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THE WEEK

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THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

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What happened

Trump's peace deal

Two days after Donald Trump accused him of stringing him along in peace negotiations, President Putin proposed another temporary ceasefire in Ukraine. It would run from 8 to 10 May, to coincide with Russia's Victory Day celebrating the defeat of Nazi Germany. Kyiv, which accused Moscow of violating a similar truce over Easter, said the Kremlin was stalling for time and called for an immediate ceasefire lasting "at least 30 days".

Following a three-hour meeting between Putin and the US special envoy Steve Witkoff last Friday, Trump had suggested that Russia and Ukraine were "very close to a deal". But the next day, after a one-on-one meeting with President Zelensky at Pope Francis's funeral in Rome, he condemned Russia's continuing attacks on Ukrainian civilians and raised the prospect of applying new sanctions on Putin's regime. He later said he believed that Zelensky was ready to cede Crimea to Russia. Mixed signals continued this week, with Russia suggesting that Trump's peace plan didn't satisfy Kremlin demands, and the US voicing its frustration with both sides and repeating its threat to walk away from the process.



Trump and Zelensky in Rome

What the editorials said

"For the first time, Ukrainian negotiators are cautiously optimistic," said *The Economist*. It's not because they think a brilliant peace deal is imminent, but because they feel that Trump may finally have wised up to Putin's true nature and begun to respect Zelensky. The White House was apparently unimpressed by Putin's latest offer of a three-day ceasefire. It has long been obvious that Putin isn't interested in peace and that he has been, in the US president's phrase, just "tapping" him along, said *The Independent*. Under Trump's original peace plan, there was meant to be an unconditional ceasefire, then talks. But by dragging the process out, the Kremlin has "succeeded in precisely reversing the supposed order of events".

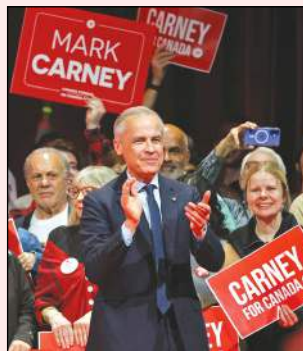
If Trump is souring on Putin, let's hope that it leads him to put sustained pressure on him, said *The Daily Telegraph*. In his haste to end the Ukraine War, Trump has been far too indulgent of the Kremlin. Russia can't be bought off with concessions, said *The Times*. Even in the unlikely event that Kyiv formally accepted Russian sovereignty of Crimea, it wouldn't satisfy Putin. "To supposedly freeze the conflict at today's front lines would be a guarantee that Russia would use the opportunity to strike further into Ukraine."

What happened

Carney wins in Canada

The former central banker Mark Carney led his Liberal Party to a fourth consecutive election victory, less than two months after succeeding Justin Trudeau as Canada's prime minister. It marks a remarkable turnaround for the Liberals. In January, they were trailing the Conservatives by 25 points in the polls. But in a campaign dominated by Donald Trump's trade war and his threats to make Canada the US's 51st state, they closed that gap and, in Monday's election, they won 169 seats, 25 more than Pierre Poilievre's Conservatives. The result leaves the Liberals just short of an absolute majority.

Carney, 60, had presented himself as the man to save Canada from Trump. "America wants our land, our resources, our water, our country," he said in his victory speech. "That will never, ever happen." Trump congratulated him on his win, and they've agreed to meet, but the White House said that its plans for Canada had not changed.



An "astonishing" reversal

What the editorials said

When Carney entered the race to succeed Trudeau as PM, the Liberals were "scraping an all-time low" in the polls, said *The Economist*. He deserves credit for the "astonishing flip" in its fortunes since then: by ditching Trudeau's most unpopular policies, including a consumer carbon tax, he managed to restore trust in his party. Yet he really has to thank Trump for his victory, said *The Times*. By imposing "blistering tariffs" on Canada, and calling for its annexation, Trump distracted voters from the Liberals' "less than stellar record in government" while making Poilievre – who'd praised Trump and adopted his "anti-woke" agenda – look guilty "by association".

Carney's honeymoon may be short-lived, said *The Daily Telegraph*. When the fury in Canada about Trump abates, this Keir Starmer-like technocrat with no "coherent policy platform" will have to address a host of domestic problems, from Canada's "non-existent" growth to its broken immigration system, while contending with a hostile administration in the US. He is likely to fail, and then the Conservatives' time will come.

It wasn't all bad

A tree that was thought to have become extinct two million years ago is now growing well in a garden in Worcestershire. The Wollemi pine, which is related to the monkey puzzle, was rediscovered by hikers in Australia in 1994, after which cuttings and saplings were sold around the world. One was bought by Pamela and Alistair Thompson, who planted it in their garden in the Malvern Hills. Fifteen years on, the tree is 13ft tall, and this month, it bore fruit for the first time.

A woman who posed as a boy in order to join the Magic Circle has been readmitted – 34 years after her ruse was discovered by its all-male members and she was ejected from the society. In her 20s, Sophie Lloyd disguised herself as an 18-year-old called Raymond, and having dazzled with her tricks, she was admitted. But later that year, just as the Circle was about to start accepting women, members realised they'd been fooled – and kicked her out. Last year, they decided it was time to make amends. Lloyd was tracked down to Spain, where she runs an animal sanctuary, and last week, she formally rejoined. It was "emotional", she said.



British scientists are running the world's first trial of a vaccine that does not need to be kept refrigerated, reports *The Times* – an innovation with the potential to be a "global lifesaver". Currently, vaccines must be stored and transported chilled or frozen, which is complex, costly and energy intensive, and so a huge barrier to rolling out vaccine programmes in developing countries. But now UK biotech firm Stablepharma has found a way of converting existing vaccines into versions that are "thermostable" at temperatures up to 40°C.

What the commentators said

The Catholic in me wants to believe that Trump experienced “the ultimate Pauline conversion” during his heart-to-heart with Zelensky at the Vatican, said Gerard Baker in *The Wall Street Journal*. His actions will show whether such hopes are justified. America’s choice in this conflict isn’t simply between “arming Ukraine in a seemingly endless war” or walking away. It also has the option – as Trump acknowledged last week when he talked of “banking” or “secondary sanctions” – of using its leverage against Moscow. “Trump has cards to play,” agreed Tom Rogan on *UnHerd*. Russia’s economy is struggling under the weight of high inflation, falling growth and low oil prices. Further sanctions would “pose major problems for Putin”.

It’s doubtful that Trump will put the squeeze on Putin, said Orysia Lutsevych in *The Guardian*. He’s too easily swayed, and too short-termist in his thinking. He likes the idea of “being at the high table with Putin, signing a ceasefire” – it would be a show of power. He doesn’t care whether the deal actually lasts. Zelensky is under no illusions about this, said Timothy Ash in *The Kyiv Independent*. He doubtless expects that Trump will eventually strike an unfair deal with Putin and then walk away, blaming Ukraine for not accepting it. Zelensky is “playing for time”, hoping to secure as much US military aid as possible before talks break down.

There’s no doubt that Trump’s proposed deal as it stands is “a terrible one, at odds with both international law and basic decency”, said Mark Galeotti in *The Sunday Times*. It would hand over a large chunk of Ukraine to Putin and offer little protection against him coming back later for more. But if the US is set on withdrawing military support for Ukraine, Kyiv doesn’t have any good options. Europe isn’t about to take America’s place. Were Kyiv to fight on, its military position would likely deteriorate over time, eventually forcing its leaders “to swallow even harsher terms”. The current proposal would at least oblige Russia to surrender its claims to unoccupied regions and not impose limits on Ukraine’s military. “Awful though it is to contemplate, this ultimatum is probably the best deal Ukraine is going to get.”

What the commentators said

Canada’s Liberals have proved themselves a formidable force, said Daniel Block in *The Atlantic*. Over a decade in which left-wing parties across the world have been crushed by the march of populism, they’ve kept winning, while moving Canada further “leftward”. True, Trudeau ended up with “dismal ratings”, but his party handled that with “supreme competence” – in contrast to the US Democrats’ ejection of Joe Biden. They brought in Carney, “a political outsider unencumbered by Trudeau’s baggage”, who immediately killed off his predecessor’s most-hated policy, the carbon tax. Still, their victory was not very convincing, said Colin Horgan in *The Guardian*. They took 43% of the vote, to the Conservatives’ 41% (their highest share since 1988). Poilievre’s small-government, anti-immigrant message clearly “resonated” with many.

The Canadian people have made a mistake, said Michael Taube in *The Daily Telegraph*. They have elected a man with no political experience, and no convincing plan for tackling the issues they care about most, such as the rising cost of living and housing. On the contrary, a calm technocrat like Carney is exactly what Canada needs in this chaotic period, said Sean O’Grady in *The Independent*. He knows how to operate at the highest level of international finance and politics, and commands global respect – which gives him the expertise and confidence to stand up to Trump: reportedly, he recently threatened Trump with a “fire sale” of Canada’s holdings of US Treasury bonds, and it’s notable that Trump isn’t referring to him as “governor”, in the way he did Trudeau. Trump admires leaders he thinks are like him – determined, powerful, and with a mandate. Keir Starmer would do well to heed the lesson that Trump has more respect for those who stand up to him, said Edward Luce in the FT. The second lesson here is that “Trump is bad for Trumpians”. Poilievre sold himself as a “milder version of Trump”, and lost. Trump is making his imitators unelectable – which is one good thing to come out of his presidency.

What next?

Moscow is pushing for sanctions on Russian airlines to be lifted before it will agree to a ceasefire, says *The Independent*. These sanctions restrict access to Western markets for the country’s aviation sector and block imports of critical spare parts and maintenance services. Kyiv has urged allies to maintain the measures, pointing out that they are both a powerful symbol and a practical impediment, denying Russia dual-use goods that would help fuel its war machine.

The fall in oil prices triggered by Trump’s trade war is hurting Russia badly, says *The Economist*. Economic growth has sharply declined; in March, oil-and-gas revenue fell by 17% year on year.

What next?

Having failed to win the 172 seats required for an absolute majority, the Liberals will need help from smaller parties to pass legislation, said *The New York Times*. They are used to this, however, having governed without a majority for the past four-and-a-half years. Their ally the NDP took seven seats. Poilievre lost his seat, but has vowed to stay on as leader of the Conservatives, which will mean him having to find another.

Carney’s priority now will be trade talks with Trump, said Bloomberg; some 80% of Canada’s exports go to the United States.

THE WEEK

Friday 2 May is a big day: it’s World Tuna Day, designated as such by the UN General Assembly nine years ago, to “highlight the importance of responsible tuna fishing”. It comes hot on the heels

of International Jazz Day (30 April) and World Day for Safety and Health at Work (28 April). Two days before that, 26 April, was a double-whammy, shared between International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day and the more special-interest World Intellectual Property Day. May alone sees fully 24 UN-endorsed awareness days, including a personal favourite, International Day of Potato – perhaps not the most fluently named occasion, but a stirring one nevertheless (“One crop, much potential”). These events have a long history. International Women’s Day was first celebrated in 1911, World Health Day in 1948, Earth Day in 1970, Black History Month also in 1970, World Aids Day in 1988, Anti-Bullying Week in 2004. And no doubt each of them has served noble causes. But we may have reached gridlock. Most of the calendar has been colonised for awareness purposes, by bureaucrats, charities, PR people, self-appointed funsters (International Talk Like a Pirate Day, No Pants Day etc.) and, of course, HR professionals: International Human Resources Day, a day that I’m afraid few will be celebrating, falls on 20 May. In medieval Europe, when feast days reached around 60 per year, the whole system fell into disrepute. There’s a lesson there somewhere. Leave our days alone: there’s only so much awareness we can handle.

Theo Tait

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Controversy of the week

Trump's first 100 days

Donald Trump wasn't kidding when he promised "the most extraordinary first 100 days of any presidency in American history", said Jonathan Chait in *The Atlantic*. Since his 20 January inauguration, Trump has passed an avalanche of executive orders (139 and counting) designed to dismantle traditional constraints on presidential power, and to advance his agenda: threatening law firms, universities and media owners into compliance; authorising Elon Musk's Doge to "cripple" the federal bureaucracy; firing the heads of 18 federal watchdogs; "disappearing" innocent migrant workers; and deporting foreign students who have written anti-Israel articles. It's "less a new administration", said Andrew Sullivan in *The Times*, and more a "vengeful monarchy". The "trappings of a republic remain", but they are increasingly mere "facades". And for what, asked Andrew Rawnsley in *The Observer*. King Donald's assault on US universities has triggered a brain drain. His attack on the global order has been "ruinous" for the reputation of the US. He promised Americans he would bring down costs, but his trade war is set to fuel inflation and perhaps trigger a recession. "Make America Great Again? Trumpism doesn't do what it says on the baseball cap."



Celebrating in Michigan this week

Tell that to Trump's supporters, said Kimberley A. Strassel in *The Wall Street Journal*. "Creative destruction" is exactly what they wanted: they're fed up of the waste and "indolence" of Washington elites, and they voted for Trump to tear it all up. Besides, said Harry Cole in *The Sun*, who says his "manic" approach isn't working? "Woke and trans sacred cows have been slaughtered" by presidential decree; wasteful spending has "gone up in smoke". Countries are begging for new trade deals, and illegal border crossings, according to the administration, are down by 95%. I've "detested" almost all of Trump 2.0, said David Brooks in *The New York Times*, but even I have to admire his team's "energy". It's like "a supercar with 1,000 horsepower", while his Democratic opponents coast around on "mopeds". If they want to win back power, they'll need to whip up some of that *élan vital*.

The resistance is already building, albeit not yet in Congress, said the FT. The bond markets have forced Trump to rein in his tariffs. The Supreme Court has taken a stand against illegal deportations. American voters, fretting about their wallets and retirement plans, are starting to abandon him too: Trump has one of the lowest approval ratings of any president after 100 days, at 40%. If Democrats win next year's midterm elections, said Katie Stallard in *The New Statesman*, he could spend his last two years in office fighting off investigations and impeachments, ensuring his authoritarian agenda is derailed. But that's assuming, of course, the midterms actually happen. On the current trajectory, we may not get "free and fair elections in 2026, let alone a peaceful transfer of power in 2028".

Sex criminal asylum ban

Migrants convicted of sexual offences will be banned from claiming asylum in the UK, under a new law announced by Home Secretary Yvette Cooper. The Refugee Convention allows countries to refuse asylum to those who have committed serious crimes; the rule is currently used to block claims from criminals given sentences longer than one year (see page 14). Labour will extend the provision to include anyone convicted of a crime which places them on the sex offenders' register, regardless of sentence length. It will also apply to those who have already been granted leave to remain.

Public sector pay rises

Millions of public sector workers in England should be given pay rises of as much as 4%, ministers have been advised. Independent pay review bodies have recommended that 514,000 teachers should get a pay rise of close to 4%, and that 1.38 million NHS workers should receive about 3%. The Government insists there will be "no additional funding" beyond the 2.8% pay rises for which it has already budgeted. Some unions have signalled that they could take strike action if offers fall short of expectations. Private sector pay growth is expected to top 5% this year.

Spirit of the age

A growing number of people are taking advantage of working from home to secretly hold down two or more full-time jobs at once – a practice known as "polygamous working". Online, people trade tips on how to get away with it, reports *The Times*, and it seems to be rife at local councils. When the National Fraud Initiative conducted a pilot study of London boroughs, it identified 23 cases over a few months that had cost about £500,000 in overpaid salaries. The magazine *Social Work News* reports that a social worker who had taken jobs with two councils was caught when, during a video call with colleagues in Hampshire, an unmuted mic picked up them saying: "Hi, you are through to Southend Children's Services."

Good week for:

Valerie, the sausage dog, who was finally recaptured, after spending 529 days in the wild on a remote Australian island. Valerie was a cosseted urban pup when she disappeared during a camping trip in November 2023; but in the bush, she seems to have learnt to evade predators and to feed herself on carrion.

Ikea, which opened a new flagship store in central London. The retailer has taken over the three-storey building on Oxford Street that was once home to a huge Top Shop. At 5,800 sq metres, the Ikea is extensive in relation to nearby shops – but a fraction of the size of most out-of-town Ikeas.

Bad week for:

Safety warnings, after a Chinese student who climbed Japan's Mount Fuji out of its official climbing season had to be rescued twice. On Tuesday, he was plucked off the peak by a helicopter because he'd lost his crampons and couldn't get down. Days later, he went back to retrieve his phone and other belongings – and had to be rescued again, after suffering altitude sickness.

M&S, which continued to reel from the impact of a crippling cyberattack over Easter that has forced it to suspend online orders, and also disrupted its deliveries to Ocado. In a report last year, the retailer had warned that the shift to home-working had left it more vulnerable to cyberattacks (see page 35).

Decorum, after many of the thousands of people who queued for hours to see Pope Francis lying in state opted to take selfies in front of his open coffin. Such was the outrage online about this, the Vatican ordered guards to intervene.

Poll watch

54% of Americans think President Trump is "exceeding the powers available to him" (this includes **16%** of Republicans). **66%** would describe his second term so far as "chaotic". *The New York Times/Siena College*

75% of Britons expect the economy to get worse over the next 12 months, and just **7%** think it will improve. This net economic optimism score, of **-68**, is the lowest ever recorded by Ipsos. *Ipsos/The Times*

29% of Britons place themselves on the "left" of the political spectrum; **26%** place themselves on the "right"; and **22%** place themselves in the "centre". A further **22%** say they don't know where they sit. *YouGov*

Nuuk

Alliance affirmed: Denmark's King Frederik X arrived in Greenland this week, for a trip aimed at showing unity with the semi-autonomous territory in the face of President Trump's recent threats to take it over. In January, Greenland's then PM Múte Egede stepped up demands for independence from Denmark, but this week his successor, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, said that Greenland and Denmark needed to "move closer together" given the "foreign policy situation". In response, the Danish PM, Mette Frederiksen, has unveiled plans to invest more in the strategically important, mineral-rich territory, even as it takes greater control of its domestic affairs, in what she called a "modernisation" of their relationship. Both also said they were ready to strengthen defence in the Arctic region in collaboration with the US.



on trial accused of carrying out the crime. Referred to as the "grandpa robbers" by the press, the suspects are mostly long-standing members of the Parisian underworld in their 60s and 70s, with nicknames such as Old Omar and Blue Eyes. One of the two who have pleaded guilty, Yunice Abbas (pictured), 71, says he acted as lookout and helped spirit away the loot – jewellery worth up to \$10m, almost none of which has been recovered.

Paris

"Grandpa" trial:

Almost nine years after the billionaire reality TV star Kim Kardashian was bound, gagged and robbed at gunpoint in a Paris hotel room, nine men and one woman have gone

Moscow

General killed: A senior Russian general was killed by a car bomb last week, an attack Moscow was quick to blame on Ukraine. Lt Gen Yaroslav Moskalik died when a VW Golf parked outside his flat in a suburb of Moscow exploded as he walked past. Two days later, Russia's FSB security service said that it had arrested an alleged Ukrainian agent, Ignat Kuzin, and that he'd confessed to planting the bomb. Kuzin, who was born in Ukraine but later acquired Russian citizenship, is said to have been recruited by Ukraine's intelligence service, the SBU, in 2023. The SBU is believed to have been behind other assassinations in Russia, but only one of such a senior military commander – Lt Gen Igor Kirillov, killed last December.

La Grand-Combe, France

Worshipper murdered: A young Muslim man was stabbed to death while worshipping at a mosque in southern France last Friday – an attack that has shocked the country. The killer stabbed Aboubakar Cissé – a 22-year-old immigrant from Mali who had recently qualified as a mason – more than 40 times, then filmed him as he lay dying, at the mosque in the small town of La Grand-Combe. He posted the video, in which he also expressed Islamophobic sentiments, on social media. The town is one of France's poorest, and is home to a large number of Muslims, many of whom are descended from immigrants who came to work in the region's coal mines. The suspect, a 20-year-old named as Olivier A, who is from Lyon but from a Bosnian family, handed himself in to police in Italy three days later. On Tuesday, French MPs observed a minute's silence to honour Cissé.



Madrid

Massive power cut: Life was returning to normal in Spain and Portugal this week after the hours-long power outage that brought chaos to both countries and to parts of France and Andorra. For reasons that are still unclear, two separate events, a few seconds apart late on Monday morning, led to disconnections across the Iberian Peninsula. Over the next few hours, hundreds of flights were cancelled; trains ground to a halt; traffic lights turned off; restaurants closed; hospitals had to rely on generators, and phone networks were disrupted. Some fatalities were later reported, including a woman who died in her flat in Madrid in a fire caused by a candle.

Both Portugal and Spain have promised to get to the bottom of what caused the power cut – and to bring in measures to prevent a reoccurrence. It was initially reported that the outage had been caused by a rare atmospheric event – but this was soon denied. Spain's electricity generator ruled out a cyberattack, but it has been suggested there might be an investigation even so. Some have speculated that Spain's reliance on renewables could have been a factor: they argue that, as solar farms and other "low-inertia" sources do not have spinning machines to provide a bit of back-up power, they have left the grid more susceptible to sudden shocks.



Moscow

North Koreans in Kursk: Moscow and Pyongyang have confirmed for the first time that North Korean troops have been fighting alongside Russia's in the war with Ukraine. In seemingly coordinated statements, Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un both described the troops as "heroic", and Putin claimed that, together, the two armies had driven Ukraine's forces out of the Kursk region of Russia, which Ukraine invaded last August. Kyiv, however, said that its troops were still present in both Kursk and the neighbouring region of Belgorod. Experts said that by underlining the strength of the alliance, Putin might be hoping to shore up his position in the US's ceasefire negotiations. The announcements came shortly after Russia launched its deadliest strikes on Kyiv so far this year, killing at least 12 civilians, and as it continued to attack civilian areas across the country.

**Washington DC**

Amazon attack: The White House blasted the online giant Amazon this week, in response to reports that it planned to display the extra costs resulting from new tariffs on its site. “This is a hostile and political act,” said White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt. Amazon said staff had mooted the idea for its budget site Haul, but that it had never been approved. Donald Trump later said he’d had a “great” call with Jeff Bezos, and that the Amazon founder had “solved

the problem”. Amazon gave \$1m to Trump’s inauguration fund, but Bezos’s own net worth has slid by \$30bn this year, according to Bloomberg, owing partly to the tariff policy (*see page 37*).

Vancouver, Canada

Lethal car ramming: A 30-year-old man has been charged with multiple counts of second-degree murder in connection with last Saturday’s car ramming in Vancouver. Eleven people, including a five-year-old child, were killed when a large black Audi SUV careered at speed down a street that had been closed to traffic for a festival celebrating Filipino culture. Many more people were injured. The suspect, Kai-Ji Adam Lo, was apprehended at the scene by members of the public, and later arrested. Police said that he had a “significant history” of mental health issues, and that they were not treating the attack as an act of terrorism.

Chihuahua City, Mexico

Measles spreads: America’s worst measles outbreak in years has spread to northern Mexico. Last week, the country’s health ministry reported that 583 cases had been confirmed this year, up from seven in 2024 – virtually all of which have been in the state of Chihuahua, which shares a border with Texas, where the US outbreak is centred. As in the US, the surge has been driven by vaccination rates considerably lower than the 95% coverage needed to stop the virus spreading. This week, the government launched a national immunisation campaign, aimed at children. It has also updated its travel guidance to the US, warning Mexicans who visit the country to make sure they are up to date with their vaccinations, and to wear a mask if symptoms arise while there.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Judge arrested: The Trump administration’s battle with the judiciary over his deportation agenda intensified last Friday, when the FBI arrested a judge on suspicion of trying to obstruct the detention of a Mexican immigrant. After learning that immigration officers had come to arrest the man, who was appearing in her courtroom in Milwaukee, Hannah Dugan, a county circuit judge, is accused of trying to hide him by ushering him out through a “jury door” into a non-public area. Her supporters say that, in fact, she escorted him into a public area. He then ran into the street where he was later arrested. Rights groups have condemned Dugan’s arrest as an egregious violation of judicial independence. The US attorney general, Pam Bondi, said it sent a message that judges were not “above the law”.

**Bogotá**

President “is drug addict”: Colombia’s President Petro (left) has been accused of being a drug addict by his former foreign minister. In a letter published on his X/ Twitter account, Álvaro Leyva said that Petro’s incoherent statements, lack of punctuality and “trips without purpose” had fuelled rumours that he was a drug addict – which were confirmed in Leyva’s mind when the president vanished for two days during an official trip to Paris

in 2023. The letter has made front-page news in Colombia, where cocaine production has soared since the Leftist leader took office in 2022. Petro has said that cocaine is “no worse than whisky”.

Washington DC

Deportation disputes: Donald Trump’s immigration crackdown came under fresh scrutiny last week, after three children with US citizenship were reported to have been deported to Honduras with their mothers (who were undocumented migrants). One of the children was a four-year-old boy with late-stage cancer, who had been held in custody with his mother and two-year-old sister without access to his medications, a lawyer for the family said. The other children were two and 11 (though the elder child isn’t a US citizen), and had been put on a flight with their pregnant mother. Officials insisted that the mothers had requested that their children be removed with them. Lawyers for the families said, however, that while in custody the mothers had not been able to speak to lawyers or relatives to make other arrangements for their children, and had been coerced into taking them with them.

**Maceió, Brazil**

Ex-president jailed: Brazil’s former president, Fernando Collor, has been ordered to begin a nearly nine-year prison term for corruption and money laundering. The 75-year-old, who led the country from 1990 to 1992, was convicted in 2023 of having received 20 million reais (\$3.5m) in bribes between 2010 and 2014, when he was a senator. The money had been paid to him by a subsidiary of Brazil’s state oil company, Petrobras, in return for facilitating contracts between it and a construction company. One of scores of politicians and business leaders caught by the anti-corruption probe Operation Car Wash, he was placed in custody last week in the city of Maceió, after the supreme court rejected his appeal against that conviction.

Gaza Strip, Palestinian Territories

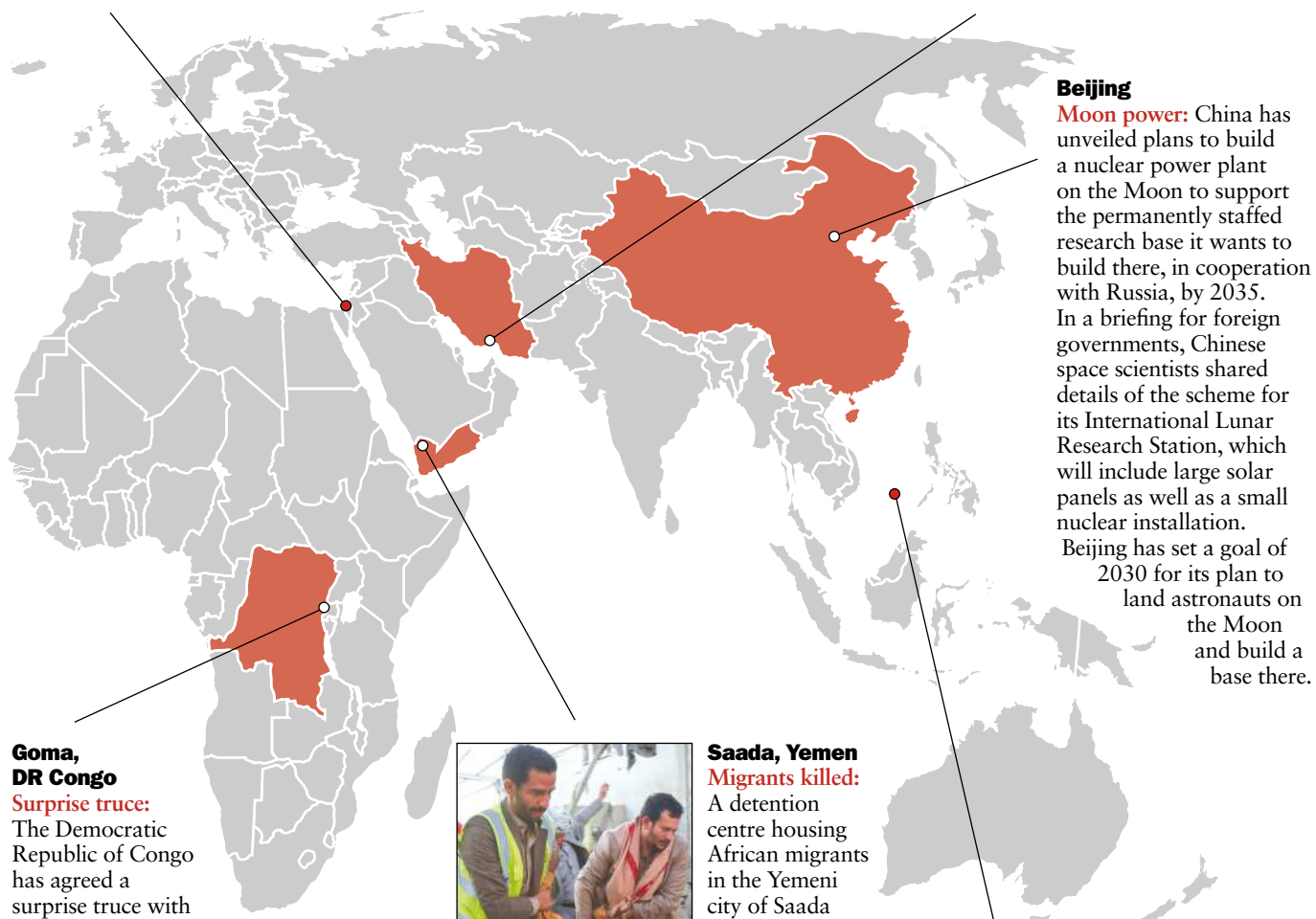
Looming famine: Two months have elapsed since Israel stopped letting food, fuel or medicine into Gaza, and aid groups say food warehouses there are almost empty. All 25 of the UN's bakeries have shut; 47 of its community kitchens providing food to the neediest have received their last deliveries. Markets are nearly bare; food prices have risen by 1,400% since March. The agencies' announcement coincided with hearings at the International Court of Justice, the UN's top court, on Israel's duty to allow aid into Gaza and to cooperate with Unrwa, the UN's Palestinian aid agency. Israel cut ties with Unrwa last year, accusing it of colluding with Hamas.

Separately, the director of Israel's Shin Bet security service, Ronen Bar (above), now says he will resign within two months. His decision resolves his weeks-long standoff with Benjamin Netanyahu, who tried to dismiss him from his post in March, accusing him of politicising Shin Bet – a move that critics claim was motivated by the PM's fury at the way Shin Bet had held Netanyahu's policies responsible for strengthening Hamas and facilitating its attack on Israel in October 2023. The supreme court, which had blocked Bar's dismissal, may now be spared from ruling on the issue.



Shahid Rajaei, Iran

Chemical blast: At least 70 people have been killed and more than 1,000 injured by a huge explosion and its ensuing blaze at Shahid Rajaei – Iran's largest shipping port – apparently triggered by containers of chemicals catching fire. Firefighters took two days to contain it. Officials suggest that improper storage of chemicals in high temperatures and "failure to observe safety principles" was to blame. The chemical involved hasn't been identified, but is likely to have been sodium perchlorate, a major ingredient in solid fuel for rockets. Many tonnes of it were recently delivered to the port from China, probably to replenish Iran's missile stocks, depleted by its attacks on Israel last year. Iranian officials deny military material was held at the port, and won't comment on suggestions that the blast was caused by a deliberate attack.



Beijing

Moon power: China has unveiled plans to build a nuclear power plant on the Moon to support the permanently staffed research base it wants to build there, in cooperation with Russia, by 2035. In a briefing for foreign governments, Chinese space scientists shared details of the scheme for its International Lunar Research Station, which will include large solar panels as well as a small nuclear installation. Beijing has set a goal of 2030 for its plan to land astronauts on the Moon and build a base there.

Goma, DR Congo

Surprise truce: The Democratic Republic of Congo has agreed a surprise truce with the coalition of militias that for decades have been waging an insurgency in the east of the country, to allow space for peace talks brokered by Qatar. The conflict has intensified since January, when M23 – the leading rebel group – seized the area's two biggest cities, Goma and Bukavu. (It's widely believed that neighbouring Rwanda is funding M23 with the aim of securing the area's mineral resources, though Rwanda denies it.) At least 7,000 people have been killed since then, and fears had grown of a much wider regional conflict. But now, in a joint statement (itself a first), the two parties have committed themselves to "an immediate end to hostilities".



Saada, Yemen

Migrants killed: A detention centre housing African migrants in the Yemeni city of Saada has been hit by a suspected US air strike: at least 68 people are said to have been killed. The US and UK started striking Houthi missile sites in late 2023, after the Iran-backed rebel group that controls most of Yemen began attacking shipping in the Red Sea, in solidarity with Hamas. The bombardment has intensified under President Trump, who has widened its aims to target the group's leaders. On Tuesday, RAF jets took part in US-led air strikes – the first military action authorised since Labour took power last July.

Sandy Cay Reef, Spratly Islands

Photo wars: China has released a photograph of four of its coastguard personnel holding its national flag on Sandy Cay Reef in the Spratly Islands, provoking the Philippines to unfurl its own flag on a nearby sandbar. Beijing described its picture as a "show of sovereignty" over the disputed, 200 sq metre sandbank, where the Philippines maintains a military outpost. The exchange has escalated the ongoing territorial dispute between China and its Southeast Asian neighbours in the South China Sea, in which the Spratlys have long featured as a flashpoint.

A Gen Z phenomenon

Bella Ramsey is, in many ways, the archetypal Generation Z star, says Zing Tsjeng in *Vogue*. Plucked from obscurity in rural Leicestershire aged 11 and given a role in *Game of Thrones*, one of the biggest TV hits of recent years, Ramsey is now starring in another massive show – the post-apocalyptic zombie drama *The Last of Us*. Empathetic, vegan, worried about climate change and largely dressed in second-hand clothes for environmental reasons, the 21-year-old has never been drunk (“I’ll have, like, half a pint of beer or Guinness”) and has only once been to a nightclub. Two years ago, Ramsey (below) also came out as non-binary, and asked to be referred to with the pronouns “they” and “them”. That process was awkward: “People who aren’t in the public eye can explore their gender identity or sexuality in private. That’s a privilege I don’t really get any more.” By contrast, they are comfortable discussing their more recent autism diagnosis. “My experience of moving through the world is as an autistic person. There is no reason for people not to know.” In fact, the diagnosis didn’t come as a complete surprise to someone who had grown up feeling like a “loner” and a “weirdo”, and looking back, Ramsey feels that being autistic has been an advantage, in a way. “I’ve always been watching and learning from people. Having to learn more manually how to socialise and interact with the people around me has helped me with acting.”

Coogan’s alter ego

Steve Coogan has sometimes had a “love-hate” relationship with his most famous character, says Ed Cumming in *The Daily Telegraph*. He has in the past felt “saddled” with Alan Partridge, the inept, self-important slacks- and jumper-wearing TV and radio presenter

he has been playing in various formats since 1991. But today he feels mostly love and resignation. He accepts that he’ll never shed his alter ego and, in fact, he is becoming more like him. He no longer wears ageing make-up to play Alan; their views sometimes align; and they even dress alike. “One morning shooting this last series, I got to my trailer and there was a checked shirt hanging up for Partridge that was identical to the shirt I was wearing. It was literally the same shirt, hanging up for Partridge to put on... I sent it to the writers and said, ‘The singularity has happened.’”

Trevor Eve’s mentor

When Trevor Eve was newly graduated from Rada, he found himself a formidable mentor, says Ben Dowell in *The Times*: Laurence Olivier took him under his wing, introduced him to directors, and helped him win parts. Eve loved him and is grateful for everything Olivier taught him, which included hard work and diligence – and also a ferocious perfectionism. He recalls that when they were both in *Dracula* (1979), Olivier “went absolutely berserk” after Eve was told to get on with a scene because the film “was not fucking *Hamlet*”. Olivier felt that every scene was worth working on, and Eve does too. “If you are doing something then do it to the absolute best of your ability. If you could actually spend 20 minutes

making it better, then spend the time and make it better.” The quality matters, and the actor will be judged on their performance, so they need to get it right.

But the acting world is bitchy, he says; actors who speak up are liable to be labelled difficult, “and then it sticks”.

So he doesn’t do that any more. “For the last ten years I haven’t opened my mouth... because I like to work. It’s very easy to get not employed in the industry.”



Having a famous father didn’t spare Elizabeth Ann Hanks from hardship, says Mike Sacks in *Vanity Fair*. Now 42, she is the daughter of Tom Hanks, one of two children he had with his first wife Susan Dillingham. But her parents split up when she was three, just before he became a major star, and she was mainly brought up by her mother – who was mentally ill, and abused drugs and alcohol. “I understood my mom was an addict, and I had a good grip on what that meant because of all the hours I spent at 12-step programmes,” she says. “But I had no vocabulary for why my mom talked to God out loud or would tell me there were men in our closets waiting for me.” Her mother, she says, “was doing the best she could”, but in practice that meant “I didn’t see a dentist for a decade”, and the backyard was “so full of dog shit that you couldn’t walk around it”. Then, in her early teens, her father won custody, and her life was transformed. Looking back, it seems to her that her father’s success was “catastrophic” for her mother. “She felt that his stature in the world obliterated her and any chance she had at continuing her stage career.” But the “uncomfortable truth” is that she was jealous: “She didn’t really have a career, and her ex-husband becoming the Tom Hanks was more insult to injury than significant impediment.”

Viewpoint:**Bread and circuses**

“The average cost of a child’s birthday party in the UK is £524. The average wedding now costs over £25,000. The average family spends over £900 on Christmas. Halloween is about £25 per person, Easter £37 per person. Are these outlays justified? I know society needs circuses as well as bread, but we’ve gone childish all in on the circuses in recent decades. The average Briton spends £1,700 a year on holidays. I heard a dad recently being interviewed about the cost of living. ‘No father,’ he said in the tone of a man enduring a shockingly unjust sacrifice, ‘should have to tell his child they can’t go on holiday.’ Really? Why not? It used to happen all the time.”
Robert Crampton in The Times

Farewell

Roy Thomas Baker, record producer of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, died 12 April, aged 78.

Jane Gardam, author and literary critic died 28 April, aged 96.

Virginia Giuffre, activist and abuse survivor, died 25 April, aged 41.

Paddy Higson, producer of *Gregory’s Girl*, died 13 April, aged 83.

Keith Stackpole, Australian Test batsman, died 22 April, aged 84.

Peter Taaffe, leader of the Militant Tendency died 23 April, aged 83.

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A nation of shoplifters

Theft from shops has risen inexorably over recent years, driven by organised gangs and “local prolificals” with substance problems

How bad is the problem?

Shoplifting figures have hit a series of all-time highs. The Office for National Statistics figures for 2024, released last week, show that police in England and Wales logged 516,971 offences: a 20% rise on the 2023 figures; the rate has more than doubled since 2021 alone. The true number is vastly higher, because so few offences are actually reported to the police: according to the British Retail Consortium (BRC), the number of thefts rose by 3.7 million last year, to a record high of 20.4 million (more than 55,000 a day). Theft cost shops and supermarkets an estimated £2.2bn in 2023/24; retailers have warned that it is “spiralling out of control”, leaving staff fearing for their safety, and denting profits of independent high street retailers and supermarket giants alike. The Co-op has warned of a state of “lawlessness on the UK high street that has never been seen before”.



A CCTV image of a thief in action in London

Why has shoplifting got worse?

It's not entirely clear. The underlying causes of shoplifting are typically social factors. The Association of Convenience Stores, which represents over 50,000 shops, says almost half of shoplifters are repeat offenders (known as “local prolificals”) with drug or alcohol problems. One such offender interviewed by the BBC in 2023 was estimated to have stolen goods worth over £140,000 in one year. A 2018 report by the Centre for Social Justice found that drug dependency drives about 70% of all UK retail theft. However, recent years have also seen an increase in organised gangs that target shops – stealing goods that are then sold on at discount prices. The rise in the cost of living, which has raised economic pressures generally and made everyday items more expensive, has almost certainly also increased such crimes. Self-checkouts in large supermarkets haven't helped, either: one poll in February suggested that 37% of British adults had deliberately failed to scan an item when using self-service checkouts. These people have been dubbed “Swipers” – Seemingly Well-Intentioned Patrons Engaging in Regular Shoplifting. And retailers say that a failure to police shoplifting properly has made the problem much worse.

What's being stolen?

Thieves, especially gangs, target goods that are of high value, but light and easy to sell on. Alcohol, baby formula, cosmetics, protein powder, meat, coffee and chocolate are often stolen; retailers report that many such items are grabbed in bulk, to be hawked at markets or online. Clothes are a favourite; Primark's boss said last year that “the cost of shoplifting is now bigger than our bill for rates”. Increases in thefts of staples such as pasta, sugar and milk have also grown in recent years. In many supermarkets, items such as steak and cheese are now fitted with security tags to deter would-be thieves.

What are the police doing?

Frankly, too little: there is an increasing consensus that shoplifting has been all but decriminalised in Britain. Fewer than one in five

shoplifting offences reported in England and Wales resulted in a charge or a summons in 2023/24 (a 2% increase on the previous year). There were 28,955 convictions in court in 2023, compared with 71,998 a decade earlier. In the year to March 2024, just 431 shoplifters were handed fixed penalty notices (the lowest form of punishment used for the theft of goods valued at under £100). That's a 98% fall from a decade earlier. Retailers complain that no action is taken, with police seldom attending, even in cases where theft is accompanied by violence.

Why do police not take action?

Central Government funding for policing was reduced by 22% in real terms between 2010 and 2019, heavily reducing police numbers. With fewer resources, police must set priorities, using a risk assessment tool dubbed Thrive (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability, Engagement) to decide whether attendance is necessary; shoplifting often doesn't make the grade. Also, in 2014 the law was changed to make “low-value shoplifting” (where the value of the stolen goods does not exceed £200) a summary offence (a criminal offence that is only triable in the magistrates' court). As a result, thieves often think that they can steal with relative impunity so long as they stay below the £200 threshold. As a result of all this, according to a report commissioned by the Co-op entitled *Stealing With Impunity*, police have “lost grip” on retail theft, and retailers have lost confidence in the police, which in turn results in chronic under-reporting of crime.

What's the Government doing?

A police Retail Crime Action Plan was launched in 2023, committing the police to engage in all lines of inquiry where evidence is provided. Operation Opal was set up to identify prolific offenders by collecting intelligence from all UK police forces. Last August, Home Secretary Yvette Cooper promised to crack down on what she called “an epidemic in our society”; to remove the £200 threshold, bring in stronger powers to ban repeat offenders from town centres, make assaults on shop workers a specific criminal offence, and to boost neighbourhood policing. An extra 3,000 officers and community support officers (PCSOs) will be hired over the next 12 months in England and Wales. In addition, the dip in police numbers occurring up to 2019 has now been reversed.

What can shops do?

Retailers have invested heavily in crime prevention measures such as security guards, CCTV and body cameras for staff. Private security firms are increasingly widening their services to include everything from “bobbies on the beat” to private prosecutions. Operation Opal is partly funded by Project Pegasus, a partnership between retailers, police and security companies. But the price of preventative action is high: retailers spent some £1.8bn on such measures last year – a heavy extra cost for an already embattled high street.

Shopworker safety: a workplace crisis

Retailers' greatest single concern is violence and abuse against staff. The BRC report identified 45,000 violent incidents over the 2023/24 year, equivalent to 124 per day, including more than 25,000 involving a weapon; in addition, there were nearly 700,000 incidents of abuse. Most commonly these come when workers are confronting shoplifters, or trying to enforce the rules about selling age-restricted items. Only a third of violent and abusive incidents were reported to police, and just 10% of the total resulted in police attendance; only 2% resulted in a conviction. The effects are profoundly negative on shopworkers, who are disproportionately young and female, and who are usually paid little more than the living wage (£12.21 per hour, with an additional £1.64 recommended for workers in London). In October 2024, the Retail Trust, a charity, published a survey of 1,240 retail workers, which found that 47% of respondents feared for their safety at work and 39% were considering leaving their jobs or the industry altogether. Violence and threats have contributed to rising levels of work-related stress and anxiety among retail workers; absenteeism is increasingly a problem. The British Safety Council calls it a “growing workplace crisis”.

Child rapists don't deserve asylum

Jenni Russell

The Times

Last week, for the second time in his long criminal career, a jailed Congolese drug dealer was spared deportation; he has a sick son who, it was ruled, benefits from having him in the UK. The judge ruled that deporting him would contravene the Human Rights Act (HRA), which enshrines Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights – the right to family and private life. If there's one thing guaranteed to make the public lose faith in our institutions, says Jenni Russell, it is this tendency of immigration judges to adopt an absurd interpretation of the HRA. Examples are legion: in February, a Pakistani paedophile escaped deportation on the basis it would be “unduly harsh” on his young daughters (with whom he only had supervised visitation). In 2015, a Somali child rapist was allowed to stay as he couldn't be treated for PTSD in Mogadishu, and risked arrest and potentially torture there. The entire system seems to revolve around the interests of the offender. The new asylum bill, says the Government, will change all that. Let's hope so. Justice has been twisted. “And voters know it.”

So much for our “green and pleasant land”

George Monbiot

The Guardian

The “worst assault on England's ecosystems in living memory”: no other way, says George Monbiot, to describe the Government's Planning and Infrastructure Bill. Until now, builders have had to follow a “mitigation hierarchy”: start by avoiding areas of high wildlife value; if not possible, minimise the harm inflicted and take steps to remedy it; then, as a last resort, and only after the former options have been exhausted, offset damage by creating habitat elsewhere. But under the new bill, developers can skip straight to the offset option. They'll be free to fell acres of ancient woodland as long as they plant some saplings in plastic tubes elsewhere and pay a “nature restoration levy” – the level of which should not be so high as to make development “economically unviable”. No need even for an ecological site survey. Keir Starmer says the law was inspired by his “conversations with leading CEOs”, and you can tell: they might as well have written it. In its manifesto, Labour called the UK “one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world”. This law will “make it much, much worse”.

Why is Labour destroying its own legacy?

Daniel Hannan

The Sunday Telegraph

Tony Blair's “greatest achievement”, says Daniel Hannan, was to let state schools in England become academies, free to vary their curriculum and to hire teachers without formal qualifications – a reform that led to England's dramatic rise in the international education league tables. And no school provides a clearer example of the benefits than the JCB Academy in Staffordshire, one of the 44 academies known as University Technical Colleges that teach manual and technical skills. It has reduced the humanities component in its curriculum to free up more time for teaching electronics, logistics and so on; and it employs engineers from companies that students aspire to join. This has enabled children “who don't respond well to sitting at desks” to thrive. The school produces excellent engineers, but also does notably well at English A levels. Yet it all could be set at naught by Labour's new Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which aims to impose a new national curriculum and squash the freedoms academies have enjoyed. Labour claims to be keen to promote the skills required to maintain our manufacturing base. Its drive for “equality over quality” in education is doing the very opposite.

Stop schools playing games with education

Hadley Freeman

The Sunday Times

Too much screen time is bad for children: everyone accepts that, says Hadley Freeman. Yet the more parents try to keep kids off smartphones and tablets at home, the more schools are pushing them onto screens in class. Behold the brave new world of “ed tech”, a world where ten-year-old pupils upload essays onto portals, where friends can rate them with emojis, and “where five-year-olds are taught how to count by AI characters who emit fireworks”. Ed tech is a huge growth business in the UK, which could be worth some £9.5bn by 2026. Defenders say it's a brilliant way to engage young minds and make learning fun, but Unesco is adamant that it impairs learning, a verdict borne out by the recent decline in global test scores in literacy and maths. And it makes intuitive sense: how does hooking pupils on “cheap dopamine hits from emojis” and whizzy AI characters help them develop social skills or learn to apply themselves? What child would now want to read a boring old book? No, the only winners from this “gamification of learning” are the ed tech firms themselves.

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

A man who bought a £20,000 car to replace his stolen Honda Civic discovered that he had actually bought back his own car. Ewan Valentine, 36, from Solihull, woke up to find his car missing in February. He later found the same model, with different plates and lower mileage, 70 miles away. Driving home, Valentine discovered not only various familiar-seeming items – a tent peg and Mars bar wrappers – but also his and his parents' address in the satnav. “I nearly crashed, to be honest,” he said.



A medieval scholar believes that he has spotted a hitherto unacknowledged penis in the Bayeux Tapestry. The Oxford professor George Garnett is the acknowledged authority on the issue: he counted 93 of them in 2018, (88 of which belong to horses). But Dr Christopher Monk thinks he has found another, attached to a figure in the margin who is hunting wild beasts. Although Garnett deems it a scabbard, Monk told the History Extra podcast: “I am in no doubt the appendage is a depiction of male genitalia – the missed penis, shall we say.”

A Michigan man who was upset that his girlfriend and her family went on a cruise without him made a false bomb threat to the cruise line. Joshua Lowe, 19, who lived with the family, was upset that he'd been left behind “to care for their pets”, stated a prosecutor last month. His email stated that the ship, en route from Miami to Jamaica, “might have a bomb” on board – prompting a search of more than 1,000 rooms. Sentenced to eight months, Lowe apologised and said he was pursuing “a path to Jesus”.

The great migrant reversal

Justin Gest

The Atlantic

An “extraordinary reversal in human migration” is taking place below the southern US border, says Justin Gest. For years, millions of people have been travelling north through Central America in the hope of a new life in the US. But for the first time in recent history, that flow has changed direction. The number of people migrating north through Costa Rica, which peaked in August 2023 at about 84,500, plunged to 14,400 in November 2024, and “zero as of mid-March”; then, during a six-week period in February and March, some 1,200 people migrated south into Costa Rica. Nearby countries such as Guatemala and Colombia have experienced a similar reversal. The main reason for this is, of course, President Trump’s hardline border policy. It’s working, but it is “disorienting the region”. Costa Rica is overwhelmed with asylum seekers: it is processing more than 184,000 applications, and officials expect a vast “wave” of migrants now filtering through Mexico. It is currently the most stable democracy in the Central American corridor; but if its pro-US government falls, “a weaker state or a more Beijing-oriented alternative” could replace it. Trump may welcome the fact that migrants are turning back, but a more unstable Central America could end up harming US interests.

A Sun King in the Oval Office

Elle Purnell

The Federalist

President Trump’s critics often liken him to Hitler, says Elle Purnell, but recently they’ve started drawing parallels with a new historical villain: Louis XIV of France. Noting the golden vases, trinkets and mouldings with which Trump has furnished the Oval Office, the Washington Post’s Carolina A. Miranda wrote: “Behold the new Sun King, a wannabe emperor who views his powers as absolute.” CNN also found sinister connotations in the gilded decor, reporting that the room was “weirdly un-presidential”, and “king-like”; New York Magazine called it “the Emperor’s New Oval Office”. This is absurd. Sure, some of Trump’s choices are “over the top”, but that’s his style – and the style of the US itself, which has long “erred on the bold and exaggerated”, and which makes up for in “glamour and confidence” what it sometimes lacks in “discretion and modesty”. The “maximalist decor” of the new Oval Office is very much “on-brand” – for Trump, and for America.



Trump in his new “on-brand” working space

Food stamps are making people fat

Allysia Finley

The Wall Street Journal

As “American waistlines have ballooned”, so too has the country’s welfare bill. Are the two linked? You bet they are, says Allysia Finley. One link between them is our poorly designed food-stamps system – officially the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programme – which allows those on low incomes to spend government handouts on junk food. People can’t buy cigarettes or booze with stamps, but they can, and do, buy lots of unhealthy food with them. In fact, more food-stamp money is spent on fizzy drinks and sweets than on fruits, vegetables, eggs, pasta, rice and beans combined, according to one report. Studies show that recipients eat more unhealthily than others on similar incomes, and suffer worse obesity and diabetes rates. Some Republican states are now pushing for a law change so that food stamps in their states can’t be spent on junk food; but “so-called anti-hunger groups on the left” protest that it would be unfair to “punish” poor people by stopping them from buying treats. This is a ridiculous claim. The US does not have a “hunger” problem. “About three-quarters of adult food-stamp beneficiaries are overweight or obese. Only 3% are underweight.” These people would still be free to buy junk food with their own money, just not on the taxpayers’ dollar.

Deepfakes and impostors: the brave new world of AI jobseeking

“It’s a strange new world out there” for hiring managers, said Brit Morse in *Fortune*. Just ask Dawid Moczadlo, the co-founder of Vidoc Security Lab, whose footage of a weird Zoom call with a job applicant recently went viral after he posted it on LinkedIn. During the interview, the candidate’s face blurred and glitched repeatedly. Suspecting that the candidate was using an AI filter to disguise his appearance, Moczadlo asked him to hold his hand in front of his face, to disrupt the filter. The request was repeatedly ignored, so he terminated the interview. Moczadlo’s experience is far from unique. According to a survey in March, around 17% of hiring managers in the US have encountered candidates using deepfake technology in video interviews. It seems to be a particular problem in IT. One executive recently found that, out of 827 applications for a software job, about 100 were attached to fake identities. Some bogus applications are from those trying to boost their income; others, more worryingly, are North Korean IT workers targeting sensitive company data.

AI technology is being used for less serious forms of cheating as well, said Parmy Olson on *Bloomberg*. A Columbia University student was recently suspended for creating an AI tool that provides software engineers with real-time answers to coding questions they’re presented with during interviews. It all appears

on a translucent screen that a screen-sharing interviewer can’t see. Employers “created this problem for themselves”. More than 80% of large companies use AI somewhere in hiring – to generate job descriptions, say, or screen candidates – and one in four use it for the entire recruitment process. This has fuelled an arms race with applicants, who are devising new ways to game the system and “slip through AI gatekeepers”.

The embrace of AI is creating headaches for people on both sides, said Taylor Telford in *The Washington Post*. Applicants can use ChatGPT to optimise CVs and cover letters, and auto-apply to hundreds of roles; but their application faces being screened out by a machine. One recruiter was shocked recently when a candidate thanked her on LinkedIn for sending a personalised rejection letter – a gesture that highlights the overall lack of a “human touch” in the process. Hiring managers can use AI tools to run cheap recruitment drives, yet they are struggling to “find real qualified workers amid the bots, cheaters and deepfakes”; many employers are having to fall back on old-school methods, such as referrals from contacts. The problem may be mostly in the IT sector for now, but it is likely to spread. “Tech is the canary in the mine here,” says one recruiter. “This is what it’s going to look like for everybody in a year.”

Kashmir: on the brink of a “catastrophic” war

Kashmir has experienced its share of violence over the past 70 years, said **Daily Excelsior (Jammu)**, but last week’s massacre in the “idyllic” Baisaran valley was a “grim” new low for the Indian-administered territory. As families and honeymooners relaxed in Pahalgam, one of Kashmir’s “most tranquil corners”, gunmen from a militant group called The Resistance Front slaughtered 26 people in a meadow, all but one of whom was Indian. Relations between India and Pakistan are now “cratering”, pushing the nuclear-armed rivals to the brink of outright war, said Rhea Mogul on **CNN (New York)**. India’s prime minister, Narendra Modi, accused Pakistan of organising the attack, vowing to pursue the perpetrators “to the ends of the Earth”; New Delhi then downgraded ties with Islamabad and shut a key border crossing. The two sides have exchanged fire over the “line of control” in the Himalayan territory, and India has taken the unprecedented step of suspending a vital treaty that allows both countries to share control of the Indus River System – a move that Islamabad called an “act of war”.



The mighty Indus: the river that feeds the two nations

Pakistan may deny it “a hundred times”, said Aaj Ki Baat on **India TV (Noida)**, “but the entire world” knows it was behind this attack. Just look at the videos of the massacre: they show gunmen kitted out with sophisticated weapons and bodycams killing their Hindu victims at point-blank range. This was “a planned, professional job”, most likely organised by Pakistan’s army and its powerful intelligence agency, the ISI. It has been the same with almost every major attack on India, said Vir Sanghvi in **The Print (New Delhi)**. After the 2008 Mumbai attacks, when 166 people were killed by Pakistani Islamists, the Manmohan Singh government ignored the angry cries for retribution, saying a war would not benefit anyone. Hailed as “statesman-like”, such restraint now “looks more and more like a terrible miscalculation”. Pakistan walked away knowing it could kill Indian civilians without consequences. It’s time India

showed Pakistan that terrorism has a price, even if that means war.

India wants to drag Pakistan into this “deplorable” episode, said **Dawn (Karachi)**. But perhaps Modi’s nationalist government should look a little closer to home and “review its brutal rule” in Kashmir, and the “immense discontent” that has bred in the “occupied” territory. In 2019, Modi revoked Kashmir’s already limited constitutional autonomy, bringing it under the direct control of New Delhi. He claims “all is well” in the region, but there will

be no end to these “blood-soaked episodes” if India continues to stamp out Kashmiri autonomy “through brute force and intimidation”. Modi’s long-term goal is to choke off Pakistan’s water supply, said **The Nation (Lahore)**, and he happily seized the opportunity last week by withdrawing from the Indus Waters Treaty, which splits control of the rivers flowing down from the Himalayas between India and Pakistan. The Indian PM is “playing with fire”: 80% of Pakistan’s irrigated agriculture is supported by that treaty, and if he disrupts that supply and undermines our economic and food security, Pakistan will have no choice but to respond – with possibly “catastrophic” results “for the entire region”.

India can’t actually disrupt Pakistan’s water supply, said Abhishek De in **India Today (New Delhi)**. It would take years to build the reservoirs and dams required to plug the water flow from the Indus. It’s more of a “psychological” tactic by Modi, who is under severe domestic pressure to respond to the attacks. India won’t be the last country to “weaponise” rivers, said Matthew Campbell in **The Times (London)**. China controls much of the world’s water tower, as the Himalayan glaciers are known, and Beijing is already building dams that could stop their flow to India. The decline in glaciers is only adding to tensions. If any of the other 800 international water treaties unravel, we could be entering “a new age of ‘water wars’”.

FRANCE

Our Republic is “committing suicide”

*Le Point
(Paris)*

“The faster history moves, the more France stands still,” says Nicolas Baverez. Europe faces a “maelstrom” of the kind last seen in the 1930s: the US is sliding into illiberalism, globalisation as we know it is ending, “high-intensity warfare” has returned to the continent. Germany, for its part, has changed its constitution to unleash new borrowing, which will help reverse chronic underinvestment. Northern Europe is “rapidly” rearming. Southern European governments are rushing to support their businesses. But France? France remains “frozen in denial”. The president is largely powerless. The national assembly is divided, without a clear majority. Instead of launching emergency measures, our authorities remain “passive”. Foreign investment is stagnating, thanks to “a wall of taxes and red tape”. Bold talk of increased defence spending is belied by the figures: the military hasn’t received a single extra euro. As for our health system, its deterioration is amply illustrated by the “explosion” of infant mortality, now near the highest level in the EU. Our leaders offer only “demagoguery” and “impotence”; the citizens, “resignation”. The Fifth Republic is “committing suicide before our eyes”.

SOUTH AFRICA

We must stand up to Donald Trump

*The Continent
(Johannesburg)*

“South Africa is not used to being the bad guy,” says Simon Allison. Ever since our peaceful transition from white supremacist state to rainbow democracy 30 years ago, we’ve basked in “international adulation”. But thanks to Donald Trump and his allies, including South Africa-born Elon Musk, we’ve entered a new era. The Trump administration thinks South Africa is cosying up to China and Iran, and at the same time demonising Israel, against which it is mounting a war crimes case at the International Criminal Court. Musk is also spreading totally spurious charges of a “white genocide” against the Afrikaner white minority. A draft State Department memo reportedly labels South Africa as a “country of concern”, putting it on a par with China and “just one rung” above Iran and North Korea. All this has panicked our political and business leaders. Some want to appease Trump by dropping the case at The Hague and “pledging fealty”. But where will that get us? We can’t pledge to stop a genocide that simply isn’t happening. So our other option? Defiance. South Africa has a long-standing commitment to human rights; it hasn’t been scared to point out the hypocrisies of the West. So let’s double down on that; let’s make ourselves “a kind of moral conscience for the Global South”.

What the scientists are saying...

The arrival of the “skinny pill”

Millions of people have injected themselves with Wegovy and other GLP-1 drugs, in an effort to lose weight: in the US, it is estimated that 12% of adults have tried the so-called “skinny jab”. Now, once-a-day pills, which have the potential to be even more popular, may be on the way. Last week, Eli Lilly revealed promising results from a stage three trial of its oral GLP-1 drug: orforglipron was found to lower blood sugar levels in patients with type 2 diabetes, and it also helped them lose weight, with those on the highest dose shedding 7kg on average over 40 weeks. The company, which is awaiting the results of a section of the trial involving patients who are overweight or obese, plans to apply for approval to market the tablet as a weight-loss treatment in the US later this year; and the Danish drug company Novo Nordisk, which makes the Wegovy jab, has already applied in the US for approval for an oral semaglutide pill. The pills will be easier to manufacture and transport than the jabs – which have to be refrigerated – which could make them cheaper, as well as easier to take.

Sunscreens role in human history

A form of ancient sunscreen could have helped *Homo sapiens* survive a period of intense environmental stress that killed off the Neanderthals, scientists have suggested. The two species existed alongside each other for millennia until about 40,000 years ago, when Neanderthals disappeared. The reason for their demise is not entirely clear, but one factor may have been the shift of the Earth’s magnetic poles that occurred around that time. Known as Laschamps excursion, this phenomenon lasted 1,000 years and weakened Earth’s magnetic field to about 10% of its current



Wild rabbits suffer “another wave of loss”

strength, leading to a massive increase in solar radiation. Researchers in Michigan have found evidence that *Homo sapiens* developed what may have been protective strategies: they took shelter in caves and ramped up their extraction of the pigment ochre, perhaps because they were using it to paint their bodies. Needles and awls unearthed at Stone Age sites also indicate the use of tailored clothes – which would have kept them warmer too, enabling them to travel further for food. But there is little evidence that the Neanderthals adapted in such ways. Solar radiation can damage sight and lead to birth defects and infant deaths – so protection from it would “have conferred significant advantage”, said Dr Raven Garvey, who co-authored the study.

Chicken chunks grown in the lab

Scientists have grown nugget-sized chunks of chicken in the lab – a milestone in efforts to create meat without having to

slaughter animals. Plenty of teams have grown meat in the lab from animal cells. However, the difficulty of ferrying nutrients and oxygen to the growing tissue (the work done by the blood vessels) has limited the size of the cultivated meat. To create anything resembling steak, researchers have had to “glue” small bits together with an edible binder; these slabs may look the part, but lack the texture of real meat. The solution devised by the team at the University of Tokyo involved suspending the cells in a gel and feeding nutrients through a network of hollow fibres. The 2cm-long, 1cm-deep chicken piece, which is believed to be the biggest yet grown, was nourished by more than 1,000 of these “arteries”. The fibres had to be removed by hand after they’d done their job; but the ultimate aim is to create edible fibres that can be left in place, giving the meat a varied texture.

A threat to Britain’s wild rabbits

A virulent new strain of a virus that poses the greatest threat to wild rabbits since myxomatosis may have arrived in the UK. Rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) was first identified in China in the 1980s, and has been endemic in the UK since the 1990s. The new strain was identified on the continent last year, and though its presence has not been confirmed here, it is suspected of being behind a rise in rabbit deaths. RHD attacks the internal organs, and is fatal in 90% of cases. “There was a sense around 2020 that [the threat of RHD] was levelling off, and then this new strain has just caused another wave of loss,” Matt Larsen-Daw, of the Mammal Society, told The Times. Nothing can be done to protect wild rabbits, but the hope is that resistance will build up, and the population will rebound. Pet rabbits can be vaccinated.

Chimps enjoy a convivial drink

Humans like to socialise with alcohol. Now chimps have been observed enjoying a communal tipples too. Motion-sensitive cameras captured the apes in the forests of Guinea-Bissau sharing chunks of naturally fermented breadfruit on ten occasions, with several of them gathering round to enjoy the same piece of fruit, even when other fermented breadfruits lay nearby. The level of alcohol was relatively low, at no more than 0.61% by volume (for context, the ABV of beer is typically 4%), but with fruit making up the bulk of a chimp’s diet, they could end up consuming significant levels of alcohol. It is not clear what effect this has on them. They are unlikely to get “drunk”, in the way humans do, as that could affect their survival chances. Possibly, though, alcohol relaxes them in much the same way as it does humans, and helps with social bonding. “We need to find out more about whether they deliberately seek out ethanolic fruits and how they metabolise it, but this behaviour could be the early evolutionary stages of ‘feasting’,” said senior author Dr Kimberley Hockings, of the University of Exeter.



An early form of “feasting”?

Over-65s need more weight

We’re often urged to watch our weight, but the NHS should warn over-65s that they need to maintain a higher BMI than younger people, Dame Patricia Hewitt, the former health secretary, has warned. She revealed last week that on holiday in Australia recently, she became severely ill with dehydration after going on a bushwalk, and her weight dropped “catastrophically”. The medics who looked after her explained the concept of geriatric BMI – the idea that the optimum BMI for over-65s is higher than for younger people. Carrying a bit more weight gives older people a “buffer” for if they fall ill and shed kilos rapidly; but it is also the case that slimmer adults tend to have less muscle mass – which increases the risk of frailty and falls. “What is a healthy weight for you as you grow older, particularly if you’re a woman, is almost certainly higher than you think it is,” said Hewitt.

Pope Francis: a funeral at “the centre of the world”

Ancient Rome styled itself *Roma caput mundi*, said Tobias Jones in *The Observer* – the centre of the world. And as the sun rose over the city last Saturday morning, it felt that way again, as national delegations from 170 countries began to gather for the funeral of Pope Francis. With numerous monarchs and other heads of state and world leaders present, security was tight: the black limos heading down the Via della Conciliazione that leads to the Vatican had police escorts; police helicopters circled overhead; there were snipers on rooftops and fighter jets on standby. The dignitaries in black suits and dark glasses were seated – as per Vatican tradition – alphabetically by their country’s name in French. Donald Trump (who stood out in navy blue) was thus alongside the Finnish leader, and some way from President Zelensky of Ukraine. By 10am, when Francis’s casket was brought out, 250,000 people were massed in attendance. The faithful had come from all over the world, said Will Lloyd in *The Times* – from Manila to Accra, Luanda to Kansas – to pay their last respects to the Pope. For many, it was their first time in Rome; for some it was their first trip overseas.



A “pared back ceremony”: St Peter’s Square

bridges, not walls.” And it was notable that Francis had opted to be buried not in the Vatican, but fully six kilometres away from it. Some 150,000 people lined the streets to see his cortège wind its way across Rome to his final stop – the basilica Santa Maria Maggiore, which lies in an unremarkable suburb close to a railway terminus. Here, Francis’s coffin was greeted by a group of the poor and marginalised – sex workers, transgender people, prisoners. It was then buried in a marble tomb engraved with a single word: *Franciscus*.

As the faithful filed home, the cardinals remained – to choose the next pope: 135 of them are under 80 and so eligible to take part in the conclave that begins on 7 May. How those cardinals vote will play a crucial role “in determining the durability of Francis’s legacy”, said *The Guardian*. His direct style endeared him to millions, including many non-Catholics. He had a profound impact. But in the Church, there were many who “railed” against his “pastoral approach to questions of sexuality and diversity, his disdain for hierarchy and dogma, and his emphasis on social and environmental justice. They will see the chance of a conservative

Francis had taken steps to pare the ceremony back, said *The Daily Telegraph*. Among other things, he’d decreed that he should be laid to rest in one coffin, made of zinc and wood, instead of encased in three (of cypress, lead and oak), as is traditional. Many, seeing the giant screens, the Swiss Guard in their Renaissance uniforms and the cardinals in their scarlet finery, might not have thought of this as a humble occasion, for a humble pope. But before the service, they had been repeatedly reminded of the Pope’s message, that the Church can be found not just amid the pomp of the Vatican, but “in some of the most wretched places on Earth”, said *The Economist*. We learnt that Francis had used most of what remained of his own money (€200,000) to pay off the mortgage of a pasta factory that operates in a prison; that one of his final phone calls, two days before his death, had been to the Christians in Gaza with whom he had kept in regular touch; and that he had been laid to rest not in papal slippers, but in his “clumpy, scuffed black orthotics”.

During the service, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re stressed in his homily the Pope’s concern for the poor, whom Francis had sought to live alongside, and for migrants; he spoke of his belief in the futility of war, and quoted one of his favourite phrases: “Build

“His coffin was greeted by a group of sex workers, transgender people and prisoners”

many of whom are Francis’s appointees – may share the moral outlook of Western traditionalists, they may also seek a pope with Francis’s commitment to fighting global inequality.

In pushing for reform, Francis worried deeply about provoking divisions, said Dan Hitchens on *UnHerd*. His strategy, he once told an ally, was to not speak plainly. But it didn’t work: his ambiguity gave false confidence to progressives that radical change was in the offing – while inflaming traditionalists who felt threatened by the idea of such change. The next pope will likewise govern a Church in which disagreements on a range of issues (from blessings for same-sex couples to “the fundamental nature of Jesus’s message”) are “beyond any compromise”. Cardinal Gerhard Müller has reportedly warned that if that pope is another liberal, the result could be a schism. And he may have a point. Electing a conservative who says the Church’s teachings are clear, and not for him to meddle with, would not stop the conflicts, but it could turn down the temperature.

Pick of the week’s *Gossip*

David Cameron’s former “guru” **Steve Hilton** (pictured) has ditched his hug-a-hoodie messaging since moving to California – and is now a Donald Trump supporter with his eye on becoming the state’s next governor. If he makes it to the gubernatorial mansion, it would be a vast upgrade on his tiny Downing Street office, which Hilton shared with ex-Lib Dem adviser Polly Mackenzie during the coalition. Mackenzie



told the *How To Win An Election* podcast that they were both initially surprised by how small

the room was – but all became clear when Tory grandee Ken Clarke burst in during their first week. “He charged into the office without knocking and stopped abruptly on seeing me,” she said. “Oh,” he exclaimed. “This used to be where we put the coats.”

Donald Trump claims to be a devout Christian; and has even named the Bible as his favourite book. But when asked by a journalist to share his favourite verse during the 2016 campaign, Trump floundered. “I wouldn’t want to get into that, it’s very personal,” he said. “The Bible means a lot

to me, but I don’t want to get into specifics.” Trying to help the candidate out, a second reporter asked: “Are you an Old Testament guy, or New Testament?” A perplexed Trump paused, before declaring: “Probably... equal!”

The combative talk show host **Jeremy Kyle** is so unpopular, that when he came second to Osama bin Laden in a *GQ* article about the most hated man in the world, his agent pointed out, “You can’t even win that!” But then bin Laden was killed, “and they gave it to me”, Kyle told the *Spooning with Mark Wogan* podcast.

Youth mobility: a Brexit reversal?

"It's nearly nine years now since Britain lost its collective mind," said Gaby Hinsliff in *The Guardian*. But as the Brexit referendum recedes into the past, some sense may at last be returning to our country's dealings with Brussels. Labour, which has long been terrified of sounding too pro-European, is catching up with the public and becoming a little bolder about acknowledging the benefits of improved links with our friends across the Channel. With an UK-EU "Brexit reset" summit in London approaching on 19 May, sources have suggested that the Government

is open to the idea of a reciprocal youth mobility scheme – or, as they prefer to call it, a "youth experience" scheme. The programme would be open to 18- to 30-year-olds and would confer the freedom to travel, study and work in this country or the EU for at least a year.

The "stench of Brexit sellout" is growing by the day, said *The Sun*. It's bad enough that, in return for being able to sell more weapons to European allies, the Government is reportedly considering surrendering more of our fishing rights to continental trawlers. Now it's proposing to invite hundreds of thousands of young workers into the country, sending our immigration system further out of control. "It's nothing short of freedom of movement by the back door." On



Will it pacify the pro-EU young?

the contrary, this is an eminently sensible plan, said *The Times*. At a time when our hospitality sector is struggling to fill vacancies, it would help the economy: projections suggest it could boost growth by 0.4% of GDP, more than the estimated effect of recent planning reforms. And it would bring clear cultural and diplomatic benefits. As for the impact on immigration levels, "voters understand the difference between desirable and undesirable immigration". They're worried about irregular Channel crossings, not about "students wanting to explore Britain for a while".

Home Secretary Yvette Cooper reportedly wants a scheme that would have no effect on net immigration figures at all, said John Rentoul in *The Independent*. Her idea is for a "one-in, one-out" system, in which the number of young people coming to the UK wouldn't exceed the number of British youths going to the EU. Even if the net figures didn't change, this would clearly be a partial return to freedom of movement, said Sam Leith in *The Spectator* – and a good thing too. While it might enrage Brexit diehards, it would go some way to pacifying the under-30s, who are the cohort most resentful of our decision to split from the EU. Eurosceptics should thus welcome the move. Far from undermining Brexit, it would "future-proof" it.

Virginia Giuffre: the heavy toll of abuse

The death of Virginia Giuffre brings to an end "one of the grimmest and saddest sagas" in recent public life, said Alexander Larman in *The Spectator*. Last week, the family of the 41-year-old – who was preyed upon by the billionaire paedophile Jeffrey Epstein and his enabler Ghislaine Maxwell – announced that she had taken her own life. Giuffre had not long escaped the clutches of a sex trafficker when, aged 16 and working as a spa attendant at Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago Club, she met Maxwell. She was "thrust into a nightmarish existence": abused by Epstein and, as she put it, "passed around like a platter of fruit" to other powerful men. One of her abusers, she alleged, was Prince Andrew. Giuffre achieved justice of sorts: Maxwell is serving a 20-year prison sentence; Epstein died by suicide while awaiting trial. But "in the end", her family said, "the toll of abuse [was] so heavy that it became unbearable".



Giuffre: fought for justice

past year her "demons" appeared to catch up with her. Last month, amid an acrimonious divorce and custody battle with her husband Robert Giuffre, the mother-of-three claimed she had four days to live after a car crash. Giuffre had long been "attacked by strangers on the internet", said Bryony Gordon in the *Daily Mail*, and many leaped on this as proof that she was a fantasist. Clearly, though, it was a cry for help: a "desperately sad example of the devastating impact" of abuse.

Her death dispels any "lingering hope" Prince Andrew may have had of clearing his name, said Richard Kay in the same paper. The duke has always denied any wrongdoing; he reached an out-of-court settlement with Giuffre in 2022 but admitted no liability, and recent questions over the accuracy of her statements had offered the possibility, albeit slim, of exoneration. But Giuffre's suicide ends all that: it "binds the two of them more tightly than ever". Prince Andrew will for ever be "associated with a photograph that shows him smiling into the camera, his hand around the bare waist of a fresh-faced Giuffre when she was 17".

Giuffre was "instrumental" in the case against Maxwell, who was convicted in 2021, said Helen Rumbelow in *The Times*, and she managed to build a "meaningful life" in Australia. But in the

Wit & Wisdom

"The stock market is a device for transferring money from the impatient to the patient."

Warren Buffett, quoted on The Knowledge

"Always make the audience suffer as much as possible."

Alfred Hitchcock, quoted in the Philippine Daily Inquirer

"Two possibilities exist: either we are alone in the universe or we are not. Both are equally terrifying."

Arthur C. Clarke, quoted on Phys.org

"There is no such source of error as the pursuit of absolute truth."

Samuel Butler, quoted in Forbes

"Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves."

Carl Jung, quoted in The Daily Telegraph

"Never trust a man who, left alone with a tea cosy, doesn't try it on."

Billy Connolly, ibid

"Principles aren't principles if they don't cost you anything."

Chris Packham, quoted in The Independent

"When women gossip we get called bitchy; but when men do, it's called a podcast."

Comedian Sikisa, quoted in The Times

"After defeat, the hardest task for any party is also the only one that counts: which is to open its eyes."

Matthew d'Ancona, quoted in The Independent

Statistics of the week

The proportion of new cars with manual gearboxes has declined from 86% in 2000 to 22% last year.

The Times

In the year to March 2025, the amount of capital gains tax paid in the UK dropped by more than £1bn compared with the year before, from £14.5bn to £13bn.

HMRC/The Times

Football: a “sun-kissed title party” at Anfield

When Liverpool ended their 30-year wait for a league title in 2020, the celebrations were muted as it happened during the Covid pandemic, said Andy Hunter in *The Guardian*. With matches played in empty stadiums, and restrictions making a trophy parade impossible, it felt like a frustratingly pent-up triumph. But last Sunday, thankfully, there was no such need for restraint as Liverpool secured a record-equalling 20th league title with a 5-1 victory over Tottenham. After an early setback, when Dominic Solanke headed Spurs in front after 12 minutes, Liverpool hit back with three goals before half-time, from Luis Díaz, Alexis Mac Allister and Cody Gakpo. “The second half was a sun-kissed title party, crowned when Mohamed Salah swept in for Liverpool’s fourth” – the Egyptian’s 28th league goal of the season. A Destiny Udogie own goal completed the rout. At full-time, the Liverpool players sank to their knees, and Anfield exploded in a deafening roar.



“This means more”

After Jürgen Klopp’s departure last season, most Liverpool fans “would have settled” for fourth place this year, said Martin Samuel in *The Times*. But instead, Klopp’s replacement, Arne Slot, has completed one of the greatest managerial debut seasons in the history of England’s top tier. Not since José Mourinho arrived at Chelsea in 2004/05, and landed them their first title in 50 years,

has a manager had such an “instant impact”. And while some might say the Dutchman’s task was made easy by having inherited such a strong squad from Klopp (only one new outfield player, Federico Chiesa, was signed last summer), it could equally be said that, with the same players at his disposal, Klopp only managed to finish third last year. “Yes, this was a team built under Klopp’s stewardship”, but Slot has made significant tactical improvements – such as using Ryan Gravenberch as a defensive midfielder, and playing Dominik Szoboszlai “as a glorified ten”, which has helped liberate Salah.

This felt like a party “35 years in the waiting”, said Lewis Steele in the *Daily Mail* – and how the “football-mad city” of Liverpool celebrated. After the game, fans were everywhere – standing on top of bus stops, even balancing “atop lampposts and trees”. Thousands of flares were let off, illuminating the skies with thick red smoke. The Liverpool slogan, “This means more”, is one that “antagonises rival fans”, said Oliver Brown in *The Daily Telegraph*. And understandably so, for it suggests that whatever the club accomplishes is somehow “imbued with a deeper significance than you would find anywhere else”. But after spending the day in Liverpool, I was convinced that this victory really did “mean more”. It was a day of “exquisite pandemonium”, and it “revealed the city and the club at its finest”.

Rugby union: England given Six Nations scare by France

England’s women are “grand-slamers yet again”, and Six Nations champions for the seventh year in succession, said Stephen Jones in *The Times*. They achieved this “magnificent record” by beating France at Twickenham on Saturday. Yet what the record books “will not show” is how easily John Mitchell’s team could have lost against a French side who made up for what they lacked in structure with impressive “attacking intent”. The early stages were dominated by the Red Roses, who “notched up five tries inside the first quarter” and raced to a 31-7 lead, said Fiona Tomas in *The Daily Telegraph*. Whether it was Abby Dow gliding over the line after latching onto a “cute grubber” from Zoe Harrison, or “Megan Jones slicing through a pair of navy shirts”, England “were emphatic” in the early stages. But in response, Les Bleues showed “gutsy flashes of their trademark flair”, and kept coming at the hosts, who “struggled to cope with their threat in



Abby Dow: “gliding”

the wider channels”. Two tries in the final ten minutes brought France to within a point of England, but the Red Roses clung on during a “nail-biting finish” and emerged 43-42 winners.

“Great teams need good opposition, and England looked as if they hadn’t faced too much of it lately,” said Andy Bull in *The Guardian*. One minute they were “utterly irresistible”, the next “accident-prone”, making basic handling errors or “slipping off a tackle after the French had won a turnover”. They have won their last 25 matches, but most of those victories have been straightforward, and “deep down they will know” that they can improve. And they could well need to. “Once the celebrations are over, they will have to ask themselves if this level of performance will be good enough if they make it back here to Twickenham for the World Cup final in five months’ time.”

Commentary box

Near novice wins marathon

The 29-year-old Kenyan runner Sebastian Sawe had only once raced competitively at 26.2 miles before taking part in Sunday’s London Marathon, said Sean Ingle in *The Guardian*. But on one of the hottest days in the event’s history, he stunned an experienced field – which included Eliud Kipchoge, the “greatest ever” – to win in 2hr 2min 27sec: the second-fastest time in London Marathon history. His victory was founded on a “staggering” 5km surge after the 30km mark, which he completed in 13min 56sec to move well ahead of the rest of the field. Remarkably, Sawe only started training seriously in his early 20s, and began competing regularly on the international circuit at 27. “My focus was



Sawe: a staggering surge

education first, and then I run,” he said. The women’s race was won by Ethiopia’s Tigst Assefa, in a record 2hr 15min 50sec.

Arsenal in European final

Arsenal Women reached the final of the Champions League after producing a remarkable comeback against eight-time winners Lyon, said Kathryn Batte in *The Daily Telegraph*.

After losing the first leg 2-1 at the Emirates, few gave the Gunners any hope in the return fixture, given Lyon’s home form and experience. But on a memorable night, they pulled off a 4-1 victory – a performance that included a “goal-of-the-season contender” from Mariona Caldentey. In the final, they will face Barcelona, who beat Chelsea in the other semi-final.

Sporting headlines

Football Crystal Palace beat Aston Villa 3-0 to reach the final of the FA Cup. They will face Manchester City, who beat Nottingham Forest 2-0.

Snooker Ronnie O’Sullivan reached a record 23rd quarter-final at the World Snooker Championships, with a 13-4 victory over Pang Junxu.

Cycling Tadej Pogačar won the Liège-Bastogne-Liège classic race for the third time.

Rugby union Exeter Chiefs suffered their worst-ever defeat, losing 79-17 to Gloucester. Bath, who lead the table by 15 points, beat Newcastle Falcons 55-19.

Pick of the week's correspondence

Pacts can go both ways

To The Guardian

Talk of electoral pacts between the Conservatives and Reform UK for the right-of-centre vote has been widely reported. [And] as the policies of these parties move further to the right, some Conservative voters will shift their allegiance. Yet these voters are not going to the Labour Party, as its leadership follows rightwards. A litany of government policies must seem as abhorrent to "old-school" Conservatives as they do to traditional Labour values.

Instead, there is steady growth in support for parties that are broadly soft-left: the Lib Dems, Greens, the SNP and Plaid Cymru. These parties, albeit each with their own policy stance or geographic focus, now have a combined voting-preference share larger than that of Labour, the Conservatives or Reform.

The trend of younger women's shift to the Green Party can surely only broaden and deepen. For society is fragmenting as living standards fall. It should not only be the right-of-centre parties talking of electoral pacts, but also parties to the left of this government. Otherwise, a future Nigel Farage-led government, incorporating the remains of the Conservative Party, seems only too likely.
Neil Brown, Oban, Argyll and Bute

God is love

To the Financial Times

The reported observation of Roger Stone, a Catholic and longtime ally of President Trump, about it being "warm" where the late Pope Francis "is right now", demonstrates precisely the loveless, narrow, selective view of some Catholic "traditionalists" that Francis appears to have rejected. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another," (*John 13:35*) is just one passage from the Gospels that comes to mind. But then, as someone said, "Who am I to judge?"
Stephen Baister, London

A stout fellow

To The Economist

I read your article on the popularity of Guinness. In 1963, I was admitted to

Exchange of the week

Should we stand up to Trump?

To The Times

Some of your correspondents hanker after a *Love Actually* moment where we stand up to President Trump. Unfortunately, as Edward Lucas says, our security arrangements – and particularly our nuclear deterrent – are intertwined and dependent on the US. The realpolitik (much as it may be unpleasant) is that we have to make nice in the short term, while planning and working to reduce this dependency in the medium term. Sadly, I fear the Government will do the former without bothering with the latter.

Simon Cook, Bridge, Kent

To The Times

Contrary to Edward Lucas's opinion that we should flatter Donald Trump, I think now is the time to do the reverse.

Trump's attitude to President Zelensky, and the US president's appeasement of Vladimir Putin, must drive the UK off the fence with a clear and unequivocal alignment with Europe, and a much more determined coalition of the willing using confiscated Russian assets. Any settlement that does not have the full agreement of the Ukrainian government will not be worth the paper it is written on, and will not last beyond the next Putin breach. Normal diplomacy with the US is effectively suspended while Trump is in office, and we should not pretend otherwise.

Simon Edwards, France

To The Times

President Zelensky has two options: agree to President Trump's plan or resign. At the start, Putin might have settled for joint control of nothing more than the separatist states, and the US would have expected nothing. Now, the result of continuing the fighting is that both superpowers expect more. The longer the war goes on, the more they will expect. All the while, Ukraine is running out of manpower. The desire of our own MPs to prolong the conflagration shows a worrying lack of understanding, particularly when we have problems of our own. These proposals give Russia access to the Dnipro River, which is regrettable. But to delay, and be forced to give more, would only make things worse for Ukraine.

David Diprose, Thame, Oxfordshire

hospital with a burst appendix and, following surgery, peritonitis. I was in grave danger of not making it to 1964. I was put in what was called "a death bed". For ten days, I was semi-conscious. When I came round, the staff discussed how to feed me. Solids were out of the question.

A nurse appeared beside my bed holding a pint of Guinness. Two nurses spent time carefully spooning it down me and the "medication" was repeated for some days.

I'm 81 now and still going well. So I can personally validate the slogan, "Guinness is good for you".

Robin Bishop, Sydney

Keeping prison staff safe

To The Guardian

Alex South believes, albeit reluctantly, that the time may

be right for prison staff to be armed. After more than 40 years in the Prison Service, I couldn't disagree more. Unlike in other jurisdictions, the operation of UK prisons has been predicated on building sound working relationships between staff and prisoners. That would not be possible if the dynamics changed, with staff carrying stun guns.

The problem is that reductions in staffing levels and the loss of experienced staff have made the maintenance of control and the establishment of reasonable officer-prisoner relationships impossible.

The solution is to provide sufficient trained officers, build relationships and provide opportunities to change the lives of those in our prisons.

Keith Munns, Bramhall, Greater Manchester

Bismarck's advice

To the Financial Times

Mark Solon suggests President Trump might be following Otto von Bismarck's advice: "The secret of politics? Make a good treaty with Russia." Trump might be better advised to take to heart two other Bismarck pronouncements. First: "God has a special providence for fools, drunkards and the United States of America." Next: "Politics ruins the character."
Gregory Shenkman, London

Beneath the surface

To The Times

Why is Waldemar Januszczak puzzled by Turner's "lack of evident Englishness"? Does he think English people are bland, emotionless and boring? I am a nice, educated, middle-class English lady and like to think I have hidden depths. Our pretty green hills may also rest on a layer of spitting magma!
Christine Considine, Totnes, Devon

The silent carriage

To The Times

I recall one method adopted by a fellow passenger to silence the user of a speakerphone on a train. He took from his briefcase a volume of Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and started reading the description of the depraved life of Elagabalus aloud. When the phone user complained, he courteously offered to stop if the speakerphone was switched off. Mutual silence followed – to the regret of some passengers, who were enjoying hearing about Elagabalus.

A. Pugh-Thomas, Oxford



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Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

Allies at War

by Tim Bouverie

Bodley Head 688pp £25

The Week Bookshop £22.99 (incl. p&p)

Can “anything new be said about the Second World War”, asked Adam Sisman in *The Observer*. “Unexpectedly the answer is yes.” Among the “surprising facts” I learnt from this “revelatory book” are that pro-Russian feeling was so strong in Britain in 1942 that *War and Peace* became a bestseller, and that Mahatma Gandhi considered Hitler “not as bad as he is depicted”. A “work of old-fashioned diplomatic history”, *Allies at War* focuses on the fraught and often shifting alliances between the countries that opposed the Axis powers: chiefly Britain, America, the Soviet Union, but also the Free French (led by Charles de Gaulle) and China. In the foreground are the “Big Three” leaders – Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin (pictured above) – but there are also “walk-on parts” for a host of foreign ministers, ambassadors and emissaries. Although Tim Bouverie has clearly done his research, he doesn’t let this overwhelm his narrative, which is consistently lucid, entertaining and witty.

In public, the Allies were mostly “models of civility”, said Caroline Moorehead in *The Spectator*. But privately, their dealings



Yalta Conference of 1945, not least the repatriation of thousands of eastern Europeans “to their deaths in the Soviet Union”.

A big strength of Bouverie’s book is how it takes in many of the War’s lesser-known struggles and connects them to its main narrative, said Andrew Roberts in *The Daily Telegraph*. He covers the Iraqi revolt of May-June 1941, and the sacrifices made by Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist China (which lost around 15 million people) – and shows how these created “stresses and strains” which impacted relations between the Big Three. As well as being historically illuminating, his book is also “extremely timely” – for it comes at a time when, thanks to Donald Trump, the Western alliance that has “kept the peace between the Great Powers for 80 years” is under strain as never before.

Moral Ambition

by Rutger Bregman

Bloomsbury 304pp £20

The Week Bookshop £17.99

Many years ago, said Stuart Jeffries in *The Observer*, “there was a BBC children’s TV programme called *Why Don’t You Just Switch Off Your Television Set and Go and Do Something Less Boring Instead?*” Dutch historian Rutger Bregman’s new book is like that programme, but “for grown-ups”. It sets out to encourage “clever, if spiritually bankrupt people” to give up their well-paid but meaningless jobs, doing things of “negligible ethical value”, and put their gifts to “virtuous use” instead. To encourage readers in this course, Bregman considers previous examples of moral ambition, said Rowan Williams in *The Guardian*. There’s “radical US activist Ralph Nader” (above), who won a “spectacular series of victories” over corporate America; and Rob Mather, an executive from London who set up a malaria charity that has raised millions. Such case studies are “vivid and often genuinely inspiring”. At its best, the book offers a “bracingly hopeful perspective” on how people can lead more fulfilling lives while also doing good.

“Bregman’s ambitions are admirable,” said Mia Levitin in *The Daily Telegraph*, and most of his arguments are sensible enough. His complaints about “armchair activism”, and the moral purism of many progressive movements, which often prevents them actually doing anything, certainly hit home. If even a small percentage of his readers are “spurred to action”, then the book will have been worth writing. Unfortunate, then, that his message is delivered in such an “irksome” way. “Bregman, the son of a pastor, is too susceptible to sermonising” – and he’s also “prone to hyperbole and gross oversimplification”. Twenty-five years after Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point*, the “Big Ideas genre” – of which this book strives to be an example – “isn’t ageing well”.



Novel of the week

Paradise Logic

by Sophie Kemp

Scribner 256pp £16.99

The Week Bookshop £14.99

This debut novel by US writer Sophie Kemp is a “wholly original skewering” of the modern dating world, said Yagnishsing Dawoor in *The Guardian*. Set in Brooklyn in 2019, it tracks the adventures of Reality Kahn, a 23-year-old ad actor who, finding herself dissatisfied with her “no-strings-attached” lifestyle, resolves to become “the greatest girlfriend of all time”.

What follows is a wild and surreal tale, “a TikTok *Stepford Wives* for the Pornhub era”, said Anthony Cummins in *The Observer*. Taking tips from a magazine called *Girlfriend Weekly*, Reality strikes up a relationship with a “crack-smoking postgrad and wannabe musician named Ariel”; and is soon happily servicing his “every last whim”. Described by writer Gary Shteyngart as the “funniest book of the year”, *Paradise Logic* is indeed funny, in an uncomfortable way – it’s a brutal “comedy about misogyny”. Some of the satire hits the mark, said Ariella Garmaise in *The Washington Post*, but the “faux-naivete” soon becomes cloying. This is a novel based on an idea which is neither clever nor funny enough to sustain “240-odd pages”.

THE WEEK Bookshop

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Opening times: Monday to Saturday 9am-5.30pm and Sunday 10am-4pm

Theatre: The Brightening Air

The Old Vic, London SE1 (0344-871 7628). Until 14 June Running time: 2hrs 30mins ★★★★★

The acclaimed Irish playwright Conor McPherson's last original straight play was in 2013, and so the opening of *The Brightening Air*, which returns him as writer-director to the Old Vic (where his acclaimed Bob Dylan musical *Girl from the North Country* premiered in 2017), feels like a "major theatrical event", said Dzifa Benson in *The Daily Telegraph*. Haunting and very funny, it is set in rural Sligo in the early 1980s, where Stephen (Brian Gleeson) and his sister Billie (Rosie Sheehy) still live in their crumbling family home, and seem likely to die there until relations arrive to disrupt their "self-made rut". The play, which has (acknowledged) echoes of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, veers into the numinous and the supernatural, said Nick Curtis in *The London Standard*. There's "a religious revelation, an apparent miracle and the smiting of the unworthy. There's even a cosmic joke at the end." It may not be to all tastes, but I "bloody loved it".

Fitfully, the play is "utterly wondrous", said Sarah Crompton on *What's on Stage* – "elevated by commanding performances from the entire cast". Sheehy is "devastating" as the eccentric and autistic Billie. Gleeson brings "troubled depth and underlying anger" to the passive, put-upon Stephen. And Chris O'Dowd is superb as their older, wealthier brother Dermot – leaning into his character's "monstrous self-absorption, timing each line for



Rosie Sheehy and Brian Gleeson: "commanding performances"

maximum impact". But McPherson crams in too much. There isn't enough room to breathe between the twists and revelations, which makes this "gripping" play ultimately frustrating: "so nearly great, so nearly soaring, yet somehow held earthbound by the weight of its intent".

It has plenty of charm, and some "searing moments", said Arifa Akbar in *The Guardian*. But the evening could do with "more momentum and emotional drive". It's not that anything rings false in McPherson's "delicious

dialogue", said Dominic Maxwell in *The Times*. The problem is that "changes happen a tad too slowly in the first half, a tad too quickly in the second". But even if the play doesn't quite add up, "it's far more interesting than plenty of plays that do".

The week's other opening

Krapp's Last Tape York Theatre Royal (01904-623568).

Until 17 May

After decades devoted to cinema, Gary Oldman returns to the stage, and the theatre where he made his debut, for Beckett's one-man classic. It proves a "startling piece... arresting and emotional, up there with the best of the modern-day *Krapp's*" (*Guardian*).

Albums of the week: three new releases

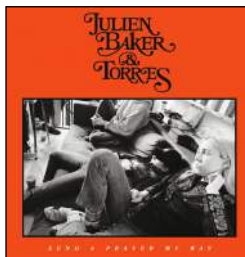
Wagner: Der fliegende Holländer (Lise Davidsen, Gerald Finley, Edward Gardner)
Decca
£12



Lise Davidsen is "the outstanding Wagner soprano of her generation", said Richard Fairman in the FT – and in this recording of *Der fliegende Holländer*, the Norwegian "roars through the opera like a North Sea gale". Backed by the orchestra and chorus of the Norwegian National Opera under Edward Gardner, she is a "force to reckon with" in the role of Senta – powerful and fearless. These are recordings of concert (rather than fully staged) performances, yet "they lack nothing in drama, thanks to Gardner's grip on pace and tension".

"From the moment that she launches into Senta's ballad in the second act, colouring it to spine-tingling effect, Davidsen holds the stage, and makes every set piece compelling," said Andrew Clements in *The Guardian*. Gerald Finley's singing as the Dutchman is as "elegant and intelligently shaped" as you would expect from him, but he is rather outgunned by Davidsen's armoury, and it is a pity the two don't strike more dramatic sparks. Still, Davidsen is a wonder, and the disc is "a compulsory purchase" for her many admirers.

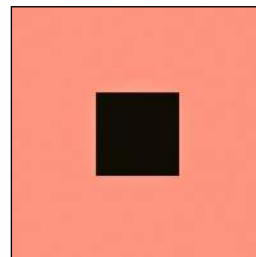
Julien Baker & Torres: Send a Prayer My Way
Matador
£11



"Country music is filled with tales of drunkenness, adultery, regret and all-round bad behaviour," said Will Hodgkinson in *The Times*. Rarely, however, if ever, have these tales been jointly written and sung by two gay women better known for indie rock. Julien Baker is known as one third of Boygenius. Torres is the recording name of indie star Mackenzie Scott. The pair have been planning to make country music together for years, and "here they go straight to the heart of Nashville on a laid-back, fiddle- and pedal steel-enriched outlaw country album about life's messy realities".

What we have here is the sound of "two lesbians from Tennessee" trying to "reckon with their conflicted relationship to the conservative-associated soundtrack of the American south", said Helen Brown in *The Independent*. They've "set up camp with elegant fiddles, sun-dappled mandolins, banjos, expansive pedal steel guitars and the occasional herd of rattling drums". They play "witty modern games with old country clichés" – and toss out melodic hooks "as smoothly as well-thumbed playing cards".

Bon Iver: Sable, Fable
Jagjaguwar
£11



The "glitchy, folk-inspired songwriting" with which Justin Vernon made his name, on Bon Iver's debut album *For Emma, Forever Ago*, has "become one of the dominant sounds in pop". And since his last album under the Bon Iver name, in 2019, the musician-producer has collaborated with the likes of Taylor Swift, Charli XCX, Beyoncé and Travis Scott. Where, then – the industry has been wondering – would this influential figure head next? The answer seems to be in two directions at once, said James Hall in *The Daily Telegraph*. The first four tracks here are sparsely acoustic songs about heartbreak. The rest are upbeat, joyful and funky. And weirdly, it somehow works.

In parts, this superb album is almost R&B, said Jem Aswad in *Variety* – complete with "falsetto vocals, Motownesque melodies and some early-Kanye-esque sped-up samples". But it also veers into sort-of pop, with *If Only I Could Wait* – an aching duet with Danielle Haim, embellished with gorgeous strings. Stylistically sprawling but surprisingly cohesive, it "contains nearly all of Bon Iver's multitudes".

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



The Friend

1hr 59mins (15)

Unusual dog-led drama
starring Bill Murray and
Naomi Watts

★★★

From *Turner & Hooch* to *Beethoven*, “the tale of a reluctant owner falling in love with a problematic pooch has played out many times on the big screen”, said Dulcie Pearce in *The Sun*. *The Friend* is the latest addition to the canon. It stars Naomi Watts as Iris, a writer who is reeling from the suicide of her friend and literary mentor Walter (Bill Murray, glimpsed mainly in flashback) when she discovers that he has bequeathed her his dog, Apollo. Unfortunately, she lives in a “tiny” New York flat – and Apollo is “a 150lb Great Dane” who has become “deeply depressed” since his master’s death.

There are some predictable odd-couple flare-ups, said Robbie Collin in *The Daily Telegraph*. Apollo chews up half of Iris’s belongings – including her “abortive second novel” – and commandeers her bed. She finds herself “wondering what on earth her late confidant thought she could do for this dog”, but of course it turns out that Walter “was more intrigued by what the dog might do for her”. Sadly, the answer is neither profound nor exciting: indeed, “seldom has a film ever felt like it’s trying so hard not to be interesting”. I was interested in the dog, said Deborah Ross in *The Spectator*. Named Bing in real life, he is “a solemn, mournful presence” with a peculiar majesty. The human stars are good, too. But *The Friend* isn’t just doggy hokum. It is based on a novel by Sigrid Nunez – a meditation on grief and friendship that is so literary and meta, you wonder why they ever thought of making it into a movie. Yet Scott McGehee and David Siegel, “who wrote the screenplay and also direct, do seem to have captured” the book’s “essence”. Their film “is a graceful, respectful and intelligent interpretation, even if it may prove too dramatically underpowered for some”.



The Accountant 2

2hrs 4mins (15)

Ben Affleck returns as an
autistic maths genius in an
action-packed sequel

★★

“When *The Accountant* was released in 2016, it felt like an odd idea for a modern action film,” said Ralph McLean in the *Belfast Telegraph*. Ben Affleck played Christian Wolff, a gifted “autistic accountant” who moonlights as a vigilante – and the result was “a fresh, funny take on the clichéd crime-drama genre” that made a healthy profit. So it is that nine years on we have a sequel – and if anything, it is even “better than part one”. When the film picks up Wolff’s story, he is “trying to live a normal life and indulging in, among other things, very awkward speed dating”. His newfound peace is shattered, however, when a former US Treasury official is assassinated while investigating a people-smuggling ring, and the government turns to him to help them crack the case. To do so, Wolff teams up with “his estranged but conveniently action-friendly” brother, Brax (Jon Bernthal), and must contend with “ruthless killers hellbent on stopping him from doing his job”.

The on-screen chemistry between Affleck and Bernthal makes for some great moments, said James Mottram in *Radio Times*. I particularly enjoyed the “childish ribbing” between the brothers, which climaxes in a scene in which Brax torments Christian by throwing away his sunscreen. Yet there are plot holes galore, and when the film “lurches into its final act”, it really starts to lose all credibility. Worse still, said Clarisse Loughrey in *The Independent*, is its portrayal of autism, which is close to being offensive. While the first film showed reasonably sensitively how the condition had shaped Wolff’s life, this follow-up teeters “on the edge of seeing his autism as nothing more than a punchline”. This leaves a bad taste in the mouth.



The Ugly Stepsister

1hr 49mins (18)

Gory Norwegian version
of the Cinderella story

★★★

The Ugly Stepsister is “an ingenious revisionist body-horror version of *Cinderella*” that unfolds from the perspective of the fairy-tale’s antagonist, said Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian*. In 18th century central Europe, “cynical widow” Rebekka (Ane Dahl Torp) remarries a man she thinks has a vast fortune – only for him to drop dead at their wedding breakfast. Left “financially embarrassed”, she must now care for her sweet but “plain” daughter Elvira (Lea Myren) and a new stepdaughter, Agnes (Thea Sofie Loch Naess), a “beautiful” young woman whom Rebekka relegates to the role of servant. News that the handsome Prince Julian (Isac Calmroth) is to host a ball where he will choose his bride seems to offer a way out, said Hannah Strong in *Little White Lies*. To improve Elvira’s chances, her mother subjects her to a series of “harrowing cosmetic procedures” – feeding her a tapeworm to lose weight, “breaking and resetting her nose” and “sewing false eyelashes into her eyelids”.

As she becomes beautiful, the initially pleasant young woman “grows vain and self-obsessed”, and is so fixated on the prince she can’t see that he isn’t up to much himself. Indeed, almost none of the characters are sympathetic (even Agnes, the Cinderella figure, is conceited and unkind), and the women in particular are horrid. All of this creates a “sour air”, in a film that uses a lot of “creative gore” to disguise the flimsiness of its concept. It’s certainly gruesome, said Jeannette Catsoulis in *The New York Times*. But it’s also “slyly funny” and “visually gratifying”. Myren is brilliant as Elvira, and grounds what is ultimately a movie about “the physical agony of aesthetic conformity”.

Louis Theroux: The Settlers – the documentarian revisits the West Bank

In 2011, Louis Theroux made a documentary about Jewish settlers on the West Bank. Now, with the world’s attention turned to Gaza, “he is back with another”, said Carol Midgley in *The Times*. His earlier film caused quite a stir, but if the settlers were wary about him returning, with his faux-naïve questions, they didn’t show it. On the contrary, they welcomed him into their homes (some half-built), and didn’t hesitate to express their belief that they have a God-given right to live there. This despite the fact that Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal under international law. “We were in this land planting vineyards before Mohammed was in the third grade,” one interviewee tells him; and at a meeting to discuss new settlements in Gaza, an ultra-nationalist rabbi



Theroux: faux naïve

declares that Lebanon should be “cleansed of these camel riders”. But he also meets an Israeli who says that the idea of settling Gaza is “ridiculous”, and sees Israeli peace activists defending Palestinians who are being stopped by soldiers from harvesting their olives. It’s perhaps a pity he doesn’t devote more time to these viewpoints.

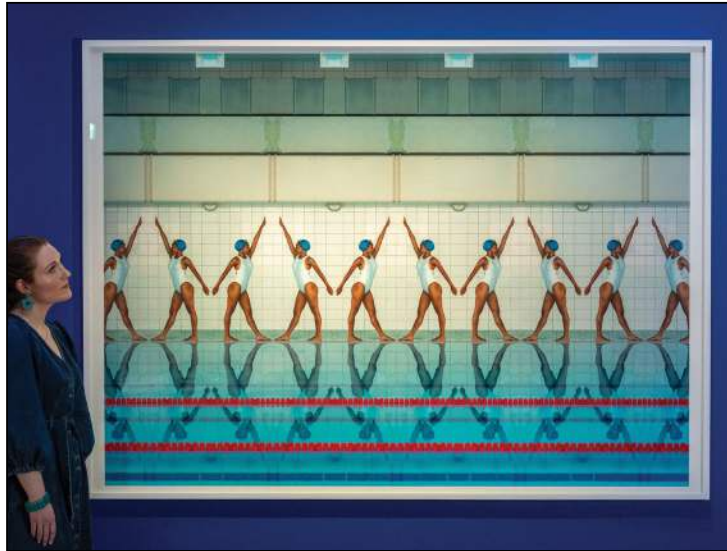
Most moderate Israelis regard the settlers as a “national embarrassment”, said Anita Singh in *The Daily Telegraph*. But Theroux’s shtick is to spend time with extremists – and, of course, he finds them here. Even so, I am not sure that this follow-up adds much; and post 7 October, his lightly sceptical style felt jarring to me. That said, I’d love to see him try it on Hamas officials.

Exhibition of the week **Splash! A Century of Swimming and Style**

Design Museum, London W8 (020-3862 5937, designmuseum.org). Until 17 August

In July 1946, US forces detonated a nuclear bomb over Bikini Atoll in the Pacific. Four days later, a French fashion designer called Louis Réard “launched a provocative two-piece swimsuit at a poolside party in Paris”. Réard wanted to give his design a name that “would embody the tiniest garment imaginable, combined with the most explosive impact possible”, and saw the “almighty atomic blast as the ideal symbol”; and so was born the modern bikini. This bizarre tale is just one of many related in this exhibition charting our love affair with swimming over the past century, said Oliver Wainwright in *The Guardian*. The show explores its subject “across fashion, architecture, sport and more”, touching on everything from Britain’s “love of lidos” and “the lure of the seaside”, to the resurgent popularity of wild swimming and even mermaid-themed TikTok trends. Featuring a fascinating selection of swimwear, photographs, films and all manner of archival material, it adds up to an “illuminating” and enjoyable event.

There’s no shortage of “spectacle” here, said Evgenia Siokos in *The Daily Telegraph*. The layout “ping-pongs the viewer’s attention” from exhibit to exhibit, taking in “an abundance of trinkets, advertisements, magazines, posters, goggles, rubber pool slides, costume sketches, swimming pool designs and rather unsightly swimming costumes”. Some are genuinely absorbing:



Mária Švarbová with Movement (2020) at Splash!

there’s the first Olympic gold medal for swimming ever won by a British woman, Lucy Morton, at the Paris Games in 1924; Tom Daley’s “microscopic” Speedos; and even the “iconic flaming red swimsuit” Pamela Anderson sported on *Baywatch*. As ever, with museum shows in Britain, you must expect a certain amount of progressive politics: a video about The Subversive Sirens, an American synchronised swimming team committed to black liberation and “queer visibility”, plays loudly across much of the show. But whether you’re curious about the “sociopolitical importance of swimming since the 1920s”,

or you just like old lidos and swimwear, it’s well worth a visit.

The show’s broad sweep means that its exploration of certain big subjects “can be (forgive me) shallow”, said Rowan Moore in *The Observer*. Nor do the dozens of “briefs and bikinis” on show make for the “most compelling” of exhibits. Still, there are some fascinating things here: a video about the women of Jeju in South Korea who have dived for seafood and seaweed for centuries; “gay soft porn” magazine spreads “masquerading as features about swimwear at a time when homosexuality was illegal”; a model of Zaha Hadid’s aquatics centre for the London 2012 Olympics. It may not be the most intellectually rigorous of exhibitions, but it amounts to “an engaging array of things to do with swimming”, which offers many “revelations and surprises”.

Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Djordje Ozbolt

at Herald St

The Serbian artist Djordje Ozbolt’s current show – *Birdsongs of Praise* – is a distinctly wacky affair, consisting of a recent series of paintings depicting birds in fantastical, glitchy situations. On the one hand, there’s a whimsical side to it – if you’ve ever, for instance, wanted to see what a barn owl might look like with a lit cigarette dangling from its beak, like some kind of avian Humphrey Bogart, look no further. On the other hand, the work is an intriguing bid to jam disparate artistic styles together to see what happens: another owl, this time almost transparent, sits in a landscape straight from van Gogh’s years in Arles, but elements of the composition point to the surrealism of Magritte or Paul Delvaux. Elsewhere, two tropical birds on a branch could be taxonomical



When Harry Met Piet (2025)

illustrations from Audubon’s *Birds of America*, were one of them not decked out in a Mondrian pattern of primary-coloured squares. Somehow, it comes across as more likeable than whimsical. Prices on request.

43 Museum Street, London WC1
(020-7168 2566, heraldst.com).
Until 17 May

The Turner Prize shortlist

“A learning disabled artist, a former Iraqi refugee, and one of the youngest-ever nominees” are among those shortlisted for this year’s Turner Prize, said Paul



Glynn on BBC News. Glasgow-born Nnena Kalu (pictured), who has limited verbal communication, “creates large-scale swirling abstract drawings and sculptures made from colourful streams of repurposed fabrics”. The photographer Rene Matić, who is only 27, is nominated for pictures of skinhead subcultures and family and friends in Peterborough. The painter Mohammed Sami hails from Baghdad, and his work draws on his life and experiences during the Iraq War and as a refugee in Sweden. Zadie Xa from Vancouver, Canada, is inspired by her Korean heritage and the importance of shamanic beliefs. Sami is “in another league”, said Jonathan Jones in *The Guardian* – “a real international talent”. The rest are painfully redolent of metropolitan liberal elite taste – and more importantly, dull. The “soppiest” list yet.



Best books... John Boyne

The bestselling novelist picks five favourites. He will discuss his new book, *Air* (Doubleday £12.99), at the Stratford Literary Festival on 10 May. Week subscribers get a discount; enter code SLFW25 (stratfordliteraryfestival.co.uk)

Old School by Tobias Wolff, 2003 (Bloomsbury £10.99). I love novels that feature fictionalised versions of authors, and this one – set at an elite boarding school in 1960s America – is among the best. The teenage narrator longs to be a writer, encountering Robert Frost, Ayn Rand and Ernest Hemingway during his final year and making some questionable choices that he lives to regret.

Barracuda by Christos Tsiolkas, 2013 (Atlantic £10.99). My favourite 21st century novel is Tsiolkas's *The Slap*, but this is also in the top ten. The tale of a young Greek-Australian swimmer with aspirations towards the

Sydney Olympics; he's good, but just not good enough. What does it mean to fail, especially when so young? Tsiolkas answers that in a novel that utterly succeeds.

The Mysterious Affair at Styles by Agatha Christie, 1920 (HarperCollins £9.99). Every year, I read at least two Christie novels; she's my comfort read. Privileged rich people killing other privileged rich people and being dashed upset about it all; what's not to love? This was her first novel. There was only greatness to come.

Night by Elie Wiesel, 1956 (Penguin £9.99). The first book to inform me of the

Holocaust, it was the start of a lifelong education that continues to this day, inspiring some of my own most famous novels. It remains one of the most upsetting but important narratives ever committed to print. Essential reading.

My Uncle Oswald by Roald Dahl, 1979 (Penguin £10.99). I read this as a teenager and loved it because, quite frankly, it's absolutely filthy. Uncle Oswald cuts a swathe around the world's women, making Casanova look like a monk. As each of his adventures is more libidinous than the last, it's definitely not one for Dahl's younger readers.

Titles in print are available from The Week Bookshop on 020-3176 3835. For out-of-print books visit biblio.co.uk

The Week's guide to what's worth seeing

Showing now

This weekend's **Cheltenham Jazz Festival** welcomes headliners from David Gray and Macy Gray to Roger Daltrey and Beverley Knight. Until 5 May, various venues, Cheltenham (cheltenhamfestivals.org).

Katherine Ryan is "her merrily merciless self" in her latest touring show **Battleaxe**, in which she takes aim at an unnamed male comedian and plays agony aunt to her audiences (Times). Until 27 June, various venues (livenation.co.uk).

The British Museum celebrates one of the most prolific and popular artists in Japan's history. **Hiroshige: artist of the open road** brings together the prints, paintings and illustrated books in which he documented the landscapes and people of a country on the brink of change in the 19th century. Until 7 September, British Museum, London WC1 (britishmuseum.org).

Book now

Following its critically acclaimed, sell-out run at Edinburgh, David Ireland's hard-hitting study of alcoholism **The Fifth Step** – starring Martin



One of Hiroshige's 69 Stations of the Kiso Highway

Freeman and *Slow Horses*' Jack Lowden – is about to open in London and tickets are already selling fast. 12 May-26 July, Soho Place Theatre, London W1 (sohoplace.org.uk).

Garden Futures: Designing with Nature brings together work by artists, garden designers and landscape architects – including Derek Jarman, Duncan Grant and Piet Oudolf – to look at how outdoor spaces shape our lives. 17 May-January 2026, V&A Dundee (vam.ac.uk).

The Archers: what happened last week

Helen breaks it to Pat that she's moving in with Tom and Natasha while she looks for her own place. Freddie tells Lily that he's sure the hidden camera wasn't a prank – he's determined to find out who planted it. Rochelle meets with Saskia, who wants access to the abattoir and tells Rochelle she'll have to burn her bridges in Ambridge when they're done. At Beechwood, Helen and Joy chat and Helen reports bumping into Rochelle with a friend in Felpersham; Rochelle is meant to be cooking dinner but rushes off after Saskia calls. Rochelle stalls for time with the abattoir plan, but Saskia says they need to be ready. Joy offers to help Rochelle get her own place, but a wrong-footed Rochelle refuses. Tensions emerge with Helen as Tom and Natasha move into Beechwood. Rex opens up to Helen, telling her he doesn't know what to do about a woman he likes. He confronts Rochelle and tries to kiss her, but she rows back saying she just wants fun and might have to leave Ambridge soon, while Rex doesn't want something casual. They agree to be just friends.

Television

Programmes

24 Hours: The Fall of Nazi Germany Documentary about the negotiations between the Allies and Nazi High Command that brought an end to the Second World War. Sat 3 May, C4 20:00 (60mins).

Families Like Ours Gripping drama from Bafta-winning director Thomas Vinterberg. A family is forced to leave home as sea levels rise and Denmark is evacuated. Sat 3 May, BBC4 21:00 and 21:50 (50mins each).

Malpractice Second season of the hospital drama. Investigators are called in when a psychiatrist makes a decision with terrible consequences. Sun 4-Tue 6 May, ITV1 21:00 (60mins each).

Dead Man Walking: Dan Walker on Death Row With polls suggesting a resurgence of public support for the return of capital punishment in Britain, Walker visits prisons in the US to discover the complex realities of having a death penalty. Wed 7 May, C5 21:00 (90mins).

VE Day 80: A Celebration to Remember Zoe Ball presents the VE Day celebrations, which include a live concert. Thur 8 May, BBC1 20:00 (120mins).

Films

Their Finest (2016) Heartwarming comedy-drama about a young screenwriter (Gemma Arterton) who is tasked with making a morale-boosting film during the Blitz. Bill Nighy co-stars. Thur 8 May, BBC2 23:00 (115mins).

Lawrence of Arabia (1962) Peter O'Toole stars as the eponymous British Army officer in David Lean's First World War epic. Fri 9 May, Film4 14:20 (260mins).

Coming up for sale

David Shrigley, Bella Freud and Marc Quinn are among the artists with work on sale at the spring edition of the **Affordable Art Fair**. With works from 100-plus British and international galleries to choose from, there will also be a Family Morning, special exhibitions, and painting and sketching classes. 7-11 May, Hampstead Heath, London NW3 (affordableartfair.com).

Houses with kitchen gardens



▲ **Hampshire:** Rose Cottage, Tunworth. A delightful thatched cottage and lodge with far-reaching rural views and landscaped gardens. Rose cottage: main suite, 1 further suite, kitchen, 3 receps. Rose Lodge: 1 bed, shower, kitchen, recep, 1-bed annexe, home office, stables, garden, garage. £1.895m; Knight Frank (01256-630500).



▲ **Cardigan:** Tredefaid, Penybryn. An eye-catching 17th century house with 75 acres of land comprising native broadleaf woodland and pasture. Main suite, 4 further beds, 2 baths, kitchen/dining room, 2 receps, garden, outbuildings, caravan, parking. £1.25m; Country Living (01437-616101).



▲ **Suffolk:** Fleurael Cottage, Westhorpe. Picturesque Grade II thatched cottage set in mature gardens. 2 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, 3 receps, garden, garage. £495,000; Bedfords (01284-769999).

► **Durham:** Broomshields Hall, Satley. This Grade II Georgian country house is set in approx 18 acres. 5 beds, 5 baths, kitchen, 5 receps, 1-bed cottage, garden, parking. £1.75m; Finest Properties (0330-111 2266).





◀ **Cheshire:** Moathouse, Beeston. A handsome 17th century former farmhouse in an idyllic country setting with a productive kitchen garden. 4 beds, 2 baths, kitchen/breakfast room, 3 receps, garden, garage. £1.25m; Jackson Stops (01244-328361).

▼ **Suffolk:** Mansard House, Bardwell. This fine Grade II, 17th century house boasts gardens designed by four-time Chelsea gold medallist (and present owner) Thomas Hoblyn. 5 beds, 2 baths, shower, kitchen/dining room, 3 receps, garden, workshop, self-contained 1-bed annexe, garage. £1.25m; Knight Frank (020-3869 4758).



◀ **London:** Pine Grove, Totteridge N20. Elegant modernised Arts and Crafts house with beautiful and productive gardens designed by Arne Maynard. 4 beds, 2 baths, 2 showers, kitchen/dining room, recep, garden. £3.5m; The Modern House (020-3795 5920).

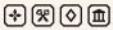


▲ **Devon:** Thornham Bridge, Ermington. A striking riverside property surrounded by carefully maintained gardens including a walled orchard. 5 beds, 5 baths/shower rooms, kitchen/dining room, recep, garden, outbuildings, garage. £1.25m; Marchand Petit (01548-831163).

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The boom in “food chat”

“For an indicator of the state of British culture”, look no further than next year’s programme for the Albert Hall, says Ed Cumming in *The Daily Telegraph*. First up is not a touring symphony orchestra, nor yet another Eric Clapton concert, but a live edition of the food podcast *Off Menu*, hosted by comedians James Acaster and Ed Gamble. The podcast – on which guests talk about their “dream restaurant”, while the hosts “riff gamely” – has been downloaded more than 200 million times. And it’s by no means the only successful “food chat” podcast: others include Jessie and Lennie’s Ware’s *Table Manners*, Angela Hartnett and Nick Grimshaw’s *Dish*, and Grace Dent’s *Comfort Eating*. You can see why celebrities like appearing on such podcasts – tricky questions are rare, and reminiscing about foods makes them seem relatable – but their popularity is frankly mystifying: “not everyone is interesting when they talk about food”, and the “amiable chinwag” format soon becomes monotonous. More satisfying, in my view, are podcasts where “knowledgeable hosts” explore “specific aspects of food culture”, such as Lucy Dearlove’s *Lecker* or Lewis Basset’s *The Full English*.

The new jacket potato tycoons

Since last November, a sizeable queue has regularly formed on Archer Street in London’s Soho, says Tony Turnbull in *The Times*. “At its head is not some newly modish restaurant concept, but a pop-up



SpudBros: a huge hit on TikTok

shop selling jacket potatoes.” The toppings – cheese, beans, chilli con carne – make the place “sound like a throwback to the 1980s heyday of the Spudulike chain”. But in fact, there’s nothing dated about SpudBros. The brand started out as a food stall run by brothers Harley and Jacob Nelson in a market in Preston, Lancashire. And it might have stayed that way, had Jacob not hit on the idea of “wearing a headcam” while serving customers, and posting clips of the interactions online. The videos proved a huge hit on TikTok, where SpudBros now has more than four million followers. That paved the way for the pair to open in central London; they’re expanding into other parts of Britain too, and launching a range of baked beans

and sauces. Although SpudBros is undoubtedly surfing the zeitgeist, Jacob credits much of its appeal to the brothers’ “work ethic and family values”. Their videos often record “small acts of kindness” – waiving a payment, for example – and one of their most-watched clips shows Jacob befriending an elderly couple, one of whom had just had a fall. “We were brought up to give back, to be nice and never to judge anyone,” he says.

The food critics recommend...

Da Mario 15 Gloucester Road, London SW7 (020-7584 9078)

In a city “full of young things doing diverting things with hand-tooled pastas”, a “reliable old-school Italian” such as Da Mario “can too easily be overlooked”, says Jay Rayner in the FT. Opened in the 1960s, it has a “thrillingly kitsch” interior, with walls adorned by photos of Princess Diana – who was a regular diner here. The food is “exactly what you want it to be”, from the “silk-scarf-thin fennel salami”, which is served at room temperature (so the “fat melts immediately on the tongue”), to “thumb-thick prawns” in a “bubbling bath of garlic-and-chilli-spiked oil”, which I gleefully mop up with slabs of springy focaccia. And perhaps most appealingly of all, Da Mario is just a short walk from the Royal Albert Hall – providing an answer to the often-asked question – “where the hell” should we eat before attending a show there?

Courgette and dill fritters (*ijeh bil koussa wel shoumar*)

When I go on hiking trips, I always scan the surroundings for edible plants, says Hisham Assaad. The mountains around Beirut are filled with a wide variety of fantastic edible greens, such as za’atar (wild thyme), wild garlic, sour sob and many others. Dill weed, with its anise aroma and flavour, is particularly common in the hills and always reminds me of these delicious fritters, which my neighbour used to make from the bunches of wild dill she would collect.

Serves 4

450g courgettes, grated 2 tsp sea salt 60g fresh dill, chopped, plus a few sprigs to garnish 50g spring onions, finely sliced
6 eggs 1 tsp allspice 80g plain flour 1 tsp baking powder olive oil, for frying

To serve: pita breads labneh cucumber and yoghurt salad

- Place the grated courgettes in a colander, sprinkle with the salt and set over a bowl or in the sink for 10 minutes to drain off any excess water.
- Put the dill and spring onions into a large bowl and crack in the eggs. Add the allspice and flour and mix to combine well.
- Press as much liquid out of the courgettes as possible and transfer to the egg mixture. Mix well. Just before frying, mix in the baking powder.
- Cook the fritters in batches. Heat a little olive oil in a wide frying pan (skillet) over a medium heat. Scoop ¼-cup rounds of the fritter



mixture into the pan and cook for 2 minutes or until slightly browned on the bottom, then carefully flip and cook for a further 1 minute. Remove with a slotted spoon to drain on paper towels.

- You can place the cooked fritters in a warm oven to keep hot until serving, if you like. Continue frying until all the mixture is used up.
- Serve the warm fritters with soft pita bread with a labneh and veggie dip, or yoghurt and cucumber salad, garnished with an extra touch of fresh dill.
- **Chef’s note:** for a gluten-free version, you can replace the flour with cornflour (cornstarch).

Taken from Bayrūt, *The Cookbook: Recipes from the heart of a Lebanese city kitchen* by Hisham Assaad, published by Smith Street Books at £27. 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

**Abarth 600e**

Price: from £36,975

The Daily Telegraph

This new hot hatch, a faster version of the Fiat 600e family crossover, shares the same platform and motor as the Alfa Romeo Junior Veloce. Both the standard Turismo Abarth 600e and the prime Scorpionissima model have a 54kWh battery and a top speed of 124mph. The “slightly more staid” 237bhp Turismo takes 6.2 secs to sprint from 0-62mph, while the top 278bhp model can do it in just 5.85 secs.

Auto Express

Abarth has given the 600e “its own flavour, with a harder-edged ride and more aggressive set-up”. There’s a new brake system and a clever Torsen limited-slip differential, giving surprising grip in corners. The steering is best in Scorpion Track mode, which unleashes the Abarth’s full potential. But the heavy performance cuts into the 207-mile range, and efficiency is “abysmal” on motorways.

Car Magazine

Despite some cheap-looking plastic, the “svelte” interior feels both premium and sporty with some “nice touches” like aluminium pedal covers. There’s an easy to navigate 10.25-inch touchscreen, with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay as standard, but the top-spec car gets firmer sports seats, a rear-view camera and faux-engine noise – which can be switched off. Rear legroom is tight, and boot space is pretty average.

The best... non-stick pans

► **Our Place Always**

Pan 2.0 “Extremely versatile”, this recycled aluminium pan has a ceramic non-stick, non-toxic coating and, unlike the original model, it is oven-safe up to 230°C. It has ten functions, from roasting to steaming. The deep sides make it a bit tricky for pancakes, but ideal for cooking casseroles (£100 for the 26.7cm pan; fromourplace.co.uk).



► **GreenPan Copenhagen pancake pan** This specialist 28cm crêpe pan has a ceramic non-stick coating, which is free of harmful chemicals, is heat-resistant to 450°C and is oven- and dishwasher-safe. It’s suitable for all hob types and makes flipping pancakes a breeze (£68; greenpan.co.uk).



◀ **Ninja Zerostick frying pan** A seriously impressive 30cm frying pan, this has a lead- and cadmium-free, scratch-resistant “Zerostick” coating, which can be used with any utensil, even metal. It needs little to no oil, goes in the dishwasher and comes with a ten-year guarantee – but it is heavy (£34.99; ninjakitchen.co.uk).

► **Samuel Groves 26cm Britannia cast-iron griddle**

Built to last, with a lifetime guarantee, this is a hand-cast (and very heavy) and oven-safe griddle. It comes pre-seasoned, and can be used on a BBQ or open fire (£132; samuelgroves.com).

► **Joseph Joseph Space Folding Handle wok**

This 32cm wok has a clever collapsible handle to save space and a non-toxic ceramic coating that helps it cook evenly, without sticking. It is oven-safe, and can go in the dishwasher, though handwashing is recommended (£135; josephjoseph.com).



SOURCES: THE INDEPENDENT/THE GUARDIAN

Tips of the week... for women travelling solo

Lonely Planet's female writers offer their advice for women travelling alone.

- Doing things alone can feel a bit odd to begin with. To acclimatise (and see if it's for you), begin with a short solo outing close to home – to a museum, say.
- You're never too old to stay in a hostel. Many cater to different age groups and have private rooms for extra comfort.
- If you're taking a big solo trip, and feeling apprehensive, arrange events for each day – a food tour, perhaps, or a class of some sort. It will give the day structure, and you might meet interesting people.
- Pack a good book. It's always useful to be able to whip out a book, whether to fill in the time when a train is delayed, or to put off unwanted conversation.
- Use headphones to listen to directions in a city instead of consulting a map, to avoid looking like a tourist. Bring a powerbank, as you'll use your phone more than usual if you're travelling alone.

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN

And for those who have everything...



Inspired by traditional boat building, Anselm Fraser and his son Tom have pioneered a way of steam-bending timber to create strong, relatively lightweight bathtubs. The one pictured here is made from olive ash, with a walnut rim and base.

£27,600; anselmfraser.com

SOURCE: COUNTRY LIFE/THE SUNDAY TIMES

Where to find... the best wellness retreats

Mayr runs detox and gut-health retreats (minimum seven days) at its clinic on Lake Wörthersee, Austria. These can be tough, but devotees swear by them (from €2,850; original-mayr.com).

Not your typical wellness retreat, **Sanctum** takes physical exercise to the next level with “mindful movement” classes, designed to leave you feeling spiritually energised. At luxury locations from Ibiza to Anguilla (from £1,940; wearesanctum.com).

Designed for readers, writers and creatives, Daisy Buchanan's week-long **Read Yourself Happy** literary retreat in Zakynthos, Greece, includes workshops, hiking, relaxation and cookery classes (from £2,100 for a twin room; aweventurer.com/travels).

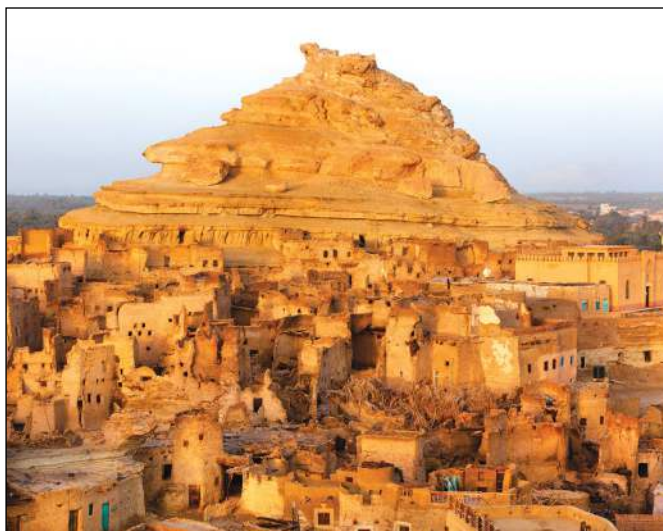
Santalan is a 12-month coaching plan for busy women, starting with a four-day retreat in Suffolk and followed by monthly one-to-one coaching sessions. The retreat includes meditation and group bonding (from £2,300; santalan.com).

SOURCE: STYLIST

This week's dream: a journey into Egypt's western desert

Most foreign visitors to Egypt stick to the Nile Valley or the Red Sea coast, but that's to miss the bulk of this huge country – the deserts that stretch westwards from the river to the Libyan border. Amid these “unfathomable distances” lie ancient Christian monasteries, oasis temples and thrillingly “surreal” landscapes, says Stanley Stewart in the FT – and most are relatively free of tourist crowds. On a private trip with Original Travel, I visited Cairo and Alexandria before heading into the desert in a 4x4 with a local guide. Our ultimate destination was Siwa, where in 331BC Alexander the Great consulted the oracle at the Temple of Amun, a striking ruin today. But there were many other “wonders” to see on the way.

Christian monasticism began in the Egyptian desert: in the 4th century, St Anthony – later known as the “father of all monks” – went there to live in an empty tomb, and was tempted by the devil. In Wadi El Natrun, we visited the monastery of Deir al-Suryani, founded two centuries later, and gazed into the



The Shali Fortress in Siwa, a lush oasis town

“startled” faces of the holy men depicted in “exquisite” murals in its 10th century church. From there, we drove to Qasr el Sagha, a Pharaonic temple perched on a lonely ridge. Its caretaker served us tea and told of the desert *djinn*s he heard “howling to one another” at night. Then came Wadi al-Hitan, where the fossilised skeletons of ancient whales (creatures whose limbs were still more leg-like than fin-like) lie half-covered in the sand – a sight as “astonishing” as any in Egypt.

We drove over dunes, and passed through the Black Desert (where the hills are “charred” with basalt) and the White Desert, with its “bizarre” pinnacles of limestone and chalk. And we stayed in some beautiful hotels – two belonging to the Tzila company, and the “splendid” Adrère Amellal in Siwa, the lush oasis town where Alexander, setting out to conquer the known world, spoke with the oracle, and divulged afterwards only that “he had heard what pleased him”. *A nine-night trip costs from £4,000pp, including flights (originaltravel.co.uk).*

Getting the flavour of...



Exploring Georgia's wine country

With more than 500 indigenous grape varieties and an 8,000-year history of wine-making, Georgia is a dream for oenophiles – and getting there just got easier, says Richard Collett in The Sunday Times, owing to new direct flights from London to Tbilisi with BA and Ryanair. More than 70% of the country's vineyards lie in the Kakheti province, where I stayed at the “secluded” and “luxurious” Lopota Lake Resort & Spa, and visited some small-batch wineries with Eat This!, a tour company founded by Tom Williams, a Briton based in Tbilisi. The food we were served – including walnut salads, mushroom dumplings and mountain cheeses – was wonderful. And the wines were “hearty”, “delightful” and highly distinctive, including a “dark amber” rkatsiteli with a “smoky” flavour, an “incredibly dry and earthy” mtsvane, and a kisi that I found “oaky” or even “chestnutty”. *See lopotaresort.com and eatthistours.com for more information.*

A heavenly corner of the Algarve

With its seven-arch Roman bridge and “cobblestone promenades”, Tavira is as “romantic” a town as any in the Algarve – and its surroundings are equally glorious, says Amelia Duggan in The Guardian. To its south, the “gleaming” salt pans, lagoons and barrier islands of the Ria Formosa Natural Park stretch along the coast for miles. “Sunseekers” might stop at the vast beaches a short ferry ride from town, but exploring further afield – on horseback with Cavalos à Ria, and by boat with Solar Moves – is well worth it. Northwards, the terrain climbs towards the peaks of the Serra do Caldeirão. You could go hiking there, or if that doesn't appeal, take a cookery class at Monte do Álamo, an “elegant” farmhouse b&b in the foothills that has wonderful sea views.

Island-hopping in the Hebrides

The Greek islands can be “a sun-baked hell” in summer – so why not head for the Hebrides instead, says Gavin Bell in The Daily Telegraph. You'll find all the sparkling seas and sandy beaches you could hope for (even if the water is rather chillier) and it's easy to get around on Caledonian MacBrayne's car ferries, with multi-destination “Hopscotch” tickets offering savings on specific routes. You could use them to take a tour of the outer isles (route eight) or of the largest inner isles (route seven). For lovers of literature and strong drink, however, route 18, from Oban or Kennacraig, is hard to beat. First stop is Islay, which is home to eight distilleries known for some of Scotland's most “distinctive” single malts. Next comes Jura, where Orwell wrote 1984. And finally, there's Colonsay (above), which has its own craft-ale brewery, as well as lots of seals, otters and wild goats.

Hotel of the week



Brach Madrid Madrid, Spain

Part of the French-owned Evok collection, the Brach is the latest in a recent wave of new luxury hotels to open in Madrid, says Lydia Bell in Condé Nast Traveller. Housed in an “elegant” 1920s building, it has interiors designed by “the man who invented the boutique hotel”, Philippe Starck. The 53 rooms and four suites have warm, earthy tones, dark wood joinery, and appealing curios; and the “low-lit” restaurant is similarly stylish, with 1920s brasserie mirrors and lots of leather. The pan-Mediterranean cuisine is wonderful, and there's a 20m pool and a spa with an impressive suite of “biohacking gadgets”.

Doubles from £480; brachmadrid.com.

Nobel laureate who ran for the Peruvian presidency

Mario Vargas Llosa
1936-2025

A giant of world literature, Mario Vargas Llosa, who has died in Lima aged 89, was a Peruvian novelist and essayist, and one of the stars of the “Latin American boom”, along with Colombia’s Gabriel García Márquez, and the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes. Translated into more than 30 languages, his books sold in their millions. He was fêted all over Europe (he had homes in London, Paris and Barcelona); and, in 2010, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Although his books covered a wide range of genres, they tended to explore political themes, said *The Daily Telegraph*. Like most of his contemporaries in the intelligentsia, he’d embraced Marxism in his youth, and welcomed the revolution in Cuba. But he was later appalled by Castro’s treatment of dissident writers, and became convinced that freedom and stability in Peru and other South American nations depended on reducing the power of the state and embracing free-market liberalism – what he called Andean Thatcherism. He had been much inspired by meeting Margaret Thatcher at a dinner in 1982.



Vargas Llosa: fêted all over Europe

His conversion cost him many friends, including Márquez, whom he once punched in the face at a film screening – though their falling out may also have been personal: it was rumoured that Márquez had told Vargas Llosa’s wife she was being cheated on. But he stuck to his guns and, in the late 1980s, with the death toll from Peru’s Shining Path insurgency mounting, inflation running at 1,000%, and the government poised to nationalise the banks, he moved into politics. Handsome, urbane and cultured, with near rock-star status, he launched a movement called Liberty, and in 1990 ran for the presidency. But having led in the polls, he lost to Alberto Fujimori – an obscure Japanese-Peruvian agronomist who scooped up the vote of poor and indigenous Peruvians by casting himself as an outsider and Vargas Llosa as a representative of the elite. Once in power, however, Fujimori adopted many of Vargas Llosa’s neoliberal policies, adding a large dose of authoritarianism. Stung by his defeat, Vargas Llosa moved back to Europe.

Jorge Mario Pedro Vargas Llosa was born in Arequipa, Peru’s second city, in 1936. His mother, Dora, came from a grand Spanish family; his father, Ernesto, worked as a radio operator. Ernesto abandoned the family soon after Mario was born, and Dora then moved with their children to Bolivia, where her father was working as a diplomat. Vargas Llosa was told that his father had died, but when he was ten, Ernesto reappeared, and persuaded Dora to return with him to Lima. There, he was violent to her and “terrorised” his bookish son, said *The Times*. Aged 14, Vargas Llosa was sent to a military academy – which inspired his first novel, *The Time of the Hero* (1963). At 16, he became a crime reporter and, aged 19, he eloped with his aunt-by-marriage, Julia Urquidí Illanes, who was ten years his senior. This formed the basis of his novel *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, which was later made into a film. They divorced after nine years, and he then married his cousin, Patricia, with whom he had three children.

By 1960, he was living in Europe, where he had been embraced by a literary set in Paris that included Márquez and Fuentes. Some of his early works, such as 1969’s *Conversation in a Cathedral*, which explores the impact of dictatorship on Peru through a series of conversations, have elements of magical realism. However, he remained closer to the realist tradition, said *The Guardian*, in books that contained “sweeping criticism of the state of Peruvian and, more widely, Latin American society”.

After the 1990 election, he did not involve himself directly in politics, but used his syndicated column in *El País* to make his views on a range of issues known across South America. He also produced more novels, including 2000’s *The Feast of the Goat*, about the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. In 2015, soon after hosting a party to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary, he left Patricia and took up with Isabel Preysler, a socialite who’d been married to Julio Iglesias. As a result, he became for a while a staple of the celebrity magazine *¡Hola!*. They split up in 2022, and he was subsequently reconciled with Patricia, who survives him.

The star and co-creator of *Upstairs, Downstairs*

Jean Marsh
1934-2025

Jean Marsh, who has died aged 90, was a struggling actress when she and her friend Eileen Atkins had an idea for a new TV series. Both came from working-class families, said *The Guardian*, and were frustrated by the paucity of TV dramas about people of their backgrounds. She recalled that watching *The Forsyte Saga*, they wondered – “who is cooking the food and ironing the clothes?” The result was *Upstairs, Downstairs*, a drama following the lives of the upper-class Bellamy family and their servants, in the early part of the 20th century. The show ran for five series in the 1970s. It attracted up to 18 million viewers in the UK, was sold to 80 countries, and won two Baftas. For her performance as Rose Buck, the maid at 165 Eaton Place, Marsh won an Emmy.



Marsh as Rose Buck in 1973

Jean Marsh was born in 1934, and grew up in Stoke Newington, in northeast London. Her father, who played the piano, was a printer; her mother had been a maid in a pub hotel. (Atkins’s father had been an under butler in a grand house.) They lived in two rooms, where Jean shared a bed with her sister. Aged 15, she

left school to train as a dancer. “If you were very working class in those days you weren’t going to think of a career in science,” she told *The Guardian* in 1972. “You either did a tap dance or you worked in Woolworths.” She began her career in rep, and by the mid-1950s was winning regular roles on TV. In 1959, she appeared on Broadway in John Gielgud’s *Much Ado About Nothing*. She also played Laurence Olivier’s lover in a television adaptation of *The Moon and Sixpence*; her big-screen credits included *Frenzy* (1972), one of Alfred Hitchcock’s last films, and *Willow* (1988).

In the 1990s, she and Atkins joined forces again to create another period drama, *The House of Eliott*, and in 2010 she reprised her role as Rose for a new version of *Upstairs, Downstairs*, but it couldn’t compete with the juggernaut of *Downton Abbey* (which she implied had borrowed heavily from the original *Upstairs, Downstairs*), and it was cancelled in 2012. Marsh had been married to the actor Jon Pertwee in the 1950s; she never remarried, but she lived for a while with Albert Finney, and had a long relationship with the director Michael Lindsay-Hogg.

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

Deliveroo/DoorDash: delivery deal

"Tony Xu has picked a good time to chow down on a rival," said Karen Kwok on Reuters Breakingviews. The DoorDash boss – who presides over America's largest food delivery app – has "offered to gobble up" Deliveroo, in a deal valuing the British company at around \$3.6bn. That looks like a mere amuse-bouche for a \$79bn giant, but the intervention is timely. In February, the investment group Prosus snapped up Deliveroo rival Just Eat Takeaway, promising heavy investment to drive growth. Deliveroo's long-suffering shareholders are certainly delighted, said Jenni Read on CNBC, though some think the celebrations hollow. The 180p-per-share offer, after all, is a fraction of the 390p at which Deliveroo listed in 2021, cementing the company's "Floperoo" tag. It also means another high-profile exit from the London Stock Exchange. Well, maybe, said Nils Pratley in *The Guardian*. On the other hand, with a bidding war unlikely, this take-out price is "probably as good as it gets for Deliveroo" – one of a crop of companies that floated at over-inflated prices during the "weird period" of the pandemic. Founder Will Shu will get £172m for his 5.9% stake. He has every incentive to cash up.

Apple: made in India

After Donald Trump's tariff announcements wiped \$700bn off its market value, Apple rushed to export iPhones made in India to the US to avoid the higher tariffs slated for China, said the FT. That plan is now being dramatically "accelerated". The company has announced it will "shift the assembly of all US-sold iPhones to India as soon as next year" – with a goal of sourcing "more than 60 million" handsets by the end of 2026. The ambitious move will entail "doubling output in India", after two decades of spending heavily in China "to create a world-beating production line". Apple's move taps into the idea of expanding US trade with India, "while also isolating China" – a strategy heavily pushed by Vice-President J.D. Vance during his visit to India last week, said *The Economist*. But there's "a giant problem". Smartphones, like many other Indian exports to the US, and elsewhere, "depend on Chinese components" (see page 40). Maga purists who, like Trump, have urged Apple to make iPhones in America won't be pleased by this development, said *The Wall Street Journal*. "Friendshoring" might be preferable to boosting Chinese manufacturing. But "Made in India" certainly isn't "made in Indiana".

Royal Mail/Thames Water: signed, sealed, delivered?

Selling Royal Mail to "a shadowy foreign billionaire" is "an act of economic vandalism that savages our nation's heritage", said Alex Brummer in the *Daily Mail*. Yet, having cleared regulatory hurdles, including a probe under national security rules, the £3.6bn takeover by "Czech sphinx" Daniel Kretínský looked set to be waved through this week. Is there still time to save Thames Water? The preferred bidder, US private equity giant KKR, hopes to take control of the company by June "to avert nationalisation", said the FT. But there remains opposition. Lib Dem MP Charlie Maynard said that allowing Thames to remain highly indebted under new private equity owners "was like watching a rerun of a horror movie" (not least since KKR partners leading the bid previously worked for Australia's Macquarie, whose stint controlling the company has been much criticised). Thames responded that the new bid was a "holistic and fundamental recapitalisation".

Seven days in the Square Mile

The US stock-market roller coaster resumed on Wednesday after data showed the economy contracted by 0.3% in the first quarter – raising fears the economy is slipping into recession. The fall in GDP, the first negative reading since 2022, was worse than forecast, and compared with a 2.4% rise in Q4 2024. But many analysts argued the headline number was mainly down to a huge increase in the trade deficit, as US companies rushed to buy goods from abroad ahead of sweeping tariffs. The US goods trade deficit reached a record high of \$162bn in March.

In contrast, the FTSE 100 chalked up 12 consecutive trading days of positive performance. The index has gained some 10% since the tariff shock, partly owing to its more "defensive" stocks. Coca-Cola reported that sales were under pressure from Trump's "America First" policies, with Danish and Mexican customers in particular turning away from the emblematic US drink.

The Italian bank Mediobanca struck back against government attempts to force a shotgun marriage with Monte dei Paschi di Siena – by striking its own deal to acquire Banca Generali for €6.3bn. Barclays reported a 20% jump in Q1 profits after frenzied tariff-related trading. Starbucks said it planned to spend more money on baristas and less on tech. Banijay Group, the French entertainment business, is reportedly drawing up plans for a takeover offer for ITV or its studio arm.

Marks & Spencer: not just any cyberattack

Figures from Kantar show that M&S "outsold every other supermarket" on food sales in the four weeks to 20 April, said Matthew Field and Hannah Boland in *The Daily Telegraph*. But there's nothing like a cyberattack to sour the mood. Some £700m was wiped off shares after a presumed ransomware heist locked down many of M&S's systems, "forcing it to halt online ordering and leaving shelves empty" at some stores. More than a week after the attack, the retailer was still in turmoil.

Experts believe a group known as "Scattered Spider", a disparate gang of cyber-criminals thought to include British and American teenagers, may be responsible for the breach – which involves using a virus to encrypt files and then demanding payment for unlocking them. The group is "best known for hacking casino giant MGM in 2023, when it took hotel systems and slot machines offline, costing the company \$100m".



M&S in Leeds: disrupted

The hack threatens "to disrupt a turnaround" under CEO Stuart Machin, said Laura Onita in the *Financial Times*, but is part of a growing trend. Christmas sales at the supermarket chain Wm Morrisons were disrupted badly by a cyberattack, and both Currys and JD Sports suffered attacks last year that breached customer data. M&S has assured its customers that their data is "safe".

It's unknown whether M&S is still being held to ransom, but sources suggest any demand could be somewhere in the order of £10m, said Isabella Fish in *The Times*. That presents "a moral and business dilemma". While paying up would restore M&S's ops and limit financial and reputational damage, it also carries significant long-term risks if it encourages criminality or "makes the company a repeat target". Besides, there is no guarantee the attackers would "deliver a working decryption key".

Issue of the week: UK trade prospects

An imminent US trade deal remains elusive, but Britain is exploring other prospects

"Pictures of a triumphant Rachel Reeves holding aloft a US trade deal" as she boarded a plane home from Washington "should have been all over the front pages" this week, said Matthew Lynn in *The Spectator*. After all, "the advance briefings" ahead of the Chancellor's meeting with US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent were that "a deal with the US was very close". Had Britain become the first country to secure a deal with President Trump, it would have been a diplomatic "triumph" – not to mention an economic tonic after "endless warnings of rising taxes, stagnant growth and broken fiscal rules". The trouble is it didn't happen. We're back to the same old briefings from the Government – about how much harder negotiations are proving than expected.



Reeves with Bessent: disappointed

In fact, the Trump administration delivered quite the snub, said Kiran Stacey et al in *The Guardian*. Sources made it clear that a trade deal with the UK is "a second-order priority", or maybe even a third-order one. The immediate concern, it seems, is "negotiating with Asian countries, with South Korea at the top of the list". That has blown Reeves's mid-May deadline for a deal out of the water – threatening to complicate future negotiations. Although a trade deal with the US "would be the biggest prize for British negotiators", they have also made big strides towards

a separate agreement with the EU which, given Trump's repeated criticisms of European trade policies, could make it even more difficult to reach a deal. Whitehall sources complain about constantly moving goalposts. In an apparent change of tack, Reeves has now suggested that Britain's new priority is moving closer to the EU on trade.

Hats off to Rachel Reeves, said Jeremy Warner in *The Sunday Telegraph*. "The Chancellor has finally plucked up the courage to state the obvious" – that a better trading relationship with Europe is more important than kow-towing to the US. This "more muscular approach" reflects the new reality: Trump's bid "to

upend the global order has already been defeated" and he is in "ragged retreat" on tariffs. That may be wishful thinking, said Christian May in *City AM*. The US is the largest market for British cars, so the 25% on car imports will hurt. Both the IMF and the Bank of England warn that the "globally connected" UK economy is at particular risk of the inevitable trade friction Trump is creating. June's G7 summit in Canada, which coincides with the expiry of Trump's 90-day pause on reciprocal tariffs, is the next staging post, said Faisal Islam on BBC Business. "There is a path to trade peace, calm and de-escalation, but it could get much worse too." These are critical weeks for the world economy.

100 market days: what the experts think

● Trump's "boom"

When President Trump took office for his second term in January, Wall Street anticipated lower taxes, looser regulations and a boom in dealmaking, said DealBook in *The New York Times*. Instead, it "got chaos".

Despite last week's rally, the S&P 500 has fallen about 8% – marking "the worst performance for the first 100 days of a presidency" since President Gerald Ford tried to pick up the pieces of the Watergate scandal in 1974. Back in January, the "sell America" trade was "practically unheard of", said Allison Morrow on CNN Business. Fleeing investors have since wiped out "trillions in market value". Trump promised Americans "a boom like no other", said Esha Dey on Bloomberg. In terms of "explosive" action, he has certainly delivered.

● The Trump put

What might happen next, asked Paul R. La Monica on Barron's. "Historically, weak performance in the first 100 days isn't a great sign." Going back to 1897, the average total return over a four-year presidential term, when markets fell in the first 100 days, is 12% – compared with an average return of 44% when they got off



The Duke brothers in Trading Places

to a good start. Those keeping the faith, such as Matt Stucky at Northwestern Mutual Wealth Management, argue the market "may not be pricing in the possibility of trade policies being less hawkish, and the potential for tax reform and deregulation".

Others argue that "the bond market's referendum on Trump's first 100 days may be more indicative than the stock market's". If there is a Trump "put", said John Luke Tyner of Aptus Capital Advisors, it is based on the ten-year treasury yield "staying below the 4.5% mark". It was bonds, not stocks, that forced the president's reversal on his "liberation day" tariffs.

● Broken machine

In the climactic scene of the movie *Trading Places*, Mortimer Duke realises he has lost a fortune as markets close, and screams: "Turn those machines back on!" in hopes of getting things back to normal. Traders, buying back into the market after "the spasm that greeted the Trump 2.0 agenda", are behaving in a similar way, said John Authers on Bloomberg. But what if the machine is now "broken beyond repair", and faith in "American exceptionalism" is shot? We can no longer rule it out.

Old pals

No surprise, perhaps, said Derek Saul in *Forbes*, that the "top stock" of Trump's first 100 days is Palantir, "the artificial intelligence and government contractor extraordinaire" chaired by Peter Thiel – Trump's long-time Silicon Valley backer and "a mentor" to Vice-President J.D. Vance. Shares have gained around 54% since the inauguration: "by far the strongest return of any company listed on the benchmark S&P 500". This "blistering start" to Trump 2.0 builds on a "red-hot run": Palantir was also 2024's "top returner". But while other tech rivals have stumbled, it has emerged as the "clear winner" of "the reimagining of the federal government".

"Palantir is on the right side" of the "spending mix shift" towards AI, notes UBS. It's also on the right side of the president. "Daddy's home," posted co-founder Joe Lonsdale on Trump's November win. "No stranger to controversy", the data-mining juggernaut stands accused by tech investor Paul Graham of "building the infrastructure of the police state". Originally funded by the CIA's venture capital arm and floated in 2020, Palantir has successfully "leveraged" its "battle-hardened reputation to reach more commercial customers", said The Motley Fool. The future looks bright. But not at the current price. Trading at 67 times this year's sales, Palantir looks "like a meme stock" – it could "be cut in half and still be considered expensive".

The rich are more useful inside the tent

David Smith

The Times

In her October Budget, the Chancellor confirmed the replacement of the previous “non-dom” regime with a new “residence-based system”, aimed at “attracting the best talent and investment”. It doesn’t seem to be working, says David Smith. There are reports of “an exodus of non-doms and entrepreneurs fleeing higher-tax UK for friendlier locations” – potentially “cutting a swathe” through the rich lists. Steel tycoon Lakshmi Mittal is among those said to be packing their bags; Goldman Sachs International boss Richard Gnodde is reportedly heading for trendy Milan. “The rich aren’t popular”, but alienating them is never a good idea. The highest-earning 1% accounted for 28.2% of all income tax last year; the top 5% contributed 48.8%, or £147bn. Reports that “the Reeves effect” is already harming tax receipts are premature: the 10% fall in capital gains revenues in 2024/25 reflects decisions made well before the Budget. But they are a harbinger. The effects of driving away the rich will take years to come through, but we’ll see them in time, in falling tax receipts, philanthropy and arts sponsorships. “If we are killing the golden goose, it could be a slow death.”

Amazon’s lost quest for transparency

Editorial

The Wall Street Journal

President Trump says his tariffs may raise enough revenue to replace income tax, says The Wall Street Journal. If so, “why is he afraid to let Americans see what they’re paying”? Instead of owning the policy, the White House has “bullied Amazon to keep quiet about what it will cost”. The retailer had been investigating labelling products so that consumers could see the impact of tariffs on price rises; the public could certainly have used the transparency. But after being blasted by Trump’s press secretary Karoline Leavitt for planning “a hostile and political act” and for parroting Chinese propaganda, founder Jeff Bezos has folded. Trump likes to say that the cost of tariffs will be borne entirely by foreign exporters; economists disagree. This was a simple way for ordinary Americans to make up their own minds. Voters who pay little attention to the macroeconomics would notice a direct markup – say, \$55 on a \$140 vacuum cleaner – on the items they buy. “Consumers are already feeling the tariff pain, whether or not retailers quantify it on their websites. White House denials won’t change that.” Repealing the tariffs, of course, would.

Up close and personal with shareholders

Lex

Financial Times

HSBC has become the latest company to consider ditching its “physical” annual general meeting. “Many a boss will sympathise,” says Lex. “Traditionally associated with retirees scarfing canapés while griping about abominable service in the Sevenoaks branch, AGMs offer little of the transparency and accountability that is their theoretical objective.” Even the voting function is largely redundant, since “the lion’s share” of votes are cast beforehand, usually electronically, by a handful of big asset managers. The upshot is that “in-person AGMs” are now the preserve of retail investors and “irksome NGOs, who turn up to harass corporate bosses on civic issues such as the environment and civil rights”. In the US, a third of companies now hold “virtual-only” meetings; Britain might well follow suit. That would be a pity. “It does corporate bosses good to get up close and personal with their individual owners.” At worst, a drubbing from the retiree with 200 shares is low-cost market research. “If they have to take the odd egg-yolk”, well, “that is all part of the CEO deal.”

From cot to corner office

Bartleby

The Economist

You would certainly be surprised, and perhaps affronted, to be asked at a job interview if you were “exposed to toxic chemicals in the womb”, says Bartleby. But copious academic studies suggest that early experiences, “all the way from foetus to first job”, can influence the way people behave at work. A Cambridge University study found that American CEOs born in heavily polluted parts of the country “took more risks than their counterparts, and that these risks tended not to pay off”. The authors hypothesise that “pollution may have affected their brain development”. Similarly, those beginning their careers during a recession became much “more conservative managers” than those who started out in a growing economy. So what, you might ask. But research like this reminds us that “luck plays a part in career success as well as talent”, and argues for greater diversity of experience at work. It also suggests that current events cast a long shadow. “As America flirts with the possibility of a self-inflicted recession”, the consequences “could endure far beyond a single business cycle”.

City profile

Klaus Schwab

It’s been quite a week on the Magic Mountain, where the World Economic Forum has been rocked by the ousting of its 87-year-old founder, Klaus Schwab, amid an investigation into “financial and ethical misconduct”, said Kalyeena Makortoff in The Guardian. “Mr Davos”, who began the totemic international get-together in 1971, stands variously accused by whistleblowers of using WEF funds to pay for “massages”, asking staff “to promote him for a Nobel Peace Prize”, and “manipulating” statistics “to curry favour with certain governments”. It is also suggested that his wife, Hilde, lived a luxury life at the WEF’s expense. The Schwabs plan to sue, saying they are victims of “character assassination”.

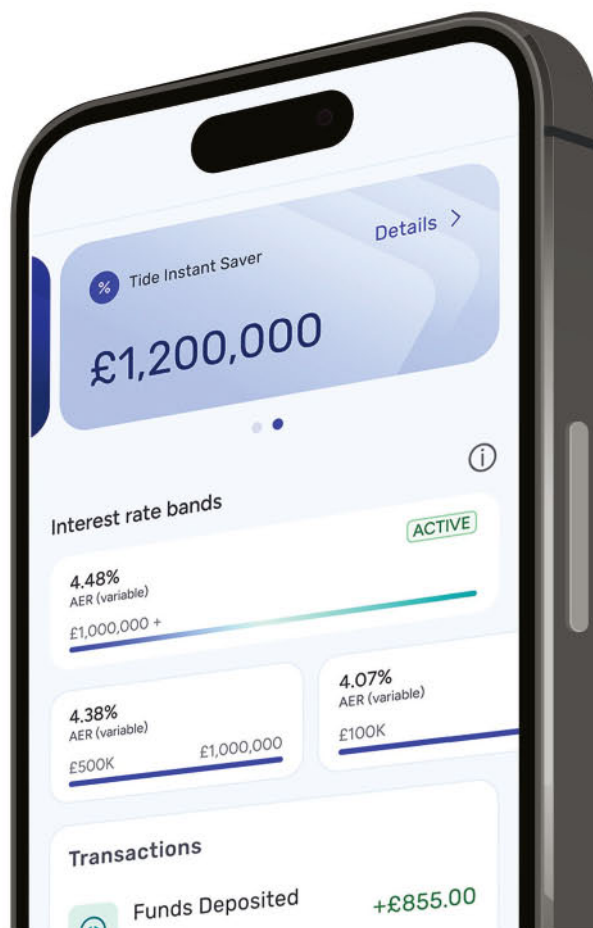


“Hubris has a way of catching up,” said Samuel Gregg in The Spectator. A mechanical engineer turned business academic, Schwab behaved like a quasi-head of state, helping “fuel some of the most lurid conspiracy theories about the WEF”. Even before reports of bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination blew up its reputation for “uber-wokism”, its “relevance and prestige” were declining. Schwab’s reluctance to devise a succession plan suggests “he had hoped to die with his boots on, like the Pope”, said The Observer. But now that the “high priest” of Davos is out, the door is open for reform. The biggest challenge is finding a chair with “the credibility and diplomatic skills to get world leaders to play nicely – something that Schwab, at his best, did brilliantly”. One name being “whispered” is a “Davos regular” – Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank.

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Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

Alfa Financial Software Holdings*The Mail on Sunday*

Alfa operates in a highly regulated industry, providing software to streamline vehicle finance. Customers, across 37 countries, are sticky and the order book is at a record high. Forecast: 300p. Buy. 210p.

Bytes Technology Group*The Times*

BTG sells software, AI and cybersecurity products to public and private sectors in the UK – including the NHS, where opportunities are “bountiful”. Worries about the Microsoft partnership are overdone. Buy. 487.4p.

Downing Renewables and Infrastructure Trust*The Daily Telegraph*

This investment trust, with exposure to UK solar power, benefits from inflation-linked subsidies. Investments also include Swedish hydropower and grid infrastructure. The discount is unjustified. Yields 7.5%. Buy. 78p.

Insig AI*The Mail on Sunday*

Insig's smart database enables financial services customers to stay on top of ESG regulations and become more sustainable. Shares have doubled in a year; there should be “plenty more to come”. Buy. 23p.

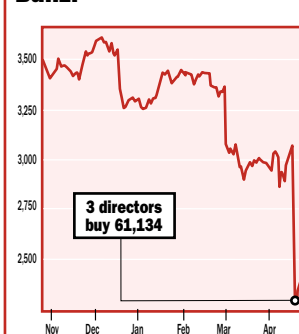
Intercede Group*The Mail on Sunday*

Intercede helps firms and state departments protect themselves from cybercrime – responsible for some £6trn of losses annually. Customers include governments, the NHS and banks. Should rebound from the “Trump slump”. Buy. 148p.

Judges Scientific*The Daily Telegraph*

The scientific instruments maker has disappointed, and it may struggle with US tariff uncertainty. Yet solid finances and an acquisitive model should drive long-term potential. A “worthwhile contrarian pick”. Buy. £60.

Directors' dealings

Bunzl

The workplace supplies distributor has cut its outlook and paused a £200m buyback. Shares have crashed, yet bosses are showing faith. CEO Frank van Zanten and “associates” bought £1.1m worth. Two other directors and associates spent £316,399.

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

...and some to hold, avoid or sell

Boohoo Group*Sharecast*

Shore Capital has upgraded its stance on the fast-fashion group. Despite low consumer confidence, the broker believes downside is limited and the rebrand to Debenhams could provide “a more sustainable solution”. Hold. 19.8p.

Billington*Investors' Chronicle*

Shares in the structural steel and construction specialist have generated a 100% return in 38 months. But challenging conditions have hit revenues and profits. Recovery isn't due till the second half of 2025. Take profits. Sell. 375p.

J Sainsbury*Investors' Chronicle*

The supermarket's profits rose 15%, thanks to growing sales and cost improvements. Yet Argos's sales fell and profits “virtually collapsed”. Yields 5.4%, with prospect of further returns. Hold. 253p.

Jupiter Fund Management*Sharecast*

Canaccord Genuity has downgraded the asset manager, citing weak earnings outlook, “non-compelling” capital returns, and “significant volatility” in the dividend. Target price cut from 78p to 60p. Sell. 70.4p.

Ten Lifestyle Group*Investors' Chronicle*

This AI-backed, platform-based concierge service enables members to organise travel and entertainment bookings. An “extra-large” US contract has boosted profitability. But competition is a threat. Hold. 61p.

TinyBuild*Investors' Chronicle*

The games developer has struggled with poor acquisitions and disappointing launches. Cost cutting has stemmed losses, but it's down to its “last few million”. Needs big releases to stay viable. Hold. 5.1p.

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip**Andrada Mining**

The Mail on Sunday
up 60% to 3.21p

Worst tip**Meta Platforms**

The Times
down 18.64% to \$550

Market view

“CEOs are an unhappy bunch. Things are in suspended animation. They're not sure if in six months there will be a new world order, or if this was just a really bad dream. You just can't make decisions.”
Steve Purdy of bond firm TCW. Quoted in Barron's

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

	29 Apr 2025	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	8463.46	8328.60	1.62%
FTSE All-share UK	4577.12	4496.57	1.79%
Dow Jones	40410.95	39092.20	3.37%
NASDAQ	17371.48	16268.91	6.78%
Nikkei 225	35839.99	34220.60	4.73%
Hang Seng	22008.11	21562.32	2.07%
Gold	3296.30	3305.65	-0.28%
Brent Crude Oil	63.39	67.89	-6.63%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	3.55%	3.60%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	4.55	4.63	
US 10-year Treasuries	4.18	4.39	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	2.6% (Mar)	2.8% (Feb)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	3.2% (Mar)	3.4% (Feb)	
Halifax house price (yoy)	2.8% (Mar)	2.9% (Feb)	

£1 STERLING: \$1.340 €1.177 ¥191.185 Bitcoin \$95,125.00

Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS

RISES	Price	% change
Entain	648.80	+13.50
Croda Int	3012.00	+10.60
Polar Cap. Tech. Trust	290.00	+8.80
Howden Joinery	773.00	+8.50
Antofagasta	1694.00	+8.20

FALLS

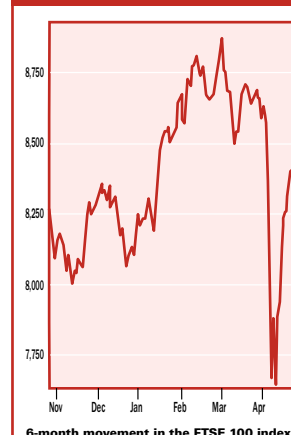
Assoc. British Foods	2034.00	-7.70
Hiscox Ltd	1093.00	-6.70
Endeavour Mining	2022.00	-6.40
Legal & General	235.70	-5.60
Marks and Spencer	386.70	-5.60

FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER

Deliveroo	171.50	+27.90
Mobico	31.96	-43.90

Source: FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 29 Apr (pm)

Following the Footsie



The iPhone: a monument to globalisation

The glossy rectangle that has become an essential part of our every waking hour, is built by Apple using a complex supply chain that reaches from Galicia to Taipei. Tom Calver reports

Globalisation as we have known it is over and the world as we knew it is gone. This is the view, advanced by Keir Starmer and countless others in recent weeks, as the world acknowledges the vast and rapid shifts in global trade and cooperation instituted by President Trump. With his sweeping tariff announcements, Trump really does appear to have called time on decades of relatively free trade across the globe, particularly between America and its rising superpower rival in Beijing.

There's just one problem. And it's probably in your pocket. Last month, having raised tariffs on Chinese goods coming into America to 145%, Trump performed one of his customary U-turns, exempting smartphones and semiconductor chips from the new duties. It was a victory for Silicon Valley, proving the sway it can exert on the Trump White House. But it also demonstrated the limits of Trump's rhetoric and freedom to operate. He can launch crusading global trade wars at will, and it doesn't seem that the pleas of Wall Street or the US Congress or long-standing allies can stop him. But Trump messes with Apple's iPhone at his peril.

Globalisation may be in retreat, but the product that millions of us spend our days glued to, the glossy rectangle that has become an utterly essential part of our every waking hour, is entirely globalised, with a supply chain reaching from Galicia to Taipei. And, crucially, sitting right at the heart of that supply chain, like a power station in an electricity grid, is China, the very rival that Trump wants to bring to heel.

Cheap as chips

If you're searching for a monument to globalisation, just open up the back of an iPhone (you'll need a special screwdriver, of course). The reason Apple sells a fifth of global smartphones, yet takes home four-fifths of profits, is testament to a supply chain that criss-crosses the globe, running through almost every fault line in geopolitics in the process.

A key reason why Apple is valued at \$3trn and reported \$184bn in profits last year is because of how carefully it has calibrated this production line. "Apple has squeezed every efficiency of the supply chain it can, right down to the glue and screws," says Chris Miller, the author of *Chip War*.



Workers at Taiwan's Foxconn factory in Henan province, China

"Sitting right at the heart of Apple's supply chain, like a power station in an electricity grid, is China"

But the iPhone supply chain is as fragile as it is profitable. Consider, for example, the journey of an iPhone microchip, the small wafer – less than half the size of a 5p coin – that powers the supercomputer in our back pockets. To make a microchip, white lumps of quartz are mined in Galicia, Spain, before being smelted in Berghausen, Germany. This "polysilicon" is then flown to Oregon, in the US, where a Japanese company turns them into silicon wafers, before it is shipped halfway round the world again to Taiwan.

There, arguably the most important company in the world – the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, or TSMC – takes these wafers and, following designs from British-based, Japanese-owned Arm, etches semiconductors into them using a machine made exclusively in the Netherlands.

The chip then zips up to Malaysia for inspection and wiring, before landing in Zhengzhou, China – nicknamed "iPhone City" – where workers for Taiwanese-owned Foxconn, paid 20 yuan an

hour (about £2), attach it to the rest of the phone. All made – from mine to motherboard – for just £35 a chip. The vulnerability of this supply chain to an economic or military shock is obvious. Taiwan, for example,

sits 100 miles off the coast of China, and Beijing is not shy about its aim to take control of the island in the coming years. If China were to blockade Taiwan, where almost 90% of the world's fastest microchips are made, then Apple's chip supply could collapse and the iPhone would rocket in price. Similarly, if the iPhone were swept up in the tit-for-tat Chinese-American trade war, as it very nearly was last month, it would again soar in price.

Which is an outcome that any president would do well to avoid. There are about 150 million iPhone users in America, comprising almost 60% of the market (in Britain, it's closer to 45%). This suggests that Americans spend around 300 billion hours per year using their iPhones. It is the indispensable consumer product – Trump himself uses one. For years, Apple has kept the iPhone's cost remarkably flat. An iPhone 16 costs the US customer \$799, the same in dollar terms (and 20% less in real terms) as the iPhone 12 four years ago. But slap 145% tariffs on top of the production costs, and – assuming profit margins are the same – that iPhone could now cost \$1,400. The price of

a top-of-the-range iPhone Pro Max could have jumped from \$1,199 to more than \$1,900, with some estimates putting it higher than \$2,000. British consumers might not have been spared either; Apple tends to adopt a global pricing strategy to spread costs.

A fab homecoming?

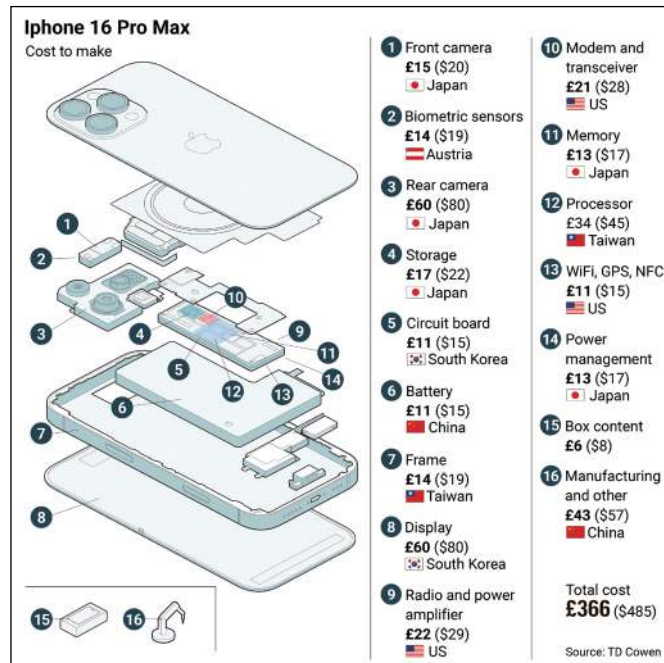
Acutely aware of its microchip Achilles' heel, America has sought to onshore chip production in recent years, under both the previous Trump and Biden administrations. The US government has pushed, bribed and bullied TSMC – established by the former Texas Instruments boss Morris Chang in 1987, and responsible for 15% of Taiwan's GDP – to build new factories in America. TSMC has complied and is in the process of building three chip factories – or “fabs” – in Arizona, with potentially more to follow. One of these has been running since the start of the year, producing about 20,000 silicon wafers a month; orders have reportedly soared since Trump's tariff threats began.

Yet two things put this shift into perspective. Firstly, the chips TSMC is making in Arizona are the four-nanometre (4nm) variety, where transistors are placed four-billionths of a metre apart. This sounds mightily impressive, and it is – until you realise that Apple's latest phones and MacBooks all use 3nm chips. This Arizona factory won't get going on 3nm ones until 2028, by which time the latest iPhones will use 2nm chips. The quickest chips are still made in Taiwan, where the bulk of the company's research talent lives. The second point concerns scale. When its three fabs are working, TSMC may be able to make chips from 60,000 wafers a month in Arizona – yet its global production is 1.3 million a month.

Chinese chokehold

Although it has made some efforts to diversify to India and Vietnam, the vast majority of Apple products are still made in China, and the microchip is far from the only component with a vulnerable supply chain. Several rare earth elements – which comprise 17 elements in their own special section of the periodic table – are also used to make an iPhone. Neodymium and dysprosium help to make the iPhone vibrate, while yttrium, lanthanum and praseodymium make the colours in the screen appear vivid. Terbium is used in the speakers.

Many of these rare earths are mined in China, which has a chokehold on the industry. And mining rare earths is just the beginning – it's refining them that's often the real challenge. They produce radioactive waste, pollution and require a lot of energy, something Western nations have shied away from. Last year China mined more than two-thirds of all global rare earth elements. The country is the leading producer of yttrium as well as neodymium and terbium and controls 90% of the global supply of rare earths. There is only one rare earth mine in the US – Mountain Pass in California – but at present, no processing is taking place. Now, the US has started looking elsewhere, including Greenland and Ukraine. But it is years behind China.



The latest iPhones contain more than 200 parts. Apple sources its components from over 40 nations, mostly in Southeast Asia. About 80% of its iPhones are assembled in China, the rest in India

“Building iPhones is tougher work than US labourers are used to. Before big launches, workers are pushed ferociously hard”

reshoring efforts. In 2012, he pledged that some components would be made in the US. But when a factory in Austin, Texas, began making \$3,000 Mac desktop computers, engineers hit a snag: a shortage of screws. In China, nearby factories can make enormous quantities of custom screws at short notice, but their

US counterparts were reliant on a contractor that could only make 1,000 a day. The project was postponed for months (and Apple had to order screws from China).

Apple still makes Macs on a contractor that could only make another Texan factory as part of a \$500bn investment in America over the next four years (though some of these funds were already committed). But labour is another hurdle to any relocation ambitions. Up to two million Chinese workers are involved in making Apple products – about 2% of the country's manufacturing workforce. This includes many trained engineers: [Cook has been at pains to point out that it's not just about labour costs, it's about skills. “In the US, you could have a meeting of tooling engineers, and I'm not sure we could fill the room,” he said last year. In China, however, “you could fill multiple football fields”.]

Building these products is tougher work than US labourers are used to. Before big Apple product launches, Foxconn ramps up production in China in ways that would be hard to get away with in America, pushing ferociously hard on overtime and bringing in temporary workers.

The six-inch supercomputer

All of which helps explain why Trump blinked over smartphone tariffs. Globalisation may be unwinding, America and China may be on a collision course for a trade war or worse, but the six-inch supercomputer that has captivated the world may have other ideas. Of course, Americans could use old phones or switch brands. But no one, not even Trump, wants to be the one to break that news.

This is an extract of an article that first appeared in The Times © Times Media Limited 2025





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

THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1463

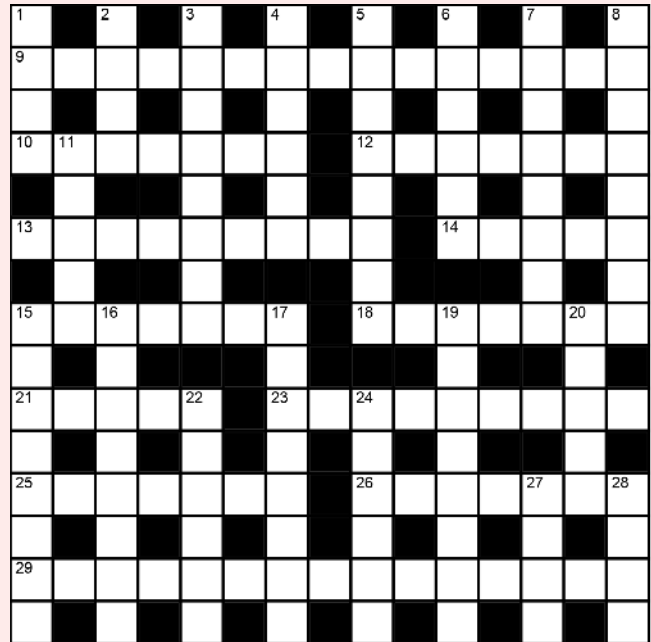
Two Connell Guides and three Week-branded items will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 12 May. Send it to The Week Crossword 1463, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. By **Tim Moorey (timmoorey.com)**

ACROSS

- 9 Game with Victorian conventions? (10,5)
 10 Shabby place bound to be shown in correspondence (7)
 12 Lower graduate into Scottish river (7)
 13 Complex situation of steersman at sea (5-4)
 14 Flip through part of Northumberland (5)
 15 Fighter hit around top of leg (7)
 18 Sober about awful crime? Could be curtains! (7)
 21 Within some wandering nomads from the east (5)
 23 Connect with colleague (9)
 25 Abandon study and start again at Twickenham (4,3)
 26 Serials broadcast without atmosphere (7)
 29 Unfavourable view seen in Snowdon image? (8,7)

DOWN

- 1 Henry's attached to fine semi (4)
 2 One seed out of date? Got it! (1,3)
 3 Offer made by Chambers put in for a pound (8)
 4 Fool the man in dress (6)
 5 Ordered chap's old hat (8)
 6 Alarm is loud, OK? (6)
 7 Contentment with appeal? Certainly (8)
 8 Sort of line taken in school meeting (8)
 11 Eastern capital has the French going round (5)
 15 Sort of party making a right row in lavatory (8)
 16 Sort of fare for comprehensive (8)
 17 Engineers busy getting a response (8)
 19 Exact account given by clergyman (8)
 20 Heard legal permission for liturgies (5)
 22 Breakfast cereal for little money once? (6)
 24 Outline broadcast about African country losing capital (6)
 27 Board no good creating sort of mess (4)
 28 Enquire on the radio for a Punjabi? (4)



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

Clue of the week: Shoot consumer inside shop and abscond (5) *The Times*

Solution to Crossword 1461

ACROSS: 1 Schnapps 5 Boughs 9 Monterey 10 Sierra 12 Vin ordinaire 15 Omega 16 Tall story 18 Brasserie 19 Oxeye 20 Asti Spumante 24 Itself 25 Ministry 26 Gasket 27 Unstable

DOWN: 1 Semi 2 Hint 3 Americans 4 Preposterous 6 Orion 7 Garrisoned 8 Spare tyres 11 Adulteration 13 Forbearing 14 Metastasis 17 Shortlist 21 Solve 22 Stab 23 Type

Clue of the week: Do I monitor racy act in shot? (8,11)

Solution: Intimacy coordinator

The winner of 1461 is **L. Blair Oliphant from Blairgowrie**

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

Sudoku 1,005 (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 1,004

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

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Charity of the week



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