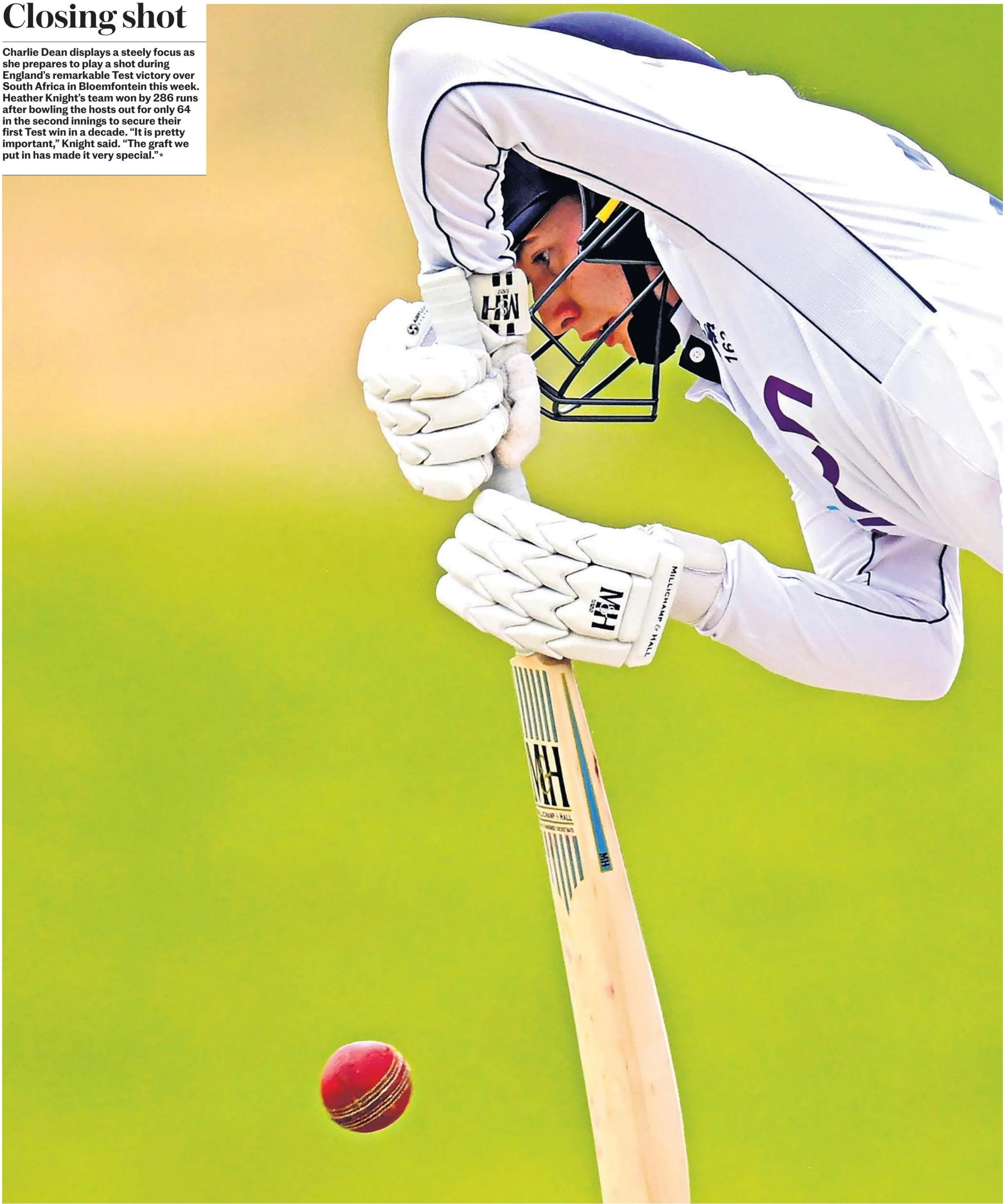
Watch
The State of It
Karen Carney last year delivered an in-depth review into the future of domestic women's football in England, recommending the professionalisation of the top two tiers, a new dedicated time slot for TV matches, that the Football Association address a lack of diversity, equal prize money for the FA Cups and the Government deliver on its commitment to provide equal access to sport in PE for girls. How much has changed in the 18 months since the release of that report? Lioness-turned-broadcaster Carney looks at the state of the women's game in this hour-long documentary, which is available to stream on ITVX.

Listen
TWS Podcast
All six episodes of the second series of the *Telegraph Women's Sport Podcast* are now available to download via your podcast feed – or you can watch them on YouTube. Listen to host Dame Laura Kenny discuss the big topics in women's sport, from inspiration to sexism, body image to kit, menopause to money. She is joined by a plethora of guests from across the sporting spectrum, including Dame Jessica Ennis-Hill, Carla Ward, Ellie Boatman, Amy Truesdale and Maggie Murphy.

Support
Big Game 16
Looking for a post-Christmas sporting fix? Head to Twickenham on Saturday Dec 28 to watch Harlequins take on Leicester in Premiership Women's Rugby (kick-off 3pm), followed by the same fixture in the men's Premiership at 6pm. Quins struggled in the women's top flight last season but are firmly in the play-off mix this time having won seven of their nine league matches to sit second in the table while Leicester are struggling near the bottom with just one victory so far in this campaign. Quins supporters will be hoping newly crowned World Rugby Women's 15s Player of the Year Ellie Kildunne, the Red Roses full-back, will deliver an entertaining performance at English rugby's HQ. There will also be musical entertainment from dance group Rudimental.

Closing shot

Charlie Dean displays a steely focus as she prepares to play a shot during England's remarkable Test victory over South Africa in Bloemfontein this week. Heather Knight's team won by 286 runs after bowling the hosts out for only 64 in the second innings to secure their first Test win in a decade. "It is pretty important," Knight said. "The graft we put in has made it very special."*



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