

An icon of the
Civil Rights
Movement

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remarkable
survival story

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four years of
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THE WEEK

28 FEBRUARY 2026 | ISSUE 1581

THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

A seismic moment for the royal family

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What happened

A crisis for the royals

Days after Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor was arrested in Norfolk, on suspicion of misconduct in public office, MPs backed the release of files relating to his appointment as a UK trade envoy in 2001. The Government promised to comply with the motion as promptly as it could without undermining police investigations into the former prince, who is suspected of passing sensitive information to the paedophile financier Jeffrey Epstein during his decade in the envoy role (see page 18). Downing Street said it might also introduce a bill to remove Andrew – the first member of the royal family to be arrested for more than 350 years – from the royal line of succession. This would then require the approval of the Commonwealth nations that have the British monarch as head of state.

On Monday, Peter Mandelson, the former UK ambassador to Washington, was arrested on suspicion of perpetrating the same offence. Both he and Mountbatten-Windsor have consistently denied any wrongdoing. The Commons Speaker, Lindsay Hoyle, had prompted Mandelson's arrest by telling police that he might be planning to flee to the Virgin Islands.



The King: fearful days?

What the editorials said

The word “seismic” is overused, said The Independent, but it’s appropriate in the case of Andrew’s arrest and its consequences for the monarchy. And who knows what else might emerge? The royal family may have “even more gruesome problems to deal with in the coming months”. Lots of questions need answering, said The Observer. Why exactly was Andrew asked to stand down as trade envoy? Did he have sex with Virginia Giuffre, and was he party to the trafficking of other young women through UK airports? What did King Charles “know, and when”?

“The days of ‘never complain, never explain’ are finished,” said The Sunday Times. Whatever happens with Andrew, the royals will need to show greater transparency with regards to their “finances, legal arrangements and archival material”. The same goes for our political class, whose response to the Epstein scandal has, until recently, been “to deflect, obfuscate and ignore”. At least Britain, with the arrests of Mountbatten-Windsor and Mandelson, is now bringing powerful people to account, said the FT. In the US, by contrast, the Epstein affair has yet to claim any scalps in the political establishment. Can anyone imagine a close relative of Donald Trump ever being put on trial while he’s in office?

What happened

Special needs reform

The Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson this week announced sweeping reforms to the special educational needs and disabilities (Send) system in England. Currently, nearly 20% of all pupils (1.7 million) are officially identified as having special educational needs. Under the proposals, outlined in a White Paper, an extra £4bn would be spent on Send up to 2029; but the number of young people receiving Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), which give legal rights to Send support, would gradually be reduced.

By 2035, only children with the most complex needs would qualify for EHCPs, which are expensive to fund and have doubled in number in the past decade. Instead, most pupils with Send would have new “individual support plans”. This is designed to lower Send spending, which will reach £15bn in three years’ time – partly by meeting needs in mainstream schools, and thus reducing the need for expensive special schools.



Phillipson: “optimistic vision”

What the editorials said

Political consensus is hard to find these days, said The Independent, but there is “unanimous agreement” that this system is in need of radical reform. Aspects of the current regime are “grotesque, if not cruel”: the process of obtaining an EHCP is arduous and can require expensive litigation. But Send is also putting great pressure on local authorities – it accounts for 10% of all councils’ spending, and has left some on the verge of bankruptcy. Phillipson wants to improve Send provision, while bringing the spending under control. It’s a “formidable” challenge, but “doing nothing is not an option”.

This is not the way to do it, said the Daily Mail. The system is “ruinously expensive”, yet the overall cost of EHCPs will go on rising until 2030. The proportion of English pupils with EHCPs rose from 2.7% in 2016 to 5.2% last year, said The Times. There is no convincing explanation for this, except that diagnoses of “fashionable maladies” such as autism and ADHD have rocketed. Too many parents are seeking Send status for their children, at the expense of those in “genuine need”.

It wasn't all bad

Thanks to a pair of eagle-eyed dog walkers, archaeologists were able to record ancient tracks on a Scottish beach before the storms that exposed them destroyed them for ever. Locals Ivor Campbell and Jenny Snedden raised the alert about the strange markings at Lunan Bay in Angus; a team then raced in, to make casts and capture drone footage in brief lulls in the wind and rain. The prints, of bare human feet, were made 2,000 years ago – around the time of the Roman invasions.

A century on from the death of its architect, and 144 years after its first stone was laid, Barcelona’s soaring Sagrada Família finally reached its maximum height last week, when a crane lifted the upper part of a four-armed cross onto the top of its central tower, The Tower of Jesus Christ. The church, already the world’s tallest, now rises 566ft above the Catalan city. Antoni Gaudí, who died in 1926 after being hit by a tram aged 73, had not expected to see the monument built in his lifetime, and though the exterior now looks quite complete, there is still an estimated decade’s worth of decorative work to do.



A baby boy has become the first child in the UK to be born to a mother who’d received a womb transplant from a dead donor. Grace Bell, an IT programmer, learnt when she was in her teens that she had an under-developed womb, which seemed to rule out the chance of her having children. She described the birth of her son Hugo, by Caesarean section, as “a miracle ... I’m the happiest I’ve ever been.” The parents of the donor – whose organs went to several people, saving lives – said they felt “tremendous pride” in their daughter’s legacy.

COVER CARTOON: HOWARD MCWILLIAM

What the commentators said

Until recently, it would have been unthinkable for the Commons to hold the kind of debate it did on Tuesday afternoon, said Robert Hutton in *The Critic*. MPs, normally so deferential to the monarchy, queued up to disparage Andrew. The Trade Minister, Chris Bryant, described him as “rude, arrogant and entitled”. The Speaker would once have put a swift stop to such talk. Not this time. “Daylight may be the best disinfectant, but it can also destroy magic. Where will all this end?” The rules of engagement with the royals have changed for ever, said Simon Kelner in *The i Paper*. “These must be fearful days within the House of Windsor.”

Let’s keep things in perspective, said Charles Moore in *The Daily Telegraph*. As “royal horror stories” go, this one falls well short of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, when the royals “stood accused of organised unkindness” and faced angry demands to “show us you care”. Ugly as the Andrew/Epstein story is, it involves an ex-prince who is no longer involved in royal life. In principle, Andrew’s disgrace shouldn’t harm the monarchy at all, said Sam Leith in *The Spectator*. King Charles’s response to the arrest has been impeccable. “Until such time as something comes out that makes clear that red flags were raised and ignored, or worse, that any potential evidence of malfeasance was actively concealed, his Maj and his heir look to have a clean bill of health.” But the whole affair is still terrible PR for the royals.

The monarchy is not about to collapse, said Will Hutton in *The Observer*. Its “roots are too deep”. But it needs to become more like the more modest European monarchies. A good model would be Denmark, where there are no “Ruritanian state openings of Parliament” and King Frederik and his family carry out their functions while living in a more low-key fashion. He enjoys approval ratings of 84% to 87%. To be fair, Prince William seems keen on this model. A “more casual” monarchy is taking shape, said DAT Green in *Prospect*, and the Andrew scandal will accelerate that process. “The extended family shots at Buckingham Palace are unlikely to be repeated again soon, if ever. The ‘firm’ phase of the monarchy appears to be over.”

What the commentators said

Send provision is “falling apart” for a variety of reasons apart from rising diagnoses, said Sam Freedman on *Substack*. The EHCP system, introduced in 2014, conferred not only legal rights but specific funding for each child; and it made it easier for parents to request an assessment, whereas previously it was mostly schools that did. At the same time, mainstream schools became less inclusive, owing to the pressure to drive up educational standards, while the stigma attached to special schools reduced. As a result, many councils started sending pupils to special schools – some of them private-equity-run independent schools that rake in “big profits”, many of them at a distance that means sending children there by taxi. Local authorities try to manage the ballooning costs of all this by stalling applications; parents then appeal, and almost always win, only adding to the costs. Credit must be given to Phillipson for taking on this “intractable challenge”, said Sonia Sodha in *The Independent*. But parents’ faith in the system is at “rock bottom”. Backbenchers’ inboxes will undoubtedly fill up with their concerns that legal entitlements will be taken away – and a “significant rebellion is not off the cards”.

It is “treacherous territory”, agreed George Eaton in *The New Statesman*, but even sceptics admit that the process has been a “model of consultation”, and Labour MPs are likely to give Phillipson the benefit of the doubt. On the surface, said John Harris in *The Guardian*, hers seems to be an “optimistic, inclusive vision”. But it is also a “high-stakes experiment”. The extra funding is not enough – barely enough for a single new teaching assistant per school. Teachers worry that trying to cater for more Send pupils in mainstream schools will not be possible. “Inclusion is a lovely word,” said Joanna Williams in *The Spectator*, but some pupils with severe learning disabilities are “not best served by being placed in mainstream schools”. Individual support plans are all very well. But “inclusion for all can mean success for no one”.

What next?

Misconduct in public office is a hard offence to prove. Prosecutors must show not only that a defendant was guilty of a “wilful neglect of duty”, but that this amounted to an abuse of the public’s trust. The investigations into Andrew and Mandelson could take several months.

The King is set to make a state visit to the US in April, and William is due there in July, to mark the 250th anniversary of independence, says *The Times*. Aides are nervous about the trips. “They can’t cancel it, that would look terrible,” says a source. “But all it takes is for Trump to start riffing about Andrew, or an opportunity-seeking congressman or woman, and it all becomes highly embarrassing.”

What next?

The White Paper is only the start of the political process, and the new system will not come into effect until 2030 at the earliest. There will be no changes to EHCPs before then. But after 2030 they will be “formally reassessed” at entry to secondary school and other transition points.

No child with a place currently funded in a special school will have that withdrawn. But the Government has pledged to tackle the high costs of private special schools by introducing new price bands. Such schools now charge an average of £63,000 per child per year.

THE WEEK

An occupational hazard of working at *The Week* is that you marinate in the news, from the big stories – Andrew, Trump, Xi – to the small. Sometimes, it’s the big ones that stop you from sleeping,

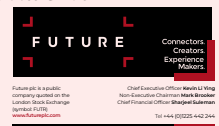
but the smaller ones have a way of getting under the skin too. For me recently it was the plight (*see page 13*) of a Hertfordshire farmer in his 80s who faced having to come up with £40,000 to clear 200 tonnes of rubbish left by fly-tippers on his land. The Environment Agency has no legal duty to pay for the junk to be removed, and the farmer’s insurers have refused to cough up. The episode has been “devastating”, he says: “I just don’t know what I am going to do.” Clearly, the story got under other people’s skin too, and now a fundraising campaign has drummed up the cash – along with some spare change, which will be given to others in a similar situation. Writing in *The Sunday Times* this month, Josh Glancy listed some of the issues that Britain is grappling with: “soaring welfare costs, small boats, asylum hotels, a stagnant economy, the madness of Trump, acute military deficiencies, a creaking NHS, jittery bond markets”. It’s hard to argue with his list – in fact, it needs extending. Still, perhaps it’s helpful to remember that the country isn’t a whiteboard of issues but is made up of individuals, and ours seem on the whole to be pretty good. There are the fly-tippers, of course. But there are also the people who are willing to reach into their pockets, to help a farmer they don’t know clear rubbish from a scrap of land they will never visit.

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Controversy of the week

A grim anniversary

When Russian troops invaded on 24 February 2022, “most experts expected Ukraine’s defeat within days”, said Rajan Menon in *The Guardian*. “Russia’s population is more than three times Ukraine’s, its GDP around ten times bigger, its army far larger.” But Ukraine defied the “doomsday predictions” and, four years on, it still holds 80% of its territory. Its army has sustained an estimated 500,000 to 600,000 casualties, including 100,000 to 140,000 fatalities, but Russia has reportedly suffered far more: an estimated 1.2 million casualties, including up to 325,000 deaths. Ukrainian drones have “prevented Russia’s generals from fighting the kind of war they prefer”, and have trapped them in a “war of attrition” in which every inch of territory gained is a struggle. Ukraine has kept Russia’s Black Sea fleet at bay, and is increasingly reaching into enemy territory: more than half of Russia’s oil refineries have been struck at least once, heavily reducing their capacity.



A mourner at a funeral in Lviv

In all wars, “defenders can expect the casualty ratio to lean in their favour”, said Memphis Barker in *The Daily Telegraph*. But in the “bloodiest sections” of the front line, near the eastern city of Pokrovsk, Kyiv’s army is eliminating fully 25 Russians for every Ukrainian killed. Over the past two months, the Russian army has reportedly started “to lose more men than it can recruit”: on average, a mind-boggling 40,000 per month. Combine Ukraine’s drone “kill zones” with Vladimir Putin’s disregard for the lives of his soldiers, “and the result is a charnel house of historically freakish proportions”. Ukraine was also given a boost this month when SpaceX stopped Russian forces using its Starlink satellites, said Ibrahim Naber on *Politico*. This “constrained Russian military capabilities”, and in the days that followed, “Ukraine recaptured roughly 77 square miles in the country’s southeast”. Yet “bloody conflict has become an end in itself” for Putin, and any peace plan acceptable to Ukraine will never satisfy him, said Peter Caddick-Adams in *The Daily Express*. “A Russia not at war would reveal angry relatives, muttering veterans, the tanking economy and questions about his leadership. For the man who could stop the conflict in an instant, peace would be more dreadful than war.”

When the full-scale invasion began in 2022, it was “hard to imagine” it lasting more than a year, said *The Kyiv Independent*. Today, the idea that it could continue until 2030 is “unbearable – but not unrealistic”. A pattern has been set: “Russia escalates. Ukraine adapts. The West deliberates. Talks resume. Talks stop. The war grinds on – and Ukraine buries its dead.” For Putin’s Russia, this is a war of “imperial restoration”, and that project requires Ukrainian obeisance. For Ukraine, its very existence is “on the line. When both sides view the war in existential terms and both retain external backing, a multi-decade-long conflict is not far-fetched. History offers plenty of such precedents.”

Ministerial probe

Keir Starmer has ordered an investigation into a Labour MP who has been accused of smearing journalists in his former job at a left-wing think-tank. As head of Labour Together, Josh Simons, now a Cabinet Office minister, paid the PR firm APCO more than £30,000 to look into “the sourcing, funding and origins” of a *Sunday Times* article, which had revealed that his organisation had been fined by the Electoral Commission for failing to declare £730,000 in donations between 2017 and 2020. The resulting 58-page report falsely claimed that the journalists may have used information gained by Russian hackers. It also contained extensive personal details, some of them inaccurate, about one of the journalists, Gabriel Pogrud. Labour Together sent parts of the report to GCHQ. Last week, Simons said APCO had “gone beyond” its brief by gathering personal information. However, many have questioned his account and have accused him of orchestrating a smear campaign. Amid calls for him to resign, the PM last week asked the Cabinet Office to investigate the affair. Its findings prompted Starmer to seek advice from his ethics adviser, Sir Laurie Magnus, who will rule if Simons has broken the ministerial code.

Spirit of the age

Stressed out residents of Tokyo are being offered the chance to relax in “cute coffins”, reports *The Times*. In sessions costing from £9.50 for 30 minutes, they can lie in either a closed or open casket designed by a company called Grave Tokyo. They can listen to “healing music”, watch a video projected onto the ceiling, snooze or meditate. Grave Tokyo says that people emerge from the sessions refreshed and better able to appreciate their lives.

A majority of British parents (64%) support a ban on social media for under-16s, but half say they would ignore it, and still allow their children access to social media platforms such as Instagram. The Public First survey also found that 68% thought their children would find ways around a ban.

Good week for:

Ageing naturally, with news that when Woody the cowboy returns to the screen in *Toy Story 5*, he will have a bald patch. In a trailer, a character suggests he use a brown marker to cover it.
Robert Aramayo, after the relatively little-known actor from Hull beat off two Hollywood megastars – Leonardo DiCaprio and Timothée Chalamet – to win the best actor award at the Baftas, for his role in the homegrown drama *I Swear* (see below).
Birch Coffee, on the Isle of Skye, which was named one of the world’s best coffee shops at the annual CoffeeFest. The only other UK café in the top 100 was Glasgow’s Ottoman Coffeehouse.

Bad week for:

The Baftas, which were plunged into controversy when audience member John Davidson – who has Tourette syndrome – blurted out the N-word while two black actors, Michael B. Jordan and Delroy Lindo, were on stage. Tourette’s campaigner Davidson, the subject of the film *I Swear*, apologised for his involuntary outburst, but questioned why, given his disability, the BBC had left a mic in front of him. Others criticised the BBC for failing to edit out the offensive words in the two hours before transmission, and Bafta for not apologising more fully to the actors.
Roaming charges, after a small-business owner inadvertently ran up a £42,000 bill on a family holiday in Morocco. Andrew Alty received a bill from O2 for £22,000 while still in Marrakech, and a later one for £20,000. It seems that with no data cap, his daughter’s use of TikTok had cost him about £5,000 an hour. In response to bad publicity, the charges were eventually waived.

Poll watch

48% of Britons delayed or avoided calling their GP surgery when they were ill in the past year. **30%** thought they would not get an appointment at a suitable time, and **17%** thought they would not be able to get through to the practice. Only **32%** think the NHS provides a good service nationally. *Ipsos/Health Foundation*

76% of Greek citizens express discontent with how democracy works in their country, compared with **68%** in France, **66%** in Romania, **42%** in the UK, and **32%** in Sweden. *Progressive Lab/Politico*

Only **26%** of UK adults say they would engage with streamed content if they knew it was created or co-created by AI. **53%** say they would not. *YouGov*

The Hague, the Netherlands

Duterte case: In a case likely to have major implications for the enforcement of global human rights, the International Criminal Court, after four days of hearings, has now to decide if prosecutors have enough evidence to try the former president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, for crimes against humanity. Prosecutors hold him personally culpable for the slaughter of up to 30,000 people, many of them just bystanders during the infamous “war on drugs” he unleashed during his third stint as mayor of Davao City in the 2010s, and when he was president, from 2016. He’s held to have urged the summary execution of countless drug dealers and users by police and vigilante death squads. Duterte, now 80, was arrested in Manila last year. He has declined to attend the hearings, saying he is “old, tired and frail”, but has been deemed fit to stand trial. The judges are to issue a written decision within 60 days on whether the case will proceed.

Paris

US row: Diplomatic tensions between Paris and Washington – not a rare event during Trump’s second term – rose to a new pitch this week after the French foreign minister, Jean-Noël Barrot, barred the US ambassador from meeting any French ministers. The spat kicked off when the US embassy released a State Department post on social media which, in light of the recent killing of a student by far-left activists (see page 15), warned that “violent radical Leftism is on the rise” in France. Accusing the US of interfering in France’s domestic affairs, Barrot summoned US ambassador Charles Kushner (father of Donald Trump’s son-in-law, Jared) to the Quai d’Orsay. But Kushner, citing a schedule clash, sent another official in his place – which he also did last year. Incensed by the failure to adhere to diplomatic protocols, Barrot then imposed his ban.



Assisi, Italy

Saint’s bones:

For the first time since his death in 1226, the

bones of Italy’s patron saint, Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan Order, have gone on public display. To mark the 800th anniversary of his death, until 22 March the saint’s skeleton is being exhibited in a bulletproof glass case at a basilica in Assisi; some 400,000 people have registered to visit it. Soon after his death, the saint’s skeleton had been buried under the basilica floor to prevent it being stolen for relics; it was discovered in 1818 and moved to a secure crypt. Church security will include metal detectors, sniffer dogs and extra cameras.



Innsbruck, Austria

Climber’s crime:

A climber whose partner died of hypothermia after he left her near the summit of the Grossglockner, Austria’s highest peak, has been convicted of manslaughter by gross negligence and given a suspended jail sentence. Thomas P, 37, and Kerstin G, 33, had got into trouble during a winter ascent last year. The court held that as “de facto” tour leader, he should have known to turn back before night fell and temperatures plunged. He left her to seek help, but failed to wrap her in an emergency blanket. The ruling (which both sides are appealing) could set a new standard for liability in mountain sports.

Warsaw

Treaty exit: Citing the need to defend itself against the growing threat from Russia, Poland has formally withdrawn from the Ottawa Convention, the 1997 treaty – since ratified or acceded to by 165 states – that bans the use of anti-personnel landmines. The PM, Donald Tusk, said Poland would consider laying anti-personnel mines along its borders with Russia and with Russia’s ally Belarus, if there were a “realistic threat of Russian aggression”. The treaty obliged Warsaw to destroy its stockpile of landmines; it has announced plans to start manufacturing them again. In December, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania also withdrew from the convention; neither Russia nor the United States have ever signed up to the treaty.



Budapest

Sanctions veto: Hungary has once again provoked consternation in Brussels by vetoing the EU’s proposals for a 20th package of sanctions against Russia and a €90bn aid package for Ukraine – despite having agreed to both in December. EU leaders had planned to mark the fourth anniversary of Russia’s full-scale invasion with a show of solidarity in Kyiv, but Hungary’s PM, Viktor Orbán, a close ally of Moscow, blindsided them with his veto on the eve of their visit. He said his decision had been prompted by disruptions to the Druzhba pipeline, which runs through Ukraine and supplies Russian crude to Hungary and Slovakia; the pipeline was damaged in a recent Russian strike and both countries accuse Kyiv of delaying repairs. Several EU governments have denounced Orbán’s move; Poland’s foreign minister, Radosław Sikorski, accused him of “blackmailing” Ukraine.

Lviv, Ukraine

Terror attack: Ukraine has accused Russia of ordering the “terrorist attack” in the city of Lviv on Sunday that killed a 23-year-old policewoman and injured 25 others. The first of the two bombs used in the attack was detonated early in the morning, just as police reached the shop in the city centre where a break-in had been reported. The second blast, timed for the arrival of a second unit of officers, went off around 15 minutes later. A dozen people were still in hospital this week; three remain in a serious condition. Authorities in Ukraine said they had detained several suspects, including a 33-year-old woman whom they have accused of planting the homemade devices in rubbish bins on the orders of Moscow. Just six days before the attack, the SBU, Ukraine’s security service, had warned its citizens that Russia was ramping up efforts to recruit Ukrainians to “commit acts of arson, terrorism and sabotage”.

Washington DC

Board of Peace meets: The US president hosted the inaugural meeting of his Board of Peace in Washington DC last week. When Donald Trump unveiled the initiative last September, he said that its purpose would be to oversee the reconstruction of Gaza, as part of his UN-endorsed peace plan; but its charter gives it a much wider conflict-resolution remit, leading to fears that it could undermine the UN, and questions about its non-treaty-based structure. As a result, many of the US's Western allies have declined to join it, as has the Vatican. At the meeting, Trump heaped praise on the 27 nations that have joined. They had, he said, pledged \$7bn for the Strip's reconstruction, while the US would give \$10bn. However, the total cost has been estimated at up to \$70bn, and this process is not scheduled to begin until Hamas has disarmed – something it is showing little sign of doing.

Washington DC

Tariff chaos: Donald Trump's new global tariffs came into effect at 10% this week – not the 15% he announced last week, after the Supreme Court blocked most of his previous tariffs agenda. The justices had ruled, by six to three, that Trump had overstepped his authority last year when he invoked emergency powers to impose sweeping "reciprocal" tariffs. Trump reacted angrily to the ruling, saying the majority justices should be "absolutely ashamed". Soon after, he said he was invoking a different law to impose a blanket 15% levy, causing intense concern in countries that had negotiated lower rates. And though it ultimately came in at 10%, the White House has said that it will be raised to 15% (see page 40).

Washington DC

Record speech: The US president delivered the longest-ever State of the Union address on Tuesday, in which he attempted to highlight his achievements amid falling approval ratings. In his 107-minute speech, Trump claimed that the US economy was "roaring like never before". He said that prices of various consumer items had fallen (true of some, but the price of groceries overall has risen); that inflation was "plummeting" (it has eased); and that the homicide rate was at its lowest for 125 years (unverifiable, but it is down 20% year on year). Many Democrat lawmakers skipped the speech, while Al Green of Texas was ejected for holding a sign reading "Black people aren't apes!" – a reference to a racist video targeting the Obamas that the White House had promoted online.

**Tapalpa, Mexico**

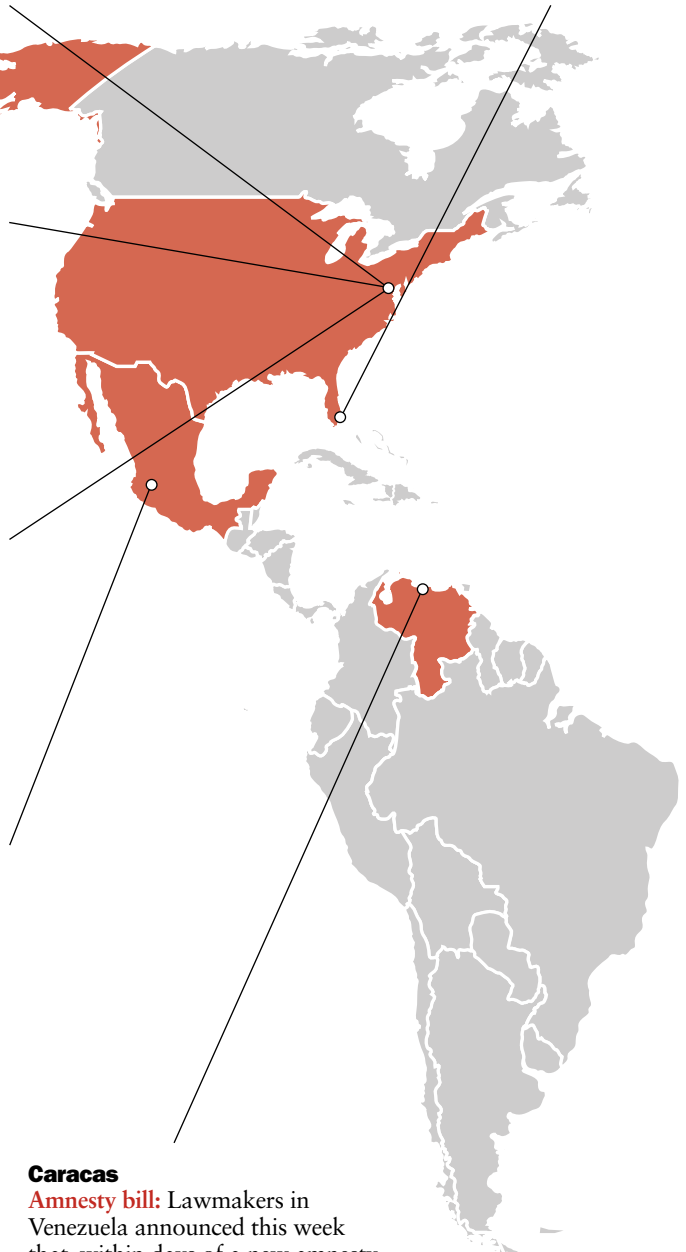
Drug boss killed: The killing of one of Mexico's most powerful drug lords by the country's special forces ignited a wave of retaliatory violence across the country this week. With the aid of US intelligence, Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes – founder of the feared Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) – was tracked down to his hideout near Tapalpa in Jalisco state on Sunday, and was shot in an exchange of gunfire. The 59-year-old known as "El Mencho", who had a \$15m

US bounty on his head, died soon after.

The CJNG is suspected of the large-scale trafficking of fentanyl and other drugs to the US. Washington recently designated it as a terrorist organisation, and had been putting pressure on Mexico's president, Claudia Sheinbaum, to take aggressive action against it and other cartels – in contrast to her predecessor's "hugs not bullets" approach, which sought instead to address the root causes of crime and avoid direct confrontations with the cartels. In response to news of El Mencho's killing, armed men in the 20 or so states where the CJNG is active blocked roads and set fire to vehicles, banks and businesses, leading to violent clashes with Mexico's National Guard in which several people were killed. In Jalisco and some other states, the chaos was such that residents and tourists were advised to shelter in place and flights were cancelled.

**Palm Beach, Florida**

Intruder killed: The armed man who was shot dead this week after breaching the perimeter of Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida has been identified as a 21-year-old from North Carolina. Austin T. Martin was carrying a gun and a fuel canister when he was confronted by Secret Service agents close to the resort's north gate at 1.30am local time on Sunday. Police said he was shot after raising his weapon. Trump was in DC at the time. Martin's motive was unclear; according to press reports, he came from a Trump-supporting family but had recently become fixated with Jeffrey Epstein's crimes.

**Caracas**

Amnesty bill: Lawmakers in Venezuela announced this week that, within days of a new amnesty law coming into force, 3,052 people under house arrest or other restrictions had been granted their freedom, and a further 179 had been freed from jails. Following the US's capture of Nicolás Maduro on 3 January, Caracas pledged to release a "significant" number of prisoners as a gesture of goodwill. However, activists have criticised the slow pace of releases. The new legislation excludes not only murderers and the like, but also people who have called for foreign armed intervention in the country. This, critics say, means that it would not cover the Nobel Peace Prize-winning opposition leader María Corina Machado.

Al-Hasakah, Syria

Camp closure: The Syrian government has evacuated and closed a camp in a northeastern desert region that had been used to detain thousands of people with links to Islamic State. At its peak in 2019, 73,000 people – many of them the wives and children of Isis fighters – were living at al-Hol. By this year, it was down to 24,000. Most of the detainees – who had not been accused of any crime – were Syrian, but there were also Iraqis and 6,000 nationals of 40 or so other countries. Thousands escaped last month when the Kurds who'd controlled the camp abruptly withdrew; their whereabouts is now unclear. Syrian authorities say that some have now been moved to other camps. The future of the Roj camp, which holds many foreigners including Shamima Begum, is unclear. It is still under Kurdish control.

Tehran

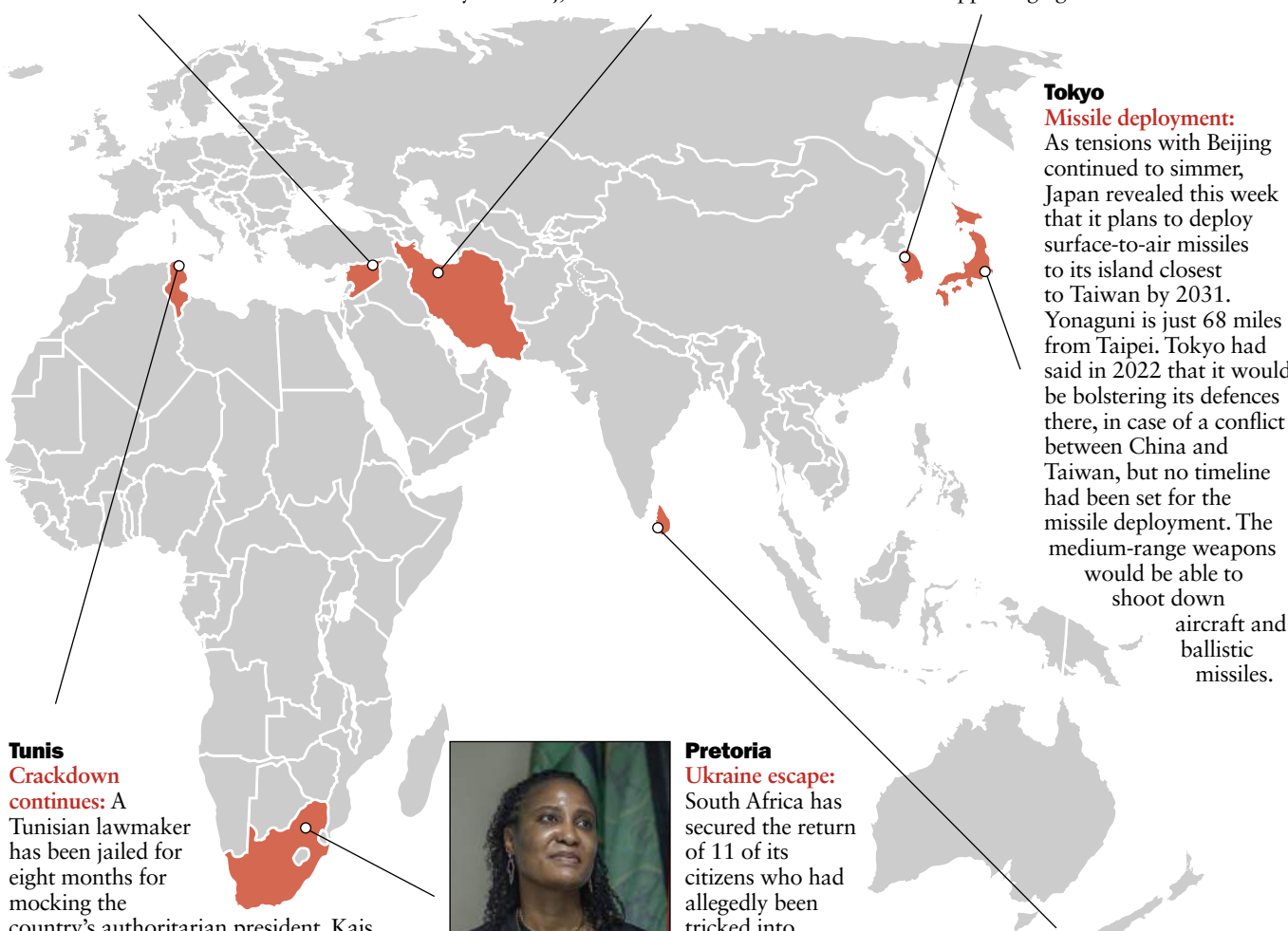
Student protests: Students have rallied against Iran's ruling regime at universities in Tehran and other cities in the first major protests since the brutal suppression of mass demonstrations in January. Rights groups say at least 7,000 people were killed in that crackdown, and more than 40,000 people have since been arrested. Even so, many Iranians have continued to express dissent in other ways, by signing petitions and attending events commemorating the dead. The fresh protests are reported to have taken place on at least eight campuses, where students chanted "Death to the dictator", and some voiced support for the exiled crown prince, Reza Pahlavi, who had backed the protests in January. At Sharif University, in Tehran, several protesters were reportedly injured by the Basij, a state-backed militia.



Seoul

Yoon jailed: South Korea's former president, Yoon Suk Yeol, has been sentenced to life in prison for leading an insurrection during his short-lived imposition of martial law in December 2024.

Yoon's declaration, in a late-night speech in which he referred to "anti-state" forces within the opposition, plunged the country into crisis. Prosecutors had sought the death penalty, but the judge declined, noting that the failed power grab had not resulted in serious casualties. The 65-year-old is appealing against the verdict.



Tokyo

Missile deployment:

As tensions with Beijing continued to simmer, Japan revealed this week that it plans to deploy surface-to-air missiles to its island closest to Taiwan by 2031. Yonaguni is just 68 miles from Taipei. Tokyo had said in 2022 that it would be bolstering its defences there, in case of a conflict between China and Taiwan, but no timeline had been set for the missile deployment. The medium-range weapons would be able to shoot down aircraft and ballistic missiles.

Tunis

Crackdown continues:

A Tunisian lawmaker has been jailed for eight months for mocking the country's authoritarian president, Kais Saied, on social media. Ahmed Saidani – who was elected in 2022 as a supporter of Saied, but who has since turned against him – had ridiculed the president over his recent visits to flood-hit areas: he referred to him as "the supreme commander of sanitation and rainwater drainage", and applauded him for "taking up the hobby of taking photos with the poor and destitute". This week, a court found Saidani guilty of "insulting others via communication networks". Since Saied assumed office in 2019, he has suspended parliament, rewritten the constitution, muzzled the media, and jailed most opposition leaders.



Pretoria

Ukraine escape:

South Africa has secured the return of 11 of its citizens who had allegedly been tricked into fighting for Russia in Ukraine. Last November, the government said it had received

distress calls from the men, who had reportedly thought they were going to Russia to be trained as bodyguards, only to be taken instead to the front lines in the Donbas region, having signed contracts they'd not understood. Their recruiters allegedly included Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla – the daughter of ex-president Jacob Zuma. She has denied involvement, but resigned over the scandal last year.

Colombo

Spy chief arrested: A former head of Sri Lankan intelligence was arrested in Colombo this week, on suspicion of aiding and abetting the suicide attacks that killed 279 people on Easter Sunday 2019. The attacks were carried out by local Islamist groups, but in 2023 a whistleblower claimed that Suresh Sallay, then a military intelligence officer, had allowed them to go ahead, to influence forthcoming elections in favour of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was duly elected on a promise to stamp out Islamist extremism. He promoted Sallay to intelligence chief later that year.

Emin's newfound happiness

These days, life is far from straightforward for Tracey Emin. After being diagnosed with an aggressive bladder cancer in 2020, the artist had major surgery, removing her bladder and urethra, and leaving her with a stoma – an opening in her stomach. She now relies on a urostomy bag which must be emptied “every 15 to 20 minutes”. She also suffers from bowel trouble. All of this, she says, “really can get you down, because you can’t be free. Nothing can be improvised. Nothing can be spontaneous. When I go away, half my suitcase is full of medical supplies.” Emin is vulnerable to infections: she was struck down with sepsis in the autumn, and worries about catching a cold or the flu. Yet for all that, she actually seems happier than ever, says Charlotte Higgins in *The Guardian*. She has moved back to her home town of Margate, where she has opened an art school and bought flats for artists to live in at low rent, and is gearing up for a major new show at the Tate Modern. “Even when I’m unhappy, I’m not as unhappy as I used to be,” she says. “I do what I want to do. If I feel like painting, I’ll go and paint. If I don’t feel like painting, I’ll go and teach. If I don’t feel like teaching, I’ll go and take a walk on the beach. If I don’t want to walk on the beach, I cuddle my cats.” After the cancer, “the big thing that I discovered was that I don’t want to die right now. You might think that’s obvious, but

it’s not. I have spent a lot of my life being sad, being nihilistic and punishing myself mentally – and drinking and smoking. And then I realised: I could have my time back again.”

An actor's good fortune

Derek Jacobi is 87 now, and still acting 81 years after he made his stage debut in a production of *The Prince and the Swineherd* at his local library in Leytonstone, east London. That show made him realise what he wanted to do with his life, and it was the start of a remarkable journey, says Dominic Maxwell in *The Times*. At 18, he appeared in a well-received production of *Hamlet* at the Edinburgh Fringe; then he was recruited to Birmingham Rep; and three years later, Laurence Olivier invited him to join his new National Theatre. The National opened at the Old Vic on 22 October 1963 – Jacobi’s 25th birthday – with Peter O’Toole playing Hamlet and Jacobi as Laertes. At the curtain call, Shirley Bassey came on and sang *Happy Birthday* for him. “I nearly died,” he recalls. “My mum and dad were there too. I thought, ‘This is the greatest day of my life.’” Of course he has great talent, and he has worked hard; but does he also feel lucky to have been around at such a golden time? “It’s all luck!” he booms. “It was luck getting the first job at Birmingham Rep... It was luck the day Olivier was out front to see me. It was luck playing Laertes. I am one of the luckiest actors you will meet.”



It is 17 months since Gisèle Pelicot became a household name in the most awful of circumstances. She had waived her right to anonymity during the trial of her husband, Dominique, who, over the course of almost a decade, had repeatedly drugged Gisèle and invited dozens of strangers to rape her in her own home. The case took a terrible toll on her (see page 23). Yet today, Pelicot, 73, is still able to look back on the first four-fifths of her 50-year marriage with some fondness. “We had a nice life, after all,” she told Gaby Wood in *Vogue*. “For 40 years, I was married to a good man. Friends would ask me: ‘Doesn’t he have a brother?’ He cooked, he did DIY, he was athletic, he was tidy – he had many good qualities.” Looking back, she believes that her ex-husband, who she now refers to as “Monsieur Pelicot”, had a split personality. “There was an A side and a B side,” she explains. “I never saw the B side. I only discovered it during the trial.” And although she can’t bring herself to forgive him (“Forgiveness is very difficult for me. Impossible even”), she does not see him as a “monster”. “He’s a human being, despite what he has done.” As for her, she says, she has given herself “permission to be happy”. She has a new partner, Jean-Loup, and is keen to “move on”. “I have no regrets,” she says. “When I look at myself in the mirror, I say: ‘We’re OK, you and me. It’s not that bad, after all.’”

Castaway of the week

This week's edition of Radio 4's Desert Island Discs featured the journalist and editor Roula Khalaf

- 1 *Misunderstanding* by Phil Collins, performed by Genesis
- 2 *Dernière Danse* by Skaldpovich and Indila, performed by Indila
- 3 *Oghneyat Al Bostah*, written and performed by Ziad Rahbani
- 4 *Feeling Good* by Anthony Newley and Leslie Bricusse, performed by Nina Simone
- 5 *Zina* by Amine Mohamed Djemal, Rahim El Hadi and Ramzy Ayadi, performed by Babylone
- 6* *Ya Laure Hobouki* by Assi and Mansour Rahbani, performed by Fairuz
- 7 *Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)*, written and performed by Green Day
- 8 *7 Seconds* by Neneh Cherry, Youssou N'Dour, Cameron McVey and Jonathan Sharp, performed by Youssou N'Dour and Neneh Cherry

Book: *A Peace to End All Peace* by David Fromkin

Luxury: a notebook and pen

* Choice if allowed only one record

Viewpoint:**Down with facts**

“There is endless talk about the effects of phone use on the young, but it poses perhaps less obvious threats to my generation. Conversation, in boomer circles, has been profoundly damaged by the relatively recent introduction of facts. In my experience, the best conversations are the ones where no one really knows what they’re talking about. I’ve participated in many debates about, say, football or politics, so gloriously unhindered by evidence, so recklessly inventive, that they constitute a sort of folk art. In the past, knowledgeable people were very thin on the ground, but now the smartphone has given everyone the chance to be a killjoy.”
Frank Skinner in The Observer

Farewell

Willie Colón, pioneer of salsa music, died 21 February, aged 75.

Eric Dane, *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Euphoria* star, died 19 February, aged 53.

Philippe Gaulier, master clown and teacher, died 9 February, aged 82.

Anna Murdoch Mann dePeyster, novelist and second wife of Rupert Murdoch, died 17 February, aged 81.

Sir Nicholas White, clinician, scientist and leading figure in malaria treatment, died 1 February, aged 74.

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The row over student loans

Millions of graduates have been left with hefty student loans, at high interest rates, and they're not happy. Is the system unfair?

Why are people angry?

Many graduates who took out student loans feel they got “an incomprehensibly unfair deal that they did not understand and now cannot escape”, says John Blake, formerly of the Office for Students. The problems are worst for the estimated 5.8 million people who took out “Plan 2” loans, the main scheme from late 2012 to mid 2023. While the interest rate on other loans is set at the Retail Prices Index (RPI) measure of inflation, Plan 2 loans are charged at RPI plus up to 3%. Then at the last Budget, Rachel Reeves froze the threshold at which repayment in England starts between April 2026 and 2030; it was meant to rise with inflation. This means that more people will have to pay, while interest has snowballed, even for those with hefty monthly repayments. The result is a large cohort of angry indebted graduates.

How do Plan 2 loans work?

They were introduced for students in England and Wales in 2012, after the coalition government tripled tuition fees from £3,290 to £9,000 per year (there are no fees for students from Scotland, and they're capped at about half the rate in Northern Ireland). While studying, each borrower was charged interest at the RPI rate plus 3%. Afterwards, it moved to tiered rates starting at RPI, rising up to RPI+3%, depending on earnings (those making £51,245 or more currently pay the full rate). However, borrowers don't have to pay anything until they reach the repayment threshold, now set at £28,470. Then they pay back 9% of their earnings above the threshold. After 30 years, any outstanding balance is written off.

How does this affect people in practice?

To take one example, Patrick Ba Tin, 30, borrowed some £50,000 in student loans – around average as a total – and was told he would hardly notice the repayments. Now a regulatory analyst earning a decent wage, Ba Tin has paid £5,000 towards his loans since graduating, with the current rate at £300 per month. Even so, the loan is actually growing; he now owes £75,000 in total; he will probably have to keep paying for the full 30 years. Of course this affects his finances, and his ability to buy a home. A typical graduate from the Plan 2 cohort has to earn at least £66,000 a year just to make his or her debt go down. Nadia Whittome, a Labour backbencher, has only managed to pay off £1,000 of her £49,600 debt despite six years on an MP's salary. And repayments come on top of already high tax rates. So a Plan 2 loan holder earning £51,245 will take home only 49% of their earnings above that.

How have loans changed since?

Plan 5 student loans replaced Plan 2 for courses starting in August 2023. These don't charge interest above the rate of inflation: the rate simply follows the RPI. But borrowers have to start paying them back sooner – the repayment threshold is only £25,000, not far off the minimum wage – and the repayment term is ten years longer: 40 years. Under this



An NUS protest outside Parliament earlier this month

system, in contrast to Plan 2, no one will have to pay back more than they borrowed in real terms, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that 79% of initial borrowers will repay their loans in full. However, lower earners will pay more and higher earners less than they would have under the previous system. Plan 5 will also be costlier for the taxpayer in the long run.

Is the system unfair?

It is harsh for holders of Plan 2 loans. A loan holder who started a course in 2022 will pay around £8,700 more on average than someone who took one out a year later. Tinkering with the repayment threshold, by Conservative and Labour governments, has made repayments unpredictable. The finance guru Martin

Lewis has called on Reeves to reconsider her repayment threshold freeze, saying it isn't “moral” to change the terms of a loan; polls suggest half of Plan 2 loan holders think the product was “mis-sold” to them. The National Union of Students and The Times have also called for an end to the freeze, along with cuts to the Plan 2 interest rate and a cap on the total amount of interest payable. Arguably, the RPI measure shouldn't be used at all: the Government is phasing it out – because it is deemed about 1% too high – in favour of the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). Beyond that, there is the wider issue of inter-generational unfairness. The Plan 2 cohort were the first to be hit with substantial tuition fees, which were not charged at all until 1998. In addition, young people face high property prices, and governments that arguably protect the finances of pensioners at the expense of younger generations.

Can Plan 2 loans be defended?

They are in some respects generous, and more like a graduate tax than a bank loan (see box). They do protect low earners; and during the ultra-high inflation period after Covid, the government intervened to cap interest rates. More broadly, the student loan system reflects important trade-offs. Britain has a mass university system – some 50% of young people in the UK go into higher education – and it has to be paid for somehow. All the main

parties in England have decided that those who benefit most directly – well-paid graduates – should bear much of the burden. The costs are considerable: the total outstanding Plan 2 debt is about £200bn.

What is likely to happen?

Reeves has insisted that the student loans system is “fair and reasonable”, and that the freeze was necessary for getting “the balance right between tax and spending”. But sources suggest discussions are taking place about possible measures to make the loans fairer, perhaps by tweaking interest rates. Kemi Badenoch has announced that the Tories would abolish the “unfair” additional interest, at the cost of some £2bn per year, paid for by cutting funding for “low-quality degrees”. But this – unlike raising the earnings threshold – would only benefit those earning enough to clear the debt within 30 years.

The solution: a graduate tax?

The idea of funding universities with a graduate tax has been mooted since the 1960s, when economists pointed out that a relatively small group of people were getting an expensive benefit paid for out of general taxation. The idea came up again during the expansion of higher education in the 1990s, and at one time or another it has been backed by the likes of Gordon Brown and Vince Cable. In practice, the loans function much like a tax – repayments are collected through the tax system – and proponents argue that presenting them with a future tax obligation is less stressful than being saddled with a large debt. Implementing a tax would raise major administrative issues, though. There is no register of graduates. And might it incentivise students not to graduate? Or encourage high-earning graduates to move elsewhere? There are already problems in this area: at least 70,000 loan holders living abroad were reported not to be making repayments in 2024. No country in the world imposes a pure graduate tax, though many use income-contingent loans. The UK loans are high, though, since people here contribute more to their education: only 23% of higher education is paid for by public funding in the UK, well below the OECD average of 67%.

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The shrinking value of a British degree

John Burn-Murdoch

Financial Times

Is it still worth getting a university degree? Doubts are growing, says John Burn-Murdoch. In 1999, British graduates earned 80% more, on average, than non-graduates; now the gap is just 45%, and that's before factoring in student loans. You may view this as an inevitable result of the expansion of higher education – more than 40% of Britain's workers now have a degree compared with 20% in 1999 – an increase in supply entailing a decrease in price. But here's the thing: this isn't the case elsewhere. In the US, France, Spain and other nations, graduate premiums have held up or increased even as university enrolment has grown. Clearly, it's a "particularly British problem", and it says more about the stagnant state of our economy than the innate value of degrees courses. In other nations, increases in graduate numbers have been matched by rising productivity and the creation of more professional jobs. In the Netherlands, the share of such jobs has risen from 34% to 45% since 2005; in the UK, it's inched up from 27% to just 33% since 1991. The solution to our "graduate squeeze" is not tinkering with higher education, it's restoring productivity growth.

A rubbish way to be dealing with rubbish

Alice Thomson

The Times

Drug dealing? People trafficking? There's a far easier and less risky way for criminal gangs to make big bucks these days, says Alice Thomson: large-scale fly-tipping. Gangs can make £2,500 per lorry-load of dumped rubbish; in the rare event they're caught, they'll probably escape with a small fine. It's a steal for them – "a fifth of domestic and industrial waste is now disposed of illegally" – but for someone like the Hertfordshire farmer who recently had 200 tonnes of toxic debris dumped on his land, it's a nightmare. He faces a £40,000 bill to clear it up. Officialdom isn't doing nearly enough, though, to address this problem. The Environment Agency has the power to issue unlimited fines and push for jail sentences, yet it rarely uses it: of the 24,000 reports of waste crime it has received over three years, just 0.65% of cases resulted in a prosecution. It needs to work with the police to actively go after the gangs. The Treasury, too, could help by moderating the landfill tax: at a steep £126.15 per tonne, it acts as a major disincentive for businesses to dispose of waste responsibly. The tax was designed to help the environment: currently it's doing the very opposite.

It isn't wise to whack the wealthy

Editorial

The Economist

Squeeze the rich. With voters yelling about the high cost of living, it's not surprising governments are seeing this as the best way to fix their broken budgets, says The Economist. In Europe, the idea of wealth taxes is gaining currency; in California, a "one-time" 5% levy on billionaires is under consideration. But however tempting, "squeezes" of this sort are a fundamentally bad idea. Unlike broad-based taxes, such narrowly targeted levies don't, in fact, generate that much revenue: even if the billionaires stayed put, California's would raise no more than 2% of the state's annual output. What such taxes do accomplish, though, is a measurably negative effect on levels of enterprise and innovation. The rich world already "does more redistribution than ever" before. The share of taxes paid by the top 1% in the US has increased this century; welfare spending has shot up. Besides, it's a mistake to try to insulate the public from the costs of new spending initiatives: with no personal stake in keeping taxes low, voters are less inclined to challenge irresponsible spending. For cash-strapped politicians, "emulating Robin Hood" may well look tempting. "But it is a trap."

No turning left: it's cattle class for all

Milan Klöwer

The Conversation

How do you solve a problem like aviation, asks Milan Klöwer. Plane flights are a crucial factor in global warming: they produce about 4% of global CO₂ once you take condensation trails (which trap heat) and other secondary effects into account. And yes, breakthroughs like electric planes and "sustainable" fuels may reduce the problem, but they're a long-term possibility at best. Yet there is a way we could halve aviation emissions right now: scrap business and first class. To make flying greener we must pack more people onto fewer flights: it's the number of planes in the sky that ultimately counts when it comes to pollution. Why do some flight routes emit more than 800 grams of CO₂ per passenger-kilometre, and others less than 50? It's all down to the number of empty seats. If every airline was made to switch to all economy cabin layouts, we could cut emissions by up to 57%. Some will rage, of course, about having to travel cattle class. But so be it: if it deters them from making non-essential business trips, so much the better.

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

A traffic warden in Tenterden in Kent issued a parking ticket to a bus parked at a bus stop on the town's high street. The Arriva bus had broken down and could not be moved until recovery teams came to tow it away, but the warden issued a ticket nevertheless. Ashford Borough Council stood by its decision. A spokesperson said: "We can confirm that a Penalty Charge Notice was issued because the bus had been left unattended at a bus stop" – which was "a clear breach" of parking regulations.



Bangkok police shadowed a suspect by dressing up in a red-and-gold lion dance costume during Lunar New Year celebrations and sidling up to him at a temple. Then an officer emerged from the costume's head and, with help from colleagues, wrestled the man to the ground. The 33-year-old was detained on suspicion of stealing numerous objects and two 12-inch Buddha statues, worth nearly two million baht (£47,700), during a series of burglaries.

A Sicilian man trained his dog to dump bags of rubbish by the roadside, in an attempt to evade CCTV installed to combat fly-tipping. Footage published by Catania's municipal police last week shows a small dog trotting along Via Pulacara, in the city's San Giorgio district, with a bag of rubbish in its mouth before dropping it neatly at the roadside. "Inventiveness can never become an alibi for incivility," declared the police. The man was reportedly identified and fined.



Bombing Iran: will Trump go to war?

"I never imagined I'd miss being lied to by George W. Bush," said Michelle Goldberg in *The New York Times*. Mendacious as his administration's propaganda was in the run-up to the Iraq invasion, it was at least "a tacit acknowledgment that public opinion mattered, that a president couldn't start a war without convincing Americans it was necessary". Donald Trump, who appears poised to attack Iran, feels no such constraints. A second aircraft carrier strike group was en route to the Persian Gulf last week, adding to the largest US military build-up in the region in decades.

Along with the warships, there are some 50 fighter jets, including F-35s, and a squadron of F-22 Raptor stealth fighters. A fleet of mid-air refuelling tankers is on standby. A strike could happen imminently, yet "not only has Congress not authorised such a war", it hasn't even debated it. The administration hasn't set out either its reasons for bombing Iran or its long-term plan.

The main reason to bomb Iran, said Martin Arostegui in *The American Spectator*, is that it's led by "a fanatically genocidal regime" that is vulnerable right now. The Pentagon is planning an air blitz to destroy Iran's missile capabilities and remaining



The USS Gerald R. Ford: heading to the Gulf

nuclear sites, which could be followed by limited special forces raids, aided by clandestine Israeli Mossad teams already on the ground, to help break the power of the mullahs. The fear is that Tehran is stringing out peace talks with the US to "gain time for Chinese deliveries of new air defence systems capable of detecting stealth aircraft, and AI-powered drones that could threaten US warships". The US should strike while it still can.

The Iranian regime is "a horror", said Fred Kaplan on *Slate*, but were the mullahs to be toppled, there's little

prospect that they would be replaced by modernising reformers. More likely, power would end up in the hands of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, who are no less hostile to the West. There's also a risk that the cornered regime would launch a massive retaliation. For this reason, Saudi Arabia and other regional powers hostile to Iran have repeatedly urged Trump not to attack. Wars can easily "spiral out of control", which is why it's "smart for leaders to know what they want, and know how far they want to press things, before they make their first move". Talks were to resume this week, but the fear is that Trump may rush "into conflict recklessly".

California is damaging faith in democracy

Editorial

The New York Times

America used to be good at counting votes, says *The New York Times*. When telegraphs came along in the 1880s, people would read election results in the next day's newspaper. And until recently, it was the norm for voters to know the outcome within 24 hours or so. But in each of the past three congressional election cycles, we've had to wait at least a week to find out whether the Republicans or Democrats controlled the House of Representatives. Blame California, America's most populous state. It allows postal votes to arrive up to a week after election day, and counts ballots "with agonising slowness". It introduced the grace period with the noble intention of maximising voting access and ensuring that postal delays don't disenfranchise anybody. But it hasn't worked. Turnout has fallen further behind the national average since the change, and the share of votes rejected for lateness has stayed the same. Delayed results, meanwhile, have left room for "misinformation peddlers" to spread mischief. Officials claim the state's large population precludes a quick count, but other big states manage: Florida counted 99% of its (five million fewer) votes by the end of election night in 2024. California needs to get "out of the pre-telegraph era and back into the 21st century".

"Black Maga": going, going, gone...

Theodore R. Johnson

The Washington Post

Just a year ago, Donald Trump held a Black History Month celebration in the White House, says Theodore R. Johnson. He'd just won re-election with more black support than any Republican candidate in 50 years, and one in three black Americans approved of the job he was doing. "I look at this turnout..." Trump crowed. "This is just love in the room." Safe to say, the honeymoon is over. Polls show that his favourability with black voters has "plummeted" since then. Many were willing to give Trump a shot in 2024, and he convinced enough of them that the Maga movement held a place for them. But disenchantment soon set in. Far from delivering the promised prosperity and jobs, Trump has worsened outcomes for black Americans with his "capricious" tariffs, government shutdowns and cuts to the federal workforce. At 7.2%, the black unemployment rate "borders on recession levels and has returned to being about twice that of white Americans". Within Maga, meanwhile, black supporters have found "hostility" and rejection. Trump began his Black History Month celebration this year by posting a racist video to social media of Barack and Michelle Obama. He can forget any hopes of a "black Maga" resurgence.

Total chaos at Homeland Security

Jeffrey Blehar

National Review

I was never keen on the idea of Kristi Noem becoming the secretary of Homeland Security, says Jeffrey Blehar. It seemed odd to give such a key portfolio to the "lightweight" governor of a small state, South Dakota – particularly one who had confessed to shooting dead her 14-month-old dog, Cricket, after it misbehaved. Noem's rabid approach to immigration enforcement only confirmed my doubts. But a *Wall Street Journal* exposé about Noem's chaotic tenure in the DHS suggests she's even worse than I thought. It described her as totally out of her depth, and strongly hinted that she's having a long-term extramarital affair with her top aide, Corey Lewandowski. The pair have sacked lots of staff and ordered others suspected of disloyalty to take polygraph tests. In one incident, Lewandowski fired a pilot for misplacing Noem's favourite blanket during a plane switch; the pilot was reinstated when the pair realised they couldn't fly themselves home. Trump has sidelined Noem, but he's unlikely to fire her – he doesn't want a confirmation battle in the Senate with midterm elections approaching. Noem will "limp along in public, like a horse with a shattered leg, waiting only for a dignified moment to be properly put down". Think of it as "karmic justice" for Cricket.

Death in Lyon: the growing violence in French politics

French politics is starting to give off a “whiff of near civil war”, said Renaud Dély on [France Info \(Paris\)](#). On 12 February in Lyon, a far-right activist and devout Catholic called Quentin Deranque was “lynched in the street for his political beliefs by thugs from the far-left”. He died in hospital from head injuries two days later. The 23-year-old data scientist was a member of Audace Lyon, a neo-fascist group that organises “white self-defence” training sessions, and which had offered to provide security to a group of self-proclaimed “feminist nationalists” protesting against the appearance of radical-left MEP Rima Hassan at a university conference. Hassan, well known for her fiercely pro-Palestinian views, is a leading light of France Unbowed (LFI), the party led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the candidate who finished third in the 2022 presidential election. Most of the 11 people arrested over Deranque’s death had been members of the banned group Young Guard, which has been aligned with LFI, and at least three of whom had reportedly worked for one of its MPs, Raphaël Arnault. Mélenchon insists his party abhors violence, but it now looks as if it will not fare well in next month’s municipal elections. Lyon itself is known as a bastion of the far-right, and a far-right demonstration swept through the city on Saturday.



A march in Lyon on Saturday in memory of Deranque

The killers of Deranque “did not simply commit murder”, said [Le Monde \(Paris\)](#). In mimicking the methods of the “fascists” whom they say they are fighting, “they have sullied progressive and humanist struggles and offered a martyr to their adversaries”. Nevertheless, justified horror at their scandalous violence should not blind us to the unsavoury nature of many of those in the far-right National Rally (RN), now leading in the polls ahead of next year’s presidential election. Some of its supporters wantonly promote violence, and are “implacable enemies of democracy and the Republic”.

The Right and far-right are “shamefully exploiting” this tragedy, said Anthony Cortes in [L’Humanité \(Paris\)](#). By demonising the entire Left, figures such as RN president Jordan Bardella hope the electorate will overlook far-right brutality, such as last month’s savage beating near Lyon of a 17-year-old student of Syrian origin. Just as French parties, Mélenchon’s included, have tried to ostracise the RN, so Bardella is now asking other parties to form a united front against LFI. Such “irresponsible political opportunism” in the wake of Deranque’s death may well have fuelled last week’s bomb threat against LFI’s Paris HQ, and attacks against the party’s offices across the country.

Deranque’s killing did not come as a surprise, said Paul Sugy in [Le Figaro \(Paris\)](#). Despite its claims to the contrary, the Left’s “anti-fascist” movement has long endorsed physical violence. For evidence of that you just have to look at the Young Guard, which Arnault co-founded in Lyon in 2018, said Gavin Mortimer in [The Spectator](#). It was ordered to disband last summer by the Council of State for inciting violence, and for offering recruits street-fighting lessons. Given its close ties to this proscribed organisation, Mélenchon’s LFI, already languishing at 10% in the polls before the scandal, is unlikely to recover its reputation. What happened in Lyon last week buries for ever the Left’s constant claim of moral superiority.

Politicians and citizens must together do all they can to ensure the situation doesn’t escalate further, said Fabienne Lemahieu in [La Croix \(Paris\)](#). Things may be bad, but they’re still a far cry “from the meticulously planned clashes of the 1970s and 1980s between skinheads and antifascists”. Let’s keep things that way by maintaining calm. To that end, LFI must urgently carry out a “genuine internal reassessment”, said Loup Besmond de Senneville in the same paper. It must stop lowering the public discourse by turning everything into a face-off. “The far-right must be fought at the ballot box and through ideas, not by shouting or becoming complicit with those who kill.”

GERMANY

The dawn of Europe’s third nuclear power?

*Bloomberg
(New York)*

Who’d have thought it? Germany is now considering the “unthinkable”, says Katja Hoyer. It hasn’t had a nuclear bomb programme since the Nazis were in power, but atomic weapons are, at long last, being discussed in earnest. Germany can’t just sit on its hands watching Russia invade Ukraine and listening to the US state its determination to play a smaller role in European security: it should acquire its own tactical nuclear weapons, argues Bundeswehr Brigadier General Frank Pieper. And he’s not alone. His proposal is even backed by ex-foreign minister Joschka Fischer, whose party, the Greens, until now have been largely pro-pacifist. Sadly, the proposal is unlikely to become a reality any time soon, as it would require major reform of the present legal architecture: pacts such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty bar Germany from becoming Europe’s third nuclear power (after the UK and France). Still, all this talk of revisiting nuclear needn’t go to waste. Instead, it should be redirected towards a return to nuclear energy. Berlin shut down the last of its nuclear reactors in 2023, leaving Germany dependent on foreign states for around 70% of its energy needs. “If Germany has learnt to stop worrying about the bomb, perhaps it can learn to love nuclear energy again, too.”

ALBANIA

AI cannot take the human out of politics

Tirana Times

Albania’s socialist PM, Edi Rama, caused a huge stir last year when he appointed to his cabinet a minister for public procurement called Diella, a dead ringer for Albania’s leading actress, Anila Bisha. And that’s because Diella (the Albanian word for Sun) is actually an AI chatbot, who has used the actress’s image to present herself to the world. The fantastic thing about Diella, the PM had boasted on appointing her, is that she will stamp out the nepotism and corruption so rampant in the award of public contracts, a feature that has undermined Albania’s aim of gaining EU membership. But, sadly, the glitz of such political spin has already worn off, says the Tirana Times. New investigations into large Albanian infrastructure projects show corruption is still rife. And to make matters worse, Bisha is now suing the government and Rama himself for illegally using her voice and image: she’d only consented to them being used, she insists, when Diella was just a digital assistant on the government’s e-services portal, not now she’s the world’s first AI chatbot minister. The Diella saga is a classic case of governance by appearance, “where innovation is used to mask rather than confront corruption”.

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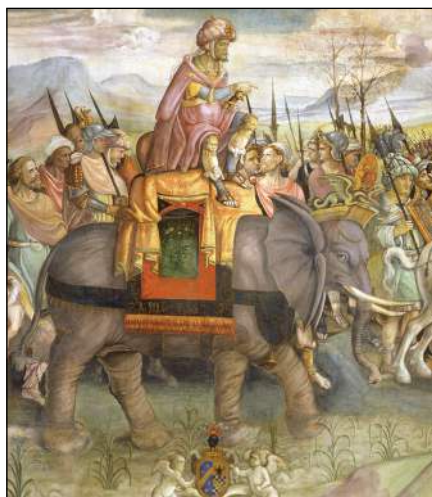
What the scientists are saying...

Doubts about intermittent fasting

Intermittent fasting regimes have become very popular: examples include the 5:2 diet, under which people eat as usual five days a week but restrict calorie intake on the other two; and time-restricted eating, which only allows eating between certain hours, say between noon and 8pm. But it seems that they do little to help people lose weight. A Cochrane review – considered the gold standard for assessing the quality of the evidence behind medical treatments – examined the existing research. The analysis of 22 clinical trials, involving 1,995 overweight and obese people aged 18 to 80 from around the world, found that intermittent fasting did not appear to deliver meaningful extra weight loss compared with standard dieting based on a daily calorie restriction. Intermittent fasters, in fact, had only slightly greater weight loss than control groups that didn't diet at all. The evidence behind intermittent fasting “doesn't justify the enthusiasm”, said lead author Dr Luis Garegnani. The study focused on weight loss, and so it isn't clear if the regimen has other benefits: there have been suggestions that it cuts the risk of heart disease, for example.

Consciousness “survives death”

We may still have some degree of consciousness for “minutes to hours” after being declared dead, a science conference has heard. Death is traditionally defined as the cessation of respiratory and circulatory or brain function. However, studies suggest that it is, in fact, not an instantaneous event but a process that gradually unfolds over time – that death has different stages. Anna Fowler, of Arizona State University, formed her theory, which she shared with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) conference, after



Hannibal by Jacopo Ripanda (c.1510)

examining existing studies on survivors of cardiac arrest. This includes research showing that one in five survivors are able to recall what was happening around them while their heart was still and their brain had stopped sending electrical impulses. These findings indicate that doctors should try to resuscitate patients for longer; they also have implications for organ donation. Dr Sam Parnia, director of resuscitation research at New York University, said it is likely that the last thing heard by many people who die in hospital is the doctor uttering the words: “time of death”.

Hannibal's elephant?

In 218BC, Hannibal led his army from Spain into France and across the Alps to Italy. He is said to have set out with 37 war elephants but, while the animals feature in ancient writings and paintings of the Second Punic War, there has been no hard proof of their existence. That may

now have changed. Archaeologists say that a strange-looking bone that they unearthed seven years ago in Córdoba in southern Spain may be from an elephant used in the war, albeit not one that crossed the Alps. By comparing the 10cm bone with those of modern elephants and steppe mammoths, the researchers showed that it likely came from the right foot of an African or Asian elephant. Meanwhile, carbon dating indicated that the animal died between the fourth and third centuries BC. Buried alongside the bone were 12 stone spheres – ammunition for torsion catapults known as *lithoboloi* – and the tip of a crossbow bolt, leaving the researchers in little doubt that the elephant had been used in battle.

The benefits of teeth-brushing

Taking care of your teeth and gums could help keep more than 50 illnesses at bay, according to a panel of experts. It has become clear that oral health influences the health of other parts of the body, including the brain, joints and gut, a panel told the AAAS conference. For example, periodontitis, or advanced gum disease, can increase the risk of dementia and other neurodegenerative conditions. Exactly how isn't clear, but studies in mice show that pathogenic oral bacteria can cross the blood-brain barrier; periodontitis can also increase brain inflammation. Other studies have found that oral bacteria can alter the gut microbiome, which may affect the odds of inflammatory bowel disease and colorectal cancer; such bacteria also play a role in the development of rheumatoid arthritis. Diets rich in sugar and ultra-processed foods are fuelling a rise in tooth decay and gum disease, said Prof Alpdogan Kantarci, of the University of Minnesota. He advises brushing teeth two to three times a day, most importantly before bed.

Why Arctic rivers are turning orange

Across the Arctic, once crystal-clear rivers are turning orange. This phenomenon is usually associated with metal leaching from mines but in this case, the culprit is climate change. The rust-coloured waterways are a sign that permafrost is melting as the world warms, reports the Financial Times. As the frozen ground thaws, sulphur-rich minerals that have been locked away are exposed to water and oxygen, creating sulphuric acid. The acid then dissolves metals from rocks, such as iron, which gives the water its orange colour. This “rusting” of rivers in the far north is widespread: it has been observed in Alaska and northwestern Canada, and satellite images suggest it is also occurring in Siberia. In the Brooks Range, Alaska's most northerly mountain range, more than 200 rusting waterways were recorded last year alone. “I've been most startled by the spatial extent,” said Dr Brett Poulin of the University of California, Davis. “And there's no way to stop it. Once it starts, it just starts.” A similar effect has been observed in the Alps and the Pyrénées, where dissolved aluminium from minerals in the permafrost is turning rivers white.



The Brooks Range, Alaska: “rusting”

Chikungunya in Europe

Chikungunya virus, a tropical disease that causes excruciating pain, is able to spread in most European countries, scientists have warned. The virus is transmitted by the Asian tiger mosquito, which is moving northwards across the continent as temperatures rise. In 2025, there were outbreaks of chikungunya in France and Italy. It had been thought that the virus needed temperatures of at least 16-18°C to spread, but an analysis of 49 existing studies has revised cut-off for transmission to just 13-14°C. This means the virus poses a potential threat for more than six months of the year in Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece; and for three to five months in Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland and a dozen other European nations. In theory, it could spread in southeast England in July and August, although the risk is currently very low, according to the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology.

Mountbatten-Windsor: “author of his own misfortunes”

In February 2010, Prince Andrew celebrated his 50th birthday with a glittering reception at St James's Palace. Jeffrey Epstein, recently released from jail for soliciting sex with a 14-year-old girl, declined an invitation. But hundreds attended, including the model Naomi Campbell and the banker Evelyn de Rothschild, said Alexi Mostrous in *The Observer*. Sixteen years on, the man now known as Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor marked his 66th birthday in radically altered circumstances. At around 8am last Thursday, a fleet of unmarked police cars arrived at the former duke's temporary residence on the Sandringham Estate, and arrested him on suspicion of misconduct in public office. While Andrew was detained in custody, officers searched his homes. Eleven hours later, as he was driven away from Aylsham police station, a photographer snapped him sitting slumped, ashen-faced, in the back of a Range Rover. The next morning, this image was splashed on front pages across the world; two days after that, anti-super-rich activists hung a copy in the Louvre in Paris, above a card reading: “He's sweating now”.



Andrew: “slumped, ashen-faced”

Even before his arrest, Andrew – who denies any wrongdoing – was a “ruined man”, said Adam Boulton in *The i Paper*, stripped of his titles, and his Windsor mansion, as the Epstein files confirmed that much of what he'd told Emily Maitlis in his *Newsnight* interview in 2019 had been untrue. The files suggest that he had met Virginia Giuffre – the Epstein survivor who accused him of having sex with her when she was 17 – though he said he had no memory of her; and that, far from cutting ties with Epstein in late 2010, he was in close touch with the paedophile for years afterwards (with their discussions about complex business deals often conducted via an intermediary, Andrew's adviser David Stern). Andrew's arrest was prompted by evidence that, both before and after that date, he'd passed Epstein confidential information he had gleaned as a UK trade envoy. The offence of which he's suspected carries a possible life term; and the bad news for Andrew is that his brother seems prepared to let them throw the book at him. As the King put it coldly last week, the “law must run its course”.

The King had reportedly objected to Andrew ever being appointed a trade envoy, said Gordon Rayner in *The Daily Telegraph*. When the idea was mooted in around 2000, he argued that his brother was not suited to the job; but the

Queen overruled him – with the support of Peter Mandelson, the former trade secretary.

I suppose it seemed a good idea at the time, said Hilary Rose in *The Times*. Having just left the Navy after 22 years, Andrew had no discernible income, and needed something to do. Why not send him abroad, to drum up business for Britain? And yet, nothing in the personality of this most spoiled and entitled of men made him fit for it. Four years ago, a former maid at his home reported that he would shout at her if she failed to arrange his 72 teddies as he liked them. But even as a toddler, Andrew had a reputation for being “difficult”, prone to kicking dogs and taunting staff. In his teens, he behaved so badly a footman is said to have punched him – and been kept on, because the Queen felt

Andrew had deserved it. He had a brief golden period, after his service in the Falklands War, but it didn't last. On a trip to the US in 1984, he sprayed a press pack with paint – a “prank” that overshadowed the tour. Visiting Lockerbie after the Pan Am disaster of 1988, he shocked grieving residents by telling them that the Americans had had it “much worse”.

During his decade as a trade envoy, ambassadors fed back that he was a liability – rude and visibly bored at engagements, said Zoe Williams in *The Guardian*. According to his biographer,

“During his decade as a trade envoy, ambassadors fed back that he was a liability – rude and visibly bored”

Andrew Lownie, his staff often asked for attractive women to be invited to events. He insisted on travelling with a large entourage of valets and equerries, who were put up in luxury hotels; he even reportedly put massages on the

taxpayers' tab. Yet these red flags were ignored; and nor were other warning signs heeded – though there were clear questions to be asked about how Andrew and his immediate family were funding their famously extravagant lifestyle. Both he and his ex-wife Sarah Ferguson regularly claimed to be broke – but it never dented their lavish spending.

Given all we know about the man, it is hard to muster sympathy for Andrew, said Sean O'Grady in *The Independent*. He is “the author of his own misfortunes”, and the police may still dig up more damning evidence against him. And yet, however deserved, his “descent into disgrace must be hard to bear”, and his future must seem very bleak. We “can vilify him all we like”; but his brother, and the authorities, owe Andrew “the moral duty of care” that he seems to have “failed to show to others”.

Pick of the week's

Gossip

The Australian TV reporter **Danika Mason** has apologised for rambling drunkenly live on air at the Winter Olympics. Mason was doing a sports update when she went off piste, slurring her words, discussing the price of coffee and remarking cryptically that she was “not sure about the iguanas”; she then lay on the ground to make snow angels. Host **Karl Stefanovic** tried to cover for her, suggesting



that the “cold air” might have affected her speech. But Mason later apologised,

saying she shouldn't have drunk on an empty stomach, and that she'd failed to meet “the standard I set myself”.

In 2011, **David Attenborough** attended a charity reception full of beans about his day's work, making a film about pterosaurs – flying reptiles that lived some 66 million years ago – using a full-sized remote-control model. He was greeted by his hostess. “And what wonderful creatures have you been filming for us today?” she asked. “Here was my chance to really impress,” he thought. “Well,” I said, “as it happens I've been filming

a pterosaur, gliding above the cliffs of Dorset.’ ‘Oh,’ she said, ‘they are so lovely, aren't they?’ and turned away.”

As the release of a tranche of Epstein files in late December raised fresh questions about the paedophile's ties to the royal family, **Sarah Ferguson** was nowhere to be seen. Now it has emerged that she had checked into a £13,000-a-day wellness clinic in Switzerland, where she remained for four weeks. A Swiss source told the *Daily Mail*: “She always feels at home at Paracelsus [Clinic], and knows she'll get love and attention there.”

The Chagos deal: should Starmer U-turn?

Keir Starmer has performed plenty of U-turns since coming to office, said Daniel Hannan in *The Sunday Telegraph*, but he's holding firm on one issue. He remains stubbornly, unaccountably determined "to give away British territory". Under the terms of a treaty struck last year – but not yet ratified – the UK is set to hand Diego Garcia and the other Chagos islands to Mauritius, in return for a 99-year lease on the joint UK-US airbase on Diego Garcia. The deal is projected to cost British taxpayers as much as £35bn over the coming century. It's madness. We're doing this in response to a resolution of the International Court of Justice criticising Britain's "colonial" rule that even the Government concedes is non-binding. Starmer has been presented with many opportunities to "walk away" from the deal, yet in the face of widespread criticism of it, including from Donald Trump, he remains wedded to the plan.



Diego Garcia: strategically crucial

administration that lobbied for the deal. Afraid that the UK's claim to sovereignty over Chagos was beginning to collapse internationally, it wanted to guarantee the long-term security of a base that holds crucial strategic importance for the US and Britain. Both countries recognised that they couldn't risk a situation in which Mauritius turned away from the West and, with widespread international backing, invited China, or anyone else, to establish a presence in the Chagos archipelago "within listening and striking distance of Diego Garcia".

"Ministers have not been mad or misguided to try to eliminate those risks," said William Hague in *The Times*. But the terms of this treaty are unacceptable. British taxpayers shouldn't be expected to shell out more than £100m a year to lease back land that is currently ours. It's wrong, too, that the treaty completely ignores the wishes of the Chagossians, whom we forcibly removed from the archipelago in the late 1960s, and who feel no loyalty to Mauritius. While the UK Government has now reportedly "paused for thought" on the treaty, aware that the US wields an effective veto over it, ministers still hope to press ahead after Trump is won round, or until he has left office. They should instead abandon the treaty and seek a new arrangement that is fairer to both the Chagossians and UK taxpayers.

As a former Foreign Office adviser who worked on the Chagos deal, I appreciate that it might seem an odd bargain, said Ben Judah in *The Sunday Times*. But believe me, it's not some craven act of virtue signalling dreamt up by "brain-dead diplomats" and activist lawyers; it's a "piece of realpolitik firmly grounded in geographical trade-offs". It was the Biden

Youth unemployment: a lost generation?

The job numbers released last week are "the starkest and most sobering I've seen in decades", said Alan Milburn in *The Independent*. The unemployment rate has climbed to 5.2%, the highest since the pandemic. One in six young people are unemployed – an 11-year high – and almost one million of them are not in education, employment or training (so-called Neets). That's enough people to fill Wembley Stadium 11 times over. The most "horrifying" statistic is that 45% of 24-year-olds who are Neets have never had a job. If you haven't had a job by the age of 24, the chances are that "you will spend a lifetime relying on the state". Something terrible is happening in the labour market, and as a result the country is now "facing the existential risk of a lost generation".

Not all of this is the Government's fault, said Ross Clark in *The Sun*. But a lot of it is. Employment was growing when Labour came to power, yet within a matter of months, as many as 100,000 jobs had gone. This was a "direct result" of hiking employers' national insurance contributions. It has been especially rough in the retail and hospitality sectors, which have long provided many people with their first jobs. Then there's the national minimum wage, said *The Times*, which has risen sharply under Labour, increasing by 6.7% for over-21s in the past year.

Those aged 18 to 20 receive £10 an hour, which is due to be gradually raised to the adult rate of £12.21, starting with an 8.5% rise this spring. This was a manifesto pledge, but it is an "unwise one": by April, the cost of employing a younger person will be 26% higher than in 2024. Added to this is the impact of AI: it is hard to track, but it seems graduate recruitment is being "throttled" by automation. This is an urgent situation, and the Government must do everything to help those starting out in work – otherwise the result will be "greater political dislocation".

Labour has tried to fend off criticism by pointing to its "youth guarantee", said Ella Dorn in *The New Statesman*. It is funding 55,000 six-month industry placements for 18- to 21-year-olds who have spent more than 18 months looking for work. This is good as far as it goes, but with nearly a million economically inactive young people, it is just "a drop in the ocean". It may be time to water down the pledge on raising the minimum youth wage, said Gaby Hinsliff in *The Guardian*. The unions won't like it. But it was originally set lower to encourage employers to take a risk on those starting out. It makes sense to pay them less. "If you're a pub landlord choosing between a gawky sixth-former with no experience ... and a seasoned 27-year old with good references, who would you hire?"

Wit & Wisdom

"The man who never alters his opinions is like standing water, and breeds reptiles of the mind."

William Blake, quoted in *The Washington Post*

"Computers make it easier to do a lot of things, but most of the things they make it easier to do don't need to be done."

Andy Rooney, quoted on *SummitPost*

"The prime purpose of eloquence is to keep other people from talking."

Louis Vermeil, quoted in *Prospect*

"I never met anyone who didn't have a very smart child. What happens to these children, you wonder, when they reach adulthood?"

Fran Lebowitz, quoted on *Culled Culture*

"Art, like morality, consists of drawing the line somewhere."

G.K. Chesterton, quoted in *The New York Times*

"I'm not a vegetarian because I love animals. I'm a vegetarian because I hate plants."

A. Whitney Brown, quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*

"We are not born human; we must become human."

Oskar Kokoschka, *ibid.*

"To create a world where old people pity young people is the most perverse and dysfunctional thing."

Irvine Welsh in *The Times*

"Most of the trouble in the world is caused by people wanting to be important."

T.S. Eliot, quoted on *The Knowledge*

Statistics of the week

One in ten Britons born between 2000 and 2002 had had children by the age of 23; of those born in 1989-1990, one in four had become parents by 25.

UCL/*The Times*

Fewer than one in ten boys aged 14 to 16 in the UK read daily for pleasure.

NLT/*The Guardian*

Winter Olympics: a Games full of incident and controversy

“With a series of gravity-defying spins, somersaults and flips”, Zoe Atkin secured bronze in the freeski halfpipe on the final day in Milano Cortina, said Jeremy Wilson in *The Daily Telegraph*. And in doing so, the 23-year-old “put the seal on Team GB’s greatest Winter Olympics”. While the overall tally (five medals) merely equalled the previous best – achieved in both 2014 and 2018 – the haul this time included a “trio of gold medals”, which is “three times more than Britain has previously achieved in a single Games”. And with five fourth-placed finishes, and 24 in the top ten, the medal count could easily have been significantly higher. For a nation that historically has had “precious little success on snow and ice”, these Games could mark a “watershed moment”.



Atkin: “gravity defying”

Team GB’s performance put them 15th in the medal table, their highest ever placing. Near the top, there were fewer surprises, said Tom Lutz in *The Guardian*. Norway won the most gold medals (18), as they have at every Winter Olympics since 2014. The US came second (12 golds), ahead of the Netherlands and Italy (ten apiece). The outstanding individual performer was Norway’s cross-country skier Johannes Høsflot Klæbo, who won six gold medals – the most by an athlete at a single Winter Olympics. Leaving aside the athletic milestones, this was an incident-packed Games with no shortage of controversy,

said Andy Bull in the same paper. Politics often intruded – whether with the jeers that greeted J.D. Vance at the opening ceremony, or with the last-minute disqualification of Ukrainian skeleton racer Vladyslav Heraskevych, on account of his “helmet of memory”, inscribed with images of compatriots killed in the war. Other controversies were tinged with the surreal, as with the allegations that Norwegian ski-jumpers had enlarged their penises by injecting them with hyaluronic acid. They had done this, it was claimed, so as to be allocated fractionally larger suits – giving them all-important extra “lift” on jumps. Perhaps understandably, when quizzed about this, the Norwegian ski-jump team refused to comment.

The beauty and wonder of the Olympics lies in the way it allows us to “glimpse sports and subcultures we have never seen before”, said Matthew Syed in *The Times*. When I tuned into the final of the women’s big air, I expected to stay long enough merely to “get a flavour of the sport”. Instead, I found myself utterly transfixed. After hurling themselves down a sheer drop, sometimes skiing backwards, the competitors would soar into the air, defying fear and gravity to make spectacular “shapes against the night sky”. While an event like the football World Cup offers “just one sport with one set of rules”, the Olympics has a unique ability to “make virgins of us all”.

Six Nations: England go from world-beaters to whipping boys

When England opened their Six Nations campaign with a victory over Wales, there was much excited talk of the competition being a “tight two-horse race” between Steve Borthwick’s men and France, said Robert Kitson in *The Guardian*. What has happened since then has made a mockery of such expectations. First came a 31-20 defeat to Scotland at Murrayfield; then, last Sunday, England were crushed 42-21 by the Irish at Twickenham. While the Scottish defeat could just about be dismissed as a “one-off” against a team who were “virtually unplayable”, that logic cannot be applied to this latest disaster, said Michael Aylwin in the same paper. England’s performance was devoid of the “confidence and panache” that had built up over a 12-match winning streak. After Ireland scored their first try, Borthwick’s team simply “unravelling”: their attacks were “rushed and edgy”; they spilled the ball at critical moments; and they committed numerous set-



Borthwick: “fastidious”?

piece errors. So dominant were the Irish that the final scoreline, if anything, flattered their opponents.

Surely no Test team has ever fallen so “emphatically to earth” as England have during this tournament, said Oliver Brown in *The Daily Telegraph*. In just seven days, they have gone “from world-beaters to whipping boys”. With the World Cup just 18 months away, it’s a real worry that England appear to be a “side in a state of existential crisis”. Borthwick is a “fastidious” coach, and he will doubtless be picking “through the wreckage”, said Charlie Morgan in *The Times*. There is no shortage of problems to address. The only area in which England were “consistently effective” against Ireland was in the scrum.

Everywhere else – in the aerial battle, in defence, in attack – they were “bossed” by their opponents. Next weekend, England travel to Rome to face Italy. Before doing so, they “must get to work”.

Can Tottenham’s new coach revive their fortunes?

Igor Tudor, Tottenham’s new head coach, is known as a manager who makes an “instant impact”, said Martin Samuel in *The Times*. At his previous five clubs, he has won every one of his first games in charge. But that facility deserted him last Sunday as his new team suffered a 4-1 drubbing by league leaders Arsenal. Perhaps the Croat has “never experienced obstacles as huge” as those he faces in north London, said Alyson Rudd in the same paper. From his predecessor, Thomas Frank, he has inherited a team in disarray. Spurs are without a victory in their last nine games, and currently sit 16th in the Premier League, four points above the relegation zone. Unless Tudor swiftly fixes things, “relegation is not a ridiculous notion”.



Tudor: no instant impact

It says something that despite this being a home game for Tottenham, it was easily the most one-sided fixture of the Premier League weekend, said Ian Ladyman in *The Daily Mail*. All the problems that afflicted Frank’s tenure remained very much on display – from being “erratic and error prone” at the back to carrying “absolutely no threat at all” when advancing forward. Tottenham’s solitary goal, by Randal Kolo Muani, was certainly “well taken”; but it “speaks volumes” that the chance was presented to him by Declan Rice, an Arsenal player. Not so long ago Tottenham were considered one of the “Big Six” of English football. Now, a simply “enormous” gap separates them from the likes of Arsenal.

Sporting headlines

Crickets England beat Pakistan by two wickets with five balls to spare and have qualified for the semi-finals of the 2026 T20 World Cup.

Six Nations Leaders France beat Italy 33-8. Scotland are in second place after beating Wales 26-23.

Winter Olympics The US beat Canada 2-1 to win their first men’s ice hockey gold since 1980. USA’s women’s team beat the Canadians 2-1 too.

Tennis World No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz followed up his win at the Austrian Open with victory in the Qatar Open. He beat Arthur Fils in the final.

Pick of the week's correspondence

Uneasy lies the head

To *The Times*

The arrest of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor has prompted some sensationalist discussion about the end of the British monarchy. Before consigning to the refuse bin of history a system of government that has stood us in fairly healthy stead for a thousand years, we should perhaps bear in mind: Edward II, whose obsession with favourites was deemed intolerable and who met an untimely death in Berkeley Castle; Richard II, a ditherer, who abdicated and was then starved to oblivion in Pontefract Castle; Charles I, executed for insisting on his divine right to do whatever; James II, rather more politely excluded for practising Roman Catholicism; George III, who suffered from periods of insanity; and Edward VIII, who, preferring his divorcée paramour to the throne, was nudged into abdication.

Let us be clear: these were all reigning monarchs, not wayward younger relatives. History is littered with lurid examples of such shameless miscreants. Yet the monarchy has survived and thrived, primarily perhaps, because it prevents politicians from controlling, as head of state, a vital aspect of ultimate authority. On high days and holidays, which of the last six prime ministers would we enthusiastically cheer on the balcony of Buckingham Palace?

Mark Pyper, Oxford

The sizzle of dissent

To *The New Statesman*

Andrew Marr shared his "secret from the sausage factory", that the entire commentariat has "committed" itself to the proposition that Keir Starmer is doomed. In his usual witty way, Marr then goes on to prove his point by writing him off.

There seems to be more unanimity about Starmer's hopelessness than, say, the economic destruction wrought by David Cameron and co, or the corruption of Boris Johnson, or the haplessness of Rishi Sunak. That Farage is a shoo-in for PM is accepted with scarcely a murmur. Everyone agrees: Starmer is the worst PM this country has known.

Exchange of the week

Is AI up to the job?

To *The Economist*

I think your optimism about the future for white-collar jobs is wrong. You lean on the idea that AI has to match the full complexity of a role before it threatens that job. But jobs are bundles of tasks, and you don't have to automate the whole bundle to wreck the economics. I run a business. The last time I wrote code was in high school around 2000. And yet, in the past few months, puttering around in my spare time, I have used Claude to build software that replaced a contractor we had been paying to produce our advertising media. The work looks good, and I didn't need a computer degree to get there.

Then my home air-conditioning broke. I used ChatGPT to go through the diagnostics, figured out the problem and fixed it myself for \$35 in parts. A repair man would have charged me around \$500. So he didn't get the work. I'm even using Claude right now to help me write this letter. And that's sort of the whole point. I am not a programmer, I am not a writer and I am not an appliance repairman. But with these tools I was able to do passable work in all three areas, in my spare time.

If a guy like me can do this while barely trying, I genuinely wonder what someone with real skill and more free time is pulling off. That should unsettle people more than you think.

Ilya Zaritskiy, United States

To *the Financial Times*

Regarding Guru Madhavan's column "The beauty of friction", one of the many ominous aspects of AI is that it takes away our voice and calls it assistance. Every time I receive an email, artificial intelligence presents a possible response that I will never use because it sounds nothing like me. The content is correct but the voice is all wrong. It is AI's voice, a mix of bland and obsequious, not mine. The subtleties of expression are as unique to individuals as their fingerprints, and are clearly beyond AI's current capacities. I guess I'll have to be grateful that AI only suggests the response and doesn't presume to send it as well.

Margaret McGirr, United States

Journey back to the days when the fourth estate was in a healthier state. There was, at least, a debate about our leaders and their policies; differences of opinion were aired. How meatier the sausage would be if the journalists broke away from their self-imposed consensus.

Richard Holledge, London

A recipe for uniformity

To *The Times*

William Hague rightly bemoans the fact that the country has had to suffer six prime ministers in a decade. The first of those, David Cameron, through central office, effectively took control of the selection process for Tory candidates, ensuring those standing for election were largely Cameron clones. Similar processes occur in the Labour Party. The result is that few candidates have a different outlook, sufficient local

knowledge, specialist skills or an independent streak that sets them apart from the group-think that ensnares the political world. This is hardly a recipe to produce leaders with the views and authority necessary to be a leader of our country.

Rob Green, Braintree, Essex

Advantage UK?

To *The Daily Telegraph*

Last year the British economy grew by an unimpressive 1.3%. That's despite Brexit, some of the highest energy prices in the world, and a Labour Government squashing the life out of the private sector.

Germany expanded by 0.2%, France by 0.9%, and Italy by 0.7%. What's their excuse? After all, they have the unrivalled advantages of the customs union, single market and the euro.

What went wrong? Keir Starmer, Rachel Reeves and others think we would be better off getting closer to the EU. Can they show their workings, please?

Thomas W. Jefferson, Goole, East Yorkshire

An opportunity lost

To *The Guardian*

Simon Tisdall is correct: it is high time for European nations, especially the UK, to "tell Trump to get lost", and to take more positive action to support Ukrainians in their resistance to Russian aggression.

But it is not only Trump at fault. In the 1980s and 1990s, when the reformers, Mikhail Gorbachev et al, were trying to bring a "new Russia" and a new European detente into being, the West had the opportunity to support democratic reforms and to begin the dissolution of Nato and the Warsaw Pact. Instead, the West facilitated the rise of "gangster capitalism" in Russia, and extended Nato's frontier eastwards, thus enabling the rise of paranoid authoritarians, notably Vladimir Putin. Chickens are now coming home to roost.

Richard Taylor, Pooley Bridge, Cumbria

Going by the book...

To *The Times*

Tsundoku describes the joy of accumulating books one fully intends to read later, but is there a word for accumulating clothes one plans to wear when the body can fit into them?

Dr Joyce Magennis, Irby, Wirral

...after a fashion

To *The Times*

Joyce Magennis asks what to call clothes she intends to wear when they fit. In our house they are known as hope couture.

Mark Baker, Abingdon, Oxfordshire



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Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

A Hymn to Life

by Gisèle Pelicot

Bodley Head 256pp £22

The Week Bookshop £19.99

For ten years, Gisèle Pelicot writes, her sleep was “a kind of execution”. As she lay drugged, her husband Dominique raped her and brought at least 70 other men to do the same. Part of the horror of the case, said Anita Singh in *The Daily Telegraph*, is the ordinariness of the people involved, and of the domestic setting. One of the men used to say a polite hello in the queue at the *boulangerie*; the first thing Pelicot did after police revealed what had happened to her was go home and put her husband’s washing on the line. But her courage in waiving her right to anonymity at the subsequent trial was extraordinary. And this book is too, both “for the story it tells and the acuity with which it’s told”. Most people in Pelicot’s position would want to curl up and die; instead, she has chosen life – and has found love again, with a gentle widower. “You wish her every happiness.”

A Hymn to Life brims with the kind of detail found in a good novel, said Emma Brockes in *The Guardian*. Its uniqueness lies in the transformation it chronicles, of a woman “content with my little life” into a figure of astonishing power. The book confronts



“a question that lurked in the minds of millions of observers during her husband’s trial: how could she not have known?” Pelicot moves through the 50 years of her marriage, searching for the clues that she had missed. It’s not an easy book to read, and not just because of the crimes. I’ll confess that, initially, I was angry that the loss of a husband seemed to register with Pelicot more than “the violence her actual husband had done to her” – but that’s a mark of the “power and honesty” of the writing.

What makes the book so compelling, said Hadley Freeman in *The Sunday Times*, “is that it shows what happens when an atomic bomb of cruelty erupts

within a seemingly normal family”. Pelicot’s translators, Natasha Lehrer and Ruth Diver, have brilliantly captured her tone of determined control and “occasional broken anguish”, as she tries to make sense of it all. The complexity is greater than even she seems to realise, said Monica Hesse in *The Washington Post*. Pelicot’s daughter Caroline, now estranged from her, believes that she too may have been assaulted: her father drugged her and took photos, but claims he never went further. Her mother dismisses the possibility of assault – possibly because whatever she can bear on her own account, the knowledge that her child suffered the same would undermine her sanity. In such a situation, the book suggests, it’s pointless to wonder “what you should have done, should have seen ... There is only what it takes to survive.”

Super Nintendo

by Keza MacDonald

Faber 304pp £20

The Week Bookshop £17.99

Since 1996, Nintendo’s Pokémon characters (right) have earned \$115bn – more than *Star Wars*, more than *Harry Potter*, more than any other entertainment franchise in history, said Steven Poole in *The Guardian*. You might see this as part of the “lamentable infantilisation of postmodern society”, but Keza MacDonald argues otherwise in her “winsomely” enthusiastic biography of the Japanese company that also gave us *Super Mario Bros.*, *The Legend of Zelda*, the Game Boy and the Wii. Pokémon, MacDonald suggests, is a joyful and sophisticated pursuit, with a complex scoring system that has engaged millions of children in maths. Such games, she believes, are an antidote to the increasingly baleful role of technology in our lives. She explores Nintendo’s roster of games and consoles, and looks at the role of figures such as Shigeru Miyamoto, the “enigmatic” genius who created Mario.

For Nintendo, preserving a sense of fun is more important than endlessly increasing profits, said Nathan Smith in *The Washington Post*. But the firm is “notoriously” private, so MacDonald relies heavily on old interviews with top brass, and offers little detailed scrutiny of the business side. As a result, *Super Nintendo*, though entertaining, only partly pulls back the curtain, and can veer into hagiography. There’s an element of “fangirlish” enthusiasm, agreed Sam Leith in *The Times*. But the book is “fluently” written and deeply informed: each chapter is focused on a different game or franchise, examining its creation and what it meant to players, and it displays an excellent grasp of the nuts and bolts of gaming. Above all, MacDonald is alive to the excitement of losing yourself in brightly coloured virtual worlds. The result is a book bursting with love: “Bop your head against it and see if a shower of gold coins comes out.”



Novel of the week

Discipline

by Larissa Pham

Serpent’s Tail 224pp £16.99

The Week Bookshop £14.99

This “spare” debut tells of a “lapsed art student”, Christine, who’s touring America to promote her own first novel, said Alexandra Jacobs in the *New York Times*. That book is a revenge fantasy about the former art school professor who seduced her, discarded her and destroyed her confidence as a painter. On her travels she shares her story with a variety of interesting characters. But all roads lead to a confrontation with the professor on an island off Maine, at which point the book “acquires Stephen King vibes”. Will Christine, like her protagonist, resort to murder? “Thickly pigmented” with suspense, *Discipline* shows that Larissa Pham “is a writer to keep a close eye on”.

Pham’s “spiky” novel provides rich insights into the art world, said Ceci Browning in *The Sunday Times*. It’s “splattered” with colourful descriptions of artists’ materials and references to specific paintings that will have you gleefully googling them. On the surface, it’s about the aftermath of an illicit affair: but, as with a painting, “far more can be revealed with a longer, more thorough look”.

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Theatre: Dracula

Noël Coward Theatre, London WC2 (0344-482 5151). Until 30 May Running time: 1hr 50mins ★★★

The Australian writer-director Kip Williams was behind 2024's hit West End staging of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, said Dominic Cavendish in *The Daily Telegraph*. Starring the *Succession* actress Sarah Snook, who played all the parts, Williams used "head-turning live-capture wizardry", giant screens and pre-filmed sections to mesmeric effect. Now he is back with a "radical" *Dracula*, in which the British film star Cynthia Erivo plays all 23 characters. It's not "flawless" – not quite as frightening as you'd hope – but it's a "tour de force"



Erivo: an "extraordinary" performance in a "radical" new production

even so. Erivo is "extraordinary", said Nick Curtis in *The London Standard*. Juggling costumes, wigs and accents, and interacting with "onscreen versions of herself", she has to walk "a knife edge between virtuosity and absurdity", and pulls it off triumphantly.

This *Dracula* is certainly an astonishing technical achievement, said Dominic Maxwell in *The Sunday Times*. But it is also ("I'll get the pun in early") disappointingly "bloodless". I wanted more dread, more drama and – paradoxically – more Erivo. Seemingly swamped at points by the technical wizardry, she is left struggling to connect with the audience. The basic problem, said Andrzej Lukowski in *Time Out*, is that Erivo is required to "portray multiple characters of roughly the same importance at the same time". Williams tries to get around this by making use of a lot

more pre-recording than he did for *Dorian Gray*, but the result is that the "real" – onstage – Erivo mostly plays the less interesting parts. Some of the characters here "verge on stereotypes", and the "ropey selection of wigs and facial hair that the pre-recorded Erivo sports add a weirdly goofy note to proceedings".

Williams's gimmicky camera-led approach "just about" worked with *Dorian Gray* because that is a story about narcissism, said Sarah Crompton on *What's on Stage*. This trick simply doesn't fly

with *Dracula*: it distances us from the dread, and "flattens rather than liberates the story". I yearned for more "fever", more "diabolism", agreed Arifa Akbar in *The Guardian*. What Williams has given us is *Dracula* "defanged".

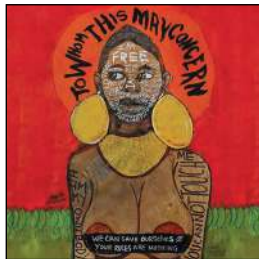
The week's other opening

Road Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester (0161-833 9833). Until 14 March

This ambitious revival of Jim Cartwright's play, about a working-class Lancashire community ravaged by unemployment in the 1980s, captures both its pathos and its bleak humour. Johnny Vegas excels as the all-seeing narrator, Scullery (*Telegraph*).

Albums of the week: three new releases

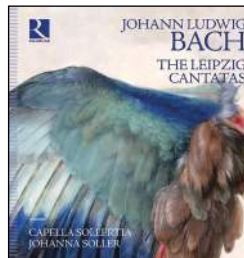
Jill Scott:
**To Whom This
May Concern**
Blues Babe
£13



Eight years on from Aretha Franklin's passing, nobody has quite seized her crown as the Queen of Soul, said Tim de Lisle in *The Mail* on Sunday. If Jill Scott had not been so busy with an acting career, it might well have been her. The Philadelphia neo-soul phenomenon is back with her first album since 2015's *Woman* – and she still knows how to "take you on a tour of the emotions and make you feel them all". *Beautiful People, A Universe and Sincerely Do* are "close to Stevie Wonder – swinging, jazz-tinged soul, with liquid basslines". *Be Great* is a "theatrical singalong with a hip-hop rhythm", Lin-Manuel Miranda-style.

This is Scott's "most experimental" album to date, said Steven J. Horowitz in *Variety*. It's a sprawling project – 19 tracks with a "staggering" number of musicians and producers – that "paints with wildly broad strokes and continuously returns on its investment". Musically, the artist draws on cocktail jazz, big band, cosmic R&B, even diva disco, in a project that recalls the scope of Erykah Badu's two *New Amerykah* albums. It's a "triumphant" return.

**Johann Ludwig
Bach: The
Leipzig Cantatas**
Ricerar
£39



It is unclear why J.S. Bach ended his "prodigious flow" of sacred cantatas in 1726 to focus instead on a set of 18 by a distant cousin he may never have met, said Clive Paget in *The Guardian*, but we should be glad he did. Because he not only performed the work of Johann Ludwig Bach, cantor and later *kapellmeister* at Meiningen, he also copied it out and so preserved a "treasure trove of music that might otherwise have been lost". Remarkably, this collection by Capella Sollertia is the first recording of these cantatas – nearly five-and-a-half hours of music, some of which "could easily pass for the work of J.S. Bach himself".

These are terrific performances of an unaccountably neglected oeuvre, agreed Jonathan Freeman-Attwood in *Gramophone*. Beautifully sung, the cantatas' spirit of "warmth and affection is especially evident when voices and orchestra dance around each other with their light, genial aplomb", under the impressive direction of Johanna Soller. It's a "seminal" and "revealing" album.

Charli XCX:
**Wuthering
Heights**
Atlantic
£11



Since her 2024 album *Brat* inspired a cultural phenomenon, Charli XCX (the 33-year-old Briton born Charlotte Aitchison) has moved away from music and towards film, said Rhian Daly on *NME*. She has a stack of acting roles in the pipeline, and is producing her own mockumentary. First, though, comes her debut soundtrack album – for Emerald Fennell's much-panned new film – which recalls her debut album *True Romance*. That record "bubbled with gothic-tinged, dramatic pop. *Wuthering Heights* takes that and elevates it."

This album is a "phantasmagorical fever dream that relishes its weird and experimental noises, without sacrificing cool hooks or accessible language", said Helen Brown in *The Independent*. Charli has scored a coup by coaxing her hero, the Velvet Underground's John Cale, to guest on the tremendous single *House*. And she proves "much more in tune with the terrible complexity" of Emily Brontë's vision than Fennell. "There are no inverted commas around the emotion expressed on this record. A windswept, gothic triumph."

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



If I Had Legs I'd Kick You

1hr 53mins (15)

Gruelling comedy-drama starring Rose Byrne

★★★★

“The latest addition to the rapidly expanding ‘unravelling mother’ genre”, *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* is a “gut-churning panic attack of a movie”, said Wendy Ide in *The Observer*. Written and directed by Mary Bronstein, it stars Rose Byrne as Linda, a therapist struggling to cope with the demands of her very sick child while her husband, an officer in the US navy, is on deployment. Linda’s life is a “soul-sapping” challenge at the best of times – then a ceiling in her flat collapses, and she is forced to move with her daughter into a grubby motel. The “inventive, needling use of sound and the blurring of reality and fantasy take us under the skin of a woman at breaking point”. It makes for “one of the most stressful experiences” you could have in a cinema, short of the “building catching fire”.

You might call this film – which was inspired by Bronstein’s own experience – “a comedy about motherhood”, said Danny Leigh in the *FT*: “I have certainly never seen a funnier scene involving a hamster.” But it’s also a “nightmare”. For the first few minutes, you feel as though things are being “thrown at your head”, and it never really stops. The movie was co-produced by Josh Safdie and Bernstein’s husband Ronald, who together co-wrote *Marty Supreme* and *Uncut Gems*, said Brian Viner in the *Daily Mail*. And it “fizzes” with the same “whirling, kinetic, chaotic energy” as those two movies. It is “rewarding but crazy”, and ultimately rather exhausting. It is definitely an “endurance test”, agreed Clarisse Loughrey in *The Independent*. But Byrne – who has been Oscar nominated for her visceral performance – is brilliant, and the film has a “tender” core. For all Linda’s faults, “she’s still a mother who loves her daughter”, and who “wants to try, even when she fails”.



The Secret Agent

2hrs 41mins (15)

Powerful political thriller set in 1970s Brazil

★★★★

Set during Brazil’s brutal military dictatorship in the 1970s, this political thriller is “populated by so many characters”, you may despair of keeping track of who is who, said Deborah Ross in *The Spectator*. But “do hang on in there”, as it repays the effort. Justly nominated for four Oscars, this is a “truly special” (if rather sprawling) film. Wagner Moura (known for playing Pablo Escobar in the Netflix hit *Narcos*) stars as Marcelo, a widowed academic who has gone on the run from a pair of hitmen. Quite why they are targeting him isn’t initially clear, but there’s a lot else to think about in the meantime: there is a “hitman hired by the hitmen”; there’s a corrupt police chief; there’s a “head-scratcher” of a sequence in which a human leg “comes to life and kicks gay people” (this is a reference to an urban legend; “Brazilians will get it, I was told”). It is, in sum, a heady mix, but it barely puts “a foot wrong”, and the performances are superb.

“If you’re expecting a Brazilian *Bourne*, forget it,” said Tom Shone in *The Sunday Times*. “For a film about a man shadowed by two assassins, *The Secret Agent* has a daringly languid pace” – it takes a full hour, for instance, to be sure who Marcelo actually is. And though there are “flashes of surreal comedy”, these belie “the seriousness of what is afoot” in a place “where evil comes with a grin and a cold beer”. Gradually, “a disquieting paranoia begins to creep into everything”, until “even the sunlight seems off”. At 160 minutes, the film does teeter “on self-indulgence”, said Patrick Smith in *The Independent*, but it is sustained by its “energetic camerawork” and Moura’s “soulful and seductive” central performance. “Few thrillers this year will risk this much, or land it so powerfully.”



Man on the Run

1hr 55mins (15)

Enjoyable documentary about Paul McCartney’s band Wings

★★★

In recent years, we have not been short of “fine documentaries” about The Beatles, said Matthew Bond in *The Mail on Sunday*. But *Man on the Run* covers “new ground”, exploring what Paul McCartney did after the Fab Four broke up – which was, of course, to form the “oft-derided Wings, arguably one of the least cool bands ever to grace the Top 30”. The film doesn’t restore the band’s reputation – “if you don’t like Wings when you go in, you still won’t like them when you come out” – but you will leave the cinema with a better understanding of “McCartney’s overriding need for a big musical project” post-Beatles, and also feeling “more sympathetic to the plight of poor Linda, a woman doomed to play under-appreciated keyboards under some of the worst hairstyles ever seen”.

This “persuasive” documentary was made by Morgan Neville, who has produced a number of solid “rock docs” about the likes of Brian Wilson and Keith Richards, said Jordan Bassett in *NME*. He has assembled an unsurprisingly impressive range of interviewees, including Macca himself, his children, former Wings members and even his old sparring partner, Mick Jagger. “Paul McCartney settling scores, Mick Jagger being hilarious and 1970s media hysteria brought howling back to life”: there is a lot to love in this “guilty pleasure” of a film, said Kevin Maher in *The Times*. Sure, there are no real “revelations”; the documentary is, rather, a “warm and cosy restatement of cultural history”. But it hardly matters. “Wings were good, The Beatles were better, and the musical world is very lucky indeed to have been enriched by Paul McCartney.”

How to Get to Heaven from Belfast: a worthy follow-up to Derry Girls

Derry Girls was always going to be a tough act to follow, said Rebecca Nicholson in the *FT*: by the time it ended in 2022, “after three perfect seasons, it had become one of the best-loved comedies of recent times”. Now its creator Lisa McGee is back with this eight-part Netflix comedy-drama – and while it’s cut from a similar cloth to *Derry Girls*, she “has rearranged the pieces, turned them upside down, thrown in a few new shapes and then glued it all together with impressive flair”. Caoilfhionn Dunne, Sinéad Keenan and Roisin Gallagher star as three old mates from Belfast, who are winding their way through their 30s when they receive an email informing them that an old schoolfriend has died. From there, the series evolves into “a murder-mystery, a road-trip buddy comedy, a ghost story, a romance, a cop show,



“A highly entertaining ride”

and more. It begins to run out of steam towards the end, but “thanks to the charm of its leads, the wit of the script and the spirit of adventure”, it’s “a highly entertaining ride”.

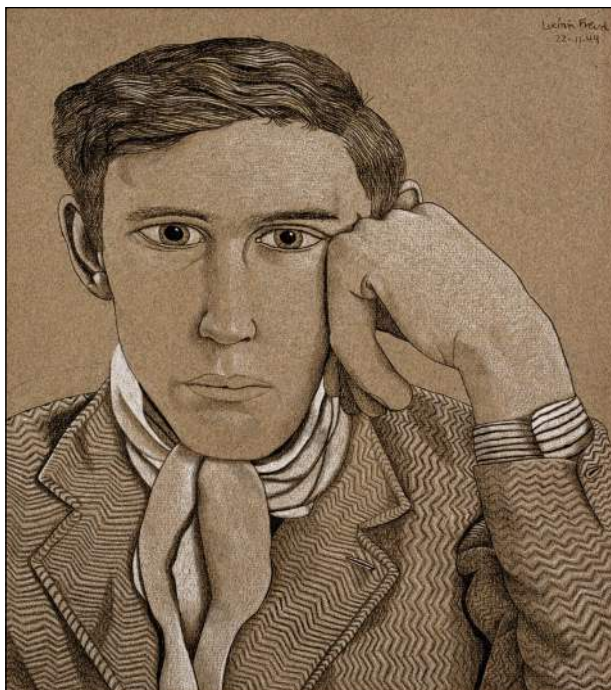
The series is a “hodgepodge”, in which the “disparate elements, far from coalescing, continue to pile up”, agreed James Walton in *The Spectator*. But perhaps that is part of the point, and if you can forgive the show’s “messiness”, it makes for “exhilarating, foot-to-the-floor” viewing. I’d recommend it as “your next binge-watch”, said Anita Singh in *The Daily Telegraph*. It all “bowls along with supreme confidence”, and there is an absolutely cracking twist at the end of episode one.

Producing a worthy follow-up to *Derry Girls* was always going to be a challenge, but McGee “has delivered”.

Exhibition of the week **Lucian Freud: Drawing into Painting**

National Portrait Gallery, London WC2 (020-7306 0055, npg.org.uk). Until 4 May

“Drawing is much more to an artist than just another medium,” said Mark Hudson in *The Independent*. For painters in particular, it’s a means of evolving ideas long before brush touches canvas; and in some cases, like Lucian Freud’s, it’s an abiding obsession. The artist (1922-2011) was “almost pathologically preoccupied with the act of drawing”, producing thousands of etchings and pictures in pencil or charcoal across the breadth of his long career. This exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery is an exhaustive trawl through Freud’s life in drawings, featuring everything from childhood doodles to pictures executed in his final years – and exploring their relationship to his portraiture. It’s “full of great things”: sketchbooks, etchings and portraits of sitters, family and friends; preparatory sketches, and several of the paintings for which they were created. Whether intended for public display or merely as references for the artist’s eyes alone, the works here add up to a “fascinating and essential” portrait of one of our most celebrated modern artists.



Portrait of a Young Man (1944), black crayon and chalk on paper

There are “bursts of true excitement” here, said Waldemar Januszczak in *The Sunday Times*. Freud’s portraits of his many lovers make for the “most gripping” section of the show. The “key players of his early love life”, Kitty Garman and Caroline Blackwood, figure so heavily that they are treated to “shows within a show”. Shown alongside photos of these women, Freud’s

pictures bear little resemblance to their real-life subjects. “If you look at photos of Garman she is unrecognisable from the human feline fantasised by Freud.”

A painting of Blackwood sees her cowering in a hotel bed, as a “creepy” Freud himself looks on. Elsewhere, however, the show is decidedly patchy. Too many key pictures are missing, and the few paintings here are much more interesting than the drawings. There are drawings of monkeys and thistles included that the curators describe as “portraits”; they are certainly not.

It hardly matters, said Jackie Wullschläger in the *Financial Times*, when the show is so “original and full of rare things”. We get a real sense of Freud’s “instinct for the essential, the indelicate, the confrontational, his intensification of the real”.

His early work is characterised by “a mournful, crystalline exactitude”

that led one critic to describe him as “the Ingres of existentialism”; his subjects mostly look “terrified”. Less so Francis Bacon, pictured in 1951 – “sexually aggressive in crayon and chalk”, his shirt and trousers undone. Better still is a magnificent 2002 oil portrait of David Hockney, peering over his glasses to return Freud’s scrutiny. His depictions of the young are often cruel, but his treatment of old age can be “heartbreaking” – witness a marvellous 1975 portrait of his mother reading. This is a superb exhibition, one that reveals Freud’s draughtsmanship to be on a par with that of the Old Masters. Don’t miss it.

Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime

at Sadie Coles HQ

Taking place over several floors of a vast Mayfair townhouse, this group show is a sprawling and highly entertaining affair. The premise revolves around *Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime*, the Oscar Wilde short story, which gives the exhibition its title. In a theatrical turn, the galleries have been decked out with rugs and period furniture that give them the air of Belle Époque salons; and the art, too, hints at the story’s themes of faded glamour and decadence. Caragh Thuring provides a comedic double portrait of a ruddy-cheeked dandy and a society lady, both rendered as paintings-within-paintings; Kati Heck gives us a fabulously languid likeness of the restaurateur Fergus Henderson



Lucas's Loungers #1 (2011)

sprawled over a wooden chair. Sarah Lucas fields her customarily ribald blend of sculptural surrealism, while 1990s wunderkind Elizabeth Peyton’s portrait of Wilde and Alfred “Bosie” Douglas brings us straight back to the source. Not everything works, but it’s a lot of fun. Prices on request.

17 Savile Row, London W1 (020-7493 8611). Until 21 March

The first ever YouTube video

The Victoria & Albert Museum in London has acquired the first video ever uploaded to YouTube for its collection, says Harrison



Jacobs on *Art News*. The video, “Me at the zoo”, was uploaded to the site on 23 April 2005. YouTube had been founded two months earlier by former PayPal employees Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim. The unremarkable 19-second video features Karim at the San Diego Zoo standing in front of the elephants. YouTube was sold to Google in November 2006 for \$1.65bn. Today, it is worth around \$500bn. The V&A bought the video, as well as the code for the “watch page” of the website at the time, and some early adverts. “As a cultural and social phenomenon, the YouTube watch page is not only emblematic of Web 2.0 and the rise of user-generated content, but also a prescient sign of what would become the creator economy and platform capitalism,” wrote a curator on the V&A’s blog, explaining why the museum had bought it.

The week's guide to what's worth seeing

Showing now

Terence Rattigan's "still-potent" **Man and Boy** – about a ruthless financier who offers up his son to a gay businessman – feels "eerily relevant" in the Epstein era, even if this production leans too heavily on experimental staging (Daily Telegraph). Until 14 March, National Theatre, London SE1 (nationaltheatre.org.uk).

It's been a book, a film and a hit Netflix series. Now David Nicholls's "near-iconic love story" is reinvented yet again for **One Day: The Musical**. It premieres in Edinburgh, where its main characters first meet (Guardian). Until 19 April, The Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh (lyceum.org.uk).

Seurat and the Sea draws together the pointillist painter's luminous seascapes, which made up over half of his output (he died at just 31). This is "London's most brightly enveloping winter show" (FT). Until 17 May, Courtauld Gallery, London WC2 (courtauld.ac.uk).

Book now

Alan Davies, Ruby Wax, Harry Enfield and Rosie O'Donnell are among the headliners at next month's **Glasgow International Comedy Festival**. The programme also includes local acts and kids' comedy. 11-29 March, various venues, Glasgow (glasgowcomedyfestival.com).

English Touring Opera kicks off its spring season with a new production of Gilbert and Sullivan's comedy of mistaken identity,



Man and Boy at The National: "still potent"

The Gondoliers, opening in Sheffield, then heading to Cheltenham and beyond; 20 March-21 May (englishtouringopera.org.uk).

Alex Kingston and Richard Schiff star in a revival of Michael Frayn's **Copenhagen**, about the 1941 meeting between two Nobel physicists on opposing sides of the War. 27 March-2 May, Hampstead Theatre, London NW3 (hampsteadtheatre.com).

Just out in paperback

Flashlight by Susan Choi (Vintage £10.99). Choi's Booker-shortlisted sixth novel tells the story of a young girl whose life is shattered when her father drowns on a beach in Japan, and "reckons with the lies that undo families and underpin empires" (Guardian).

that pushed me towards writing a spy novel of my own.

Prospero's Cell by Lawrence Durrell, 1945 (Faber £10.99). Durrell can be florid, but he loved Corfu as fiercely as I do, and I press this into the hands of those bewitched by the island. He writes place from the inside out: light, heat, stone and sea, and how they work upon you.

The Mighty Dead by Adam Nicolson, 2014 (William Collins £10.99). A book about Homer that keeps widening into questions of voice, geography and inheritance, of what it means to be a man and a poet. Nicolson writes with clarity and physicality, restoring a sense of stories as lived, spoken things before they became texts. Learned without being stiff or stuffy, it'll make you see and read Greece with new eyes.

Best books... Alex Preston

The prize-winning author, journalist and co-founder of the Corfu Literary Festival chooses his five favourite books. His latest novel, A Stranger in Corfu (Canongate £18.99), is out now in hardback



The Secret History by Donna Tartt, 1992 (Penguin £10.99). Falling in love with a book is often about when you first encounter it. I read this at 13, the ideal age for being intoxicated by such cleverness and menace. Tartt's snow-globe world of classics students, beauty and transgression felt like everything I wanted from the future.

The Transit of Venus by Shirley Hazzard, 1980 (Virago £10.99). I return to this often – Hazzard writes about love in a way that makes you feel adolescent again. Her sentences

glow and shimmer. Few novels register so clearly how desire persists through misjudgement and delay, how loss can be both an event and a permanent condition.

A Perfect Spy by John le Carré, 1986 (Penguin £12.99). Philip Roth called it the finest English novel since the War and he wasn't wrong. Le Carré strips the spy story of its comforts and leaves a study of fathers and sons, deception and self-knowledge. It has genuine, even Dostoevskian, moral gravity and psychological depth. This was the book

Television

Programmes

Bill Bailey's Vietnam

The comedian embarks on a journey exploring Vietnam's culture, food and history, and the legacy of the war, 50 years on. Sat 28 Feb, C4 21:15 (60mins).

Europe on the Edge

with **Katya Adler** The BBC's Europe editor visits European countries to see how they are adapting to the changing world order, starting in Italy and Germany. Tue 3 Mar, BBC2 21:00 (60mins).

Hostage

Three-part docuseries. In 2012, as the Syrian conflict unfolds, two photojournalists chase a scoop – but also attract the attention of jihadists. Wed 4 Mar, BBC2 21:00 (60mins).

Crufts 2026

Claudia Winkleman joins Clare Balding to present live coverage of the dog show from Birmingham's NEC. Thu 5 Mar, C4 15:00 and 19:30 (60mins and 90mins respectively).

Films

Little Women (2019) Greta Gerwig directs this critically acclaimed adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's classic coming-of-age story about the loves and losses of the four March sisters. Mon 2 Mar, Film4 18:20 (160mins).

The Menu

(2022) Ralph Fiennes stars as the sinister chef presiding over a high-end island restaurant in this dark, satirical thriller. Mon 2 Mar, Film4 21:00 (130mins).

The End We Start From

(2023) Powerful environmental drama. As London is submerged by floods, a young mother (Jodie Comer) tries to find her way home. Fri 6 Mar, BBC2 23:00 (95mins).

New to streaming TV

Being Gordon Ramsay

Expect "a feast of swearing and theatrical jeopardy" in this series following the chef as he starts on a new project (Guardian). On Netflix.

Love Story: John F. Kennedy Jr. & Carolyn Bessette

A "slick, soapy" dramatisation of JFK Jr and Bessette's tragic and turbulent 1990s romance (FT). On Disney+.

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

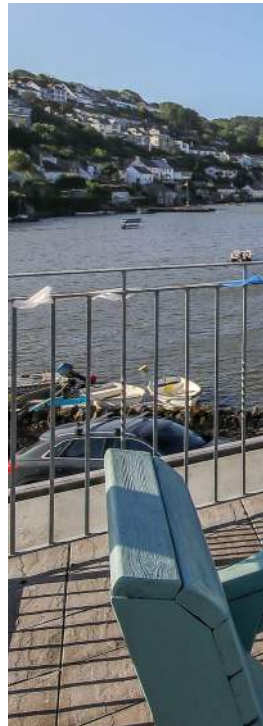
Owing to changes at the BBC, we are unfortunately no longer able to publish a summary of *The Archers*

Properties with splendid roof terraces



◀ **London:** Thornhill Road, Islington N1. This charming building with a Victorian shopfront has been converted by architects into a house with a private roof terrace. 2 beds, 2 baths, kitchen/dining room, recep, study. £1.95m; Savills (020-7226 1313).

▶ **Devon:** The Oyster House, Newton Ferrers. A handsome property with fine rooftop views. 4 beds, 3 baths, open-plan kitchen/living/dining room, study, workshop, garage. £1.25m; Luscombe Maye (01752-872417).



▲ **London:** Hilary Mews, London Bridge SE1. Modern townhouse with a private roof terrace that offers far-reaching views over the City of London skyline. The property is in an exceptional location close to Borough Market and the South Bank. 3 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, recep, study. £1.7m; Dexters (020-7650 5100).



◀ **London:** Fransfield Grove, Sydenham SE26. Striking former warehouse, built in the 1870s, that has been converted into a distinctive modern residence with a large private roof terrace. 2 beds, 2 baths, kitchen/dining room, recep. £675,000; Stanfords (020-8699 6778).

▶ **Dorset:** The Run, Mudeford. An exceptional waterside townhouse overlooking Christchurch Harbour, Hengistbury Head and Christchurch Bay with spectacular views from every floor. 5 beds, 3 baths, open-plan kitchen/living/dining room, garden, parking. £2.35m; Mitchells (01202-499295).





▲ **London:** Pattern House, Clerkenwell EC1. Duplex in a converted 1920s warehouse, with a communal rooftop boasting 360-degree views that stretch as far as St Paul's Cathedral. 3 beds, 2 baths, open-plan kitchen/living/dining room, lift, parking. £1.8m; The Modern House (020-3795 5920).

▼ **Cumbria:** Linethwaite Hall, St Bees. Commanding country house dating back to 1720, with the benefit of a paved rooftop garden. 6 beds, 3 baths, kitchen/dining room, 3 receps, 2-bed self-contained wing, garden, parking. £1.2m; Finest Properties (0330-111 2266).



◀ **Devon:** Flete House, Ermington. An elegant first-floor flat (for over 55s only), with a private roof garden, in a Grade I mansion. 3 beds, 2 baths, kitchen, 2 receps, grand communal spaces, 12 acres, parking. £450,000; Luscombe Maye (01548-830831).



▲ **Perthshire:** The Control Tower, Clathmore. This converted Second World War control tower is set in approx. 1.5 acres. 4 beds, 4 baths, open-plan kitchen/living/dining room, recep, sun room, garden, gym, garage, outbuilding. OIEO £1.65m; Savills (01738-477525).

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The collage features several MoneyWeek magazine covers. One cover is titled 'Making the grade' with the headline 'Britain's boffins are learning to produce profits' and 'Page 20'. Another cover is titled 'Lowering' with the headline 'Britain's dwindling global influence' and 'Page 12'. A third cover is titled 'Go for' with the headline 'The bull market isn't over' and 'Pages 3, 4, 20 and 22'. A tablet displays an 'INVESTMENT STRATEGY' chart for 'iShares S Tips 0-5 ETF' showing 'Total return in GBP, hedged vs unhedged' from 2020 to 2024. A smartphone displays a 'PERSONAL FINANCE' article by David C. Sorenson titled 'THE RANGER OF INVESTMENT PLATFORMS CONSIDERS HIS EXPLORE' and 'The best investment platforms'.

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The Hart 56 Blandford Street, London W1 (020-3468 1647)

This Marylebone boozier “is exactly the sort of place you want to be” on a glum winter’s night in London, says Tom Parker Bowles in *The Mail on Sunday*. After battling through the hordes in the pub bar downstairs, you climb a precipitous, narrow staircase and emerge in a “smallish, wood-panelled room that feels like a mix between a Swiss chalet and an Edwardian chop house. Tablecloths are pristine white paper, napkins thick, and candles flicker on every table”; at one end, a fire blazes. Owned by the Public House Group, which has a string of successful pubs to its name, The Hart serves “a mix of exalted bar snacks and no-nonsense British comfort food”, from cheese straws with “just the right ratio of crunch to chew” to pressed pig’s head, which comes coated in breadcrumbs and deep-fried, the “interior gently sweet with the merest whiff of the farmyard”. If I have a quibble, it’s the wine list – “there’s precious little under £50” – but this is still “food you want to eat, in a place you want to eat it. Which is, I suppose, the whole point of going out.”

The Highland Laddie 36-38 Cavendish Street, Leeds (0113-469 8076)

Out beyond the ring road in Leeds sits The Highland Laddie, a “red-brick wedge of an old Leeds boozier” surrounded by “fiercely modern blocks of student flats”, says Jay Rayner in *the FT*. It’s so out of place, it looks like “the plucky hero



Rules: food that leans on the rich side

in a movie about rapacious urban development”, which makes you “root for it”. Happily, the food makes it worth rooting for. Inside, the front room is all bar, while the backroom, which has a wood-burning stove, has space for about 20. On the menu are indulgent classics, from sausage rolls wrapped in Instagram-worthy pastry, to thick-cut smoked lamb belly ribs that come in a “lamb Marmite glaze”. There’s cheffy stuff too, such as Jerusalem artichokes that are “roasted until almost toffee-ed”, plus dishes geared purely around comfort, including “brothy peas”, which are “extraordinarily meaty” for something that contains no meat to speak of. The Laddie is a “shameless clapback

to an imaginary back-in-the-day”, but “let’s not quibble with wonky nostalgia. Let’s just celebrate a present which has found space for The Highland Laddie amid the high-rise clutter.”

Rules 35 Maiden Lane, London WC2 (020-7836 5314)

Established in 1798, Rules was founded when George III was on the throne, says Camilla Long in *The Sunday Times* – and with its “swirling Edwardian carpets, little-titty mistressy lights” and “walls filled with antlers”, it looks as if he might have decorated it. Popular with the likes of Nigel Farage and Andrew Lloyd Webber, the restaurant serves traditional British food that leans on the rich side (“Well, you can see why toffs die at 50,” my friend gasps). There’s “no vegetarian main, obviously – just acres of succulent brown food”; plus “soft and silken” potted shrimps, duck rillettes (“gamey, spicy, fabulous”), and a roast crown of mallard that’s served pink – but is, alas, only “fine”. The service is so unobtrusive you scarcely feel it happening, and it’s also relatively affordable – “at £35.95, its rump steak is now almost a steal for central London”. Rules is by no means “the best restaurant in the world, but it knows what it is, and who it serves”, and it “offers what it has with warmth and humility”. It understands that people go to restaurants “to feel a bit special when everything else in the world is cold and ephemeral”.

Recipe of the week: aloha pineapple kimchi with teriyaki salmon

I first made pineapple kimchi when celebrating Thanksgiving in Hawaii, says Linda Shiu. I wanted something to make our turkey dinners taste more “local” – and came up with the idea of combining chunks of pineapple with kimchi to use in place of cranberry sauce. Here, it makes a super accompaniment to teriyaki salmon.

Serves 4

500g salmon fillet, skin on, cut into four pieces pinch of salt 1 tbsp rapeseed oil 3 small garlic cloves, mashed 1 tsp honey
1 tbsp tamari or light soy sauce 2 spring onions, cut on diagonal into 5cm lengths

For the kimchi: 2 tbsp grated garlic (about 6-9 cloves) 1 tbsp peeled and grated ginger 1 tsp granulated sugar
4 tbsp gochugaru (Korean red pepper flakes) or Aleppo chilli flakes, or 2 tbsp crushed chilli pepper flakes, smashed in a mortar and pestle, or ground in a spice blender into finer flakes 2 tbsp chopped coriander leaves 2 tbsp fish sauce 3 tbsp water
1 ripe pineapple, peeled and cut into 2.5cm cubes (core included)

- To make the kimchi, place the garlic, ginger, sugar, gochugaru, coriander leaves, fish sauce and water in a blender or food processor and blend until smooth. Combine the spice mixture with the pineapple in a bowl and allow to sit at room temperature for 30 minutes, then refrigerate, unless you’re using it right away. It makes around 1 litre.
- While the kimchi rests, prepare the salmon. Pat the skin dry with kitchen paper. Season both sides with the salt. Heat a medium non-stick frying pan over a medium-high heat, then add the oil, swirling to coat the pan. Add the garlic,



then the salmon, skin-side down. Cook for about 4 minutes, then drizzle with the honey before flipping over. Pour the tamari on top and allow it to swirl under the salmon. Add the spring onions and reduce the heat to medium-low.

- Continue to cook for another 1-2 minutes, or until both sides are glazed and browned and flesh begins to flake apart when pierced with a fork or the tip of a knife.
- Spoon the kimchi over the top of the salmon. Serve immediately. Refrigerate the remaining kimchi in a tightly sealed container – it will last for up to 3 months.

Taken from *The Apothecary Chef* by Natasha MacAller, published by Kyle Books at £30. Photography by Manja Wachsmuth. To buy from *The Week Bookshop* for £26.99 (incl. p&p), call 020-3176 3835 or visit theweekbookshop.co.uk.

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New cars: what the critics say



Omoda 9
from £44,990

Car Magazine

Following the success of its 5 and E5 cars, the “affordable premium” Chinese brand Omoda has launched this plush plug-in hybrid SUV. The 9 combines a “giant” 34.5kWh battery and a 1.5-litre petrol engine to give 443bhp, and a “best-in-class” EV-only range of 93 miles. It can sprint from 0-62mph in just 4.9secs, and its top speed is 124mph. “This is easily Omoda’s best effort yet.”

Auto Express

The Omoda 9 is a car “unashamedly geared towards comfort rather than sporty handling”, and as such it’s not much fun to drive, but it is an “excellent cruiser”. Quick yet “soft”, the 9 is most at home on zippier roads and motorways; it’s a bit “wishy-washy” on country roads. It feels “reassuringly solid” and visibility is good, but the steering is vague and the brakes are “a little grabby”.

Autocar

This “bluff, modern” SUV looks “inoffensive”, if “a bit boring”, but at 4.75m long, the 9 is “seriously spacious”. It’s “brimming with tech”, too, from autonomous parking to heated back seats, and despite some cheap plastics, it “feels classy”. The 12.3-inch curved touchscreen could be more intuitive, but the graphics are good and there are welcome physical rotary controls for air-con.

The best... wheelbarrows



◀ **Henchman Galvanised Wheelbarrow** This pre-assembled, super-strong wheelbarrow is ideal for heavy duty use in the garden. It can carry up to four times more than a normal wheelbarrow, and with two wheels, it won’t tip over. The wide handle can be pushed or pulled, and there’s an optional tow bar. It comes in 200- and 350-litre sizes, with puncture-proof tyres as an option, too (from £299; henchman.co.uk).

▶ **County Clipper Garden Wheelbarrow** Sturdy yet light, this classic 90-litre polypropylene wheelbarrow is easy to push, thanks to ball bearings in the wheels. The pneumatic tyre gives extra traction, too. It is simple to assemble, but you’ll need Allen keys, a spanner and possibly a mallet (£109; mowermagic.co).



▶ **Draper Garden Caddy Wheeled** Great for small gardens, this trolley holds 65 litres and is easy to bump down steps. It’s simple to assemble, but liable to tip over if you overfill it. It’s light enough to lift and tip the contents into a bin, but the handle is a bit low for taller people (£34.50; diy.com).



▶ **Draper 120-litre Mobile Tipper Cart** Light but tough, with a reinforced steel frame, this four-wheeled cart is powder-coated to resist erosion, and its handle can be converted so it can be towed by a ride-on mower. Assembly takes ages, because there are lots of bits and pieces, but the step by step instructions are decent (on offer, £132; robertdyas.co.uk).



▶ **Zipper 75-litre ZI-EWB500 Electric Wheelbarrow** This looks like a normal wheelbarrow, but the 500W electric motor makes light work of heavy loads and inclines. Controls are on the handlebars, and the battery lasts for up to eight hours. It takes a while to assemble and, at 32.7kg, it is heavy when it’s off (£450; zippermachines.co.uk).



SOURCE: THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Tips of the week... to maintain weight loss

- Accountability is key, so keep weighing yourself every day. Tracking your daily calories on an app is tedious, but it works.
- Walking is crucial, and it can be threaded into your day relatively easily. Add extra steps into your routine by strolling to the shops or to meetings, for instance.
- Focus on training harder with weights, rather than more often. Hit the gym, or invest in a dumbbell starter kit. Don’t bother doing more cardio than you need to.
- Eat plenty of healthy proteins, such as chicken, Greek yoghurt and pulses. Aim for 0.35g a day per pound of bodyweight.
- Eat more healthy fats, such as olive oil, avocado and nuts, and avoid reduced-fat foods, which are often high in sugar.
- Give yourself a break if you’re on holiday. Aim for an 80:20 rule for treats; if you really want a pudding, indulge and enjoy it.
- Sleep is vital for maintaining weight loss, so try going to bed about the same time.

SOURCE: THE TIMES

And for those who have everything...



Pawelier’s FinFin Reversible Down Puffer wouldn’t look out of place on a designer catwalk. Crafted with 90% white duck down filling for warmth without bulk, it is designed for sighthound breeds such as whippets, which can get cold easily.
£115; pawelier.com

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN

Where to find... the most iconic metros in the world

The **Paris Métro**, famous for its iron-and-glass art nouveau station entrances, opened in 1900, and now has 49 more stops than London, but only 60% of the track.

Rome Metro has just three lines and 77 stations, but there are two new “museum stations”, which showcase artefacts uncovered during their construction.

With about 554 miles of track, **Beijing Subway** is the longest in the world. Look out for the futuristic maglev line, S1, which has electromagnetic trains capable of 65mph.

The **Buenos Aires Subte**, opened in 1913, is the oldest in the southern hemisphere. Many stations are de facto art galleries; look out for the stained glass on Line B.

Tokyo Metro is crowded, but efficient and punctual. It whizzes around the metropolis in a gratifying *Blade Runner* blur.

And, of course, the **London Underground** was the world’s first when it opened in 1863. It now has 272 stations spread over some 250 miles of track.

SOURCE: THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

This week's dream: the weird and wonderful wildlife of Ghana

Like many other nations in West Africa, Ghana can't match countries in the east and south of the continent for safari spectacle. But its rainforests are "prolifically biodiverse", says Mike Unwin in *The Daily Telegraph*, making up for a relative dearth of wildlife "A-listers" (lions and so on) with no end of "little-known gems". On a nine-night trip with Rainbow Tours, I visited several of the country's national parks, and saw an amazing array of beautiful animals, from colourful birds to mammals such as the potto, a short-tailed primate "like a cross between a sloth and a teddy bear". And there was also time between forest walks to take in some of Ghana's culture and history, including tasty local cuisine and a visit to a colonial fort once used by slave traders.

My trip began triumphantly, with the appearance of a white-necked picathartes – better known as a bald crow – perched on a "bungalow-sized boulder" at the Bonkro Community Reserve in the south of the country. This rare bird "launched the career" of



The 40-metre-high canopy walkway at Kakum National Park

bush viper. And though we saw none of the chimpanzees, leopards or elephants that inhabit the Ankasa Reserve, our trek along its steep, muddy paths (ducking wasp nests and hurdling "liquid ropes of driver ants") proved worth it even so, with sightings including an akun eagle-owl, hammer-headed bats, and a single palm civet, spotted slinking off into a thicket of bamboo.

Sir David Attenborough, as the prime target of his 1954 series *Zoo Quest*. With its black-and-white body and naked yellow head, it's far more striking than its nickname suggests. And another lucky sighting followed – a black-bellied pangolin sitting on a nearby branch. The smallest of Africa's four pangolin species, this elusive creature has a long prehensile tail and big protective scales that make it look like "a giant polished artichoke".

As we crossed the 340m-long canopy walkway at Kakum National Park, my guide pointed out further wonders, including spot-nosed monkeys, a Pel's anomalure (a long-tailed flying squirrel) and a glistening green

Getting the flavour of...



A voyage to the end of the world

The seas around Cape Horn are notoriously treacherous – but there's a good chance of reaching the headland even so on a four-night voyage from mainland Chile with Australis Cruises, says Mark Stratton in *The Daily Telegraph*. I travelled aboard the *Stella Australis* with 64 other guests, from the port of Punta Arenas to this southernmost tip of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago, at the foot of South America. The ship was simple but pleasant, my fellow guests were sociable, and every day we went on wonderful trips on shore – hiking through an "ethereal" forest of *Nothofagus* trees, seeing Magellanic penguins tending their nests, watching the magnificent Pia Glacier as it calved, and more. And landing at Cape Horn despite choppy seas felt like a little victory. A monument atop its cliffs commemorates the many lives lost in shipwrecks here, and the views out over the Drake Passage towards Antarctica are soul-stirring.

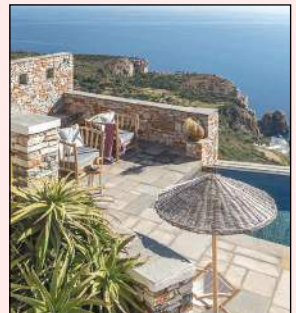
A palace of pop art in Mantua

It's not on the average tourist's "tick list", but Mantua is among Italy's most "preposterously picturesque" Renaissance cities, says Christian House in the FT. Its best-known sights are the frescoes by Andrea Mantegna and Giulio Romano in the vast palaces of the princely Gonzaga dynasty. But it also harbours other cultural gems – from elegant old hat shops and tasty traditional cakes to a new art gallery, the Sonnabend Collection Mantova. With a focus on American pop art and 20th century Italian *arte povera*, the collection was created by the New York gallerist Ileana Sonnabend and, almost two decades after her death, it has been entrusted to Mantua by her son as a long-term loan. Its new home is the 13th century Palazzo della Ragione (pictured), where it stands in teasing counterpoint to Renaissance frescoes.

East Anglia's beautiful new wilderness

For a luxurious winter weekend in wild country, it's hard to beat Fritton Lake, says Patrick Barkham in *The Guardian*. This holiday club on the Norfolk-Suffolk border is set beside a two-mile lake, and centred around a 16th century house with guest rooms and a pleasant restaurant. There are also cottages, chic wooden cabins and no end of leisure facilities, from tennis courts to kayaks and a "magical" floating sauna. But what makes it special is the surrounding landscape – the 5,000-acre Somerleyton estate, of which a quarter is being rewilded. Tours of this huge lakeside area with a resident botanist are fascinating. There are creatures including red deer, kingfishers and osprey to spot, and the woods and meadows themselves are "otherworldly" in their beauty. *Double rooms cost from £130 (frittonlake.co.uk).*

Hotel of the week



Verina Astra Sifnos, Greece

Sifnos is "possibly the perfect Greek island" – "quietly authentic but effortlessly chic" – and Verina Astra is its finest boutique hotel, says Rachel Howard in *Condé Nast Traveller*. The hotel's 16 rooms and suites have huge verandas, and are set around terraced gardens that spill down a cliff on the island's wild east coast. Decor is "soothing", with wildflowers in locally made urns set off against pale stone, linen and rattan, and there's a gorgeous saltwater infinity pool, a spa, and a "dreamy" restaurant, Bostani, that draws heavily on produce from the kitchen garden and has huge sea views.

Doubles from £264; verinahotelsifnos.com.

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Charismatic civil rights leader who ran for the presidency

Jesse Jackson
1941-2026

On the night that Barack Obama was elected president in November 2008, Jesse Jackson, who has died aged 84, was there among the vast crowds that gathered in Chicago's Grant Park, tears streaming down his face, said *The Times*. Growing up in the segregated Deep South, Jackson "could never have dreamt that he would one day see a black American winning the highest office in the land". But he, as much as anyone else, "had blazed the trail for Obama's victory". A civil rights leader in the 1960s, Jackson became the most influential African-American leader in the decades after Martin Luther King Jr's death; he ran for president twice in the 1980s, and though unsuccessful on each occasion, he won millions of votes and went "further than anyone at that time believed a black man could". But "Jackson's strengths were also his weaknesses. He was driven, ambitious, a powerful orator and brilliant at garnering publicity, but he was also impulsive, attention-grabbing and endlessly controversial."

Jesse Louis Burns was born in the small town of Greenville, South Carolina, in 1941. Nothing about his life was simple, said *The New York Times*, starting with his upbringing. His mother, Helen, was a 16-year-old schoolgirl; his father, Noah, was a 33-year-old former boxer who lived next door, married to another woman, and was not involved in his upbringing. In 1943, his mother married another man, Charles Jackson, who only adopted Jesse 14 years later. Before that, Jesse was sent to live with his maternal grandmother, Matilda, in a shack. "Rejected by his father and not fully embraced by his stepfather, he was taunted by other children, all while learning the racial caste system of the segregated South": years later, he recalled the two water fountains at the bakery, and the first time his mother led him to the back of the bus. But his grandmother, an illiterate domestic servant, encouraged his growing sense of self-belief.

Jackson stood out at school – "he could talk a hole through a billy goat", remembered a friend – and excelled as an athlete. In 1959, he won a football scholarship to the University of Illinois, but was shocked to find that, as a black student, he would not be able to play as a quarterback. While home from college, he joined a sit-in at Greenville's segregated library and was arrested. He then transferred to the historically black North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, where he was elected student body president. There he met Jacqueline Lavinia Brown, a fellow student, whom he married in 1962. The pair would go on to have five children. In 1964, Jackson enrolled at the Chicago Theological Seminary but, horrified by the beatings of black demonstrators in Selma, Alabama, in 1965, he left his studies to join the protesters (he was ordained a Baptist minister in 1968). He met Martin Luther King Jr and, "transformed", offered his services to King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Jackson was appointed head of the Chicago branch of Operation Breadbasket, which boycotted businesses that did not hire black people. He made an impact; but his drive, ego and desire for self-promotion "led to clashes, even with Dr King".

In April 1968, King was shot dead on a balcony at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Jackson claimed to have raced to



Jackson: rousing Southern Baptist oratory

"Jackson appeared on TV shows the day after King's shooting, wearing the sweater, stained with blood, that he'd worn the day before"

King's side, cradling his head as he died. He appeared on TV shows the next day wearing the same sweater – now stained with blood – he had worn the day before. "I come here with a heavy heart because on my chest is the stain of blood from Dr King's head," he declared. There had been a crucifixion, he said. "I was there. And I'll be there for the resurrection." His claims were disputed by others present, said *The Daily Telegraph*: they "unanimously agreed" that Jackson had remained in the parking lot; he was accused of using King's death for his own advancement. Whatever the truth, "the image of Jackson and his bloody shirt brought the horror of the assassination home to the American public" – and he became a "civil rights celebrity". But he quarrelled with SCLC leaders and, in 1971, Jackson left to form his own group, People United to Save Humanity (Push).

Criss-crossing America, "speaking out against racism, militarism and class divisions", Jackson became a household name, leading campaigns against truancy and drug use, and inspiring audiences with his slogan: "I am somebody." In 1979, he travelled to South Africa to denounce Apartheid, before visiting the Middle East, where he publicly embraced Yasser Arafat, calling for Palestinian emancipation. In October 1983, he entered the race for the Democratic presidential nomination. Jackson was, in fact, the second black American to do so – Shirley Chisholm had run in 1972. His platform was partly "classic left liberalism: taxing the rich, cutting defence and using the savings for social programmes", said *The Economist*. But he also had a "glorious vision", rendered in his rousing Southern Baptist oratory: he told the Democratic National Convention that he would champion "the desperate, the damned, the disinherited, the disrespected and the despised". He came third in the primaries, having run into trouble when he reportedly called Jews "Hymies", and New York "Hymietown".

Jackson ran again in 1988, emerging from the contest in second place, with seven million votes; Michael Dukakis, who won the nomination, overlooked him as a running mate. "The rest of his life was spent trying, unsuccessfully, to find a role that would match the excitement of the civil rights years and the presidential runs," said *The Guardian*. His international profile remained high; he flew to Baghdad ahead of the first Gulf War to negotiate the release of hundreds of Americans, and to Yugoslavia in 1999 to seek the release of three downed pilots. President Clinton awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and made him his spiritual adviser during the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Jackson was no stranger to scandal himself, admitting in 2001 to a four-year affair with a member of his staff, who had become pregnant in 1998. He did not leave his wife, but supported his daughter financially.

He supported Obama's run for the presidency, but not uncritically: he accused him of talking down to African Americans. Obama was brilliant, he conceded, but "I would say he ran the last lap of a 60-year race", Jackson remarked in 2010. On the night of Obama's victory, he said, his tears had been for King, his mentor and father figure. In 2017, Jackson was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and later with progressive supranuclear palsy. He is survived by Jackie and their five children, Santita, Jesse Jr, Jonathan, Yusef and Jacqueline, and by his daughter, Ashley.



PETER SOMMER
TRAVELS

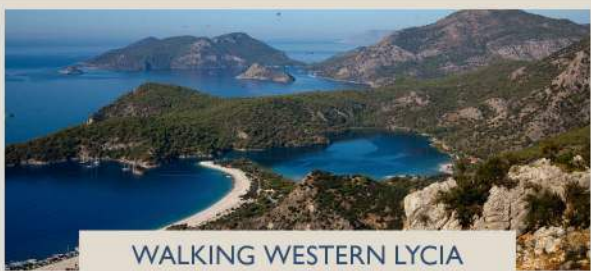
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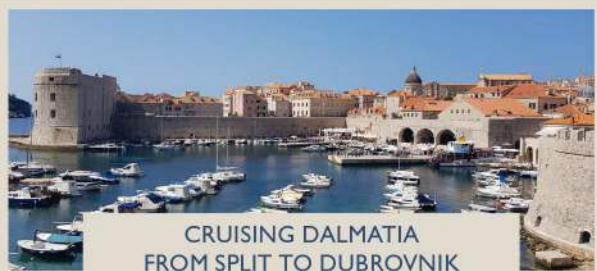
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Companies in the news ...and how they were assessed

Warner Bros./Netflix/Paramount: studio showdown



The months-long fight for control of one of Hollywood's oldest studios has reached high noon, said Brian Steinberg in *Variety*. Paramount Skydance has filed what is believed to be "a sweetened bid" for Warner Bros. Discovery (WBD), "opening a new round of haggling" for control of the studio and its HBO Max streaming service. Netflix – whose \$83bn bid for Warner's key assets was accepted in December – now has days to come back with a matching offer, or exit the M&A drama completely. Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos recently observed that the

company has a "rich history" of being "willing to walk away and let someone else overpay for things". Larry Ellison (Oracle boss and Trump ally) and his son David, who bought Paramount last year with the aim of merging it with WBD, seem to be making the most of their second shot with a revised bid that's expected to be "meaningfully higher than the Netflix offer" at above \$31/share, said Ran Melamed on TipRanks. The new tilt "aims to reduce uncertainty around financing" – a detail that "may matter to investors who are focused not only on price, but also on deal certainty". On that score, there's been another significant development, said DealBook in *The New York Times*: the re-entry of Donald Trump into the fray. Apparently infuriated by a podcast in which Netflix board member Susan Rice warned companies about aligning themselves too closely with Trump, the US president has demanded that Netflix fire her immediately – "or pay the consequences".

Diageo: "Drastic" remedies

Sir Dave Lewis has "a passion for playing corporate Captain Rescue", said Jessica Newman in *The Times*: first at Unilever – where his reputation for cost-cutting earned him the nickname "Drastic Dave" – and then at Tesco, which he dug out of a "£250m accounting hole". But the headache he faces at Diageo is of a different order. Lewis, who became the Guinness maker's third CEO in less than three years in January, must address an over-leveraged balance sheet and a share price that has collapsed by almost 40%. Ahead of this week's predictably dire results statement, reports circulated that an early step in Lewis's campaign will be to stamp on Diageo's "fat and happy" culture, said Madeleine Speed in the FT. But its internal struggles coincide with "a lean time for the wider spirits industry". The cause of the slump has become a hot topic of debate among investors. "Some believe it is because alcoholic drinks have simply become less affordable after a nasty bout of inflation, and that sales will rebound when disposable incomes grow." Others think the drinks industry is entering "an inexorable decline", as consumers choose "a healthier lifestyle, or turn to cannabis or gaming and social media instead".

Telegraph Group/New York Times: new backers

The Telegraph is a newspaper that refuses to be put to bed – at least in terms of the three-year battle for its ownership, said Michael Savage in *The Guardian*. In January, an agreed £500m sale to Daily Mail owner Lord Rothermere was referred to regulators over concerns about media plurality and competition. Now a new challenger is on the scene – with a powerful new backer. Dovid Efun, the British owner of *The New York Sun*, has joined forces with the German media giant Axel Springer – home of *Bild*, *Die Welt*, *Politico* and *Business Insider*. The consortium is already flexing its muscles, threatening legal action against the Government for lifting key "restrictions" on the Daily Mail and General Trust offer. Is there still investment mileage in newspapers? Having declared them "toast" in 2020, Warren Buffett seems to think so, said *The Observer*. In one of his final acts at Berkshire Hathaway, the 95-year old investment maestro has invested around \$350m in *The New York Times*, prompting a 3% jump in shares. The attraction is the NYT's "vast online enterprise" and 12 million-plus digital subscribers. As someone once joked, it has become "a games and recipe company with a newspaper attached".

BrewDog: punk wipeout?

The potential sale or break-up of Britain's biggest independent beer company is causing ructions, from the City of London to Aberdeen. While workers at BrewDog's Scottish home are planning a walkout in protest this week, bankers at HSBC are "scrambling to avoid steep losses on tens of millions of pounds of loans", said *The Daily Telegraph*. The debts are reportedly secured against BrewDog's Aberdeenshire brewery, giving the bank the right to seize the property. Meanwhile, hordes of loyal retail investors – BrewDog's so-called "equity punks" – have been left with "a bitter taste", said Stephanie Stacey in the FT. These pioneering crowdfunding investors now "expect their investment to be wiped out".

Seven days in the Square Mile

Markets braced as Donald Trump's new global tariffs (see page 40) came into force on Tuesday – putting many international trade deals in limbo – but there was no repeat of last year's "liberation day" ructions, despite Trump's threats of "more powerful and obnoxious tariffs". The dollar fell but US stock markets, earlier roiled by another AI scare, rallied midweek. The prospect of fresh tariff chaos prompted the UK Government to ramp up efforts to build closer ties with Europe. The Business and Trade Secretary Peter Kyle said Britain and the EU are "united by a shared mission to protect European supply chains from unfair practices, tariffs and dumping". The FTSE 100 hit another all-time high, jumping above 10,800 on Wednesday.

There was good news for householders. UK energy bills are set to fall by £117 to a typical annual bill of £1,641, according to regulator Ofgem, which announced a 7% reduction of the energy price cap for the period covering 1 April to 30 June.

Wayve, the driverless car company, raised \$1.5bn in the largest funding round yet for a British AI startup; the fundraiser valued the company at \$8.6bn. Almost £150bn was wiped off the value of the Danish drugmaker Novo Nordisk after a trial of its new weight-loss drug fell short of expectations. Aston Martin Lagonda confirmed plans to axe up to 20% of its workforce after losses jumped to £493.2m last year. John Lewis scrapped its plan to build 10,000 homes, citing "a fundamental change in economic conditions" since launching the controversial venture five years ago.

Grind culture

The "grind culture" of Wall Street is in the spotlight again, says Bloomberg. Boutique investment bank Centerview was sued by a former analyst, Kathryn Shiber, who claimed she was wrongfully fired for "asking to be able to sleep more than eight hours a night" because of anxiety disorders that required "a consistent schedule". She sought \$5m in damages. Centerview countered that the demand was incompatible with "the essential functions of the analyst role". So how much sleep should young traders and analysts be allowed? Sadly, the answer remains elusive. At the 11th hour, just as the jury was being selected, Centerview settled – "to put this distraction behind us".

Issue of the week: the return of tariff turmoil

The Supreme Court decision is a vindication for the rule of law, but opens up a welter of new uncertainties

The US Supreme Court has finally stood up to President Trump, said David Frum in *The Atlantic*. Last week, it quite rightly struck down the tariffs that have been the signature initiative of his presidency. “A tariff is a tax.” A president who imposes them without Congress’s permission is “on his way to becoming a tyrant”. The move is “a long-run positive”, said Alan Beattie in the FT, but at the cost of short-term uncertainty all round. After the ruling, the US president behaved like “an enraged toddler lashing out after his favourite toy is taken away”, damning the Supreme Court justices and promising new tariffs. The “smart play” after the legal defeat would be “to take an off-ramp”, said *The Wall Street Journal*. Instead, the White House “dusted off Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 as a work-around”, enabling Trump to impose tariffs of at least 10% across the board for up to 150 days (possibly rising to 15%). What happens after that is anyone’s guess, bar the prospect of an “unending Trump tariff mess”.

“Certain trading partners don’t look too clever right now,” said Beattie: principally the UK, whose 10% early deal with Trump may now be redundant. On the other hand, it was “an excellent day” for America’s most defiant partners, China and Brazil, whose imports to the US will now cost much less. The ruling certainly



Supreme Court justices at the State of the Union address

gives Beijing “a stronger hand” ahead of forthcoming high-stakes talks with Trump, said DealBook in *The New York Times*: “any decision that removes a tactical weapon from the Trump administration’s hand is welcome news in Beijing”. Potential refunds are another big issue. Companies such as Costco, Toyota, Goodyear and Alcoa have already sought to reclaim levies; others will follow. Indeed, some economists reckon “a refund windfall” could kickstart “a huge economic stimulus”. Up to \$175bn is on the table, said Irwin Stelzer in *The Sunday Times*. But Trump is defiant – promising endless litigation for those claiming the tariffs back. The real winners in all this are lawyers.

Whether or not the refunds get paid, there are huge financial implications to this ruling, said Bloomberg. The US government’s fiscal calculations – already dubious – “have now been torn up”. Even the most “expansive” alternative measures are unlikely to bridge the \$250bn a year in expected tariff revenues. If Trump’s efforts to reimpose tariffs by other means are rejected by the Supreme Court – a clear possibility – who knows what he might do to intimidate the justices? In a worst-case scenario, Trump’s setback might become “a fiscal emergency (real, not imagined), an economic body blow and a constitutional crisis all in one”.

Crypto winter 2.0: what the experts think

● Mar-a-Lago fest

Four hundred investors and “dignitaries” turned up at Mar-a-Lago last week to attend an inaugural conference convened by World Liberty Financial – the Trump family’s main crypto venture, said the FT. “This is retribution,” declared Eric Trump. “When we lost the ability to bank, we created World Liberty Financial.” Some of Wall Street’s biggest lenders “wanted us to crawl into the corner and die”, added his brother Donald Trump Jr. “They created a monster.” The Trumps and everyone else at Mar-a-Lago “largely ignored” the brutal crypto sell-off since October. Others don’t have that luxury, said Sidhartha Shukla on Bloomberg. Bitcoin is heading for its “worst month” since the crypto collapse of June 2022, when TerraUSD’s implosion “triggered a daisy chain of failures”. Ethereum has tanked almost as badly.

● Who’s holding the bag?

“In past cycles, everyone seemed to suffer together,” said Shukla. “This time, the pain looks more selective” – and retail investors seem “to be bearing the brunt”. Currently trading at around \$66,000, bitcoin has nearly halved since its October 2025 peak of \$126,000. Volatility is a given, but the



Bitcoin’s worst month since 2022

difference in this cycle is market structure. Since January 2024, when spot bitcoin exchange-traded funds (ETFs) opened the door to traditional capital, “crypto has been increasingly routed through Wall Street vehicles” rather than traded peer-to-peer.

“That shift has changed who sets prices – and who absorbs risk.” Insiders appear “to have rotated out” of the market – hedge funds that helped fuel the boom are in rapid retreat – leaving ordinary punters holding the bag. And there’s “little sign of fresh institutional accumulation” to help them out.

● Stablecoin summer

“We’re certainly in a crypto winter,” as Danny Nelson, of asset manager Bitwise, put it. But the rout has confused many in the sector, said Ben Weiss in *Fortune*. “Previous bear markets followed explicit collapses”, yet there has been no obvious catalyst. The one ray of light is stablecoins (tokens pegged to reserve assets like currencies), which appear to be “decoupling from the crypto market cycles” as “real-world use” expands, said CoinDesk. As payments firm Stripe observed this week, it may be “crypto winter”, but it’s a “stablecoin summer”.

AI scare trade

Citrii sensation The “AI scare trade” is back. Tech stock bears inflicted another mauling this week – inspired by a viral Substack post by research firm Citrini, conjuring up the disruption that “abundant intelligence” might wreak on sectors ranging from e-commerce to private credit and insurance, said Louisa Clarence-Smith in *The Times*. Shares in many firms mentioned by name fell sharply: including Visa, Mastercard and food delivery platform DoorDash.

Adapt or die Among the hardest hit were enterprise software stocks, said the FT. IBM tumbled 13% in its “biggest one-day decline since 2000”. Salesforce, Oracle, Workday, CrowdStrike and Datadog were whacked in what some describe as an “adapt or die” moment. The malaise spread to US private capital giants – including Ares, Apollo, KKR and Blackstone – which have extended loans to the casualties, or backed them.

Market catharsis? “The Citrini fuss exposes a market looking for an excuse to fall,” said Robert Armstrong in the FT. Indeed, the “AI scare trade” could be healthy if it forces investors to be “more discerning about the AI future”, said Jonathan Levin on Bloomberg. Still, it’s hard to find your bearings in an apparently indiscriminate sell-off that has scarred everyone from lawyers to estate agents, said Alistair Osborne in *The Times*. “Is this how the bubble bursts, with the robots pulling the foundations out of every sector?”

It's Anthropic vs. the Pentagon...

Dave Lee

Bloomberg

"They say your values aren't truly values until they cost you something," says Dave Lee. Anthropic's safety-conscious boss is being tested. Summoned to a meeting with the US secretary of war, Pete Hegseth, this week, Dario Amodei was threatened with "severe sanctions" unless he agrees to allow the Pentagon to use Anthropic's Claude AI tools as it sees fit. When the company struck a \$200m deal to supply the software last July, Amodei insisted that Claude shouldn't be used for "mass surveillance" or controlling "autonomous weapons" – on grounds the technology isn't yet reliable enough to make life-or-death decisions without human supervision. If the Pentagon is unhappy with those conditions, it has every right to cancel the contract. But trying to ostracise Anthropic – by designating it "a supply chain risk" – appears "unreasonably punitive". The company isn't dictating how the Pentagon must use a weapon. It is responsibly making sure that "a tool bought for one purpose won't be recklessly used for another". It is not "woke" to want to avoid accidentally killing innocent people. "Anthropic should stand its ground."

...and Hegseth doesn't hold all the cards

Editorial

The Economist

Pete Hegseth is "taking a my-way-or-the-highway" approach to the use of AI on the battlefield, says *The Economist*. And it may be "unrealistic" for tech firms to think that they can control how their technologies are used. "They can urge caution, but it is constitutional oversight of the armed forces that ultimately determines how wars are fought." Nonetheless, Anthropic does have some "leverage" in the matter. Its technology is now so deeply embedded in the Pentagon that officials are reluctant to rip it out. What's more, rivals with fewer qualms can't yet match it on tech. Firms such as Anthropic and OpenAI are "alert to the risk of losing their brainy AI researchers", who "may not share the Trump administration's ideology": in 2018, Google was forced to give up a Pentagon contract called Project Maven, after an internal revolt. Since then, "the mood in Silicon Valley has become more pro-Pentagon" – many defence-tech firms have welcomed Hegseth's efforts to "accelerate like hell". But he still has to move carefully. "If he destroys this nascent trust with heavy-handedness, he may jeopardise his access to more than just Claude."

Why are there still so few women CEOs?

Anjli Raval

Financial Times

The latter half of 2025 saw some of the UK's most prominent female chief executives exit roles at Diageo, GSK and Severn Trent. "Each was replaced by a man," says Anjli Raval – reviving the question of why women remain so scarce at the top. The latest FTSE Women Leaders Review report shows the count has risen from eight roles in 2021, to nine last year – a "stubbornly low proportion" that contrasts with more successful efforts to increase female representation on FTSE 100 boards. The problem is partly the old one of pipelines, say recruiters. Although well represented generally, "women are less likely to hold revenue-generating responsibilities, which are traditionally feeder positions for the chief executive"; headhunters often insist candidates have held "P&L roles". The current political climate hasn't helped, either – not just the US-led backlash against diversity measures, but a perception that men are a "safer" choice in a tumultuous business environment. Together, all this has helped to create the impression that "women lack the experience and skills for the top job".

Hell is lunch with other people

Adam Sage

The Times

Twenty years ago, the average French worker spent 90 minutes over lunch, says Adam Sage. Now the figure is more like half an hour, but lunch remains "a significant daily event" for a nation that doesn't yet seem ready for the British-style sandwich al desko. Still, there's trouble afoot. "Tensions are rising in the country's business sector as younger generations eschew the traditional lunch with colleagues." Commentators have pointed to a cultural divide: Generation Z is often filled with "dread" at the thought of a supposed break filled with workplace chatter – particularly if the "patriarchal" atmosphere means they're obliged to laugh at their managers' jokes. Psychologists postulate that the rise of open-plan offices, video conferences and endless online messages has reinforced the appetite for a solitary lunch as "a moment for psychological recovery". Still, old habits die hard. Eating alone, as the financial daily *Les Echos* observes, is still seen as a corporate "taboo": solo diners are often viewed as "antisocial and unlikely to be good team members". Sanity or promotion? Your choice.

City profile

Matt Pohlson

The co-founder of Omaze – the prize company whose multimillion-pound house draws have soared in popularity in Britain – attributes its rapid growth to a "fundamentally appealing product", said the FT. "Everybody wants a nice house on the water," says Matt Pohlson. And consumers like feelgood stories: Omaze gives a cut of the profits to charity. A Californian entrepreneur who set up Omaze in Los Angeles in 2012, Pohlson has a feelgood story of his own: a near-death experience – a cardiac arrest in 2018 – convinced him to shift from selling raffles for celebrity experiences to something more meaningful. In 2019, he improbably organised a charity auction for a Lamborghini, and convinced Pope Francis to bless the car. A year later, he moved to the UK to tap the native obsession with property.



Pohlson, 48, has a degree in economics and political science from Stanford, and an MBA from Wharton. Before starting Omaze he had little hard business experience, "barring a two-month stint at management consultant McKinsey" and a spell in the entertainment industry, said Yahoo Finance. He was \$200,000 in debt when Omaze began life in "a storage unit". Since 2020, it has raised £100m for UK charities, and in 2024 posted its first profit. Momentum is growing at a time when the National Lottery is grappling with a sales slowdown. One of Pohlson's most testing tasks is navigating "Nimbyism" to find 12 great houses a year for his punters, said *The Daily Telegraph*. He himself rents a "not very Omaze-style" flat in London, doesn't own a car and uses Lime bikes.

Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

AG Barr*The Times*

The Inn-Bru maker has gained new sparkle by moving into posh adult soft drinks – seeking to capitalise on the move away from alcohol via acquisitions like “vintage-recipe” specialist Fentimans. Cost pressures are easing too. Buy. 689p.

BHP Group*Investors' Chronicle*

The mining giant plans to increase copper output by 40% within a decade, as its profits overtake iron ore. Boosted by “byproduct” sales of gold, silver and uranium, the dividend is ahead of expectations. Buy. £27.89.

IG Group Holdings*Citywire*

The online trading platform is “a windfall beneficiary of volatility” in an increasingly volatile investment world, says Deutsche Bank, which has reiterated its “buy” recommendation and increased target price to £14. Buy. £13.61.

Keystone Law Group*Citywire*

This future-facing law firm operates a cloud-based model, with over 400 self-employed lawyers. Benefitting from “strong recruitment activity”, says Panmure Gordon. Buy on weakness; new target 980p. Buy. 583.8p.

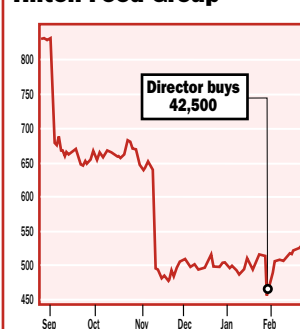
Micron Technology*The Motley Fool*

Shares have jumped 40% this year, but the memory chip maker is “in the sweet spot” of a supercycle in the DRAM and NAND markets owing to AI infrastructure build-out. Still cheap, despite ballooning margins. Buy \$428.17.

RS Group*The Times*

This recovering electronic components distributor should benefit from the brighter manufacturing outlook in Britain and Germany – with profits rising to £253m. Has expertise not “easily replaced by a chatbot”. Buy. 711.5p.

Directors' dealings

Hilton Food Group

A move into seafood has wrong-footed the supermarket “protein processor”: shares have nearly halved in a year. It now plans to refocus on the red meat business. Executive chair Mark Allen has shown faith in this strategy, buying shares worth £199,000.

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

...and some to hold, avoid or sell

BAE Systems*Investors' Chronicle*

Sales are up more than 50% over five years, with operating profit up 60% – and defence spending shows no sign of slowing. Investment could deliver greater returns long term but, for now, shares look fairly priced. Hold. £21.64.

Lloyds Banking Group*The Motley Fool*

AI-related white collar job losses are starting to become a quantifiable reality, and Lloyds is more exposed than rivals to a knock-on hit from mortgage defaults. After a huge shares run, there are better opportunities. Avoid. 104.8p.

Marks & Spencer Group*Citywire*

The retailer is on the road to recovery after 2025's cyberattack, fleshing out plans to grow its food and online clothing offer. There's potential, says Columbia Threadneedle. Shares remain “reasonably valued”. Hold. 398p.

NatWest Group*Investors' Chronicle*

Annual profits, up 24% to £7.7bn, exceeded expectations, and the purchase of wealth manager Evelyn Partners will boost fee income. But there are concerns about the deal's price. Wait and see how synergies play out. Hold. 615.6p.

Nokia*The Motley Fool*

Shares in the Finnish comms specialist have nearly doubled since mid-2024, as it reorganises around AI-native networks and 6G. “Steady”, but growth investors should look elsewhere. Hold. \$7.77.

Seraphim Space Investment Trust*The Times*

Shares in this space-focused trust have trebled in two years, thanks to higher defence spend and “the SpaceX factor”. Speculative excitement could push them higher, but it's vulnerable to any retreat. Bank some profits. Sell. 152.5p.

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip**Tesco**

The Times
up 8.84% to 501.2p

Worst tip**Rightmove**

Sharecast
down 27.56% to 416p

Market view

“I see a couple of people doing some dumb things.”
JPMorgan Chase's Jamie Dimon says risky bets to earn extra income remind him of the run-up to the 2008 financial crisis.
Quoted in *The Independent*

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

	24 Feb 2026	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	10680.59	10556.17	1.18%
FTSE All-share UK	5735.21	5677.65	1.01%
Dow Jones	49220.91	49462.31	-0.49%
NASDAQ	22819.48	22525.29	1.31%
Nikkei 225	57321.09	56566.49	1.33%
Hang Seng	26590.32	26705.94	-0.43%
Gold	5143.03	4861.73	5.79%
Brent Crude Oil	71.03	67.23	5.65%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	2.90%	2.86%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	4.31	4.37	
US 10-year Treasuries	4.02	4.04	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	3.0% (Jan)	3.4% (Dec)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	3.8% (Jan)	4.2% (Dec)	
Halifax house price (yoy)	1.0% (Jan)	0.3% (Dec)	
£1 STERLING:	\$1.351 €1.146 ¥211.670		Bitcoin \$65,561.73

Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS		
RISES	Price	% change
Antofagasta	4213.00	+16.48
Endeavour	4974.00	+10.29
ConvaTec	251.00	+9.53
Fresnillo	4032.00	+7.98
Croda International	3212.00	+7.60
FALLS		
Pershing Square Hldgs	4192.00	-5.54
InterContinental Hotels	102.84	-4.94
Rightmove	416.00	-4.66
Melrose Industries	640.00	-4.39
Whitbread	2619.00	-4.35
FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER		
Pan African Resources	177.00	+21.67
HG Capital Trust	390.00	-17.27

Source: FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 24 Feb (pm)

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Britain's shoplifting epidemic: how supermarkets are fighting back

Metal barriers, digital locks, facial recognition and other bi-tech innovations are being rolled out in an attempt to reverse the shoplifting crime wave. Simon Osborne reports

Jackson Mills spent large parts of his childhood in the Londis convenience store that his parents ran in Lytham St Annes, Lancashire, not far from Blackpool. Straight out of school, he got a job as a trainee manager at a big supermarket and didn't look back. At 32, he is now the youngest regional manager at Co-op, where he is responsible for 120 branches in central and south London. "Retail is in my DNA and, as my team will tell you, I'm still happiest when I'm on the shop floor," he says, scanning the neatly stacked shelves at one of his stores near Stockwell.

Shops have always been vulnerable to thieves. Mills has had a wine bottle thrown at him during a confrontation, and once covered with colleagues during an attempted cash machine raid.

But it's only in the past few years that crime has become so common and brazen that he can no longer remember each case. "I've seen them come in with big laundry bags and just fill them up," Mills tells me, miming the emptying of a shelf into a bag – a crime known as "sweep theft". "Last year we had someone going into a store with a wheelie bin. You get people stealing five or six times a day. They just don't care, they feel immune to the law."

In 2024, thieves stole stock worth £80m from Co-op, £10m more in "shrinkage", as it is known, than in 2023. Across the group's 2,500 stores, incidents took place at an average rate of almost 1,000 a day. Losses have become so great that Co-op has considered closing some heavily targeted inner-city stores. The numbers are bleak everywhere. Shoplifting losses hit a record £2.2bn in the year to August 2024, according to the British Retail Consortium, with more than 20 million incidents. Violence and abuse have also become rife, with 737,000 reported incidents in the same period. (The survey for 2024-25, just published, shows a slight improvement.)

Under this unprecedented crime wave, a feeling has percolated high streets and retail parks that retail crime has become almost unpoliceable. But Co-op has become the most vocal force in a fightback that is beginning to transform the modern supermarket. In partnership with police, security firms, the Government, as well as suppliers of a growing array of anti-theft technology, including AI tracking and facial recognition, retailers are getting smart. But they are also treading carefully. How can you design shoplifting out of the aisles while respecting the privacy of your customers – and without making stores begin to resemble forbidding, heavily surveilled retail fortresses?



Plaistow's Co-op, with the new fortified kiosks

I am meeting Mills at Co-op's store on the busy South Lambeth Road. While Co-op won't share branch-level crime stats, Mills tells me that this is one of its worst-hit stores. As a result, the group has chosen it as a test bed for the innovations that retailers are trialling across the country. It starts just inside the doors, with a pair of new automatic entry and exit barriers. When a shopper comes in, they must work their way all the way round the store, via the checkout, before exiting. The system – already common in larger supermarkets – is designed to stop opportunists who dash in from the pavement, grab whatever's near the door and flee. Only the Wall's ice cream freezer sits exposed, between the gates and the front doors. "We don't get a lot of ice cream theft," Mills says.

Inside the gates, new anti-sweep-theft innovations include secure risers on the shelves. These Perspex guards act like front-facing bookends for small products such as chocolate bars and packets of biscuits. More valuable items such as coffee are placed behind additional sliding Perspex guards that shoppers must move out of the way. In the chillers, sea bass fillets and beef joints selling for £16.75 sit inside lock boxes with GPS trackers. They can only be opened at the checkout. Farther in, large, £14 boxes of Aptamil baby milk formula also have secure caps. The wine fridges are locked; customers must ring a bell to alert a member of staff with the key, in a kind of throwback to the counter service that pre-dated supermarkets.

Boxes containing bottles of Smirnoff and Captain Morgan are empty, and must be filled behind the checkout. The kiosk itself is also fortified; steel and Perspex barriers rise to the ceiling, shielding staff from the thieves who regularly used to vault over and raid the vape and spirits shelves. Customers who want a human to check their goods out must now pass their baskets through a hatch. The smarter changes are more subtle. Mills guides me through the storage area, downstairs into a small office. In the corner, screens show feeds from more than 30 CCTV cameras. With the touch of a button, staff can also activate cameras clipped to their chests.

Staff often play back footage after a theft, but nobody here is routinely watching these cameras. Instead, AI does it remotely. The cameras are linked to a security operations centre in Northampton, where a crime intelligence team working for Mitie, the facilities and services company, is dedicated to Co-op. When a product leaves the shelf, the AI system follows it. If a bottle of

"Screens show feeds from more than 30 CCTV cameras. With the touch of a button, staff can also activate cameras clipped to their chests"

wine or a pack of Pampers, say, disappears into a bag or a coat rather than being held or placed in a basket, the system alerts the Mitie team, who then check the cameras. If they determine a theft is in motion, they radio their security guards in the store. The guards, who are dressed in Co-op uniforms, can have a quiet word with a suspected shoplifter or detain them until police arrive. “It’s absolutely incredible what it can pick up,” Mills says of the AI, which Co-op is still trialling. Mitie also gets an alert any time a Co-op employee turns on their body-worn camera. And when stores experience crime spikes, plain-clothes guards are sent to patrol the aisles, where they pretend to peruse the ready meals and confectionery.



High-value items now sit in locked cabinets

Owned by its members, Co-op has also been vocal in Westminster, where government has now woken up to the scale and nature of the problem. In 2023, it announced a new retail crime action plan, which included a commitment by police to attend stores when violence had been reported or a suspect had been detained, and to investigate prolific offenders. It also established Operation Pegasus, a retailer-funded police intelligence unit at Opal, a national intelligence unit for serious organised acquisitive crime. The Crime and Policing Bill now going through Parliament is also expected to drop a £200-value threshold that has blocked a proper response to “low-level” theft. The new law would introduce a specific offence of assaulting a retail worker. Meanwhile, retailers are being encouraged to report all crime.

Newly motivated police forces have started to join the dots. In Bromley in south London, Detective Superintendent Luke Baldock has led an operation to gather evidence of prolific offenders in partnership with stores. His team reviewed CCTV footage, and soon recognised patterns of behaviour and familiar faces. Ultimately, he established that just 13 criminals were responsible for around 80% of thefts in the area. Arrests soon followed. Last year, the National Business Crime Solution, a non-profit body that targets business crime alongside police, exposed a group of Romanian criminals who would communicate via Bluetooth earpieces in supermarkets and hit emergency alarms before fleeing with sparkling wine. The “champagne gang” pulled off 60 hits across England over a year, pinching fizz worth at least £73,000. Last year, in partnership with Co-op, Metropolitan Police officers in plain clothes hid in the backroom of a store near Waterloo railway station, waiting for a repeat offender to return. When he appeared on CCTV, officers swooped, tackling him as he began raiding the meat chiller.

“If you look at shoplifting as a macro issue, it almost looks impossible to solve,” Baldock tells me. “But when you start dealing with someone stealing a few Mars bars, you find out they’ve committed 20 other crimes and all of a sudden you’re charging them with £10,000-worth of shoplifting over the space of a couple of months.” In parts of Bromley, retail crime dropped by about 70% following the operation. More widely, police forces still face an uphill struggle. Across the capital, the Met tells me there were almost 50,000 shoplifting offences in the year to October 2025, a slight rise on the previous 12 months. Increased reporting may partly explain this. There was also an increase in cases resulting in a charge, from 5% to 11% year on year. Baldock wants police to keep up the pressure. He has come to see the targeting of shoplifters in spaces where good CCTV evidence is relatively easy to gather as a strategic opportunity. “There’s this concept that a shoplifter is a burglar on his day off,” he says. “By dealing with them for this, you’re going to stop them breaking into a car or house or worse. It’s a win-win.”

“There’s this concept that a shoplifter is a burglar on his day off. By dealing with them for this, you’re going to stop them breaking into a house”

In two stores in London and Bath, Sainsbury’s is trialling live facial recognition, perhaps the most controversial anti-shoplifting measure. The system, supplied by a firm called Facewatch, includes cameras at the entrance that instantly compare customers’ faces with a database of faces that stores can upload themselves when they check existing footage of shoplifters. A match creates an alert. “We’ve got a tablet by the till that will make a sound,” says Nathalie Fullerton, who runs a convenience store in

Glasgow. Over a year using Facewatch, she has added 31 faces to her database and prevented an estimated £8,000 of theft. “Quite a few times, the person will hear it and just go, ‘Oh, s**t’, and walk back out again.” If a flagged suspect carries on into the store, Fullerton will “kill them with kindness. We’ll say, ‘Are you all right there? Are you looking for something in particular?’ Or if they’re holding a couple of items, we’ll politely offer them a basket. When they know we’re watching, they’ll usually put their items down and leave.”

In an unlikely origin story for an AI tech firm, Facewatch was born at Gordon’s Wine Bar, a central London drinking hole. The owner, Simon Gordon, had grown tired of pickpockets and set up his own CCTV system more than a decade ago. The firm is now an international player in retail security and already operates in Home Bargains, Costcutter and Spar stores. But its tech has also prompted questions about high-street surveillance. Last year, a woman told BBC News that she had been thrown out of a store

and banned from the chain when Facewatch wrongly flagged her as a suspect. But Nick Fisher, Facewatch’s chief executive, is bullish about the firm’s approach to privacy. He says biometric data from

unmatched faces is instantly deleted and that faces are only added to the database locally, unless the company determines that a record of repeat or violent offences justifies flagging suspects in stores in a wider area. “Retailers have a right to protect their assets and their people,” he adds. “And all the statistics tell you that this thing’s totally out of control.”

Co-op tells me it has no plans to trial live facial recognition. It may not need to; it says that the effects of its own crackdown, along with the improved engagement from police, are starting to show, after more than £240m of investment over five years. Kiosk breaches are down by 26%, year on year; physical assaults have dropped by 32%; and antisocial behaviour and verbal abuse are down 30%. Overall, crimes have dropped by 15% and there are signs that the total value of stolen goods may no longer be rising.

In south London, Jackson Mills says regular customers have adjusted to the new measures. “When the fortified kiosks went in, they said, ‘God, what’s this?’, but I think people understand because they see shoplifting themselves and it upsets them too.” He says staff appreciate the reinforced checkouts in particular. “I used to be scared to be here, but now it feels like I’m in a different shop,” says Atish Patel, the store manager. It might feel slightly optimistic, but Mills sees stores such as this one as a vital realm at the junction of commerce and community. The crime wave has threatened not just his stock and staff, but that space. He is pleased that Co-op is tackling the problem so openly. “My customers need to know what’s happening, but also that, while there’s still more to do, things are getting better,” he says, surveying the shelves again. “The tide is turning.”

A longer version of this article appeared in The Daily Telegraph © Telegraph Media Group Holdings Limited 2026

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THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1505

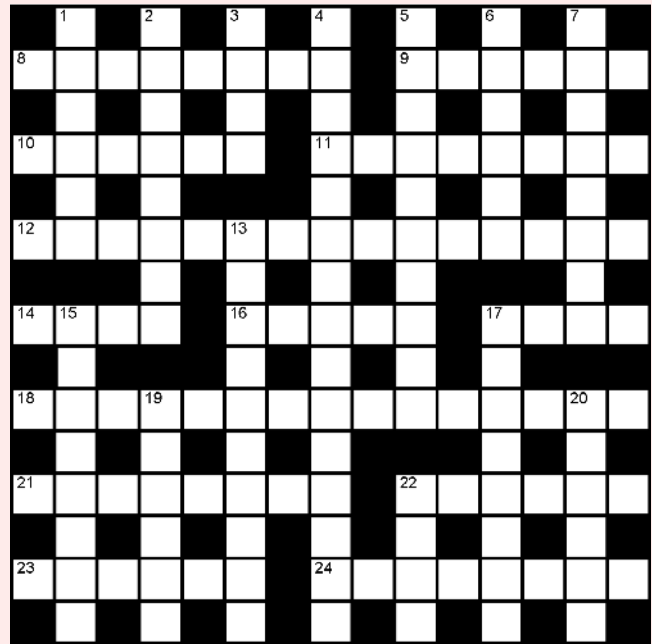
Two Connell Guides and three Week-branded items will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 9 March. Send it to The Week Crossword 1505, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. By **Tim Moorey (timmoorey.com)**

ACROSS

- 8 In all honesty fireboat failed (2,2,4)
- 9 Polish handle in US railroad (6)
- 10 Girl of the month with diamonds (6)
- 11 Truthfulness of lady close to London? (8)
- 12 What's shown in archaeological exhibition? We can't tell yet (7,2,2,4)
- 14 First indication of congestion on expressway? (4)
- 16 Nothing in small department warehouse (5)
- 17 Choir member's partly nasal tone (4)
- 18 Woeful midweek issue? (10,5)
- 21 Part of shoe damaged? It's a blow (8)
- 22 Display book, a grand thing rarely subject to inflation (3,3)
- 23 Prejudice treated as crime? Mostly (6)
- 24 Taxi loads reduced for the whole works (8)

DOWN

- 1 Pub with English setting (6)
- 2 Reflect upon change in China (8)
- 3 Large bundle from global enterprise (4)
- 4 Where insured soldiers go for surgery? (7,8)
- 5 Unprincipled types copy a Hitchcock character (10)
- 6 Cans drunk with Ed Balls (6)
- 7 What's testable in a crash? (8)
- 13 Dee in fancy tunics, Pam in new fashion? Not here! (6,4)
- 15 Start with place at one in type of office (4-4)
- 17 Heart racing, 100 for former England captain (8)
- 19 English eleven negative all round? Not the way to go (2,4)
- 20 Responsible for a libel that's terrible (6)
- 22 A second engaging bishop in old pulpit (4)



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

Clue of the week: Fishing boat goes to fish? Exactly! (5-3) *The Independent*

Solution to Crossword 1503

ACROSS: 1 Retina 4 Aseptate 9 Shrine 10 Prorogue 12 Beak 13 Transients 15 Spokespeople 18 Dressing-down 21 New Orleans 22 Life 24 Long shot 25 Canape 26 Slapdash 27 Sevens
DOWN: 1 Rose-bush 2 Tornadoes 3 None 5 Spring onions 6 Persiflage 7 Angina 8 Even so 11 Preposterous 14 Terrorised 16 Nominate 17 Integers 19 Ankles 20 Rwanda 23 Bare
Clue of the week: Seaside resort overlooking the Isle of Dogs (6, first letter C) **Solution:** CANNES
The winner of 1503 is Carol Hindom from Blackawton

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

Sudoku 1,047 (easy)

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 1,046

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

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