

The “Darth Vader” of US politics

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THE WEEK

15 NOVEMBER 2025 | ISSUE 1566

THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Turmoil at the BBC Is the broadcaster biased?

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BBC

A close-up photograph of a man and a woman. The man, on the left, has dark, wavy hair and a light beard, smiling warmly. The woman, on the right, has long, dark hair and is looking directly at the camera with a subtle smile. She is wearing a watch with a blue dial and a gold-tone case on her left wrist, and a simple gold ring on her ring finger. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting with warm lighting.

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What happened

BBC bias battle

Donald Trump threatened this week to sue the BBC for \$1bn for “deceitfully” editing footage of a speech he gave on 6 January 2021, the day of the Capitol riot. BBC chair Samir Shah had earlier apologised for the “error of judgement” in the 2024 *Panorama* episode, which, by splicing together quotes from two separate parts of the speech, gave the false impression that Trump had directly incited the riot, omitting the section where he urged the crowd to protest “peacefully and patriotically”. However, Shah rejected claims of systemic bias.

The row broke out last week after internal memos written by Michael Prescott, a former independent adviser to the BBC’s editorial standards committee, were leaked to The Daily Telegraph. As well as complaining about *Panorama*’s editing, the memos suggested that there were “systemic problems” of bias in the BBC’s reporting of the Israel-Gaza war, and that the broadcaster’s coverage of trans issues had been effectively censored by LGBTQ+ reporters promoting a pro-trans agenda. The ensuing media furor prompted the resignation on Sunday of two of the BBC’s most senior figures: director-general Tim Davie and BBC News CEO Deborah Turness.



Davie and Turness: resigned

What the editorials said

“The first rule for an institution in trouble,” said The Daily Telegraph, “is to admit there is a problem.” The BBC can’t bring itself to do that. Prescott informed Davie of his misgivings back in May, but nothing happened. Senior BBC figures are now blaming the row on “shadowy forces on the Right”. The BBC needs to take the criticisms more seriously, said The Times, because they raise legitimate questions about its culture. The corporation’s inaction over *Panorama*’s edit contrasts with its willingness last week to censure the newsreader Martine Croxall for correcting the wording of a bulletin from “pregnant people” to “women” and raising her eyebrows as she did so.

The BBC has always been a “political lightning rod”, said The Economist, but it’s becoming harder for it to avoid controversy in our more polarised times. The political views of younger and older voters are diverging, and there’s also a widening split between rural and urban voters. That’s a challenge for a news organisation headquartered in London, 70% of whose staff are under 50. It’s a challenge that the BBC, on the whole, handles remarkably well, said The Guardian. It is the “most trusted source of news in the UK, and among the top five worldwide”. The Government must defend the BBC against those who would deprive the country of this “public good”.

What happened

Cop in the Amazon

The UN’s Cop30 climate summit opened in Brazil on Monday, against a backdrop of warnings that key targets are slipping out of reach. Keir Starmer and France’s Emmanuel Macron were among the guests at a curtain-raising “Leaders’ Summit” in the Amazonian city of Belém last week, where the 11-day conference is being held. However, Donald Trump – who recently called climate change a “con job” – stayed away, as did China’s Xi Jinping and India’s Narendra Modi.



The road to Belém

One of the key issues due to be addressed at the summit was how countries can adapt to the world’s changing climate. Before it began, Brazil faced criticism for felling tens of thousands of trees to build an eight-mile road to transport the 56,118 delegates (from 193 nations and the EU) to the conference. On Tuesday, tussles broke out at the summit between security guards and indigenous protesters carrying signs saying: “Our land is not for sale.”

What the editorials said

The mood music ahead of this year’s Cop wasn’t exactly upbeat, said Le Monde. Ten years on from the landmark Paris Agreement, the key target agreed there – to limit warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels – looks certain to be missed; and the US is about to withdraw from the accord. Still, there are “glimmers of hope amid the gloom”, said the FT. Emissions are rising at only a fifth of the rate they were when the Paris deal was finalised; and warnings that temperatures could increase by up to 4°C this century have been scaled back. And though it is “clumsy and cumbersome”, the Cop process is the best we currently have.

Perhaps owing to the “increasingly pointless” nature of these meetings, far fewer participants were expected in Belém than at previous Cops, said The Daily Telegraph. Those who do attend will doubtless be treated to the usual “outpouring of hot air”, while countries more sensible than Britain continue to prioritise their interests over net-zero “insanity”: Brazil, under its Leftist government, plans to increase its oil and gas extraction by 20% by 2030.

It wasn’t all bad

A plate stolen by a student from Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, well over 100 years ago has finally been returned. Decorated with a view of Caius Court on the front, and marked “Caius Coll. Kitchens” on the back, the plate was pilfered by Gordon Stewart Wimbush, some time after he joined the college in 1908. In the 1960s his widow passed the plate to a close family friend, who was then in her 20s. Now 85, she decided that it was time it went back to its “proper home”.

An American couple with a combined age of 216 have been declared the oldest married couple in the world. Eleanor and Lyle Gittens (aged 107 and 108 respectively) met at a college basketball game in 1941 and married in 1942 – when he was given a three-day pass from his US army base in Georgia. He later served in Italy with the 92nd Infantry Division, while she worked for an aircraft-parts producer. After the War, they settled in New York, where they raised three children and worked for the civil service. Asked the secret of their 83-year marriage, she said: “We love each other.” “I love my wife,” he added. “It’s simple.”



A windsurfer in Australia has lived to describe a close encounter with a great white shark. Andy McDonald was windsurfing at Prevelly Beach, Western Australia, when the shark appeared from nowhere, pulled his board under the water and took a great bite out of it. “At that point I thought, ‘This is it. This is my time up,’” McDonald said. However, the shark got tied up in his leg rope, and as he punched and kicked it, it thrashed about – then broke free and disappeared, leaving McDonald to paddle as fast as he could back to shore.

What the commentators said

“What a honking, stupid, first-day-in-the-office sort of error to make,” said Sam Leith in *The Spectator*. There’s a wealth of evidence out there to support the argument that Trump fomented the ugly mood that led to the violent insurrectionary assault on Capitol Hill. What made *Panorama*’s producers think they needed to spice things up by creating a misleading clip? It was indefensible. Sure, this was one distortion in an otherwise sound programme. And sure, other media outlets do worse things every day: only a few months ago, the *Daily Telegraph* was forced to withdraw a story based on an interview with someone who turned out not to exist. But we expect better of the BBC. As a state broadcaster bound by a Charter commitment to balance, it can’t afford “to play fast and loose with basic journalistic standards”.

Maybe so, said Adam Boulton in *The i Paper*, but does the *Panorama* row really warrant the “gutting” of the BBC’s news operation? As for the corporation’s supposed bias on trans issues and gender identity, the BBC was not alone in dancing around these topics before the publication of the Cass Review, and the UK Supreme Court ruling that the legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex. “I don’t recall its critics now being brave then either.” The reality is that the BBC has faced accusations of bias from all sides, said Stephen Armstrong in *The Observer*. In November, 121 staff members wrote to Davie complaining that the BBC had become a mouthpiece for Israel; in September, the Lib Dems launched a petition lamenting the BBC’s “wall-to-wall coverage” of Nigel Farage and Reform UK.

My view as a long-time BBC freelancer, said Anne McElvoy in *The i Paper*, is that the broadcaster is not a “nest of Lefties” but is simply an insular, defensive organisation prone to “lean into whatever groupthink is on the go at any time”. That’s what always gets it into trouble. The BBC needs to be more transparent in its workings, so that mistakes are picked up earlier. It needs to bring in new blood by ceasing to run “what everyone involved knows to be effectively closed processes for key roles”. The corporation deserves to “survive and thrive”, but to do that it will need to drop the self-pity and work to equip itself for a new era.

What next?

The BBC is readying for its 2027 Royal Charter renewal. The Government plans to release a green paper on options for the broadcaster’s future by the end of this year. The consultation is expected to propose retaining the licence fee as the basis of the BBC’s funding, but looking at a “mixed” formula with extra revenues from advertising and subscription services.

The BBC is also set to launch an investigation to assess bias in its climate change coverage. It will be the latest in a series of reviews carried out under its ten-point impartiality plan, which was introduced in 2021 after an inquiry into the scandal surrounding the 1995 *Panorama* interview with Diana, Princess of Wales, involving Martin Bashir.

What the commentators said

Had all gone to plan, the delegates gathered in Belém this week would have plenty to celebrate, said Ben Cooke in *The Times*: if the Paris Accord’s 195 signatories had acted decisively to curb climate change, the 1.5°C target would now look feasible. Instead, their rate of fossil fuel consumption rose ever higher. Only 64 met September’s deadline to publish their latest emissions goals. The US wants to “drill, baby, drill”; the EU is “riven by infighting” over the green transition; and oil-rich states such as Russia and Saudi Arabia are still frustrating progress at Cops. It’s easy to be cynical, said Michael Jacobs on *The Conversation*, and it’s true that the summits are “too big and bureaucratic”. But they are not futile. For instance, targets agreed at Cops have helped drive an “astonishing” rise in renewable energy use in the past 15 years.

Brazil wants this Cop to focus on “implementation”, said Fiona Harvey in *The Guardian*: that is, taking steps to achieve existing goals, rather than setting new ones and bickering over where the burden should fall. Ultimately, though, this summit won’t determine whether we avert “scorching” warming of 2°C plus, said Ambrose Evans-Pritchard in *The Daily Telegraph*. No, that question will be settled by “market prices and the tidal force of technological change”. And here, there are good grounds for optimism. The emissions of China, the world’s largest polluter, have peaked well ahead of schedule; and Beijing is exporting green technology on a vast scale. Indeed, its exports are now driving progress beyond its own borders, said Somini Sengupta and Brad Plumer in *The New York Times*. With the help of cheap Chinese parts, countries including India and Vietnam are rapidly expanding solar and wind power; and as Chinese EVs flood the global market and bring down prices, Ethiopia has taken the remarkable step of banning all new fossil-fuel car imports. All over the world, “the centre of gravity seems to be shifting”.

What next?

Diplomats were not altogether dismayed by the failure of the US to send “high-level representatives” to Cop30, says *The Guardian*: they’d feared that a Washington delegation might act as a “spoiler” to progress. The largest delegation is that of the host nation, Brazil; China and Nigeria have each sent more than 700 delegates. France sent 530. The UK sent 210.

Cop30 officially runs until 21 November; but several previous summits have overrun owing to last-ditch negotiations to secure a deal dragging on.

THE WEEK

In northern France, Britain’s war dead lie in well-tended graveyards that attract streams of visitors. For the 3,000 or so Allied soldiers and medics buried in the Gaza War Cemetery, it is a different story.

Given the extent of the destruction and death in the Strip in the past two years, it is arguably absurd – even in the week of Remembrance Sunday – to worry about the bones of soldiers who died there a century ago. Still, there is something poignant about the idea of long dead young men lying not in a corner of a foreign field that is forever England, but amid the dust and rubble of a modern war. And so it is fitting that there are people whose job it is to worry about them and others like them. Some work for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which may one day be able to restore the war-torn war cemeteries in Gaza, Iraq and elsewhere; others are civil servants, employed by the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre Commemorations Team, part of the MoD. Their job is to deal with the remains of troops killed in action, from the First World War onwards, when these are turned up. They seek to identify the individual, by scouring military and historical records, and then to track down any living relatives. All are buried with full military honours. It is a compassionate business; but as one of these “war detectives” told *The Times* last year, its purpose is not only to bring peace to the dead. It also provides reassurance to the living, who may be called upon to fight a future war, that – should the worst happen – they’ll not be forgotten.

Caroline Law

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Future PLC,
 12-14
 Westbourne
 Terrace, London
 W2 6JR

Editorial enquiries:
 editorialadmin@
 theweek.co.uk

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Controversy of the week

The chaos in our prisons

As Lady Bracknell might say, “to allow one dangerous, illegal migrant sex offender to be mistakenly released may be regarded as a misfortune”. To lose two in the space of a fortnight “looks like carelessness”, said *The Independent*. The Government seems unable to get through a week without some catastrophe sending its popularity to “fresh Stygian depths”. And last week, days after the farcical manhunt for Ethiopian migrant Hadush Kebatu, Justice Secretary (and Deputy PM) David Lammy suffered fresh humiliation when it emerged that a 24-year-old Algerian, Brahim Kaddour-Cherif, was on the run, and had been for six days – having been accidentally released from HMP Wandsworth. Prison officers only discovered Kaddour-Cherif was missing because he was due in court for other offences; his lengthy rap sheet stretches to burglary, assaulting a police officer and possession of a knife, along with indecent exposure. He was eventually arrested in north London, said *The Times*, but not before the scandal had dominated a “lamentable” PMQs debut by Lammy, who was standing in for Keir Starmer. Under questioning, he was “blustering and aggressive”: he fled the chamber rather than admit that Kaddour-Cherif was missing. Lammy’s oversight of our prisons has so far “been woeful”.



Lammy at PMQs: “blustering”

This chaos isn’t Lammy’s fault, said *The Guardian*. The issue is “a broken system, not human error”. Our prisons mistakenly release hundreds of inmates every year: there were 262 such mistakes in the year to March 2025. They happen because years of Conservative underfunding have driven these institutions to the point of collapse. HMP Wandsworth is a case in point, said Peter Walker in the same paper. A recent inspection painted a picture of chaos in the inner-city Victorian prison, where last year 1,521 prisoners were crammed into a building designed to hold 979 men and where, thanks to chronic understaffing, “staff could not reliably say where all prisoners were during the day”. Then there’s the lack of digital infrastructure, said Rachel Cunliffe in *The New Statesman*. This forces staff to trawl through boxes of paperwork and manually calculate how long an offender has left of their sentence, while processing hundreds of releases a day. It’s no surprise the system fails so often.

The terrible condition of our prisons is perhaps the most shocking recent example of state negligence, said Ian Birrell in *The i Paper*. It should shame everyone in Westminster – from Lammy, with his embarrassing attempt to dodge responsibility, to the hypocritical Tories, “shouting in shrill outrage” for what is, above all, a “collective failure”. Meanwhile, “a despairing public looks on, aghast at the latest sign of breathtaking incompetence”, weeks before they “will be squeezed for even more cash to fund a decaying state that seems unable to deliver even its most basic functions”. Is it any wonder that voters are turning away from mainstream parties to “hard-right populism”?

Leadership “plots”

On Tuesday evening, allies of Keir Starmer anonymously briefed several news outlets that the Prime Minister’s job was under “immediate threat”, and expressed fears that Wes Streeting, the Health Secretary, might be planning a coup. They insisted that Starmer would “fight” any such attempt. On Wednesday, Streeting denied the claims entirely, describing them as “self-defeating nonsense” and said they were indicative of a “toxic” atmosphere in No.10. In the Commons, Starmer denied authorising the briefings, and said attacks on his Cabinet members were “unacceptable”.

Unemployment rises

The UK’s unemployment rate rose to 5% in the three months to September – its highest level since early 2021, during the third Covid lockdown. The Office for National Statistics (ONS), which compiled the data, said they pointed to a weakening labour market. The figures raised expectations that the Bank of England could cut interest rates in December. Wage growth also marginally slowed. However, the ONS – which has faced questions over the accuracy of its data – said the figures should be treated with caution for now.

Spirit of the age

Heywood Hill, the bookshop in Mayfair where Nancy Mitford worked in the 1940s, is now offering what it calls “London’s greatest book subscription”. For the top-of-the-range package, which costs £1,200 a year, subscribers are given a reading consultation with one of the store’s employees, and are then sent 40 hand-picked hardbacks over 12 months. It’s like “having an intellectual personal trainer”, said one customer, the CEO of an international commodities trading firm.

Almost half of UK adults have bought a toy for themselves or another adult this year. Toy makers are hoping to cash in on this trend at Christmas, with *Wicked 2* dolls among those expected to appeal to “kidults” as well as to kids.

Good week for:

David Szalay, who won the Booker Prize with his sixth novel, *Flesh*. It traces the life of a working-class Hungarian émigré – a soldier turned strip-club bouncer, turned property developer – from his teens to middle age, to explore themes including masculinity, trauma and power.

Nicolas Sarkozy, the former French president, who was released from prison just three weeks into his five-year sentence. The 70-year-old had contested the decision to jail him before the appeals process was exhausted, which is unusual for white-collar crimes. Under the terms of his release, he may not leave the country or meet witnesses or others associated with his case.

Comebacks, with reports that the Duchess of Sussex is returning to acting, after an eight-year hiatus. Meghan is said to be making a cameo appearance as herself in a film called *Close Personal Friends*, about two couples – one famous, the other not.

Bad week for:

Electric car drivers, with reports (see page 35) that the Treasury is pushing for them to be hit with a 3p-per-mile tax, to make up for the loss of billions in fuel duty as more people switch to EVs.

The NHS in England, as resident doctors prepare for another strike. The BMA confirmed that the five-day action would start on Friday, after deciding that an offer that included the NHS covering the cost of doctors’ exam fees did not go far enough.

DFDS ferries, after an adult film was accidentally broadcast in a passenger lounge on the Dieppe to Newhaven service. Children reportedly ran away screaming when the porn film began.

Poll watch

31% of British adults think the BBC is biased in favour of left-wing views, while **19%** believe the corporation to be biased in favour of right-wing views. **19%** think it is not biased at all. **31%** do not know. *YouGov/The Daily Telegraph*

Just **20%** of the British public believe that it is acceptable for Labour to break its manifesto promise not to raise income tax, even if that is what the UK needs. Labour voters are evenly split on the issue, with **38%** on either side. *Demos/The Independent*

86% of British men feel safe behind the wheel, compared with **78%** of women. Official figures show that men accounted for **76%** of all road fatalities (but also drive more miles per person). *National Accident Helpline*

Copenhagen

Social media ban: Social media is “stealing our children’s childhood”, declared Denmark’s PM, Mette Frederiksen, in a speech last month; and last week her government announced its plan to ban children under 15 from going on social media platforms. A recent survey has shown that, in Denmark, 14-year-old girls spend almost four hours a day on average on social media; boys of the same age, over two-and-a-half. The new rules, which have cross-party support but no timescale, will oblige people to use an age-verification app to get on social media; parents will be given dispensation to let their 13- and 14-year-olds access specific platforms. This will be the first such ban in Europe, though France does oblige users under 15 to have parental consent. Denmark is following the lead taken by Australia, where parliament has enacted a ban on social media use for all children under the age of 16.

Brussels

Disruptive drones: The UK, France and Germany have sent military experts to Belgium to help it counter the mysterious drone incursions that forced the closure of airports in Brussels and Liège last week. Drones were also spotted at the military base of Kleine-Brogel, where US nuclear weapons are stored. The incidents are the latest in a wave of disruptive drone sightings across Europe since September: in Denmark, Germany, Spain and many other countries. In Belgium, large drones have been deployed in formation, meaning they were probably controlled by specialists in hybrid warfare, Moscow being the likely culprit. Germany’s defence minister, Boris Pistorius, suggested the Belgian incidents could be a response to discussions by the EU and UK over the possible use of frozen Russian assets, held mostly in Brussels, as collateral for a €140bn loan to Ukraine.

Milan

Sniper tourists: Italian prosecutors have launched an investigation into allegations that people from Italy and other countries went to Bosnia to shoot civilians for fun during the 1992 to 1996 Siege of Sarajevo. There have long been rumours that many of the Sarajevans shot by snipers positioned on the surrounding hills were killed not by Serbians but by “sniper tourists”, but until now no action was taken. However, following a legal complaint filed by Italian writer Ezio Gavazzeni and a former mayor of Sarajevo, Benjamina Karic – both of whom have collected fresh evidence – Italian prosecutors last week launched an investigation. Gavazzeni claims there were many such “tourists” – some of them British – who paid large fees to Bosnian Serb militias under the warlord Radovan Karadžić, with a price list in which children were the most expensive targets, and elderly people could be killed for free.

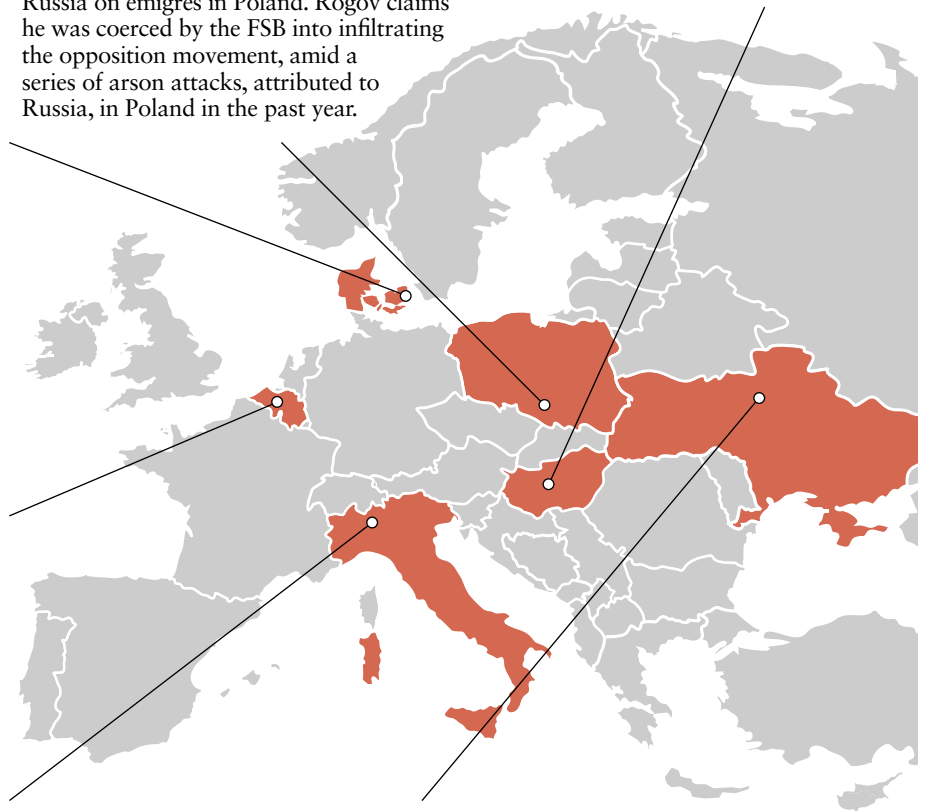


Sosnowiec, Poland
Spying for Putin: A Russian opposition activist who once worked for Alexei Navalny’s Anti-

Corruption Foundation, and who fled to Poland after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, has admitted to working as an undercover agent for Russia’s FSB security service. Igor Rogov and his wife were arrested last year, initially on suspicion of handling explosives. They will go on trial next month on charges of spying for Russia on émigrés in Poland. Rogov claims he was coerced by the FSB into infiltrating the opposition movement, amid a series of arson attacks, attributed to Russia, in Poland in the past year.

Budapest

Sanctions waiver: Hungary has been granted a one-year exemption by Donald Trump from the US sanctions imposed last month on countries that buy oil and gas from Russia. Hungary imports 86% of its oil from Russia (more than it did before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022), but Trump justified the exemption on the basis that Hungary had less scope to break its dependence than other EU nations, which he has slammed for failing to do so. The announcement comes on the heels of a White House meeting between Trump and Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán, who is both a strong supporter of Trump and Vladimir Putin’s closest ally in Europe. Orbán has also agreed to buy liquefied natural gas from the US to a value of roughly \$600m.



Kyiv

Nuclear fears: Kyiv has accused Russia of “deliberately endangering nuclear safety in Europe” after it struck power substations supplying two nuclear power plants in western Ukraine. The substations support crucial safety and control functions at the plants; attacking them, said Ukraine’s foreign minister, risked a “catastrophic incident”. Ukraine has accused Russia of similar attacks on nuclear facilities in the past, most recently at Zaporizhzhia, a nuclear plant that was forced to rely on back-up generators for a month from 23 September. Russia also launched air strikes against energy facilities across the country this week – one of the largest such barrages of the war to date, necessitating extensive power cuts.



Meanwhile, fighting has intensified in Pokrovsk (pictured), a crucial transport hub in the Donetsk region that Russia has been striving to capture for close to two years. Some 150,000 Russian troops are now deployed there, but President Zelensky insists Ukrainian forces have been holding their positions, and have actually made gains in the town of Dobropillia, to the north. However, there were conflicting reports of fighting around Myrnohrad, a town to the east, which Russia’s forces have encircled but which Kyiv says has been successfully resupplied with troops and provisions.

Alberta province, Canada

Measles is back: The Americas has lost its “measles elimination status” owing to a year-long outbreak in Canada. The outbreak began in October 2024. Since then, more than 5,100 cases have been recorded, along with two deaths, most of them in communities with low rates of vaccination uptake in Alberta and Ontario. Canada was deemed measles-free in 1998, but overall vaccination rates have fallen recently. The proportion of two-year-olds to have had at least one dose of the vaccine fell to about 82% in 2023, from 90% in 2019. The Americas – which includes the countries of North and South America and the Caribbean – became the first, and so far only, region to be designated measles-free by the WHO in 2016, but has now lost this status by default. The US could be the next country to fall: it has until January to contain an outbreak in Utah, Arizona and South Carolina.

Washington DC

Shutdown over?: The US House of Representatives looked poised this week to agree a deal to end the country’s longest-ever federal shutdown. The spending bill was passed by the Senate late on Monday, after eight Democrats broke from their colleagues to join Republicans in backing it. Although obstacles remained, it looked likely to pass the House on Wednesday, and President Trump had signalled that he would then sign it. The shutdown, which began on 1 October, had meant that 1.4 million federal employees were either on unpaid leave or working without pay; 41 million Americans on low incomes were unable to access food assistance programmes; and in the past week, thousands of flights had been delayed or cancelled as a result of staff not turning up to work.

**Mexico City**

President groped: The president of Mexico, Claudia Sheinbaum, is pressing charges against a man who groped her as she mingled with voters in the capital last week. Footage of the incident shows a visibly drunk man coming up behind Sheinbaum and trying to kiss her neck and grab her chest – until a security guard intervenes. “If they do this to the president, what will happen to young women in our country?” she said. However, her opponents have accused her of being reckless in venturing out in public without more security.

Washington DC

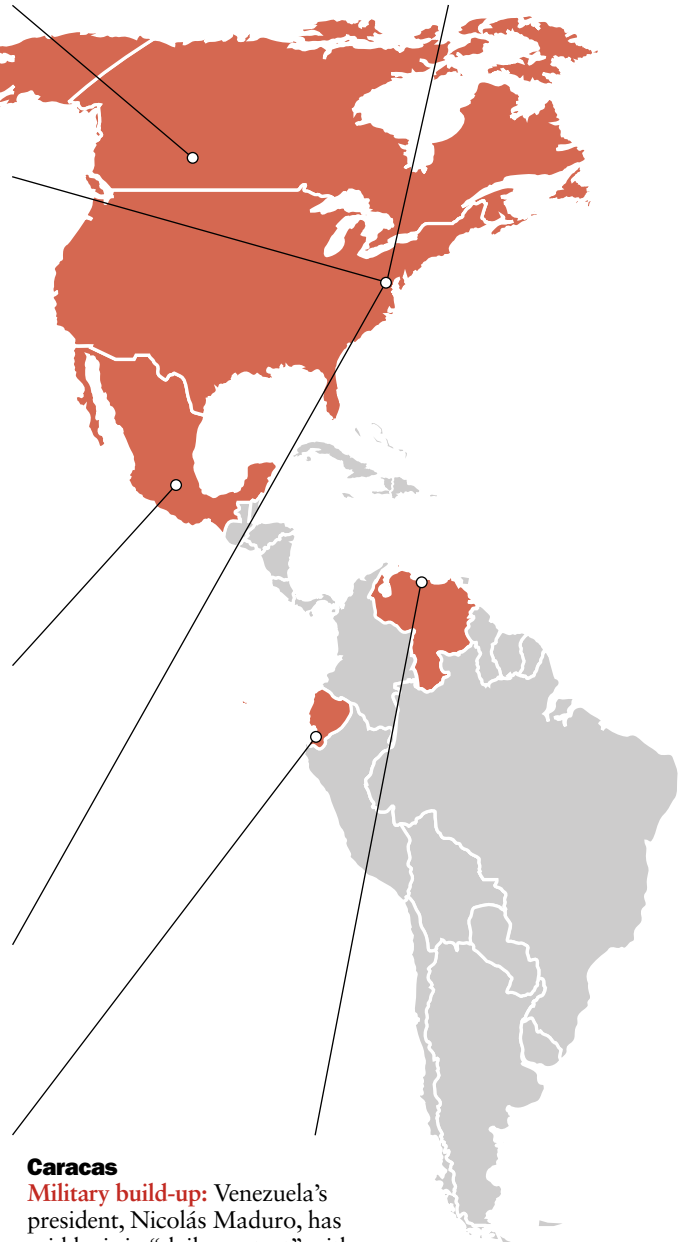
Andrew’s testimony: Democrats on the US congressional committee investigating the late Jeffrey Epstein have written to Andrew Mountbatten Windsor, asking him to submit to an in-person interview about the convicted sex trafficker’s network, associates and operations. The letter from the panel – which has no power to force Mountbatten Windsor to testify – refers to the former prince’s “long-standing friendship” with Epstein, and the allegations against him, which include “abusing minors” at the millionaire’s private island in the US Virgin Islands. Mountbatten Windsor, who has always strongly denied wrongdoing, has been asked to respond to the formal request by 20 November.

Machala, Ecuador

Dozens dead in prison riot: At least 31 inmates were killed in a prison riot in Ecuador in the early hours of last Sunday. It was initially reported that four people had been killed in the violence at El Oro prison in Machala, which was apparently sparked by news that some inmates were going to be transferred to a new maximum-security facility. However, hours later, officials found the bodies of a further 27 people who had been hanged in a different part of the jail. Since 2021, more than 500 prisoners have been killed in prison riots, and last year 150 prison guards were taken hostage during coordinated riots across multiple prisons. The unrest has been put down to a combination of overcrowding, corruption and growing rivalries between powerful drug gangs for control of prisons, territory and export routes.

**Washington DC**

Historic meeting: Syria is to become the 90th country to join a US-led coalition to combat the remnants of Islamic State in the Middle East, an official in Washington confirmed this week. The announcement came after Ahmed al-Sharaa became the first Syrian president ever to visit The White House. Sharaa – who was once wanted by the US as a terrorist – later told the media that the meeting with President Trump heralded a “new era” of Syrian cooperation with the US. The Syrian embassy in Washington will now reopen, and the US has suspended some sanctions on Syria.

**Caracas**

Military build-up: Venezuela’s president, Nicolás Maduro, has said he is in “daily contact” with Moscow, including on military matters, as tensions with the US continue to rise. Last week, the US Senate voted to allow President Trump to launch a war on Venezuela without further consultation with Congress. On the same day, a pair of US B-52 bombers flew along the country’s coast. This week, the *USS Gerald R. Ford*, a nuclear-powered supercarrier capable of launching some 75 fighter jets, has arrived in the region. The US military presence in the Caribbean is the biggest in the region since the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Last week, a senior Russian MP hinted that Moscow might send hypersonic missiles to Venezuela.



Tel Aviv, Israel

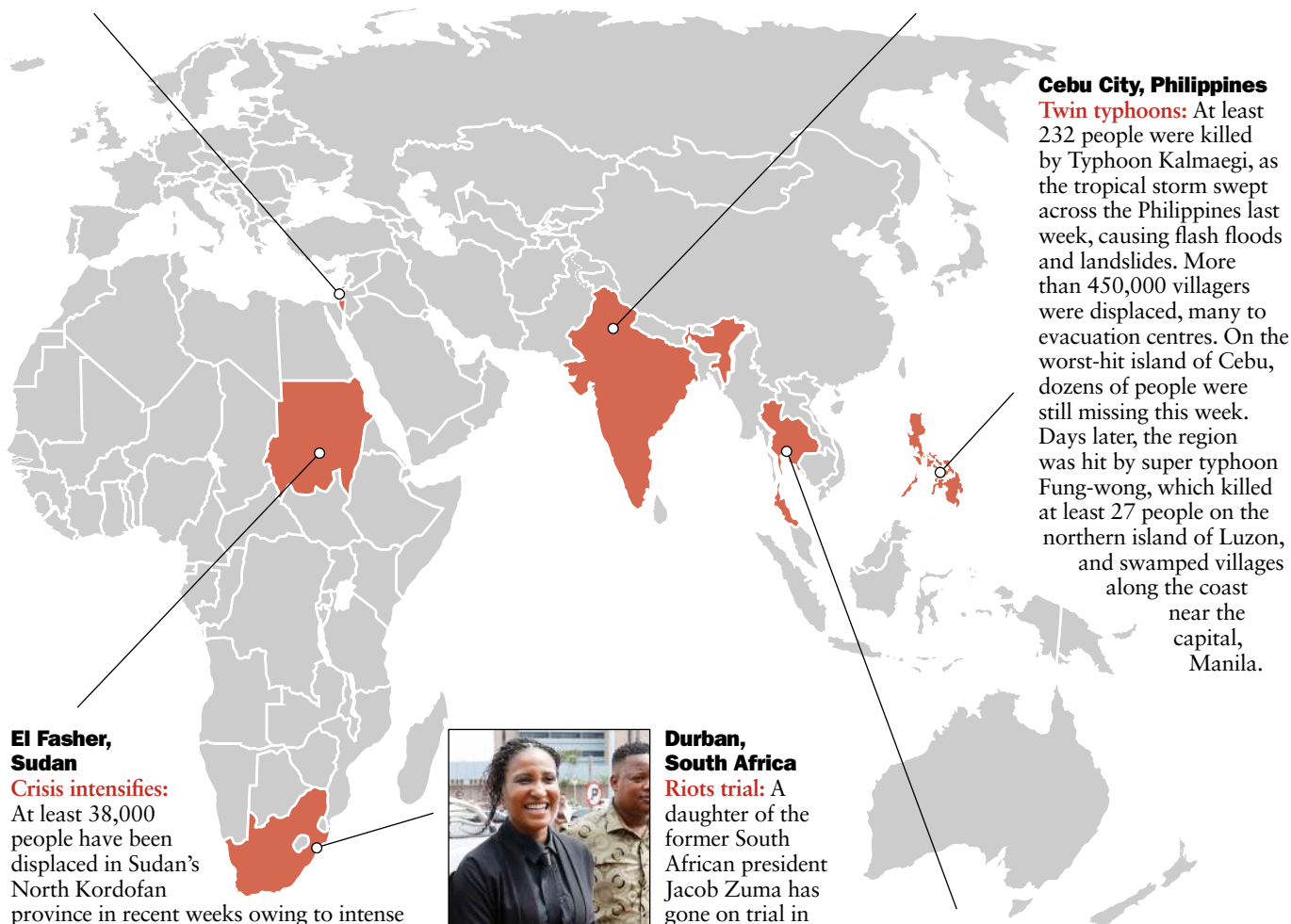
Mediators struggle: The US envoy, Jared Kushner, returned to Israel on Sunday as mediators struggled to advance negotiations over the fragile ceasefire in Gaza. Many key issues remain unresolved, including the deployment of an international “stabilisation” force

to the territory. This week, the UAE said that it would probably not participate in such a force, because it could not see a “clear framework” for it. King Abdullah of Jordan has said he’d not be willing to send Jordanian troops to “enforce peace” in Gaza, and Israel has vetoed Turkish participation. A further challenge to the peace process has been a group of 150 to 200 Hamas fighters hiding, or trapped, in tunnels in Israeli-controlled southern Gaza. Israel’s PM Benjamin Netanyahu was reported to have told Kushner this week that Israel would allow the fighters to be deported.

Israel launched a series of drone strikes on southern Lebanon over the weekend, killing at least three people. Despite the ceasefire that came into force last November, Israel has continued to carry out nearly daily strikes, which have intensified in recent weeks owing to reports that the Iran-backed terror group Hezbollah is rearming.

Delhi, India

Deadly blasts: Police in India are investigating the lethal car blast in Delhi on Monday as a possible terrorist incident. Eight people were killed when a white Hyundai blew up outside the Red Fort. Police suspect a link between this blast and the news, a few hours earlier, that police in Indian-controlled Kashmir had dismantled an alleged militant cell that had operatives on the outskirts of Delhi. A large cache of explosives was found at properties near the city, and at least two doctors were arrested. There are fears the blast may increase tensions with Pakistan. India accuses Pakistan of funding militant groups in Kashmir; and this week, Pakistan’s PM, Shehbaz Sharif, said that extremist groups “actively backed by India” were behind a suicide bombing in Islamabad that killed 12 people.



Cebu City, Philippines

Twin typhoons: At least 232 people were killed by Typhoon Kalmaegi, as the tropical storm swept across the Philippines last week, causing flash floods and landslides. More than 450,000 villagers were displaced, many to evacuation centres. On the worst-hit island of Cebu, dozens of people were still missing this week. Days later, the region was hit by super typhoon Fung-wong, which killed at least 27 people on the northern island of Luzon, and swamped villages along the coast near the capital, Manila.

El Fasher, Sudan

Crisis intensifies:

At least 38,000 people have been displaced in Sudan’s North Kordofan province in recent weeks owing to intense fighting there, the UN’s International Organisation for Migration has said. The region is emerging as a major focal point in the country’s civil war, along with Darfur, where the city of El Fasher – the army’s last stronghold in the area – fell to the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) last month. Atrocities including rapes and mass killings have been widely reported in both areas. This week, the Sudan Doctors Network said that the RSF had burnt hundreds of bodies in El Fasher, to conceal its “genocide”. There are also reports of people dying of hunger, thirst and gunfire, as they try to flee the region.



Durban, South Africa

Riots trial:

A daughter of the former South African president Jacob Zuma has gone on trial in Durban, for allegedly inciting public violence during protests in 2021 in which more than 300 people were killed. The protests were sparked by Zuma’s arrest for refusing to testify at a corruption inquiry, and descended into days of arson and looting in parts of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. A trusted ally of her father, Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla is accused of using social media posts to whip up the violence. She denies the charges, which she says are designed to hurt her father.

Bangkok

Truce tested: Thailand suspended peace talks with Cambodia this week, after four Thai soldiers were injured by a landmine in a long-contested border area. Tensions over the territory led to a five-day conflict in July, which ended in a ceasefire that Donald Trump had helped to broker. He also presided over the signing of an expanded truce last month. Further talks were due to start this week. However, Thailand insists that the landmine that injured its troops had been newly laid by Cambodia (it denies this), and that “everything has to stop until there is clarity”.

Don McCullin's despair

War photographers are not supposed to reach the age of 90, says Emine Saner in *The Guardian*; and as he enters his tenth decade, Don McCullin feels “uncomfortable” that he is still here – and about all the accolades he has received for his work, covering conflicts and disasters. “I feel as if I’ve been over-rewarded,” he says, “because it’s been at the expense of other people’s lives.” Surely, though, his work witnessing atrocity was important? “Yes, but at the end of the day, it has done absolutely no good at all. Look at Ukraine. Look at Gaza. I haven’t changed a solitary thing.” In recent years, he has mainly used his camera to capture the beauty of the landscape around his home in Somerset; and he can’t bring himself to look at some of the images that made his name – such as his photograph of a starving boy during the Biafra War in 1968. “I haven’t printed that picture for almost 30 years now. I don’t want to see it coming up in the dark room. I even feel guilty that these pictures – I have about 70,000 negatives – are in the house.” But he is proud of one thing: that while news crews could be ruthless in pursuit of a story or image, he treated his subjects with respect. “When it comes to my work, I’m very sensitive, very polite,” he says. “I’m a human being. I would never have got pictures of people who are injured and angry and hurt without that... I’ve managed to allow them to give me that moment of trust.”

A battle over Richard III

In 2022’s *The Lost King*, the film dramatising the search for Richard III’s body under a car park in Leicester, a character named Richard Taylor appears as a smug bean counter at the University of Leicester who obstructs an amateur historian’s efforts to instigate the search – then tries to take credit for the find on behalf



of his employer. This depiction was shocking for the real Richard Taylor, because he did nothing of the sort. And last month, he won “substantial damages” from the film’s writer, Steve Coogan, and two production companies. He’d actually appealed to Coogan as soon as he got wind of the fact that he was being portrayed as the villain of the piece, but got no reply. Then Coogan fought his claim in court, and even after a settlement was reached, he insisted he was proud of the way he had told the story, and publicly denigrated Taylor. It’s puzzling, the academic told Steve Boggan in the *Daily Mail*: Coogan has been a fierce critic of press intrusion, but seems careless about the way he misrepresented a private individual in his own film. “He has spoken about feeling helpless and damaged by the way he has been portrayed – yet that is exactly how I felt when he did the same to me.”

Heseltine's career advice

At 92, Michael Heseltine is still addicted to politics, says Alice Thomson in *The Times*: he reads four newspapers a day and listens to the BBC news too. “It’s like gardening; it needs day-to-day attention or you get behind,” he explains. Though most grandees stayed away, Heseltine (pictured) was at the last Tory conference; and he recently gave a speech to an enthralled Gen Z audience in a nightclub in London. Yet despite his passion for politics, he doesn’t entirely recommend it as a career. “I always say if you are thinking about it, don’t go near it,” he says. “It’s a tough, gruelling, thankless life. But if you really want to do it, it’s the most exciting journey.” The key, he says, is to “do something that makes you look forward to Monday morning. I envy the next generation in one way. They have more time than me.”



Sanna Marin was 34 when she became PM of Finland in 2019. The international media was delighted to see a young woman take power, says Charlotte Ivers in *The Sunday Times*, and Western liberals looked to her (along with the likes of New Zealand’s Jacinda Ardern) for proof that a new style of leadership was possible. With a young daughter of her own, Marin made creating a better work-life balance for Finnish workers her priority; but inevitably, the pressure of her role took a toll on her own family life, and ultimately led to the breakdown of her marriage. Years earlier, she and her partner had watched the TV drama *Borgen*, in which a fictional PM’s marriage collapses under the strain, and “neither of us could understand why they’d sacrificed their relationship for the sake of her career. Now I could. It’s not a conscious choice. It’s just life.” However, she does also think that women have it hard. A low point came when the press published photos of her dancing on a night out with friends, and she felt obliged to take a blood test to prove that she had not taken cocaine. “Nobody ever asked a male leader, ‘How can you be capable of handling your career when you just went on a night out with the boys to a bar to watch a football game?’” she says. Women, she adds, “should have the right to be strong. They should have the right to be leaders, but at the same time they should have the right to be mothers and sisters and friends.”

**Viewpoint:
Poppy shaming**

“The poppy police, an informal mainstream and social media militia, is placed on high alert early every November. Sniffing out those suspected of insufficient respect to fallen service personnel, and then abusing them – for not wearing a poppy or wearing one of the wrong colour – has become an annual witch-hunt. Not only is this poppy shaming nasty and absurd, it’s totally unBritish. If there’s one thing Our Glorious Dead died for, it was the freedom to not conform to any particular orthodoxy. Yet Remembrance Day is becoming as much about bullying those who fail to go along with the approved version of patriotism as it is about honouring veterans.” *Robert Crampton in The Times*

Farewell

Susanna Gross, journalist and bridge champion, died 11 November, aged 58.

Gopichand Hinduja, billionaire businessman, died 4 November, aged 85 (see page 37).

Tatsuya Nakadai, Japanese actor in *Ran* and *Harakiri*, died 8 November, aged 92.

James Watson, Nobel winner who discovered DNA structure, died 6 November, aged 97.

Quentin Willson, *Top Gear* presenter, died 8 November, aged 68.

The asylum hotels

Using hotels to house asylum seekers has proved extremely unpopular. Why, and what can the Government do about it?

Why is this an issue now?

Hotels housing asylum seekers became a lightning rod this summer for political and community tensions over illegal migration, and over the dramatic increase in the number of migrants arriving in Britain on small boats. Large numbers of people are still being housed in these hotels, though the Government has promised to end the practice by the end of this parliament, in 2029. As of June 2025, 32,059 asylum seekers were being accommodated in hotels. That's 8% up on last year's level (though actually down from a peak of 56,042 in September 2023). One council, Epping Forest, has argued in court – unsuccessfully – that using hotels in this way is a breach of planning laws. The Government has also been criticised by the Home Affairs Committee of MPs for its general failures in its management of asylum accommodation, and for squandering billions on hotels.



Flashpoint: The Bell Hotel in Epping, Essex

What is the context to all this?

The number of asylum seekers coming to the UK has risen sharply in recent years, because of small-boat crossings. In the year ending December 2024, a record 108,138 people claimed asylum (84,231 main applicants plus 23,907 dependants). The figure for 2019 was 44,494. When asylum seekers have been processed (see box), if they are judged to be “destitute”, as most are, they are eligible for accommodation and subsistence while their claims are being assessed (most are not allowed to work). New arrivals are placed in “initial accommodation”. Then they are moved to longer-term “dispersal accommodation” – flats or houses of multiple occupation, often in areas such as the North West, where housing is cheaper – until an asylum decision has been made. But when this is not available, “contingency accommodation” is used: usually hotels. All this accommodation is provided by private contractors: in 2019, the Home Office gave ten-year contracts to three companies: Serco, Clearsprings Ready Homes and Mears.

Why are hotels being used so much?

Until 2020, they were used only in very limited circumstances. But when the pandemic struck, the contractors began placing asylum seekers in hotels – partly for public health reasons, and partly because empty hotels were a useful place to house growing numbers of people. This was only ever intended as a temporary measure, as a response to the pressures of the pandemic. However, it soon became a major part of the asylum accommodation system: at one point, 400 hotels were being used. After the pandemic, demand continued to grow – because of rising numbers, and because of Boris Johnson’s decision to stop processing asylum claims as his government pursued its Rwanda policy, meaning that more people were stuck in the system. Around a third of the total are now housed in hotels.

Why is it seen as a problem?

Firstly, asylum hotels are poor value for money. The average daily cost of

housing an asylum seeker is about £145 per person – compared with £23 in “dispersal accommodation”; catering, laundry, onsite security and so on raise costs. As a result, the expected cost of those three ten-year contracts has risen from £4.5bn to £15.3bn, according to the Home Affairs Committee. Hotels are also unsuitable for asylum seekers themselves: some spend years living in hotels. Bored and unable to work legally, asylum seekers have little to do but stay in their rooms or loiter in the local area; some have committed crimes. Residents living near these hotels often complain that they feel unsafe; The Bell Hotel in Epping, along with others, have become flashpoints for protests and violence.

Are there any alternatives?

There are few easy solutions. From August 2023, some 500 male asylum seekers were moved to the *Bibby Stockholm* barge docked off the Dorset coast; but that prompted protests and legal challenges, and within 16 months it had been emptied. At present, two large former Ministry of Defence sites are being used to house them: Napier Barracks near Folkestone – found by the High Court in 2021 to be “filthy” and overcrowded – and a former RAF base at Wethersfield in Essex. Napier is due to close by December. Another option, proposed by the Refugee Council, would be for ministers to grant time-limited leave to remain in Britain to all asylum seekers from five countries (Syria, Eritrea, Sudan, Iran and Afghanistan) whose claims are almost certain to be successful, which would allow asylum hotels to be closed within six months.

What's the Government doing?

It wants to tackle the problem by reducing the number of people in the asylum system: speeding up the processing of claims; reducing irregular arrivals by cracking down on criminal gangs; stepping up returns of those who have been rejected; and perhaps tightening up the rules in general (see page 18). Keir Starmer has said that he wants asylum hotels “emptied as quickly as possible”. Labour wants to open asylum camps on disused Army bases and on government land, including barracks in East Sussex and

Inverness. It's also trialling a plan to give asylum seekers £100 per week so they can live with family or friends.

A Channel migrant's journey

Most adult migrants who arrive in the UK on small boats are sent to Manston, a processing centre that opened on a former RAF base in Kent in 2022. They are supposed to be held there for only 24 hours, while officials carry out security and identity checks; but owing to overcrowding, some stay for weeks. Conditions can be squalid: in 2022, there was an outbreak of diphtheria at the site. Upon leaving, asylum seekers take up one of some 1,750 places in initial accommodation, while officials assess their eligibility for further help. After this, most will be sent to longer-term “dispersal accommodation”.

On average, it took 413 days for an asylum application to receive an initial decision in 2024 (down from 735 days a year earlier). Although most asylum seekers cannot legally work while their applications are pending, reports of black market employment are common. The destitute receive £49.18 a week in government support to cover food and other living costs; that figure drops to £9.95 a week for those living in hotels providing meals. The UK spent some £5.4bn on its asylum system in the 2023/24 financial year – more than twice as much as in 2021/22. This mostly comes from the “overseas development” budget.

Will the hotels be closed?

The PM has told ministers that he hopes to be able to end the use of hotels next year. By then, the Government aims to have readied military sites, and made progress in cutting the asylum backlog (which Labour says has fallen by around 20% since it took office). Still, plans to house asylum seekers on government land are likely to encounter local opposition and legal challenges. It's likely to be expensive, too: such sites often cost more even than hotels. The Home Office's record does not inspire confidence: the Home Affairs Committee described it as “chaotic”. It had failed, for instance, to claw back millions in “excess profits” owed by contractors to the public purse until prompted by the Committee.

The collapse of our old political order

Andy Beckett

The Guardian

It is extraordinary, says Andy Beckett, how rapidly the architecture of British politics – in particular its century-long domination by two major parties – is “falling apart”. Only six years ago, in the 2019 election, Labour and the Tories between them won 75.8% of the vote. Current polls show them with a combined support of less than 40%. Each is now trailing Reform UK and struggling to stay ahead even of the Greens and Lib Dems. It’s so unprecedented, we still haven’t come to terms with the potential impact of this fragmentation on every aspect of political life. Safe parliamentary seats could become a thing of the past, with parties no longer able to count on any heartlands. That, in turn, could spell the end of long careers in politics, thus making MPs more responsive to their constituencies and less susceptible to lobbying, but also leaving us with fewer experienced ministers and veteran rebels. And if parties lose their strength, will the power of more permanent, unelected interests – big corporations; Whitehall – fill the vacuum? Fear it or welcome it, a new political order seems just around the corner.

Labour doesn’t get the truth about markets

Martin Wolf

Financial Times

Until the advent of Tony Blair, the Labour Party suffered from a fatal disability, says Martin Wolf: it couldn’t grasp the reality that “people respond to incentives”; it thought everything could be fixed through top-down regulation. New Labour broke with that fallacy, adopting a more pragmatic approach to markets; but what we see now is the party sliding back into Old Labour ways. Look at the restrictions it has imposed on the labour market – hiking the minimum wage (41% of the median wage in 2000; 61% today) and extending day-one rights for employees. Such moves may be well-intended, but are blind to the reality that if you make offering jobs “more expensive” and “more inflexible”, employers will offer fewer jobs. So while in most high-income nations the percentage of 15- to 64-year-olds in employment has risen in recent years, in the UK it has fallen. Same goes for Labour’s new protections for people in rented accommodation: they will benefit current tenants, but hurt future ones by shrinking the market. Labour’s reforms are taking us back “to what we know will not work”.

We need to nationalise the European Court

Jonathan Sumption

The Daily Telegraph

Torture; slave labour; rigged or secret trials: these were the abuses the UK and other nations had in mind 75 years ago this month when they signed the European Convention on Human Rights. How things have changed, says Jonathan Sumption. Over the years, the judges in Strasbourg have promiscuously expanded that original vision. Anything can now be a right in need of protection if they deem it in the spirit of the convention. And this “living instrument” doctrine is being used to make laws over the heads of legislators and voters. To grasp how undemocratic the system has become, consider last year’s judgment against Switzerland about climate change. Strasbourg judges held that the right to privacy, protected by Article 8, included a right to require one’s government to have statutory rules in place for achieving net zero by 2050 – outrageous, given that Swiss voters had rejected that very legislation in a referendum. And that is why Britain should now withdraw from the ECHR and re-enact the convention in domestic law, requiring it to be “interpreted exclusively by the UK courts according to its language, like any other statute”.

Why so many have ceased playing doubles

Editorial

The Economist

Human history has undergone a sea change in recent years, says The Economist. Across the rich world, “the norm of marriage is being abandoned”. More than a third of adults in Sweden and Finland now live alone. In the US, 50% of men and 41% of women aged 25 to 34 are single – double the proportion of 50 years ago. In part, this is a tale of liberation: as the barriers excluding women from the workplace have crumbled and the stigma of singlehood receded, women no longer have to put up with abusive partners, and have more scope to decide how to lead their lives. But the flipside is that going solo is often more a predicament than a choice: in national surveys, 60-73% of single people admit they’d rather be in a relationship. That they are not reflects the fact that, for one reason or another, “women’s standards have grown more exacting” – perhaps dating apps have made them more picky; perhaps too many men have fallen behind educationally. Who knows? Whatever the reason, the rise of singlehood is set to reshape our world, and everyone from the taxman to the construction worker “had better prepare” for it.

IT MUST BE TRUE... I read it in the tabloids

A Facebook group devoted to “barefoot living” in the UK has been infiltrated by “foot fetishists”, The Times reports. The group was designed for people to share experiences of barefoot hiking and the like; but administrators have now had to bring in new rules – including a ban on photos of “just feet” – owing to a rise in people lurking in the group and making inappropriate requests. New members are now warned that this is “not a foot fetish group”: “Nothing against you,” a message to them reads, “but it’s not that kind of group.”



A spider with markings resembling a human face has gone viral in Thailand. The photo of a crab spider – a harmless species known for its sideways movements – was first shared on a Thai Facebook group, the Bangkok Post reports.

A horse breeder near Newmarket has received an official noise complaint – due to “constant neighing” from her stables. Mandy Young, who keeps at least 12 horses in her Suffolk stables, said the letter came while three of her foals were being weaned. That can lead to a “little bit more neighing than usual”, she admitted; but said the “petty” letter had upset her. Newmarket, she pointed out, is the “home of horse racing”.

Two musicians have found an alternative use for the world’s longest fence: they’ve turned it into a musical instrument. Jon Rose and partner Hollis Taylor use bows to make sounds from the 3,500-mile barbed-wire Dingo Fence, intended to keep dingoes in the Australian outback away from sheep. “It seems like a fence is probably just one sound,” says Rose, “but it’s an extraordinary reservoir of sonic possibilities.”

Mamdani's victory: a socialist mayor for New York

Few politicians have risen to power with such meteoric speed as Zohran Mamdani, said David Wallace-Wells in *The New York Times*. In February, he was barely registering 1% in polls for the New York mayoral race. Yet he won the Democratic nomination – and last week comfortably won the election, securing more votes than any New York City mayoral candidate since 1969. He did this at the age of just 34, as an avowed socialist. It's remarkable. While his rival, former governor Andrew Cuomo, “desperately caricatured” him as an Islamic fundamentalist, Mamdani won over voters by remaining tightly focused on cost-of-living issues. He showed an “exceptional talent” for creating and holding together a broad coalition united “by a growing affordability crisis” and “by simple rage” at inequality and corruption. In his victory speech, Mamdani took a defiant swipe at the president, declaring that “if anyone can show a nation betrayed by Donald Trump how to defeat him, it is the city that gave rise to him”.



The campaign's focus on the cost of living resonated

Mamdani should enjoy the moment, said Coleman Hughes in *The Free Press*. If history is any guide, the “celebration may be short-lived... From the Soviet Union to Venezuela, the antidote to Marxism has always been experiencing Marxism.” His proposals will almost all be counterproductive, said John R. Puri in *National Review*. New York City has one of the most tightly regulated housing markets in the US. “Not coincidentally”, it also has one of the most expensive rental markets, and persistent housing shortages. Mamdani plans to double down on the failed policy of rent control, which will only make things worse. He also believes, wrongly, that city-run grocery shops are the answer to high food prices. And he wants to make all bus travel free, which, if Albuquerque's experiment is anything to go by, will turn buses into “homeless shelters on

wheels”. Republicans should leave him to his naive ideological fantasies, said Itxu Díaz in *The American Spectator*. As the saying goes: “Never interrupt your enemy when he's making a mistake.” On paper, Trump should make mince-meat of Mamdani, said Gerard Baker in *The Wall Street Journal*. A socialist, an immigrant, the son of a movie director and a professor of postcolonialism, with a degree in “African studies” – there are so many lines of attack. But Republicans should bear in mind that Mamdani's success comes from addressing voters' genuine

concerns. The fact is, it's hard to get by in New York today unless you have wealthy parents or work for an investment bank, hedge fund, tech company or law firm. “Economic fairness” is a winning political message, agreed Chauncey DeVega on *Salon*. Voters are sick of the excesses of the “Trumpian Gilded Age”. Mamdani's message should “strike fear” in the hearts of administration officials.

New York is “a fantastically difficult city to govern” at the best of times, said Ross Barkan in *New York Magazine*. It has America's largest education and police departments, and a municipal budget that tops \$100bn. For Mamdani to deliver his campaign promises will be tough, but not impossible. Free buses will cost less than \$1bn a year – a relatively “minuscule” amount. And while a tax hike to fund a \$6bn universal-childcare programme may prove trickier, the idea “polls well and faces relatively little political opposition”. The big challenge will be dealing with Trump, who has labelled Mamdani a “communist” and vowed to withhold federal cash from the city. He's sure to deploy the National Guard to the city as part of his anti-immigrant crackdown. How Mamdani reacts “will likely determine whether he, as mayor, is ultimately successful”.

Tucker Carlson has lost the plot

Thomas D. Howes

Civitas Outlook

“I have never been a fan of Tucker Carlson,” says Thomas D. Howes. There was a time, though, when I could forgive conservatives for enjoying the former Fox News star's “brand of political entertainment”. It was McDonald's, yes, but, as they say, “everyone has their McDonald's”. While he may have been a loudmouth, Carlson was a “libertarian-leaning conservative who operated within a broadly conservative, classical liberal framework”. Yet over the past few years, he has moved beyond the pale by defending Russia's invasion of Ukraine and voicing increasingly extreme views. His “anti-Israel, even antisemitic insinuations” have grown louder, never more so than in his recent interview with the white nationalist activist Nick Fuentes, an avowed admirer of Hitler and Stalin. Carlson happily nodded along as Fuentes inveighed against “organised Jewry in America”. The interview, a clear “attempt to normalise” the egregious Fuentes, outraged even some of the *Maga* faithful. Like “frogs slowly boiling in water”, many conservatives have gradually rationalised Carlson's poisonous, anti-immigrant rhetoric, caught up in the tribal conflict with the Left. But his embrace of Fuentes might perhaps be what breaks the spell – and finally divides the Republican base between real conservatives, and “those who want to remain on Carlson's sinking ship”.

All hail the Ozempic effect

Bryan Walsh

Vox

A remarkable trend is emerging in America, says Bryan Walsh. Adult obesity rates, which for decades have only ever climbed upwards, are suddenly moving in the opposite direction. Having peaked at 39.9% in 2022, the US adult obesity rate has now dropped to 37%. There's little mystery as to why. It's a testament to the remarkable effectiveness of appetite-suppressing GLP-1 drugs such as Ozempic and Wegovy. Use of these weight-loss injectables is growing fast: 12.4% of US adults reported taking them in the second and third quarters of 2025, up from 5.8% in early 2024. This translates into millions fewer people needing treatment for diabetes, heart disease, sleep apnea and joint issues. GLP-1s have their drawbacks beyond their high cost: some patients experience serious side effects, and people commonly regain weight when they stop taking them. But these drugs are only likely to improve and get cheaper over time. Admittedly, there's something “uncomfortable about the idea of solving obesity primarily through a drug”. In an ideal world, we'd fix it by eating healthier food and taking more exercise. But let's face it: in the “obesogenic” world that Americans inhabit today, these medicines “seem to offer the best chance to tilt the scales back in our favour”.

Shein in Paris: has the fashion capital surrendered its soul?

The Walmartification of French fashion is now complete, said Sophie Coignard in *Le Point (Paris)*. To widespread Parisian disgust, one of our most glamorous department stores, BHV, is now officially home to the Chinese online juggernaut Shein: it was in this landmark building that the ultra-fast-fashion company opened its first-ever bricks and mortar premises last week. Don't look on this as "just another retail opening", said James Tidmarsh in *The Spectator*. "It's cultural surrender." For more than a century, BHV has "embodied a certain Parisian ideal" of accessible luxury, craftsmanship and good taste. "Now it's flogging throwaway polyester" stitched in exploitative Asian factories; tat which, until now, was only available on Shein's website alongside 600,000 other cheap goods. "It is proof that Paris, once the world's fashion capital, is now renting out its soul to Chinese algorithms."

We French are supposedly scandalised by Shein's arrival, said Erwan Sezec in *Le Point*. And certainly Shein's grand opening was assailed by angry crowds protesting against the Asian giant's vile labour and commercial practices. These are well documented: a recent investigation revealed extensive evidence of forced labour, with workers in some factories forced to work 18-hour shifts for just £0.03 an item. And the discovery that child-like sex dolls were being sold on Shein's website resulted in a threat to ban the website in France unless they were removed. Yet for all the "virtuous rhetoric" and the snobbery, the French are still "addicted to fast fashion": every single respondent in a recent



Fast fashion has invaded a bastion of French style

survey admitted to buying clothing from a fast-fashion brand this year, whether it were China's Shein and Temu, or more traditional European players such as H&M and Zara. And fully 35% of French shoppers – enticed by its "rock-bottom prices", targeted algorithms and "discounting techniques" – admit to having bought something from Shein itself last year, said Stéphane Vernay in *Ouest-France (Rennes)*. They're no doubt familiar with the accusations of deplorable behaviour levelled against Shein... "but who cares? The urge to buy is stronger." Shein's tills in Paris were ringing last week, and it now plans to open five more locations in France.

You'd have thought Europe's politicians would be trying to shield our manufacturers from this onslaught, said James Tidmarsh. Not a bit of it. In France and in the UK in particular, they've opened the door to the Chinese: they've handed our textile industry to companies such as Shein; they've opened our roads to carmakers such as BYD and MG – and they call it "progress". Progress? Our manufacturers just can't compete with these regulation-skirting companies. "We're soon not going to have any industry left at all." Only the US president has clocked this "unprecedented trade offensive", said Gaëtan de Capèle in *Le Figaro (Paris)*. Trump has already "built a wall imposing a 100% tax on parcels from Shein and its acolytes"; shipments to the US have dropped 40% as a result. Yet for all "its unrivalled regulatory nit-picking", Brussels won't be able to halt the influx for another few years – by which time countless homegrown businesses will have gone to the wall.

Massacre in the favela: Rio's police take on the gangs

"In Rio de Janeiro, the term 'public safety' has become synonymous with 'public massacre'," said Tom Farias in *Folha de S. Paulo*. On 29 October, a square in the Penha neighbourhood was turned into an open-air morgue – following the deadliest police raid in our country's history, in which some 2,500 officers swept their way through one of the city's dirt-poor favelas, killing more than 132 suspected gang members in a so-called "defence operation". It was the fourth such massacre carried out under Governor Cláudio Castro – but it was by far the most barbaric. Many of the men had been shot in the back of the head, clearly executed. Their "decapitated, dismembered, stabbed and gunshot-disfigured" bodies were laid out in the streets, said an editorial in the same paper. The executions were almost indiscriminate: of the identified dead, at least "20 had no prior police record or criminal history", and in the aftermath, the police reportedly allowed crucial evidence to disappear. With its "death squads" and police corruption, this operation recalls the "worst moments of the military dictatorship".

Liberal elites are horrified, said Iolanda Fonseca in *The Rio Times*. But favela residents "overwhelmingly back" the raid. A huge 88% of them approve of the police operation, according to a recent poll. That's because they know what life in the favelas is really like, said Adele Cardin in the same paper. Millions of people in these labyrinthine shanty towns now live



More than 132 people were killed in the raid

under the total control of the terrifying Comando Vermelho (CV) crime syndicate, which over the past five decades has transformed from a bunch of "drug peddlers into sophisticated territorial overlords". Residents' movements are tightly controlled between barricades made out of stolen train tracks; night-vision-equipped drones hover overhead, monitoring their every move. Inside, the CV enforces a monopoly on everything, from the sale of cooking gas (at an extortionate R\$150 a bottle, compared with the statewide average of R\$97), to internet access. "This isn't just crime; it's a parallel state trapping the poor in poverty and fear."

It's true that many residents are fed up, said Ruth de Aquino in *O Globo (Rio de Janeiro)*. But if the authorities really want to fix this problem, then what the favelas need is "genuine political will and investment" to establish a state presence that can push out the gangs. That includes providing basic sanitation, better roads and housing, and access to public facilities. A massacre like this, on the other hand, will provoke only "more hatred and revenge". "We've seen this story before," agreed Merval Pereira in the same paper. In 2010, the army was drafted in to invade the Complexo do Alemão slum and drive out the gangs once and for all. The drug traffickers fled; the operation was declared a success. But without rigorous legislation and intelligence operations, guess what happened: "Well, they all came back."

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What the scientists are saying...

The case for more PSA tests

Screening all men over 50 for prostate cancer could significantly reduce the number who die from the disease, a major study has found. Prostate cancer is Britain's second-biggest cancer killer in men, responsible for more than 12,000 deaths a year. However, men in the UK are not routinely screened for it because the main test – which looks for levels of prostate-specific antigen (PSA) in the blood – is not very reliable, creating a high risk of overdiagnosis and overtreatment. Men over 50 can, however, request a test from their GP. The research, for the long-term ERSPC study, involved 162,236 men aged 55 to 69 from eight European countries, almost half of whom were invited for a PSA test every four years; the others acted as a control group. Twenty-three years on, those who were screened were 13% less likely to have died from prostate cancer. The study did show that screening leads to “considerable harms”, but these were less prevalent than previously estimated. The findings, said the Dutch researchers, boost the case for a targeted approach, in which men in high-risk groups are invited to have regular PSA tests. That might include black men, who are twice as likely to get and die from prostate cancer than white men. The UK National Screening Committee is currently reviewing the evidence on prostate screening, and is due to publish its recommendations this year.

Why the sleep-deprived can't focus

A disrupted night's sleep can play havoc with our ability to concentrate, and now scientists think they have identified what causes this foggy. Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have found that if the brain isn't able to conduct essential “maintenance” at night,



Sheltering from the Blitz, Aldwych 1940

it does it during the day – which leads to lapses in focus. The team devised two tests of attention, one of which involved watching a cross on a screen and hitting a key when it turned into a square, and asked 26 people to do them once when well rested and again when sleep-deprived. Meanwhile, their brain activity was measured via an electroencephalogram cap and an fMRI scanner. Unsurprisingly, they reacted more slowly when they were sleep-deprived, and sometimes failed to respond at all. The scans revealed that these lapses coincided with the brain releasing waves of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) – a process that occurs during sleep, and which helps wash away waste that has accumulated during the day. In the journal *Nature Neuroscience*, the researchers posit that when we've not slept, the brain does this “housekeeping” during the day – but it comes at a cost, in terms of impaired alertness and slower reaction times.

An ancient Egyptian in London

Londoners who were forced to shelter in Tube stations during the Blitz made a dismaying discovery: the network was infested with mosquitoes. The London Underground mosquito, or *Culex pipiens f. molestus*, was so well adapted to the Underground, many assumed it had evolved there, from *Culex pipiens f. pipiens*, which lives in the open and feasts on birds. But new research confirms that its roots go far further back. By analysing the DNA from about 800 mosquitoes from around the world, scientists at Princeton University have concluded that the London Underground variety originated in the Middle East. They believe it evolved from its bird-biting cousin up to 10,000 years ago, most likely in the irrigation channels of ancient Egypt. It seems to have travelled north, but would have struggled to take hold in northern climes – “until there were underground structures to occupy during the winter”, said senior author Dr Lindy McBride.

Walking “wards off Alzheimer's”

Walking just 3,000 steps a day appears to slow the onset of dementia. For a new 14-year study, 296 people aged 50 to 90 and free of memory problems wore step-counters for a week. They were also given scans to measure levels in their brains of amyloid and tau – two proteins linked to Alzheimer's. The participants then underwent regular cognitive tests. The results showed that among the participants with elevated levels of amyloid at the start, those who did 3,000 to 5,000 steps a day began to show signs of cognitive problems three years later than those who were less active, while getting in 5,000 to 7,500 steps appeared to delay cognitive decline by seven years, on average.

Secrets of the bowhead whale

With a lifespan that can exceed 200 years, the bowhead whale lives longer than any other mammal; it is also rarely affected by cancer. Now, scientists have identified one of its secrets. All living organisms suffer DNA damage as they age, and if it isn't repaired, the cells can develop mutations which, in high enough numbers, can lead to cancer. The team from the University of Rochester, New York, showed that bowhead whales are unusually good at repairing a type of damage in which both strands of the DNA double helix are broken. As a result, they acquire fewer mutations and their DNA stays pristine for longer. “What we are finding is that these kinds of repairs are very important for long life,” said Professor Vera Gorbunova. Further tests showed that the whales have high levels of CIRBP, a protein involved in DNA repair. When the whale CIRBP was added to cells from humans and fruit flies, the human cells were able to repair twice as many double-strand breaks, while the fly cells lived longer and were more resistant to radiation. Bowheads are known to make more CIRBP when the temperature drops, suggesting that brief exposure to extreme cold (or drugs that mimic it) could boost levels in humans.



Bowheads: can live for centuries

Winter flu SOS

Hospital bosses have warned that the UK may be on the brink of a winter flu crisis. The number of cases has started rising earlier than usual this year – there have been three times as many as normal at this point – which is worrying, because millions of those eligible have not yet had their flu jabs. As of last week, 13 million people had been vaccinated, five million fewer than were vaccinated last year, when nearly 8,000 people died of flu. Officials have also noted that Australia's flu season, which is often a predictor of what is facing the UK, has been the worst on record. The NHS has issued an “SOS” to people to have the jab. Those eligible to have it on the NHS include people aged 65 and over, under-65s in clinical risk groups, pregnant women, care-home residents and carers, and children. Flu admission rates so far have been highest in over-85s, and children over the age of four.

Pick of the week's

Gossip

Alan Hollinghurst was this year's proud winner of the prestigious David Cohen Prize for lifetime achievement in literature. When Harold Pinter won the prize in 1995, he informed the crowd that he'd recently come under the scrutiny of a far harsher judge, says *The Times*. He'd met a six-year-old boy, whose mother had introduced the playwright by saying: "This man is a very good writer." The boy looked Pinter up and down sceptically, and said: "Can he do a 'W'?"



The late Jilly Cooper wanted to be cremated; she'd scattered her own mother's ashes in the garden of her Cotswolds home, and installed a headstone, carved with her name, dates (1906-1997) and an image of a rabbit running over some grass. The memorial had many admirers. Once, when Cooper was entertaining racehorse trainer Charlie Brooks, her husband Leo went to check if Charlie's chauffeur was all right, and found him standing in front of "Mummy's" grave. The chauffeur looked at Leo, and said: "I must say, Sir, that was a very good innings. For a rabbit."

Matt Faulding has stood down as secretary of the Parliamentary Labour Party – a job that often requires phoning up prospective candidates and gently enquiring about the veracity of certain rumours. The calls can be awkward, says *The Times*. Once, Faulding rang a candidate about an affair (an allegation which turned out to be baseless). "Can we talk about this later?" the candidate said. "I'm with my family in the car and you're on speakerphone."

Asylum: should we copy Denmark?

At Labour's party conference in September, Shabana Mahmood pledged to do "whatever it takes" to regain control of Britain's borders. It looks like that means copying Denmark, said Millie Cooke in *The Independent*. The Home Secretary dispatched officials to Copenhagen last month to study the country's restrictive immigration regime, which last year succeeded in reducing asylum claims to a 40-year low. While refugees who are targeted personally by foreign regimes are normally given long-term protection by Denmark, those fleeing

dangers such as civil wars are now granted only temporary leave to remain while the threat persists. Refugees with residency rights must meet strict criteria for their partner to join them. Both must be 24 or older, and must pass a language test; the partner in Denmark must not have claimed benefits for three years. Mahmood is expected to announce a shake-up of the UK's asylum system along Danish lines this month.

Denmark has shown that "a centre-left party can be ruthlessly restrictive on immigration – and politically rewarded for it", said Leo Cendrowicz in *The i Paper*. Its government has slowed the inward flow of migrants to "a trickle", neutralising the populist Right. Yet this drive has come at a cost. It has alienated progressive



A migrant boat in the English Channel

voters and left asylum seekers excluded from Danish society and prone to poverty. Some Danes worry that it has made their country a crueller place. Similar reforms would certainly help Labour counter the threat from Reform UK, said Rakib Ehsan on *UnHerd*. The hard part for Mahmood will be getting her colleagues to agree to them. A few Labour backbenchers are already condemning the Danish model as "hardcore" and racist.

For some on the Left, any attempt to restrict the movement of people is "a form of racism", said *The Daily Telegraph*. But to tighten the rules on family reunion and limit the stays of some refugees, as the Danes have, would simply be a common-sense tweak to a system widely recognised as being "far too generous".

Copying Denmark is the only way we'll stop the small boat crossings, agreed William Hague in *The Times*. Going after people smugglers is futile; history shows that you can only defeat an illicit trade by eliminating the demand for it. With 71% of the public telling pollsters that immigration is too high, the Government must face down backbench resistance to these reforms and demonstrate that mainstream politicians can get a grip on this problem. Ministers otherwise risk "proving to voters that if they want borders to be controlled, they need Nigel Farage".

Sick note culture: a ticking time bomb

Britain is in the middle of a "quiet crisis", said Octavius Black in *The Daily Telegraph*: one that is dragging our economy down, and trapping millions of people in a cycle of dependency. That's the conclusion of the former John Lewis chairman Sir Charlie Mayfield who, in a new report entitled "Keep Britain Working", warns that a staggering one in five working-age adults (more than nine million people) are now out of the labour force, largely due to ill health or disability. Mayfield cites plenty of factors that have helped create this "sick note culture", said Sean O'Grady in *The Independent*. Hard-pressed GPs are poorly placed to assess whether a person is fit for work, so end up signing off 93% of those who ask; there's a sharp rise in mental ill health among young people; and a "culture of fear" surrounding health issues in the workplace because of legal ramifications. But the cost to the nation is astonishing – equating to 7% of GDP. "This is far from inevitable," says Mayfield. "Other countries do much better. We can too."

"Mayfield is not wrong in his diagnosis," said Ross Clark in *The Spectator*: the UK is suffering from an "epidemic of worklessness". It's just a shame he has to be so "terribly nice and civilised" – so "John Lewis", in fact – when it comes to his solutions. Mayfield's fix is to shift responsibility away from individuals and the

NHS, and towards employers – who are being asked to new forge a "new deal" with workers. That's overly "wishy-washy". And it ignores the real problem: it is "far too easy to claim out-of-work benefits". Claimants used to have to present themselves in person to be assessed for their capability to work. But post-pandemic, most interviews are conducted over the phone or online. "There is no guarantee that the claimants are actually in the country, let alone too ill." Many don't even exist: a Bulgarian gang used thousands of fake identities to steal £53m from the UK benefits system. Instead, we should make people undergo an in-person assessment, and if they pass, appoint them to a job. "If they refuse, they should not receive a bean." That would "end workshy culture in an instant".

Something has to be done about this "ticking time bomb", said Camilla Cavendish in the FT – not just for financial reasons, but because it is "starting to strain social solidarity". Over half of those polled now say welfare is too generous. As the resentment of the so-called "shirkers" by the "strivers" grows, more voters are heading to the political margins, Left and Right. "Labour can't afford to give up on welfare reform." Yet delivering it would require great determination, and real honesty about the problem – "neither of which this Government has yet shown".

Budget plans: a “whiff of incoherence”

“The frenetic pace of the briefings and leaks” from the Treasury is such that you really have to ask, said Tim Shipman in *The Spectator*: “What the blithering heck is Rachel Reeves up to?” Last Tuesday, the Chancellor gave a speech blaming the parlous state of the national finances on the Tories, Brexit, the pandemic, foreign wars, Trump’s tariffs, low productivity, and so on. A few days later, it was reported that she had warned the Office for Budget Responsibility that she plans to raise income tax at the Budget later this month, contrary to Labour’s manifesto promises – possibly alongside a 2p cut in national insurance, to protect the less well-off. A few days after that, she hinted that she would lift the cap on benefits for families with more than two children. There’s a strong “whiff of incoherence” surrounding her plans. She seems to be saying: Brexit’s awful, but we have no plans to rejoin. The economy’s unproductive, but we’re still going to tax people more. The public finances are in deep trouble, so what are we going to do? Increase welfare spending.



Reeves: should she pull the lever?

This Government has spent a lot of time “trying to camouflage its essential character even from itself”, said Robert Shrimley in the FT. Talk of austerity and fiscal rules has distracted us from the truth: “this is a high-spending, high-taxing

Government”. Reeves has committed the UK to an extra £70bn per year of public spending, and has already raised taxes by £40bn. And, contrary to what she promised last year, she’s clearly coming back for more. If Reeves does indeed raise income tax, there will be an almighty row, said Martin Kettle in *The Guardian*. Since Thatcher’s time, the British ruling class has been committed to ever-lower personal taxes and a small state. So the Right will be scandalised, and the press will be furious. “Labour MPs in marginal seats will be scared.”

Middle-class voters will be worried. But we must be honest about why this is necessary. “It cannot be said too often that cutting the state and reducing personal taxes have created the problems that Reeves is tasked with fixing.”

Of course she’ll be punished if she breaks her manifesto promise by raising income tax, said Rupert Harrison in *The Times*. But if Reeves wants to keep the public finances in a decent state, and give the markets confidence, there’s a very good case for pulling that “one big lever”. She may as well embrace the decision, rather than dithering and apologising for it: it will end “the cycle of speculation and instability”. But that “will take political bravery and a clear story about the gain that will come from the pain”.

The John Lewis ad: touching, or just weird?

Over the past 18 years, the launch of the John Lewis Christmas advert has established itself as a key point in the UK’s festive calendar, said Ed Davies in the FT. The ads are, of course, designed to be miniature weepies – to create a warm fuzzy feeling towards Britain’s favourite department store; but for many fathers of teenage boys (and some mothers too), this year’s has hit especially hard. Set in a middle-class home, the ad is about a man who finds under the tree a last unopened gift, from his silent, headphone-wearing son. It is a vinyl copy of Alison Limerick’s 1990 club hit *Where Love Lives*, and it transports dad back to a 1990s rave, said *The Guardian*; the pace then changes and dad, now alone in a dark space, sees his son as a toddler and a baby. We then return to their home for a hug – and the tagline “If you can’t find the words, find the gift”. So yes, it’s a shameless tearjerker, but it also taps into an urgent national conversation about the crisis in boyhood, sparked in part by the TV drama *Adolescence*.



Transported to a 1990s rave

The masculinity crisis is not a very festive theme, said Jan Moir in the Daily Mail. And the

whole ad is weirdly disturbing, said Simon Mills in *The Times*. When I went to acid house raves, the very last thing I’d have wanted to see, looming out of the darkness, is any kind of relation, from the present or the future. Then there is the unspoken “recreational drugs connection”. For anyone who was part of that scene, *Where Love Lives* will bring back memories of being “absolutely wasted on E” during

nights of woozy, loved-up hedonism – and of the agonising comedowns that followed them. This is not touching family fare: no one wants to see dad gurning. It’s very unChristmassy.

I suppose the boy’s gift is a sign that he realises that his dad is a person, who has had a life of his own and has tastes equivalent to his, said Stuart Heritage in *The Guardian*. That is “a profound moment for a child”. And there is something reassuring in the obsolescent traditions the ad celebrates: going into a bricks and mortar shop, buying an actual object. But for Gen Z, this ad must look mind-bendingly anachronistic. What will John Lewis show us next year? A “farmer trading a goat for a sack of stubble turnips”?

Wit & Wisdom

“Coincidence is God’s way of remaining anonymous.”
Adage cited in The Atlantic

“Old age is the most unexpected of all the things that happen to a man.”
Leon Trotsky, quoted in The Daily Telegraph

“I always wanted to be somebody, but I should have been more specific.”
Attrib. Jane Wagner, quoted in The i Paper

“The most successful people I know believe in themselves almost to the point of delusion.”
Sam Altman, quoted in The Knowledge

“No man can be virtuous unless he has the strength of character to be wicked.”
La Rochefoucauld, quoted in The London Review of Books

“If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs, it’s just possible you haven’t grasped the situation.”
Jean Kerr, quoted in the Daily Mail

“Jokes are the resistance.”
Comedian Sammy Obeid, quoted on Salvos Online

“Whose bread I eat, his song I sing.”
German saying, quoted in Forbes

“Wanting to meet an author because you like his work is like wanting to meet a duck because you like pâté.”
Margaret Atwood, quoted on Tortoise

Statistics of the week

611,300 primary school places in England were left unfilled in the 2023/24 academic year, 12% of 4.95 million places available.
Nuffield Foundation/FT

Since May, Reform UK has won 41 council seats in by-elections, but it has also lost 36 councillors: 18 have quit, 11 have been expelled, six suspended, and one defected to UKIP.
Politics Home/Daily Mail

Football: how Sunderland shook up the Premier League

When Sunderland were promoted to the Premier League last season, after an eight-year absence, questions were asked about Régis Le Bris's side, said Cerys Jones and Anantaajith Raghuraman on *The Athletic*. How would a manager whose top-flight experience was limited to two years with French club Lorient fare in England's ferocious top division? "How would the team with the worst defensive record of the three promoted sides stand up to elite attackers?" With more than a quarter of the season gone, the answers to such questions look overwhelmingly positive, said Martin Hardy in *The Sunday Times*. Sunderland are fourth in the table, and are a team who "do not know when they are beaten" – as they proved once again last Saturday by drawing 2-2 with leaders Arsenal. Their campaign has featured much "late drama": a stoppage-time winner early in the season against Brentford; another recently against Chelsea. Against Arsenal, they again left things late, before salvaging a point in the 95th minute thanks to the "flying boot" of Dutch striker Brian Brobbey.

Arguably, Le Bris's masterstroke this season has been bringing in Swiss midfielder Granit Xhaka as captain, said Dominic King in the *Daily Mail*. The 33-year-old, who played for Arsenal for seven years before moving to Bayer Leverkusen in 2023, has been a "pivotal figure", inspiring the team with his "energy and



Xhaka: a "remarkable coup"

influence" and providing three assists – the most of any Sunderland player. Someone of Xhaka's calibre would not have lacked for options when he left Leverkusen; so for Sunderland to "bring him to Wearside" was a "remarkable coup".

Sunderland's strong start to the season bucks the trend, said Miles Starforth in *The Guardian*. Most newly promoted clubs fare badly in the Premier League; in each of the past two seasons, the three newly promoted clubs have been relegated. At this stage, by contrast, Sunderland are doing better than any promoted side since Hull in 2008/09. Nor are they the only new arrivals "giving the competition a shake-up", said Mike McGrath in *The Daily Telegraph*. Burnley and Leeds, both promoted last season, are doing better than expected, and are hovering above the relegation zone. One reason mooted for the success of all three clubs is the return of "direct football", with set-pieces and long balls "back in fashion" – a shift that could favour less skilful teams. Another "pertinent factor" may be the fact that all three were active in the summer transfer market, while some established clubs, perhaps assuming they wouldn't be threatened by the new arrivals, took their "foot off the gas". Arguably, the likes of Wolves and Nottingham Forest (currently bottom and second bottom respectively) are "paying the price" for such complacency.

Formula 1: a "dream weekend" for Lando Norris

"You have to say, the stars are aligning" for Britain's Lando Norris, said Tom Cary in *The Daily Telegraph*. Last month, in Mexico, the McLaren driver produced one of the performances of his life to win his first Grand Prix since August. Now, he has backed that up with an "absolute dream weekend" in Brazil, during which he powered to "flawless" wins in both the "sprint race and the feature race". It means that with three race weekends to go, he leads his McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri by 24 points – which is "almost a full race win". Whisper it, but the drivers' championship increasingly looks like "his to lose". It was at São Paulo a year ago that Norris's "title hopes evaporated in a miserable effort on a tricky wet track", said Molly Hudson in *The Times*. That defeat led many to question whether he had the "mettle of a champion". His struggles continued during the early part of this season, when he felt that his McLaren hadn't been tuned to suit



Norris: "his to lose"

his driving style. Finally happy with his car, he now very much looks "the champion in waiting".

Norris's performance was one of "precision and control", but it was Max Verstappen who stole the show on Sunday with an "extraordinary drive", said Giles Richards in *The Guardian*. During a "dire qualifying", the Dutchman had struggled with the setup of his Red Bull – and started the race in the pit lane. But after "taking a new engine", he found the pace that had previously eluded him, and "scythed through the field" to finish third. While he has little real hope of catching Norris, whom he trails by 49 points, it was a reminder that he can't be completely written off. And Norris isn't taking anything for

granted: after his victory, he warned that he "did not expect to be competitive at the next round in Las Vegas" – where he has never done especially well. He stressed that there's "a long way to go".

England "exorcise their demons" against Fiji

Perhaps the nadir of Steve Borthwick's tenure as England's rugby coach was his side's 22-30 loss to Fiji at Twickenham in August 2023, said Gavin Mairs in *The Daily Telegraph*. Last Saturday, on the same ground, his team exorcised the demons of that defeat, with a 38-18 victory over the Pacific Islanders. In so doing, they matched the "dizzying moments of the first flush of Eddie Jones's tenure" by completing nine Test wins in a row. Yet overall, England's performance was "unconvincing". Fiji caused problems "in every aspect of play", and for most of its duration the match hung in the balance: Borthwick's men went into the final quarter with a slender three-point lead. It was only then that they finally "took control",



Arundell: "dangerous pace"

scoring three tries – including one by Henry Arundell (playing his first game for England in two years) that showed how "dangerous his pace can be".

England will "need to find another gear" if they are to have a chance against New Zealand this Saturday, said Robert Kitson in *The Guardian*. Yet they can take some positives from this game.

A year ago, they tended to fade in the final quarter; nowadays, they're finishing matches "more strongly". And they have some "rare talent lurking in reserve" – with the likes of Jamie George and Henry Pollock making an impact from the bench. "It all made for a thought-provoking evening", ahead of the "ultimate autumn Test" against the All Blacks.

Sporting headlines

Tennis Elena Rybakina upset world No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka 6-3, 7-6 to win the WTA Finals in Riyadh. She won £3.8m – the largest payout in women's tennis history.

Football Manchester City narrowed Arsenal's lead in the Premier League to four points with a 3-0 win over Liverpool. Chelsea moved to third place by beating Wolves 3-0.

Cricket England touched down in Australia ahead of their Ashes series. Before the first Test, which begins in Perth on 21 November, Ben Stokes's team will play just one warm-up game, against the England Lions.

Pick of the week's correspondence

Slow progress...

To *The Times*

Matthew Syed is right that our political and planning systems have become sclerotic, trying to satisfy every interest group and avert every risk until nothing is achieved except very slowly at enormous cost.

I chair a charity that is trying to build a 55-mile cycleway alongside the River Derwent. A planning application for just three miles of the route, although supported by the landowner, has involved consulting various bodies on archaeology, heritage, arboriculture, water quality, fauna and flora, biodiversity net gain and flooding. The requirements of each consultee conflict with those of others, and there is no dialogue between them, causing repeated consultations.

After 18 months this proposal still awaits permission. How can our economy grow with this level of inertia?

Derek Latham, president, Derbyshire Historic Buildings Trust

...and slower change

To *The Times*

It appears as though the purpose of inquiries and reviews is not to find out what happened so that it doesn't happen again, but to seem to be taking whatever happened seriously and to introduce delay into revealing what everyone knew already. What they do not appear to be good for is identifying who was responsible for what happened and providing a platform for remedial action.

During my career, I wrote 25 serious case reviews on the outcomes of child-death inquiries. The conclusions and recommendations of the last report I wrote, about five years ago, were almost identical to those written by Louis Blom-Cooper in 1985 on the inquiry into the circumstances of the death of Jasmine Beckford. I echo Matthew Syed's despair.

Mick Muir, Oldham, Greater Manchester

Reassessing Reaganism

To *The Economist*

You credited Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher with establishing an orthodoxy for "justified and sustainable"

Exchange of the week

The game of thrones

To *The New Statesman*

I loved Will Lloyd's take-down of the monarchy, but in one respect at least he underestimated the degree of bowing and scraping to that questionable institution. Assuming that Athelstan was the first king of England (disputed I know), we have had 1,098, not 365, years of such servitude. It was only between 1649 and 1660 that we English did not have a monarch to bow and scrape to.

Colin Richards, Spark Bridge, Cumbria

To *The New Statesman*

Will Lloyd's thought-provoking analysis of the monarchy undervalues cross-generational ties. For Edmund Burke, society is a "partnership between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born". It is easy to dismiss this as reactionary, yet the opposite is true: without a connection to our past, we become severed from our future, for once the future becomes the present, the present will be the past. An ecologically and economically conscious politics must begin with a reverence for our inherited institutions and traditions.

The institution of the monarchy esteems service, duty and obligation – a vital counterweight to the dominant liberal value of self-realisation. And the distinction between the Windsors and the institution of monarchy is a critical one in light of Andrew Mountbatten Windsor's repugnant actions. For the false comforts of moral indignation cannot compensate for the loss of our ancient constitution's timeless wisdom. We would do better to heed T.S. Eliot's recognition that "A people without history/ Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern/ Of timeless moments."

Teymour Gray, London

public debt. Reagan did quite the opposite: at his inauguration in 1981, America's public debt stood at a 50-year low of 31% of GDP. Under the 12 years of Reagan and George H.W. Bush, that ratio more than doubled, to 63%. In fact, the new orthodoxy that Reagan established in his party was for tax cuts, with delirious projections of increased revenue through growth. Before Reagan's electoral victory, Bush memorably described this as "voodoo economics". Bush faithfully continued the policy.

His son, George W. Bush, gleefully resumed it, shredding the budget surpluses attained under Bill Clinton's presidency.

Greg Price, United States

Taxing lessons

To *The Guardian*

One lesson in any new "life skills" curriculum should be on teaching school leavers about taxation. As an employer, I regularly find comprehension of how PAYE, national insurance, tax codes and student loans are calculated is minimal. An understanding

of what P6, P9, P60, P45 and P85 forms are for would help students transition into the world of employment.

William Alexander, Sevenoaks, Kent

Why Japan cleans up...

To *The Times*

You report on the recent victory of the Japanese team in the litter-picking "World Cup" in Tokyo. On a recent two-week visit to Japan, I counted exactly three pieces of litter, one of which had been inadvertently dropped by a Western tourist.

Given the lack of domestic opportunity for practice, this makes the Japanese team's victory even more remarkable.

Sebastian Cox, London

...at this World Cup

To *The Times*

Sebastian Cox should not have been surprised by the lack of litter in Japan. Most Japanese schools observe a daily *soji no jikan* (cleaning time), during which pupils and teachers

spend 10 to 20 minutes sweeping classrooms, wiping desks, mopping floors and cleaning toilets. No doubt this creates lasting habits.

At a time of straitened budgets, British schools might consider doing the same.

David Osmond, Barnoldby le Beck, Lincolnshire

Budget blindness

To *The Spectator*

What many lose sight of (most of all our Chancellor) is that by raising the minimum wage, those employees who were just above it usually seek pay rises to stay ahead of it, or employers risk losing those staff. This can then have a ripple effect through the whole organisation. It is another reason the Chancellor's last Budget had such a profound impact on companies and, in turn, the economy.

With employers' NI rises as well, company cost bases have risen significantly, stifling investment, growth and recruitment, and leading to our worsening finances and the tax rises that are now on their way.

Her recent delaying of the Budget has also put large parts of the economy on hold. It would be helpful for the UK if the Chancellor could start thinking through all the consequences of her actions.

Andrew Haynes, London

A just price for jailers

To *The Times*

How will prison difficulties be managed, let alone new prisons staffed if – as recently reported – prison officers recruited from West Africa, who make up 13-20% of new staff, do not have their two-year work visas renewed because the minimum qualifying salary for a skilled worker is rising from £29,000 a year to £41,700?

Giles Payne, Oxford



"Yeah, a lot of people think that, but it's actually the name of the doctor... Just put 'Kevin'"



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Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

Wings

by Paul McCartney

Allen Lane 576pp £35

The Week Bookshop £31.99 (incl. p&p)

Paul McCartney's post-Beatles group, Wings, was "one of the most successful bands of the 1970s – and one of the strangest", said Ian Leslie in *The Guardian*. They formed in 1971, a year after the Beatles split, because "McCartney yearned to play before audiences again" – something he hadn't done since the Beatles stopped touring in 1966. And so he asked his musically untrained wife, Linda (above, with Paul), to "help him put together a new group". Things got off to an inauspicious start, when their first album, *Wild Life*, was released to a "round of jeers". They followed that with an "unplanned tour of British universities", which involved them turning up at campuses, finding the student union, and asking "an open-mouthed social secretary if they fancied a gig that evening" – for which they'd charge 50p per ticket. Edited by cultural historian Ted Widmer, this "compelling" oral history, based on interviews with McCartney and other band members, recounts the decade Wings spent together. Telling a "story with elements of *Spinal Tap* and *Wacky Races*", it provides a "portal into a more eccentric age of pop".



After the Beatles, McCartney said he had one aim: "to grow up". This book tells the "astonishing, unruly story of how he achieved that goal", said Victoria Segal in *The Sunday Times*. By adopting a "raggle-taggle" approach – Wings would tour with his and Linda's young children in tow, along with their sheepdog Martha – he created a rock'n'roll life based on "domesticity and hippy ideals", while reconnecting with the excitement of the Beatles' early years. In time, Wings became more mainstream: their 1973 album *Band on the Run*, recorded in Lagos during a cholera epidemic, reached No. 1 on both sides of the Atlantic, and they

followed it up with the "huge" *Wings Over America* tour of 1975.

Partly because of their endlessly revolving line-up (Wings went through three lead guitarists and four drummers), their music declined in quality later in the decade, said Neil McCormick in *The Daily Telegraph*. Then, in January 1980, McCartney was arrested for marijuana possession at Tokyo airport. "It was the maddest thing in my life," he recalls. "I put a bloody great bag of the stuff right on the top of my suitcase." Although he spent just nine days in prison, the ordeal sapped his enthusiasm for touring – and Wings disbanded shortly afterwards. Despite the tone being at times "a little hagiographic", *Wings* is full of "amusing observations" – and provides a fascinating look at the band that, as Alan Partridge quipped, "the Beatles could have been".

Middleland

by Rory Stewart

Jonathan Cape 352pp £22

The Week Bookshop £19.99

In a career of great breadth – from a deputy governor in Iraq to Harvard professor and now successful podcaster – Rory Stewart's latest book represents "one of his quieter triumphs", said Patrick Galbraith in *Literary Review*. But it's "a triumph nonetheless". It collects the fortnightly columns he wrote for the *Cumberland and Westmorland Herald* during his nine years as MP for Penrith and The Border. Despite often being "produced in the dead of night (sometimes in the bath)", the pieces are "very good indeed" – and show how genuinely Stewart cared about this "half-forgotten part of Britain". Most MPs who write columns for local newspapers produce only "turgidly self-serving accounts", said Jamie Blackett in *The Daily Telegraph*. Not Stewart, whose writings are affecting and wide-ranging. Descriptions of walks across the "fells and valleys" mingle with historical reflections – on the death of Edward I, who developed dysentery after drinking Cumbrian water. And while there are detours into the nitty-gritty of Stewart's life as an MP – he describes agonising with constituents over a proposed scheme to build wind turbines, and trying to keep an agricultural college open – the overall tone is "one of curious detachment from the political process".

As a writer, Stewart has long been able to bring "intelligence and panache" to almost any subject, said David Robinson in *The Scotsman*. That is why, even if you're unfamiliar with this slice of Cumbria, the pieces in *Middleland* "stand up surprisingly well". What they don't do is make being an MP sound appealing: Stewart describes having to reply to 20,000 emails each year, and having "no real power, though everyone thinks otherwise". Being an MP, he concludes, is an "impossible job" – which is why he has left frontline politics behind him.



Novel of the week

Saltwash

by Andrew Michael Hurley

John Murray 245pp £16.99

The Week Bookshop £14.99

Known for works such as *The Loney* and *Devil's Day*, Andrew Michael Hurley is one of Britain's foremost "folk horror" writers, said James Walton in *The Times*. His latest novel is less reliant on the supernatural than its predecessors, but is "still abidingly strange". It begins with Tom Shift, a 75-year-old with terminal cancer, arriving at a hotel in the "otherworldly" Lancastrian town of Saltwash, having been invited there by a fellow sufferer called Oliver, with whom he has been corresponding as part of an NHS pen-pal scheme. Oliver, however, hasn't turned up; instead, Tom encounters a "large group of elderly people dressed to the nines for some sort of annual dinner". He stays, gets drunk, and mingles – and has an evening "far odder" than any he could have expected.

Although this "deceptively simple tale" borrows tropes from cosy crime, it ultimately snares you into something "deeper, darker and more chilling", said Liz Jensen in *The Guardian*. "Easy to read but challenging to process", it "left me entertained" – but also as "existentially shaken as Tom, its hapless everyman".

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Theatre: Othello

Theatre Royal Haymarket, London SW1 (020-7930 8800). Until 17 January Running time: 2hrs 45mins ★★★

It can be easy for Othello – manipulated and out-argued by Iago – to end up “looking like a sideshow” in the play that bears his name, said Susannah Clapp in *The Observer*. In Tom Morris’s new production, however, David Harewood is in command from the moment he strides onto the stage in general’s uniform. In 1997, he became the first black actor to play Othello at the National Theatre. Then, his performance was “impressive but sometimes strenuous”. Here, he is “utterly at ease in the entire range of the part”. An uneven production is redeemed by the acting, agreed Dominic Cavendish in *The Daily Telegraph*. Harewood proves to be a “great, under-sung Shakespearean”, while as Iago, Toby Jones exudes a gleeful nastiness.



Jones and Harewood in a staging that “grows into its horror”

Jones is convincing in the role of the Machiavellian schemer, said Alice Saville in *The Independent*, but he doesn’t “channel the inner darkness you’d expect from this destructive force”. Here, the villain has “all the looming menace of a peevish middle manager”. At one point, when he makes a racist joke about Harewood’s “statesmanlike Othello”, it prompts uneasy laughter from the audience. They’re not sure who they should be rooting for. The staging does “grow into its horror”, and build into a “deeply nasty tale of murder and manipulation”, but while Morris is good

on the physical violence – the audience “winces” when we hear a “spine snap, sharp as celery” – he is less so on the psychological violence.

It’s when the women are foregrounded, in the second half, that the production “finds its focus”, said Dominic Maxwell in *The Sunday Times*. The American actress Caitlin FitzGerald is terrific as Desdemona. By “bridging classical and contemporary sensibilities”, she “helps you to buy into” the character’s inner life, and thus the “awfulness of her murder”; and Vinette

Robinson is stunning as Emilia, her maid and Iago’s wife. By “finding more life in the story’s victims than in the insanely articulate men who talk themselves into unspeakable acts against them”, the production “ends so much stronger than it started”.

The week’s other opening

Fatherland Hampstead Theatre, London NW3 (020-7722 9301). Until 29 November

Nancy Farino’s debut play, about a father-and-daughter road trip to explore family roots in Ireland, is a “wonky gem” of immense promise. Both Jason Thorpe and Farino herself (playing the daughter) give compelling, nuanced performances (*Guardian*).

Podcasts... celebrity interviews, and a father’s secret

I didn’t expect to like James Corden’s new celebrity interview podcast, said James Marriott in *The Times*. I’m aware of the host’s mixed reputation and, frankly, I am sick of celebrity podcasts. “The whole mwah-mwah luvvy routine was vomitous enough when it was confined to Hollywood parties.” Yet **This Life of Mine** – while not totally free of back-slapping bonhomie – turns out to be highly listenable. Corden’s “years as a chat show host in America have paid off”; he’s an exceptionally skilled interviewer who knows when to prod and when to get out of the way, as he deftly steers his guests through personal and difficult terrain.

And his own status means he gets properly interesting guests: the first are hip-hop producer Dr. Dre, designer and director Tom Ford, and actress Julianne Moore. It’s not a high bar, but this is “the best celebrity podcast I’ve heard”.

As a child in the 1970s, Antony Easton sometimes wondered if his father Peter – a “gruff”, inscrutable figure, prone to “dark moods” – was an on-the-run Nazi who’d adopted an English persona. Peter received periodic visits from a strange benefactor, Mr Mann, and under his bed there was a suitcase full of German banknotes and newspaper cuttings. It was only after Peter’s death in 2009, said Patricia Nicol in *The Times*, that Easton discovered the truth – and it was rather the opposite of what he had imagined.



Peter Hans Rudolf Eisner with his sister, Helene, in Berlin

Born into a Jewish family of industrialists and art collectors in Berlin, Peter was originally Peter Hans Rudolf Eisner. He had fled to Britain aged 14 in 1939, via Prague, Warsaw and Copenhagen; and almost every member of his extended family was murdered by the Nazis. In the latest, superb series of *The History Podcast* (BBC Radio 4 and Sounds), the investigative journalist Charlie Northcott tells this “fascinating, thought-provoking” story. Following Antony Easton as he explores his lost heritage – and tries to track down his extremely wealthy family’s stolen fortune – **The House at**

Number 48 is a “taut story of hidden documents and mysterious visitors that will have you hooked until the final episode”.

“A small, polished gem instead of a multi-episode true crime waffle-athon? Count me in,” said Miranda Sawyer in *The Observer*. The Radio 4 show **Illuminated** is a terrific showcase for interesting one-off documentaries that could be seen as a “sort of replacement for the late, much-lamented *Lights Out* strand”. One recent episode, entitled **Problems with Julia Masli**, is about the life and work of an Estonian performance artist and clown. It is “strange and funny, but also very touching”, and features fantastic soundwork by the brilliant Talia Augustidis. *Illuminated* is well worth sampling.

Stars reflect the overall quality of reviews and our own independent assessment (5 stars=don’t miss; 1 star=don’t bother)



Die My Love

1hr 59mins (15)

Jennifer Lawrence excels as a new mother tipped over the edge

★★★

Lynne Ramsay's *Die My Love* is the latest in a string of films to have explored "the feral, demented side" of new motherhood, said Wendy Ide in *The Observer*. And thanks largely to a "fearless" central performance from Jennifer Lawrence, it's easily the best of them. Lawrence plays Grace, an expectant mother who has moved with her husband Jackson (Robert Pattinson) to a dilapidated house in the country, so that they can be closer to his mother (Sissy Spacek). The idea is that they will have more space to pursue their creative ambitions, and at first they relish the isolation, and rediscover a wild physical intimacy. But Ramsay conveys the sense that this house may become a cage, and once Grace's baby son is born, she spirals into mental illness. The film does not seek to give a precise diagnosis for her condition, but simply immerses us in her "unnerving fever dream".

Jackson's life is not changed by the arrival of their son, said Richard Brody in *The New Yorker*: he goes off to work, leaving Grace alone for long periods, and appears to be cheating on her. As their sex life diminishes, Grace becomes viscerally frustrated, demanding attention from her husband while fantasising about a biker who drives past the house – and who may not exist. Ultimately, it all becomes very overwrought, "a spectacle of overheated exertion substituting for drama". Lawrence "hurls herself into every scene", said Amy Nicholson in the *LA Times*; but while Grace's anguish may be universal, the focus here on her erotic anxiety is not only "reductive", it is also "a bit ridiculous". I admire Ramsay for "facing down the phonily upbeat and relatable motherhood discourse with this bogey-mom", but good as Lawrence is, there were times I wanted to rescue her from this film.



The Choral

1hr 53mins (12A)

Alan Bennett comedy-drama set in Yorkshire during the First World War

★★★

At the age of 91, Alan Bennett has produced his first original film script for 40 years – and the result is a "plangent, drily comic" treat, said Robbie Collin in *The Daily Telegraph*. Directed by Nicholas Hytner, *The Choral* is set in a fictional Yorkshire mill town in 1916. With conscription in force, most of the town's working-age men have gone off to war, and its choir has been starved of its best male voices. Nevertheless, the new choirmaster (Ralph Fiennes) – who is regarded with suspicion locally because he is devoted to German culture, an atheist and probably gay – resolves to stage a performance of Edward Elgar's oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius*. The film is "superficially" reminiscent of Blair-era hits such as *The Full Monty*. But this is no "schematic, feel-good jaunt". Instead, with young men being sent off to fight a war they do not understand, "it's an anthem for doomed youth in a familiar Bennett key: wry, melancholic, sneakily profound".

I'm afraid it struck me as "second-rate Bennett", said Brian Viner in the *Daily Mail*. "In trying to be a comedy, a weepie and a history lesson; in attempting to tackle class, sexuality and bereavement; in straining to be melancholic, profound and fun... *The Choral* never quite convinces as an actual story." Every "tug on the heartstrings feels more like someone energetically ringing the church bells", and there are too many "set-piece monologues". I could have done without some of the subplots too, said Tom Shone in *The Sunday Times* – many of them focused on the romantic lives of the teenage conscripts. Less a drama than a series of "pleasing vignettes", *The Choral* is not a terrible film, but there was a time when Fiennes would have turned up his nose at a "crowd-pleaser" such as this.



Train Dreams

1hr 42mins (12A)

Meditative period piece about a working man in a vanished America

★★★★

Adapted from a novella by Denis Johnson, *Train Dreams* is an "elegiac portrait of a man (and his country) undergoing a radical transformation", said Tara Brady in *The Irish Times*. Set in America's Pacific Northwest, it follows a jobbing worker called Robert Grainier (Joel Edgerton) from his birth in the 1890s to his death in the 1950s. His is a poignantly ordinary story "of love, loss and endurance" that takes place during the rapid industrialisation of an untouched wilderness. The film mourns that vanished US, and "salutes those nation builders who were never visible to begin with".

Grainier "epitomises strong but silent American masculinity", said Laura Venning in *Little White Lies*. Early on, while working on a railway bridge, he witnesses the "horrific" murder of a Chinese labourer at the hands of his colleagues. Later, he falls for the "vivacious" Gladys (Felicity Jones), with whom he has a daughter. They build a house and live a version of the American dream, until tragedy befalls them. That is more or less all that happens, but to recount the plot "is to undermine one of the film's many strengths: its non-linear unfolding of images and fragments of the story as if we, the audience, are drawn into Grainier's memory". Narrated by Will Patton, the film has a "fable-like quality" reminiscent of Terrence Malick at his best, said Kevin Maher in *The Times*. It looks "gorgeous" too, offering up "a veritable eyegasm" of stunning landscapes and some extraordinary shots as Grainier and his fellow loggers "chop, blast and slash" the unforfeiting wilderness around them. The film "positively pulses with awards season gravitas": it's a "stunner".

All's Fair: shockingly poor legal drama with Kim Kardashian

Glee co-creator Ryan Murphy is "the high priest of tacky, tasteless television", said Ed Power in *The Daily Telegraph*. Yet with this latest series for Disney, he has really outdone himself, turning in "a show of mind-bending horror sure to trigger nightmares in the unsuspecting viewer". It stars Kim Kardashian and Naomi Watts as high-flying divorce lawyers, and Niecy Nash as their investigator, who have left a smart firm to set up an all-female practice in California. And it's an "abomination".

The series could be seen as a post-#MeToo *Sex and the City*, said Judy Berman in *Time Magazine*, if "the sex were all talk, the city irrelevant" and the humour unintentional. Or perhaps it's "*The First Wives Club* for psychopaths". Either way, it "functions primarily as a long-form



Kardashian and Watts

commercial for a long list of brands". Strangely for a legal drama, we don't see much law being practised; instead, much time is devoted to the partners' personal lives and vendettas.

The script is an "embarrassment" and the performances are no better, said Lucy Mangan in *The Guardian*. Kardashian, while predictably "expressionless", is at least "inoffensively useless". The Oscar-nominee Watts, by contrast, "preens and pouts" and delivers her lines "so archly that you can almost hear her joints cracking". And you wonder what Glenn Close, who appears in cameo, was thinking. Camp, lurid drama played with gusto can be fun, but with its dismal plots and characters, this really is not that. Truly, "I did not know it was still possible to make television this bad".

Exhibition of the week **Wright of Derby: From the Shadows**

National Gallery, London WC2 (020-7747 2885, nationalgallery.org.uk). Until 10 May

Joseph Wright of Derby is a painter “all too often under-served in accounts of British art”, said Mark Hudson in *The Independent*. Born in Derby in 1734, he trained in London but returned to the Midlands to capitalise on the money flowing into the region in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. A “prodigiously gifted” artist, he developed a style inspired by Caravaggio’s chiaroscuro technique, painting scenes that blended “heightened realism” with “powerful contrasts of light and shadow”, as well as portraits and landscapes that flattered the local industrial elite and their domains. Yet while several of his paintings have become renowned as “seminal” images of the British Enlightenment, he is – possibly on account of the “parochial suffix” attached to his name – often remembered as “a jobbing provincial painter”. This show at the National Gallery seeks to correct that assumption. It brings together many of his best-known works to reclaim him as one of the great British artists of the 18th century, confounding expectations at every turn while creating several bona fide masterpieces. It is “revelatory”.

At the show’s heart are two “spectacular” paintings, said Alastair Sooke in *The Daily Telegraph*. The first, the National Gallery’s *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* (1768), is “an electrifying, life-and-death composition”, depicting a white cockatoo placed within a glass vessel. A red-robed scientist is seen drawing the oxygen from the contraption as the creature



A Philosopher Lecturing on the Orrery, (1766): “spectacular”

thrashes around, fighting for survival. The second is *A Philosopher Lecturing on the Orrery* (1766), normally on display in Derby. It’s “just as spectacular”, presenting “an impresario-cum-philosopher with flowing grey locks” performing a scientific demonstration with a clockwork model of the solar system. Both works have long been seen as archetypal images of the Age of Reason. Yet, as the wall texts remind us, they may not be “entirely in sync with it”. While apparently championing rationality, they are “animated by childish wonder as much as intellectual enquiry”, and they show off Wright’s

virtuosic skill at replicating artificial illumination.

Wright was certainly interested in science and technology, said Jonathan Jones in *The Guardian*. But the paintings he made on these subjects make humanity’s new knowledge look terrifying. One girl hides her face from the air-pump experiment, too appalled to look. “This is meant to be a rational exposition of the vacuum, but has become a nightmarish theatre of science, power, cruelty and death.” Wright is perhaps better understood as “the first gothic artist”, using his mastery of light and shade to create truly uncanny pictures. *A Philosopher by Lamplight* (1769), for instance, sees two travellers crossing a moonlit stream to find an old hermit looking at a skeleton, trying to discover what happens when we die. “The bloodcurdling secret at the heart of these paintings is scientific not supernatural.”

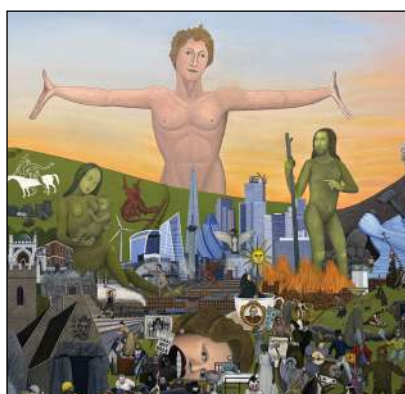
Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Ben Edge

at The Fitzrovia Chapel

Ben Edge is an artist immersed in the vagaries of English folk tradition. Working in a distinct, quasi-pointillist style, Edge (b.1985) creates heavily populated compositions that endow the natural world with as much personality as any of the people or animals he depicts. The artist himself – recognisable on account of his trademark quiff and quizzical expression – figures heavily, adrift in a landscape of solid oaks, white chalk horses on hillsides and moonlit rituals. There’s modern imagery, too: BA jets, Margaret Thatcher and Channel migrants share the pictorial space with Vikings and Green Men (his art was inspired by seeing a procession of druids march past a KFC in central



The Children of Albion (2025), detail

London). The extent to which you enjoy Edge’s paintings will depend on your tolerance for whimsy. But he really can paint: his landscapes quote directly from Bosch and Bruegel, while certain passages recall the style of Patrick Caulfield or Francis Bacon. In short: it’s a curate’s egg. Prices range from £3,250 to £25,000.

2 Pearson Square, London W1 (020-3409 9895). Until 26 November

The Louvre’s failures

At the time of the brazen heist of €88m-worth of crown jewels (pictured) from the Louvre last month, the password to the world-famous museum’s video surveillance



system was simply “Louvre”, according to a museum employee. Little more than a third of rooms had CCTV installed. The only camera outside the Apollo gallery, which was targeted using a stolen mechanical ladder, was facing west and did not cover the window. The incident was “a deafening wake-up call” for the “wholly inadequate” security arrangements at the museum, the head of France’s state auditor, Pierre Moscovici, found in a report last week. Four suspects are now in custody over the robbery on 19 October, including three who are thought to have been members of the four-man gang involved. One of the suspects has been named as Abdoulaye N., 39, a social media star known online as “The Motocross Legend”, from Aubervilliers, a northeastern suburb of Paris. The stolen jewels have not yet been recovered.



Best books... Hannah French

The BBC Radio 3 presenter and baroque-music specialist picks her five favourites. Her new book, *The Rolling Year: Listening to the Seasons with Vivaldi* (Faber £20), is out now

Arcadia by Tom Stoppard, 1993 (Faber £10.99). It's rare for a week to go by without me making reference to this play – whether with regard to “noise”, fate or mansplaining. About lives misunderstood in parallel centuries, it features a cast of characters who are unapologetically clever and plain funny as they debate at the junction of science and art.

The Birth of the Orchestra: History of an Institution, 1650–1815 by John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, 2004 (OUP £370). I knew as a penniless postgrad that I couldn't afford to be without this, and it's been a constant companion ever since. No lofty tome, it's

a readable romp through the historic adventures of the orchestra in a flurry of fascinating facts and figures.

Miss Garnet's Angel by Salley Vickers, 2000 (Harper Perennial £10.99). I defy anyone to read this novel and not fall in love with Venice. Vickers is a lyrical, tactile writer. Her interweaving stories of saints and sinners animate the floating city's stones and waterways, prompting unpredictable transformations, and awakening an enduring belief in angels.

H is for Hawk by Helen Macdonald, 2014 (Vintage £10.99). A memoir of grief and healing – I thought no

one really understood my feelings on losing my father until I came across this. Inspired by dreams of goshawks, Macdonald's experience training an intensely wild animal – before daring to let it go – is a searingly personal parable.

Not the End of the World by Kate Atkinson, 2002 (Black Swan £9.99). This was the set of stories that began my obsession with distilling ideas into the shortest of spaces. Atkinson's crepuscular imagination, Yorkshire-esque directness, and glorious visions of the everyday meet varying degrees of magic realism in a collection that progressively reveals and rewards.

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The Week's guide to what's worth seeing

Showing now

A purpose-built 1,200-seat theatre is the suitably epic setting for **The Hunger Games: On Stage**. It has been adapted for the stage by Conor McPherson – so audiences can “expect soul as well as spectacle” (Guardian). Until 25 October, Troubadour Canary Wharf Theatre, London E14 (thehungergamesonstage.com).

The Shelter of Stories, a new exhibition co-curated by writer and historian Marina Warner, asks if fairy-tales and myths can help us face our fears. It includes more than 100 works by artists from Wassily Kandinsky to Paula Rego. Until 22 February, Compton Verney, Warwickshire (comptonverney.org.uk).

Book now

Wes Anderson: The Archives explores the film director's distinctive vision through storyboards, sketches and props. 21 November–26 July, The Design Museum, London W8 (designmuseum.org).

The Manchester Collective teams up with The Marian Consort singers for **Wintering**, a new



Mia Carragher as Katniss in *The Hunger Games*

work by composer Samantha Fernando, based on Katherine May's bestselling book. 22 November, Wigmore Hall, London W1, then touring (manchestercollective.co.uk).

The Tony Award-winning actor Billy Crudup is returning to the London stage for a new adaptation of the western **High Noon**, co-starring Denise Gough. 17 December–7 March, Harold Pinter Theatre, London SW1 (highnoontheplay.com).

Television

Programmes

Hitler's DNA: Blueprint of a Dictator A geneticist and a historian examine what they say is Hitler's DNA – extracted from dried blood apparently found on a sofa in the Berlin bunker – and explore what it might reveal about the despot. Sat 15 Nov, C4 21:00 (60mins).

Wild Cherry Glossy coming-of-age drama in which the seemingly perfect lives of two women are thrown into disarray when their teenage daughters are embroiled in a scandal. Sat 15 Nov, BBC1 21:00 and 21:55 (55mins and 50mins respectively).

Summerwater Brooding adaptation of Sarah Moss's novel, interweaving the stories of four families at a Scottish holiday park where a tragedy has occurred. Sun 16–Tue 18 Nov, C4 21:00 (60mins each).

Turner: The Secret Sketchbooks Experts and artists delve into Turner's vast archive of sketches to reveal more about the artist. Wed 19 Nov, BBC2 21:00 (60mins).

Cancer Detectives: Finding the Cures Three-part series following leading scientists as they work with patients to cure, and even prevent, cancer. Thu 20 Nov, C4 21:00 (60mins).

Films

Judgment at Nuremberg (1961) Fictional account of the trial of four German judges charged with crimes against humanity. Spencer Tracy and Maximilian Schell star. Sat 15 Nov, BBC2 13:00 (170mins).

Steel Magnolias (1989) Heartwarming weepie about a group of Southern Belles, with an ensemble cast featuring Shirley MacLaine, Sally Field and Dolly Parton. Sat 15 Nov, Film4 15:30 (150mins).

New to streaming TV

Pluribus From Vince Gilligan, creator of *Breaking Bad*, comes a “gripping” series about an alien virus that makes everyone contented (Guardian). On Apple TV+.

Death by Lightning Matthew Macfadyen delivers “a peach of a performance” as President Garfield's assassin in this tragic-comic historical drama (Daily Telegraph). On Netflix.

The Archers: what happened last week

At The Bull, Chris and Carly reconnect over memories from their past, and their kids. Henry is grumpy about missing the Scottish holiday. Desperate for holiday cover for Bridge Farm, Helen and Tom consider George. Meanwhile, George approaches Susan about volunteering at the village shop; Susan is determined to make it happen, but Neil urges caution. Next day, angry Mick refuses to be served by George – Susan defends George and sends Mick away. Tom approaches Mick to cover at Bridge Farm, but it doesn't work out. Carly goes to Chris's place for fireworks in the garden with Martha. After a near miss with a firework, they end up kissing. Next morning, Chris overshadows with Alice, revealing that Carly stayed the night. After an interruption at her father's funeral, Esme frets that she has let him down. The next day, she tells Ruth and David she's decided to take on the farm herself; they promise support. Following complaints, Susan is told by the committee that George can't volunteer. She tells Neil she'll deliver her own ultimatum and resign – is he with her?

Characterful houses for less than £785,000



◀ **Norfolk:** Wittles, Stocks Green, Castle Acre. This elegant 18th century property combines a first-floor flat with a thriving 26-seat café, and a retail shop with a passive income of £6,000 per annum. 3 beds, family bath, kitchen/dining room, 2 receps, walled garden, roof terrace, shop, café, outbuildings, garage. £785,000; Savills (01603-229229).



▲ **Wiltshire:** The Old Forge, All Cannings. An attractive, thatched timber-frame house, believed to date from the 1650s and set in mature gardens. 4 beds, 2 baths, kitchen/dining room, 2 receps, garden, outbuildings, parking. £775,000; Knight Frank (01488-688547).



◀ **Cumbria:** The Ridding, Millom. A charming house with fine views, on the edge of the Lake District. 5 beds, 2 baths, kitchen/dining room, 3 receps, garden. £599,500; Fine & Country (01539-733500).

▶ **Surrey:** Pollard House, Lingfield. Beautifully restored Grade I pre-Tudor hall house with a wealth of period features. 3 beds, family bath, kitchen, 2 receps, garden, garage. £750,000; Jackson-Stops (01883-712375).





▲ **Kent:** King Street, Fordwich. This cosy end-of-terrace house dates back to 1580, features in Pevsner, and is located in the heart of England's smallest town. 4 beds, family bath, kitchen, 2 receps, study, garden, garage/barn. £450,000; Miles & Barr (01227-200600).

◀ **Somerset:** The Old Parsonage, Dowlish Wake. A Grade II house with Tudor origins, nestled on the edge of one of the area's most desirable villages. 4 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, 3 receps, garden. £710,000; Symonds & Sampson (01460-200790).



◀ **Cornwall:** The Carriage House, Port Isaac. A delightful cottage close to the harbour. 3 beds, family bath, open-plan kitchen/living room, car port. £575,000; John Bray Estates (01208-862601).

▲ **Bedfordshire:** Three Horseshoes, Swineshead. This picturesque Grade II house is set in a 0.75-acre plot. 4 beds, 2 baths, kitchen/breakfast room, 3 receps, outbuildings, garden. £700,000; Fitzjohn Estates (01234-380360).



▲ **Carmarthenshire:** Dyffryn Cottage, Llanfynydd. A handsome cottage in a spectacular valley setting on the outskirts of Llanfynydd. 5 beds, 3 baths, kitchen/dining room, 3 receps, garden, garage. OIRO £550,000; Luxury Welsh Homes (01834-818076).

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LAPADA MEMBER



Starling 3 High Street, Esher, Surrey (01372-650015)

Nick Beardshaw, the owner of Starling, used to be head chef at Tom Kerridge's Bar and Grill, says Jay Rayner in the FT. And he clearly "shares with his one-time boss an enthusiasm for rollicking, crowd-pleasing flavours, only executed with control and precision". Our lunch begins with a pair of oblong crumpets, "layered with whorls of herby whipped cream cheese", plus a grating of aged parmesan. "The cheese crumpet we never knew we needed, it is a mark of what is to come." From the £30 set-lunch menu, available on Wednesdays and Thursdays, "satin-soft" pumpkin and ginger soup is "accessorised with delightful attention to detail": clusters of toasted seeds, splashes of sweet maple dressing, a dollop of "brightly acidic crème fraîche". Pork loin chop, stuffed with a round of pistachio-studded sausage meat, comes with a "perfectly calibrated" devilled sauce and a "generous cast-iron pot of mash". Puddings are excellent too. On a weekday lunchtime, Starling is doing the sort of business many London restaurants would be happy with on a Friday night – and no wonder, given Beardshaw's determination to "show his customers a good time". This is already "one of my picks of the year".

Fête 10-13 Grays Brewery Yard, Chelmsford (hello@fetegraysyard.co.uk)
Located in a cobbled courtyard in Chelmsford, Fête may look like a "quaint,



Starling: "rollicking, crowd-pleasing flavours"

neighbourhood restaurant", says Grace Dent in The Guardian. But there is nothing low-key about the cooking here. Rather than sticking to a narrow theme, chef Tobias Godfrey roams across continents on an eclectic menu of (often "whopping") small plates, the focus of which is on "big, hearty, pan-global flavours". A bowl of "wobbly, balm-like burrata" is laden not just with figs and hot honey, but also "generous amounts of pistachio and layers of beetroot" and a "slab of sourdough toast". Duck-fried rice is similarly generous in proportion: it comes topped not only with a fried egg, but with XO sauce, chilli and kimchi *furikake*. As a customer here, you do have to "hang on to

your hat for the gear changes": there can't be many establishments at which a dish of battered sausages with mustard might be "followed by a Taiwanese bao with a side of winter tomatoes in cashew cream". But I found it all "endearingly adventurous", and relished Godfrey's "devil-may-care" approach. The locals clearly do too: "the place was orderly bedlam" when I visited. *Dinner from about £40 a head.*

Punk Royale 6 Sackville Street, London W1 (020-8075 3877)

A meal at this Mayfair restaurant is "certainly different", says Tom Parker Bowles in The Mail on Sunday: Punk Royale offers an "intoxicating mix" of "haute cuisine, camp, vaudeville and caviar". For £220, you get a 24-course dinner, plus "lots and lots of excellent booze". You have to surrender your phone on arrival, submit to having one course fed to you (and you're instructed to lick another directly from the plate), and you have also to put up with "stobes, lasers and dry ice". In other words, this place won't appeal to everyone – but I found it enormous fun. It helps that they don't take themselves at all seriously, except when it comes to the cooking – the food is superb. Dishes such as a "delicately wobbling *chawanmushi* (Japanese egg custard) topped with the most intense chicken sauce" are clearly made with genuine skill. Displaying a "joyous disregard for the bourgeois niceties" of fine dining, Punk Royale is an "exhilarating, bonkers blast".

Recipe of the week: spiced, butter-roasted carrots with walnuts

I am not very heavy-handed with the spices in my savoury cooking, says Alison Roman, but there is something about sweet, earthy carrots that calls for them. Instead of getting toasted beforehand, the spices (and walnuts) are roasted with the carrots, blooming in the fat as they cook. I'm wary of sweet vegetables, so I always like to anchor them in something deeply savoury.

Here, raw garlic adds that intensity, but don't worry: the heat from the just-roasted carrots gently tames its bite.

Serves 4

2 bunches small carrots (about 450g, unpeeled, tops trimmed) 75g walnuts, coarsely chopped 2 tbsp olive oil
kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper ¼ tsp ground cinnamon ¼ tsp ground coriander ½ tsp chilli flakes
1 tbsp fennel seeds 2 tbsp unsalted butter, cut into tiny pieces (or more olive oil) 1 garlic clove, finely chopped or grated

- Preheat the oven to 220°C/200°C fan/425°F.
- For fun and if you feel like it, thinly slice some of the carrots into coins. Halve the remaining ones lengthways, quartering them if they're especially large or thick (don't overthink this!) – it's just nice to have different shapes that lead to different textures once roasted.
- Toss the carrots, walnuts and olive oil together on a baking tray, and season with salt and pepper. Add the cinnamon, coriander, chilli flakes and fennel seeds and toss to coat. Scatter with the butter (or more olive oil).
- Roast, tossing every 15 minutes or so, until the carrots are deeply browned, well past the



point of tender and starting to frizzle at the edges, 30-35 minutes.

- Remove from the oven and toss with the raw garlic (the warmth of the carrots will soften the raw bite). Serve warm or at room temperature.

Do ahead

The carrots can be roasted a few hours ahead of serving, then gently rewarmed in the oven if your kitchen is cold and the butter has solidified.

Eat with

Crisp, hot roast chicken and a bowl of spelt tossed with herbs, or alongside brothy beans or chickpeas and a perky salad.

Taken from *Something From Nothing* by Alison Roman, published by Quadrille at £27. Photography by Chris Bernabeo. To buy from The Week Bookshop for £23.99 (incl. p&p), call 020-3176 3835 or visit theweekbookshop.co.uk.

New cars: what the critics say



Kia EV6 GT
from £59,985

PistonHeads

Following a midlife facelift, the new Kia EV6 GT is “a better cruiser than ever” – it has more power, better range and is cheaper than its “impressive” forerunner. The battery is 8.5% larger (84kWh) and lighter too, so the range is “a smidge” longer at 279 miles. It now charges at 258kW (up from 239kW), and has an extra 65bhp (641bhp total). With a top speed of 161mph, it’s “fast as heck”, and it takes just 3.5secs for 0-62mph.

Evo

The updated EV6 GT has a new virtual gear shift, with six simulated “gears” and a synthesised soundtrack to accompany them, making the drive “more interesting”. Noise levels are down and the new damper tuning gives better control, balance and refinement. The steering lacks traditional feel, but is well weighted. This new EV6 GT is “approaching a genuinely engaging electric car to drive with verve”.

What Car?

This is Kia’s fastest-accelerating car, and to highlight the sportiness it gets 21-inch alloys and neon-green brake calipers. The neon theme continues inside on the piping on the comfy bucket seats. It’s “spacious” with “limo-like rear legroom”, but the boot could be bigger. As with the standard EV6, there’s a curved 12.3-inch infotainment touchscreen, a 12.3-inch driver’s display and smartphone mirroring.

The best... fitness trackers



► **Huawei Watch Fit 4 Pro** At 30g, this is very light and well built, with brilliant battery life of up to ten days and good health insights. It has a big, bright touchscreen. It works with iPhone and Android, and has more than 100 sport modes. Setup is simple, but there are endless opt-in messages (£250; consumer.huawei.com).

► **Fitbit Charge 6** A Which? Best Buy, this lightweight, comfortable tracker works on Android. The screen is fairly basic, but it has 40 or so exercise modes and automatic workout tracking. Battery life is seven days, and it supports smartphone notifications and Google Maps (£140; store.google.com).



► **Garmin Vivoactive 6** This tracker balances fitness with smart features. It weighs just 36g, and has a vibrant 1.2-inch touchscreen. Core health insights from sleep-tracking to steps and heart rate are available, and it has about 80 sport modes. Battery life is “excellent”, and it has text and calendar alerts, plus offline music support (£280; garmin.com).



► **Amazfit Active 2** As you would expect from the price, this isn’t as refined as some, but has lots of smart features including calls, texts and app alerts, and has comprehensive tracking with GPS and heart-rate monitoring. The touchscreen is “impressive” and battery life is good (£85; amazfit.co.uk).



► **Oura Ring 4** A ring is a more compact option, and this one links to a simple app to offer a range of health insights. It can monitor more than 30 health and wellness metrics, including sleep, heart and stress. There’s no GPS and you have to pay to access full data features (from £349; ouraring.com).

Tips... the experts’ guide to buying inexpensive art

Soho House curator Kate Bryan and artist David Shrigley share their tips

- Search for open-studio weekends, where there is less pressure to buy. They tend to be busy on opening nights and quiet on Sundays. You could also search on Google Maps for artist studios and arrange a private visit. Graduate shows can be interesting. Check art school websites for details.
- There are lots of art fairs that specialise in or include less expensive art. London hosts The Other Art Fair and the Art Car Boot Fair, where artists present their own work.
- Instagram is a good resource. Search using the hashtag #artistsupportpledge. It was created in lockdown for artists to sell work costing up to £200, excluding postage.
- Look out for emerging galleries supporting new talent, and check museum gift shops, as some sell pieces. Tate Edit at Tate Modern commissions contemporary artists to make multiples (they sell out quickly, so join the mailing list).

SOURCE: THE TIMES

And for those who have everything...



You don’t need green fingers to grow herbs with this Auk Mini smart garden. With LED lighting and automatic watering, it does most of the work for you. The starter bundle includes basil and parsley seeds.
from £219; auk.com

SOURCE: STUFF

Where to find... the best letterbox gifts

Handmade in Lancashire, Butlers’ **Perfect British Cheeseboard with Crackers & Chutney** comes in two sizes, with a blue, a soft and a hard cheese, plus fig relish and crackers (from £10; butlerscheeses.co.uk).

Cutter & Squidge’s **Mixed Mini Brownie Box** includes a mix of six flavours of brownie bites, including peanut butter and salted caramel (£20; cutterandsquidge.com).

The Gardeners Tools Collection comes with a gardening fork, a small roll of twine and wooden plant markers (£30; moonpig.com).

Letterbox Gifts has ideas for every occasion including a **Muscle Relaxation Gift Set** (£38) or the **New Mum Gift Set** (£37), which includes camomile tea, essential oil, bath salts, a tea light and chocolate (letterboxgifts.co.uk).

One for readers, **The Letterbox Tea Break** includes a pre-loved book of fiction or non-fiction; tea, coffee or hot chocolate; and a sweet or savoury snack, all in recycled packaging (£12; sustainablebookclub.co.uk).

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN

This week's dream: the vast horizons of the Puna de Atacama

A vast high plateau in the far northwest of Argentina, the Puna de Atacama is “how the planet looked before us, almost before anything, the Earth’s skeleton laid bare”, says Stanley Stewart in the *Financial Times*. It is contiguous with the Atacama Desert in Chile, but receives a bit more rain, and far fewer visitors. Covered in volcanoes, bubbling hot springs, steaming fumaroles and immense salt flats, the landscape here is “dramatic and surreal”. It unfolds across “unfathomable” distances and is wreathed in “profound” stillness and silence. It feels harsh and alien – Martian, perhaps – and yet the Puna is astonishingly beautiful, “streaked with colour as if by a child let loose with crayons – carnelian and rust reds, magnesium greys, chalky white, obsidian black, malachite green”.

The nearest airport is in Salta, a city known for its gaucho culture and for the high-altitude wines of the Calchaqui Valley. On a recent trip, my guide and I drove out in a 4x4 from there to Tolar Grande, deep in the Puna. Perched at 3,508 metres above



The Cono de Arita: an extraordinary black pyramid of magma

sea level, this small settlement, home to 150 people, feels like “a Wild West town”, with its wide streets of low adobe buildings. From there, we went on to Antofalla and El Peñón, other tiny towns with “delightful” guesthouses. Among the extraordinary sights along the way were flocks of flamingos stepping “delicately” through the saline waters of the Laguna Grande; the Cono de Arita, a black pyramid of magma that seems to hover above the dazzling salt flats of Arizaro; and – outside El Peñón – blocks of pumice “the size of houses”, sculpted into “bizarre” forms by the desert winds.

Finally, we gazed up at the snow-capped, 6,739m peak of Mount Llullaillaco, where in 1999 archaeologists found the mummified bodies of three children, who had been sacrificed in an Inca ritual. They now lie in the museum at Salta – a reminder of a time when the high Andes were a divine realm, from which children such as these were believed not to have truly died, but to be watching the world below.

Getting the flavour of...



Walking on the Catalan coast

There are lots of touristy spots on the Costa Brava, the rugged coast of northern Catalonia, in northeast Spain – but there’s solitude to be found on the coastal path between them, says Katie Gatens in *The Sunday Times*. Known as the Camí de Ronda, it winds through fragrant pine woods, and dips down to “beautiful” coves that are often quite deserted. I recently walked a two-day section from Roses to El Port de la Selva, stopping on the first day for grilled sardines in the little village of Montjoi. Next came the “pretty” port town of Cadaqués, where I spent the night, and on the second day I visited the excellent Salvador Dalí House Museum in nearby Port Lligat, and the Cap de Creus Natural Park, where Dalí was inspired by its “gnarled” rock formations.

The remote, rugged charm of Cantal

It’s easy to fall in love with the Auvergne, with its miles of “green wilderness” dotted by “small,

sleepy towns” – and no other corner of it is “quite so green and wild” as Cantal, says Anna Richards in *The Daily Telegraph*. This department is too remote to attract many tourists: it is a two-hour drive from the nearest international airport, in Clermont-Ferrand. But it has some nice places to stay (consider Buron de la Chambe, for instance), and some good restaurants, such as Serge Vieira, which has two Michelin stars, and Bulle de Salers. The fondue there, made from five local cheeses, was named France’s best in 2022. And it offers wonderful walking: on a recent trip, I wandered the woodland paths around the Lac de la Siauve (where I stayed at the Huttopia glamping site), and climbed Le Plomb du Cantal (pictured), the department’s highest peak, at 1,855 metres.

A lovely corner of East Suffolk

“When I tell people I grew up in Ipswich, interest swiftly turns to Southwold and Walberswick” – but for me, the greater draw in East Suffolk is the little town of Woodbridge, says Emma Cook in *The Observer*. Woodbridge is delightfully ungentrified, though it has a “pretty” market square and some charming shops. And it is surrounded, to its south and east, by countryside that is wonderfully wild, rich in history, and eerily atmospheric. It’s a perfect base from which to visit the Anglo-Saxon burial site of Sutton Hoo. You might also go for a walk in Rendlesham Forest (where US servicemen famously reported a UFO sighting in 1980), before hiring a canoe and paddling seven miles down the River Deben to Felixstowe, with its “faded” 1920s seafront. The coast to the north is “striking”, and Orford, a few miles along it on the edge of the striking Orford Ness Nature Reserve, is the perfect place to round off a trip.

Hotel of the week



Tewinbury Farm Hotel Hertfordshire

Set on a former dairy farm near Welwyn Garden City, this rambling hotel is like a more “affordable” and “family friendly” version of Soho Farmhouse, says Cathy Adams in *The Times*. Its 52 rooms are spread across the old farmhouse, its outbuildings (which have a “nicely worn-in, homely feel”), and a series of lakeside huts (with their own outdoor hot tubs) and lodges. There is an upmarket gastropub on site, serving “classics well done”, a courtyard where you can get pizza from woodfired ovens, and a wine bar. A gym, freshwater swimming lakes and an outdoor cinema are due to open soon.

Doubles from £175 b&b;
tewinbury.co.uk

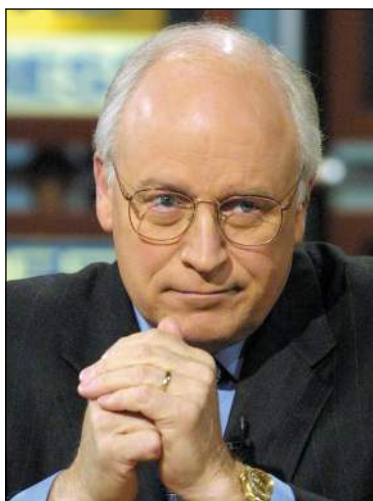
“The most powerful vice-president in US history”

Dick Cheney
1941-2025

The office of vice-president is often regarded as a marginal role, said *The Guardian*. Yet Dick Cheney, who has died aged 84, held so much influence, as VP to George W. Bush, that he was often referred to as “the real president”. Bush has pushed back against that idea, yet there can be little denying that Cheney – the leading figure of a group of neocons that included Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz – “found the laidback president pliable on a whole raft of policy decisions”, including the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

Cheney was not single-handedly responsible for the Iraq War. Wolfowitz had discussed the possibility of military action to protect US interests in the region before 9/11; and Bush had come to office, in 2001, with a feeling that the overthrow of Saddam Hussein was business left unfinished by his father, George H. W. Bush. But Cheney was a driving force behind US foreign policy post 9/11, said *The Times*, having been profoundly affected by the attacks. “If terrorists armed merely with box cutters could wreak such havoc, what could they do if they acquired nuclear or chemical weapons, he asked.” He had already pushed for the US invasion of Afghanistan. Saddam – who’d supposedly stockpiled weapons of mass destruction – “had to go”. And if, to ensure US security, suspected al-Qa’eda militants had to be subjected to “enhanced interrogation techniques”, such as waterboarding, and locked up without trial at Guantánamo Bay, then “so be it”. Congress later decided that those methods amounted to torture; the war is widely believed to have left the world a less stable place. Yet this “taciturn”, inscrutable figure never expressed any regret about it. “In the fight against terrorism there is no middle ground, and half-measures keep you half-exposed,” he said. He would note that there had been no repeats of 9/11 in the US.

Richard Cheney was born in 1941, and brought up in Wyoming, where his father worked for the department of agriculture. As a



Cheney: Bush’s “Darth Vader”

star player in his high-school football team, he dated Lynne Vincent, a cheerleader who became his wife, and later a public figure in her own right as a conservative talk-show host. They had two daughters: Mary, whose sexuality prompted Cheney into his only liberal position – supporting same-sex marriage – and Liz, who went into Republican politics herself and is today best known as an outspoken Trump critic.

After leaving the University of Wisconsin, he got a job working for a Republican congressman in Washington. Having managed to avoid the Vietnam draft, he became a protégé of Rumsfeld, who secured him government jobs. Aged 34, he became President Ford’s chief of staff, the youngest person ever to hold that office. On the campaign trail in 1978, he had the first of five heart attacks. Nevertheless, he pressed on, and was elected to the House of Representatives. He held a host of right-wing positions – from opposing abortion rights to backing the Contra rebels in Nicaragua. As Bush Sr’s defence secretary, he masterminded Operation Desert Storm, launched in response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Back then, he supported the decision not to topple Saddam, citing the chaos it could unleash.

Cheney made millions working for Halliburton during the Clinton years, and then, in 2000, he suggested himself as Bush Jr’s running mate. A Washington insider working for an inexperienced president, he was able quickly to accrue power, said *The New York Times*. Indeed, he is often described as having been the most powerful VP in US history. However, by the end of Bush’s first term, he had, he said, become the “Darth Vader of the administration” and offered not to run in 2004. Bush did not take him up on that, but he relied on Cheney less during his second term. Appalled, like his daughter Liz, by the 2020 Capitol riots, this staunch Republican announced in 2024 that he would be voting for Kamala Harris in that year’s election.

Actress who found global fame in *Shirley Valentine*

Pauline Collins
1940-2025

Having worked solidly for years on stage and on TV in the UK, Pauline Collins was propelled to worldwide fame in the late 1980s by the success of Willy Russell’s film *Shirley Valentine*, about a frustrated Liverpool housewife who escapes her humdrum life by getting on a plane to Greece. Collins had created the role on stage. The play – a hit in the West End and on Broadway – was a one-woman show, a warm and funny two-hour monologue, said *The Guardian*. On screen, Collins was joined by Bernard Hill, as her insensitive husband, and Tom Conti, as the Greek taverna owner with whom she has an affair. The film’s producers had wanted Cher to play the main role. But Russell loyally insisted that it had to be Collins – and she went on to win a Bafta, and to be nominated for an Oscar.

Pauline Collins spent her early childhood in Wallasey, on the Wirral, not far from Liverpool. Her parents were both teachers of Irish extraction, and she regarded herself as Irish-Catholic. The family later moved to London. She went to the Convent of Sacred Heart school in Hammersmith, then the Central School of Speech and Drama. She made her professional debut in 1962. The following year, while acting in rep in Ireland, she had



Collins: rejected Hollywood

a relationship with the actor Tony Rohr, and on her return to London found that she was pregnant. She gave birth to a daughter in secret, in a mother-and-baby home, and put the baby up for adoption. She was haunted by her decision; she said that not a day went by when she didn’t think about her daughter, and that she had wished she had tried harder to find a way to keep her. More than 20 years later, her daughter, Louise, made contact, and they were reunited.

In the 1970s, Collins starred regularly in the West End. On TV, she was in five episodes of *Doctor Who* in the late 1960s, and the first series of *The Liver Birds*, before her role as Sarah the parlour-maid in *Upstairs, Downstairs* made her a household name. She was exhausted by the publicity around *Shirley Valentine*, and unimpressed by Hollywood, so she returned to the UK, and took a role opposite her husband John Alderton in *Forever Green*, a TV drama about a married couple who move to the country. She also appeared in serious films, including as a woman sent to Auschwitz in *My Mother’s Courage*. One of her final appearances was alongside Maggie Smith and Michael Gambon in the film *Quartet*. She is survived by Alderton, the three children they had together, and Louise.

Companies in the news ...and how they were assessed



Seven days in the Square Mile

The **Bank of England** kept interest rates on hold at 4%, in a tight 5-4 vote split. But traders have increased the odds of a cut in December following unexpectedly high unemployment figures from the Office for National Statistics. **UK unemployment** rose to 5% in the three months through September, up from 4.8% the month before. The jobless rate is the highest since early 2021, when the economy was under Covid restrictions.

Global markets rallied on Monday after the US Senate took the first step to end the longest **government shutdown** in history. The **Stoxx Europe 600** closed 1.4% higher, the best day since May, and Germany's **Dax** was up 1.7%. In the US, the **S&P 500** rose 1.5%. It came after American tech stocks suffered their worst week since April, amid concerns over a possible AI bubble and weak economic data.

SoftBank unexpectedly announced it had sold its entire stake in **Nvidia**, worth about \$5.8bn, so that it could finance a \$30bn commitment to **OpenAI**. The chief executive of **British Airways** warned that its Spanish owner, **International Airlines Group**, could ditch investment in Heathrow if the bill for the airport's third runway is too high. Chinese "**BitQueen**" Zhimin Qian was jailed for 11 years and eight months by a UK court for a £5.1bn cryptocurrency scam. Chancellor Rachel Reeves has reportedly earmarked some of the seized crypto to shore up the public finances.

Diageo: drastic remedy

Rarely had the fortunes of Britain's largest drinks group, Diageo, seemed so bleak, said *The Mail on Sunday*. Last Thursday, a profits alert sent shares in the rudderless company to their lowest level in a decade. But never underestimate the power of a timely snifter, said Alistair Osborne in *The Times*. In the nick of time, Diageo has served up a "cocktail worth drinking". What's it called? A "Drastic Dave", of course. The booze group's value gained £2bn in a session on news that the former Tesco boss Sir Dave Lewis has been put "in charge of the drinks cabinet". True, Lewis has no direct experience in the industry. But 27 years at consumer giant Unilever (where he earned the nickname "Drastic" for his bold cost-cutting moves), and a textbook turnaround at Tesco a decade ago, following the discovery of a £250m accounting black hole, stand him in good stead – even "in an age of more moderate drinking". Still, Lewis will need "all of the most radical actions in his corporate toolbox" to revive Diageo, said Andrea Felsted on Bloomberg: it is suffering slowing sales in key US and Chinese markets. Expect a preliminary "kitchen-sinking" and then possible disposals. He might even consider demerging Guinness, which could be worth more than \$10bn as a standalone entity.

EV market: "poll tax on wheels"?

A key plank of Labour's net-zero plan is "the mass adoption of electric cars", said Matt Oliver in *The Daily Telegraph*. Which makes reports that the Chancellor is preparing to levy a "3p-per-mile" road tax on EVs in the Budget all the more perplexing. Critics, including the AA, have warned that this "poll tax on wheels" could "slam the brakes on electric car adoption", even as the Government seeks to subsidise it. The proposal has provoked "howls" from the car industry, said Nils Pratley in *The Guardian*. But the plain fact is "we can't afford not to tax electric cars", whose owners currently avoid an average of £600 in fuel duty annually. In 2024/25, fuel duty is expected to bring in revenues of £24.4bn – a figure projected to halve by the 2030s as drivers switch from petrol to electric models. Something has to give. There is at least some respite, said Oliver Gill in *The Sunday Times*. Van drivers look likely to "swerve" the tax – a partial relief for manufacturers such as Ford. But the timing is terrible, said Rob Hull on *This is Money*. With demand for EVs already fragile, and manufacturers on the brink of fines for missing sales targets, "the move risks bursting Britain's electric car bubble for good".

Post Office/Fujitsu: endless Horizon

The Post Office has made no bones of its desire to leave behind the Horizon accounting system at the centre of the scandal that saw more than 900 subpostmasters wrongly prosecuted for fiddling the books, said Emma Simpson on BBC Business. But ditching Horizon is quite the challenge. The software is so enmeshed in the organisation's processes that the PO is paying Fujitsu a further £41m to continue using it until at least March 2027 – although it is also "bringing in a different supplier" to manage Horizon while a new system is developed. That's likely to be little consolation to those whose lives were wrecked by it. The Japanese tech company has apologised for its role in the debacle and acknowledged it has "a moral obligation" to contribute financially. "No timeline or figure has so far been set."

ITV/Sky/Comcast: transatlantic acquisition drama

Britain's first commercial broadcaster recently celebrated its 70th birthday. Could it be its last as an independent company? Last week, ITV dropped a bombshell worthy of *Love Island*, said Jake Kanter and Max Goldbart on *Deadline*: "a buyer has entered the villa". The US giant Comcast – which bought rival Sky from the Murdochs for a hefty £30bn in 2018 – has offered £1.6bn for ITV's broadcasting arm. If a deal is completed, the company will be split in two, with shareholders retaining the prize of ITV Studios, the broadcaster's increasingly prosperous production arm.



McCall: a reforming CEO

Happy days indeed, said Lex in the *Financial Times*. ITV shares leapt by 19% as investors cheered a potential exit from its "poor standalone prospects" as a broadcaster. The current £2.9bn market cap is around half its value four years ago – a measure of the dent to prospects and profits wrought by the streaming wars. A merger with Sky would

concentrate around 70% of the UK's TV ad revenues in one entity, which might alarm the regulator Ofcom. But the plethora of new viewing choices ought to help on that score. Ultimately, "ITV and Sky's real competitors are not one another but YouTube, Meta, Amazon and TikTok".

Prepare for "the slow dismantling" of Britain's "public service broadcasting tradition", said Stephen Armstrong in *The Observer*: with predictable consequences for news and regional coverage. Perhaps, said Nils Pratley in *The Guardian*. But the hurdles to achieving this combo look immense, from the low-ball price offered "to the pure politics of US ownership".

City analysts have long argued that ITV's parts are worth more than its depressed share price – and Carolyn McCall, who has proved a reforming CEO, is right to seek a deal. "It's just not obvious that Sky/Comcast is the right one."

Issue of the week: Musk's \$1trn pay deal

Tesla approved a record pay package for Elon Musk at the company's annual meeting. Is he worth it?

"Consider a management hypothetical," said Max Chafkin on Bloomberg. A chief executive, going through some sort of mid-life crisis, "suddenly seems incapable of focusing on his day job". He's distracted, he stays up late playing videogames, he takes drugs, he's juggling messy relationships and paternity suits. Worse, he has "embraced an extremist brand of politics" that many of the company's customers find "gross", and which has ignited protests and boycotts; once-fast-growing revenues have sharply declined. Despite all this, he has been complaining "that he's not compensated well enough" and has threatened to quit unless the board gives him a huge raise. "This, of course, isn't a hypothetical. It's

a straightforward account of the past several years of Elon Musk's tenure at Tesla Inc." And strangely, 75% of shareholders backed him at Tesla's annual meeting in Texas last Thursday, giving him a pay package that will double his stake. If Tesla hits a series of ambitious milestones, Musk gets an extra \$1trn over the next ten years – "by far the largest amount ever paid to an executive".

Hear me out, said Sean O'Grady in *The Independent*: this deal is a good one for the company. Musk gets no salary. Each payout relies on reaching a target: Tesla must deliver 20 million electric vehicles to buyers, and sell ten million self-driving subscriptions.



"Elon is Tesla": promising a robot revolution

It must deploy one million robotaxis, and build one million humanoid Optimus robots. Musk claims that the robots, which he danced with on stage, will be "the biggest product of all time", and will be used for everything from healthcare to prisons. He also has to boost Tesla's market value from £1.4trn to \$8.5trn. In purely business terms, if Musk can do all this, he'll be "worth every cent of his trillion dollars". Musk has overpromised before, said *The Wall Street Journal*. But if he succeeds, he'll have created revolutionary technology and thousands of jobs. "He'll have made countless lives better while taking only a fraction of the wealth he helped to create."

This was "a troubling display of corporate capture", said *The Economist*. Tesla currently has a limited and "ageing line-up" of models. It is struggling to match cheaper Chinese rivals. Perhaps robotaxis and robots will be revolutionary, but that's a "giant gamble". All the deal really shows is that Musk "has Tesla and its board wrapped around his finger": 35% of shares are held by retail investors who mostly think he's the "technological Messiah"; 15% are held by Musk himself, "who is of the same opinion". But in truth, shareholders didn't have a choice, said *The Times*. Imagine the share price if he left. "Tesla is Elon Musk. Without its rocket man, it is simply an overvalued metal-basher."

Betting on Britain: what the experts think

● A low roar

To bet against America's central bank is "to fight the Fed", said *The Economist*. Short-selling Japanese bonds is "the widomaker" trade. Another well-known trading strategy, "shunning British assets like the plague", has no slang name.

But it's very popular: stock markets that have raised more equity capital this year than the UK include Mexico and Oman. Investors have good reason to "give Britain a miss". It has the worst inflation problem in the rich world. Growth is minimal. The public finances are ropery. But in "a remarkable turn of events", British asset prices are now doing better. Sterling has strengthened against other currencies. Britain's FTSE 100 share index has outperformed America's S&P 500 this year, returning 23% to the S&P's 12%. Animal spirits aren't exactly "roaring" in Britain. But look around you, argues Andrew Sheets of Morgan Stanley: "Where else in the G7 is it that much better?"

● Waiting for Budget day

The FTSE 100 hit a record finish of 9,787 on Monday, said Chris Price in *The Daily Telegraph*, boosted by news of a deal on the US government shutdown. The surge



The City: on the up?

was driven by gains for the mining giant Fresnillo and drinks-maker Diageo, which climbed 6%. According to the Man Group, two-thirds of recent FTSE 100 gains are down to just 12 stocks, said Tom Stevenson in the same paper: "banks plus an eclectic group of momentum plays

including Rolls-Royce, BAE Systems and AstraZeneca". And unlike in the rest of the country, many in the City can't wait for Budget day. Bond yields are already falling. Rachel Reeves has made it clear that any tax rises will be expressly designed to "bear down on inflation". Alexandra Jackson of Rathbones thinks the Budget could be a "clearing event" that will put UK equities back on investors' radar.

● IPO fever?

London has had a dearth of initial public offerings in recent years, said Patrick Hosking in *The Times*. But the head of Lazard's investment banking arm, Cyrus Kapadia, is predicting a wave of "mid-sized stock market debuts" next year, as many companies grow too big to stay in private equity hands, and the fashion for Wall Street listings fades. In addition, Waterstones, Starling Bank and Ebury are all the subject of "float speculation".

A cool trillion

Elon Musk is already the wealthiest person on Earth, with an estimated net worth of around \$500bn, said *The Independent*. Adjusting for inflation, he outstrips the richest men in US history: J.P. Morgan, Henry Ford and John Paul Getty. Only the oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller edges him. But an extra trillion would put Musk in a new league.

What can you do with a cool trillion? "It turns out, quite a lot," said *Sky News*. Musk could buy up the top 15 largest publicly traded automakers (excluding Tesla) by market capitalisation – including Toyota (\$275bn), BYD (\$120bn), Mercedes-Benz (\$62bn), BMW (\$52bn), Volkswagen (\$50bn) and Ford (\$48bn) – and still have change. "He could buy up every single residential property in San Diego County" – or, all the homes in Tennessee. He could buy 175 billion Big Macs or, if he so wished, turn his fortune into dollar bills, and cover the whole of Jamaica.

A trillion is a "mind-meltingly large number", said *BBC News*. It's a one followed by 12 zeroes. It would take the average US worker 12 million years to make that amount of money. It is the same as the GDP of Switzerland. In fact, a trillion dollars is larger than the GDP of 170 countries, said Chandrashekar Srinivasan on *NDTV*. Equality campaigners regard it as a "staggering and abhorrent" pay deal, and fear that it will open the door to "an even greater (and faster) concentration of wealth".

The job market and Budget fears

David Smith

The Times

Until this week, a narrative was starting to develop that Britain's labour market was recovering after the shock of last year's Budget, says David Smith. That has been dealt "a savage blow" by the latest job figures. The headline bad news is a rise in the unemployment rate to 5%: the highest, outside the pandemic, since 2016. In particular, construction jobs – essential for the rebuilding of Britain and the Government's housebuilding target – are falling, with numbers dropping by a fifth since 2016. In some ways, the timing of these gloomy figures is helpful. "It makes it highly likely that there will be a cut in interest rates next month", and should act as "a red flag for the Government" on the fragility of the labour market. If the Chancellor is to keep more of her "working people" in work, she really ought to avoid tax-raising measures that bear down heavily on employment. Not only that, but the Government ought to soften the Employment Rights Bill, whose "day one" protection against unfair dismissal could seriously curb the willingness of firms to hire. So far, calls for change from all quarters have been rebuffed. It's time to act.

Maga + AI is a recipe for chaos

Adam Tooze

Financial Times

"At critical moments in history, technological change can produce not just economic growth", but it can "consolidate or disrupt political regimes", says Adam Tooze. In 2008, the excitement generated by smartphones and social media did much to offset the toxic shock of the financial crisis: it showed capitalism wasn't all bad. But at other times, digital platforms have become "drivers of polarisation" and even civil war. For the time being, the hyperscaling of AI is currently shielding President Trump from pushback against his more dysfunctional policies. "Lulled with a combination of tax cuts and stock market gains", powerful business elites are distracted from the breakdown of regular governance. Yet if the AI bubble bursts, likely sparking a severe recession, how do we imagine that the Trump White House would react? Those clinging to the idea that America might one day return to its senses are "hoping for a goldilocks crash: big but not too big – enough to dispel the AI hype and the intoxication of Trump's first year", but not enough to precipitate political chaos. The odds of such a "return to American normality" look slim.

These are glory days for green tech

Mark Gongloff

Bloomberg

There's an old climate joke that goes, "You may not believe in climate change, but your insurance company does." So, too, does the stock market, says Mark Gongloff. For much of this year, the S&P Global Clean Energy Transition Index has outpaced the S&P 500, Nasdaq, and MSCI World Index so clearly, that Jefferies analysts are declaring these are "glory days" for green tech. Despite being banished – in America at least – to the political wilderness, the sector is thriving. One reason is that clean energy stocks have ties to the energy-hungry AI boom: few investors are betting on a "net-zero future", but they see the benefit of "buying shovel makers" when there's a gold rush on. Sceptics might argue that coal-mining stocks have also boomed. But the costs of coal-power plants keep rising, while wind and solar get cheaper. "If climate concerns aren't enough to kill coal in the long run, then economics will." Total global investment in the energy transition hit \$2.1trn in 2024 and is expected to break records again this year. "For all the climate-change denialism ... markets are grounded in reality."

On the buses: China's "kill switch"

Oliver Gill

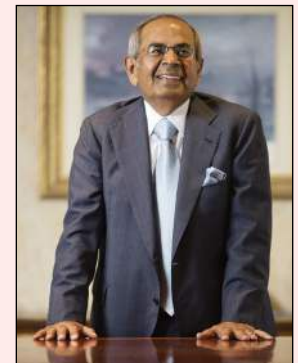
The Sunday Times

All aboard for the latest strange threat from China, says Oliver Gill in *The Sunday Times*. UK Government officials are working with the National Cyber Security Centre to investigate a security loophole that "could allow hundreds of Chinese-made electric buses" to be remotely deactivated "mid-transit". Norwegian officials have reportedly discovered a "kill switch" in buses made by the Zhengzhou-based company Yutong. Denmark has also launched an "urgent review". There are currently around 700 Yutong buses on British roads, mostly in Glasgow, South Wales and Nottingham. BYD, a Chinese rival, has nearly 2,500 buses in the UK, including more than 1,000 in London. Yutong, which has built its own electric double-decker, is eager to join the fray. The firm claims it "strictly complies" with all laws and regulations, but the question is whether it has retained "remote access" to its software for purposes beyond maintenance. Iain Duncan Smith argues the buses should not be on Britain's roads, full-stop. "Do not buy Chinese buses," he said, "they are listening devices."

City profile

Gopichand Hinduja

"In the freewheeling commercial milieu of 1970s Tehran", it was said that the Shah once complained "the Hinduja was making more money than he was", said *The Daily Telegraph*. That knack never deserted them. On his death last week aged 85, the family patriarch Gopichand Hinduja was the UK's richest man: topping *The Sunday Times Rich List* with an estimated £35bn. Known fondly as GP, the British-Indian tycoon was the second of four brothers who fled Iran, where the family had been for 60 years, before the 1979 revolution, and built their father's trading firm into an international conglomerate spanning oil, carmaking, banking, healthcare and real estate. "Jovial and voluble", he was their natural spokesman.



The Hinduja was "tough and inscrutable dealmakers who sailed with the political wind wherever they operated" – first hitting the UK headlines over passport-for-donation allegations in 2001 that brought down Labour minister Peter Mandelson. Yet they were also devout Vedic Hindu philanthropists who shared their worldly goods and even the upbringing of their children with each other. GP and his brother Srichand (SP) shared a palatial duplex in London's Carlton House Terrace, and became famed for their Diwali parties, so stuffed with luminaries that the editor of *Tatler* once likened them to a meeting of the UN General Assembly, said *The Times*. Yet this harmony was shattered by a feud over the control of the family assets, which intensified on SP's death in 2023 and now threatens to rip the clan apart. "We are one soul," GP liked to say. Wishful thinking, perhaps.

Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

C&C Group*Investors' Chronicle*

Citing cost control and operating efficiencies for resilient half-year numbers, the Tennent's lager and Magners cider owner is focused on realising synergies from acquisitions. Strong free cashflow underpins further buybacks. Buy. 134p.

Focusrite*Investors' Chronicle*

Tariffs have shocked the audio equipment seller, but there are signs that it's "past the worst". Organic revenues are up 8.8%, driven by the content creation arm. A "grossly undervalued" sector leader. Buy. 224p.

InterContinental Hotels Group*The Times*

With its solid finances, upbeat growth prospects and wide geographical spread, IHG merits a premium valuation. "High-quality", with rising profits and a pipeline of 342,000 rooms. Buy. £93.14.

Reckitt Benckiser Group*The Times*

The Dettol, Gaviscon and Finish owner is divesting non-core brands to create a leaner and faster-growing business. Performing strongly in emerging markets. Cost cuts are boosting margins. "Undervalued." Buy. £58.88.

Rightmove*Sharecast*

The property portal's shares tumbled after it warned hefty AI investment would weigh on profits. Panmure Liberum cut its target from 790p to 660p, saying "credibility will take time to rebuild" – but still upgraded the stock from "hold" to "buy". Buy. 573.6p.

Tesco*The Times*

Sales and profits are rising at the supermarket, thanks to loyal customers and improving online offering. £500m of cost cuts should boost margins. Finances solid as it gains market share. Buy. 460.5p.

Directors' dealings

Whitbread



Managing directors Simon Ewins and Mark Anderson collectively offloaded £172,450-worth of shares in the hospitality group. The sales may have been driven by concerns over potential changes to capital gains tax rules in the upcoming Budget.

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

...and some to hold, avoid or sell

Apple*Investors' Chronicle*

Tariff fear proved "misplaced", and Chinese subsidies on consumer electronics purchases have helped Apple, which is expecting the "best ever" Christmas for the iPhone. Still, growth worries linger. Hold. \$271.

Coral Products*Investors' Chronicle*

The plastic products microcap's new management team is focused on improving ops and driving efficiencies. Meanwhile, a "bargain" acquisition is boosting capabilities, revenues and margins. Hold. 9p.

Sabre Insurance Group*Sharecast*

RBC Capital Markets has downgraded the motor insurance firm to "sector perform", and cut the target from 170p to 135p, arguing the competitive environment is a tough backdrop for its growth plan. Hold. 129.6p.

Associated British Foods*Investors' Chronicle*

Spinning off Primark to focus on the food businesses – grocery, ingredients, sugar, agriculture – could help ABF help address the "implied conglomerate discount". For now, we await greater clarity. Hold. £22.44.

Marks and Spencer Group*Investors' Chronicle*

The £136m cost of the cyberattack has been cushioned by £100m in insurance proceeds, but remedial measures have eaten into the bottom line. There are plans for 18 new store openings. Hold. 379p.

Wise*The Times*

Once the "jewel in the crown" of the British fintech sector, the cross-border payments specialist (once TransferWise) is defecting to the US. Costs are ballooning and there are worries about the co-founder's dominance. Sell. 910p.

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip

Balfour Beatty
Investors' Chronicle
up 16.58% to 654p

Worst tip

Cranswick
The Daily Telegraph
down 4.77% to £49.90

Market view

"What often bothers very wealthy CEOs – they are human, after all – is that other CEOs are getting even richer ... Envy and greed walk hand in hand."

From Warren Buffett's parting letter before "going quiet". Quoted in the FT

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

	11 Nov 2025	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	9899.60	9714.96	1.90%
FTSE All-share UK	5325.22	5233.82	1.75%
Dow Jones	47821.55	47054.73	1.63%
NASDAQ	23359.65	23512.91	-0.65%
Nikkei 225	50842.93	51497.20	-1.27%
Hang Seng	26696.41	25952.40	2.87%
Gold	4108.00	3995.10	2.83%
Brent Crude Oil	65.23	64.57	1.02%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	3.06%	3.13%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	4.49	4.49	
US 10-year Treasuries	4.12	4.09	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	3.8% (Sep)	3.8% (Aug)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	4.5% (Sep)	4.6% (Aug)	
Halifax house price (yoy)	1.9% (Oct)	1.3% (Sep)	
£1 STERLING:	\$1.314	€1.135	¥203.226
			Bitcoin \$103,394.80

Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS

RISES	Price	% change
WPP	303.00	+11.40
Vodafone	96.00	+11.20
Barratt Redrow	401.00	+7.60
AstraZeneca	13466.00	+7.50
InterContinental Hotels	9912.00	+6.50
FALLS		
Rightmove	575.00	-13.90
Smith & Nephew	1266.00	-10.70
Hikma Pharma	1597.00	-9.40
Intl. Cons. Airlines	383.00	-9.40
Metten Energy & Metals	€42.15	-7.20

FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER

4imprint	4020.00	+25.20
Hilton Food Group	496.00	-22.80

Source: FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 11 Nov (pm)

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The fearful autocrat: how Putin became Russia's King Lear

For a leader who has always been essentially cautious, Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine seemed an uncharacteristically wild gamble. But Putin hasn't really changed at all, says Mark Galeotti: he has simply become more himself

I may be nostalgic for the Vladimir Putin of 2018. Back then I was writing the first edition of my primer, *We Need to Talk About Putin*. Despite his annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the attempted murder of the double agent Sergei Skripal in Salisbury just a few months before I finished the manuscript, the Russian leader seemed essentially cautious.

Yes, he was becoming more authoritarian. Yes, he still pursued

macho (and increasingly pathetic) photo opportunities, from shirtless Putin horseback riding to camouflage-clad Putin on the rifle range. But this seemed to be a man more committed to protecting his grip on power – and his and his cronies' ill-gotten gains – than imperial adventures.

Seven years on, things look very different. A brutal, misjudged invasion of Ukraine – justified in apocalyptic language as a response to some terrible threat of Nato hostility and “a neo-Nazi regime” in Kyiv – has left more than a million Russians dead or wounded, along with hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians. In response to what Putin describes as the West launching “a real war” on his country, he has unleashed saboteurs, assassins, hackers and troublemakers.

At home, 40% of Putin's federal budget is now being spent on security and defence. Instead of the old social contract, offering a steadily rising standard of living in return for political quiescence, Russians are now being bombarded with patriotic rhetoric and subjected to ever-more draconian repression. Since the war began, Putin has hastened Russia's slide into full-blown autocracy. He has enacted a set of laws that criminalise “discrediting” the armed forces or “dissemination of unreliable information” about the “special military operation” in Ukraine, and expanded “foreign agent” laws that justify removing the last vestiges of media independence; dissidents such as the journalist Vladimir Kara-Murza have been arrested; the right to any form of peaceful protest has been increasingly limited.

So when I began to update my book this summer, my first question was: what changed? I believed for a time that we were indeed faced with a new and very different Putin: a risk-taker, committed philosophically to rebuilding Russia's old empire, whatever the cost. And that might not have been so surprising. Who, after all, could be an autocrat for more than two decades and not be distorted by the experience? But after much reflection,



“A virtual prisoner of his own choosing”: Putin meeting Emmanuel Macron in February 2022

I have reached a different conclusion. I now think that the Putin we are seeing is one who has moved in the opposite direction: instead of mutating, he has simply become more himself. The world in 2025 is dealing with “Putin squared”.

Consider, for example, his decision to invade a country with a population of 40 million, and a military that had been preparing for this very scenario since 2014. It looks like a wild gamble

until you realise that Putin did not see it that way at all. Instead, he persuaded himself that it would be easy to bring the Ukrainians back into the Russian fold.

In the build-up to the war, the president-turned-amateur-historian had written shoddily researched articles assembling a hotchpotch of cherry-picked incidents and accounts to argue that Ukraine was not a real country. The non-people of this non-state would hardly resist. Within a few days, weeks or months, a puppet government would be installed in Kyiv and all would be quiet. This was not a risk-averse leader become daring, but a fact-averse leader convinced he was on to a sure thing.

“During Covid, anyone meeting Putin face to face had to first spend two weeks quarantined under guard in a government facility”

Based on multiple, fundamental misunderstandings of the real situation, he made seemingly rational (but actually disastrous) decisions. Many of the senior figures in his court must have known better – but no one dared tell him. The closest we saw to good advice was when Putin's chief Ukraine negotiator, Dmitry Kozak, suggested he keep the dialogue going in a televised meeting right before the invasion – and Putin simply cut him off. A dispirited and defeated Kozak has since left the presidential administration.

That highlights one of the other crucial ways Putin has become more intensely Putin: his intolerance for hard truths. Right from the start, it was evident that Putin was poor at dealing with bad news (most notoriously in his evasive, delayed response to the *Kursk* submarine disaster less than a year into his rule in August 2000). Yet in his early period as president, he was willing to listen to critics and let relatively liberal figures such as the finance minister Alexei Kudrin remain in his circle. Today, he has become much more isolated – a process accelerated by Covid.

The maniacal medieval monarch Ivan the Terrible once divided Russia between his personal kingdom within a kingdom, the Oprichnina (Separation), and the rest. During the pandemic,

Putin was a virtual prisoner of his own choosing, within an unprecedented biosecurity bubble. His private realm shrank to his palaces. Those meeting him were first required to spend two weeks quarantined under guard in a government facility, before approaching him through a corridor fogged with antibacterial spray and bathed in ultraviolet light. He scarcely travelled in his own country, and even his closest allies often saw him only through a video screen.

The prime minister, Mikhail Mishustin, and everyone else with a real job, could not set aside the time to go through this rigmarole. Instead, it was cronies such as the banker Yuri Kovalchuk who kept Putin company; and they spent their time riffing on the need to reclaim Russian greatness and Ukraine's selfish and ungrateful rejection of Moscow. By 2022, Putin had become a modern King Lear, demanding that his court of fawning lackeys and compliant clones (most of his closest allies are of similar age, came from Leningrad and served in the KGB) simply parrot back to him what he wanted to hear. Much of this related to his genius and his supposed triumphs.

Obsessed with his legacy, Putin presumably meant the full-scale invasion of Ukraine to be the capstone of his career. He had always had a preoccupation with how posterity would regard him. In 2008, he asked the influential journalist Alexei Venediktov – who had been a history teacher for 20 years – how he would be portrayed in future textbooks. Venediktov stammered out a few achievements, but clearly his reply disappointed Putin and stuck with him, because in 2014, after annexing Crimea, he asked him: “What about now?” Seeing Venediktov's confusion, Putin reminded him: the textbooks.

By 2022, his aims had become more grandiose. With the Belarusian dictator Aleksandr Lukashenko already dependent on Russia for his political survival, imposing a friendly regime onto Ukraine would effectively bring the lands of the ancient Rus' back under Moscow's control: not a USSR 2.0, nor even a revived Russian empire, but a three-way fusion of what Putin believes to be really one single people. This would bring about the landmark historical triumph which he had for so long craved.

Yet although he compares himself with such decisive and commanding leaders as Peter the Great, Putin consistently ducks the hard decisions. When Covid struck, he didn't just retreat physically from the challenge, he dumped the work of actually dealing with the crisis on Mishustin, the Moscow mayor Sergey Sobyenin and regional governors. Putin relies on his many competent technocrats to keep the ship of state afloat, and expects them to resolve the problems created by his own policies. But he does not pay attention to their advice.

Again, this represents a hardening of Putin's established habits. When Chechen gunmen murdered the opposition figure Boris Nemtsov in the shadow of the Kremlin in 2015, Putin's security chiefs urged him to clip the wings of the maverick local strongman Ramzan Kadyrov. Although Putin eventually opted for a face-saving compromise, he at least heard them out. In 2022, though, when Elvira Nabiullina, the very able chair of the Central Bank, told him plainly that as a result of his invasion the economy was being “flushed down the sewer”, Putin simply ended the call before she could even get to her recommendations.

All that said, “Putin squared” is not going anywhere. How can he? He now faces not just the risk of losing his pampered lifestyle,



Projecting machismo in 2009

but the shadow of a war crimes tribunal in The Hague. He has trapped himself in a golden cage, even as he gets older, less energetic, less in tune with his country and his people, and less deft in his control of the elites, the skill that used to be at the heart of his power.

When the entrepreneur-turned-mercenary-commander Yevgeny Prigozhin launched his desperate mutiny in 2023, seeking not to topple Putin but to persuade the president to back him in his conflict with his nemesis, defence minister Sergei Shoigu, it was in hindsight predictable. Putin had empowered this opportunistic ex-con, encouraged him to build a private army, then stood by while his rivalry with Shoigu escalated. He was warned that this was a recipe for disaster, but did nothing beyond enjoining the two men of war to make peace – and then was panicked when Prigozhin snapped.

At the time, a seasoned political observer in Moscow – a man who in the 2000s had been a part of his electoral machine – delivered a damning verdict: “Putin is no longer Putin, and hasn't been for some time.” Yet really, he very much is. It is just that – like so many ageing autocrats – he has become a caricature of himself. More desperate to shape a historical legacy. More willing to believe in his own genius and discount the views of others. More intent on manipulating an elite he takes for granted. More convinced that a hostile West is scheming against him. And more afraid.

Last year, Alexei Navalny, the most prominent opposition leader, died in agony after apparently being poisoned in the Arctic Polar

“By 2022, Putin was demanding that his court of lackeys parrot back to him what he wanted to hear – much of it related to his own genius”

Wolf maximum-security penal colony. Afterwards, one retired Russian security officer admitted to me that he had been shocked, not so much by the inhumanity, but the weakness it betrayed.

“He could simply have been locked away in some regular camp for a decade and by the time he was out, no one would remember who he was,” he said. “This made Putin look scared, not strong.”

In hindsight, many of Putin's policies have stemmed from weakness and fear, but again, this is becoming all the more evident as the years go by. And it will probably also shape his decisions in the years to come. Unless forced to do so by health or happenstance, he cannot step down, but nor can he dare anoint a successor, lest he begin to look like a lame duck. He cannot continue his war in Ukraine for ever – his calculation is, admittedly, that Kyiv will buckle first – but nor can he let it end with anything that he cannot claim as a triumph.

He knows the elites around him are plundering the state, but while he can allow individuals to be arrested, even if he wanted to cleanse the system, he cannot dare challenge the people on whom he relies to manage Russia. And so he will remain openly unchallenged, yet hemmed in by the consequences of his actions and his own fears for the future. The irony is that as Putin becomes more himself, his country – the country that genuinely welcomed him in 2000, elevating him in what was arguably Russia's last democratic election – is evolving. It may have needed a Putin then; it may have still been willing to accept him in 2018; but by 2022 a poll found 83% saying Russia needed change.

The leader who once could rule by luck, artifice, promises and deception is increasingly looking like another superannuated dictator, presiding over a banana republic that grows no bananas.

This article first appeared in The Sunday Times © Times Media Limited 2025. Mark Galeotti's We Need to Talk About Putin is published by Ebury Press at £9.99

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This week's winner will receive Week-branded items, as well as two Connell Guides (connellguides.com).

THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1491

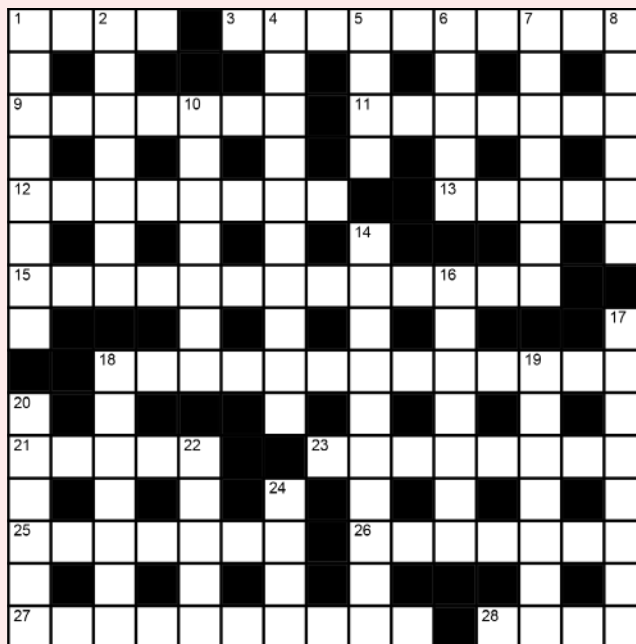
Two Connell Guides and three Week-branded items will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 24 November. Send it to The Week Crossword 1491, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. By **Tim Moorey (timmoorey.com)**

ACROSS

- 1 House provided by small record company (4)
- 3 Large estate with project to replace head in post (10)
- 9 Lively old Elgar composition with no depth (7)
- 11 Amenities lacking IT ordered for tight folk (7)
- 12 Gain ground in medicine measure to identify problem (8)
- 13 Hang back for a seat (5)
- 15 Where you often find shoes hopelessly tight (5-3-5)
- 18 Champion wave? The largest ever apparently (6-7)
- 21 Book finally losing backing (5)
- 23 Short of energy, nothing to eat? The opposite! (8)
- 25 Senior relative mostly touring a Spanish province (7)
- 26 German car Edward checked (7)
- 27 Head out to lunch mostly for Covent Garden entertainment (10)
- 28 A day in Rome conceals no end of research (4)

DOWN

- 1 Be prominent and it's beer all round (5,3)
- 2 Mum left Fat Duck (7)
- 4 Leo's interest in a big part (5,5)
- 5 Handel, say or handle (4)
- 6 Sort of apple one checks (5)
- 7 Leaders missing, check overdue copy (7)
- 8 Get close to Swiss manufacturer (6)
- 10 Info on Morecambe not specific (7)
- 14 Nag firmly established couple (10)
- 16 Favoured actor Brian (7)
- 17 Port in bed's possibly good for the troops (8)
- 18 Storm about priest with Robin? (7)
- 19 Joined fool boring King Edward (7)
- 20 Speak at length? Exactly right (4,2)
- 22 Part of flight that could end in landing (5)
- 24 Soft stuff taken from antenatal clinic (4)



Name _____
 Address _____
 _____ Tel no _____
 Clue of the week answer: _____

Clue of the week: From policeman, a temporary discharge (7)
Philistine, The Observer

Solution to Crossword 1489

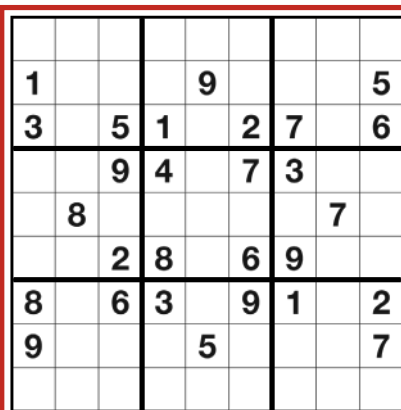
ACROSS: 1 Lacrosse 5 Rescue 9 Runner-up 10 Hearse 11 Dressers
 12 Tahiti 14 Ameliorate 18 Top bananas 22 Animal 23 Carapace 24 Intros
 25 Stashing 26 Streep 27 Gym slips

DOWN: 1 Laredo 2 Canned 3 Odessa 4 Square meal 6 Elevator
 7 Cardigan 8 Eyeliner 13 Pleasantry 15 Steadies 16 Sprinter
 17 Sagamore 19 Cassis 20 Wapiti 21 Neighs

Clue of the week: Fine house under protection of Buddhist state (8)
Solution: OKLAHOMA

The winner of 1489 is Ian Williams from Yaxley

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Sudoku 1,033 (difficult)

Fill in all the squares so that each row, column and each of the 3x3 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9

Solution to Sudoku 1,032

2	3	4	9	6	8	1	7	5
7	6	5	2	1	3	4	8	9
8	9	1	4	5	7	3	6	2
5	7	8	1	9	6	2	4	3
3	2	9	5	7	4	8	1	6
4	1	6	8	3	2	9	5	7
9	5	7	3	4	1	6	2	8
1	8	3	6	2	5	7	9	4
6	4	2	7	8	9	5	3	1



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Charity of the week



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