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‘Medieval conditions’ in a city under constant attack

▲ *A Ukrainian serviceman takes a photograph of a damaged church yesterday after shelling in Mariupol*
PHOTOGRAPH: EVGENIY MALOLETKA/AP

● Relentless shelling by Russian forces leaves trail of utter devastation on the streets of Mariupol

● Without power or water, residents of besieged Ukrainian port are focused solely on survival

Luke Harding *Lviv*
Caroline Bannock

Russia’s siege of the city of Mariupol resumed in the dark hours of the morning, residents said yesterday, at around 3am. “The windows are shaking. It’s early today,” one resident, Angela Timchenko, posted on Facebook. She described Russia’s latest bombardment of the city – now in its ninth day – as a “heavy downpour”. She added: “I think about where to find some tea and a drop of sugar.”

It was “frosty outside and fiercely cold” inside Mariupol’s apartments, which are without heat. There was – as she put it – “no bitch snow, which means there will be no water”. Earlier in the week the city’s residents collected snow to drink. Without running water, Timchenko said, she was struggling to feed her family. “Tell me, is it possible to bake an egg in foil? I have six of them lying around. Kids would have had their breakfast,” she wrote.

The destruction of the city continued, locals said. On Wednesday a Russian warplane dropped a bomb on Mariupol’s maternity hospital number nine. According to Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, the strike killed three people, including a girl. Seventeen patients and staff were injured. The photos of pregnant women being carried over a lunar landscape of rubble and craters outraged the world. This, Zelenskiy said, was genocide.

Petro Andriushchenko, a member of Mariupol’s council, said genocide was still happening. The city was under “constant shelling” from Russian 4 →

UK freezes assets of Chelsea FC owner over Putin links

Aubrey Allegretti
Jasper Jolly

Roman Abramovich, one of the world’s richest men, was finally sanctioned by the UK government after ministers accused him of having “clear connections” to Vladimir Putin’s regime and being among a group of businessmen who had “blood on their hands”.

The owner of Chelsea FC was one of seven Russians worth up to £15bn who had their assets frozen yesterday and were banned from travelling to Britain in a move designed to dramatically increase pressure on the Kremlin over its invasion of Ukraine.

The sanctions against Abramovich – years after campaigners first raised concerns about his ties to the Russian president – left the London football club in turmoil, with his plans to sell it frozen indefinitely.

After weeks of pressure to act more aggressively against the oligarchs who have made the UK their home, Boris Johnson said Abramovich had been targeted because of his links to Putin. “You have to have clear evidence that they are connected to the Putin regime, and that has been established, that’s why we are going ahead with the sanctions that we are,” the prime minister said.

The foreign secretary, Liz Truss, also insisted oligarchs would “have no place in our economy or society”. She said: “With their close links to Putin they are complicit in his aggression. The blood 8 →

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Ceasefire talks in Turkey get nowhere as Russia shrugs off attack on children's hospital

Luke Harding *Lviv*
Jennifer Rankin

High-level talks between Russia and Ukraine ended without a ceasefire, as violence continued across Ukraine, with conditions in the besieged city of Mariupol described as "dire and desperate" as residents run out of food.

Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said there had been no progress towards achieving a ceasefire in talks in Turkey with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, in the first high-level meeting between the two countries since Moscow launched the invasion of its neighbour two weeks ago.

Talks got under way near Antalya amid an outpouring of international outrage over Russia's attack on a children's hospital in the strategically important city of Mariupol that killed at least three people, including one child.

The bombing of the 600-bed children's and maternity hospital that injured pregnant women was evidence of "genocide" Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said. The White House called the attack barbaric, while the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said she was convinced the "inhuman, cruel and tragic" act could be a war crime.

The day after the attack, the International Red Cross reported that conditions in Mariupol were "increasingly dire and desperate", as hundreds of thousands of people had no food, water, heat or electricity. The organisation's delegation deputy head, Sasha Volkov, described the harrowing conditions in the city, with people reporting they had no food for children and attacking each other for sustenance.

Ukrainian officials say 1,207 bodies have been collected from the streets there in recent days. Workers are burying the dead in mass graves.

▲ *A military priest in Kyiv tries to comfort a woman who fled Irpin*

Meanwhile, Ukraine's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, reported that half of the capital's total population had left the city as Russian forces advance on the city. More than 2.3 million people have fled Ukraine since the war began a fortnight ago, the UN refugee agency reported. Bombs fell on two hospitals in a city west of Kyiv on Wednesday, its mayor said. The World Health Organization has confirmed 18 attacks on medical facilities since the invasion began.

Western officials said Russian forces had made little progress on the ground in recent days, but they had intensified the bombardment of target cities.

The US vice president, Kamala Harris, on a visit to Poland, backed calls for an international war crimes investigation into the invasion.

"The eyes of the world are on this war and what Russia has done in terms of this aggression and these atrocities," she said.

In a video message to Russian leaders, Zelenskiy said: "You will definitely be prosecuted for war crimes. And then, it will definitely happen, you will be hated by Russian citizens – everyone whom you have

▼ *Residents of the devastated town of Irpin, north of Kyiv, pass the body of a Russian soldier as they evacuate*
PHOTOGRAPH: ARIS MESSINIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

▲ *A senior police officer killed by Russian forces in the Luhansk region is mourned in a village near Lviv yesterday*
PHOTOGRAPH: BERNAT ARMANGUE/AP

▲ *Sergei Lavrov dismissed concerns about civilian casualties in Ukraine*

been deceiving constantly, daily, for many years in a row, when they feel the consequences of your lies in their wallets, in their shrinking possibilities, in the stolen future of Russian children."

As refugees continued to pour into neighbouring countries, Ukraine's foreign minister and officials were pictured sitting opposite the Russian delegation as the brief talks that Kuleba described as both "easy and difficult" got under way.

In comments after the talks broke up, Lavrov said the west had caused the conflict by forcing Ukraine to choose between Russia and the west. He dismissed concerns about civilian casualties as "pathetic shrieks" from Russia's enemies and denied that Russia had invaded Ukraine.

He also claimed without evidence that the Mariupol children's hospital had been seized by far right "Ukrainian radicals" who were using it as a base and denied that any patients were present despite photographs from the aftermath showing pregnant women and children at the site.

In a later statement the Russian defence ministry denied it had carried out airstrikes in Mariupol and claimed the hospital attack was a "staged provocation" by Ukraine.

Kuleba called for Russia to allow the evacuation of civilians from Mariupol. He said Ukraine was ready for diplomacy but also able to defend itself as it appeared that Russia would fight on and was seeking a surrender from Kyiv that it was not prepared to offer.

Turkey's foreign minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, who brokered the meeting, said before it began that the aim was to pave the way for talks between Vladimir Putin and Zelenskiy, facilitated by Turkey's leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Turkey, a Nato member which has not imposed sanctions on Russia but has condemned the attack and allowed Turkish-built drones to be bought by Ukraine, is trying to position itself as a neutral broker in the conflict.

The Kremlin has said it would stop the war if Ukraine ceased military action, enshrined in its constitution that it had no plans to join Nato, gave up annexed Crimea and recognised the separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states.

Putin, addressing a meeting of the Russian government, claimed the west was trying to blame Russia for its own mistakes with the US ban on oil, and accused countries of deceiving their populations. He claimed Russia would emerge stronger after what he called the west's "illegitimate" sanctions. "We are not going to close ourselves off. We are open to work with all our international partners who want this," he said.

Despite the bravado, the effect of sanctions continue to ripple through the Russian economy. On Wednesday the Fitch ratings agency warned of an imminent Russian default on sovereign debt and cut the country's credit rating further into junk status. Yesterday Goldman Sachs announced it was closing its operations in Russia, the first Wall Street bank to do so.

In an update yesterday, the Ministry of Defence said the large Russian column north-west of Kyiv had made "little progress in over a week" and suffered continued losses at the hands of Ukraine forces.

The MoD added that there had been a noticeable drop in Russian air activity in recent days, probably due to the "unexpected effectiveness" of Ukraine's forces. It also said Russia had deployed conscript troops despite assurances from Putin not to do so.

Russian forces continue to push into Ukraine

● Under Russian control ← Russian invasion routes

Source: Rochan Consulting, Institute for the Study of War with AEI's Critical Threats Project. 2130 GMT 8 March

Analysis
Patrick Wintour

Lavrov opts to push conspiracy theories and propaganda rather than negotiate

The face-to-face meeting between Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, and his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, was largely a depressing rehearsal of two conflicting narratives, but perhaps most revealing for what it showed about Russia's siege mentality and consummate ability to relabel objective truths as western lies.

The meeting was also notable for the Ukrainians starting to develop an argument that they are prepared for an alternative to Nato membership, so long as the country is given security and economic guarantees underwritten by the west and Russia.

Kuleba stressed in an interview with the Turkish public broadcaster TRT that Ukraine was not willing to give up the possibility of Nato membership yet, but could see these guarantees as either an alternative or a staging post to Nato. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, admitted he had gone colder on Nato in recent weeks given its refusal to use its collective strength to help his country.

Lavrov said these remarks "showed there were signs that the Ukrainian president Zelenskiy is starting to understand our approach", but it is hard to envisage what credible security guarantees Moscow could give any western government – early on at his press conference, Lavrov said "Russia has no plans to attack other countries, we have not even attacked Ukraine".

He later justified the attack on Mariupol's maternity hospital by saying Russia had warned at the UN days earlier that the hospital had been taken over by the Azov battalion, a far-right militia initially formed after the invasion of Crimea in 2014.

"All the mothers that were about to give birth were chased out of there," he claimed.

He then became irritated when western journalists, whom he regards as state propagandists, tried to point out there were pictures of children killed at the hospital. "Oh, this is the third time I've had to speak on the maternity and children hospital," he said. "And you're just not listening."

> *He showed surprising enthusiasm for decoupling the Russian economy from the west, saying 'no Uncle Sams' would destroy it*

Lavrov also showed a surprising enthusiasm for speeding up the economic decoupling of the Russia from the west. He said Vladimir Putin was taking care of the Russian economy, and that measures would be taken to ensure "no Uncle Sams" destroyed it: "We will overcome adversity, and we will do everything to no longer depend on the west in any strategic sectors of our life that are of decisive importance for our people."

Lavrov did not rule out a meeting between Putin and Zelenskiy at some point – but only if it was not talks for their own sake.

Kuleba, for his part, said it felt as if Lavrov had not come to negotiate on the issues he had raised, such as a 24-hour ceasefire. In reality, he said, he had only gone to Turkey in deference to the request made by his friend Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the Turkish foreign minister.

Çavuşoğlu described the summit as "an important beginning", referencing discussions about security guarantees for Ukraine. But it was noticeable that Lavrov was happier acting as a propagandist than as a negotiator, discussing Russian conspiracy theories such as Ukraine's plans to build a new Nazi state and the supposed presence of US military biological weapon sites in Ukraine.

▼ *Firefighters rescue a woman from an apartment that was damaged by shelling in Mariupol yesterday*
PHOTOGRAPH: EVGENIY MALOLETKA/AP

Fear gives way to frustration in a city 'abandoned'

Continued *from page 1*

artillery, he said: from Grad and Smerch rockets and Tochka-U missiles. Yesterday, missiles pulverised another residential district, clawing holes out of several buildings. Shells landed on the city's theatre, built in Soviet neoclassical style and located in the centre of town.

According to Andriushchenko, Mariupol's left bank, normally home to 135,000 people, is "no longer liveable". "The other districts have critical damage. Most residential buildings are not usable," he wrote on Telegram; the city was without electricity, heat, drinking water and gas, and the Russian Federation was in effect holding 350,000 people hostage.

With bodies lying on the streets – it is too dangerous to collect them – the precise death toll was unknowable. Andriushchenko said 1,200 people had perished "by rough calculations". "We don't know the exact number of people under the debris," he explained. "The Russian army attacks directly so we can't gather the dead or evacuate the wounded. All the hospitals are full. We have 2,500 beds." A mass grave had been dug on the city's outskirts, he said.

For the sixth day in a row, the evacuation of Mariupol's civilians failed to happen. Andriushchenko said Russian aircraft were deliberately targeting the road where buses were meant to collect people to take them to safety and Ukrainian-controlled territory.

"Airstrikes started from the early morning. Airstrike after airstrike. All the historic centre is under bombardment," he said, adding that the city was home to 50,000 children and 3,000 babies.

The deputy mayor, Serhiy Orlov, has described living conditions as "medieval". Sasha Volkov, an official with the International Committee of the Red Cross, corroborated this bleak account in a phone interview. He said many residents had no water for drinking, despite efforts by the city council to deliver bottles to major areas. Shops and pharmacies had been looted four or five days ago. Some people had food; others, including parents with children, had run out.

The situation had become desperate, Volkov added.

"People attack each other for food, or they smash someone's car to take the petrol out. Residents are falling ill because of the cold."

The most precious commodity was wood for cooking food on open fires. Groups were roaming around destroyed houses, searching for something to eat, taking their chances and boiling water from the stream.

Volkov said his building was home to 65 people. They had a generator, which gave them power for three or four hours a day.

Women and small children were accommodated in the basement, while others slept on the ground floor. Meat was unavailable, but there was a "sort of black market for vegetables". "We try to do the best we can," he said, coughing.

Others are living underground in their cars. Tanya, an 18-year-old who grew up in Mariupol and is now in Germany, said her mother and brother were camping out in a basement garage. "It's safer than their apartment, which is on

> ***'There's no fear now. We kind of get used to all this. Shooting – that's fine. Bombing – that's fine. We're just tired, tired'***
>
> **Tanya's mother**
> *Mariupol resident*

▲ *With people unable to bury their dead properly, bodies are placed into a mass grave on the outskirts of Mariupol* PHOTOGRAPH: EVGENIY MALOLETKA/AP

the fifth floor," she said. "They're sleeping in the car so they can keep a little bit warm and can charge their phone."

Tanya, who declined to give her surname, added: "There are 10 or 12 people down there. My brother told me that everyone is trying to help each other. If someone has spare food or water, they share it."

Her mother had cooked a "huge amount of porridge" while there was still electricity and had filled up the bath with water in the first days after Russia's invasion. "They did some shopping to stock up when the war started, but it's never enough," she said.

"My mum said by phone they've lost so much weight because they're so stressed. She said: 'Without food, that's fine, you know. We're not scared any more – we're just tired, tired from this situation. There's no fear now. We kind of get used to all this. Shooting – that's fine. Bombing – that's fine.'" The hunger pangs had faded. "They're just so tired. They want to leave, they want to be safe," Tanya said.

There was a sense of frustration among residents at their hopeless situation – abandoned by Kyiv and the international community. Mariupol, located in the far south-east corner of Ukraine, on the sea of Azov, is sandwiched between the old frontline with pro-Russian separatists, 12 miles east of the city centre, and the Russian army, which has taken up positions on Mariupol's western coastal outskirts. It is surrounded.

In the north around Kyiv, Ukrainian forces have shot down Russian warplanes and peppered enemy tank columns using Turkish-made drones. The Ukrainian army in Mariupol has no anti-aircraft missiles, it seems, and Russian jets are able to carry out bombing runs unimpeded. "Why is there no news about the glorious Bayraktar [drone] in the Mariupol area!!" Timchenko wrote on Facebook, in bitter tones.

Some relatives of those trapped in Mariupol do not know if their loved ones are alive or dead. In Vienna, Viky, 33, said that since 2 March, she had been unable to contact her parents, Volodymyr and Irina, her grandmother, Galyna, who is 88, her sister, Julia, and her niece, Veronika. All were sheltering in a small basement in their house in the Primorsky district of Mariupol, the target of repeated Russian bombing.

Viky's husband, Olsi, said: "The silence is killing us. We do not know what's happened to them. Are they alive or not alive? We have tried Mariupol city Telegram groups, and volunteers who are trying to get information out to relatives, but we have heard nothing."

Olsi said their worst fear was that they would never find out what had happened to their family. "They have eight cellphones. We try all of them, all day long, from morning until night. The only positive thing that happened was two days ago, one of the cellphones rang two times. No one answered, no one picked up the phone. That they didn't have the chance to pick up the phone is a terrifying thought."

EU Western leaders reject fast-track membership for Ukraine

Daniel Boffey
Versailles

Emmanuel Macron has led western European leaders in rebuffing appeals from Volodymyr Zelenskiy for fast-track EU membership for Ukraine despite the backing of eastern member states.

At a summit in Versailles, the 27 EU countries acknowledged as one the "tectonic shift in European history" caused by Russia's invasion of its neighbour and vowed to bolster their military might and "strengthen our bonds and deepen our partnership" with Kyiv.

But calls from the Ukraine's president – supported by Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland – for a special membership process failed to convince France, Germany, Spain or the Netherlands.

France's president said he wanted to send a strong signal of solidarity but "at the same time, we must be vigilant", adding he did not believe it possible to "open an accession procedure with a country at war".

The Netherlands' Mark Rutte said there was no prospect of EU membership for Ukraine in the short term. He said: "All countries in western Europe that I speak to say that you shouldn't try to have a fast-track procedure or accelerated accession process."

Western European governments opposed to rushing to EU candidacy status are concerned by the widespread corruption in Ukraine, the lack of stability in its institutions and its parlous economic state. Being unable to act in relation to the democratic deficit in Hungary and Poland has put off a number of capitals from any enlargement ahead of major reforms of the bloc's decision-making mechanisms, still rooted in unanimity.

There was no immediate response from Kyiv. The EU member states have asked the European Commission to give an assessment of the membership application, which could take up to 18 months.

The leaders were meeting just hours after talks between Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, and his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, in Turkey ended in stalemate.

Macron said: "I do not see a diplomatic solution in the next few hours or the next few days ... I have to confess that the conditions [Vladimir Putin] puts on the table aren't acceptable to anybody to be honest."

The EU's leaders discussed a variety of ways in which economic and political ties could be strengthened with Kyiv, ranging from a seat at some EU meetings to membership of the Erasmus student programme.

They also focused on how to reduces the EU's dependency on Russian gas and oil, and on the expansion of the package of sanctions "if needed".

▼ *EU leaders gathered at the Palace of Versailles before their summit to discuss the invasion of Ukraine*

PHOTOGRAPH: LUDOVIC MARIN/AFP

A step too far

Bid to join bloc will be uphill battle for Zelenskiy

Jennifer Rankin
Brussels

The phone rings and Volodymyr Zelenskiy reaches into his pocket. The German chancellor is on the line to inform him: "We decided to take your country to the European Union."

"Oh fuck," Zelenskiy says, as Beethoven's Ode to Joy, the EU anthem, soars into life.

It is an old clip from Zelenskiy's acting days, when he played Ukraine's accidental president in the hit TV show Servant of the People. It was filmed several years before Russia's all-out attack began, before bombs fell on a maternity hospital in besieged Mariupol, before a six-year old girl died of dehydration under the rubble of her destroyed home, according to Ukrainian officials.

The clip went viral last week because the question of Ukraine's EU membership is no longer a sitcom joke but an urgent question.

The real President Zelenskiy filed Ukraine's application for EU membership five days into Russia's invasion, calling for "immediate accession via a new special procedure". As EU leaders gathered yesterday to discuss that application in the historically charged setting of Versailles, Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, urged them to make it happen. "Ukraine is a strong force for good, a brave and intelligent nation which will contribute greatly to the political, economic, cultural and social strength of the EU after this war is over," he wrote in the Financial Times. "It will be a matter of prestige, as well as strength, for the EU to have a member like us."

While the EU has surprised observers with its unity and readiness to cast aside old doctrines to stand against Russia's aggression, EU membership for Ukraine appears to be a step too far.

This is not for lack of support. The EU remembers the 2014 Euromaidan revolution, when peaceful protesters lost their lives to defend Ukraine's right to choose a European future. Eight member states, all in central and eastern Europe, have called on the EU to immediately grant Ukraine candidate status and open the process of negotiations.

But supporters know it is an uphill battle.

"They have even more values than many of us, but practically it will be very challenging," said one senior diplomat. Old member states, including France, Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark, do not want Ukraine to get a shortcut to EU membership.

Officials point out Ukraine needs to be able to absorb the 80,000-page EU rulebook encompassing everything from air pollution to zoonoses (infectious diseases from animals) monitoring. Underpinning this mountain of technical regulations is a sound public administration, independent judiciary and market economy.

▲ *Volodymyr Zelenskiy in his hit TV sitcom Servant of the People*

"Let's be fair, Ukraine is nowhere near that point, especially because of what Mr Putin has done," a senior EU diplomat said, adding that even before the war Ukraine was "not moving in the right direction" on the Copenhagen criteria – EU standards on democracy, the rule of law and market economy.

The diplomat ruled out the suggestion that the EU's reluctance stemmed from concern over antagonising the Kremlin, but supporters of Ukraine's EU membership fear this is the real reason. Like Nato, the EU has its own mutual defence clause, where an attack on one is an attack on all.

Long before Ukraine's membership application, the EU's old member states were wary of EU enlargement and felt burned by democratic backsliding in Poland and Hungary, or lingering corruption in Bulgaria and Romania. "Enlargement changes to a certain extent the nature of the European Union, so it is a question of fundamental existential importance for every leader, for every country," an EU official said.

So far the divisions have produced a classic Brussels compromise, where EU leaders will declare that "Ukraine belongs to our European family", according to a draft text seen by the Guardian.

In the fictional clip, Ukraine's membership dream ends when the German chancellor realises she made a mistake: it was Montenegro she wanted in the EU. Ode to Joy cuts out abruptly, the president's face crumples: "I see, OK, my congratulations, yes, to Montenegro."

As Ukrainians die for what the real Zelenskiy has cast as a fight to be "equal members of Europe", Ukraine's government may be less understanding if they perceive that the EU's door remains closed.

‘Half the population has fled’

Kyiv a ghost town as Russian army draws closer to capital

Lorenzo Tondo
Lviv

Two weeks ago, the greater Kyiv area had a bustling population of 3.5 million, streets buzzing with busy cafes, businesses and bars. Today, after 13 days of bombing by the Russian military, the Ukrainian capital is more like a ghost town, with 50% of its inhabitants gone.

“Half of the Kyiv population has fled,” Kyiv’s mayor, Vitali Klitschko, said yesterday, as Moscow’s forces continue to give the city no respite. “A little less than 2 million have fled the capital.”

In recent days, as the Russian bombardments in Irpin and other suburbs of the capital intensify, the citizens of Kyiv have been flowing into the western city of Lviv, where tens of thousands of Ukrainians have sought shelter since the beginning of the invasion.

Anastasya Stepanchuk, 28, was determined to stay in her home in the Kyiv suburbs at the side of her husband, who is fighting to defend the capital.

Then, two days ago, as Russian forces started to press ever closer to the city, she too decided to flee, leaving behind an unrecognisable city, the cafes and shops closed and the streets full of roadblocks and anti-tank defences. It has become, said Klitschko, “a fortress, with every street, building and checkpoint fortified”.

Stepanchuk said: “I had to flee and I’m scared, because I left a lot of friends and, of course, my husband. I don’t want to go abroad. I’m determined to go back to my city when things improve.

“Once Ukraine wins, I will come back to Kyiv to build it back. We all want to return and take part in the rebuilding.”

Many of those forced to flee their city spoke of their fears of what they would return to.

When the war began, Yulian Kondur, 28, was forced to move to the outskirts of Kyiv. But, after a week, nowhere in the city was safe and, in the end, he too began the journey west towards the borders.

“During the first bombing, a building, two blocks from mine, was hit,” says Kondur, a coordinator of a Roma charitable organisation. “When I left, the city looked like a ghost town. Most of the people who are left live in the bomb shelters and some are helping others with food and other needs, for the displaced. Kyiv was very lively and peaceful, with people going to work, every day, and living their normal lives. The idea of going back and seeing Kyiv in this condition scares me a little. ”

In Lviv, doctors, soldiers and volunteers are anxiously awaiting the arrival of people from Mariupol, a city that has experienced horrific bombardment by Russian forces.

On Wednesday the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, called an attack on a maternity hospital in Mariupol “an atrocity”. There are preparations to welcome more wounded and displaced in the coming weeks.

Olga, 30, and her four cats arrived in Lviv on Wednesday from Kharkiv, a major city in eastern Ukraine near the border with Russia, which was among the first to be bombarded. “It was very difficult to get out of the city. People are afraid of driving cars to reach the border or other areas of the country,” she said.

“There is little information and not everyone knows that there are buses to evacuate people. If you could let these people know that they can leave cities safely, you could save a lot of lives. But as long as the fly zone is open, people will continue to die.”

TikTok ‘splinternet’
Foreign content block

TikTok has blocked all non-Russian content in Russia but is allowing historical content uploaded by domestic accounts to stay online, including videos by state-backed media services.

The Chinese-owned video-sharing app said it had banned livestreaming and uploading of new content in Russia after the Kremlin criminalised the spreading of what it deems to be fake news about its invasion of Ukraine.

TikTok has also blocked all non-Russian content leaving only old videos uploaded by Russia-based accounts. Facebook and Twitter have had their services blocked by the Russian communications regulator after they pulled content from state media-backed news providers across Europe. Twitter has launched a privacy-protected version of its site to bypass surveillance and censorship.

Tracking.exposed, an EU-based non-profit organisation that studies the profiling and tracking of internet users, described TikTok’s move as establishing a “splinternet” within a global social media platform. It said: “This is the first time that a global social media platform splits the content availability at such scale.”

Tracking.exposed, which used Russian IP addresses to attempt to access non-Russian TikTok content, said the accounts of the World Health Organization and the popular TikToker Charli D’Amelio – who has 137.6 million followers – are among those inaccessible.

TikTok said it did not want to put its Russian employees or users at risk of severe criminal penalties, as it described the service as a source of “relief and human connection during a time of war”. Dan Milmo

New arrivals at the railway station in the western city of Lviv, where tens of thousands of Ukrainians have sought refuge
PHOTOGRAPH: ALESSIO MAMO/THE GUARDIAN

Russian tanks being destroyed on the outskirts of Brovary in a video released by Ukranian armed forces
PHOTOGRAPH: AZOV HANDOUT/REUTERS

Drone footage
Forces shown ambushing Putin's tanks in city suburb

Dan Sabbagh

Dramatic drone footage has emerged of a Ukrainian ambush on a Russian armoured column just outside Brovary, an eastern suburb of Kyiv.

Bellingcat, the open source investigator, said it had geolocated the video to a lightly inhabited area on the E95 road about 35km (22 miles) from the centre of Kyiv, a direct route to the east of the capital where Russian forces have been trying to mass.

The edited 45-second video, released by Ukraine's armed forces, is a montage of the fighting on the road, which shows at least one company of Russian tanks and armoured vehicles coming under repeated attack. Its production quality means the fighting filmed may not have taken place yesterday.

It is overlaid with an audio of what appears to be a Russian officer reporting an attack to his superiors, which is presented as an effective commentary on the fighting shown. It also says the regiment's commander was killed, named by Ukrainian media as Col Andrei Zakharov – this could not be independently confirmed.

"Sixth regiment lost," the officer tells headquarters. "I cannot report about the sixth regiment. I'm collecting data. Lots of losses. They waited for us. Head of the convoy got into the ambush. Regiment commander killed in action."

Parts of the footage show a TOS-1 heavy flamethrower, marked with a painted O symbol. At one point during the fighting it unleashes an incendiary rocket at a target off screen, a demonstration of Russian willingness to use thermobaric weapons during combat.

Military experts described the video as credible and said it showed surprising tactics on the part of the Russian forces, with more than 20 tanks and other armour on a main road fairly close to the capital.

Ben Barry, a former tank commander with the British army and a land warfare specialist with the thinktank IISS, said: "They either think they are going through a safe area, or they were not well trained or they are moving fast for some other requirement."

Tanks moving through a built-up area should normally use close infantry support to prevent ambushes from the side of the road, Barry said. Having watched the footage, he said he thought the Russian armour had been probably targeted with either Javelin or NLAW anti-tank weapons because the blasts were concentrated.

In the audio, the Russian reporting the ambush speculates that they may been targeted by Turkish Bayraktar drones, but parts of the video show conditions not considered ideal for drone attacks.

▼ *Jewish immigrants fleeing the war in Ukraine disembark from a plane at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv*

PHOTOGRAPH: MENAHEM KAHANA/AFP

'We are the luckier ones'
Israel welcomes Ukrainian Jews fleeing war at home

Bethan McKernan
Quique Kierszenbaum *Jerusalem*

A red carpet, applause and dozens of blue-and-white flags were waiting for the first Jewish Ukrainian refugees to arrive in Israel as part of a huge rescue operation triggered by the Russian invasion.

About 400 people on four flights from Poland, Moldova and Romania landed in Tel Aviv on Sunday, among them 100 children who had been living in a Jewish orphanage in the northern city of Zhytomyr. Most of the new arrivals were visibly relieved to have reached safety; as is tradition, several people touched and kissed the ground after disembarking.

Many had never been to Israel before and had not imagined they would be making aliyah – the immigration of Jews to Israel from the diaspora under the right of return – in these circumstances. But as so often in the two weeks since Russia announced the military operation against its neighbour, history appears to be repeating itself.

"Israel is not what I expected … Well, I did not really know what to expect," said the 17-year-old computer programmer Yohor Sereda, who fled Kyiv with his father and grandfather. After a dangerous journey to the Polish border, for two days the trio took turns to stand in line and nap in the car before they were allowed to cross. In Warsaw they were reunited with Sereda's mother and two younger sisters, who had been on holiday in Egypt when the war broke out.

"I just took my laptop and a rucksack of clothes. It was very scary driving out of Kyiv: there were explosions everywhere. It felt like being in a movie," he said. "But we are definitely the luckier ones."

About 1 million Ukrainian Jews were killed in the Holocaust, but Ukraine and Russia are still home to large Jewish communities.

The Israeli interior minister, Ayelet Shaked, said on Tuesday that the state was preparing to take in up to 100,000 Jews from the two countries and the Russian dominated Commonwealth of Independent States as part of Operation Israel Guarantees.

Up to 5,000 non-Jewish Ukrainians will be allowed to come to Israel and another 20,000 who arrived before the fighting will be able to stay temporarily. A heavily criticised policy of forcing Ukrainian nationals or their Israeli hosts to pay a 10,000 shekel (£2,330) bond on arrival at Ben Gurion airport has been scrapped.

▲ *People waving the flag of Israel welcome the arriving Ukrainians*

Since 1950 Israel has seen several waves of aliyah immigration from countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia and Yemen. Operation Israel Guarantees, however, is an emergency undertaking on a scale not seen since the influx of more than 1 million people after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989.

At a four-star hotel next to West Jerusalem's main bus station on Wednesday, the lobby and restaurant were chaotic: suitcases and bags of clothes were left next to sofas while Ukrainian *olim*, or migrants, spoke into their mobiles in Ukrainian and Russian to loved ones and lawyers sorting out their paperwork. Small children ran around playing while teenagers made TikTok videos.

Immigration ministry employees and volunteer interpreters were on hand to help. But for Igor Fedyaev, from the south-eastern city of Zaporizhzhia, the enormity of what has happened had not yet sunk in. While the state will help, he does not know where his family will live, or learn Hebrew.

Fedyaev was not following the news before 24 February, when the Russian invasion began. As usual, he got up early for his weekly five-a-side football game before work only to realise that something was wrong: the roads were empty and the gym was closed. "No one really believed it would happen. It was only the next day we realised we needed to look at escaping," the 43-year-old father of two said.

The family realised they would need permission from Fedyaev's first wife to take his 16-year-old son, Maksim. While she was keen to help, no lawyers were available to assist with notarising the paperwork and government databases had shut down.

In the end they had to leave with just a written note from Maksim's mother before embarking on a 680-mile car journey, making lengthy detours to avoid bombed-out towns and roads.

"The images we are seeing, it looks like the second world war," he said. "In the end in every war you see the same sort of things. Most people love their home and the country they were born in. Just because [you are Jewish] it doesn't mean you want to leave."

Court-martial
PM warns UK troops who go to conflict

Peter Walker
Political correspondent

British soldiers who travel to Ukraine to fight can expect to face a court-martial, Boris Johnson has said, adding that civilians should also avoid going there to fight.

Asked about reports that a 19-year-old from Warrington with no military experience had gone to Ukraine to join efforts against the Russian invasion, the prime minister said that while he could comprehend why people wanted to help, they should remain in the UK.

"I think that everybody seeing what's happening in Ukraine will understand those feelings," he told reporters during a visit to the Cammell Laird shipyard in Merseyside.

"I think many people will sympathise because I don't think I've ever seen such a clear distinction in international affairs between right and wrong … in what President Putin is doing to people in Ukraine.

"But we have very clear laws in this country … I'm afraid people going from our armed services, as the chief of the defence staff made clear the other day, will face court-martial."

> ***'Many people will sympathise … I don't think I've seen such a distinction between right and wrong'***
>
> **Boris Johnson**
> *Prime minister*

His comments are in contrast to those by Liz Truss, the foreign secretary, who said last month that she would back Britons going to Ukraine to join the fight against the Russians.

Truss faced criticism for her comments, which ran counter to advice on her department's own website, which says that those who travel "to fight, or to assist others engaged in the conflict" could be prosecuted on their return to the UK.

Ministry of Defence chiefs have banned all service personnel from travelling to Ukraine "until further notice" and warned they will face prosecution if they do.

The armed forces minister, James Heappey, said it was illegal for British service personnel to go absent without leave or to go AWOL in order to fight in a foreign war.

UK freezes assets of seven oligarchs, including Roman Abramovich

Continued from page 1

of the Ukrainian people is on their hands. They should hang their heads in shame."

Abramovich was targeted because the UK government's Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation suspected a steel company he had effective control of, Evraz plc, supplied the metal to the Russian military to produce tanks.

The move will heap more pressure on Putin, two weeks since he ordered troops into Ukraine in a bloody battle that has seen thousands injured and killed, and the Russian military investigated at the international criminal court for accusations of war crimes.

Chelsea has been left in limbo by restrictions placed on it that ban any new player transfers and the sale of tickets or merchandise to fans. The club faced further financial headaches when mobile network and sponsor Three reportedly demanded its logo be removed from the Chelsea's shirt and stadium.

Government sources suggested the licence would remain in place until at least the end of the season and act as a "safety net" to avoid calamitous consequences to the wider football pyramid. They said some requirements were likely to be tweaked, such as the cap on "reasonable costs" of £500,000 per fixture.

Evraz shares fell by 11% after the sanctions announcement before trading was suspended on the orders of the Financial Conduct Authority, the City regulator, "pending clarification of the impact of UK sanctions".

Abramovich's stake in the company was worth £1.4bn at the end of 2021, but that sank below £320m by yesterday evening.

Israel's national holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem, also said it was suspending relations with Abramovich, who is Jewish and last month agreed a "a new long-term strategic partnership" with the site.

Evraz denied any links with the Russian military and before the invasion of Ukraine, Abramovich's lawyers argued that he did not fit the criteria for sanctions, saying it was "ludicrous to suggest that our client has any responsibility or influence over the behaviour of the Russian state". Abramovich did not respond to the announcement of sanctions against him.

Other oligarchs slapped with sanctions yesterday were Abramovich's one-time business partner, Oleg Deripaska, Putin's "right-hand man" Igor Sechin, and four men in the Russian president's "inner circle" – Andrey Kostin, Alexei Miller, Nikolai Tokarev and Dmitri Lebedev.

All were barred from conducting any financial transaction in the UK, meaning those with property in Britain will no longer be able to employ staff such as cleaners, housekeepers or gardeners, or even have contracts for utilities such as electricity.

Meanwhile, the prime minister admitted that he feared Russia could deploy chemical weapons in Ukraine. Johnson said it would be "straight out of their playbook", following Moscow's unfounded claim that opponents were developing chemical weapons in the region.

"When they themselves deploy chemical weapons, as I fear they may, they have a sort of *maskirovka* – a fake story – ready to go," Johnson told Sky News. "You've seen it in Syria. You saw it even in the UK. That's what they're already doing. It is a cynical, barbaric government."

After the sanctions announcement yesterday, ministers were accused of acting too late to stop oligarchs who feared sanctions weeks ago removing their assets. Abramovich's private jet reportedly left the UK in late February. The shadow foreign secretary, David Lammy, claimed Britain continued to "lag far behind" other allies on the number of Putin-linked individuals and entities facing sanctions.

Labour analysis found the UK had issued 16 times fewer sanctions than Brussels, with Britain targeting 41 Putin-linked individuals or entities, compared with 660 spread across the EU. Lammy demanded that tougher action be taken, such as excluding Beralusian banks from the Swift payment system, imposing sanctions on all 351 members of the Duma who voted to recognise the self-proclaimed people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk; and limits being set on Russians depositing money into UK bank accounts.

Chris Bryant, the Labour chair of the parliamentary group on Russia, argued it was "absolutely preposterous we're only doing all of these measures now". He said: "We've been woefully ill-prepared ... which is why yesterday the EU sanctioned another 160 people and we only sanctioned seven people today."

> ***'With their close links to Putin the blood of the Ukrainian people is on their hands'***
>
> **Liz Truss**
> *Foreign secretary*

Sport Cover story Page 48→

Crumbling assets Chelsea FC owner frozen out of club and stock exchange

Jasper Jolly

Of all the trophy assets owned by Russia-linked billionaires in the UK, one has always stood out: Chelsea football club. Yesterday, ownership of the London club was officially frozen after the designation of Roman Abramovich for UK sanctions.

Before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, lawyers for Abramovich had strenuously insisted that he did not fit the criteria for sanctions, but the UK has now become the first of the Nato allies to impose sanctions on him.

Of all the people alleged by the UK government to have links to Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, Abramovich had perhaps the closest affiliation with the UK. However, an MP last week claimed in the Commons that he was starting a fire sale of UK properties, as well as seeking to offload Chelsea for as much as £4bn.

As well as Chelsea, Abramovich owns a stake in the steel company Evraz and Norilsk Nickel, also known as Nornickel, both of which had shares listed on the London Stock Exchange that are now suspended. The UK government cited Forbes's estimate of his net worth at £9.4bn, and said he was "one of the few oligarchs from the 1990s to maintain prominence under Putin".

His UK property reportedly includes a 15-bedroom mansion on Kensington Palace Gardens in central London that was bought for £90m in 2009, and a Chelsea penthouse overlooking the River Thames bought in 2018 for a reported £22m.

Yet he also has assets that are beyond the reach of British officials. Château de la Croë, a sprawling villa on France's Mediterranean coast once owned by British royals, is thought to be worth €100m (£84m).

Abramovich owns one of the world's biggest superyachts, the 140-metre Solaris, which can reportedly host 36 guests. Its value has been estimated at $600m (£458m) by the website SuperYachtFan. The yacht left Barcelona on Tuesday, and was sailing off the south coast of Sicily yesterday morning, according to the ship-tracking website MarineTraffic. A spokesperson for Abramovich previously told Reuters: "We never comment on the movements of the yacht or any other vehicles or vessels."

The billionaire has also been linked to an older but even larger yacht, the 162m Eclipse.

▼ *Abramovich was reportedly trying to offload Chelsea for up to £4bn*

▲ *The oligarch's London property in Kensington Palace Gardens*

▲ *The billionaire's superyacht, Solaris, left Barcelona on Tuesday*

▲ *Roman Abramovich reacts to a speech by Vladimir Putin, with whom he has kept strong links*
PHOTOGRAPH: ANTHONY DEVLIN/PA

For faster travel, Abramovich is also thought to own a private jet. Forbes Russia last year reported that Abramovich had spent $350m on a new Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner. The 787 is more usually used by airlines as a twin-aisle passenger jet to carry up to 300 people, but Forbes said that Abramovich's version was reduced to about 30 passengers travelling in luxury, along with 20 staff.

The plane linked to Abramovich flew from Moscow to Dubai and back again on 4 March, according to Flightradar24, a tracking website.

The sanctions mean Abramovich will be unable to sell any shares in Evraz, a steel company incorporated in London but with mostly Russian assets.

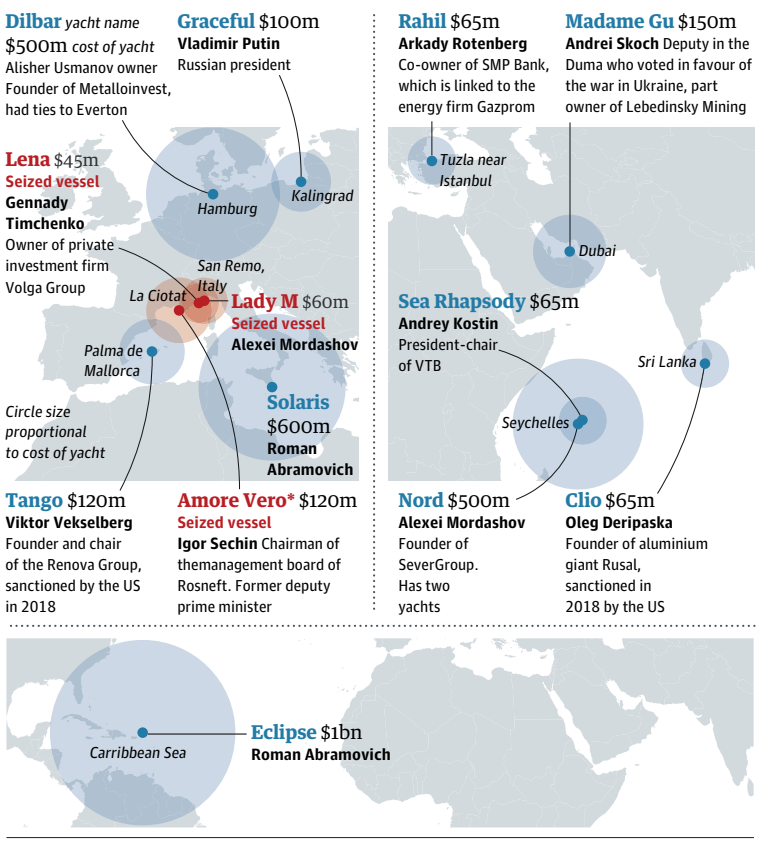
Its share price slumped by as much as 13% yesterday morning after the announcement of sanctions, before financial regulators ordered trading to be suspended to await clarification on sanctions.

Abramovich's stake was worth £1.4bn at the end of 2021, but had slumped to £320m on Wednesday evening.

The London Stock Exchange suspended trading in Norilsk Nickel on Thursday last week, along with 26 other companies with strong links to Russia. A further eight firms were suspended the next day for having similar ties.

Abramovich and Evraz were approached for comment.

Three yachts linked to Russian oligarchs have been seized



Source: Marinetraffic.com. Note: Last known positions shown. *Amore Vero - belongs to company of whom Sechin is main shareholder. Time stamped: 18.30 GMT

Superyachts Scramble to sail away from risk of seizure by the west

Rupert Neate
Niamh McIntyre
David Blood

Roman Abramovich's superyacht Solaris was heading east across the Mediterranean yesterday after sanctions were extended to the Chelsea FC owner.

His £460m vessel, which was tracked off the coast of Sicily, appeared to have joined the hurried sailings of Russian oligarchs moving their superyachts across the world to avoid seizure by governments enforcing sanctions in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Solaris left Barcelona, where it had been undergoing repairs, on Tuesday, according to Reuters, and by yesterday afternoon it was rounding the southern coast of Sicily.

Abramovich's other yacht, the even more luxurious Eclipse – estimated to be worth more than £760m after extensive renovations – set sail east from the Caribbean island of St Maarten towards international waters shortly after other oligarchs' yachts were seized.

Eclipse had crossed much of the Atlantic by midday yesterday when it was located to the west of the Canary Islands, according to vesselfinder.com.

Abramovich was sanctioned by the US in 2018 but joined the UK list yesterday. A spokesperson for Abramovich said earlier this week: "We never comment on the movements of the yacht or any other vehicles or vessels."

The 163-metre (577ft) Eclipse, which has nine decks, two helipads and a 16-metre swimming pool that can be converted into a dancefloor, is the most expensive vessel owned by individuals on the growing US, EU and UK sanction lists.

Many super-rich Russians appear to be attempting to move their superyachts to countries without formal extradition agreements with western governments.

French and Italian authorities last week seized three yachts worth more than£170m.

Titan, owned by Alexander Abramov, a billionaire iron and steel magnate, arrived in Maldives waters last week after sailing from Fethiye in Turkey. Its owner, who holds a big stake alongside Abramovich in the London-listed coal and steel group Evraz, is not on any sanctions lists.

Clio, a $65m superyacht which is owned by the aluminium billionaire Oleg Deripaska who has been subject to US sanctions since 2018, was reported last week to be heading for Raa Atoll in the Maldives, which has no extradition treaty with the US or the EU.

The US president, Joe Biden, addressed Russian oligarchs directly last week in his State of the Union address, saying: "We are coming for your ill-begotten gains."

Grant Shapps, the UK transport secretary, said the government would detain any yachts suspected of being Russian-owned if they entered UK waters.

Additional reporting **Gwyn Topham**, **Pamela Duncan**, **Joanna Partridge** *and* **Georgina Quach**

£460m
Value of Abramovich's yacht Solaris which was tracked sailing east across the Mediterranean

Analysis
Peter Walker

None of the justifications for sanctions against Abramovich are new. So why the delay?

Roman Abramovich has been a prominent and controversial figure since 2003, when he bought Chelsea football club, and the document imposing sanctions on him cites contracts he received before the 2018 World Cup. So why has nothing happened before now?

There are various reasons, but much of it boils down to one key factor: such things take time, and especially when compiling what officials stress has to be a "legally watertight" case against someone with access to extremely expensive lawyers.

"You need an exceptionally high bar for these sorts of things," one UK official connected to the process said. "Government lawyers are naturally a bit reticent, even if it is a very small risk."

Reading the entry for Abramovich on the list of new sanctions prepared by the Treasury's Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation, it is nonetheless notable that none of the justifications for the asset freeze against the 55-year-old billionaire involves new developments.

As a means of demonstrating Abramovich's close links to Vladimir Putin, the document lists benefits he has received via the Russian president, including tax breaks for his companies and contracts ahead of the 2018 World Cup, held in Russia.

Similarly, his links to other Russian figures who have now had sanctions placed on them, and his controlling shareholding in the steel company Evraz, which the UK government said potentially supplies material for Russian tanks, are both longstanding.

> *'You need [to clear] an exceptionally high bar for these sorts of things. Government lawyers are naturally a bit reticent'*

UK officials dispute the idea there has been an excessive delay in placing sanctions on Abramovich, pointing out they have done so before he has faced any similar restrictions via the EU or US. While it is known that the UK government has been compiling information on Abramovich's links to Putin for some time, one reason for delay cited by officials is the concern that human rights-based amendments to a 2018 sanctions law made the process more difficult – although legal experts, including the crossbench peer Lord Pannick, who tabled the amendments, dispute this.

One definite issue has been government capacity, particularly building up a post-Brexit independent sanctions system. This capacity has been increasing gradually, particularly following the new regime of so-called Magnitsky sanctions, imposed in 2020 against individuals accused of human rights abuses.

What has been imposed against Abramovich and six other Russiansis nonetheless comprehensive, banning those named from any sort of financial transaction in the UK and freezing all their assets.

For properties that can be definitively traced to his ownership, not only will he not be able to sell or rent them, but he cannot employ any staff, whether a cleaner or gardener, or even have an electricity supply.

If Abramovich were to try to see one last match at Stamford Bridge, the private plane on which he arrived could be impounded. If he wants to see a future for the club he loves, his only apparent option is to sell it and forfeit any of the resultant money. It might have taken time, but barring unexpected legal challenges, it seems as if officials have made their watertight case.

Oleg Deripaska Sanctioned oligarch scrutinised for political links in UK

Rob Davies

He is said to be Vladimir Putin's favourite industrialist, with deep links to the British and Russian establishments. Unlike some of his countrymen, Oleg Deripaska has cultivated influence quietly while staying out of the spotlight.

Yet the metals magnate has found himself at the heart of a string of high-profile political rows, culminating in the UK government's decision yesterday to add him to the list of individuals hit with sanctions in response to the war in Ukraine. The British rationale is that Deripaska is "a prominent Russian businessman and pro-Kremlin oligarch" who is "closely associated with the government of Russia and Putin", according to his entry on the list.

The 54-year-old has previously come under scrutiny for his UK political links, too. In 2008, he became embroiled in a bitter row that exposed his ties to two of the most powerful figures in modern British politics: Peter Mandelson and George Osborne.

It began when it emerged that Lord Mandelson, then the trade secretary, had cut import duties affecting Deripaska's aluminium empire, Rusal, after being entertained onboard his 73-metre Queen K superyacht off Corfu.

The plot thickened when the financier Nat Rothschild wrote to the Times that Osborne, the Tory shadow chancellor, had also met the Russian in Corfu, at the Rothschild family villa. Osborne, he said, "found the opportunity of meeting with Mr Deripaska so good" that he invited the Tories' fundraiser Andrew Feldman to visit Deripaska on his yacht.

Rothschild claimed that the idea was floated that Deripaska could donate to the Tories via one of his British companies, avoiding a ban on foreign funding of political parties. Deripaska was not present during the conversation and Osborne later said the mention of donations was not a suggestion but a standard explanation of the rules.

The Russian's addition to the sanctions list means he is now bound by a different set of rules entirely, including a freeze on his UK assets and a travel ban that covers private jets and yachts.

Like many oligarchs, Deripaska owes much of his wealth to the chaotic fall of the Soviet Union. He gained control of vast previously state-owned aluminium assets, which he later consolidated within the Rusal group, in partnership with Roman Abramovich, a fellow sanctions target. Rusal, now part of Deripaska's En+ Group, raised $1.5bn (£1.1bn) with a listing on the London Stock Exchange in 2017.

But in 2018 the US included the company and Deripaska on a list of sanctioned entities and oligarchs, in response to "worldwide malign activity" by Russia.

That same year, the Belarusian model and escort Anastasia Vashukevich claimed to possess evidence of Deripaska's involvement in attempts to interfere in US elections, after spending time on another of his yachts, the Elden. She was arrested upon her arrival in Moscow after deportation from Thailand.

▲ *Vladimir Putin, left, and Oleg Deripaska at a 2013 Kremlin signing ceremony with a Chinese delegation*
PHOTOGRAPH: SERGEI KARPUKHIN/REUTERS

US sanctions on En+, although not on Deripaska himself, were eventually lifted with the help of the Tory peer Greg Barker, who earned a bonus said to be worth more than £3m for his role in negotiating with the US Treasury. Deripaska agreed to leave the board of En+ and reduce his ownership interest to less than 50% under the plan. Barker was chair of En+ until he stepped down earlier this week.

One person familiar with En+ and Deripaska said his view of the west had been "jaundiced" by its apparent rejection of him: "He's torn between loving the west [but] underneath it all he's very much a Russian ideologue. I don't think he's a particular fan of Putin but he's a Russian patriot through and through."

Twitter Russian post on Mariupol bombing removed

Dan Milmo
Hibaq Farah

Twitter has removed a post from the Russian embassy in London about the Mariupol hospital bombing which claimed that the facility was no longer operational and that images had been faked, following criticism from Downing Street.

No 10 accused the embassy of posting disinformation after it posted pictures of the bombing emblazoned with the label "fake". A series of follow-up tweets, including a claim that a victim of the bombing was "played" by a beauty blogger, have also been removed after the platform said they "violated the Twitter rules".

Earlier, a spokesman for Boris Johnson said: "It is clear that this is further disinformation. You have seen the pictures of the people who were wounded during that attack, and you have seen what the prime minister said in his tweet yesterday."

The spokesman said he was "not aware" that the Foreign Office had held "specific conversations" about reprimanding the embassy for the social media post.

Nadine Dorries, the culture secretary, accused the embassy of publishing fake news and said it had been reported to Twitter.

Eliot Higgins, the founder of the investigative journalism website Bellingcat, urged Twitter to "kick these propaganda-spewing accounts off" the platform.

Twitter has been blocked in Russia in an apparent tit-for-tat response to the site blocking Russian state-owned media content across the European Union.

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Sunak considers limited extra measures to tackle cost of living crisis as pressure grows

Heather Stewart

Rishi Sunak will take some limited action to tackle the cost of living crisis in this month's spring statement but will reject calls to beef up his much-criticised energy bill reduction scheme, government sources say.

Amid mounting pressure from inside his own party, and with some City analysts predicting inflation could hit 10% within months, the chancellor has asked Treasury officials to draw up options for cushioning the blow for consumers.

But sources stress the government cannot protect the public from what is a global crisis – and underline the fact that the public finances are weaker than at the start of the pandemic. "We have dealt with one crisis that was supposed to be once-in-a-generation, and we have just walked into another one," they said. "There's only so much that can be done, and we've never seen oil prices where they are now."

One option would be to raise state benefits by more than the 3.1% pencilled in at last autumn's budget, which looks set to amount to a hefty real-terms cut, given the rapid increase in inflation since.

Torsten Bell, director of the thinktank the Resolution Foundation, said: "The chancellor cannot protect the country from the economic pain that higher energy prices bring, but he can decide who bears the burden. His top priority for the spring statement should be to ensure benefits don't fall £10bn behind the fast-rising cost of living."

Other options could include a further cut to the universal credit taper rate, which Sunak reduced in his October budget, allowing claimants to keep more as their earnings go up; or unfreezing personal tax allowances, which are due to drag more people into paying higher rates.

The prime minister acknowledged that consumers were facing difficult months ahead, as the UK and European economies are weaned off Russian energy. "Now is the time, and it may be a bumpy period, but we'll get through it as fast and well as we possibly can."

> **10%**
> *Predicted inflation within months, which has led to mounting Tory calls for the chancellor to act*

Boris Johnson told Beth Rigby on Sky News the government would do "everything we can to help households", but "the best thing for dealing with the cost of living ... is to have a strong economy, good high wage jobs".

The former Tory prime minister David Cameron has called on the government to cut taxes in the teeth of the crisis – but while Sunak has insisted he wants to be a tax-cutting chancellor, he remains committed to April's 1.25 percentage point increase in national insurance contributions to pay for health and social care.

Domestic fuel bills are expected to rise by an average of almost £700 a year when the price cap set by the regulator Ofgem is raised in April. In response, Sunak has promised a £150 council tax rebate for properties in bands A to D next month, and a £200 cut to energy bills in October, to be repaid over five years.

Labour have attacked the buy-now-pay-later nature of the scheme, and called for a more generous package funded by a windfall tax on the energy companies. Johnson defended the plan on Wednesday at PMQs, but it later emerged his team had commissioned Kwasi Kwarteng's business department (BEIS) to look at ways of making it more generous.

BEIS officials stressed it was not unusual to be asked to come up with policy options for future contingencies – but the fact No 10 asked for the work underlines the scale of concern about soaring living costs.

Privately, many Tory MPs say they believe Sunak's February cost of living measures now appear inadequate. "It just won't cut it," one backbencher said.

'We will give them no peace. We don't even need to gear back up. We've got boots by the door, we're ready'

◀ *Tina Rothery, a founding member of the Lancashire anti-fracking group the Nanas*

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/ THE GUARDIAN

Nanas against fracking

'Geri-activists' vow to resume fight if moratorium is lifted

Helen Pidd
North of England editor

Anti-fracking campaigners have vowed to give energy firms "no peace" if the government lifts the moratorium on fracking, pledging "inconvenient and noisy" protests at every site.

Steve Mason, campaign director of Frack Free United, said there was an army of retired "geri-activists" ready to lie down and face prosecution for the cause again.

Tina Rothery, who was arrested seven times at Cuadrilla's fracking site at Preston New Road near Blackpool, said campaigners were ready to unfurl their banners, dig out their drums and make life as hard as possible for any energy firm hoping to use the Ukraine crisis to restart fracking operations. It is only a month since fracking was declared finished in Britain after Cuadrilla announced plans to concrete up its Blackpool wells. But following Russia's invasion of Ukraine the extreme form of energy extraction is back in the spotlight, with a small cadre of Conservative MPs and energy lobbyists touting it as the solution to the nation's energy security.

Rothery was one of the so-called Nanas, a tireless band of women who kept watch at the gate of the Preston New Road site every day for years. Dressed in yellow tabards with matching headscarves and often with grandchildren in tow, they revelled in a form of peaceful protest designed for maximum annoyance.

The formation of the Nana Samba Band was viewed as the nadir for the Lancashire police officers tasked with guarding the site gate until the government imposed a moratorium on fracking in November 2019.

Rothery said: "A samba band is great if you like being inconvenient and noisy, and I can't tell you the joy of having a drum on when a cop is coming towards you," said Rothery. "Plus it's a great way to beat the shit out of your rage."

Another Nana protest saw the site festooned with bras – a lacy nod to studies that suggested a link between proximity to fracking wells and an increase in cases of breast cancer.

The Nana Samba Band will be making a racket outside the Conservatives' spring conference in Blackpool on 18 and 19 March, alongside protesters from around the UK.

"We will give the fracking industry no peace. We don't even need to gear back up. We've got boots by the door, we're ready," said Rothery. "We've done it before, we'll do it again."

Rothery's view, shared by many privately in the energy industry, is that protesters made fracking so difficult, expensive and politically unpalatable that the industry never really got off the ground in the UK. "We cost them so much money and time and public opinion that they could not recover from that," she said.

The Nanas formed after Cuadrilla began test drilling at Preston New Road in 2010, causing tiny earthquakes that spooked the local population in 2011.

In Doncaster, Dave Shaw, a local Labour councillor, said he doubted fracking would seriously restart, "because any meaningful level of extraction is going to take 10 years at least". But Frack Free South Yorkshire was on high alert: "We're not going into battle just yet, but there's certainly a cranking of the wheels."

Mason said the same was true in Ryedale, where a potential fracking site at Kirby Misperton prompted years of protest. The site is no longer at risk of fracking after Third Energy, the company granted the exploration licence, was taken over by the renewable energy firm the Wolfland Group. Mason is one of the company's directors, and said they hoped to use the existing wells for geothermal energy and the burial of captured carbon dioxide emissions.

But Mason added that other energy companies, including the chemical firm Ineos, still held licences to frack in Yorkshire and elsewhere, and he warned that protesters would be ready should the government lift the moratorium. "What we used to call geri-activists, they are more than ready to step up again ... to protect where they live."

Shaw said he would start to worry if Jim Ratcliffe, Britain's richest man and the Ineos chief executive, takes an interest in fracking again. "But as far as I can see, he's not waded in. If he starts making some noise I'll be a bit concerned."

UK to ease entry restrictions for refugees after days of chaos and pressure on Patel

Peter Walker
Political correspondent

The UK is to ease its rigid entry requirements for Ukrainian refugees, meaning those with passports can apply for entry online and only have to give biometric details when they are in the UK, Priti Patel has said.

The home secretary's announcement, responding to an urgent Commons question from her Labour shadow, Yvette Cooper, follows increasing criticism about the bureaucratic delays facing Ukrainians with family ties to the UK.

Many have gone to Calais only to find out they could not apply for visas there, and were sent to other cities. A number of UK consular offices had very limited numbers of appointments.

From Tuesday, Patel told the Commons, such appointments would no longer be needed for Ukrainian nationals with passports. They could apply remotely and would be told when they could travel.

"In short, Ukrainians with passports will be able to get permission to come here fully online from wherever they are, and will be able to give their biometrics once in Britain," she said.

"This will mean that visa application centres across Europe can focus their efforts on helping Ukrainians without passports." This will only be the case for people with passports, not ID cards, she said.

Cooper welcomed the change, but castigated Patel for the system thus far, calling the treatment "a total, total disgrace, bringing shame on to our country".

"I have to say to the home secretary – why does it always take being hauled into the House of Commons to make basic changes to help vulnerable people who are fleeing from Ukraine?" Cooper asked.

Cooper queried why the changes were only being made now when Patel "has had intelligence for weeks, if not months, that she needed to prepare for a Russian invasion of Ukraine", saying the home secretary should accept an offer of help from the armed forces.

"It is deeply wrong to leave people in this terrible state," Cooper said. "Our country is better than this. If she can't get this sorted out, frankly she should hand the job over to somebody else who can."

In her statement, Patel defended the decision to make checks on Ukrainian nationals before they came, saying she had sought advice from the security services before making the change.

Replying to Cooper, Patel insisted the government was taking a "pragmatic and agile approach" to visas. It was important for arrivals in the country to have proper documentation, she added, citing the Windrush scandal as an example of the problems that can otherwise occur.

Patel has also come under increasing pressure over recent days from fellow Conservative MPs to speed up the visa process.

Responding to her statement, a series of Tory backbenchers praised the change of stance but called for more to be done. One, Steve Baker, queried why a visa centre in Warsaw was closed from 5pm at weekdays, and all weekend, while the former minister Robert Buckland asked her to better coordinate UK officials, calling it "a crisis that will not wait".

While EU nations are allowing Ukrainians to stay long-term without visas, the only routes to the UK are existing ones, either for people with family ties, or if they are sponsored by an individual or organisation.

Patel's announcement came as the armed forces minister, James Heappey, said that British troops would be sent to help speed up the processing of visas for Ukrainian refugees in Poland but not France.

Heappey told Sky News that the Home Office believed it could reinforce the visa application centre in northern France without help from the Ministry of Defence.

But the MoD had been asked to "supply manpower to Poland, which is the busiest of the visa application centres by some margin" and that the department was "in the process of making that happen", he added.

Sponsorship
Public asked to offer rooms to Ukrainians

The public will be able to offer accommodation to Ukrainians under government plans after criticism of its strategy for those fleeing the invasion.

People will be asked to house refugees who have no family ties who would be eligible to work, access benefits and public services. At present those with family ties who are eligible to come have faced delays and few visas have been granted.

Sources confirmed to the Guardian a report in the Telegraph that under a wider sponsorship scheme, individuals, charities, firms and community groups will be able to offer accommodation and employment via a hotline and webpage. Those offering a place will be vetted and must agree to house a refugee for a minimum period.

A source in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities said it was still considering the time that people from Ukraine could stay under the scheme. A full announcement is expected on Monday by Michael Gove, the communities secretary.
Nadeem Badshah and Aubrey Allegretti

'We keep getting new advice' Anger of families stranded at Calais

Analysis
Jessica Elgot

Criticism undermines home secretary's position and shines light on immigration posture

Priti Patel faced days of public and private opprobrium before the Home Office's abrupt U-turn to halt Ukrainian visa appointments for passport holders yesterday. But has the prime minister already lost faith in the home secretary?

One cabinet source said Boris Johnson had been perturbed by the volume of negative headlines around the low number of refugees being granted visas – and speculated that Patel's future would again be under discussion at the summer reshuffle.

They pointed in particular to the cover of this week's Spectator magazine – which Johnson used to edit – which featured a cartoon comparing the UK's bureaucratic response with that of other EU nations. "Priti is fundamentally opposed to a more liberal system, yes, but the other issue is that she just cannot do effective, fast-paced delivery," another MP said.

Allies of the home secretary say that is unfair, as officials are pulling 15-hour days to set up new systems from scratch and respond to changing humanitarian and security pictures. They predict a surge in visa numbers by the end of the week to around 5,000.

It has been a week of punishing criticism for the home secretary from her own MPs in parliament, including claims about staffing in Calais and appointment wait times that had to be retracted. The Tory MP Roger Gale said that her behaviour this week would "have been a resigning matter under any normal administration". Another, Alec Shelbrooke, told the immigration minister Kevin Foster that the operation of the scheme was "a disgrace".

On Tuesday, sources said Patel was given an uncomfortable grilling by cabinet ministers about the UK's response at their weekly meeting. One cabinet source said it was "not a slanging match but more like an interrogation".

Grant Shapps, the transport secretary, cross-examined Patel repeatedly on the details of what was on offer and how support could be accessed. "She floundered a bit," the source said.

A Patel ally did not deny there were tensions with the prime minister but said they did not think the home secretary had lost his confidence. "The PM just wakes up and looks at the headlines and then moans about it," they said.

▲ *Priti Patel 'cannot do effective, fast-paced delivery', one MP said*

"Generally they have a pretty good relationship compared to almost anyone. She'll come speak to him, they see eye to eye on a lot. She likes him and she's taken a lot of blows for him. But of course it's difficult when there are just volumes of these tragic stories every single day in every paper."

There is a widespread view among MPs and officials that a wider Home Office culture – beyond Patel – is also at fault.

"Fundamentally, cutting immigration dominates people's thinking," a former official said. "They see their job, from when they wake up in the morning, as stopping people getting into this country.

"But actually, that's not their job. Their job is to enforce our immigration policy, which does include letting some people in.

"Senior people are in that building now, reading these horrendous stories in the press and they are like, argh, fuck, why is this happening again?

"But if the general culture is to find ways of keeping people out, it's not a surprise, really."

▲ *Ukrainian refugees in Calais wait at a bus stop in order to travel to Brussels to apply for a visa to enter the UK*
PHOTOGRAPH: GRAEME ROBERTSON/THE GUARDIAN

◀ *Andrii and Alla Berliuta (from left) with Svitlana Apanasenko and Karolina and Klaudion Dzhulai*
PHOTOGRAPH: GRAEME ROBERTSON/THE GUARDIAN

Amelia Gentleman
Calais

Twelve days after witnessing his home in Kharkiv being shelled by Russian forces, Sergei Koletvinov, a London-based van driver, was stopped at the entrance to the Calais ferry and told he could not bring his family to Britain without a visa.

He was turned back at 2.30am yesterday morning, and spent the rest of the night trying to sleep in his car with his wife, Oxana Lubeinoko, their two-and-a-half-year-old son, Simon, and five-year-old daughter, Alissa, while parked outside a temporary Home Office advice centre in the port, turning the engine on occasionally to keep warm. They had consulted friends and Facebook pages and were under the impression that because he had permanent residency in the UK, they would have no problem crossing the border.

A few metres away in the same car park, Svitlana Apanasenko from Kyiv, who is eight months pregnant and nervous about going into premature labour, was also trying to get some sleep, squashed inside a minibus with seven other people. Her family had been turned back at the border in the early hours as well, halting an already long and stressful journey to safety.

Yesterday, amid international outcry over the UK's slow and restrictive visa arrangements for Ukrainian refugees, the home secretary, Priti Patel, announced a modest reduction of the red tape involved. However, these tweaks to an exacting bureaucratic process were criticised by Amnesty International as "too little, too late, and yet more evidence of the Home Office's corrosively anti-refugee attitude". And because they will only begin next week, the changes offered little comfort to hundreds of refugees who are currently stuck in northern France trying to get appointments in UK visa application centres in Paris, or across the border in Belgium, before then facing a wait of up to five days to see if their application is approved.

Throughout Wednesday night and yesterday morning, Ukrainian refugees continued to be turned away at the UK border in the Calais ferry port. By 11am, Koletvinov had been seen by some Home Office staff, and was waiting to be taken by bus to Lille with his family to submit biometric data for the visa in a temporary centre. No one was able to tell him how long the visa application process might take. The family had eaten nothing since Wednesday except for KitKats offered by UK border officials.

> ***'This has been the worst time of my life. We're not asking for anything; we just want to be safe'***
>
> **Sergei Koletvinov**
> *London van driver*

"This has been the worst time of my life," he said, grey-faced and trembling from exhaustion, scrolling through messages on his phone that showed images of the ruined buildings near his block of flats, every window blown out. He said he was too tired to feel anger at the unexpected bureaucracy.

Koletvinov, who has been working in the UK for eight years, spending a few weeks a year with his wife and children in Ukraine, was with his family when the Russian attack began; they took just 15 minutes to pack up and leave.

He said the uncertainty over when or whether they would be granted visas was hard to process. "We still don't know what's happening," he said. His children busied themselves with colouring books and crayons on the floor of the port building, climbing over and under the waiting room's metal seats, oblivious to their parents' unease.

He plans to rent a bigger flat in London, and find better-paid work to support his family. "We're not asking for anything; we just want to be safe," he said.

Alla Berliuta, an assistant at a care home in Southampton, had spent the last week driving with her husband, Andrii, an alarm fitter who, like her, has permanent residency in the UK, to rescue relatives from a town just outside Kyiv. She collected her heavily pregnant sister Apanasenko, her 15-year-old niece, a sister-in-law, a brother-in-law and a two-year-old nephew from the border with Moldova, but they were forced to reroute via Romania to visit a UK centre there and be fingerprinted.

"No one understands the visa system. It's so new and we were given different advice at different times," Berliuta said. "My brain feels a bit boiled by everything. I've been so worried about my sister because her pregnancy has been very complicated and she needs a caesarean." She was also worried that the visa-related delays to the journey would put her job at risk, although she said that her employer, Allied Healthcare, had been very understanding.

Because the family had already visited the visa appointment centre in Romania, Home Office staff were able to finalise their visas, and they were able to board a ferry to the UK early yesterday afternoon.

The French interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, accused Britain of being "a bit inhumane" and urged ministers to "stop the technocratic nitpicking", a stance echoed by several other refugees.

A new UK visa application centre will be opened in Arras today, 70 miles east of Calais. "To support those people in Calais who are eligible for the scheme, we have worked closely with the French to set up a new, larger temporary visa application centre in Arras for referrals only," a Home Office spokesperson said.

Officials said over 1,000 UK visas had now been granted in centres across Europe. The UN estimates that over two million people have fled Ukraine.

▶ *UK-based driver Sergei Koletvinov with wife Oxana and children Simon, two, and Alissa, five*
PHOTOGRAPH: GRAEME ROBERTSON/GUARDIAN

Sketch
John Crace

How can Priti Vacant survive these blunders? The same way she's survived all the others

You can only imagine the kompromat that Priti Patel must have on the prime minister.

As international development secretary in Theresa May's government, she had been sacked for going rogue with her own foreign policy. For most politicians that would have been an end to their career. But not Priti Vacant. When Boris Johnson became prime minister he promoted her to home secretary.

Then came the inquiry that found Patel guilty of breaking the ministerial code for bullying staff. That again should have been enough for instant dismissal. Instead The Suspect ordered colleagues to protect "The Prittster" at all costs. And so she survived. To bumble on with her characteristic mix of incompetence and viciousness. No more so than during the war in Ukraine.

While most other government departments have upped their game over the past weeks, the Home Office has been a national embarrassment. From not disclosing where most of the visa application centres were situated to making sure those that were advertised were closed. Cue hundreds of refugees being sent on pointless journeys from Calais to Lille to Paris. And back.

On Monday, Vacant had managed to give the Commons the wrong information about which visa application centres were open and where they were. One hesitates to say she lied, as she's genuinely stupid enough not to be across the finer details of what her department is up to.

Yesterday Patel tried again, this time with actual detail. To make things easier, refugees with Ukrainian passports and family in the UK would now be allowed to apply for visas online. Quite how this would work for refugees whose passports were lost or missing in the chaos of war, she didn't say. Nor how people without data roaming on their phones would manage to upload their visa applications. Even assuming they could still manage to charge their phones.

This was a start, said Yvette Cooper, the shadow home secretary. But why had it taken yet another urgent question to shame Patel into action at the dispatch box? Vacant was a model of indignation. Contrary to appearances, she hadn't been dragged to the Commons. She had been gagging to be asked. It's just that she was a little shy and didn't want to appear too pushy. Patel: the model of modesty.

Then came the moment that silenced the chamber. The visas and the bureaucracy were actually doing the refugees a favour, Patel continued. Because if we had an open border policy and let in as many as wanted to come, then we'd have a Windrush situation where people couldn't prove they had leave to remain.

This was Vacant either at her most vicious or at her most stupid. It was the hostile environment policy that had sought to deport people legally entitled to be here who didn't have all the paperwork. A hostile environment policy dreamed up by May in 2012 and slavishly pursued by Patel.

Most MPs were in a forgiving mood, though. Ready to congratulate Patel on her baby steps toward humanity, rather than to castigate her for the all-too-obvious shortcomings in her plans. There again, there was every chance the home secretary would be back to explain another policy disaster in the coming weeks. Time was on their side. If not on the side of those fleeing the war.

'The gala is about taking a stand for human values. Our unity strengthens the message'
Ivan Putrov
Ballet dancer

◀ *Ukrainian-born dancer Ivan Putrov, former Royal Ballet principal, is spearheading the charity gala along with the Romanian ballerina Alina Cojocaru*
PHOTOGRAPH: TERI PENGILLEY

Ballet stance
Ukrainian and Russian stars to raise relief funds with London gala

Harriet Sherwood
Arts and culture correspondent

International ballet stars are to take part in a charity gala at the London Coliseum this month to raise money for people in Ukraine.

Dance for Ukraine will feature the most prominent Russian ballerina outside Russia along with artists from the Royal Ballet, the English National Ballet and the Paris Opera Ballet. Proceeds will go to the Disasters Emergency Committee's Ukraine humanitarian appeal.

The gala is being spearheaded by the Ukrainian ballet star Ivan Putrov and the Romanian ballerina Alina Cojocaru, who trained together in Kyiv before joining the Royal Ballet.

Putrov said: "The gala is about taking a stand for human values. Our unity strengthens the message. Everyone's participation will help someone just like them who found themselves in dire circumstances due to violence of war.

"Dance, music and art move the world, not violence. Since we, the artists, possess the gift - we must use it."

Among ballet stars set to appear are the acclaimed Russian ballerina Natalia Osipova and Katja Khaniukova, who fled Kyiv during fighting in 2014 to join the English National Ballet.

Those involved in the gala are donating their services, and the English National Opera has waived its fee for the London Coliseum.

Cojocaru said: "Mere words can offer little in the face of such suffering and the loss of innocent human lives. Art, love and humanity have the power to inspire and even to heal. In this spirit we will unite to dance and offer what help we can."

A number of other fundraising events for Ukraine have been organised by artists and performers as well as auction houses and galleries.

Charities' plea
Give money, not goods

The war in Ukraine has prompted a massive outpouring of support around the world. Some people are offering up their homes to host refugees. Others are organising collections of goods to send to people in Ukraine or neighbouring countries.

But charities say donating cash to charities is the best way to help those caught in the crisis.

Dan Walden, Unicef UK's senior emergencies specialist, said money, not goods, was the most efficient and effective way to distribute emergency aid.

"We understand that it's tempting for people to want to make donations that seem more personal to them: raiding their cupboards for items they can imagine being helpful," he said.

"But time is of the essence in Ukraine and we can get money transferred from our bank to a local bank in Ukraine within moments."

Giving cash transfers to trusted charities, he said, was not wasteful, did not create dependency, and was empowering and effective. "It would take months to get goods transferred between countries and the logistics would be very complicated, time consuming and expensive - usually more than the goods are worth."

Judith Escribano, director of communications at Action Against Hunger UK, agreed. "We can't send food, clothes, blankets or medical equipment from the UK, even if they're in perfect condition," she said. "We don't have the capacity to sort the goods here or to distribute them once there."

Experts say humanitarian aid charities are practised in delivering funds over the long term, so monetary donations might contribute towards the relief effort and help to resettle families further down the line.

But Mark Greer, managing director of philanthropy services at the Charities Aid Foundation, said aid groups understood that it might not be feasible for some people to give financially at the moment. "If people want to donate goods and supplies, it's worth speaking to international aid charities first, to see what's most needed."

But if donors gave food or medical supplies in the UK, Greer said, in addition to shipping costs there were extra benefits that charities lost out on. "UK charities can claim Gift Aid on monetary donations, which means that they effectively receive an extra 25% in extra funding ... because they can claim back tax."

He added: "Employees can also use Give As You Earn, also known as payroll giving, to set up tax-effective charitable donations directly from your wages, which works in a similar way to a salary-sacrifice arrangement."

Amelia Hill

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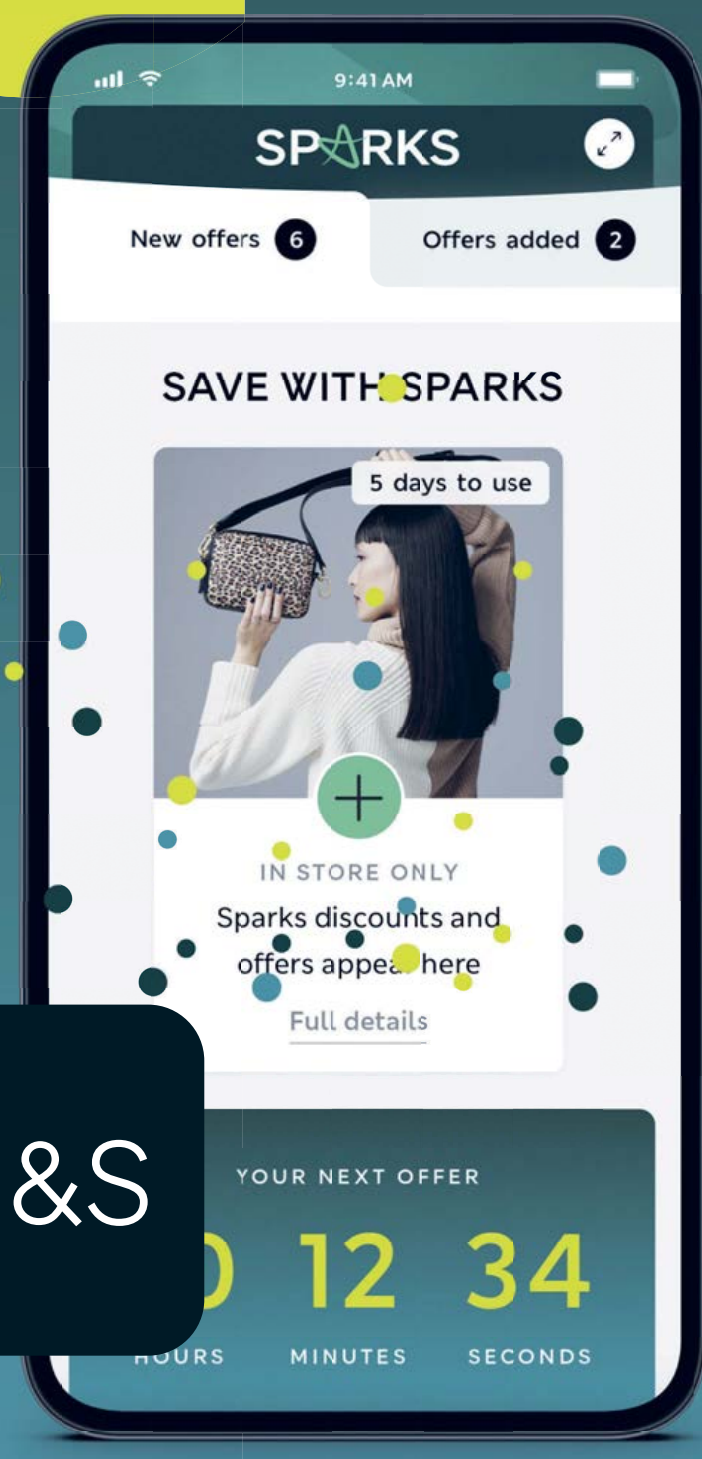

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£5bn on Covid tutoring scheme not being spent wisely, say MPs

Richard Adams
Education editor

A national tutoring programme is failing to help the children who need it most, according to MPs, who say ministers should terminate their contract with the consultancy firm running the scheme unless it "shapes up".

A report by the education select committee gives a scathing account of the government's £5bn national tutoring programme (NTP), which aims to help children in England catch up on learning missed during the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021.

The MPs criticised the "spaghetti junction of funding" that makes it difficult for schools to support tutoring programmes. But they reserved their sternest criticism for Randstad, the Dutch multinational service provider given a contract to administer the scheme by the Department for Education (DfE) last year.

The committee said it had "huge concerns" over Randstad's ability to meet the targets it was set. The NTP is said to have reached only 15% of its overall target so far.

"The NTP is missing its overall target to deliver tuition to 2 million children. When Randstad appeared before us, they were unable to provide us with figures setting out who was accessing the NTP," the committee said. "If the NTP is not meeting its targets, the [DfE] should terminate its contract with Randstad."

MPs said the £5bn funding was not being spent wisely and the government "risks baking in deepening inequalities between disadvantaged children and their better-off peers".

Randstad has removed a requirement to reach 65% of disadvantaged children from its contracts with tutoring firms, according to Schools Week.

Robert Halfon, the Tory MP who chairs the education committee, said: "The government must ensure Randstad shapes up, or boot them out."

The DfE said new statistics about the NTP's operation would be published tomorrow. A DfE spokesperson said: "We continue to work with Randstad to ensure as many children from all backgrounds - in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds - across the country can benefit from high-quality tutoring."

Bridget Phillipson, the shadow education secretary, said the poor design of the NTP meant ministers were "pouring taxpayers' money down the drain".

"Our children have been an afterthought for the Tories throughout the pandemic and are now being neglected in our recovery," she said.

Karen Guthrie, Ranstad's senior programme director for the NTP, said: "We are working closely with schools across the country who are best placed to select pupils that need tuition the most."

Cost of content to compete with rivals forces Netflix to increase subscriptions again

Mark Sweney

The cost of watching Netflix hits from Bridgerton to The Crown is to increase, as the streaming platform raises its prices for subscribers in the UK and Ireland for the second time in less than 18 months.

The move, the latest sign of the financial toll the growing competition is taking on the world's most popular service, follows a round of price rises for UK subscribers in December 2020 and for those in Ireland in March last year.

Netflix, which has about 14 million UK subscribers and 600,000 in Ireland, according to Ampere Analysis, is to raise the price of its most popular package to £10.99 a month. This offers simultaneous viewing on two screens, HD and the ability to download shows and films to two devices.

It is also raising the price of its basic package for the first time in a decade. The entry-level plan, which allows viewers to watch only one screen at a time and download to one device, will rise by £1 a month to £6.99.

▲ *Bingeing on Bridgerton will come at a higher price for UK subscribers*

The cost of Netflix's premium plan, which allows it to be watched on up to four different screens at a time and downloads to up to four devices, will increase by £2 a month to £15.99.

In Ireland, the basic plan will rise by €1 to €8.99, the standard package will increase from €12.99 to €14.99 and the premium tier will rise from €17.99 to €20.99.

The price rises, which were expected after a hefty increase for its US subscribers in January, will come into effect immediately for new subscribers. Existing subscribers will get 30-days notice by email, depending on their billing cycle.

Netflix said the increases were inevitable in order to maintain a continual pipeline of new content for viewers amid rising competition from rivals including Amazon's Prime Video, Disney+ and HBO Max.

"We have always been focused on providing our members both quality and clear value for their membership," said a Netflix spokesperson.

"Our updated prices reflect the investment we have made in our service and catalogue and will allow us to continue making the series, documentaries and films our members love as well as investing in talent and the creative industry. We offer a range of plans so members can choose a price that works best for them."

The UK is Netflix's biggest production base for TV shows and films outside the US with a $1bn annual content spend.

Before the two rounds of price rises Netflix's most popular tier cost £8.99 and its premium plan cost £11.99.

Its rival Disney+, which launched in the UK in early 2020, raised its prices from £5.99 to £7.99 last year. The decision was taken after it doubled its content by adding its Star service to Disney+, offering programmes such as Lost and Desperate Housewives, designed to appeal to a wider non-Disney audience.

PHOTOGRAPH: ROYAL MAIL/PA

First class A selection of winning designs from the children's Royal Mail Heroes of the Pandemic stamp competition, which are being issued today. A total of 606,049 entries were received from children across the UK.

In brief

Coronavirus

PM announces terms of reference for inquiry

The prime minister, Boris Johnson, has published the draft terms of reference for the public inquiry into the government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The inquiry, which will be chaired by the retired judge Lady Hallett, will cover the public health response, including how decisions were made, and a wide range of other issues, from shielding and lockdowns to the procurement of PPE and the closure of schools.

The inquiry, which begins with a consultation on its terms of reference, is asked to produce a "factual narrative account" of the response to the pandemic - and then to identify any lessons to be learned, "thereby to inform the UK's preparations for future pandemics". Heather Stewart

Music

TikTok star to sing for UK at Eurovision in May

TikTok star Sam Ryder has been announced as the UK entry for the 2022 Eurovision Song Contest. The singer-songwriter will perform the track Space Man at the final in Turin, Italy, on 14 May.

Ryder found fame covering songs on the platform during lockdown and has accumulated 12 million followers, making him the most followed UK music artist on TikTok, according to the BBC.

Ryder said: "I hope to sing my head off in a way the UK can be proud of, and to showcase a song I wrote with my friends last summer makes the whole experience even more special. See you in Turin."

He co-wrote Space Man with Grammy-winning songwriter Amy Wadge and Max Wolfgang. Last year the UK was the only country to score zero points. PA Media

Courts

Former Radio 1 DJ jailed for child sexual abuse

A former BBC Radio 1 DJ has been jailed for 12 years for arranging to have sex with vulnerable children in the Philippines. Mark Page, who worked at the station in the 1980s, was guilty of "grotesque sexual abuse" of children as young as 12, the judge said. The trial at Teeside crown court heard that Page, 63, tried to bargain down the price for a sexual encounter with a 12-year-old girl and a boy of 13, saying 3,000 pesos (£44) was too much.

Page was convicted on Wednesday of four counts of arranging the commission of a child sex offence between 2016 and 2019. The judge also imposed a lifelong sexual harm prevention order. Josh Halliday and agencies

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NHS children's gender identity service 'is being overwhelmed'

Libby Brooks

The only NHS gender identity service for children in England and Wales is under unsustainable pressure as the demand for the service outstrips capacity, a review has found.

The interim report of the Cass Review, commissioned by NHS England in 2020, recommends that a network of regional hubs be created to provide care and support to young people with gender incongruence or dysphoria, arguing their care is "everyone's business".

Led by the paediatrician Hilary Cass, the interim report explains that the significant rise in referrals to the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) at the Tavistock and Portman NHS foundation trust in London has resulted in overwhelmed staff and waiting lists of up to two years that leave young people "at considerable risk" of distress and deteriorating mental health. The number of referrals to the service went from 138 in 2010-11 to 2,383 in 2020-21.

Last spring, the Care Quality Commission demanded monthly updates on numbers on waiting lists and actions to reduce them in a highly critical report on GIDS.

Differing views and lack of open dialogue about gender incongruence in childhood and adolescence – and whether transition is always the best option – means that patients can experience a "clinician lottery", says the review, which carried out extensive interviews with professionals and those with lived experience.

It notes that the clinical approach used by GIDS "has not been subjected to some of the usual control measures" typically applied with new treatments. The report says there are often tensions between the expectations of the young person – who often wants rapid access to physical interventions after a long, challenging wait to be seen – and the responsibilities of the clinician.

Another significant issue raised with the review team was that of "diagnostic overshadowing", whereby once identified as having gender-related distress, other complex needs – such as a neurodiversity or a mental health issue that would normally be managed by local services – can be overlooked.

2,383

Number of referrals to the NHS gender identity service in 2020-21, up from 138 in 2010-11

While noting that "many of the challenges and knowledge gaps that we face in the UK are echoed internationally", the review group raises serious concerns about the lack of data collection by GIDS and more broadly, especially on outcomes for the recent increase in girls questioning their gender identity.

In a letter directly to children and young people at the beginning of the report, Cass says "more services are needed for you, closer to where you live". But she also cautions them that "there is still a lot we don't know about the long-term effects" of hormone treatments.

Last September the court of appeal overturned a judgment that children under the age of 16 are unlikely to be mature enough to give informed consent to puberty-blocking drugs.

Cass writes that the review group will spend the next few months assessing all available information on hormone treatments. A spokesperson for the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust welcomed "the focus of on increasing and broadening the care and support available for this group of patients who are currently waiting far too long and on developing the evidence base".

Sand and the rising sun
A surfer heading out into the chilly North Sea, with a glorious sunrise in front of him, on Long Sands beach at Tynemouth in North Tyneside yesterday.

PHOTOGRAPH: RAOUL DIXON/NORTH NEWS & PICTURES

Cancer care waiting times for England longest on record

Pamela Duncan
Denis Campbell
Georgina Quach

Waiting times for cancer care in England are the longest on record, the latest figures have revealed, forcing tens of thousands of patients a month to wait longer than they should to see a specialist or start treatment.

The NHS's performance against seven of its nine cancer waiting times targets has fallen to its worst ever level, prompting concern about delayed diagnoses and treatment.

The worsening of access to cancer care was revealed in NHS England's latest monthly batch of data showing how quickly hospitals are providing key services, including surgery and A&E care, against targets that are supposedly patient rights, enshrined in the NHS constitution.

The number of people waiting for operations such as hip and knee replacements and cataract removals, for instance, rose again, to just over 6.1 million, another record. Almost 24,000 have been waiting for more than two years.

And while 93% of people who GPs suspect may have cancer should be seen by a specialist within two weeks of their urgent referral, in January just 75% were – the lowest proportion ever. While 152,093 of the 202,816 people GPs referred to hospital were seen within two weeks, 50,723 – one in four – were not.

Similarly, 96% of people with confirmed cancer should start treatment within 31 days of doctors deciding to treat them, but just 89.6% did so. That means 2,644 of the 25,524 patients had to wait longer than a month to start chemotherapy, have radiotherapy or undergo surgery.

And an even smaller proportion of people with cancer who should start treatment within 62 days of being referred by a GP did so in January. While the target is 85%, hospitals managed to treat only 61.8% of them in that time.

"It is deeply troubling to see these figures now at yet another worst ever record, as we know that any delay to diagnosis and treatment causes huge amounts of anxiety and distress for people living with cancer," said Eve Byrne, the director of advocacy at Macmillan Cancer Support.

Macmillan and Cancer Research UK identified longstanding shortages of staff in the NHS cancer workforce as a key reason for the sharp decline in performance. Michelle Mitchell, the chief executive of Cancer Research UK, said: "Winter pressures and Omicron combined have only added weight to a historically overburdened NHS, but staff shortages were holding down efforts to improve cancer survival well before this."

Global Covid death toll 'may be three times the official figure'

Denis Campbell
Health policy editor

The Covid-19 pandemic may have claimed 18.2 million lives around the world, more than three times the official death toll, a study suggests.

The higher figure is a better estimate of the true global toll to the end of 2021, according to an analysis by a consortium of health researchers published in the Lancet. They based their calculation on the number of "excess deaths" which they believe were caused directly or indirectly by the pandemic. These are calculated by looking at the difference between the number of deaths recorded from all causes and the expected number based on previous patterns.

"Our estimates of Covid-19 excess mortality suggest the mortality impact from the Covid-19 pandemic has been more devastating than the situation documented by official statistics," say the co-authors, who were led by Dr Haidong Wang, an associate professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington.

"Official statistics on reported Covid-19 deaths provide only a partial picture of the true burden of mortality. While the official Covid-19 death toll was 5.9 million between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021, the new study estimates that 18.2 million excess deaths occurred over the same period, suggesting the full impact may have been greater."

The research is based on what Wang and his collaborators say are the first peer-reviewed estimates of excess deaths due to the pandemic in 191 countries and territories.

If their estimate is correct then "the global all-age rate of excess mortality due to the Covid-19 pandemic was 120.2 deaths per 100,000 of the population and [the] excess mortality rate exceeded 300 deaths per 100,000 of the population in 21 countries".

Globally south Asia (5.3 million), north Africa and the Middle East (1.7 million) and eastern Europe (1.4 million) had the most excess deaths.

For the UK, the report's estimated excess Covid deaths (163,000 to 174,000) was close to the actual reported figure of 173,000.

Vulnerable children are being failed by social care firms – report

Patrick Butler
Social policy editor

The UK has "sleepwalked" into a dysfunctional market for children's social care, with local authorities forced to pay excessive fees for privately run services that often failed to meet the needs of vulnerable children, an official report has concluded.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) called for an overhaul of the £6.5bn market for children's residential and foster care, saying it had found "significant problems" with the provision of the privately dominated services.

Private companies were too often failing to provide the right services in the right places, it said, with children frequently placed in homes miles from where they lived, separated from siblings and unable to access care and therapies they needed.

Authorities across the UK told the CMA that it was especially difficult to find placements for older children and those with more complex needs. Private providers in England accounted for 75% of children's homes. Lack of an appropriate children's home placement meant some young people had been placed illegally in unregulated settings, the CMA report said.

Profit margins were "materially higher than expected", the competition regulator said, with the largest residential home providers posting operating profit margins of 22.6% in recent years on prices that averaged more than £150,000 a year for each place.

£150,000
The average yearly price the largest private residential care home providers charge for each place

The CMA urged the government to step up oversight of private providers of care, help local authorities to improve the way they managed care markets and support councils to set up more in-house fostering agencies to compete with private companies.

The Department for Education has been approached for comment.

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Jess Phillips urges MPs to introduce tougher sentences for femicide

Rachel Hall

Ministers must introduce tougher sentences for femicide and investigate whether female suicides are the result of domestic violence in order to tackle brutality against women and girls, Labour MP Jess Phillips urged as she read in parliament the names of 128 women killed in the past year.

Phillips told MPs these demands would be included in a "families' manifesto for change" that the Labour party is preparing with the help of families of the victims on her lists – which she has shared with parliament for seven years running.

"Each one had stories to tell about their daughters being murdered, the perpetrators on bail … or killings that went uninvestigated because the woman had taken drugs," she said.

Speaking at a debate held in honour of International Women's Day on 8 March, Phillips was joined by the family members of two young women killed by their ex-partners: Carol, Matt and Zeb Gould, the parents and brother of Ellie Gould, a 17-year-old student; and Julie Devey, mother of Poppy Devey Waterhouse, a 24-year-old trading analyst.

The family members have campaigned since February 2020 to change the minimum sentence for domestic murder. Although their daughters suffered multiple injuries after they were brutally stabbed and the killers tried to hide their crimes, the guidelines for murder sentencing meant that both received minimum tariffs set at less than 20 years.

In the case of Gould's killer it was because he was under 18, and for Devey Waterhouse, because killings in the home using an implement found at the scene – such as a kitchen knife – are given lesser sentences.

Phillips sourced the names of the murdered women from the Counting Dead Women project led by the campaigner Karen Ingala Smith.

Phillips told MPs it should be the government's responsibility to keep track of murdered women, rather than requiring women such as Ingala Smith "to give away their labour for free in the pursuit of their own safety".

The list included Sabina Nessa, a 28-year-old teacher whose killer was recently convicted in a high profile trial that gained public attention for its parallels with the murder of Sarah Everard. The two cases prompted an outpouring of fury from women over the lack of action to tackle violence against women and girls. Before reading the list, Phillips noted that the killings of the women she was preparing to cite had all occurred since "that supposedly watershed moment".

She added: "Every name I'll read, there will be a story of how better mental health services, even the slightest suggestion of offender management, or the availability of quick specialist victim support would have saved their lives."

▼ *Jess Phillips's list includes Sabina Nessa, who was attacked and killed in south-east London last September*
PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS J RATCLIFFE/GETTY

▲ *Boris Johnson announces plans to recruit 20,000 extra officers during a 2019 visit to a police training centre*
PHOTOGRAPH: DANNY LAWSON/PA

Rush to recruit more police risks hiring racists and criminals, warns watchdog

Rajeev Syal
Home affairs editor

Boris Johnson's promise to hire 20,000 police officers has increased the risk of introducing misogynist and racist recruits, a police watchdog has said, amid concerns that a discriminatory culture exists in forces across England and Wales.

Sir Tom Winsor, the chief inspector of constabulary, said police must confront a series of problems, including the aftermath of Sarah Everard's murder by a serving Met police officer, if damage to public confidence is be restored.

His report comes a month after Dame Cressida Dick's resignation as Met commissioner, which followed a damning inquiry by another police watchdog into a culture of violently misogynist, racist and homophobic messages exchanged by some officers at Charing Cross police station in central London.

Winsor reiterated warnings that the "sheer magnitude and speed" of the recruitment campaign to hire 20,000 police officers "inevitably carries risks", adding that there was a "heightened danger that people unsuited to policing may get through and be recruited".

He said in too many cases the system "fails" when on occasion organised crime groups try to infiltrate the police, which can have "catastrophic consequences".

"When unsuitable applicants lie on their application forms, conceal their social media activity or play down their criminal connections, the quality of vetting needs to be consistently high," he said.

"If during the probationary period a constable displays behaviour like homophobia, racism, misogyny or dishonesty it's necessary to take that seriously. If they just say: 'well, he's going to be a good cop, we'll knock off the rough edges', you're storing up a problem that could last for 30 years."

In 2019 Johnson pledged to recruit an extra 20,000 police officers. Police numbers had dropped by more than 20,000 since 2010.

Asked about the scale of problems with culture and behaviour in policing, Winsor said at a briefing yesterday: "I don't think that what we saw in Charing Cross police station is limited to London, but we don't have evidence yet of just how widespread that is. I think these matters are taken very seriously ... by all police forces. And while what has happened recently is London-centric it is not London-limited in all probability."

Revealing how a regional chief constable had told him within the past fortnight "we have this problem too", without disclosing their identity, he added: "I expect that there are pockets of those things in other parts of the country How much and how bad it is, we don't know."

His comments follow the release of the wide-ranging report that also found fraud had "exploded" and continued to be wrongly treated as a low priority by many forces.

The model of local accountability involving police and crime commissioners had fractured some relationships between police and politicians and left some chief constables lacking in confidence in their operational independence, it said.

The "fragile architecture" of having 43 police forces, devised in 1962 and implemented in 1974, is "very far from fit for purpose" in the 2020s.

Online crime was now by far the most prevalent type of crime. "It used to be that our children were unsafe if they were out on the streets. They're now more unsafe in their own bedrooms," Winsor said.

Public expectations for the police to fight crime cannot be met without sufficient funding and "the public through their politicians must decide how much threat, harm and risk they are prepared to tolerate".

> ***'I don't think what we saw in Charing Cross police station is limited to London'***
>
> **Sir Tom Winsor**
> *Police watchdog*

Winsor added: "Major shortcomings in policing persist, and these need to be addressed. Criminality is often now complex and far more sophisticated, and investigations can take far longer.

"If the police continue to use 20th-century methods to try to cope with 21st-century technology, they will continue to fall further and further behind."

Speaking to the BBC last month, the business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, claimed the prime minister had been correct to leave out fraud when quoting statistics stating that crime had decreased because fraud was not a "crime that people experience in their day-to-day lives".

However, Winsor said it was wrong for politicians to leave fraud out of crime statistics.

"Fraud needs to be taken far more seriously. It is indefensibly a low priority for the police. It is a tsunami of offending which can and does lead to catastrophic human suffering," he said.

The report comes at the end of Winsor's 10-year stint in the job, which he will leave this month. He said: "As I reflect on the past decade in policing, I commend the courage and commitment of police officers and staff across the country.

"The severity of the problems that our police service now faces should not be underestimated, but the public should be reassured by the strong, pragmatic and professional approach of police officers and staff."

Leak of IRA spy's location 'did not cause his murder'

Lisa O'Carroll
Dublin

The murder of a British spy at the heart of the IRA was not caused by the leak of his whereabouts in rural Donegal, the police ombudsman for Northern Ireland has concluded.

Marie Anderson's report into the 2006 death of Denis Donaldson, two weeks after his cover was blown, found that the Police Service of Northern Ireland should however have carried out a risk assessment when his whereabouts were published in the media.

The investigation into the killing, claimed by the Real IRA, follows a complaint by Donaldson's family that the police had leaked information about his location to a number of people, including journalists.

In 2005 Donaldson, a former leading Sinn Féin member who had served time in Long Kesh prison, confessed to being a spy for the British government for more than 20 years.

The revelation, which came after the peace agreement, was a bombshell and his family believe it could have been avoided had the police behaved differently.

On 15 December 2005 Gerry Adams, then the Sinn Féin president, revealed at a press conference in Dublin that Donaldson had been a spy, something that would have been punishable by death under the IRA during the conflict in Northern Ireland. Donaldson later confirmed this in a statement read out on RTE later that day.

After his cover was blown Donaldson moved to a cottage near Glenties in County Donegal, where he was murdered on 4 April 2006.

Anderson concluded that a risk assessment should have been undertaken after his whereabouts were revealed by the now-defunct Sunday World newspaper.

The ombudsman found that the police's warning to Donaldson that his cover had been blown was not bogus but based on "reliable information from a credible source".

While she said a risk assessment should have been done after his whereabouts had been made public, she also stated that "if such a risk assessment had been undertaken and shared with AGS [Garda Síochána], that the murder of Mr Donaldson could have been prevented".

▲ *Denis Donaldson was murdered in his cottage in Donegal in 2006*

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Stage review

Hitchcock's talkie hit still speaks to us

Blackmail
Mercury theatre, Colchester
★★★☆☆

Chris Wiegand

An artist is dead in his Chelsea studio, stabbed in the throat, blood everywhere. But this stage is no crime scene: the only red stuff is the jam that police officer Harold Webber spreads on his bread.

That's because Mark Ravenhill has sliced off the first act from Charles Bennett's thriller, best known for becoming Alfred Hitchcock's first talkie in 1929. We don't see the artist's attack on a young woman, Alice, who kills him in self-defence. In Ravenhill's version we instead hear about it in grim detail. Alice (Jessie Hills) first tells Harold (Gabriel Akuwudike), to whom she is engaged, and later her mum, Ada (Lucy Speed).

Harold has been assigned the case, and the conflict between duty and loyalty gives the play the suspenseful momentum of a potboiler (further boosted by the arrival of a blackmailer).

Ravenhill includes a wealth of social context. Ada tuts about Alice's flapper style and narrows her daughter's horizons. Awe of a higher social class is shown as one reason why Alice accompanied the artist to his home, while the extra emphasis on the abuse of power resonates in the age of #MeToo.

There are other headline 2022 issues, too, such as wavering trust in the police to protect women. The challenge, in Anthony Banks's stylish production, is to treat these seriously while oiling the wheels of an edge-of-the-seat thriller.

One smart design touch among many is the silhouette of a ghostly nightdress hanging in a window, evoking the image of Anny Ondra as Alice in the film. Hitchcock casts quite the shadow, but by the end Ravenhill emerges as a master of moral suspense.

Until 19 March

◀ *Ekman's magnolia tree, found only on Haiti, was once used for firewood but is no longer useful and is now endangered*

Most plants of no use to humans 'will go extinct'

Sofia Quaglia

Researchers have categorised more than 80,000 plant species worldwide and found that most of them will "lose" in the face of humankind – becoming extinct because people do not need them. This means that the plant life of the future will be hugely more homogenised than that of today.

The findings, which paint a stark picture for biodiversity, cover less than 30% of known plant species and as such are a "wake-up call", say the researchers, highlighting the need for more work in this field.

"We're actually beginning to quantify what's going to make it through the bottleneck of the Anthropocene [epoch]," said John Kress, botany curator emeritus at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in the US and lead author of the paper which was published in the journal Plants, People, Planet.

"It's not the future, it's happening. The bottleneck is starting to happen right now. And I think that's part of the wake-up call that we are trying to give here."

Researchers at the Smithsonian Institution set out to categorise which plant species have been most affected by humans since the start of the Anthropocene – the geological epoch marked by humanity's profound impact on Earth.

They analysed data on 86,592 vascular plant species, gathering information about the uses for and perceptions of these plants: for example as crops, invasive weed species, endangered species, or rare species involved in illegal trade.

From this data, they created a system to indicate how the plants will fare in the future, describing eight distinct categories and concluding that many more species will be pushed to extinction by human activity on Earth rather than be aided by it.

There are 6,749 plants which are "winners" and helpful to humans, such as corn, rice, wheat and other crops, which cover 40% of the surface of the planet, and plants which faced extinction in the wild but are surviving in cities – such as the ginkgo tree, planted on every block of New York City, according to Kress. There are also 164 "winners" that are not useful to humans – mainly invasive species such as kudzu.

About 20,290 species of plants are categorised as losers, mostly because they are no longer useful to humans and are already recognised as endangered species, such as Ekman's magnolia, a species of tree in Haiti once cut down for firewood and which does not grow anywhere else.

Additionally, the scientists branded 26,002 species as potential losers in the future, and 18,664 species as potential winners.

▲ *The ginkgo thrives in cities and is considered a 'winner' in the survey*

6,749

Number of plant species, out of 86,592 surveyed, categorised as successful and useful to humans

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▼ Birmingham
An Australian shepherd is groomed as Crufts returns to the NEC after it was cancelled by Covid last year
PHOTOGRAPH: OLI SCARFF/GETTY IMAGES

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▼ Gabriel, aged 10, with friends, a regular at Grove adventure playground in south London
PHOTOGRAPH: JILL MEAD/THE GUARDIAN

'We connect children here with nature. They are part of it without noticing – it's just here in every corner'

Ashlee Aderele
Play leader

'Somewhere special' Fears for the last adventure playgrounds

Harriet Grant

"I like everything here but that swing makes me feel sick." Leire, seven, has a smile on her face as she pushes her friends Romeo and Gabriel. Despite the cold, the three of them have hurried straight to the Grove adventure playground in their school uniforms.

Walk down a quiet street in Brixton, south London, and the playground appears on the skyline as a riot of red, yellow and blue. "When a child walks in they know they are somewhere special," said Nick Lewis, who helped save the playground a few years ago.

Here, children – some of whom may live in flats with little or no outside space – can climb wooden towers, light fires in the communal fire pit and jump in puddles.

But a "Save our Playground" sign hangs in the trees. The Grove's constant struggle for funding is part of a wider crisis for adventure play, an energetic philosophy born in the years that followed the second world war and inspired by activists who saw how happily children played on bomb sites.

The play lead, Ashlee Aderele, said: "We connect children here with nature but they don't even notice – it's just here in every corner – the fire, the mud, the wood – they are part of it without noticing because they are playing.

"But there isn't any funding just for having fun. We can get funding from Lambeth council for projects like food for the kids, or for providing sessions for children with special needs, and we are surviving but there is very little money just for play."

Figures from Play England given exclusively to the Guardian show that at least 21 adventure playgrounds have been lost across England since 2017. Their research found 126 sites of "staffed outdoor play", free for children to attend. This is down from 147 in 2017. Many more have lost direct council funding or have severely reduced their hours or staffing.

21
The number of adventure playgrounds that have been lost across England since 2017

In Crawley, East Sussex, they have closed all four of the town's adventure playgrounds, despite a local campaign to save them. "It's heartbreaking," said the playworker and photographer Jeff Pitcher, who was involved in the campaign, but was made redundant when the playgrounds closed. "I went over today to look through the fence at one, Creasys Drive. The play equipment – which only needed minor repairs – has been removed and it's just a locked expanse of land now."

Pitcher said children needed the spaces more than ever. "These playgrounds were built as part of Crawley's 'new town' dream back in the 60s. They were refuges, where kids could learn how to rub along together and play healthily outdoors. Last summer, in their final days we had 300 families a day across the two most popular sites."

The Guardian spoke to local parents who said the playgrounds were a huge loss. The council says it has "mothballed" two of the sites "pending investigation into future use" insisting they had reached the end of their lives. The two other sites will open as "fixed, unsupervised" play areas this year.

Crawley council argues that the playgrounds were expensive, at about £30 a head, by the time they closed; a figure Pitcher denies.

Anita Grant, the head of Play England, said static playgrounds could not replace the magic of well run adventure playgrounds. "The loss of 21 adventure playgrounds is 15% of provision, a significant and worrying trend away from the hope the Blair government generated with its generous play funding.

"They are community spaces where thoughtful staff help children engage with nature and play with other children of different ages – an experience we are losing in wider society."

Other councils face difficult choices as budgets are cut. In Bath, Lewisham, Oxford, Southampton and Southwark, Play England notes closures or reduced services.

There are models of good practice. In Islington, Grant runs six thriving adventure playgrounds with a 15-year funding commitment from the council. The first was started by local mothers in the 50s.

At the Grove, occasional grants from charities keep them alive.

Aderele watches as Romeo and Gabriel get ready to jump. "It's really fun helping children face their fears in the outdoors. I have a job where I just play all the time."

Power, division and politics

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World

BJP claims victory in four state elections including in crucial Uttar Pradesh

Hannah Ellis-Petersen
Delhi

India's ruling Bharatiya Janata party has claimed victory in four significant state elections, in a sign of the sweeping power of Hindu nationalist politics across the country.

In a crucial win, the BJP defied historical precedent and retained power in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous and politically significant state with over 180 million voters. Early results yesterday showed the party had won at least 266 out of 403 seats, giving it a clear majority.

It was the first win for an incumbent party in the state in more than three decades, and ensures that the chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, a Hindu monk known for his hardline views, will be the first in the state's history to remain in power for a second consecutive term.

It secures Adityanath's status as one of the most powerful figures in the BJP and potential successor to prime minister Narendra Modi, as well as offering a ringing endorsement for the hardline Hindu nationalist agenda that Adityanath has enacted over the past five years.

During his tenure, Adityanath, who dresses in saffron robes and led his own "Hindu army", had often used communal rhetoric seen as targeting Muslims during his time as chief minister. He had banned the slaughter of cows, an animal which is holy to Hindus, and brought in an anti-conversion law against "love jihad", a disproven conspiracy theory that Muslims are forcing Hindu women into marriage in order to convert them to Islam. Journalists and activists were also routinely harassed and charged, and the Uttar Pradesh police stand accused of routinely murdering Muslims and low-caste Dalits under Adityanath's watch.

Uttar Pradesh was one of the states hit hardest by the second Covid wave that engulfed India, with corpses filling up the Ganges river as hospitals and burial grounds became overwhelmed. The state has one of the highest unemployment rates in India.

But Adityanath's win has been credited to his development agenda and perceived crackdown on crime, as well as the popularity of Hindu nationalist politics in India, which is shifting the country away from its secular roots towards becoming a Hindu nation.

Holding on to the important state had been seen as essential for the BJP as it prepares for national elections in 2024. Early results showed that the BJP, which has ruled India's central government since 2014, led by Modi, also held on to power in the states of Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur.

In the Uttar Pradesh capital, Lucknow, BJP workers rode bulldozers to the party offices in celebration of their crushing win. In a victory speech in the city, Adityanath told crowds: "Under prime minister Narendra Modi's leadership, today the BJP won a majority in Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur. The voters have blessed Modi's policies of development and good governance."

The assembly results have been portrayed as a final nail in the coffin for India's once formidable National Congress Party, the country's oldest political party and main national opposition for the BJP. Yesterday, it became evident that Congress had lost seats in Goa and Manipur and failed to win back its former stronghold of Punjab, one of the few states where it had still held power. In Uttar Pradesh, it won just a single seat.

"The revolution marches on" was the headline following the result on an editorial in the Indian Express newspaper, which called the results "sobering" and added: "It sends a plain and simple message ... the BJP simply has no competition."

Instead, in a victory that could be transformative for India's future political landscape, it was the Aam Admi Party (AAP), a relatively new party in power in Delhi but with limited presence outside the capital, that claimed a landslide win in Punjab, with the comedian turned politician Bhagwant Mann to become chief minister.

The Punjab win could set AAP up as a national contender in the 2024 general elections, as various regional parties jostle to fill the opposition vacuum left by a weakened Congress.

Congress leaders issued sombre statements. "This is a challenging moment for the Congress party and Punjab most certainly has been a disappointment," said a party spokesperson, Aadil Singh Boparai.

Rahul Gandhi, the de facto Congress leader, tweeted that the party "humbly accept people's verdict. We'll learn from this."

The former government minister Ashwani Kumar, who quit the Congress party, said it was a "moment of reckoning". "One thing is clear," he said. "The Gandhi leadership no longer delivers for the Congress."

Australia suffering 'weather extremes from climate crisis'

Natasha May
Sydney

The wet season is unusually dry in northern Australia while other parts of the country struggle through the effects of drought, as climate change means more extreme heatwaves and floods simultaneously.

The Bureau of Meteorology data shows that in the past month, as heavy rain has hit south-east Queensland and coastal New South Wales, northern Australia has had well below average rainfall. The latest bureau report also shows that February rainfall was below average for Tasmania, south-east South Australia, most of Victoria and parts of the southern coast of Western Australia.

David Karoly, a professor in geography, earth and atmospheric sciences at the University of Melbourne, says that it is typical of a La Niña event to experience increased rainfall in northern and eastern Australia, and drier conditions in the south-west as the "other part of La Niña".

However, Karoly says because climate change is "superimposed" upon these patterns, it exaggerates the more typical La Niña conditions, meaning "the wet getting wetter and the dry getting drier".

Carly Veitch, a wheat and sheep farmer at Quairading in Western Australia, said while bad bushfires in the past had all happened in the hills and tree country, the most recent fires which affected her neighbours 50km away were in very flat open farming country – "the sort of area you'd never think you were in danger or wouldn't have time to get out".

She said the extreme heatwave and fires in WA have started more discussions about greater preparedness for climate change at a local industry level. "It's starting to feel like we're living it now rather than something that could happen in the future."

▲ *Despite flooding in parts of Australia, rainfall has been below average for large areas of the country, including Tasmania* PHOTOGRAPH: MATT DEVER/ALAMY

Gabriel Boric
Chile to swear in its youngest president
Page 30

'Getting busier'
Backpackers return to Thai tourist spots
Page 32

◀ *Supporters of India's ruling party Bharatiya Janata party celebrate after learning the initial poll results at the party headquarters in Delhi*

PHOTOGRAPH: ADNAN ABEDI/REUTERS

However, Karoly said the weather in the northern part of the country has been more unusual. While the wet season started off fairly wet for northern Australia, the dry February and early March is not typical.

"A La Niña event would typically be associated with wetter wet seasons in Queensland," Karoly said.

Bruce Currie, a cattle farmer in the desert uplands bioregion in central west Queensland, said the benefit of the big rain event in November has been negated by the subsequent heat.

"It doesn't matter how much rain you get, if you get severe heat conditions afterwards the transpiration and evaporation from the soil burns your country off."

When a drought hit in 2017, Currie took his stock off the property. He has been trying to rebuild his cattle numbers, but says if the heat keeps burning off the pastures, he will be back to de-stocking in three months. The move to de-stock, he says, comes as "we try and protect our ground cover and our land and our environment".

"The land is everything. If you don't look after your land, your land can't look after your stock, can't look after you, and the impacts from having degraded landscapes impacts downstream people," said Currie.

"The water runs off quicker, it causes more severe flood events, it silts up infrastructure like dams and weirs, it muddies the water, if you're in the reef catchment it goes out on to the reef and impacts the fishing and tourism industries."

Steve Turton, a professor of environmental geography at Central Queensland University, says the oppressive heatwaves in north-east Queensland and WA are due to stalled weather patterns caused by "blocking" high-pressure systems.

Turton believes you still have to "wait until the fat lady sings", as more rain could arrive in the wet season which lasts until April. "I think La Niña has one more burst up her sleeve." Karoly said in a more typical La Niña event you would get rain not just in the coastal area but also inland, but the lack of rain inland is related to the dryness in the northern wet season regions.

> ***'Wait until the fat lady sings. I think La Niña has one more burst up her sleeve'***
>
> **Steve Turton**
> *Environmental scientist*

Angus Whyte, a sheep farmer in south-west NSW, 80km away from the SA and Victorian borders, says while the drought is not as severe as 2017-19, he's still "teetering" – unable to get back to above average seasons and fully restore his soil moisture.

Whyte feels there are generalisations about conditions in coastal areas affecting the whole of the state when there is so much variability even in the one state.

"The thing about Australia – there's always someone flooding, there's always people in drought. And there's always someone in between."

North Korea is testing new missile, White House warns

Julian Borger
Washington

The US believes North Korea is testing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) in what the Biden administration called a "serious escalation" that will trigger more sanctions.

Pyongyang conducted two recent missile launches that it said were ultimately intended for putting satellites into space. After scrutinising them, US intelligence has assessed the real intention was to test parts of the new ICBM.

"Based on analysis of these launches, the US government has concluded that these launches involved a new ICBM system that the DPRK [North Korea] is developing," John Kirby, the Pentagon spokesperson, said. "This is a serious escalation by the DPRK."

The US believes the ICBM being tested was first displayed by the Pyongyang regime in the Worker's Party parade on 10 October 2020, and then again at a defence exhibition a year later.

"The purpose of these tests, which did not demonstrate ICBM range, was likely to evaluate this new system before conducting a test at full range in the future, potentially disguised as a space launch," Kirby said.

The US made its assessment in conjunction with Japan and South Korea, officials said, and would share the conclusions with other allies and partners, including the UN.

US forces have stepped up their monitoring and intelligence collection in the region, and new sanctions are to be introduced today aimed at further restricting North Korea's access to advanced technology that it could use in its weapons programmes.

The White House says that Joe Biden is open to diplomacy and would be prepared to meet the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, "when there is a serious agreement on the table".

North Korea conducted three ICBM tests in 2017, and has carried out a total of six nuclear tests, before suspending both types of testing ahead of the summits with Trump.

In January, Pyongyang said it would reconsider "restarting all temporarily suspended activities", and analysts have seen signs of construction at North Korea's Punggye-ri nuclear test site for the first time since its closure and dismantlement in the spring of 2018.

'A warrior' Youngest president ushers in a new era for Chile

John Bartlett
Santiago

After a dizzying rise from student protest leader to head of state in just over a decade, 36-year-old Gabriel Boric was due to be sworn in today as Chile's youngest president.

Boric will be flanked by several of the student leaders who served alongside him through two terms in congress, and who are now joining his cabinet. "This is the best generation of young politicians Chile has had in 50 years," said Luis Maira, 81, a former minister who was a mentor for the new president. "Without a shadow of a doubt, Boric is leading us into a new chapter of Chilean history."

Chile was rocked by months of unrest in 2019 over inequality, corruption and inadequate social welfare. Many of the protesters' demands echoed those that Boric and his contemporaries had pushed in a student movement which demanded that Chile be rebuilt with the concerns of its people at the core.

It is a vision that Boric has vowed to achieve as president – although a divided congress will probably hamper progress.

In the background representatives who come from every corner of Chile are drafting a constitution to replace Gen Augusto Pinochet's 1980 charter. The new constitution will be put to a referendum this year.

The new government will also have to negotiate heightened tensions between the state and indigenous Mapuche in the south, and a migration crisis in the north.

Although Boric makes a point of insisting that history does not begin with his generation, there is no denying its impact on politics.

"He always wanted to know where those who held power came from and what they had done before," said Maira.

In the winter of 2011, Boric and his contemporaries paralysed Santiago with their movement targeting free, high-quality education for all, catapulting them into the national consciousness.

▲ *New president Gabriel Boric, 36, has pledged to rebuild Chile by putting the concerns of its people at the heart of change* PHOTOGRAPH: ALBERTO VALDES/EPA

A year later, Boric took the reins at the University of Chile's student union in the centre of the capital, where bright swirls of colour now adorn a building once occupied by Pinochet's feared secret police.

"He always had something about him, and when he put himself forward for congress I joked that he might become president," said Sonia Moreno, 59, who has worked at the union for more than a decade. As she flicked through pictures of her and a long-haired Boric on her phone, she recalled how he pushed her to finish her schooling and even helped raise money for an operation on her arm.

"I have so much faith in him because he's a warrior – he does what he says. He has a strong character and he's determined," she said.

In 2013, Boric was elected to congress representing Magallanes, Chile's southernmost region, vowing to change the country from the bottom up.

Those around him paint a picture of a voracious reader and patient negotiator, who is determined to collect opinions, bridge political divisions and build majorities.

Boric has repeatedly said that as part of his ambition to decentralise Chile, he hopes to leave the presidency with less power than when he inherited it.

He has also been careful to signpost the changing of the times with his early choices.

Boric reiterated his backing for Chile's constitutional process the morning after the election, and last month he announced a female-majority cabinet with 14 women and 10 men – a symbol of the feminist Chile he iwants to build.

He will live in Barrio Yungay, Santiago, where eclectic rows of low-rise homes and graffitied facades line cobbled streets – a far cry from the outgoing president, the billionaire Sebastián Piñera, who has a large house in the capital's affluent north-eastern suburbs.

The home that Boric has chosen sits between streets named Freedom and Hope.

"If Boric is able to oversee the transition from one constitution to another, and from one generation to the next, then I would consider that a success," said Maira.

"If he can do that, then the effects will be felt across Latin America, as he could be remembered as the leader of a new era in a region that has rarely found consensus."

PHOTOGRAPH: ROB GRABOWSKI/AP

Looking back live The singer Dua Lipa performing in Chicago this week on her Future Nostalgia tour. Originally intended to support her second album, which was released in 2020, the tour was delayed several times by pandemic restrictions, before finally starting last month in the US. The UK leg next month includes performances in Manchester, London, Cardiff and Newcastle.

Danish PM says sorry to Inuit children taken from Greenland

Agence France-Presse

Denmark's prime minister has apologised in person to a group of Greenlandic Inuit who were removed from their families and taken to Copenhagen more than 70 years ago as part of an experiment to create a Danish-speaking elite.

"What you were subjected to was terrible. It was inhumane. It was unfair. And it was heartless," Mette Frederiksen told the six surviving members of that group at an emotional ceremony in the capital. "We can take responsibility and do the only thing that is fair, in my eyes: to say sorry to you for what happened."

In 1951, 22 Inuit children between the ages of five and eight were sent to Denmark, Greenland's colonial power at the time. The parents had been promised their children would have a better life and return to Greenland one day as the future elite, in a deal between authorities in Copenhagen and Nuuk, the Greenland capital.

The children were not allowed contact with their families. After two years, 16 were sent back to Greenland but were placed in an orphanage. The others were adopted by Danish families. Several of the children never saw their real families again.

Trump lawyer knew plan to delay Biden's certification was unlawful, emails show

Hugo Lowell
Washington

Interrupting the certification of Joe Biden's election win on 6 January last year as part of an attempt to return Donald Trump to office was known to be unlawful by at least one of the former president's lawyers, according to an email exchange about the potential conspiracy.

The former Trump lawyer John Eastman conceded in an email to Greg Jacob, counsel for the then vice-president, Mike Pence, that the plan was a violation of the Electoral Count Act.

But Eastman then urged Pence to move ahead with the scheme anyway, pressuring the former vice-president's counsel to consider supporting the effort on the basis it was only a "minor violation" of the statute that governed the certification procedure.

The admission the scheme was unlawful undercuts arguments by Eastman that there was no wrongdoing in seeking to have Pence delay the certification past 6 January.

The request to adjourn the joint session was one of several strategies Eastman had laid out in an infamous memo presented to Trump, Pence and top aides last year that outlined how the former vice-president could attempt to unilaterally overturn the 2020 election results.

The strategy to delay the joint session past 6 January was about buying time for Trump's team to pressure state legislatures to send Trump slates of electors to Congress on the basis that the Biden slates were illegitimate because of supposed election fraud.

The email exchange – revealed in court filings by the select committee last week – shows Eastman attempted to take advantage of the fact that the Electoral Count Act was not followed exactly in the immediate aftermath of the Capitol attack to try to benefit Trump.

"The Senate and House have both violated the Electoral Count Act this evening – they debated the Arizona objections for more than two hours. Violation of 3 USC 17," Eastman wrote to Jacob in his 9.44pm email, referring to the statute in the US criminal code.

But in the second part of his email, Eastman claimed that because the statute had already been violated in small ways – delays that amounted to a few hours at best – Pence should have no problem committing "one more minor violation and adjourn for 10 days".

That admission is significant since it demonstrates Eastman knew the plan to delay Biden's certification was unlawful – which the select committee believes bolsters its case that he was involved in a conspiracy to defraud the United States and obstruct Congress.

The House counsel, Douglas Letter, appearing on behalf of the select committee in federal court, said of Eastman's request of Pence: "It was so minor it could have changed the entire course of our democracy. It could have meant the popularly elected president could have been thwarted from taking office. That was what Dr Eastman was urging."

But if Eastman knew the scheme violated the law, it raises the additional possibility that Trump's former lawyer Rudi Giuliani also knew it was unlawful when he called the Republican senator Tommy Tuberville and asked him to object to Biden's wins, after the Capitol attack.

The judge in the case ruled in the panel's favour after the hearing on Tuesday, allowing a review of around 100 emails to determine whether the records were subject to privilege, though he did not comment on whether Eastman might have engaged in criminal activity.

A puffadder shyshark. Ecosystems and biodiversity in oceans remain insufficiently studied
PHOTOGRAPH: JUSTIN GILLIGAN/SAVE OUR SEAS/WILDSCREEN

64%
Proportion of the world's oceans, outside exclusive economic zones, that qualifies as the high seas

1.2%
Proportion of the high seas protected from human activity under current international controls

Treaty is 'a once in a lifetime chance' to protect high seas

Karen McVeigh

The world has a "once in a lifetime" chance to protect the high seas from exploitation, scientists have said, as UN negotiators meet in New York this week to hammer out a new treaty on the oceans. One called the treaty, which will set out a legal framework to protect biodiversity and govern the high seas, the most significant ocean protection agreement for 40 years.

"It's extremely important it happens now," said Prof Alex Rogers, the science director of Rev Ocean, an ocean research NGO. "We've continued to see industrialisation of areas beyond national boundaries, including distant-water fishing and potentially deep-sea mining."

A vast portion of the ocean, 64% by surface area, lies outside the exclusive economic zones that stretch from the shorelines of individual states. This huge area, referred to as the high seas, hosts a wide array of ecosystems and species, many insufficiently recorded. The increasing reach of shipping, seabed mining and new activities such as "bioprospecting" have put the high seas' biodiversity at increasing risk of exploitation.

A group of 50 countries has signed up to the 30x30 coalition, which aims to protect 30% of the planet's land and sea by 2030. But without an agreement, these pledges will have no legal basis on the high seas. Currently, all countries can navigate, fish and carry out scientific research there with few restrictions. Only 1.2% of the high seas are protected.

"One of the fallacies about the high seas is that you have this great big empty space," said Doug McCauley, associate professor of ocean science at the University of California, Santa Barbara. "But by all indicators it is busier that it has ever been."

A baby leatherback sea turtle

McCauley contributed to a paper highlighting 10 biodiversity hotspots that would benefit from protection. They include the Costa Rica Dome – nutrient-rich waters that attract yellowfin tuna, blue whales and leatherback sea turtles. The paper concludes that, while a patchwork of international bodies and treaties manage resources and activity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, they vary greatly in their mandates.

"The treaty won't create protections for hotspots but will hopefully create a structure so that we can create international parks for the first time," he said. "It's a starting place and a really important starting place."

Shane Warne's body arrives in Australia after Thailand death

Australian Associated Press

The body of the cricket great Shane Warne has arrived back in Australia almost a week after he died of a suspected heart attack in Thailand.

The 52-year-old died at a resort on the Thai island of Koh Samui last Friday, prompting widespread grief as fans mourned the loss of one of the world's best ever spin bowlers.

His remains arrived at Essendon airport in Melbourne at about 8.30pm local time yesterday aboard a chartered jet. Thai police said this week an autopsy showed Warne's death was due to natural causes.

Warne's family has accepted the Victoria government's offer of a state memorial service, to be held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on 30 March.

The MCG was the stage of the legspinner's famous Ashes hat-trick in 1994 and 700th Test wicket on Boxing Day in 2006 – his final series before he retired from international cricket.

Warne's family issued a statement on Monday night describing the days since his death as "a never-ending nightmare".

His parents, Keith and Brigitte, said: "Looking to a future without Shane is inconceivable. Hopefully the mountain of happy memories we all have will help us cope with our ongoing grief."

The Victoria premier, Daniel Andrews, has said there will be no crowd limit for Warne's memorial service. "It's Australia's greatest sports stadium," Andrews said. "He, without a doubt, is one of Australia's greatest sportspeople, and it's the best place to say goodbye to him.

"We wish we weren't doing it, of course. He's gone too soon."

'Things will improve' Thai tourism finds hope as backpackers drift back to the sun

◀ *Travellers at a Chiang Mai market before Covid brought a halt to tourism*
PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN ANGERSON/ALAMY

▶ *Elephant owners were among those badly hit by the pandemic*
PHOTOGRAPH: LAUREN DECICCA/GETTY

Andrew Nachemson
Chiang Mai

After months of absence, Chiang Mai's waterfalls, night markets and hostels are once again filling up with a familiar sight: backpackers. While Thailand was once a haven for budget travellers, Covid-19 devastated the tourism industry, which is only now starting to take tentative steps towards reopening.

People familiar with Chiang Mai at its tourism peak will still find the city relatively quiet, but those in the travel industry are seeing glimmers of hope after two years of despair.

"We can see the number slowly increase," said Palakorn Viriya, owner of Deejai Backpackers hostel, adding that the previous two years had been a "struggle".

Palakorn said before Covid, he usually had 40-60 guests every night, but now he gets about 10. Still, this is a marked improvement from 2020 and 2021.

"The last customer left the hostel in July 2020 and then there was nothing until November 2021," when Thailand eased entry restrictions for vaccinated visitors, he said.

Palakorn says he was lucky because he owns the property outright but estimates as many as 80% of his competitors were forced to close down, mostly because they couldn't afford rent with no customers.

There are more customers now "but still not really that much if compared before Covid", said a Thai tour guide and driver who goes by the English name Vincent.

Vincent said before Covid hit, he had customers every single day, but now he only has customers two or three times a week, and many are domestic travellers. During peak Covid waves, he had no customers at all and was forced to go back to working at his family's rice mill.

According to data from the country's tourism ministry, nearly 204,000 tourists arrived in Thailand last month. January arrivals slumped to 134,000 owing to an Omicron wave, while in December about 230,000 came. There were fewer than 200,000 arrivals in the previous 11 months.

But the recent increase pales in comparison to the 39.8 million international tourists who thronged Thailand's beaches, mountains and cities in 2019 before the pandemic, contributing 21.9% of Thailand's total GDP.

Still, Palakorn and Vincent both believe the industry has rounded the corner. "I can see the town is getting busier," Palakorn said.

"I think the tourist situation will absolutely improve," said Vincent.

Deejai hosted a pool party on 6 March, its first event in two years, and Palakorn said there would be more to come, though there are still complications. He estimates that about 250 people attended, a "successful" turnout. All attenders were given rapid Covid tests before being admitted, with two testing positive and being sent home.

But constantly changing regulations and onerous requirements may be keeping some tourists at bay. In Thailand, fully vaccinated travellers must apply online for a Thailand Test and Go pass before entering, which requires vaccination, health insurance, flight bookings, and a pre-booked hotel and PCR test for the first night. This costs hundreds of dollars before the traveller has even been approved to enter.

Some tourism experts have urged Thailand to scrap the pass and the first-night quarantine.

"Thailand is at a crossroads now. There's no choice but to open up and get rid of Test and Go," said Thailand Hotels Association president Marisa Sukosol this month.

In neighbouring Cambodia, fully vaccinated tourists take a rapid test on arrival and are free to go if it is negative. Palakorn would like to see Thailand's policies change, or risk losing visitors to other countries.

"I want to see, when you arrive at the airport you just show your vaccine and that's it," he said.

◀ *Novice monks wear masks as they walk past Wat Chedi Luang temple in Chiang Mai after blessing tourists, who are slowly returning to Thailand*
PHOTOGRAPH: PONGMANAT TASIRI/SHUTTERSTOCK

Film about protests in Hong Kong breaks record at cinemas in Taiwan

Rhoda Kwan
Taipei

A film on the pro-democracy protests that rocked Hong Kong in 2019 has broken a box office record in Taiwan for an overseas Chinese-language documentary, within the first fortnight of its release.

Revolution of Our Times, directed by Hongkonger Kiwi Chow, grossed about $17m NTD (£455,700) as of Wednesday, its distributor said.

Released in Taiwan on 25 February, the film has been shown at about 40 cinemas, with some patrons booking out entire cinemas to screen it for free. It has even drawn the support of the president, Tsai Ing-wen.

The documentary chronicles the months of mass demonstrations in Hong Kong in which millions took to the streets to march against a proposed extradition law. The protests prompted Beijing to impose a national security law that observers say has been used to quash dissent and dismantle the city's civil society.

Chow, who has remained in Hong Kong and has not been able to view his own film in a cinema, said: "It's like a type of embrace ... that so many are willing to listen to the will and desire of Hongkongers. I feel a sense of comfort, of power in our unity."

The aftermath of Hong Kong's protests have been warily watched from across the Taiwan strait, where some saw a warning for their own future. China's president, Xi Jinping, has vowed to "unify" Taiwan with China, by force if necessary.

"I think with these screenings, the most important thing isn't to get people to focus on Hong Kong, the most important is that they are focused on Taiwan, their home," Chow said.

▶ *A scene from Revolution of Our Times about the fight for democracy*

FTSE 100	All share	Dow Indl	Nikkei 225	£/€	£/$
-91.63	-45.13	-386.48	+972.87	1.1915	1.3129
7099.09	3954.30	32899.77	25690.40	+0.0004	-0.0028

Financial

Russia plans to seize assets of firms leaving the country

Richard Partington

Russia has drawn up plans to seize the assets of western companies leaving the country as the Kremlin seeks to counter sweeping sanctions and the exodus of international business since its invasion of Ukraine.

Announcing the move after a string of global firms said they would suspend operations in Russia this week, the economic ministry said it could take temporary control of departing businesses where foreign ownership exceeds 25%.

Vladimir Putin said to members of his government the Kremlin could find legally viable ways to seize international firms. The government would push to "introduce external management and then transfer these enterprises to those who actually want to work", Putin said.

Mikhail Mishustin, the Russian prime minister, said that while most businesses had temporarily suspended operations, the situation would be closely monitored and that steps to "introduce an external administration" could be used.

Western governments are seeking to impose maximum pressure on Putin after the invasion of Ukraine by announcing drastic restrictions on imports of Russian oil and gas on top of financial sanctions and asset freezes for prominent oligarchs.

Major western businesses and high-profile brands have also taken steps to either exit the country altogether or suspend operations in response to the invasion, including Starbucks and McDonald's. BP said it would exit stakes in major projects, while Unilever said it would stop imports and exports. Burger King said it would suspend its corporate support for the Russian market.

Outlining the Kremlin response to its increasing international isolation, Dmitry Medvedev, the former Russian president, said the Kremlin was using a "symmetrical response" to the sanctions imposed by the west, "including the seizure of foreign assets and their possible nationalisation". "The same applies to the refusal of foreign companies to work in our country," he wrote on the social media website VKontakte, accusing western firms leaving the country of being "moronic for dancing to the tune of Washington and Brussels".

> *'Foreign firms must understand that it will not be easy to return to our market'*
>
> **Dmitry Medvedev**
> *Ex-president of Russia*

He said Moscow would respond "fundamentally and harshly" to the departures, adding: "Whatever the reasons for the exodus, foreign companies must understand that it will not be easy to return to our market."

Russia announced plans yesterday designed to exert pressure back on the west through economic sanctions, including through an export ban on timber, electronic and telecoms equipment. Moscow passed laws to impound $10bn (£7.6bn) of jets leased to Aeroflot and other Russian airlines by western organisations.

Russia is heading closer to defaulting on government debt payments, with ratings agencies warning of "imminent" failure in a move that could lead to financial losses for holders of Russian sovereign bonds.

The World Bank's chief economist, Carmen Reinhart, said Russia and Belarus were "square in default territory". Fitch downgraded Russia's sovereign rating further into "junk" status this week.

Russia is due to make payments worth about $117m on government borrowing denominated in US dollars on Wednesday. However, doubts have been raised over whether the coupon payments will be made.

▲ *Steve Rowe joined M&S aged 15*

M&S boss to step down after nearly 40 years with retailer

Sarah Butler

Marks & Spencer's chief executive, Steve Rowe, is stepping down in May after nearly 40 years at the business he joined straight from school.

Rowe, who has spent six years overseeing the beginnings of a turnaround in the retailer's fortunes after years in the doldrums, is to be replaced by the boss of its food business, Stuart Machin.

Katie Bickerstaffe, who oversees M&S's clothing and home division and was also a contender for the top job, will sit on the board as co-chief executive, tasked with a focus on uniting the retailer's online and high-street operations. Eoin Tonge, the finance director, will oversee strategy in an increased role.

▲ *The new M&S leadership team, from left, Stuart Machin, Katie Bickerstaffe and Eoin Tonge*
PHOTOGRAPH: OLIVER DIXON

Bickerstaffe and Tonge, who had also been in contention for the top job, will report to Machin, but Archie Norman, the chair of the retailer, said the structure was intended so that the three would "fly in formation".

"This is a big and complex company ... While we have made progress, we haven't fixed everything," Norman added.

The new team takes charge after a positive turn for the 138-year-old chain, which had its best Christmas for food and claimed its highest market share in full-price clothing since 2013 as shoppers emerging from last year's lockdowns sought it out.

M&S did not reveal whether Rowe, who joined M&S at 15, would receive a payoff but said he would step down as chief executive after the company's annual results announcement on 25 May and cease full-time employment after the annual shareholder meeting on 5 July. He will remain as an adviser for up to 12 months.

Norman said: "The appointments we are making today bring together a very strong leadership team to take the business into the next stage of its transformation."

He added: "Steve has been a magnificent servant of M&S, putting his heart and soul into the job. Coming from the shop floor to lead the business, he epitomises our values and has lived and breathed M&S for so many years.

"He is living proof of the opportunities M&S provides for great people to succeed. The M&S he took over was in parlous shape and throughout my tenure he has been fearless in grasping the nettles and facing into the challenges and has delivered massive progress."

Shell chief's pay rose by a quarter in 2021 to £6m

Jasper Jolly

The Shell chief executive Ben van Beurden's pay rose by a quarter in 2021 to £6m, as the fossil fuel producer benefited from soaring energy prices amid calls for a windfall tax on energy companies.

The FTSE 100 company reported record profits during 2021, thanks in part to a gas price surge in the final three months amid a rebound in demand for commodities as the world recovered from lockdowns.

Van Beurden's pay rise, to €7.4m (£6.1m) in 2021 from €5.8m (£4.9m) the year before, came amid widespread calls for booming energy companies to pay a windfall tax on profits as people struggle with a cost-of-living crisis.

Van Beurden was paid 57 times more than the median Shell worker in 2021, according to the company's annual report.

Luke Hildyard, director of the High Pay Centre, said: "Oil and gas companies have argued that money for a windfall tax would have to come from their budget earmarked for long-term investments. But when they are paying out such huge sums to wealthy investors and top earning staff that argument looks laughably weak. Businesses that truly want to serve society should be happy to contribute a slightly higher rate of tax at a time when they are having a bonanza year, through pure good luck rather than their own hard work or innovation, while society as a whole is struggling with rising costs, stagnating wages and further economic turmoil."

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused energy prices to rise further since the start of the year, suggesting that even higher bills may be likely.

Van Beurden was forced to withdraw Shell from its joint ventures with the Kremlin-controlled oil firm Gazprom worth a total of $3bn. Shell has announced it will stop buying Russian oil or gas, and will close its 500 petrol stations in the country.

Van Beurden said: "Our decision to exit is one we take with conviction." However, in his foreword to the annual report he described the exit as "in line with government guidance", referring to the heavy pressure thought to be exerted by the UK government.

> **57**
> *Ben van Beurden was paid 57 times more than the average Shell worker in 2021, according to a firm's report*

Tui terminates branding deal with oligarch on European sanctions list

Jasper Jolly

Tui, Europe's largest holiday company, has cancelled a deal allowing the Russian oligarch Alexei Mordashov to use its name after the billionaire was hit by EU sanctions in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Tui Russia was established in 2009 as a joint venture with Mordashov's Severgroup to expand the business in Russia and Ukraine. Mordashov had invested in Tui and joined its supervisory board but he resigned last week after the sanctions were revealed.

Tui had sold its stake in the joint venture at the end of March 2021 to KN-Holdings LLC, a company then wholly owned and controlled by Mordashov's sons, Kirill and Nikita. However, Mordashov recently took back control of the company.

The brand licence agreement allowed Tui Russia to continue using the name in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Fritz Joussen, the chief executive of Tui Group, said: "Tui condemns Russia's attack and war against Ukraine. Our position is clear. The Tui brand must no longer be used by Tui Russia for its business and the company's presence."

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AER (Annual Equivalent Rate) illustrates what the annual rate of interest would be if the interest was compounded each time it was paid. Where interest is paid annually, the quoted rate and the AER are the same. **Gross** is the taxable rate of interest without the deduction of UK Income Tax.

Disney joins exodus as it halts Russian operations

Sarah Butler

Disney has become the latest company to suspend its Russian operations after the invasion of Ukraine.

The entertainment group said yesterday it will pause all business there, including content and product licensing, Disney Cruise Line activities, National Geographic magazine and tours, local content productions and its live television channels.

"Given the unrelenting assault on Ukraine and the escalating humanitarian crisis, we are taking steps to pause all other businesses in Russia," the company said. Disney said some businesses would take time to pause due to contractual nuances. The company had earlier said it would halt film releases in Russia. Turning Red, a Disney family film about a girl who turns into a red panda when she is excited, had been set to premiere in Russia yesterday. Fellow Hollywood studios Warner Bros and Sony Pictures Entertainment had also pulled their releases in Russia.

▲ *Disney film Turning Red had been set to premiere in Russia yesterday*

Earlier yesterday, the Japanese retailer Uniqlo suspended its Russian operations in a U-turn after pressure to take action.

This week Fast Retailing, the clothing chain's owner, said it intended to keep its Russian shops open because clothing was a "necessity of life", even as a string of brands, from McDonald's and Starbucks to Burberry and Asos, suspended operations in Russia.

Yesterday, however, Fast Retailing issued a statement saying it was suspending its operations as it had "recently faced a number of difficulties, including operational challenges and the worsening of the conflict situation".

Fast Retailing made a donation of $10m (£7.6m) to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, to help people fleeing Ukraine. It also said employees in Europe had been helping to deliver clothing to refugees.

Yesterday the British beauty brand Lush said it had suspended supply to its Russian licensee and had stopped online sales in the country. It was also in the process of buying out its licensee in Ukraine.

Lush's 48 stores in Russia would continue to operate and the retailer said it was "not in a position to dictate whether they are open or closed. They are governed by longstanding legal agreements that are not easily changed."

LSE suspends Evraz shares after Abramovich sanctions

Rob Davies

A steel company that is 29% owned by Roman Abramovich has denied a government claim that it may have provided raw material to build Russian tanks, after sanctions imposed on the Russian oligarch led to its shares being suspended on the London Stock Exchange.

The Financial Conduct Authority said trading in Evraz shares had been halted "pending clarification of the impact of UK sanctions".

Evraz has not been added to the list of Russian firms - such as Gazprom and Sberbank - whose shares have been suspended as a result of those firms facing sanctions themselves.

But Abramovich's UK assets have been frozen, meaning he cannot sell his 29% stake in the London-listed steel and coal company.

The official government sanctions announcement also claims that Abramovich in effect controls the company, that it may have made steel for Russian tanks and that it supplied goods and services to the Russian government that could contribute to the invasion of Ukraine.

Evraz has denied the claims and said it did not expect the company itself to be hit with sanctions.

Abramovich did not have "effective control" of the company, it said in a statement to the stock market yesterday afternoon, highlighting that he owned less than 50% and could appoint only three of 11 board members. "In view of the aforesaid, the company considers that the UK financial sanctions shall not apply to the company itself," it said.

Evraz denied that its steel was used to build Russian tanks, saying it provided steel only to the "infrastructure and construction sectors".

The company also denied "that it is or has been involved in providing financial services, or making available funds, economic resources, goods or technology that could contribute to destabilising Ukraine or undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty or independence of Ukraine - which includes potentially supplying steel to the Russian military which may have been used in the production of tanks".

▲ *Roman Abramovich holds a 29% stake in the steel and coal company*

A day earlier, Evraz had distanced itself from Abramovich and two other directors, as well as cancelling a shareholder payout that would have been worth $210m (£160m) to the Chelsea FC owner.

Evraz said on Wednesday that it could not be certain whether three major shareholders - Abramovich, Alexander Abramov and Alexander Frolov - would be seen as persons "connected with Russia" for the purposes of sanctions law. It added that, regardless of their investment in the company, Evraz "does not consider itself to be an entity owned by, or acting on behalf or at the direction of, any persons connected with Russia".

The company also said it had not made any loans to the men since 1 March, when the UK issued financial sanctions against a number of Russian entities and individuals.

The company will retain the dividend worth $729m to shareholders, which was due to be paid on 30 March. Abramovich's share of the payout would have been worth $210m based on his 29% stake.

James Rutherford stepped down as a non-executive director of Evraz last Friday. The company is due to be dropped from the FTSE 100 after investors sold out in droves and the share price plunged by 68% in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

Q&A

Will Moscow default on its foreign debts?

Richard Partington
Economics correspondent

Russia is close to being unable to pay its debts following the sanctions imposed by the west after Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. The World Bank's chief economist, Carmen Reinhart, warned yesterday that Russia and its ally Belarus were "mightily close" to default.

A key test will come next Wednesday, when Russia has to make a $117m (£89m) payment on some of its debt denominated in US dollars. While Russia has relatively low debts and its financial system is less integrated with the world than other countries', some analysts warn a default could have unforeseen consequences.

What happens in a default?

A default occurs when a borrower fails to make agreed payments on their debts. The Bank of Canada and Bank of England, which track sovereign defaults, estimate the value of government debt in default around the world was $443.2bn in 2020 - about 0.5% of world public debt. Typically, a defaulting country fails to keep up payments denominated in foreign currencies.

Russia must make two "coupon", or regular interest, payments on 16 March. However, it will have a 30-day grace period, meaning a default would not formally happen until at least April.

◀ *People in Moscow changing roubles into foreign currencies in 1990, amid the collapse of the Soviet Union*
PHOTOGRAPH: ANDRE DURAND/AFP/GETTY

When was the last time Russia defaulted?

It has happened before, including during the 1917 revolution and in 1998, when the country's economy was weak after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the costs of war in Chechnya meant it was unable to keep up with its debt payments. However, even then, Russia kept up with its dollar payments.

$733bn
Russia's total external liabilities - money owed by the government, companies and individuals - in 2014

$480bn
Russia's total external liabilities today following the imposition of western sanctions over Crimea

That so-called rouble crisis caused severe damage for neighbouring economies and sent shockwaves through the global financial system, including massive losses for the giant US hedge fund Long-Term Capital Management.

What's at stake

Russia has strengthened its financial position in recent years in response to sanctions imposed after the 2014 annexation of Crimea, with the government running budget surpluses and cutting its reliance on the US dollar.

According to the Institute of International Finance (IIF), Russia's external liabilities - money owed to creditors by the government, companies and households - have fallen from about $733bn in 2014 to about $480bn. Of this, $135bn is due to be paid within one year.

However, the amount owed by the government itself is relatively small. The state has about $40bn in foreign currency bonds denominated in dollars and euros - tiny compared with the size of its economy and with several comparable nations. Overseas investors also hold $28bn of Russian debt denominated in roubles. The scale of the problem is bigger for Russian corporates, with just under $100bn in international bonds outstanding.

Investors in Russian debt include hedge funds and major global asset managers. According to the Financial Times, the US fund manager Pimco, one of the world's biggest bond market investors, has amassed a $1.5bn position in Russian sovereign debt.

Why could Russia default?

Sanctions on Russia's central bank and its biggest lenders are causing disruption for financial transactions. Moscow has also imposed capital controls in response, including suspending the transfer of coupon payments on sovereign debt to foreign investors.

The finance ministry has said it will service and pay sovereign debts in full and on time. However, Putin has said Russian entities can pay foreign currency debts in roubles priced at exchange rates set by the Russian central bank to residents of "countries that engage in hostile activities".

While Russia would have had enough foreign currency to cover debt payments, having amassed $630bn in reserves, the US, UK and EU freezing the assets of its central bank have made much of this sum inaccessible. The ratings agency Fitch downgraded Russia's sovereign debt to its second-lowest level this week, saying a default was "imminent".

What could be the consequences for Russia?

Defaults make it harder to borrow in future, given the reputational damage. However, Russia is already isolated on the global stage after the invasion. According to the IIF, sanctions pushing up the cost of funding are likely to hit the government's financial position, potentially forcing Moscow to cut spending or raise taxes.

What could the consequences be elsewhere?

Targeting Russia's financial system is intended to inflict economic pain inside the country, although there could be wider indirect effects.

However, many economists, including Andrew Bailey, the governor of the Bank of England, have suggested Russia's financial links to the rest of the world are not of systemic importance. Foreign banks - mainly in Europe - have about $121bn in exposure to Russia, according to the Bank of International Settlements. The IIF estimates foreign banks play a minor role in the country, holding only 6.3% of total assets.

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Business view

Nils Pratley

Chelsea fans aren't alone in not knowing where they stand. Nor do outside investors in Evraz

Chelsea fans don't know where they stand and nor do outside shareholders in Evraz, the FTSE 100 steel maker where Roman Abramovich is a 29% shareholder.

After the government announced sanctions against the oligarch yesterday morning, trading in Evraz's shares continued for more than an hour before the Financial Conduct Authority, in charge of listings on the London Stock Exchange, ordered a temporary suspension at 11am. The FCA said it acted "in order to protect investors pending clarification of the impact of the UK sanctions".

Well, yes, clarification is definitely required because a reader of the asset freeze order against Abramovich would immediately wonder why Evraz itself hadn't also been sanctioned. Here's one passage: Abramovich "is or has been involved in destabilising Ukraine and undermining and threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, via Evraz PLC".

In the gap between the government's move and the FCA's, Evraz's shares fell from 93p to 82p. The stock is thinly traded but a few wide-awake investors may have used the window to get out quickly. That, in most books, counts as a disorderly market.

It's hard to blame the FCA if it wasn't given advance warning by government officials, but the market-related angle to the sanctions process in the past fortnight has been chaotic.

Evraz popped up later in the day to argue that UK financial sanctions should not apply to the company itself and that it doesn't consider Abramovich to be "a person exercising effective control". It also denied the allegation that it has supplied steel to the Russian military that may have been used in the production of tanks.

The position will be resolved eventually but ensuring an orderly market in the shares ought not to be as hard as the authorities are making it appear. The government and the FCA just have to talk to each other.

M&S fudges it

A chief executive with the nickname "Nails" is exactly what Marks & Spencer needed circa 2016. The business had to be told a few home truths about getting competitive again. Steve Rowe, a virtual M&S-lifer who had risen from the shop floor, was best placed to deliver them.

> *In the gap between the government's move and the FCA's, Evraz shares fell from 93p to 82p. In most books that counts as a disorderly market*

He got M&S out of most of its ragged international ventures, took it into online food with Ocado, and finally tackled the excess of floorspace. Miracle of miracles, the clothing side even looks sharper. If Rowe is quitting because he's knackered after six years in charge, you can't blame him. He's done an excellent job – certainly better than the share price makes it seem.

Worryingly, though, M&S seems to have concluded that Rowe is irreplaceable in conventional fashion. Stuart Machin and Katie Bickerstaffe will be co-chief executives, except that only the latter will have the "co" bit in her job title. It rather looks as if Archie Norman, the chairman, is the real boss. The new set-up looks a fudge.

Branching out

It's too soon to say the John Lewis Partnership is out of the woods, but there's definitely progress: the self-help programme is probably about a year ahead of schedule.

The department stores were always the more troubled side and revenues there reached a record £4.93bn, despite the closure of 16 outlets. For all the wailing in some quarters, last year's numbers offered strong evidence that the closures had to happen. The online shift is relentless: two-thirds of non-Waitrose sales were online.

Cost savings were the key driver of the recovery in overall profits (before tax, staff bonus and exceptional charges) to £181m. As important is the vastly improved state of the balance sheet. John Lewis can continue to invest.

The next task is to ensure that it does so well. Adventures into financial services and build-to-rent flats are billed as big new sources of sustainable profits. There's a commercial logic at work for a mutually owned company with long investment horizons, but diversification is rarely easy.

▲ *John Lewis Partnership's improved trading performance means staff will get a 3% bonus*
PHOTOGRAPH: RAY TANG/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

John Lewis restores staff bonus after losses narrow

Sarah Butler

The John Lewis Partnership has restored its staff bonus after narrowing losses to £26m last year.

The department store group, which is staff-owned and also operates Waitrose supermarkets, said it would pay a 3% bonus to workers, equivalent to 1.5 weeks pay. The group's executive team, led by Sharon White, the chairman, said they would donate their bonus to the British Red Cross in the light of the war in Ukraine.

The group also said it would pay all partners at least the independently verified living wage of £9.90 across the UK, a 2% pay rise. The company said it was investing £54m in additional pay excluding the bonus.

A year ago it said it would not be paying a bonus to staff, known as partners as they jointly own the company via a trust, for the first time in 67 years and was unlikely to pay a bonus this year after slumping to a £517m loss for 2020.

White said yesterday: "With our partners, like the whole country, facing a cost-of-living squeeze, we believe that this is the right time to pay the voluntary real living wage, nationwide."

She said the group would be "increasingly thinking about the value proposition" for customers given the cost-of-living crunch, including increasing its cut-price Anyday range at John Lewis.

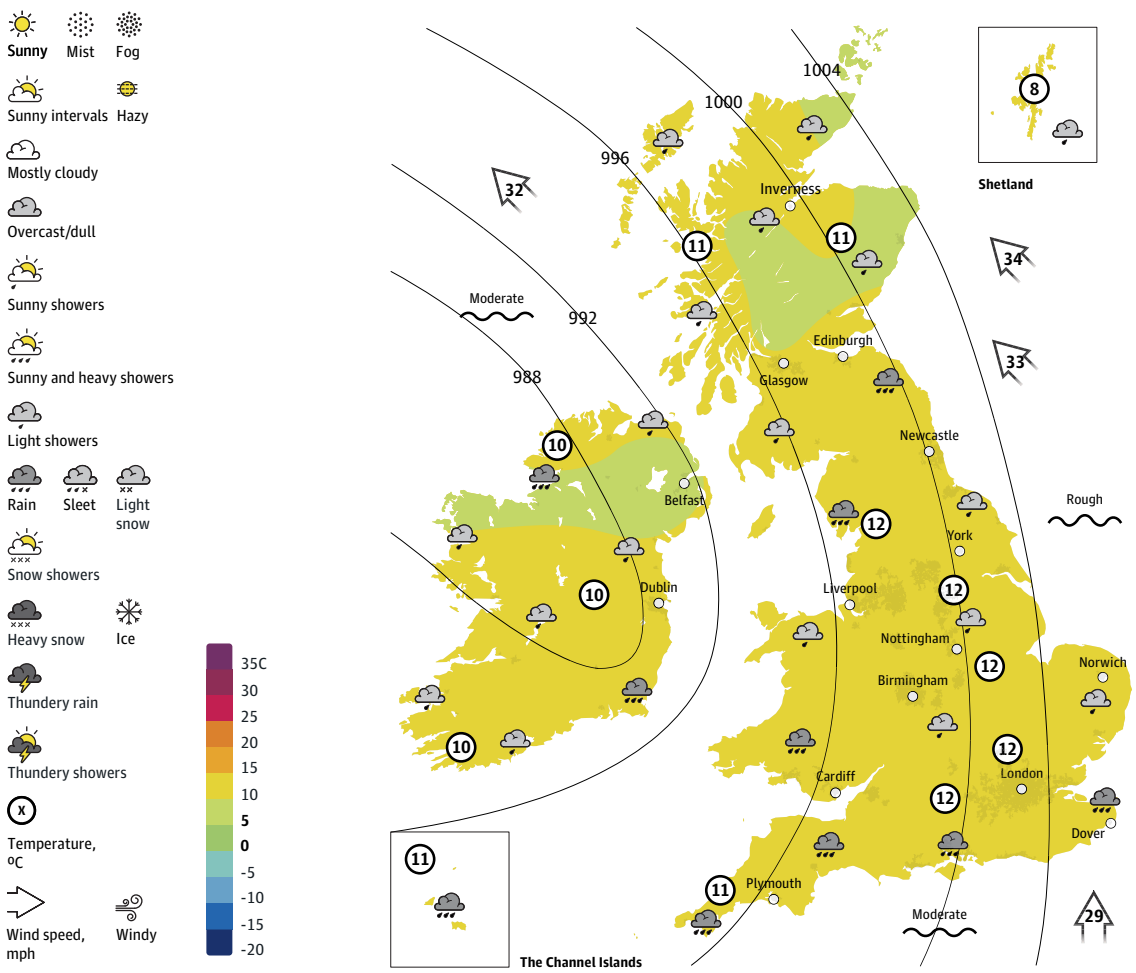
But White warned the situation in Ukraine meant inflation in costs was likely to be "more persistent and at a higher level" than previously expected, affecting John Lewis and Waitrose.

The company said it did not plan more job cuts or store closures in the year ahead but would be aiming to become more efficient with technology to cut the cost of handling products and to reduce waste.

The improved deal for workers came after John Lewis said total sales for the group rose 1% to £12.5bn in 2021. Losses narrowed to £26m from £517m after £161m of exceptional items largely related to closing eight department stores.

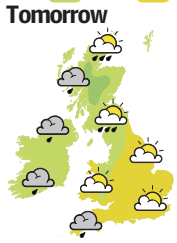
Weather
Friday 11 March 2022

UK and Ireland Noon today



Forecast

Low 7 High 11
Tomorrow



Low 7 High 11
Sunday

Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO_2 readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

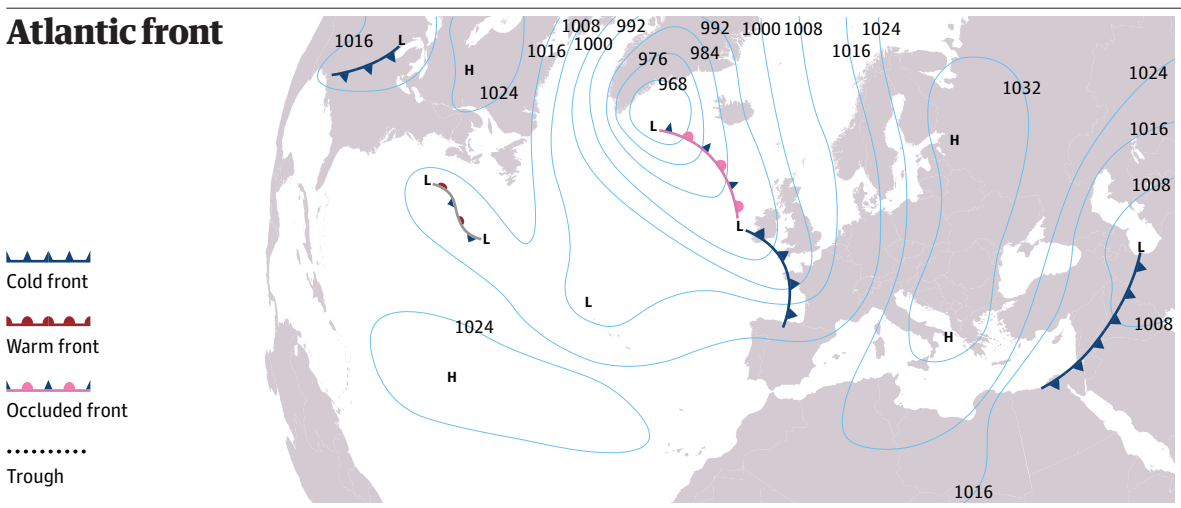
Latest	
08 Mar 2022	418.12
Weekly average	
27 Feb 2022	419.20
10 Mar 2021	417.68
10 Mar 2012	394.54
Pre-industrial base	*280*
Safe level	*350*

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

	Lows and highs		Precipitation	Air pollution
London	7	12	85%	Low
Manchester	7	12	80%	Low
Edinburgh	6	13	80%	Low
Belfast	4	10	90%	Low
Birmingham	6	11	80%	Low
Brighton	8	11	90%	Low
Bristol	5	10	85%	Low
Cardiff	6	11	90%	Low
Newcastle	6	12	80%	Low
Penzance	7	11	90%	Low

Atlantic front



High tides

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Aberdeen	0724	3.2m	2006	3.1m	**London Bridge**	0708	5.8m	1933	5.5m
Avonmouth	--	--	1216	9.4m	**Lossiemouth**	0532	2.9m	1810	2.9m
Barrow	0447	6.8m	1744	6.6m	**Milford Haven**	--	--	1152	4.9m
Belfast	0502	2.9m	1731	2.7m	**Newquay**	1050	4.9m	2329	4.8m
Cobh	1106	3.1m	2339	3.0m	**North Shields**	0927	3.8m	2211	3.7m
Cromer	--	--	1241	3.7m	**Oban**	1123	2.7m	2335	2.7m
Dover	0435	5.2m	1732	5.0m	**Penzance**	1027	4.0m	2319	4.0m
Dublin	0547	3.1m	1830	3.0m	**Plymouth**	1057	4.1m	2329	4.2m
Galway	1114	3.7m	2340	3.7m	**Portsmouth**	0451	3.7m	1725	3.5m
Greenock	0544	2.9m	1818	2.6m	**Southport**	0349	6.7m	1628	6.5m
Harwich	0507	3.3m	1732	3.1m	**Stornoway**	0058	3.4m	1353	3.3m
Holyhead	0356	4.2m	1645	4.1m	**Weymouth**	--	--	1203	0.4m
Hull	--	--	1137	5.6m	**Whitby**	0953	4.2m	2238	4.1m
Leith	0836	4.1m	2113	4.1m	**Wick**	0502	2.6m	1748	2.5m
Liverpool	0436	7.0m	1722	6.8m	**Workington**	0502	6.1m	1746	5.9m

Sun & Moon

Sun rises	0623
Sun sets	1757
Moon rises	1016
Moon sets	0308
Full Moon	18 March

AccuWeather.com

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2022

Lighting up

Belfast	1821 to 0648
Birm'ham	1804 to 0629
Brighton	1759 to 0621
Bristol	1809 to 0632
Carlisle	1807 to 0634
Cork	1831 to 0655
Dublin	1822 to 0647
Glasgow	1813 to 0641
Harlech	1813 to 0638
Inverness	1810 to 0641
London	1757 to 0621
M'chester	1806 to 0631
Newcastle	1802 to 0630
Norwich	1752 to 0617
Penzance	1820 to 0643

Pollutionwatch

Children will have their lives shortened by an average of a year and eight months from breathing polluted air, according to two reports from the State of Global Air initiative. In the worst affected countries, babies born today will lose more than three years of life unless air pollution improves.

Overall, air pollution was the fourth leading cause of death across the globe in 2019, with around seven million early deaths. This is more than those from more well-known risks including smoking, malaria and poor hygiene.

Indian cities dominate a list of places that have particle pollution more than 20 times the new World Health Organization guidelines. Rawalpindi in Pakistan also features, along with Cairo in Egypt and Kampala in Uganda, but the picture across Africa is incomplete.

In the 1920s, when routine measurements of particle pollution began, central London was twice as polluted as contemporary Indian cities. Stoke-on-Trent was more than four times worse. At that time the UK was home to 44 million people. Today, about 400 million people are exposed to the poor air in India's Ganges River basin, making it a far larger air pollution crisis. **Gary Fuller**

Around the world

Algiers	19	Lisbon	16
Ams'dam	14	Madrid	12
Athens	7	Malaga	17
Auckland	24	Melb'rne	20
B Aires	23	Mexico C	27
Bangkok	35	Miami	30
Barcelona	15	Milan	11
Basra	27	Mombasa	32
Beijing	16	Moscow	0
Berlin	7	Mumbai	35
Bermuda	22	N Orleans	22
Brussels	15	Nairobi	30
Budapest	5	New Delhi	30
C'hagen	5	New York	11
Cairo	16	Oslo	3
Cape Town	32	Paris	14
Chicago	2	Perth	35
Corfu	10	Prague	5
Dakar	25	Reykjavik	6
Dhaka	35	Rio de J	33
Dublin	10	Rome	13
Florence	15	Shanghai	25
Gibraltar	17	Singapore	32
H Kong	23	Stockh'm	5
Harare	27	Strasb'g	13
Helsinki	3	Sydney	22
Istanbul	2	Tel Aviv	14
Jo'burg	26	Tenerife	21
K Lumpur	33	Tokyo	16
K'mandu	27	Toronto	2
Kabul	13	Vancouv'r	8
Kingston	30	Vienna	4
Kolkata	33	Warsaw	3
L Angeles	22	Wash'ton	15
Lagos	32	Well'ton	21
Lima	25	Zurich	12

Winter Paralympics
Austrian success as warm weather disrupts skiing
Page 43 →

Six Nations
Boost for England as Sinckler fit to start v Ireland
Page 40 →

Sport

◀ *Jelena Ostapenko is on the verge of returning to the top 10 after a fine run of form that included nine straight wins in the Middle East*
FRANÇOIS NEL/ GETTY IMAGES

On the front foot

Gutsy Ostapenko regains consistency without sacrificing desire to attack

Tumaini Carayol

Even in an era of professional tennis filled with athletes who can obliterate any ball off their groundstrokes from any part of the court, Jelena Ostapenko is unique. Her strength doesn't simply lie in her power but the natural timing that allows her to change the direction of any speeding ball, the precision of her early, flat shots and, most importantly, her unrelenting belief that she must be in control of every point of every match. When in full flow and absurdly aiming for every line, she will find them.

The clearest example of Ostapenko's talents came in the biggest, most tense moment of her career, when aged 20 she marched into the 2017 French Open final before trailing Simona Halep 0-3 and facing three separate break points in the third set. With her back to the wall, Ostapenko swung and swung until she changed her own destiny, reeling off the final six games to win her first grand slam title.

Having punched herself into a new existence as a grand slam champion with a target on her back and a high-risk style that is so hard to consistently maintain, a dip in Ostapenko's form after her win was widely anticipated. While it did not come immediately, by 2019 Ostapenko had fallen as low as No 83 in the world. Some small positive runs followed, and occasionally enough shots landed in for a big win, but all too often Ostapenko would step into matches determined to hit her opponent off the court and self-sabotage with unforced errors in the process.

As the great BNP Paribas Open begins in Indian Wells this week, however, Ostapenko arrives as one of the stories of the season. After being ranked outside the top 50 last year, she is now No 12, on the verge of returning to the top 10 and rising quickly. Since September she has pieced together one of the most consistent periods of her career, performing week after week and compiling a 23-8 record.

While her gradual rise up the rankings initially flew somewhat under the radar, last month she burst back into the spotlight by embarking on a nine-match winning streak in the Middle East, winning the Dubai WTA 500 event before reaching the semi-final at the WTA 1000 in Doha. Across her nine wins, Ostapenko defeated six different grand slam champions: Sofia Kenin, Iga Swiatek, Petra Kvitova, Simona Halep, Barbora Krejcikova and Garbiñe Muguruza.

For most big-hitting tennis players in a long slump, the route to sustained success is always said to be by playing more consistent, cerebral tennis, such as adding more top spin and tempering the urge to attack every shot. Ostapenko has certainly attempted to broaden her skill set at times, incorporating more drop shots and patience while echoing those sentiments in interviews.

Yet as she discussed her revival in the Middle East last month, she had other ideas, instead doubling down on her need to lace every point with attacking play. "I was trying to be more accurate and just put the ball in play, which I shouldn't," she told WTA insider. "I should go for my shots and play my aggressive game. I felt like I have to be *even more* aggressive sometimes."

"Aggressive" is the most overused word in the sport, a sentiment that even some of the most defensive players on both tours use to describe their tactics, but Ostapenko's commitment to attacking tennis runs deep. She believes that tennis should be played on the front foot, taking risks and controlling your own destiny, and she has frequently shown no respect for players who rather live off their consistency and their opponents' errors.

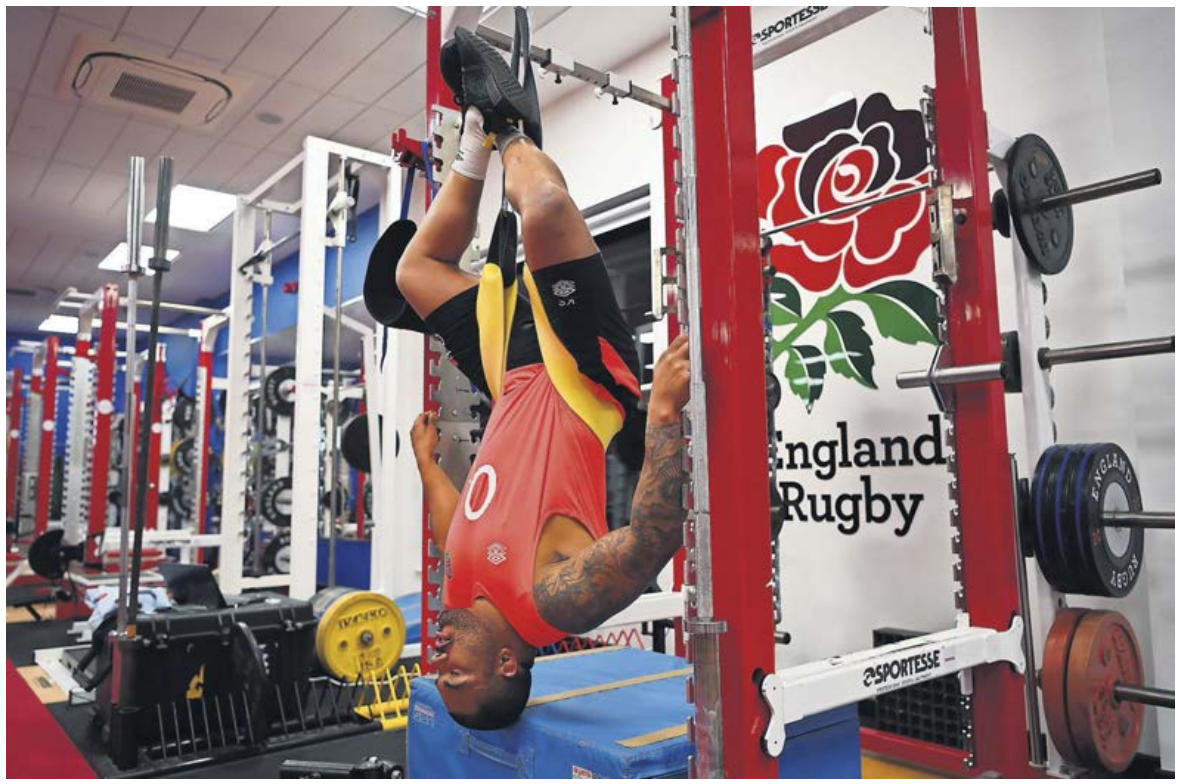
When she was younger, Ostapenko's abhorrence of defensive opponents even extended to the best players in the world. When the 19-year-old Ostapenko played against the then No 4, Agnieszka Radwanska, in 2016, she spent her changeovers during the loss denigrating her opponent's game to her coach and vowed never to play her again. "She doesn't play at all," said Ostapenko. "She plays like an amateur. Our amateurs play better in Latvia."

She believes tennis is about taking risks, and has shown no respect for players who live off their opponents' errors

While Ostapenko refuses to temper her playing style, her revival has not merely been a consequence of hitting a purple patch. There have been only a few matches where her winners flowed freely, particularly when she dismantled Muguruza and Krejcikova in consecutive matches in Doha. Otherwise, she has dug out wins from dire positions, sometimes while playing far from her best tennis. In Dubai she played three brutal three-set matches in succession, against Swiatek, Kvitova and Halep, recovering from a set down in all and saving a match point against Kvitova.

She showed that even with her low-percentage game, she can still give herself the best chance of success by controlling what she can control, remaining mentally present in every match, and not allowing her emotions to cloud her play. In the process she has found a rare period of consistency: since September she has lost only to current or former top 10 players in completed matches.

This steadfast consistency will not hold forever; there will be plenty of volatility in Ostapenko's results as long as she maintains her commitment to attacking, but she has put herself in the position to be a contender once more.



▼ *Kyle Sinckler is in England's starting lineup despite a back problem*
DAN MULLAN/THE RFU/GETTY

Physical England will get in Ireland's faces, promises Jones

Robert Kitson

Eddie Jones cannot even pop out to a cafe without being told his side must raise their game to beat Ireland. When his local barista, as allegedly happened this week, starts expressing doubts about England finishing the Six Nations with a flourish, it is small wonder Jones is labelling Ireland as "red-hot favourites" before tomorrow's showdown at Twickenham.

Even allowing for a whiff of artistic licence, Jones's account of the conversation will certainly raise a wry smile across the Irish Sea. "The girl says: 'That Irish team must be good. All their ex-players think they're going to win and all the ex-England players think they're going to win. They must be pretty good. How you feeling?' I said: 'Just give me the coffee please.'"

Boom boom. If England wish to avoid their 2022 championship ending bitterly they will need to wake up and smell whatever it takes to elevate them to the next level.

The good news is that the match-day squad to face Ireland includes all the players who have been doubtful this week, with the influential Tom Curry having passed his return-to-play protocols. Kyle Sinckler has also been named in the starting lineup despite a back problem while Alex Dombrandt is on the bench having convinced the management he has recovered fully from a touch of Covid.

If Jones did not sound 100% confident about Sinckler – "We think he is going to be right" – he was in no doubt about the key areas and vital personnel if England are to gain revenge for their 32-18 defeat in Dublin 12 months ago. With Sam Simmonds at No 8 and Joe Marchant at No 13 there are just four starting survivors from that encounter, and Jones wants his reshuffled side to concentrate on shutting down Ireland's strengths. "Whenever you play Ireland the breakdown is a significant part of the game," stressed Jones.

"They pride themselves on that area, but we are a very physical team and they haven't played against a side as physical as us for a long time. If you look at their record, they haven't played against South Africa since 2017. We played against South Africa last year and did well in those physical stakes so we intend to really take it to them."

With Marchant preferred to Elliot Daly for his aerial prowess and slightly more direct approach, England are also hoping the long-awaited return of Joe Launchbury to a match-day squad will help stiffen their maul late in the second half and further inconvenience a settled, cohesive Irish side. "We have one intention in this game and that's to go after Ireland," said Jones, reaching for a now-familiar metaphor. "We are going to chase them hard down the street. Everywhere they go, we're going to be in their faces and we're going to take time and space away from them. Do we enjoy that challenge? Yes."

It is also worth mentioning that, for all Ireland's strengths and record of 10 wins in their previous 11 Tests, England have won their last three home games against Australia, South Africa and Wales. Jones remains adamant that a spectacular attacking display is brewing and will soon materialise. "It's like a wave coming in. You can see it coming in and all of a sudden it crashes and all this power comes out of it. That's what we'll be like.

"We're not far away. We're one pass, one accurate kick, one good support line away from being very good. I've got a picture in my head and it's a very good picture. But we're a work in progress. No progression is a linear progression. If it was a linear progression everyone would do it and it'd be easy. It's not. There's ups and downs and you've got to ride that."

Maro Itoje has even started channelling the Book of Job – "Our future will be brighter than our past" – before a weekend when the Rugby Football Union will fly the national flag of Ukraine at Twickenham between those of England and Ireland. The fact, though, that Jones has stopped watching the morning news to avoid becoming distracted is another clear indication that England are treating this game with the utmost seriousness.

England F Steward; M Malins, J Marchant, H Slade, J Nowell; M Smith, H Randall; E Genge, J George, K Sinckler, M Itoje, C Ewels, C Lawes (capt), T Curry, S Simmonds. *Replacements* J Blamire, J Marler, W Stuart, J Launchbury, A Dombrandt, B Youngs, G Ford, E Daly.

▶ *Maro Itoje, winning this lineout in training, has been quoting the Book of Job in advance of Ireland's visit to Twickenham*
DAN MULLAN/THE RFU COLLECTION/GETTY

Favourites talk does not bother me, says Farrell

Andy Bull

Andy Farrell does not care a lot whether or not his Ireland side are favourites to beat England tomorrow, and even less about whatever Eddie Jones has had to say about it. Farrell, who knows Jones well from the days when they were both at Saracens, is not the sort to get sucked into that sort of back-and-forth before a game. "It doesn't bother me whatsoever. I don't see what it does for or against. I also know that Eddie has said plenty of times in the past that praise makes you weak. So we'll make sure we just take care of our own house."

If Farrell thought twice about Jones's remarks talking up Ireland, it was only to wonder why he bothered making them. "I love Eddie's comments, I love reading them, I think it's great for the game. I love his character, and his charisma. And I've learned a lot off him, I've been a captain of one of his sides, I've worked under him, and I enjoy his company.

"But in answer to your question, I don't see the need for it, no. I don't get it. But I like reading it. I think it's intriguing." Asked whether he felt those kinds of mind games ever have any effect, he said: "Not at this level, no."

Of course all Jones's talk may be more for his own players' sake. They will need to play better than they have yet in the tournament if they're going to win this one. If Farrell's team has been weakened by a couple of untimely injuries in the front row, where he has lost both Andrew Porter and Ronan Kelleher, they are still a formidable side. Farrell made six changes from the team that beat Italy. Johnny Sexton is back at fly-half, and so is James Ryan at lock, while Cian Healey replaces Porter at prop. Bundee Aki starts at inside-centre, with Robbie Henshaw on the bench, Andrew Conway is on the wing instead of Mack Hansen, and Hugo Keenan is at full-back.

As interesting as any of the changes is Farrell's decision to stick with Peter O'Mahony on the flank, with Caelan Doris at No 8 and Jack Conan on the bench. "Pete's in good form," Farrell said, "he's a good emotional leader for us, and leadership is a big part of every team performance. Obviously we know what he brings at the set piece and at the breakdown, but the rest of his game has come on an absolute treat too. His attack has really stepped up. He played really well against Italy, so did Jack coming off the bench, so we feel that's the right balance for this week."

Farrell clearly has Ireland's defeat to France in the second round in the back of his mind. He spoke about how important it will be for the team to make sure they don't lose the run of themselves in the heat of the Test. Against France they were 10-0 down inside 10 minutes. He suggested that they had allowed their emotions to take control, when they should have stayed in the moment and stuck with their plan. "We've learned some lessons in that regard, and not too long ago," Farrell said, "so we're looking to make sure we get better in that area." O'Mahony's there to help them do that.

"The next step for the team is to go to places like this and be at our best," Farrell said. "We know England are going to come at us and cause us problems. But we're confident in our own ability too. We know we're a good side, we need to make sure that we're able to be at our best in what is going to be a fantastic occasion. There's going to be thousands of Irish at Twickenham as well and we want to hear them sing through our performance as well."

Ireland H Keenan; A Conway, G Ringrose, B Aki, J Lowe; J Sexton (capt), J Gibson-Park; C Healy, D Sheehan, T Furlong, T Beirne, J Ryan; P O'Mahony, J van der Flier, C Doris. *Replacements* R Herring, D Kilcoyne, F Bealham, I Henderson, J Conan, C Murray, J Carbery, R Henshaw.

Ireland will welcome back Johnny Sexton

▼ *Dan Biggar highly rates France's half-back pairing*
HUW EVANS/BEN EVANS/SHUTTERSTOCK

Biggar's Wales braced for major challenge from 'real deal' France

Daniel Gallan

If nothing else, this one will make for some stunning photographs. The deep blue of France against the bright scarlet of Wales, the Friday night lights of Cardiff offering a richness to the images.

That is about as much optimism as can be confidently projected from a Welsh point of view as a French side set on a grand slam meet a squad seemingly held together by chewing gum and gumption.

"They're the real deal," said the Wales captain and fly-half, Dan Biggar, on the eve of the match. "We realise that this French team is different to the previous French teams that we've played over the years. The size of the pack, the in-form players that they've got, the coaching setup and who they've brought in."

Much of the attention has rightly focused on Antoine Dupont, World Rugby's reigning player of the year and the fulcrum at No 9 between a blistering backline and a set of forwards that might be the most dominant in the game at present. "It's pretty obvious he's the best player in the world," Biggar said of Dupont. "He has a huge influence on any game he plays. His partnership with [Romain] Ntamack has flourished over the past 18 months. They're in seriously good form."

This will be the half-back pairing's 12th Six Nations game together. According to the statistician Russ Petty they are only three away from Morgan Parra and François Trinh-Duc. But at 25 and 22 respectively, Dupont and Ntamack are on the brink of what could be a dynastic union.

That they are mostly playing front-foot ball has several explanations. For a side famed for their expansive running and offload game, France kick a lot. They have made almost 800 more metres from the boot than any other team in the competition and therefore rarely play in their own half. They pin the opposition back three in their own territory and invite counterattacks from distance. They then commit to the breakdown like zealots, jackalling with ferocious intent until they either win a penalty or turn the ball over. Then there's their monstrous pack.

"Look at the way they dismantled Scotland," Biggar said of France's 36-17 win in Edinburgh. "A lot of it was due to big carries, getting on top of the ball or being on top defensively and scoring points from that. It's about making sure we're physically ready and then we've got to make sure we take our opportunities because they'll probably be few and far between. France aren't going to give us anything on a plate."

France have not stumbled upon their extra heft overnight, it has been building. At the 2018 Under-20 World Championship final, France bulldozed England to win 33-25. An indomitable scrum and a clinical lineout proved the difference in Béziers. Ntamack played that day, but more crucially so did Julien Marchand and Cameron Woki who will both start in France's tight five tonight with Jean-Baptiste Gros offering support from the bench.

Biggar, though, did offer one other source of hope. He cited the 2013 game in Paris. Not much was expected of Wales having just lost eight games in a row. But a scrappy 16-6 win kickstarted their campaign, which would end in triumph five weeks later.

"We're quietly confident," said Biggar, who has been productive against France, scoring three tries from 11 games, winning seven of them. "We're happy for Dupont and Ntamack and Shaun [Edwards, France's defence coach who had previously fulfilled the role with Wales] to take all the headlines. We're just trying to make sure we focus on ourselves."

Scotland ring changes

Gregor Townsend is delighted to have Hamish Watson and Matt Fagerson back for Scotland's clash with Italy after the duo missed the defeat by France through illness and injury respectively. They return amid five changes to the starting XV with the Glasgow wing Kyle Steyn making his Six Nations debut. The centre Sam Johnson and hooker George Turner are the others added to the team. The five players to drop out are Stuart McInally, Magnus Bradbury, Sione Tuipulotu, Nick Haining and the suspended Duhan van der Merwe.

Scotland S Hogg (capt); D Graham, C Harris, S Johnson, K Steyn; F Russell, A Price; P Schoeman, G Turner, Z Fagerson, S Skinner, G Gilchrist, R Darge, H Watson, M Fagerson. *Replacements* S McInally A Dell, WP Nel, J Hodgson, M Bradbury, B Vellacott, A Hastings, S Tuipulotu.

Wales

France

Today 8pm

Wales		France
L Williams Scarlets	15	**M Jaminet** Perpignan
A Cuthbert Ospreys	14	**Y Moefana** Bordeaux
O Watkin Ospreys	13	**G Fickou** Racing 92
J Davies Scarlets	12	**J Danty** La Rochelle
J Adams Cardiff	11	**G Villière** Toulon
D Biggar N'hampton (c)	10	**R Ntamack** Toulouse
T Williams Cardiff	9	**A Dupont** Toulouse (c)
G Thomas Ospreys	1	**C Baille** Toulouse
R Elias Scarlets	2	**J Marchand** Toulouse
T Francis Ospreys	3	**U Atonio** La Rochelle
W Rowlands Dragons	4	**C Woki** Bordeaux
A Beard Ospreys	5	**P Willemse** Montpellier
S Davies Cardiff	6	**F Cros** Toulouse
J Navidi Cardiff	7	**A Jelonch** Toulouse
T Faletau Bath	8	**G Alldritt** La Rochelle
Replacements		**Replacements**
D Lake Ospreys		**P Mauvaka** Toulouse
W Jones Scarlets		**J-B Gros** Toulon
D Lewis Cardiff		**M Haouas** Montpellier
R Moriarty Cardiff		**T Flament** Toulouse
J Morgan Ospreys		**D Cretin** Lyon
K Hardy Scarlets		**M Lucu** Bordeaux
G Anscombe Ospreys		**T Ramos** Toulouse
L Rees-Zammit G'cester		**M Lebel** Toulouse

Venue Principality Stadium
Referee Matthew Carley (Eng)
9°

TV BBC One **Radio** BBC Five Live, BBC Cymru

Formula One

Mercedes insist their new-look car complies with FIA regulations

Team principal Toto Wolff says no illegal parts used but design could be challenged

Giles Richards

Mercedes have firmly rejected suggestions their new car for the Formula One season features any illegal components. Responding to reported comments from Red Bull, the Mercedes team principal, Toto Wolff, said their innovative sidepod design unveiled in Bahrain was within the new regulations.

When Lewis Hamilton took to the track for the final test this week, his Mercedes was radically different from the one at the first test in Barcelona. They have used the side impact structures as fins and mirror mounts and in so doing have dramatically decreased the size of their sidepods. The intent is to improve airflow and increase downforce. The design has the potential to give Mercedes a major pace advantage going into the new season, which begins in Bahrain on 20 March.

Yesterday morning, Germany's Auto Motor und Sport reported that Red Bull's team principal, Christian Horner, had already called the car's legality into question. "From our point of view, Mercedes went a step too far," he said. "That doesn't correspond to the spirit of the regulations. For us, these wings are illegal."

In a surprising twist Red Bull quickly and strenuously denied Horner had made any comments about the Mercedes. Nonetheless, Wolff responded by noting that although they were the only team to have adopted such a radical approach, their car had been designed in full consultation with F1's governing body, the FIA, which had confirmed it was within the regulations during development.

"When you go down a specific development direction, the FIA scrutinises it and you make them a part of the process," he said. "We were keen in not running alone, but being in touch with the FIA, that is why I think it will be OK. It is clear that when you come with an innovation it creates the kind of debate that we are having here. That was expected."

Given there are new rules of governance this year, it is possible the design could become outlawed should enough teams believe it confers an unfair advantage.

F1's director of motorsport, Ross Brawn, was at the helm of the new regulations, the biggest shake-up the sport has experienced since the 1980s, aimed at improving the chances of overtaking. Brawn said the Mercedes approach, which he described as "extreme", had not been expected and noted that even if the car is within the regulations such innovations could now be banned mid-season should eight of the 10 teams (known as a "supermajority") agree.

"There's no doubt that the Mercedes concept we didn't anticipate, it's a very extreme interpretation of the regulations," he said. "From our perspective, it's largely about does it affect the objective of the regulations? From the teams' perspective, they want to be sure that no one's taken an interpretation that they don't feel is correct. So I think there's going to be a lot of debate in the next few days."

The other teams will have the opportunity to protest against the design before next week's race but it remains to be seen whether Mercedes have indeed stolen a march on the rest of the field.

Yesterday, they ran the car with the intent of putting miles on the clock and checking long-run performance without setting out to push to its limits – a task they will probably leave until the final day of testing tomorrow. Hamilton was fifth-fastest in the first session with his teammate, George Russell, ninth.

◀ *Lewis Hamilton tests the new Mercedes, with the innovative sidepod, in Bahrain*
HAMAD I MOHAMMED/REUTERS

Greg Wood's racing tips

Leicester
1.00 Eairsidh **1.30** First Figaro **2.05** Nelson River **2.40** The Edgar Wallace **3.15** Pride Of Lecale **3.50** Ecu De La Noverie

Exeter
1.15 Morning Spirit **1.45** Trelawne **2.20** Operation Manna **2.55** Hititi **3.30** Imperial Joe **4.05** Fulgurix **4.40** Give Us A Swig

Newcastle
1.55 Freethinker **2.30** Choral Work **3.05** Wilhelm Vonvenster **3.40** Edmond Dantes **4.15** Foster'sisland **4.50** Ar Mest **5.20** Taragrace

Wolverhampton
5.10 Colinton **5.45** Purple Power **6.15** You're Cool (nap) **6.45** Clase Azul Ultra **7.15** Conducive **7.45** Zain Sarinda **8.15** Illuminated (nb)

Warne's body returned to Australia
Coffin of cricket legend brought from Thailand to Melbourne *News, page 31* →

▼ *Nkrumah Bonner picks up runs on the leg side on his way to a century*
GARETH COPLEY/GETTY IMAGES

Bonner knock and Wood injury put England on the back foot

West Indian's defiant century against tourists' depleted attack builds lead of 62 runs

Ali Martin
Sir Vivian Richards Stadium

Paul Collingwood believed England's players deserved medals after the Ashes, and at the end of the third day in Antigua – one that felt as dispiriting as anything witnessed in Australia – the interim head coach was ready to hand out more.

Over the course of nearly 10 hours Nkrumah Bonner's 123 had ground West Indies to 373 for nine and a lead of 62. At the close Collingwood opted to front up while his charges put their feet in ice, offering the kind of upbeat assessment that was the hallmark of his own playing days.

"Absolutely not," replied Collingwood when asked if he was disappointed with England's bowlers. "I thought today was probably one of the best efforts I've seen in an England shirt and in Test cricket.

"To go for 170 runs and take five wickets today is a pretty good effort, especially backing that up from two sessions in the field yesterday. I thought the fitness levels and the attitude in the field was exceptional."

On one level his view was understandable. The pitch at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium has gone into a deep sleep and the efforts of Joe Root's bowlers could scarcely be questioned, not least having lost Mark Wood to an elbow injury that has set alarm bells ringing over his continuation in this series.

Ben Stokes typically thundered in, chalking up 28 overs in the innings and 19 on the day when he was only meant to be used sparingly after a side strain. Jack Leach sent down 43 tight overs and was unfortunate to have just one wicket to show for his efforts.

But there was also a sense that an attack which has been asked to step out of the shadows of Jimmy Anderson and Stuart Broad could be out of its depth if conditions like these persist on tour. Chris Woakes and Craig Overton did little to shake the belief they are just a bit too English and 157 overs makes it the longest innings Root's men have spent in the field this winter.

There was at least a moment of cheer before stumps, with the loopy off-spin of Dan Lawrence finally prising Bonner from his rock when a faint tickle down leg was snaffled by Ben Foakes and given out on review. But this wicket should have come earlier in the piece, with Bonner edging Leach to slip via his pad on 73 only for Zak Crawley to grass the chance.

Mark Wood's elbow injury could bring his series to an early end

The biggest headache is Wood. He was absent when West Indies resumed on 202 for four first thing before emerging with a tubigrip and strapping on his bowling arm. He seemed fine during an initial four-over burst but shortly after the second new ball he sent down six more deliveries that were down on pace and forced his exit.

Subsequently, Bonner was able to trust his defence. And though he lost Jason Holder early, who edged behind off Stokes for 45, it meant he could also put his faith in those supposedly less capable down the order.

After a two-hour stand of 73 with the wicketkeeper Joshua Da Silva had finally been broken by Leach lbw, only Alzarri Joseph failed to repay Bonner at No 8, out for two attempting to hook Overton. The more experienced Kemar Roach was not nearly so wasteful, however, enduring blows to the hand and body during an 89-ball 15 and driving Root for four to take West Indies into the lead when they reached tea on 322 for seven.

Even after Roach and Bonner had been separated, the No 9 run out from the deep by the substitute Ollie Pope, in came Veerasammy Permaul to offer 87 balls of resistance for an unbeaten 26. Both tailenders had taken their lead from Bonner, an orthodox right-hander who moments after tea swept Leach for four to move to a hard-earned century from 257 deliveries.

The persistence on show tallied with his story overall, Bonner having played a couple of forgettable Twenty20 internationals more than a decade ago and then almost given up on a professional career back in 2018 when runs proved so elusive while playing for the Leeward Islands.

He briefly moved to Houston, Texas, to work in construction before deciding to return to his native island of Jamaica for one last crack. And something clicked: Bonner forced his way on to the tour of England in 2020 with two centuries and an average of 58 in the regional four-day competition that preceded it.

Scores of 86 and 90 during his debut series in Bangladesh 12 months ago were followed by a maiden Test century on this ground; Bonner's first-class average of 28.8 coming into this series was therefore deceptive.

The same could not be said about England's fast-medium bowlers and the potential loss of Wood could now mean Saqib Mahmood makes his Test debut in Barbados next week.

There will be no SOS sent out to Anderson and Broad, however, with neither on the list of standby bowlers. England appear determined to do things the hard way.

Day three scoreboard

North Sound West Indies lead England by 62 runs with one first-innings wicket remaining.

England First innings 311 (JM Bairstow 140; JNT Seales 4-79).

West Indies First innings (overnight 202-4)		Balls	4s	6s
NE Bonner c Foakes b Lawrence	**123**	355	12	1
JO Holder c Foakes b Stokes	**45**	119	6	1
†J Da Silva lbw b Leach	**32**	88	1	0
AS Joseph c sub (Pope) b Overton	**2**	7	0	0
KAJ Roach run out (Pope/Foakes)	**15**	89	3	0
V Permaul not out	**26**	87	3	0
JNT Seales not out	**0**	5	0	0
Extras (b1, lb3, w4, nb3)	**11**			
Total (for 9, 157 overs)	**373**			

Fall cont 206, 279, 282, 326, 372.

Bowling Woakes 30-6-88-1; Overton 32-7-85-2; Wood 17-4-45-1; Leach 43-20-79-1; Stokes 28-7-42-2; Root 5-0-30-0; Lawrence 2-2-0-1.

Cricket 'facing a reckoning' on discrimination, says ICEC chair

Sean Ingle

Cricket is "facing a reckoning" as a result of the Azeem Rafiq affair and needs to take a long look in the mirror when it comes to discrimination, the chair of the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC) has said.

After launching a call for written evidence for her independent report, which is due to be published this autumn, Cindy Butts said the ICEC had received a "staggering" response to an initial online survey, with more than 4,000 people detailing their experiences of discrimination on the basis of race, gender and class.

Butts stressed she was unable to talk in detail about those findings as the results were still being processed, but said: "What is clear is that all is not well in cricket. Cricket is facing a reckoning. It has to grasp this opportunity to understand and diagnose what the problem is. And then recommend – in an evidence-based way – what the solutions are to its problems.

"Cricket needs to really look in the mirror. It has to say: 'This is what we look like and we are prepared to tackle the issues that are prevalent within the sport in a concerted, serious and considered way.' We hope that, through our report, we will be able to help the sport to move forward."

The aim of the commission is to identify the actions the England and Wales Cricket Board will need to take to tackle these issues. However, Butt said Rafiq's bravery in coming forward had been influential in the first stage of the listening process.

"People were spurred on by Azeem Rafiq's experiences, and issues in relation to race in particular, going on in cricket," she said. "That gave people the courage to come forward and to speak about their own experiences. It was an indication of people being incredibly concerned about what's going on."

The commission, whose formation was announced in November 2020, is now seeking written evidence from people across cricket on issues such as the leadership of the sport, as well as its culture and talent pathways. Those wanting to contribute are being urged to do so by 20 April.

"We're looking at good practices, culture, complaints and obviously governance and leadership, not just in terms of the ECB but the counties too," Butts said.

▲ *The Azeem Rafiq affair has unearthed wider issues in cricket*

▲ *Teenager Johannes Aigner makes a turn on the way to his second gold*

Winter Paralympics

Aigner takes second gold as artificial snow starts to melt

Martin Belam

Weather conditions disrupted the para Alpine skiing at the Winter Paralympics yesterday as warm temperatures meant that, even with an earlier start time, the artificial snow at the Yanqing National alpine Skiing Centre was melting as athletes attempted the giant slalom course. Temperatures had been forecast to rise to as high as 23C (73F).

Austria's 16-year-old Johannes Aigner secured his second gold and fourth medal overall of these Games in the men's visually impaired class, finishing 1.68sec ahead of the defending champion, Giacomo Bertagnolli of Italy. The final two runs of Aigner and Bertagnolli pushed Britain's Neil Simpson into fifth, meaning he could not add to the two medals he has won in Beijing.

There was heartbreak for the Slovak Marek Kubacka, who finished fourth. Kubacka lost his sight aged nine and was the only completely blind athlete in the men's para alpine visually impaired field. As a B1 classified athlete his clock runs at 60.53% of real time. His margin on missing out on the podium was 1.55sec.

In the men's standing giant slalom, Santeri Kiiveri of Finland won gold by 0.04sec from Thomas Walsh of the US. Britain's James Whitley finished sixth, moving up from 12th at the halfway stage after a sensational second run to lead the event for a time. Only the bronze medallist, Arthur Bauchet of France, went faster than Whitley's second run time of 57.3sec.

The final event of the para alpine skiing yesterday was the men's sitting giant slalom, with athletes having to cope with a course that was rutted and cut-up from the earlier runs. That led to a series of crashes but Norway's Jesper Pedersen made it look easy, with a victory by more than three seconds.

At Beijing's Ice Cube, the British curling team were playing for pride. Gary Smith was deputising for the injured David Melrose, but could not help the team avoid a 6-3 defeat to the defending champions, China. That ensured the hosts will qualify for the next stage and results elsewhere mean Sweden and Canada join them in today's semi-finals.

The British rallied to win their final match 8-4 against Latvia, a result that confirmed Slovakia as the last semi-finalists.

Munir seizes advantage but Hammers have all to play for

Sevilla 1
Munir 60

West Ham 0

Jacob Steinberg
Estadio Ramón Sánchez Pizjuán

This was a game of fine margins and in the end it belonged to the side with greater European expertise. Sevilla were everything we have come to expect from them in this competition – clinical when the moment arrived, obdurate enough to hold out once they were ahead – and the question now is whether West Ham are capable of learning a few tricks of their own before this absorbing tie resumes at the London Stadium next week.

The challenge is daunting. Caught cold when a clever set-piece routine allowed Munir El Haddadi to give Sevilla the lead with a sweet strike on the hour, the primary emotion for West Ham was frustration. David Moyes's side missed several excellent chances in both halves and, while they will back themselves to turn this last-16 tie around, they know that their European adventure will be over if their finishing does not improve.

Crucially, though, they still have belief. The underdogs were beaten, but they were not disgraced. They created enough to suggest they can still upset the odds and it is worth taking a moment to consider how far they have come since appointing Moyes two years ago.

After all, this, a glamour tie against opponents who more or less own this competition, was unfamiliar territory. West Ham have been more accustomed to battling relegation than competing on the European stage and it would have been understandable if there had been a few nerves at kick-off, a few players in claret and blue wondering if they truly deserved to be at the Ramón Sánchez Pijuán, where there is no shortage of reminders that Sevilla have won the Europa League six times.

Yet there is a robustness to West Ham now and they did not look out of their depth during the first half. Their football was crisp and their boldness unsettled Sevilla at times, particularly with Michail Antonio running the channels and doing everything possible to ruffle a defence that looked vulnerable with Nemanja Gudelj alongside Jules Koundé.

▲ *Munir El Haddadi starts to scamper past Declan Rice after scoring*
MARCELO DEL POZO/REUTERS

The early action was end-to-end, the first jabs coming from Sevilla. Yet while West Ham were fortunate not to fall behind when Munir headed wide from Jesús Navas's cross, the visitors had their moments. Antonio was a nuisance, barging past Gudelj before shooting wide, and West Ham seemed certain to take the lead when Declan Rice nodded Manuel Lanzini's free-kick into the six-yard box, only for Nikola Vlasic to head too close to Bono.

It was a bad miss but West Ham were causing problems. Rice was working well with Tomas Soucek. The full-backs, Aaron Cresswell and Ben Johnson, had freedom to support the attack and there were more encouraging moments for West Ham before half-time, Bono pushing an effort from Vlasic wide and Antonio's cross just evading Soucek.

West Ham, who need Jarrod Bowen to recover from an achilles injury before the second leg, had to be more clinical. Sevilla were without several important players and their problems increased when Ivan Rakitic fell ill during the warm-up, Munir coming in for the influential midfielder, but the hosts still had plenty of threats.

Munir was lively, sliding a shot just wide, and West Ham had another escape when Youssef En-Nesyri eluded Kurt Zouma and Craig Dawson. Alphonse Areola responded sharply to the striker's header.

The game was nicely balanced at the break. West Ham had settled, Rice winning his tackles and oozing confidence. Gaps appeared and they went close at the start of the second half, Antonio teeing up Soucek to draw another fine save from Bono.

Sevilla were in a game. Sensing danger, their fans increased the noise. Julen Lopetegui was whipping his players up and West Ham had to retreat, their defence breathing a sigh of relief when En-Nesyri spurned another good headed chance.

Had West Ham's moment passed? Sevilla had started to press more and West Ham were edgy, the signs ominous when Zouma conceded a free-kick after being played into trouble deep on the right.

A goal was coming. Marcos Acuña trotted across to take the free-kick and West Ham momentarily forget themselves, nobody spotting Munir lurking on the left of the area. Nobody, that is, apart from Acuña, whose delivery caught West Ham out and sat up perfectly for Munir to clip a beautiful finish.

It was a sloppy goal and they were fortunate not to fall further behind when Lucas Ocampos curled a shot narrowly wide. Moyes replaced Vlasic with Saïd Benrahma and West Ham improved, Lanzini denied an equaliser by a heroic block from Navas. Not for the first time, the finishing touch had eluded them. It needs to return next Thursday.

Sevilla
4-3-3
Bono; Navas, Gudelj, Koundé, Acuña; Jordán, Torres, Munir (Martial 75); Corona (Augustinsson 88), En-Nesyri (Mir 90), Ocampos 🟡
Subs not used
Dmitrovic, Cruz, Salas, Carmona, Sánchez, Pastor, Romero

West Ham
4-2-3-1
Areola; Johnson, Zouma 🟡, Dawson, Cresswell; Rice 🟡, Soucek; Fornals (Masuaku 90), Lanzini 🟡 (Noble 83), Vlasic (Benrahma 67); Antonio
Subs not used
Fabianski, Randolph, Diop, Fredericks, Kral, Alese, Chesters, Potts, Perkins

Referee Sandro Schärer (Swi)

Football In brief

Tottenham's Ryan Sessegnon has a hamstring injury

Schools

Smith delighted by girls' mass training session

The former England and Arsenal forward Kelly Smith expressed her delight at the number of girls taking part in the biggest football session in schools across the country on Wednesday, with numbers topping 90,000. "That just blows my mind," said the 43-year-old. "I've seen an appetite and a hunger from these girls to play football. Currently 63% of schools offer girls' football in PE and only 40% offer extracurricular football to girls. The Let Girls Play campaign, launched by the Football Association and Barclays, hosted sessions in 1,450 primary and secondary schools as part of an attempt to get 75% of schools offering football for girls in PE lessons and 90% offering extracurricular access to the game by 2024. **Suzanne Wrack**

Tottenham

Conte worried by Skipp and Sessegnon injuries

Ryan Sessegnon will be out until after the international break with a hamstring injury, the Tottenham manager, Antonio Conte, has revealed. The wing-back Sessegnon suffered the problem in Monday's 5-0 win over Everton and will now miss games against Manchester United, Brighton and West Ham. "We are not talking about a new problem, we are talking about a situation that unfortunately is repeating," Conte said. Conte is also concerned about Oliver Skipp's ongoing absence. Skipp has been out since January with a groin injury that suffered issues with treatment and Conte does not know when the midfielder will be fit. "He started with a groin pain. And then now, we are talking about two months, two months and a half, that he is out." **PA Media**

Results

Football

UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE
Last 16: First leg

Atalanta (2) 3 — **Bayer Leverkusen** (1) 2
Malinovsky 23, Muriel 25 49 — Aranguiz 11, Diaby 63

Barcelona (0) 0 — **Galatasaray** (0) 0

Rangers (2) 3 — **Red Star Belgrade** (0) 0
Tavernier 11pen
Morelos 15, Balogun 51

Sevilla (0) 1 — **West Ham** (0) 0
Munir 60

Braga (1) 2 — **Monaco** (0) 0
Ruiz 3, Oliveira 90

UEFA EUROPA CONFERENCE LEAGUE
Last 16: First leg

Leicester (1) 2 — **Rennes** (0) 0
Albrighton 30, Iheanacho 90

Bodø/Glimt 2 AZ 1; Marseille 2 Basel 1; Paok 1 Gent 0; Partizan Belgrade 2 Feyenoord 5; PSV 4 Copenhagen 4; Slavia Prague 4 LASK 1; Vitesse 0 Roma 2

PREMIER LEAGUE

Leeds (0) 0 — **Aston Villa** (1) 3
Coutinho 22, Cash 65
Chambers 73

Norwich (0) 1 — **Chelsea** (2) 3
Pukki 69pen — Chalobah 3, Mount 14
Havertz 90

Southampton (1) 1 — **Newcastle** (1) 2
S Armstrong 25 — Wood 32, Guimarães 52

Wolves (3) 4 — **Watford** (0) 0
Jiménez 13, Hernández 18og
Podence 21, Neves 85

FA WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Arsenal	16	11	4	1	42	10	+32	37
Chelsea	14	10	2	2	34	7	+27	32
Manchester Utd	15	8	4	3	32	15	+17	28
Tottenham	15	8	4	3	19	11	+8	28
Manchester City	14	7	2	5	30	20	+10	23
Reading	15	7	2	6	18	23	-5	23
Brighton	16	7	1	8	18	23	-5	22
West Ham	15	5	5	5	19	22	-3	20
Aston Villa	16	5	1	10	11	30	-19	16
Everton	14	4	2	8	11	23	-12	14
Leicester	16	4	0	12	12	31	-19	12
Birmingham	16	1	1	14	11	42	-31	4

West Ham (0) 1 — **Chelsea** (3) 4
Brynjarsdottir 48 — Harder 21 32, Charles 24
Kerr 63

Rugby league

BETFRED SUPER LEAGUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PD	Pts
St Helens	4	4	0	0	128	26	+102	8
Wigan	4	4	0	0	109	62	+47	8
Huddersfield	4	3	0	1	114	50	+64	6
Warrington	4	3	0	1	106	72	+34	6
Hull	5	3	0	2	127	107	+20	6
Catalans Dragons	4	3	0	1	66	72	-6	6
Salford	4	2	0	2	82	110	-28	4
Leeds	5	1	0	4	78	115	-37	2
Castleford	4	1	0	3	69	112	-43	2
Hull KR	4	1	0	3	56	102	-46	2
Wakefield	4	0	0	4	56	94	-38	0
Toulouse	4	0	0	4	72	141	-69	0

Leeds 8 Hull 31

Cricket

ICC WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

Hamilton New Zealand 260-9 (AE Satterthwaite 75, AC Kerr 50; P Vastrakar 4-34). India 198 (H Kaur 71). New Zealand beat India by 62 runs.

Tennis

ATP/WTA BNP PARIBAS OPEN (Indian Wells)

Women: First round: D Kovinic (Mne) bt J Belen Teichmann (Swi) 7-5 7-5; **A Li** (US) bt M Brengle (US) 1-6 7-6 (5) 6-0; **C Garcia** (Fr) bt D Yastremska (Ukr) 6-4 6-7 (8) 7-5; **E Alexandrova** (Rus) bt E Kalieva (US) 4-6 6-2 7-6 (7); **A Kalinina** (Ukr) bt C Burel (Fr) 6-3 6-2; **C Liu** (US) bt V Tomova (Bul) 7-6 (2) 6-4; **M Doi** (Jpn) bt A Potapova (Rus) 0-6 6-4 6-3; **A Tomljanovic** (Aus) bt H Baptiste (US) 6-2 2-6 6-2; **A Kalinskaya** (Rus) bt H Tan (Fr) 6-2 1-0 ret; **H Dart** (GB) bt A Konjuh (Cro) 6-1 3-1 ret; **B Haddad Maia** (Bra) bt S Kenin (US) 6-3 7-5; **K Volynets** (US) bt A Rus (Neth) 4-6 6-4 6-1; **P Martic** (Cro) bt A Bondar (Hun) 7-5 6-3; **A Riske** (US) bt C McNally (US) 6-0 6-3; **K Kanepi** (Est) bt R Montgomery (US) 6-3 6-3; **Zheng Q** (Chn) bt V Zvonareva (Rus) 6-3 6-2

Golf

MYGOLFLIFE OOPEN (Hartbeespoort, South Africa)

Leading first-round scores (GB/Ire unless stated)
62 I Elvira (Sp); H Du Plessis (SA); T Strydom (SA); R Fisher. **63** P Larrazabal (Sp). **64** J C. Ritchie (SA); R Sterne (SA); N von Dellingshausen (Ger). **65** D Burmester (SA); J Campillo (Sp); L Canter; S Norris (SA); A Cockerill (Can)

Snooker

TURKISH MASTERS (Antalya)

Second round: T Un Nooh (Tha) bt J Brown (NI) 5-1; **Ding J** (Chn) bt K Wilson (Eng) 5-3; **M Gould** (Eng) bt J Lisowski (Eng) 5-4; **Lu N** (Chn) bt Wu Y (Chn) 5-4; **S Murphy** (Eng) bt J Robertson (Eng) 5-3; **O Lines** (Eng) bt A Higginson (Eng) 5-3; **J Jones** (Wal) bt H Vafaei Ayouri (Irn) 5-4; **Yan B** (Chn) bt E Slessor (Eng) 5-4; **J Trump** (Eng) bt Liang W (Chn) 5-4; **S Craigie** (Eng) bt Yuan S (Chn) 5-2; **A Carter** (Eng) bt M Stevens (Wal) 5-4; **Zhou Y** (Chn) bt L Brecel (Bel) 5-4

Fixtures

Football
Sky Bet Championship West Brom v Huddersfield (8pm)
Sky Bet League Two Tranmere v Mansfield (7.45pm)
cinch Scottish Championship Ayr v Kilmarnock (7.45pm)
Rugby union
Guinness Six Nations Wales v France (8pm)
United Championship Sharks v Scarlets (5.10pm)
Rugby league
Betfred Super League Salford v Hull KR (7.45pm); St Helens v Warrington (8pm); Wakefield v Toulouse (7.30pm)
Cricket
ICC Women's World Cup
Group stage Pakistan v South Africa, Tauranga (1am)

Premier League

Guimarães downs Southampton to keep Newcastle surging up table

Southampton 1
S Armstrong 25

Newcastle 2
Wood 32, Guimarães 52

Ben Fisher
St Mary's Stadium

Perhaps it was inevitable given how the half-time playlist gleefully segued between Dirty Cash (Money Talks), Price Tag and Can't Buy Me Love that a divine second-half intervention from Newcastle's marquee January signing, Bruno Guimarães, would earn a sixth win in seven matches and extend Eddie Howe's unbeaten streak to nine Premier League games.

Chris Wood scored his first goal for the club to cancel out Southampton's first-half opener before Guimarães's touch of class sealed a victory that lifts Newcastle 10 points above the relegation zone. Not that Howe is getting carried away, dismissing the notion his team might already be safe. "We're not," he said. "What we have done is put a gap between us and the bottom teams, but that's all it is."

It was hard to begrudge the sold-out away end savouring the moment, even if some of the songs felt delightfully far-fetched. For Ralph Hasenhüttl, whose Southampton side have lost successive games for the first time since November, defeat would have only rammed home his frustration.

▲ *Bruno Guimarães is mobbed by his teammates after making it 2-1*

Hasenhüttl had aired a few gripes about Newcastle being able to name a "completely different team" compared to the one Southampton would have faced at the end of December and argued new signings should have been ineligible for this rearranged game, the original fixture postponed owing to Covid and injuries. Four of Newcastle's January recruits started here, including Guimarães.

Newcastle's 3,300-strong support enjoyed Dan Burn's early challenge on Armando Broja, but Southampton began stronger. Martin Dubravka did well to claw the ball from Broja after the on-loan Chelsea striker latched on to a fine Oriol Romeu pass and Broja later skewed wide after Romeu edged out Jonjo Shelvey on halfway. But the pressure told when Stuart Armstrong opened the scoring. Mohamed Elyounoussi diverted Kyle Walker-Peters's cross back across goal and Armstrong nodded in, via Burn, who tried in vain to clear.

Southampton's lead proved short-lived. Shelvey played a laser pass into the box for Wood and the striker easily eluded Mohammed Salisu to power a header into the bottom corner. The hosts went close to regaining the lead before the interval, Che Adams blasting against the crossbar.

"A few inches are missing," Hasenhüttl said. "This is the difference and we have to turn this around."

Newcastle's players emerged for the second half to the backdrop of Money, Money, Money and Guimarães soon displayed the kind of skill that convinced Amanda Staveley and Jamie Reuben, among those in the directors' box, to part with £40m to sign him from Lyon. Jacob Murphy saw a shot deflected wide and, from the subsequent corner, Burn knocked the ball down into the six-yard box. Guimarães, with his back to goal, flicked the ball in with his right boot to spark delirium among the away fans. He departed with cramp to an ovation. "I've not seen too much of that backheeling from close range," Howe said with a wry smile.

Southampton fell flat but Dubravka had to be alert to divert a Tino Livramento cross that swirled goalwards and, with a minute of normal time to play, the keeper pushed a Salisu header away. There were hairy moments for Newcastle during six added minutes but they held on.

Southampton
4-4-2
Forster; Livramento, Bednarek🟡, Salisu, Walker-Peters; S Armstrong, Ward-Prowse, Romeu (Long 79), Elyounoussi (Djenepo 85); Broja (A Armstrong 73), Adams
Subs not used
Caballero, Stephens, Perraud, Smallbone, Diallo, Valery

Newcastle
4-3-3
Dubravka; Krafth (Manquillo 90), Schär, Burn, Targett; Willock, Shelvey, Guimarães (S Longstaff 67); Murphy🟡, Wood, Fraser (Almirón 85)
Subs not used
Darlow, Dummett, Lascelles, Ritchie, Gayle, De Bolle

Referee Kevin Friend

Europa League

Balogun header caps rampant Rangers victory

Rangers 3
Tavernier 11pen, Morelos 15, Balogun 51

Red Star Belgrade 0

Paul Doyle

Rangers have taken a big step towards their first European quarter-final for 14 years. James Tavernier and Alfredo Morelos struck in a hurly-burly first half before Leon Balogun headed into the net at the start of the second to give the Scottish champions a plump cushion to take with them for next week's second leg in Belgrade.

However the Rangers manager, Giovanni van Bronckhorst, warned that Red Star remain a threat. "We played really well. If you'd seen the game you would think more goals were in it, also for them," he said. "We go to Belgrade next week, it is going to be hard, maybe harder than today. We have a three goal difference to take with us but this tie isn't over yet."

Two weeks after one of the most glorious European results in Rangers' history, Van Bronckhorst sent out the same XI that finished the victorious tie against Borussia Dortmund. Red Star started brightly but the 50,000 excited souls in Ibrox rejoiced when Rangers' first proper attack yielded a penalty, Ryan Kent skittering into the box and falling over Slavoljub Srnic's trailing leg. Tavernier curled a spot-kick into the top corner.

Aleksandar Katai thought he had equalised almost immediately but, for the second time in a frenetic start, his effort was ruled out for offside. Red Star barely had a chance to curse their poor timing before Rangers inflicted further pain. Ryan Jack received a short corner at the edge of the box before crossing towards the far post; a defensive header sent it bouncing towards Morelos, who dispatched a sweetly controlled shot into the net from eight yards.

Jack's fortunes then turned for the worse as he was penalised for a foul in his own box. But Katai's luck did not change: Allan McGregor clawed away his penalty with a brilliant one-handed save. The visitors were slick and muscular but Rangers nearly made it 3-0 before the break, Glen Kamara firing over the bar.

Five minutes into the second half, Rangers broke through again. Balogun leapt to head an outswinging corner beyond goalkeeper Milan Borjan from 10 yards. Connor Goldson nearly made it 4-0 from another corner but Aleksandar Dragovic cleared off the line. Red Star remained dangerous. McGregor was beaten in the 73rd minute but Guélor Kanga's ferocious shot from 25 yards clattered the bar.

Rangers
4-2-3-1
McGregor; Tavernier, Goldson, Balogun, Bassey; Lundstram, Jack🟡 (Sands 75); Aribo🟡 (Sakala 75), Kamara, Kent; Morelos
Subs not used
McCrorie, McLaughlin, Diallo, Ramsey, Wright, Roofe, Barisic, King, Lowry

Red Star Belgrade
4-2-3-1
Borjan; Piccini (Gajic 72), Erakovic🟡, Dragovic, Rodic🟡; Srnic (Ben Nabouhane🟡 61), Sanogo🟡; Ivanic, Kanga, Katai (Motika 84); Omoijuanfo (Pavkov 61)
Subs not used
Popovic, Gordic, Pankov, Kristic, Falco, Zivkovic, Radulovic, Gobeljic

Referee Serdar Gozubuyuk (Neth)

Europa Conference League

Doubling up Leicester take a 2-0 lead to Rennes next week for the second leg of their last-16 tie thanks to Marc Albrighton and Kelechi Iheanacho. Albrighton scored after 30 minutes and Iheanacho (📷) doubled their lead in the third minute of stoppage time.

MATT WEST/ SHUTTERSTOCK

▼ *Matty Cash adds Aston Villa's second on a miserable night for Leeds*
PETER POWELL/REUTERS

Marsch feels little love as Leeds slump again

Leeds 0

Aston Villa 3

Coutinho 22, Cash 65, Chambers 73

Aaron Bower
Elland Road

Jesse Marsch is learning the hard way how football can turn in the blink of an eye. At kick-off here, he emerged for his first match in charge of Leeds at Elland Road to a cacophony of noise and support. There was no doubting it: Leeds supporters were backing their new man. Just 90 minutes later, their mood could not have been more different.

Seconds after Calum Chambers had put this result beyond doubt with a wonderful strike to make it 3-0 and ensure it would be six successive league defeats for Leeds, some supporters in the main stand here turned towards the home directors and made their feelings abundantly clear. Seconds later, chants for Marsch's predecessor, Marcelo Bielsa, were almost deafening. These supporters know what many others do: their team is firmly in a battle to preserve their top-flight status.

The statistics, and indeed the irony surrounding them, make for uncomfortable reading. The last time Leeds lost six successive league games? 2003-04, a season which ended with relegation from the Premier League. This squad are hurtling towards a similar fate and after another chastening performance, it is not an understatement to suggest Sunday's game against Norwich is nothing other than must-win.

"It is basically a final on Sunday and we have to find a way to get a result in that match," Marsch said. "We have to continue to stay strong and be calm and be clear in what we try to achieve. I underestimated the stress of the moment from the players' perspective. I've tried to create clarity for the group as to how we want to play but it was clear from the beginning that we lacked confidence and aggression."

Most worryingly for Leeds, the atmosphere their players have thrived under during Bielsa's time in charge seemed to have the inverse impact here, with the pressure almost palpable as they slid to another defeat. "I heard a lot about the Elland Road crowd and it was fantastic, and the players want to do well so badly that it brings more pressure on to their shoulders," Marsch said.

But this result was as much about Aston Villa's performance as it was Leeds's. This is now three successive wins and clean sheets for Steven Gerrard's side, with their attacking triumvirate of Danny Ings, Ollie Watkins and Philippe Coutinho again impressing. Coutinho's first-half strike gave the visitors a deserved lead by half-time – his shot deflected past Illan Meslier – and they had the better of the chances throughout that first half, meaning it was no surprise when they eventually went ahead.

"I can't ask for any more from the players about how they went about their work," Gerrard said. "We've done it with control and we thoroughly deserved it. Once we settled in both halves, how we dominated possession is a real plus." As Gerrard pointed out, Leeds began both halves brightly, and they were buoyed after the restart thanks in part to Joe Gelhardt's introduction and Patrick Bamford's long-awaited return from injury.

But despite a couple of half-chances, including a clever ball across goal from Raphinha which narrowly evaded Dan James, Villa rode the storm and struck a telling blow just after the hour mark. Matty Cash, who had already provided the assist for Coutinho's opener, found himself unmarked at the back post and he waltzed past Junior Firpo before firing beyond Meslier to double Villa's lead. It completely stunted any momentum Leeds had built and from there, the outcome felt inevitable.

The final 25 minutes were somewhat of a procession and when Chambers' curling effort sailed past Meslier, the mood inside Elland Road profoundly turned with the chants for Bielsa and the ire hurled towards the directors' box by Leeds supporters, many of whom were heading for the exits with 17 minutes still remaining. Marsch, who inherited this situation rather than playing a role in its creation, must have felt as though he was rudderless aboard a ship which has all the hallmarks of one that is sinking.

The crumb of comfort many Leeds supporters have held on to for so long is that despite their own form, there are three teams who are potentially worse than themselves.

This night, above all else, underlines how that is a dangerous mindset to take as things stand. This is not quite a job on the scale of Brian Clough succeeding Don Revie in 1974, but the magnitude of the job Marsch faces now must feel enormous.

Leeds
4-2-3-1
Meslier; Dallas, Ayling, Struijk, Firpo🟡; Forshaw (Klich 67), Koch🟡; Raphinha🟡, Rodrigo (Gelhardt🟡 ht), Harrison (Bamford 58); James🟡
Subs not used
Klaesson, Llorente, Cresswell, Shackleton, Summerville, Greenwood

Aston Villa
4-3-3
Martinez; Cash, Chambers, Mings🟡, Digne; McGinn, Douglas Luiz🟡 (Young 87), Ramsey; Coutinho (Buendía 77), Ings (Sanson 71), Watkins🟡
Subs not used
Olsen, Konsa, Traoré, Bailey, Iroegbunam Carney Chukwuemeka

Referee Simon Hooper **Attendance** 36,400

How they stand

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Manchester City	28	22	3	3	68	18	+50	**69**
Liverpool	27	19	6	2	71	20	+51	**63**
Chelsea	27	16	8	3	56	19	+37	**56**
Arsenal	25	15	3	7	41	29	+12	**48**
Manchester Utd	28	13	8	7	45	38	+7	**47**
West Ham	28	13	6	9	46	35	+11	**45**
Tottenham	26	14	3	9	40	32	+8	**45**
Wolves	28	13	4	11	28	23	+5	**43**
Aston Villa	27	11	3	13	40	37	+3	**36**
Southampton	28	8	11	9	35	43	-8	**35**
Crystal Palace	28	7	12	9	39	38	+1	**33**
Leicester	25	9	6	10	40	43	-3	**33**
Brighton	27	7	12	8	26	32	-6	**33**
Newcastle	27	7	10	10	32	47	-15	**31**
Brentford	28	7	6	15	30	45	-15	**27**
Leeds	28	5	8	15	29	64	-35	**23**
Everton	25	6	4	15	28	46	-18	**22**
Burnley	26	3	12	11	22	36	-14	**21**
Watford	28	5	4	19	27	54	-27	**19**
Norwich	28	4	5	19	17	61	-44	**17**

Jiménez sparks goal rush to help Wolves cruise past Watford

Wolves 4

Jiménez 13, Hernández 18og, Podence 21, Neves 85

Watford 0

Peter Lansley
Molineux

Wolves ended their run of three successive defeats with a comfortable win over Watford, just as they had done in September, on a night when they equalled their biggest Premier League win to consolidate their place among the chasing pack, four points behind fifth place.

Rúben Neves's sumptuous chip five minutes from time allowed Wolves to match their 4-0 win over Blackpool in 2011 on a night that Ben Foster will probably want to forget as Watford's good run on the road came to an abrupt halt.

The former West Bromwich Albion goalkeeper, who celebrated Watford's FA Cup semi-final win over these opponents three years ago with a tweet mentioning W01ve5 in memory of the Baggies' 5-1 win at Molineux in Mick McCarthy's final game here in 2012, was harangued all evening long by the Wolves fans and gave away the ball for Daniel Podence to make it 3-0 in the 21st minute.

Wolves had won 2-0 at Vicarage Road after losing their opening three games under Bruno Lage at the start of the season, going on to produce top-six form before a recent trio of setbacks prefaced this improved performance.

Raúl Jiménez opened the scoring before Cucho Hernández put past his own keeper but the goal of the night came late on when Neves, having taken one touch to steady himself on receiving Chiquinho's header back, advanced into the penalty area as if he was going to blast his shot only to dink it over Foster's head into the top corner. It was a sublime moment, the cherry on the icing, from a 24-year-old whom his manager believes can reach the top of his profession.

"I think he misses his chance of shooting when he came inside," Lage said. "It's so important for Rúben. He knows what I want from him, and what I want for his career. He should be the top of the top. So now the challenge is to come with another good performance against Everton."

Watford remain in the middle of the relegation zone, with one win in 17 games, three points off 17th-placed Everton having played three more games. Their record as defensive misers on the road since Roy Hodgson took over was in tatters inside the first quarter of the game as Wolves refound their attacking swagger.

Three goals in an eight-minute burst left Watford "staring down the barrel of a gun," according to their manager, who blamed the goals on individual errors.

Jiménez, recalled to the starting lineup after missing the last two defeats, opened the scoring with a neat right-foot trap and left-foot finish after Hwang Hee-chan burst on to Podence's touch into the left side of the penalty area to cross short and low to his strike partner.

Wolves looked much more dynamic with the Mexican striker back down the middle, and with Jonny, on his first start for a year, and Rayan Aït-Nouri advancing down the flanks at every opportunity. When Jonny cut back inside down the right wing and crossed left-footed to the opposite wing-back, Aït-Nouri's pull-back was diverted into his own goal by Hernández.

Watford had been seeking to equal their top-flight club record of three consecutive clean sheets away from home but their defensive confidence was clearly shattered. Foster, in particular, was getting brickbats from the home fans and when the former England goalkeeper, under pressure from Jiménez following a bobbling back pass, shanked his attempted clearance, Podence calmly collected the ball 25 yards out and lobbed it into the empty net. How the Wolves fans gloated. "Foster, Foster, what's the score?" was one of their more polite enquiries.

The second half turned into something of a pantomime. Lage was quicker to respond to the South Bank's calls for a wave than Foster who sent another miskick to Podence, this time 60 yards out. The Wolves' No 10 still went for the lob from the centre circle, Foster back-pedalling in time to take the catch.

Hodgson agreed Foster had a poor game but did not castigate him. "He would be the first to put his hand up," his manager at West Brom said. "He has been vitally important in every respect, with his performances and the way he is. As a keeper, you are a hero or a zero. He has been a hero a number of times, this was the other side of the coin. If you want to be anonymous, get yourself in midfield."

▲ *Ben Foster's mistake donates Wolves' third to Daniel Podence*

Wolves
3-4-3
Sá, Boly, Coady, Saïss; Jonny (Chiquinho 82), Neves, Moutinho, Aït Nouri🟡; Podence, Jiménez (Silva 71), Hwang (Neto 61)
Subs not used
Ruddy, Marçal, Trincão, Kilman, Dendoncker, Cundle

Watford
4-3-3
Foster; Femenía (Kabasele 30), Cathcart, Samir🟡, Kamara; Sissoko, Louza🟡, Cleverley (Etebo 73); Hernández, Dennis, King (Kalu ht)
Subs not used
Bachmann, Masina, Sema, Sierralta, Kucka, Kayembe

Referee Darren England **Attendance** 29,658

'Business as usual,' Tuchel insists as he praises players

Barney Ronay
Sophie Downey

At the end of one of the strangest days in the history of English football, Thomas Tuchel suggested it was "business as usual" for Chelsea as they eased to a 3-1 win against Norwich just a few short hours after the club had been placed in suspended animation by government sanctions.

It is a mark of how profound the turbulence around Chelsea has become that Tuchel has already developed an effective public manner for dealing with questions about the club ownership. Links to the warmongering regime of Vladimir Putin? Chants from fans about sanctions? Tuchel has been left to field these issues. But he was impressively straight-batted at Carrow Road.

"The evening did not feel strange," he said. "It helps sometimes to have a fixed schedule. You use it to give you structure, to feel safe, to have lunch together, to have your meetings. It helps you to be in that mood. There is another level of distraction with the sanctions, we could feel it and the disturbance around it, but we accepted it. The excitement and love of the game helps us.

"The team showed very good character. We can be proud that they performed like this under the circumstances. The squad and the structure and the culture in the club is right."

Asked about the gleefully provocative chants of the away section, which gloried the name of Roman Abramovich and referenced UK sanctions related to the deaths of Ukrainian civilians, Tuchel replied: "I did not hear them and did not understand them. It's the first time I heard about them and I prefer not to comment."

The sanctions imposed on Abramovich also affect Chelsea's women's side. Speaking after their 4-1 victory over West Ham in the Women's Super League, Emma Hayes described the developments earlier in the day as a "big moment" for Chelsea but also called for patience from all associated with the club.

"We're aware of the things that are going on – we read, we watch television," the manager said. "And yes, today is a big moment for the club. But I believe in giving both sides the time to get it right going forward. I think it is important for the players, the staff, the fans to be patient. Let's sort through that. And hopefully that process won't take too long."

▲ *Emma Hayes wants patience from all associated with Chelsea*

Havertz conjures a silver lining

Kai Havertz continues his fine form by firing home Chelsea's third goal to seal their win against Norwich JOE GIDDENS/PA

Norwich 1 *Pukki 69pen* **Chelsea 3** *Chalobah 3, Mount 14, Havertz 90*

Havertz sparkles but Chelsea's uneasy new reality is laid bare

Tuchel's players try to go about their business as usual but there is nothing routine about this victory, sealed on one of the strangest days in football history

Barney Ronay
Carrow Road

Freeze our assets. Curtail our hotel allowance. Link our 19 years of unbroken success to the enabling of a blood-stained dictator. It seems that the show really does go on – for now anyway – as on a crisp, clear Norfolk evening the players of Chelsea dished up an entertaining Premier League defeat of an energetic Norwich.

Welcome to Chelsea, the afterlife: a place that felt, as the Norwich fans sang about dirty Russian money, like another lurch into the strange parallel timeline of football and geopolitics in 2022.

News of the sanctions imposed on Roman Abramovich had emerged shortly after 9am yesterday morning. By lunchtime the boulevards of Norwich's pedestrianised city centre were thronged with Chelsea supporters singing the blues away. We've got Tommy Tuchel: he knows just what to do. In which case, perhaps he could share it with the rest of us. Because nothing right now makes a great deal of sense.

As Chelsea's away fans kept up an early wave of noise close to kick-off there was a valedictory, Viking Funeral-style air about their boisterous good spirits, a sense of good cheer, of event-glamour about all this. Humans are odd creatures. Give us a tribe, a hill to die on: any hill, and often that's enough.

Tuchel had picked an everyday Chelsea team for this most otherworldly of occasions, rotating some key parts but retaining the first-choice forward line that sees Kai Havertz settled as the focal point. Tuchel could be excused feeling a little demob-unhappy. One thing does seem certain: Chelsea finally have a manager they can't, under current UK law, actually sack.

Otherwise it was business as usual. With one minute gone at Carrow Road Chelsea's fans were singing "Roman Abramovich". With two minutes gone they were singing "We've won it all", greeted by chants of "You've lost it all" from the Norwich fans. With three minutes gone they were 1-0 up, Trevoh Chalobah heading in Mason Mount's corner. Say what you like about the oligarchical system of Vladimir Putin's Russia: it has helped create a very effective football team.

With 14 minutes gone Mount made it 2-0, teed up by Havertz who looked a whirl of ceaseless movement and sharp edges close to goal. And as the game drifted on there was time to reflect on one of the strangest days in English football history, the day the most successful Premier League club of the past two decades became, at a stroke, a distressed asset.

There are two points worth making about all this. First, the government's decision to sanction seven Russian oligarchs has little to do with Chelsea. What is or isn't fair for football fans makes up a tiny portion of this picture. Unrecoverable hotel costs? Nothing to do on Saturday? Tell it to the besieged civilians of Ukraine.

> ***'In Thomas Tuchel, Chelsea finally have a manager they can't, under UK law, actually sack'***

And secondly, Chelsea are, for the time being, absolutely cooked. The club can't generate income, can't manage the payroll, can't sell any tickets (those stacks of unsold Chelsea tickets have now become non-fungible tokens, to be traded for curiosity value, like a stopped watch from the deck of the Titanic).

The players were getting on a plane at Gatwick when news broke that this entity, this endlessly giving hand, had been chopped off at the knees by the British government. How many calls had been made by lunchtime to Reece James's agent? How will Chelsea's players make that £20,000 away day allowance stretch after this final Norfolk blow-out? Get the room service. Dismantle the trouser press. For tomorrow we're in the serviced apart-hotels. There is at least something brilliantly prescient about Chelsea's choice of Liquidator as the pre-match music at Stamford Bridge.

▲ *Chelsea supporters give their backing to their players*
SIMON TRAYLEN/ PROSPORTS/ SHUTTERSTOCK

▼ *Norwich fans respond with a punchily worded banner*
ANDREW BOYERS/ ACTION IMAGES/ REUTERS

And really the key point here is the sheer suddenness. Really? Has the government only now discerned that Chelsea's owner of the past 19 years is, in its own words, "connected" to Vladimir Putin? Had this not triggered any alarms? Did nobody have a word with the Premier League? Abramovich has not suddenly declared his fealty to his sovereign lord. He remains the same oddly mute, oddly sphinx-like presence. Plus of course right now there is nothing to stop it happening again. Finance a war criminal. It's all good. Welcome to the greatest league in the world.

It has to be said, Chelsea's players were undaunted and hungrily engaged with the task in hand. It wouldn't be a total surprise to see them win the Champions League again under this cloud, to hear Roman's name sung down the Champs Élysées. Would that feel good? Does it still feel glorious?

Nobody in the away end here seemed to mind, even if Chelsea were made to hold on as Norwich pushed hard after pulling one back though Teemu Pukki's penalty. Havertz's late third killed the game. And Chelsea, for now, roll on.

Norwich	Chelsea
5-3-2	**3-4-2-1**
Krul; Aarons, Zimmermann (Rupp ht), Hanley, Kabak, Williams; Lees-Melou, Normann (Rashica ht), McLean; Sargent (Rowe 84), Pukki	Mendy; Chalobah, Silva, Christensen; Azpilicueta (Loftus-Cheek ht), Jorginho, Kovacic (Kanté 85), Saúl; Mount, Werner (Lukaku 86); Havertz
Subs not used	*Subs not used*
Gunn, Gibson, Dowell, Placheta, Sørensen, Giannoulis	Arrizabalaga, Rüdiger, Ziyech, Kenedy, Sarr, Vale

Referee Martin Atkinson

Q&A What effects will the sanctions have

Sean Ingle

What has happened?
Roman Abramovich had his assets frozen as part of a range of British government sanctions against seven Russian "pro-Kremlin" oligarchs linked with Vladimir Putin. It means Abramovich can no longer sell Chelsea or make money from owning them.

What are Chelsea barred from doing?
From now on, only season-ticket holders and those who have already bought tickets will be allowed to attend Chelsea games. The club are no longer permitted to transfer or loan players, while broadcast and prize money is also frozen.

Yesterday lunchtime, the official Chelsea club shop was also forced to close. However, the club can continue to play fixtures and are permitted to have "reasonable travel costs" to and from games up to a maximum of £20,000.

What will Abramovich do next?
Government sources have stressed that Abramovich will not make a penny from any sale. Essentially, Abramovich has two choices: to sell the club and walk away quietly or stay and fight, which could lead to further sanctions and the club being run down.

What about Chelsea's sponsors?
Three, the British telecoms company which is the team's principal shirt sponsor on a deal believed to be worth around £40m a year, has confirmed it is suspending its partnership with the club. A spokesperson said: "We recognise this decision will impact Chelsea fans. However, we feel that given the circumstances, that is in place, it is the right thing to do."

Hyundai, Chelsea shirt sleeve sponsor, has also released a statement. It reads: "Hyundai has become one of the strongest partners in football over the years and the company supports the sport to be a force for good. We are currently assessing the situation with Chelsea FC."

Does the news lead to wider questions for English football?
Undoubtedly. Chelsea are not the only Premier League club whose owners and sponsors have been called into question. Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund has a majority stake in Newcastle. The Abu Dhabi United Group runs Manchester City. Meanwhile last week, Everton suspended all sponsorship deals with the Uzbek oligarch Alisher Usmanov.

While the decision to impose sanctions on Abramovich was welcomed by Tracey Crouch, the MP who chaired the recent fan-led review into football governance, she said it illustrated the need for better scrutiny of owners and directors. "There has been a huge desire for this to happen," Crouch said. "But the situation at Chelsea does demonstrate why we need an independent regulator with really tough owners' tests."

Players fearful over futures and desperate for clarity

Continued *from back page*

crystal clear that Abramovich cannot benefit in any way.

The government is open to considering an application for a new licence that would permit a new owner if a suitable bid emerges, but Abramovich will not be permitted to profit from any sale. However, much of the detail is yet to be decided, including where the proceeds of a deal could end up.

Discussions continue between the Treasury, the Premier League and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. One source said: "The primary thing today is about taking action on oligarchs with close ties to the Kremlin. We're working through some of those wider implications at the moment."

In a private letter to Conservative MPs, seen by the Guardian, the culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, made it clear the government saw the club as a cultural asset. "The government understands that today's sanctions will have a direct impact on the club, its fans and the wider football pyramid," Dorries wrote. "We have therefore been working hard to ensure that the national game, the Premier League, the club and its fans are not unnecessarily harmed by these important sanctions."

It is understood the decision to impose sanctions on Abramovich, which was announced in the morning, has not deterred potential bidders. Sources said a consortium led by Todd Boehly and Hansjörg Wyss has not ended its interest. The British property tycoon Nick Candy has also been working on putting a bid together and representatives for Muhsin Bayrak have said the Turkish businessman remains determined to buy the club.

For the time being, though, Chelsea are in turmoil. Abramovich cannot put any money into the club or take any out of it. The 55-year-old has given Chelsea £1.5bn worth of loans since buying them in 2003. The latest accounts revealed a loss of £145.6m in the last financial year, although that was put down to the pandemic.

Funding is provided by Fordstam Limited, a company owned by Abramovich. As one source said: "Who would buy a club with a £1.5bn loan hanging over it?"

The UK has targeted Abramovich as part of its response to Russia's actions in Ukraine. In a document published by the government in the morning, Chelsea's owner was identified as "a pro-Kremlin oligarch" and was said to be "associated with a person who is or has been involved in destabilising Ukraine and undermining and threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, namely Vladimir Putin, with whom Abramovich has had a close relationship for decades".

Abramovich put the club up for sale last week. He appointed the New York-based bank the Raine Group to oversee the process. The Times has reported that lawyers for the Raine Group had contacted all interested parties after the government's announcement that "the process has been paused as the parties consider the implications of the developments and discuss the next steps with the relevant UK authorities".

A spokesperson for the Chelsea Supporters' Trust said: "The CST notes with concern the government's statement regarding the owner. Supporters must be involved in any conversation regarding impacts on the club and its global fan base. The CST implores the government to conduct a swift process to minimise the uncertainty over Chelsea's future, and for supporters to be given a golden share as part of a sale of the club."

Abramovich's spokesperson has been approached for comment.

> ***'Supporters [must] be given a golden share as part of a sale of the club'***
>
> **Spokesperson**
> *Chelsea Supporters' Trust*

The game has been wilfully oblivious to known facts

Continued *from back page*

oligarch partner, Boris Berezovsky, providing him with political *krysha* (protection) were: "Inherently corrupt, and that likewise, the deal between the two men, whereby Mr Abramovich agreed to pay Mr Berezovsky for his *krysha* services, was also corrupt."

The judgment also noted that Abramovich had "good relations" with Putin, including "privileged access" to the Russian president.

How the money was made was known and well-reported by 2003 when Abramovich bought Chelsea, and the club's successes have been funded with his oligarch money. He bankrolled transfers and wages the club could otherwise not have paid. In that way he bought the Premier League, the Champions League and, days before Putin invaded Ukraine, the Club World Cup.

It could also be comforting to lay blame for the reverent indulgence of Abramovich at the doors of just the Premier League, the Football Association or a succession of governments more than happy for Britain to soak up cash from anywhere. But that would be a cop-out too: the facts have been there for anybody who bothered to care.

There was, though, a wilful obliviousness to the known facts of how he had become an oligarch, and he proceeded to cement his presence and Chelsea's super-club status while football adjusted to his mega-spending. After it was all laid out in 2012, his representatives said Gloster had not got her assessment quite right. They played down Abramovich's relationship with Putin, pointing to evidence that he was "not in the inner circle".

Recently, he started even to come on to the pitch to celebrate a trophy. For those who did care, it was painful to see César Azpilicueta, the modern model professional, ushering his owner to centre stage with the Champions League trophy at the final last season. The globally broadcast images of Abramovich, with his wide, triumphant smile and his hands on football's greatest prize, were not a great look for football, for Britain or for Europe.

Finally the government has ploughed through all the froth, stating in its reasons for the sanctions that Abramovich is a "pro-Kremlin oligarch" who has had "a close relationship for decades" with Putin, and had "preferential treatment and concessions from Putin and the government of Russia" including contracts in the run-up to the 2018 World Cup. His company could supply steel to the Russian military, which could be used to produce tanks, and could provide money, goods or technology "that could contribute to destabilising Ukraine".

There is a clear challenge for English football, which is important even in this horrifying context, as the glamour and legitimacy it bestows is coveted by all manner of regimes and money men. It must ask whether it does enough to ensure that its irresistible sport and adored clubs are forces for good in the world – because its rules have been exposed as laughably inadequate.

Even now, its owners and directors test appears to approve Abramovich as "a fit and proper person". The rules were designed to stop small-time crooks taking over small football clubs, and have never been equipped for the Premier League's modern age. People are barred if they have a criminal conviction for dishonesty or have been made bankrupt.

No, Abramovich doesn't have any convictions and no, he has never been bankrupt. He became a billionaire in the "wild east" of Russia post-communism, which was not governed by the rule of law. For nearly two decades, he has been allowed to bestride the game, flood it with his money and claim its greatest prizes, and all that has only finally ended because of an actual war.

Mounting a response – Blues beat Norwich in first game of an uneasy new reality

Barney Ronay, page 46 →

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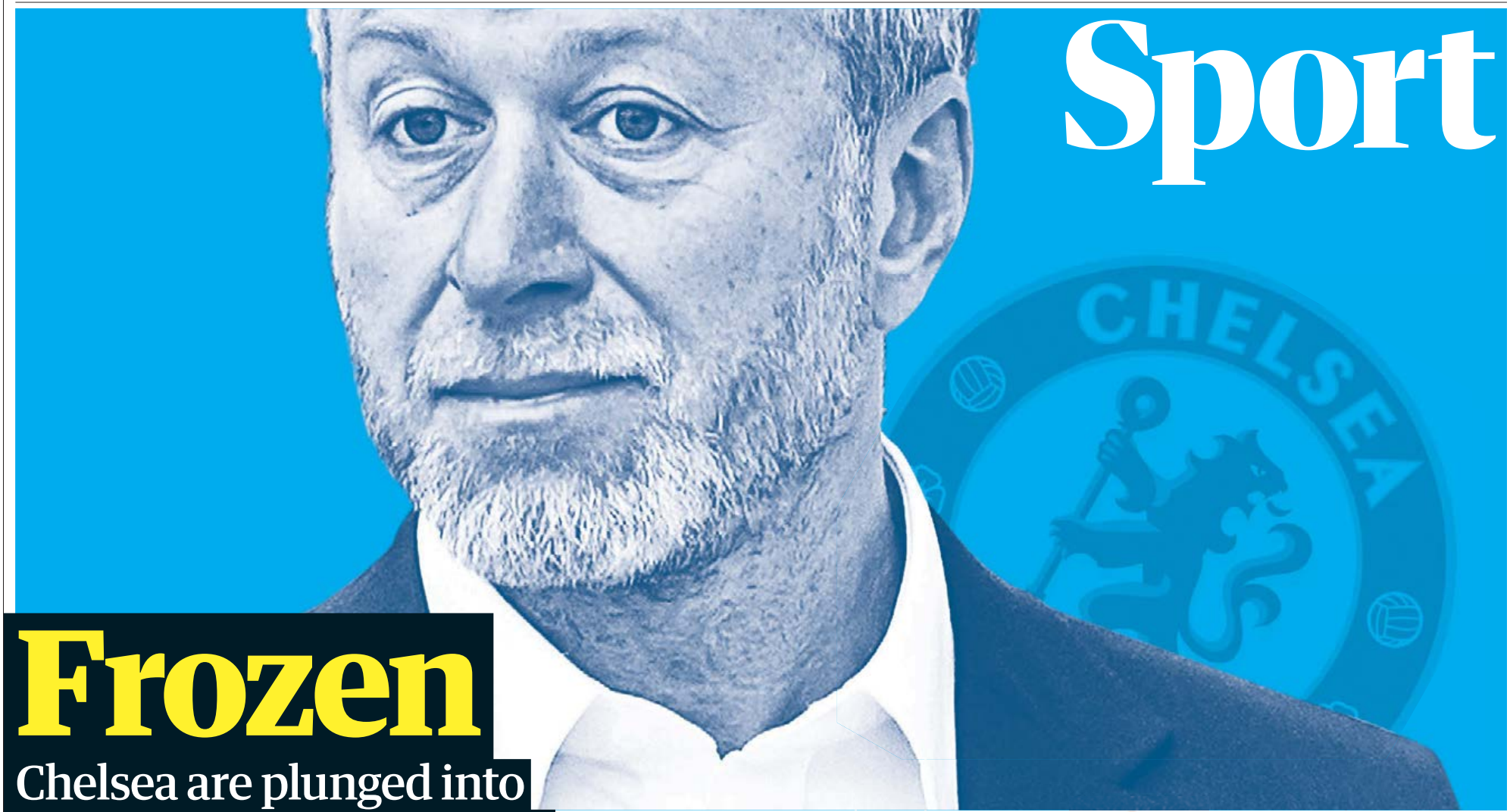
The Guardian
Friday 11 March 2022

Sport



Frozen

Chelsea are plunged into crisis, chaos and fear after Abramovich is hit with government sanctions preventing him selling club

Jacob Steinberg
Sean Ingle
David Hytner

Chelsea players are fearful about their futures after an extraordinary day on which Roman Abramovich was hit with government sanctions and the mobile phone company Three suspended its sponsorship of the club.

The government's decision to freeze Abramovich's assets – and bar him from selling the club for the time being – plunged Chelsea into a state of limbo, with one dressing-room source describing the atmosphere as "chaos" and some worried that the club could go into administration.

The Guardian also understands some of the players are concerned about the direction of the club and, by extension, their own futures, and are desperate for clarity. They are alarmed because one of the stipulations that has arisen from the sanctions is that Chelsea are unable to sign players or renew existing contracts.

On a day of uncertainty and confusion, Chelsea were:

- Blindsided by the government's decision to freeze Abramovich's assets because of the oligarch's ties with Vladimir Putin and the Russian government. Abramovich will now need approval from the UK government before selling the club.
- Told they could compete only under a special licence that will allow them to fulfil their fixtures, but will force the club to cease many of its commercial activities, including future ticket sales, and see its broadcast money frozen.
- Hit by Three suspending its sponsorship, including the removal of its brand from shirts and around the stadium "until further notice".
- Were banned from signing players and new contracts.

£1.5bn
Worth of loans Roman Abramovich has provided Chelsea since ***purchasing the club in 2003***

The men's team have three important first-team players whose deals are set to end in the summer – César Azpilicueta, Antonio Rüdiger and Andreas Christensen. The women's team have five squad members whose contracts expire at the end of the season: Ann-Katrin Berger, Maren Mjelde, Jonna Andersson, Ji So-yun and Drew Spence. Christensen is believed to have an agreement in principle to join Barcelona as a free agent. Neither the men's manager, Thomas Tuchel, nor the women's, Emma Hayes, is understood to be considering their futures at the moment.

In the afternoon Chelsea held talks with the government in the hope of softening some of the restrictions it faces – including a £20,000 limit on costs for away matches. But while the government is understood to be receptive to making some changes, it has been made

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Analysis
David Conn

We all ignored truth about owner's wealth for too long

It must have been a bracing morning call at Stamford Bridge, with the news that Roman Abramovich is now considered so toxic that the government has slapped him with sanctions after 19 years in which he has been garlanded as the Chelsea benefactor.

For the UK, the Premier League, for football – for all of us – it would feel a little better if we could say this has come as a terrible shock, that nobody has known enough about Abramovich all these years. But that kind of reassurance would be more self-delusion, and the times we are in demand a bit of straight talking.

Of course it was stunning to see the government actually freeze Abramovich's assets, overthrowing his and Chelsea's complacency with one closely typed paragraph damning his closeness to Vladimir Putin. But really the shock was mostly of recognition, pointing past the emperor's clothes – and trophies, in Abramovich's case – to some naked truths in plain sight all along.

The court proceedings referred to by the Home Office, in that document Chris Bryant read out to such dramatic effect in the Commons two weeks ago, took place in 2012. By 2019, after the novichok poisoning of the former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in Salisbury, the government took the view: "Abramovich remains of interest to HMG [Her Majesty's Government] due to his links to the Russian state and his public association with corrupt activity and practices … An example of this is Abramovich admitting in court proceedings that he paid for political influence."

The court judgment by Mrs Justice Gloster stated that it was Abramovich's own case that the political lobbying activities of his former

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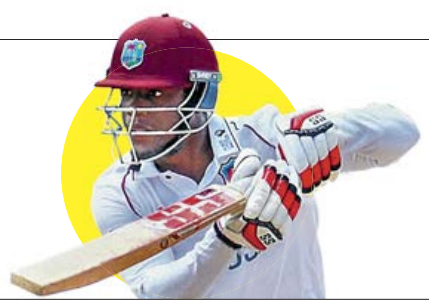
Bruising Bonner

Batsman's stubborn century leaves insipid England reeling on day three of first Test *Page 42 →*



Hammer blow

West Ham suffer 1-0 Europa loss at Sevilla *Page 43 → **

The war in Ukraine is about who owns the nation's story *Editorials, page 2*
How Britain's upper classes came to serve the global elite *Andy Beckett, page 3*
What is driving the Great Resignation? *Emma Brockes, page 4*

G2 Daily pullout life & arts section *Inside*

The Guardian Friday 11 March 2022

Journal

Opinion and ideas

Let Bercow's humiliation be a warning to all bullying bosses

His fists were bunched and trembling, his eyes popping, his body shaking with fury. For more than a quarter of an hour he ranted, loudly enough to be audible from the office next door. And the cause of this reported towering outburst

Gaby Hinsliff

from the Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow? Not some constitutional outrage perpetrated by a government riding roughshod over due process; not even the high stakes of the parliamentary battle over Brexit, which made him a hero to so many remainers. According to a withering report from an independent parliamentary appeals panel this week, which deemed him both a bully and a "repeatedly dishonest" witness, he thought the clerk of the House, Lord Lisvane, had put a paper on the agenda for an upcoming meeting without his knowledge.

You don't have to work in politics to feel a pang of recognition for the "stomach-clenching anxiety" the incoming Speaker's secretary, Kate Emms, described feeling on seeing her new boss publicly belittle her outgoing predecessor, Angus Sinclair. On Fleet Street when I was starting out, being screamed at on a daily basis was simply regarded as routine. A famously expletive-ridden executive once delivered such a loud dressing-down that someone on another floor was widely rumoured to have called security, convinced the building was actually under attack.

But bullying happens everywhere, from school staff rooms to factory floors, and from Premier League dressing rooms to the NHS. The television dramatisation of Adam Kay's medical memoir, This Is Going to Hurt, captures the contempt heaped by some senior doctors on junior ones, who in turn dish it out to even more lowly medical students as if they were all still at a boarding school run by particularly sadistic prefects. The series is a black comedy, but management by fear isn't funny.

Being bullied at work is every bit as miserable as being bullied at school; the same sick sense of foreboding every Monday morning, the same constant nervous vigilance, and often the same irrational sense of shame. Months of being publicly picked on can reduce the most confident person to a puddle of doubt and self-loathing. Tell someone they're useless often enough and they can start to believe it, or at least to worry that complaining will probably be interpreted as weakness. Reporting a member of parliament for rudeness, one anonymous senior clerk explained to the panel, "can only end up with you being seen as in some way inadequate".

And Bercow's liberal public persona gave him the perfect ideological cover for those private, spittle-flecked rages, which according to Sinclair once saw him smash a mobile phone to smithereens on a desk. He

Let Bercow's humiliation be a warning to all bullying bosses

Gaby Hinsliff

← Continued from front

pitched himself as "a moderniser, a reformer, a progressive change-maker" whose first great modernising project had effectively been himself. Having started his political career on the hard right of the Conservative party, he ended it by burnishing his feminist credentials and attacking what he depicted as stuffy old reactionaries at Westminster. He was a creative and activist Speaker who pushed through some welcome changes, from boosting the power of backbenchers and hosting receptions for gay rights charities in his grand Westminster apartments, to opening a parliamentary nursery.

But it's an unusual kind of feminist who stands accused – as Lisvane wrote in a resignation letter that he drafted but didn't actually send – of pushing the first ever female Speaker's secretary out of her job, "damaging her health and making a sham of your alleged commitment to diversity". And modernising zeal doesn't explain why Bercow, who has dismissed the report's findings as a "kangaroo court" verdict, reportedly threw a tantrum at an airport when told he couldn't take toothpaste in his hand luggage.

> **Even after Newsnight ran a detailed account of his behaviour in 2018, too many MPs protected him**

True progressivism means treating others with basic respect, even if you do think they are fellow middle-aged white men who (as he once reportedly told Lisvane) "come here with your privileged background and offer your opinion". As the independent panel concluded, historians will judge whether he was one of parliament's great reformers, but "there was no need to act as a bully in order to achieve that". He should, they felt, be banned for life from having a parliamentary pass.

Andrea Leadsom, the former leader of the House of Commons he famously dismissed as "stupid", deserves some retrospective credit for apparently doggedly pursuing bullying charges not just against Bercow but more widely. Yet even after BBC Newsnight ran a detailed account of his behaviour in 2018, too many MPs protected him.

At a critical point in the battle over Brexit, Bercow had found parliamentary time for MPs opposed to it, and grateful remainers closed ranks. The former foreign secretary Margaret Beckett was at least honest enough to spell the deal out. Abuse was terrible and should be stopped, she said, but "yes, if it comes to it, the constitutional future of this country, the most difficult decision we've made for hundreds of years, yes it trumps bad behaviour". Perhaps even now some feel this trade-off was justified. But it still beggars belief that Jeremy Corbyn recommended Bercow, who defected to Labour after leaving the Speaker's chair, for a peerage.

The truth is that bullying flourishes in badly run institutions, under managers who don't know any other way to manage, and where people have been browbeaten into believing that this is somehow normal. But it isn't actually normal to shout and swear and throw things; it isn't normal to wake up every day feeling sick at the thought of going into work. Routine hazing of the kind Adam Kay has described is no way for juniors to learn their craft, and nor should explosive rage be the price you pay for working at the heart of power in Westminster.

Of all the workplaces in the world, the one that makes the rules for everyone else's office life should have had the gumption to say so.

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'Comment is free... but facts are sacred' CP Scott

Economics

Sunak's pro-profit politics holds back government while households suffer

Just as Russian tanks were starting to roll into Ukraine, Rishi Sunak revealed himself to be a Thatcherite in trainers. His Mais lecture last month was a paean to his heroine's philosophy. Yet the past decade has shown this creed to have been a failure in the light of its original aims. It has not increased productivity. It has not led to lower inflation. It has not seen the national debt fall. Mr Sunak says the problem is that businesses won't invest – yet why would they if sales are drying up? Thatcherism's economic legacy has seen wages stagnate, insecure work increase and the government starved of resources.

Rather than rethink, Mr Sunak dug his heels in. In his speech he called for a "new culture of enterprise" and lower taxes to promote growth. But this has been on the song sheet of every chancellor since 1979. Mr Sunak may be reverting to type because of a largely forgotten component of Thatcherism that may prove useful in the years ahead. Margaret Thatcher came to power after a decade of economic problems. In the 1970s, these were captured by the portmanteau "stagflation" to describe what happened when high unemployment and high inflation rates occurred simultaneously. In most nations, the double-digit inflation of the 1970s was caused by oil shocks. Thatcherism's insight was to shift blame for price rises away from commodity producers to high public spending.

Mr Sunak faces a not dissimilar situation as the cost of fuel and food surges. Things are getting more expensive. Either the government or households or companies or some mixture of the three will pick up the tab. The chancellor's lecture outlines an anti-state, pro-corporate political programme that could be sustained while household finances deteriorate. This may be framed as the price the British public must pay to defeat Vladimir Putin. The Resolution Foundation forecasts that higher than expected inflation will see a typical household's income drop by £1,000 this year – the biggest real-terms fall in incomes since the mid-1970s. But this is unnecessary suffering. Mr Putin won't be defeated by such needless pieties.

The budget is set for 23 March. Mr Sunak should act before then and set out how he intends to deal with falling living standards. There are plenty of good ideas around. Instead of offering more tax deductions for companies, Mr Sunak ought to take a leaf out of Labour's book and impose a one-off windfall tax on oil companies to fund lower bills for consumers. He needs to be more generous to help with gas bills in the face of soaring wholesale prices, especially for poorer families. The government should uprate benefits in line with higher inflation costs so that workers and pensioners are protected from a potential £10bn real-terms loss. Ministers could, as suggested by the Institute for Public Policy Research, protect incomes by raising the minimum wage level or paying public sector staff more.

Now is not the time for ideological peacocking. There is no place for balanced budgets today. Hiking interest rates will not bring down inflation caused by disruptions to supply. Price rises will end when their sources – found in the post-pandemic disorder and war in Ukraine – subside. The UK needs energy security, not worker insecurity.

There are enough onshore wind and solar projects granted planning permission to make up for the shortfall caused by banning Russian energy imports. But ministers have yet to back them. Mr Sunak should adjust his policies in the light of developing circumstances. To ignore what is happening and go on as before might be acceptable if the basic premises upon which his policy is founded were right. But they are wrong and are damaging Britain.

Ukraine

This war is not just about territory. It's about who owns a nation's story

Culture has long been a proxy in the assertion of power by one people over another. Recent egregious examples include the Chinese government's attempt to suppress Uyghur religion, literature, music, even food, and Islamic State's destruction of ancient monuments. In war, culture is a second front. At their most extreme, wars are about eradicating a people's cultural memory altogether, wiping them from the slate as if they had never been.

That Vladimir Putin should have prefaced his invasion with a speech falsely framing Ukraine as essentially Russian is on the one hand a spurious justification for invasion, and on the other an attempt to seize, simplify and own a complex historical narrative about the two intertwined but distinct nations.

However, Mr Putin has been outsmarted by his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskiy. The former comedian, who had never held office before his 2019 election, has, remarkably, been a persuasive rhetorician and war leader. On the other hand, a career in acting is perhaps exactly what was required for him to step so convincingly into this new role.

He is not the only one to make such a leap. A potent symbol of the ploughshares-to-swords shift of Ukraine is the fact that ballet dancers from Kyiv's national opera house have joined the fight. Elsewhere, symbols of Ukrainian resistance – the sunflower, and the blue and yellow of the national flag – have been deployed internationally to moving effect. And acts of fellowship – making Ukrainian food, for example, as part of the UK-based Cook for Ukraine humanitarian fundraising effort – have their own simple and practical power.

"If we lose our culture, we lose our identity," Lilya Onyshchenko, the head of Lviv's city council heritage protection office, told the Guardian. Ms Onyshchenko went on to emphasise that the city in western Ukraine had always been multicultural. It is not clear what Mr Putin's intentions are, precisely, in relation to Ukraine's assertion of its own identity. But the understandable fear is that Russian expansion seeks to colonise minds as well as places.

In some ways, intentions are less important than effects, amid war's messy reality. A missile strike in Kyiv that reportedly killed five people was seemingly directed at the television tower, but it lies close to Babyn Yar, the site of the massacre of 150,000 people during the second world war, including 30,000 Jews – a great irony given Mr Putin's stated ambition to "denazify" Ukraine. An attack on the town of Ivankiv, 50 miles north-west of Kyiv, set afire the town's Historical and Local History Museum, destroying precious works by the 20th-century folk artist Maria Prymachenko. The artist is an important symbol of Ukrainian art – and Ukrainian hope.

Three decades ago, war in the former Yugoslavia saw sacred and beautiful places such as Dubrovnik or the Mostar bridge and old town targeted, sometimes with the intention of erasing the evidence that people of another religion or ethnicity had once lived there. Whether or not sites like Babyn Yar and Ivankiv's museum have been collateral damage rather than actual targets, the cultural front in war is never trivial. This is a conflict, like so many others, that's not just about controlling territory – but owning narrative.

ILLUSTRATION: THOMAS PULLIN

How Britain's upper classes came to serve the global elite

Andy Beckett

Britain is good at wealth. Not necessarily at generating it, or distributing it in ways that make a contented society, but at looking after it, helping it grow and making it respectable – converting it into social and cultural capital. For centuries British bankers, lawyers, accountants and other assistants to the wealthy have discreetly performed these roles.

Their customers used to be mostly British: slave traders, industrialists, people who had extracted fortunes from our colonies. But in recent decades, foreigners have become the main beneficiaries of Britain's readiness to serve the rich regardless of how they made their money. So significant is this change that Britain has become "butler to the world", according to a persuasive new book by the anti-corruption campaigner and journalist Oliver Bullough.

Other secretive countries, such as Switzerland, have been doing it for longer. Yet Britain has offered oligarchs an unusually broad range of opportunities, from the chance to own famous football clubs to money-laundering through prestige property; from private educations for their children to a ruling party that isn't squeamish about who funds it.

The economic crime bill, finally going through parliament after years of delays, may reduce this activity: by requiring that foreign owners of land and property be more clearly identified, and by making investigations easier into those with "unexplained wealth". Sanctions against some Russian oligarchs are bringing parts of Londongrad to an abrupt halt. But Bullough says these belated measures don't go nearly far enough. Meanwhile the capital and home counties suburbs will go on servicing plutocrats from elsewhere.

For a country that was a superpower less than a lifetime ago, being a butler to the elites of other countries that have overtaken it seems quite a drop in status. In 2007, the social commentators Peter York and Olivia Stewart-Liberty described the increasing number of firms set up by posh English people to ease the lives of the super-rich – such as Quintessentially, co-founded by Ben Elliot, nephew of the Duchess of Cornwall and now Conservative party co-chairman – as a "master-turned-servant" phenomenon. The same could be said of older British institutions such as the City of London, which used to finance the British empire but now largely works for its successors.

> "Who better to understand the needs of these privileged winners than those who grew up with staff themselves?

How have our elites managed to rationalise this switch in roles? One obvious answer is that working for foreign tycoons can be very profitable. A more counterintuitive explanation is that running an empire and organising things for rich clients requires some of the same qualities: confidence, good contacts and a belief in hierarchy as the natural state of the world. As global capitalism has created ever more privileged winners, who better to understand their needs than Britons who grew up with staff themselves?

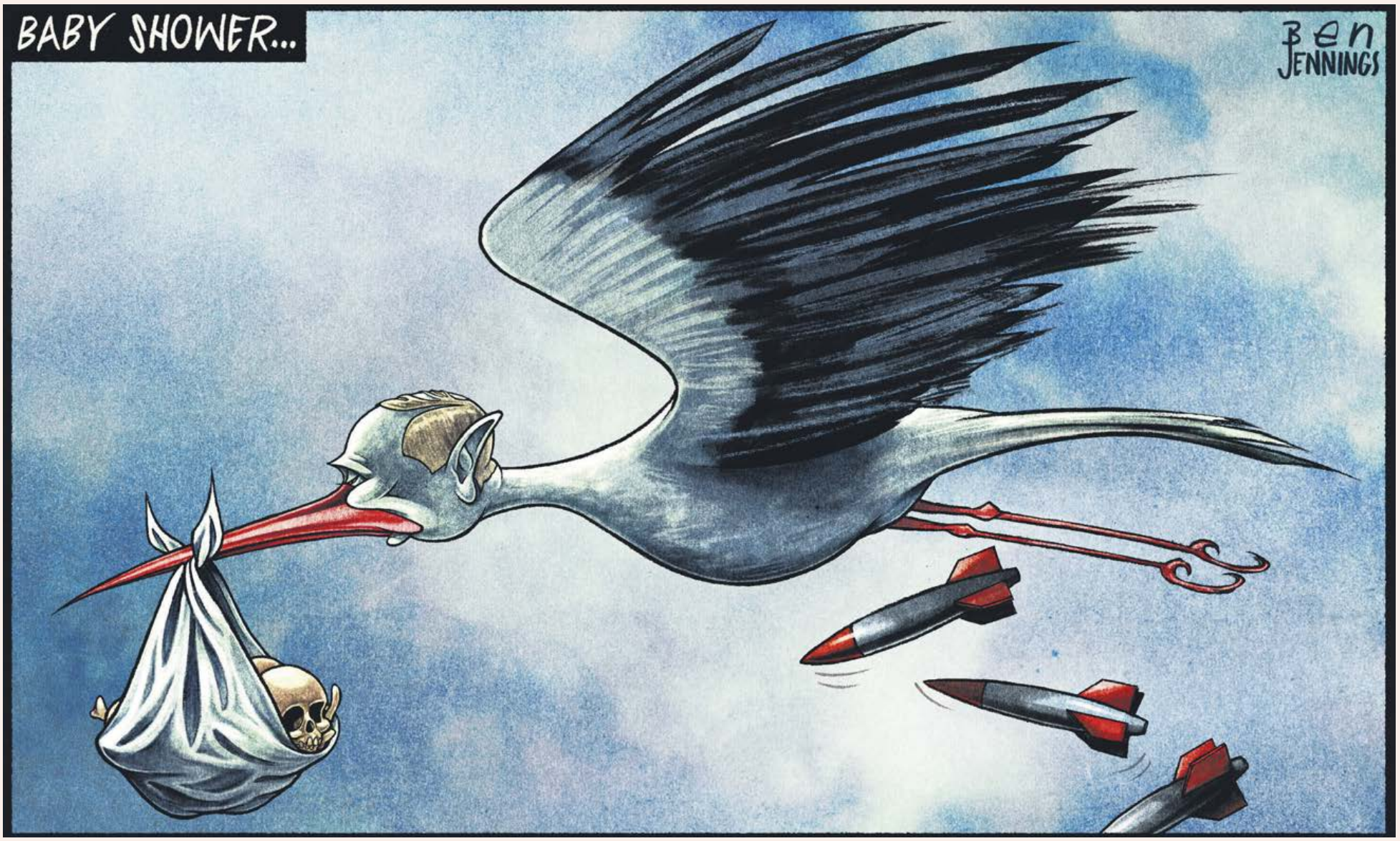
You could also see a final victory for Thatcherism in this aristocratic entrepreneurialism. Long after the British working class and middle class, at least some of the upper class have got used to selling themselves. They don't "have the old inhibitions about being pushy", York and Stewart-Liberty wrote. With the new foreign money making life in London more expensive, the upper classes "can't afford that old false modesty".

Serving the international super-rich can also be a way of escaping Britain. In 1973, the historian Jan Morris identified among British imperialists "a recurrent yearning to break out" of these islands "into more vivid places, where fortunes can be made, outrageous enterprises undertaken, and the restrictive rules ... disregarded". In a smaller but similar way, working for an oligarch can make you feel part of a global adventure, close to real power – while leaving Britain's problems for others to try to solve.

It was in the 1970s, the first decade after the empire's final dismantling, that London began welcoming Middle Eastern tycoons who wanted to spend and hide their oil money. A new breed of British estate agent, specialising in ultra-expensive property, emerged to cater to them. The growth and polarisation of the Russian, Chinese and Indian economies from the 90s onwards produced further waves of newly wealthy people, looking for business and pleasure in high-status western cities. London sold itself to them as a place of good taste and tradition – and lower taxes than New York or Paris. Sometimes this process was seen as part of "the Wimbledon effect": the idea, named after the tennis tournament, that what matters to the British economy is not the nationality of the competitors, but where the competition happens.

Could post-imperial Britain have chosen to provide different, less morally compromised services to the outside world? Arguably, for much of the postwar period, it did. From the 60s to the 90s, what Britain primarily sold to foreign visitors was the mass culture made possible by social democracy: innovations in pop music, street fashion and television, subsidised by more generous unemployment benefits, a more confident BBC and free university education.

That vibrant pop culture still exists, but it feels less central to British life and less globally influential. Today, London in particular is known to the world's wealthy as a place to eat in expensive restaurants, park your supercar outside Harrods and check on your barely used properties and hidden investments. It's an economic model that works, up to a point, except when geopolitical shocks disturb it. But for those who can't afford or don't provide its services, it offers little. If all the oligarchs ever leave, we won't be mourning.



What is driving the Great Resignation?

Emma Brockes

All week, we'd been rehearsing how my friend should leave her job. Specifically, where to land her resignation speech on the spectrum between a cathartic, spite-filled rant and something more businesslike. She was quitting because the money was terrible, the hours were terrible, it was stressful and she felt constantly gaslit by a boss who, while giving her a dumb assignment, would assure her it was consolidating her "brand". We could rake over her motivation until the cows came home, but her reasons for quitting basically boiled down to one thing: "I've had a gutful," she said (she's Australian).

In the past year, the urge to quit has jumped from a staple background whinge to a startling mass action. In November last year, the number of people leaving their jobs in the United States reached a record high of 4.53 million. For the most part, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the highest concentration of workers walking out of their jobs fell in the leisure and hospitality industry, shortly followed by retail workers – that is, in the middle to lower wage brackets. Surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center found the reasons people cited for leaving were low pay, feeling stuck and "disrespect". In other words, nothing out of the ordinary. But where, in previous years, these kinds of discomforts might have been weathered indefinitely, or until a better option came along, now people were snapping and walking out.

My friend who was quitting had plenty of plans, but no solid job offer to go to. She was quitting cold, unable to stand it for a second longer, which seemed to be the pattern elsewhere. Another friend quit her job a few weeks ago, somewhat to her own surprise. When I asked what had prompted it, she said, "the pandemic distilled things to the core attributes", and mentioned the effect of all those months at home giving her more time to think. An exhausted labour force is, generally, a more compliant one than workers who have a little time and space to take stock. Furthermore, said my friend, any employer who had not "displayed full empathy" during the pandemic appeared guilty of something much worse than bad management.

If we have all been through the equivalent of a collective near-death experience, the urge to embrace a radical life change makes sense. In the US, pandemic relief payments from the federal government gave people a small amount of "fuck you" money. And the thrill of being on the other side of something as large as an entire world that has shut down is a head rush it's hard to ignore. Quitting hasn't been the only expression of this feeling. Relative to the sheer scale of the psychic ground covered over the past two years, other types of movement seem trivial. In my children's school, there has been more intake churn, and more evidence of people selling up and moving across the country, than anything seen prior to 2020.

Still, for many of us social conformity and conditioning run deep. "Am I being a brat?" said my friend. We'd been round this cul-de-sac before. Most people hate their jobs; having a job was a privilege; where did boldness stop and recklessness begin? At root, what made her think she deserved better? We talked about the endless books and podcasts that foreground the success of people who quit – like Jeff Bezos quitting finance to start Amazon – and how the thousands of people for whom this risk presumably didn't pay off never get much of a look-in. We discussed whether there was some middle ground, where she might scale down to part-time. Every one of these discussions ended in despair. We have one life. What is there to gamble on if it isn't yourself?

I think you should take the moral high ground, I said: tell them you could string them along while you look for something else, but that it's better all round if you quit. We did a few role plays, all of which ended in hysteria when one or other of us addressed the boss character as "madam". We tried to anticipate what horrible things would be said to her in the course of resigning. "It's abusive," we said of her workplace, which is true. As a single contributor to the Great Resignation, my friend is part of a movement that at a distance looks seamless, even easy, but behind the scenes is riven with anxiety and self-doubt. Late the other day, her boss cancelled the meeting at the last minute. My friend felt a combination of relief, disappointment and shame at not being able to execute her plan. She'll do it next week.

Letters

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Country diary

Black Hill, West Yorkshire

The notion of rock climbing in February on an exposed crag like Laddow seemed improbable, but there we were, warm gritstone under our hands and the sun on our backs.

It couldn't last. Two ravens, wings half closed like blades on a penknife, hung above us on the strong breeze catching Laddow's crest. That must be cold, I thought, and so it proved when we reached the top and left the crag's shelter. Worse, as the sun crept westward, the rocks were plunged into shadow, calling time on our unseasonal adventure. So, what to do instead?

A walk up Black Hill seemed the obvious choice, but I was reluctant. My last visit, many years ago, had been a grim struggle through treacly gloop, with little in the way of nature as compensation.

It's certainly a place with a mixed reputation. John Hillaby described it as "a monstrous chocolate cake". Alfred Wainwright, who had a particular animus against Black Hill, saw "a desolate and hopeless quagmire". Wainwright blamed nature for this, but the true culprit was 19th-century air pollution that poisoned the vegetation.

Despite all this, it soon became clear that something rather magical has happened to Black Hill. There's a lovely spot called Red Ratcher, where the moors fold into each other like rumpled silk, and here I paused, looking towards Dun Hill – the slope before the top of Black Hill.

There's no heather here, but rather an even flow of cotton grass that spreads like the steppe in all directions, a dome of liberating space that we now traversed.

But the real surprise came at the summit, reached along a sturdy sequence of gritstone slabs that delivered us – dry-shod! – to a landscape utterly changed, and for the better. Almost two decades of restoration work, by the estimable Moors for the Future, has turned a hilltop once stripped of life into a vibrant green oasis. Best of all, close to the trig point, was a flush of sphagnum moss – a sure sign that the tide has turned. The black hill is black no longer.

Ed Douglas

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Nuclear option is not the best for energy transition

Agreed, Russian gas bad – but George Monbiot's attack on Germany, Europe's largest economy, seems deeply misplaced (We can free ourselves from this addiction to Russian gas, 9 March). The German energy transition is all about replacing conventional power plants, fissile as well as fossil fuel, with renewables. Looking at both short- and mid-term energy scenarios, Germany decided that the costs and risks of keeping nuclear outweighed the limited benefits. Meanwhile, worldwide, renewables are exponentially ramping up, and nuclear declining.

Global renewable electricity capacity is forecast to increase by over 60% between 2020 and 2026, reaching more than 4,800GW. This is equivalent to the current global power capacity of fossil fuels and nuclear combined. And here's the killer: Russia produces about 35% of the world's enriched uranium for nuclear reactors, and the EU's uranium imports from Russia equal those from Niger, at 2,545 tonnes. The Fukushima disaster made Monbiot pro-nuclear and now military attack on nuclear in Ukraine makes him even more so. Good luck with that.

Dr Paul Dorfman
Associate fellow, Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex

● What on earth does George Monbiot mean when he refers to small modular reactors as "kinder nuclear technologies"? SMRs are still vulnerable to accidents and attack (think of what happened in Ukraine); they still produce more nuclear waste per unit of electricity than conventional reactors; and there is still no safe, long-term solution for radioactive waste. Additionally, these reactors will remain dependent on uranium for fuel – when we know that uranium mining has caused suffering and death to mainly indigenous people across the world.

Rae Street
Littleborough, Greater Manchester

● George Monbiot makes a convincing argument for "the comprehensive energy transition that should have happened years ago". He concludes by asking "So what are we waiting for?" We are waiting for another comprehensive transition – from our enslavement to the mysterious deity called "the market", which also should have happened years ago.

John Airs
Liverpool

● Michael Gove backs a new commission to explore tidal energy (Russia concerns put Severn tidal energy project back on agenda, 9 March), and reveals a government racked by incompetence. There is already an "oven-ready" Swansea tidal lagoon project, fully costed, and with planning approval. The government failed to back it in 2018.

Roger Critchley
West Bridgford, Nottinghamshire

● Re Larry Elliott's analysis (Yes, Russia is already feeling the impact of sanctions. But so is the west, 8 March), we could reduce consumption of oil, limit our dependency on supplies from Russia and deny revenues to Putin if we reduced speed limits on the roads.

When the speed of a petrol-engined car is reduced from 70mph to its optimal speed of 55mph to 60mph, its petrol consumption falls by 17%. Given that demand for road transport fuels in the UK is around 44m litres of petrol and 81m litres of diesel per day, that brings petrol consumption down by 7.5m litres and diesel by 13.8m litres per day. If the Nato allies were to agree such a strategy, they could inflict a sizeable cut in the financial support being provided for Putin's war.

David Walker
Sheffield

● Regarding your report ('Blow to Putin': Britain and US ban Russian oil, 9 March), imagine if the US had not withdrawn from the Iranian nuclear accord, known as the joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA), in 2018. Today, there would be no discussion about oil prices rising to such high levels. Before the withdrawal, Iran was producing 2m to 2.5m barrels a day, with the potential to reach 3.5m to 4m. A return to the JCPOA and the return of Iranian oil to the world markets are vital for a successful grinding down of the Russian economy.

Fariborz S Fatemi
McLean, Virginia, USA

Vulnerable children falling off school rolls

The recent report by the children's commissioner found that there is little knowledge about children who are not enrolled in state schools, including how many are missing out on their entitlement to formal, full-time education (Commissioner backs tracking of children due to lack of data, 9 March).

Our research using anonymised data on 1 million children in English state schools found that non-enrolment particularly affects the most vulnerable children: those who are in care or supported by children's social care services.

One in 10 children who had been in care at any time between the ages of eight and 14 became unenrolled from state school during the GCSE years between 14 and 16 years old. For those who ever received any help from social care, one in 15 were not enrolled. This compares with one in 40 children who were never involved with social care services aged eight to 14. The rates of non-enrolment were even higher for those who had ever received help for special educational needs as well as social care support. In other words, the very children who have been recognised by social care services and schools as being most in need of help are the most likely to fall through the safety net and miss out on education.

Much more needs to be done to retain all children inclusively in education, including ensuring that schools have the resources to meet the often complex needs of the vulnerable children they care for.

Matthew A Jay
Louise Mc Grath-Lone
UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health

Catholic church is still failing young people

The archdiocese of Southwark's decision to ban a gay author from speaking at a school (Catholic church bans visit by gay author to boys' school, 10 March) shows that the Catholic church still has much to learn about protecting the wellbeing of young people.

Young people need examples of all types of positive, loving relationships, same-sex and otherwise, to help them make informed choices about their own relationships.

Restricting access to such information can create a culture of secrecy, fear and confusion. Some members of the Catholic church have relied on such a toxic, closed culture to let them get away with horrific acts of abuse against young people for many years.

If the Catholic church is genuinely sorry for these past abuses then they should now be doing all they can to encourage young people in their care to be informed, empowered and able to take part in healthy debate about sexuality and other important issues of faith and life.

Dr Jeremy Oliver
Clinical psychologist, London

Corrections and clarifications

● **An article referred to Storm Eunice and said "a 400-year-old oak crashed into a family home in Essex, killing four people". In fact, no one was injured during this incident, but four people were killed in the UK by that storm (Take a bough, 9 March, G2, p4).**

● **The actor Tamsin Greig was misnamed as "Grieg" in a caption (Eyewitness, 7 March, p26).**

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Fast-track visas as if they're PPE contracts

There is a marked contrast between the lack of due diligence over the awarding of PPE contracts in 2020 and the overcaution and delays when issuing visas to Ukrainian refugees (Envoy's appeal: 'Cut red tape for Ukrainians heading for Britain', 10 March). Time for the prime minister to put his money where his mouth is and direct the Home Office to sort out its processes and logistics. Emergency visas need as much haste as obtaining PPE.

Penny Hart
Southsea, Hampshire

● Heather Stewart explores ways the chancellor might ease the cost of living crisis (What can Rishi Sunak do to relieve the cost of living crisis?, theguardian.com, 10 March). One thing that seems to be flying under the radar is that Rishi Sunak has frozen personal tax allowances until 2026, so has already nailed his colours to the mast for another four years.

Sue Hardman
Woodbridge, Suffolk

● The only thing that could have improved Jo Burden's glorious letter about her partner's enthusiastic response to your article on septuagenarian sex (Letters, 10 March) would have been the time-honoured addendum: "PS, please excuse shaky handwriting."

Andrew Connell
Cardiff

● Re Danielle Lowy's cat changing name from Vladimir to Volodymyr (Letters, 10 March), as Arthur Askey might have said: to a cat's ears it's Vladimirly the same thing.

Michael McGeever
Menai Bridge, Anglesey

● Re missing stations on the feminist tube map (Letters, 8 March), as any inhabitant of Stoke Newington will proudly tell you, there is no tube station there.

Andy Charlton
Twickenham, London

Josephine Veasey

Commanding mezzo-soprano famed for her interpretations of Wagner and Berlioz, especially at Covent Garden

The mezzo-soprano Josephine Veasey, who has died aged 91, was famed for her interpretations of Dido in Berlioz's Les Troyens and Fricka in Wagner's Ring, but was also a familiar and much admired singer at Covent Garden throughout the 1960s and 70s, making 780 appearances in 60 roles there.

Having the good fortune to reach her vocal maturity at a time when the Royal Opera had its own company of singers who were encouraged to essay a wide range of roles, she was able to move at her own pace, during her years as a company principal (1955-82), from lighter roles such as Dorabella in Così Fan Tutte and Rosina in Il Barbiere di Siviglia to heavier ones including Iphigénie (Iphigénie en Tauride), Preziosilla (Il Forza del Destino), Eboli (Don Carlos), Fricka and Waltraute in the Ring, Brangäne (Tristan und Isolde), Venus (Tannhäuser), Kundry (Parsifal) and first Cassandra, then Dido in Berlioz's epic masterpiece.

Her approach to Berlioz came through the role of Marguerite in La Damnation de Faust (which she sang under Georg Solti on the opening night of the 1963 Edinburgh festival) and the song cycle Les Nuits d'Été. She was then invited to take the role of Cassandra at the BBC Proms under Colin Davis in 1968, graduating to the lead role of the Queen of Carthage the following year in the new production at Covent Garden under the same conductor.

She also took the role of Dido in the Philips recording, released in 1969. The idiomatic diction and heroic strength she brought to the part, along with her commanding delivery and a tender, sensuous quality in the more intimate passages, made her a near-ideal interpreter of the role.

Veasey as Dido, the Queen of Carthage, in Berlioz's Les Troyens at Covent Garden
ERICH AUERBACH/ GETTY IMAGES

That regal aura stood her in good stead for the part of Fricka, consort of Wotan, the ruler of the gods, in the Ring. It was Solti, then music director of Covent Garden, who encouraged her to learn the role, and beginning with Das Rheingold in 1964 she took it both in the Hans Hotter production then current, and in the new staging by Götz Friedrich from 1974 to 1978, deploying her ample tone to imperious effect.

She was invited to sing the part under Herbert von Karajan in Salzburg, and at La Scala and the Metropolitan, New York. However, she never enjoyed working with Karajan, and when he dropped her she bravely wrote to inform him that she had no intention of ever working with him again.

Born in Camberwell, south London, Josephine was one of two daughters of Ivy (nee Dunn) and Frank Veasey, a scientific instrument maker. The family were evacuated to Crawley Down in West Sussex during the second world war and, on leaving her secondary school in East Grinstead, she took a job with the Civil Service Clerical Association (now PCS). At the age of 18, having had singing lessons from Audrey Langford, she joined the chorus at Covent Garden.

She moved on to Opera for All, a small touring company, and in 1951 married Ande Anderson, a director on the staff of Covent Garden. After having two children, Nick and Charlotte, she toured with the Covent Garden company as Cherubino (The Marriage of Figaro), and made her debut at the Royal Opera as the Page in Salome in July 1955, followed by a highly praised Shepherd Boy in Tannhäuser. It took some years for the larger roles to come her way. "I don't have the kind of pushing personality that is always asking for new parts," she said. "I suppose I'm very English in accepting what comes along."

> **The idiomatic diction and heroic strength she brought to the part of Dido, made her a near-ideal interpreter**

On the other hand, this meant she was not pressurised into taking strenuous roles that may have harmed her voice. But eventually, along with Berlioz and Wagner, she performed at Covent Garden as Mrs Sedley (Peter Grimes, 1960), Maddalena (Rigoletto) and Mistress Page in Franco Zeffirelli's Falstaff (both 1961), and in the title role of Carmen (1967).

Appearances at Glyndebourne included Clarice in Rossini's rarely performed La Pietra del Paragone (1964), Octavian (Der Rosenkavalier, 1965) and Charlotte (Massenet's Werther, 1969). For her Paris Opéra debut in 1969 she sang Dido, returning for Kundry in 1973; that year, too, she sang Eboli at San Francisco. A high extension to her lustrous mezzo voice enabled her to flourish in some soprano roles, such as Faure's Pénélope and Selika in Meyerbeer's L'Africaine, both of which she recorded for radio.

In Ernest Ansermet's recording of Debussy's Pelléas et Mélisande (1964) she took the role of Geneviève. Other recordings included ventures into bel canto, such as Agnese in Bellini's Beatrice di Tenda alongside Joan Sutherland and Luciano Pavarotti, and Adalgisa in the same composer's Norma at the Théâtre d'Antique, Orange, in the south of France, with Montserrat Caballé and Jon Vickers.

She created the roles of Andromache in Tippett's King Priam (Covent Garden, 1962) and the Emperor in Henze's We Come to the River (Covent Garden, 1976). In 1980 she gave a riveting performance as Gertrude in Ambroise Thomas's Hamlet at the Buxton festival. Two years later she bade farewell to Covent Garden and the stage, singing Herodias in Richard Strauss's Salome.

Among her favourite concert repertoire were Handel oratorios and the mezzo part in Verdi's Requiem, which she recorded under Leonard Bernstein. In 1970 she was appointed CBE.

After she stopped performing she taught singing at the Royal Academy of Music and was a voice consultant at English National Opera. There her pupils included Sally Burgess, Felicity Palmer and Eric Idle.

Her marriage ended in divorce in 1969. She is survived by Charlotte and three grandchildren, Clare, Kate and Ben. Nick died in 2020.

Barry Millington

Josephine Veasey, mezzo-soprano, born 10 July 1930; died 22 February 2022

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John Salt

British pioneer of photorealist painting in the US whose work 'transmogrifies the discarded into the treasured'

John Salt, who has died aged 84, was a pioneer of photorealist painting, a genre that emerged in late 1960s America, in part, like its predecessor pop art, as a response to abstract expressionism. The paintings were of photographs of random subjects, enlarged and rendered in such detail that they themselves could be mistaken for photographs.

John was British but, while living in the US and painting photographs of cars and trailer homes, he became identified with the American photorealist movement. Like other artists around the same time, he chose the photograph as his subject matter because there was no preconceived idea of how it should be represented. When looking at one of John's paintings it is not his picture of a car, but his picture of a photograph of a car, that we see. The more photograph-like the painting, the more essential it is to view the painting itself, rather than a reproduction, in order to assess, for instance, scale, colour and texture.

Within three years of arriving in the US, John joined Ivan Karp at his newly opened OK Harris Gallery in New York in 1970, and with Karp's encouragement his career took off. For the next 25 years, John showed regularly in New York and across the US and Europe. He was among the photorealists included in the 1972 Documenta 5 exhibition in Germany, where the curator Harald Szeemann introduced photorealism to Europe.

Salt in his studio in 2004 and, below, his painting Red Mailbox 2 (2015). He chose photographs as his subject matter because there was no preconceived idea of how they should be represented
LOUIS K MEISEL GALLERY

Photorealism conveyed the everyday and derived from its source material a sense of the chance configuration of captured moments. It was dismissed by US critics as shallow, in that beyond the technical prowess required to produce a painting identical to a photograph, there remained little of interest – and limited imagination and a minimal knowledge of art was needed to appreciate it.

In the UK, photorealism was similarly received by the art establishment. Apart from a 1973 group show at the Serpentine Gallery in London, curated by the critic and writer Lawrence Alloway, there were few exhibitions of photorealist work until 1975, when John had his first major UK solo show in his home town of Birmingham, at the Ikon Gallery, where I was then the director.

Soon afterwards, John and his family returned to the UK to live in rural Shropshire. Despite the physical distance he continued to paint predominantly American imagery.

> Using handcut stencils and a spray gun, he produced images of abandoned cars and trailer homes

John was born in Birmingham, the only child of Amy (nee Evans) and Cyril Salt, who ran a garage. He studied at Birmingham School of Art (1952-57) at the same time as Peter Phillips and John Walker, under Gilbert Mason and Kate Fryer, and when strong drawing and technical skills were prerequisites for a career as an artist. He went on to the Slade School of Art in London (1958-60), under William Coldstream.

His work then was abstract and frequently in collage, with influences from Francis Bacon, Prunella Clough and Alan Davie. He was drawn to work by Jim Dine, James Rosenquist and Robert Rauschenberg and out of this interest arose an ambition to see the US.

Shortly after he married Jean Arnold, a science teacher, in 1967, the couple decided to spend a few years in America. John was offered a scholarship for the master's programme at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, which included a paid teaching post. The head of its graduate school was the abstract expressionist painter Grace Hartigan, who became John's mentor and, with the figurative artist Alex Katz, she was largely responsible for encouraging him to remain in the US.

It was at this time that John's new work, using images from car sales brochures and later 35mm colour transparencies, emerged. Using handcut lace-like paper stencils and a spray gun, he produced paintings of wrecked and abandoned cars and trailer homes. John's work became recognised as among the most sensitively produced of that first wave of this new school.

In 2014 John joined the Louis K Meisel Gallery in New York. His work was included in Picturing America: Photorealism in the 1970s, at the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin in 2009, and Photorealism: 50 years of Hyperrealistic Painting, which travelled to several European cities in 2013. He continued painting until 2018, when failing health began to take its toll.

He leaves a body of work that, according to Linda Chase, author of John Salt: The Complete Works 1969-2006 (2007), "transmogrifies the ugly into the beautiful, the discarded into the treasured, and gives us new eyes with which to view and appreciate our world. These paintings impress with their mastery and verisimilitude but continue to engage with their mystery."

John is survived by Jean and their daughter, Katy, son, Thomas, and four grandchildren.

Simon Chapman

John Salt, artist, born 2 August 1937; died 13 December 2021

Birthdays

Oonagh Aitken, former chief executive, Volunteering Matters, 66; **Jake Arnott**, novelist, 61; **John Barrowman**, actor and singer, 55; **Tammy Beaumont**, cricketer, 31; **Peter Bennett-Jones**, TV producer and co-founder, Comic Relief, 67; **Jodie Comer**, actor, 29; **David Cooke**, former director, British Board of Film Classification, 66; **Sir Stephen Deuchar**, former director, the Art Fund, 65; **Didier Drogba**, footballer, 44; **Peter Eyre**, actor, 80; **David Gentleman**, designer and painter, 92; **Robert Glenister**, actor, 62; **Trish Greenhalgh**, professor of primary care health sciences, University of Oxford, 63; **Alex Gregory**, rower, 38; **Richard Holden**, Conservative MP, 37; **Tom James**, rower, 38; **Prof Gus John**, educationist and civil liberties campaigner, 77; **Alex Kingston**, actor, 59; **David LaChapelle**, photographer, 59; **Lord (Nigel) Lawson of Blaby**, former Conservative cabinet minister, 90; **Laurence Llewelyn- Bowen**, interior designer and broadcaster, 57;

Jodie Comer, currently starring in the final season of the award-winning BBC thriller Killing Eve, is 29 today

Don Maclean, comic, 78; **Bobby McFerrin**, singer, 72; **Rupert Murdoch**, media mogul, 91; **Paddy O'Connell**, broadcaster, 56; **Sir Malcolm Pill**, former lord justice of appeal, 84; **Prof Griselda Pollock**, cultural historian, 73; **Shane Richie**, actor and comedian, 58; **Hakuhō Shō**, sumo wrestler, 37; **Robert Thomson**, chief executive, News Corp, 61; **Sir Richard Tilt**, former director-general, prison service, 78; **Paul Trevillion**, artist, 88; **Alan Yentob**, broadcaster and former BBC creative director, 75.

Announcements

In Memoriam

ROGERS, Michael.
4 May 1932 to 11 March 2019. Always loved, always missed, never forgotten. Mary.

For Announcements, Acknowledgments, Adoptions, Anniversaries, Birthdays, Births, Deaths, Engagements, Memorial Services and In Memoriam, email us at announcements@theguardian.com including your name, address and telephone number or phone 0203 353 2114.

Reread our obituary of the rock musician Mark Lanegan
theguardian.com/obituaries

Yesterday's solutions

Killer sudoku
Easy

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

Medium

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

Codeword

C	U	F	F	S		S	T	U	B	B	Y	
A		L		Q		A		G		A		C
P	R	E	Q	U	E	L		L	U	N	G	E
O		D		A		S		Y		J		R
N	I	G	H	T	J	A	R		C	O	L	A
		E		S			O		A			M
W	A	D	S		B	R	O	C	C	O	L	I
O			A		L		K		T			C
O	U	T	S	T	A	Y	S		I	C	E	S
D			S		Z			B		A		
C	L	O	Y		E	X	P	L	O	D	E	S
U		L		S		Y		O		E		I
T	W	I	C	E		L	I	K	E	N	E	D
S		V		M		E		E		Z		E
	S	E	X	I	S	M		S	C	A	N	S

Cryptic crossword
Solution No. 28,701

S	T	O	W	E	D		O	E	N	O	L	O	G	Y
	E		I		I		N		I		E		A	
C	A	N	N	U	L	A	E		G	E	N	T	R	Y
	T		E		U		O		H		T		B	
			M	O	T	I	V	A	T	I	O	N	A	L
	D		A		E		E		C				G	
N	E	C	K				R	E	A	L	A	L	E	S
	S		E		H		T		P		L		C	
S	O	U	R	M	A	S	H				L	E	A	K
	L				M		E		E		A		N	
B	A	N	T	A	M	W	E	I	G	H	T			
	T		O		E		I		G		O		M	
L	I	Q	U	O	R		G	I	N	A	N	D	I	T
	O		C		E		H		O		C		L	
O	N	T	H	E	D	O	T		G	R	E	E	D	Y

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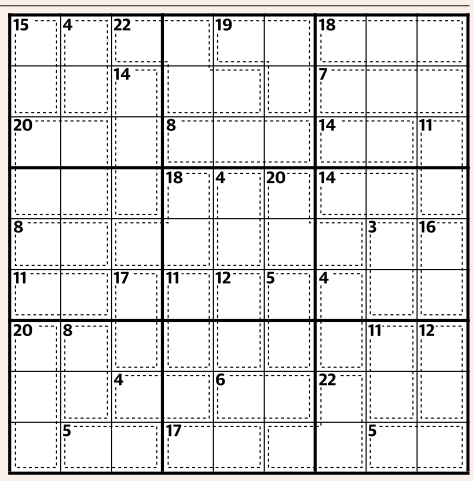
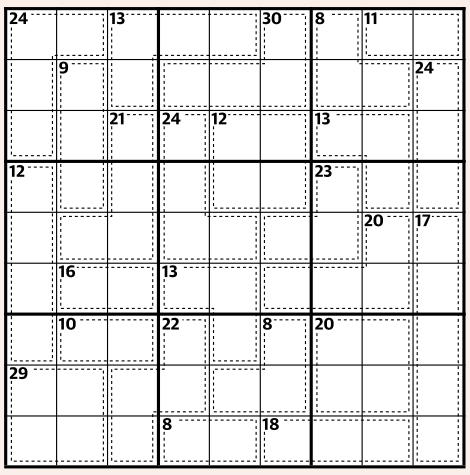
Killer sudoku

Easy

The normal rules of Sudoku apply: fill each row, column and 3x3 box with all the numbers from 1 to 9. In addition, the digits in each inner shape (marked by dots) must add up to the number in the top corner of that box. No digit can be repeated within an inner shape.

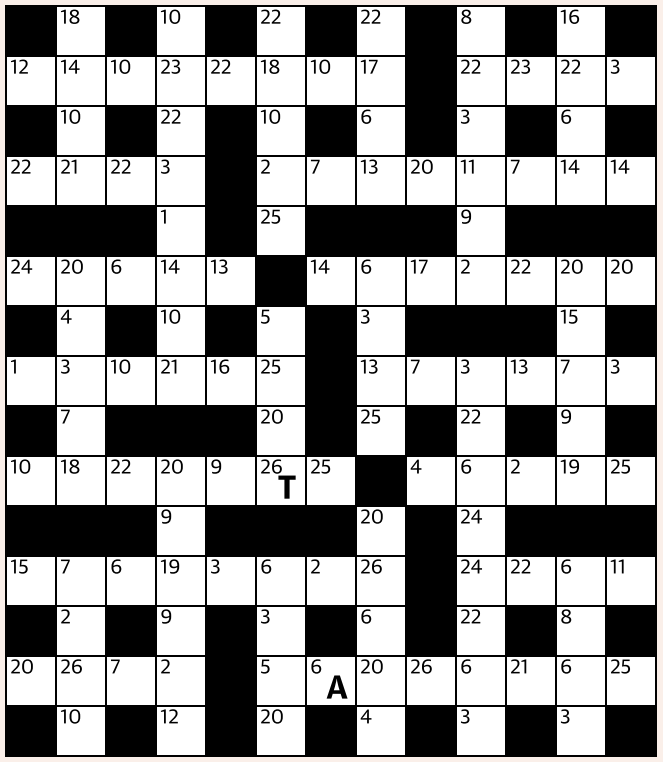


Medium



Codeword

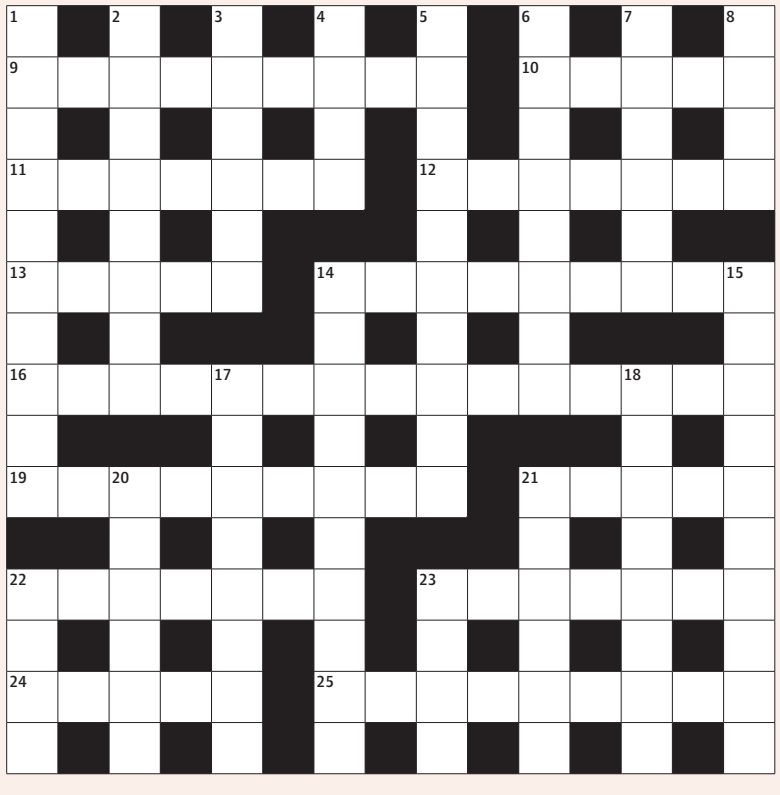
Each letter of the alphabet makes at least one appearance in the grid, and is represented by the same number wherever it appears. The letters decoded should help you to identify other letters and words in the grid.



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

1	2	3	4	5	6 A	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26 T

Guardian cryptic crossword No 28,702 set by Picaroon



Across

9 Penny-pinching pillager, crooked Frenchman on the fiddle (9)
10 Greeting daughter with extremely emotional call off peak (5)
11 Where order is kept to release criminal at first (7)
12 Start, as thieves may, to engage with two breaking in (3-4)
13 Places to park behind vehicles from Spain (5)
14 Stone to crush – this is just breaking now! (4,5)
16 What mum does, receiving letters about the future for Bill? (3,2,10)
19 Club sandwiches have to be nearer the mouth (9)
21 More precise haulier ditching fashion label (5)
22 Showing a complex palinode, wanting name translated (7)
23 It downplays setter getting eaten by 50 bears (7)
24 Muslim group welcoming very revered Indian (5)
25 Feeling less clear over site of recent parties (6,3)

Down

1 Urge VIP to tuck into stock food: it's sweet stuff (3,7)
2 Spar with graduates boxing in street (8)
3 Drugs? Being on these, one would be broke (6)
4 It's not bubbly in large heavy bottles (4)
5 Better description of a tsunami, possibly (4,6)
6 Mince pasty I'd stuffed with nothing in awful state (8)
7 Guidance in case of acknowledged wrongdoing (6)
8 This is one prompt to pen line (4)
14 Girl set out with van, one that's utterly empty (10)
15 Taking off coat in Swansea, turning it upward (10)
17 It creates excitement on behalf of online work (8)
18 Emit gas and perhaps smoke around gallery (8)
20 Soldier punching awful weed pulling prank on American (6)
21 Gossip heard in bourgeois magazine (6)
22 Fight on horseback with no leader to unseat (4)
23 Dancing bishop leaves one stretched out on the road (4)

The Guardian

Rex rated

How Simon Rex found redemption playing a washed-up porn star

G2

Friday 11/03/22

Film & Music

Revenge of the NERD
Pharrell Williams's finest moments
page 2

Amy Poehler
'Comedy is a way to medicate'
page 3

Ranked! Pharrell Williams tracks

As his debut with NERD turns 20, we rate Williams's 30 greatest pieces of work. By Alexis Petridis

10

Snoop Dogg ft Pharrell Williams - Drop It Like It's Hot *(2004)*
Even by the Neptunes' early 00s standards, Drop It Like It's Hot was huge: the most popular rap song of the decade, according to Billboard. It was also an audacious way to achieve huge crossover success, its backing almost entirely made up of white noise and the sound of tongues clicking.

9

Ol' Dirty Bastard ft Kelis - Got Your Money (1999)
ODB's life was spiralling out of control by this point. But this single was an unalloyed triumph, framing his increasingly unhinged rapping with a skeletal funk bassline, lo-fi synth lines and a chorus that introduced Kelis to the world.

8

Britney Spears - I'm a Slave 4 U *(2001)*
There is something incredibly cheering about the Neptunes' refusal to tone down their production style even when employed by a star as huge as Britney Spears: the brilliance of the Prince-influenced I'm a Slave 4 U lies in the tension between its pop melody and the off-key electronics in the background.

1

Kelis - Milkshake *(2003)*
It's a close thing, but Milkshake represents the high-water mark of Williams and Chad Hugo's production company the Neptunes' ability to turn exploratory music into chart gold. It tears up the pop rulebook: it's flat-out one of the weirdest-sounding records to make the Top 5. But it works perfectly, impossibly hooky and an irresistible invitation to dance. A pop masterpiece.

2

The Clipse - Grindin' *(2002)*
"The world is about to feel something they never felt before," crows Williams on Grindin', and he has a point. So minimal that the sudden appearance of a hi-hat pattern feels like an event.

3

Kendrick Lamar - Alright *(2019)*
Before it became an important track - adopted as a Black Lives Matter protest anthem - Alright was already an incredible one. Williams set Lamar's optimism in the face of crushing adversity to a disorientating patchwork of jazz brass, luxurious harmony vocals and snapping drums.

4

Jay-Z ft Pharrell Williams - I Just Wanna Love U (Give It to Me) *(2000)*
Williams is famous for his "four-count starts" - there's a 13-hour Spotify playlist dedicated to them - but on I Just Wanna Love You, the Neptunes stuck the same stammering effect into every fourth bar of the guitar sample to ultra-catchy effect. Also features one of Williams's best falsetto hooks.

5

Pharrell Williams ft Jay-Z - Frontin' *(2003)*
Amid the dazzling pyrotechnic displays of the Neptunes' productions, the funk guitar-driven Frontin' minted a line in Williams solo tracks that rested less on jaw-dropping sonics than straightforwardly great songwriting rooted in R&B's past, particularly the work of Curtis Mayfield, who he sounds remarkably like here.

6

Frank Ocean - Sweet Life *(2012)*
The highlight of Ocean's second album Channel Orange set his jaded drawing of Ladera Heights' moneyed denizens to a deceptively complex Williams backing, filled with subtle details: beneath the retro-soul electric piano and bass and thick harmonies lurk echoing voices, strange vocal loops and a fantastic horn arrangement.

7

Snoop Dogg ft Pharrell Williams - Beautiful *(2003)*
Where that other classic Snoop/Williams collaboration, Drop It Like It's Hot, is minimal and darkly funky, Beautiful is its polar opposite: busy and, in its own, very Snoop-esque way, lovestruck: the simple, Williams-sung chorus is just perfect, despite his later protestations that his vocal is "flat as fuck".

See full list of 30 at theguardian.com/music

Playlist

1 **Rachel Chinouriri**
All I Ever Asked
Touches of southern soul and soft rock merge in this plea for respect in a relationship, one that glows ever brighter as the Croydon singer-songwriter's harmonies stack higher and higher.

2 **Rema ft AJ Tracey**
Fresh Young Nigga
The Afrobeats superstar transcends smooth on this ode to opulence: his bird-like vocals caress the skin like a warm spring breeze, a sweetness echoed in the track's flute-dappled 70s soul.

3 **Beckah Amani**
Lebeka Leka
The Tanzanian songwriter and her harmony singers negotiate what it takes to let go of old emotions, exchanging lines in this glorious folksy lilt.

4 **Leyla McCalla**
You Don't Know Me
The New Orleans guitarist puts a fierce spin on this Caetano Veloso classic, negotiating the idea of unknowability with glee, followed by frustration at the pain of being misunderstood.

5 **Mandy Moore**
In Real Life
A gorgeous rock ballad about growing up that owes a little to Fleetwood Mac and the Cardigans: "It's too late to wait until it feels right," sings Moore, full of resolve.

6 **Nia Archives**
Part of Me
You can hear Erykah, Amy and all of jungle history in this lovelorn, pick-yourself-up-and-carry-on single by the Bradford producer. Its restlessness suggests she won't wallow in heartbreak for long.

7 **Aitch**
Baby
This pastiche-level throwback to luxe early 00s R&B and its untrammelled sexual filth is elevated by the Manchester rapper's irresistible charm as he flirts brazenly with an old Ashanti sample.

PHOTOGRAPH: LINDA NYLIND/THE GUARDIAN
COVER PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY

The reader interview

'Peep Show? Five biscuits! Fawlty Towers? Four!'

The actor, writer and director **Amy Poehler** on her new Lucille Ball doc – and her method of rating British comedy

PHOTOGRAPH: ZUMA PRESS/EYEVINE

What's your process to prepare for directing, and how does this compare with your past films? *fionasack*
Well, Lucy and Desi is the first documentary I've directed. There's tons of prep and research before you can even start shaping the story. It was great to work on during a pandemic because, rather than being on set, I was out interviewing people. My editor and I kept carving away to get a point of view. It really started to take shape as we got to understand the subject more. So it was a very different animal.

How big an influence has Lucille Ball been on your own comedy? *DeJongandtherestless*
As all good art comes in and out of your life, you see it in different ways. I Love Lucy felt like a show that came with my TV, but it wasn't until I was older that I really started to notice Lucille Ball's performance. Then I started rewatching it for the writing, production and nostalgia. She's a huge influence because she took very surreal and crazy situations and played them so grounded.

As Lucille Ball seems to be such a big influence, who would you have as guests at your dream dinner table? *isislloyd*
I think I'll just make the dinner table Lucy and Desi related, so Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz, Carol Burnett, Bette Midler, Norman Lear and Sammy Davis Jr would be a pretty boisterous table. There'd be a lot of cigarettes and not a lot of eating, so maybe we'd just order in a pizza.

If you were in your 20s, how would you try to get into comedy? Would you still go down the improv/Second City route or would you be blowing up on TikTok? *EmilyM*
The business has changed so much, yet talent still seems to find its way. I didn't have any connections when I first started. Please don't make me go back to my 20s, I guess is my answer. Don't make me go back. You can't make me go back.

You seem equally at home writing, directing and producing as you do in front of the camera. But which makes you feel the most vulnerable? *HannaJames*
I think if you're doing your job right, you should be feeling vulnerable because it means you're pushing yourself to try new things. Doesn't vulnerability find its way into everything? I'll answer the opposite, which is I certainly don't feel invulnerable in any way at all.

My husband and I just finished watching Parks and Rec for the third time, this time with our kids (nine, 13 and 15), who howled with laughter; it's so joyous and hopeful. What's the secret to its rewatchability? *MillHouseMo*
I think – to get a little existential – when times are scary and unsure, we like to go back to things that we've seen before. Comedy especially is a way to medicate. A lot of people went back to shows that they knew would keep them happy, that they could watch with their family, and they knew how would end. And I think Parks and Rec was lucky to be one of those.

> **Women are constantly being asked to walk the fine line of pleasant and aggressive**

Leslie Knope was often labelled a "steamroller" for how she conducted herself in her relationships. How does a woman give herself the agency of respect without being misinterpreted as domineering or overbearing? *HannaJames*
I don't know if it's even a woman's job to try to figure out the balance. We should take the burden off women in general. Women are constantly being asked to walk the fine line of speaking their mind and being pleasant. We should shift the burden from figuring out the right way to express how women feel and be more receptive to the idea of creating a little more space.

What British comedy do you like? *Thatonethere*
I'm a child of the 80s, so our British comedy came smuggled on a VHS tape from the cousin of a friend who had heard about a show called Brass Eye. We didn't have access in the way we do now, so it took so long for us to discover your beautiful shining jewels.

What is your opinion on dark comedy and would you ever play a character like Fleabag? *NourMyth*
I haven't heard a word you said because I'm still furiously trying to think of the best British comedies to seem cool. I'm too scared to even start naming because I have such a deep reverence. Americans my age felt very special when we got to discover it, like *we* were the only ones who knew who Garth Marenghi was. Gimme a minute.

What is your advice to young aspiring film-makers and writers? *ellapascua*
Hmm. Get your list of the best British comedies ready for the Guardian! For comedy writers – and this advice is not new in any way – just write constantly, all the time, as much as you can, as much as you can stand. Because, like any muscle, you have to keep working it.

What kinds of stories do you gravitate towards now, and how do they differ from what interested you 10 years ago? *bvckle*
I have no fun answer for this, but I'm just always trying to find new interesting ways to figure out characters and people. Sorry. I'm in a total spiral about my list of British comedies. I can't stop thinking about it. You name some British comedies and I'll rate them from one to five biscuits. Alan Partridge? Five biscuits! The Office UK? Five biscuits! Peep Show? Five biscuits! Fawlty Towers? Four biscuits.

If you were to direct another documentary, what or who would you do it on? *lauren8101*
Oh, I don't know. Who would you like to see a documentary on? French and Saunders? Twenty-five biscuits! I have such high respect for British comedy that I was paralysed at the thought of talking about my favourite types of it. Now there's just this incredible cross-pollination of casting, writers and actors working together in ways that I don't think they ever did before, which is frankly very exciting, like Catastrophe with the great Rob Delaney and the great Sharon Horgan. Catastrophe! Five biscuits and one cookie, because Rob Delaney is American.

As told to Rich Peley

Lucy and Desi is on Amazon Prime now.

Send us your questions for next week's interviewee
theguardian.com/culture

Ana de Armas and Ben Affleck in Adrian Lyne's Deep Water, his first film for 20 years

'It's hideous but jealousy is an aphrodisiac'

Fatal Attraction director Adrian Lyne had a string of hits, but can the stars (and ex-lovers) of his new film, Ben Affleck and Ana de Armas, outsweat Glenn Close and Michael Douglas, asks **Catherine Shoard**

Adrian Lyne is 81 and hasn't made a film for 20 years. The last one was Unfaithful, a top erotic thriller to add to his sweaty collection (Fatal Attraction, Indecent Proposal, 9½ Weeks). It won an Oscar nomination for Diane Lane, who we saw flushed on a train, recalling her busy afternoon with Olivier Martinez.

So, on the surface, Lyne seems a strange choice to direct Deep Water, based on a book by Patricia Highsmith about a sterile marriage. Vic Van Allen is a small-time press publisher in New England who breeds snails in the garage. His wife, Melinda, takes a string of dim younger lovers. Her trysts are not detailed; instead, Highsmith concentrates on Vic.

Lyne's update chucks much of this. We see the sex, for starters. Melinda's indiscretions are made explicit in their social circles. At a house party in the opening scene, a friend approaches Vic, gestures to Melinda and her new fella and asks: "They fuckin'?"

And Vic – recast as the inventor of drone microchips – not only cares about the adultery, but is aroused by it, too. "The hideous truth is that jealousy is an aphrodisiac," chuckles Lyne. "It's hateful and awful and destructive, but it is!" He grins down the camera in our interview: plain navy background, red Hawaiian shirt. He looks like Bill Murray in space.

"I wanted to introduce a kind of complicity," he says. "Vic was interested in her sexually, but tried to be urbane about it. He's rejected and you can see that he's decimated by that and takes refuge in his snails."

From time to time, Melinda chucks him a crumb: half a handjob, vague fellatio. These sequences are not in the novel and "a lot of people" wanted to ditch them. "The instinct is to make it mundane. Endlessly, they said: 'Why the snails? Take the snails out!' But it's always the bumps that are the most interesting."

So Deep Water is a sort of erotic thriller after all, just one with a lot more gastropods than most. All Lyne's signature moves are there – baths! Banisters! Very big kitchens! – but there is substance as well as style.

Working with Lyne, says the actor Finn Whittrock a few days later, was "a dream come true. My film-maker friends were in awe of him. He's an auteur, but never quite got the credit for being so – because of the subject matter and maybe the popularity, too."

This is probably correct. Something about Lyne's success (Fatal Attraction was the highest grossing film of 1987) as well as his self-deprecation means he has never been a critical darling, even when he has made movies without synths and shagging. He is blithe about it at first, then, when pressed, admits being close to tears reading reviews and "sometimes getting a bit pissed off, because I don't think they realise how much you put into it".

Anyway, in Deep Water, Wittrock plays Melinda's third lover, Dom: brainy as well as dishy and therefore a big threat. Everyone was lovely on set, he says, but he did feel a bit of a third wheel. Or perhaps fourth, as Lyne and his leads, Ben Affleck and Ana de Armas, shared "this intense intimacy. It was a triangle. A little posse they created."

Lyne introduced the pair when he screen-tested them at his house in late 2019. They then became a couple until breaking up early last year. "I got a very real sense that the chemistry was good," remembers Lyne. "I remember feeling that with Glenn [Close] and Michael [Douglas]." Match-making is "pleasing, really. You just pray they won't fall out. And they didn't!"

Directors have to be as close to actors on a shoot as a spouse, he says – or at least a therapist. This is why he didn't like having an intimacy coordinator to police the sex scenes. "It implies a lack of trust. And that's all I have. If the actors don't trust me, I might as well go home. I've gotta make myself vulnerable for them; for them to know I would spill my guts, do anything for them. Then, with any luck, I get the same back."

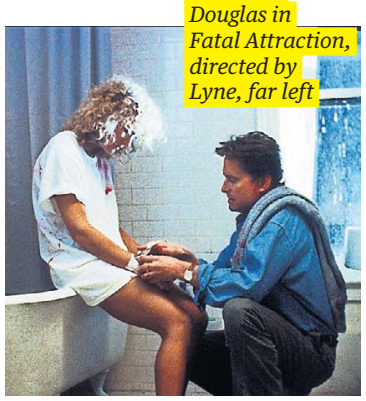
When he shot Fatal Attraction, Close and Douglas swigged champagne before their first sex scene, margaritas before their second. "You can't do that now!" he says wistfully. "Why is everything so serious? God, it's not like they're gonna get paralysed or something."

Actually, there isn't really a lot of sex in that film, he says – maybe a minute in total. "But that's what people remember, I suppose because it interests them."

For someone who has flogged it so profitably, Lyne does not seem that interested in sex, nor in nudity – possibly after so many years living in France. "You see a woman's breasts on television. You don't even think about it. You go to the beach and see tiny kids running around naked. What could possibly be more natural?

"Yet, in America, they'll blur out the buttocks of a four-year-old. I find that dangerous. The suggestion that a little child naked could in any way be prurient I think is truly fucked up. That sort of loss of innocence is a pity."

Lyne likes living near Marseille and thinks "you're much better off in Europe". Unfaithful was a Chabrol adaptation; Truffaut is his hero. He loves Truffaut's line about Americans making films about heroes and Europeans about losers – and loves it even more when I relate that to Affleck in Deep Water. He looks *wrecked*; a bleary husk next to a stack of beefcakes.



Close and Douglas in Fatal Attraction, directed by Lyne, far left

> **Lyne didn't like having an intimacy coordinator as 'it implies a lack of trust'**

"He really worked hard at a kind of stillness and vulnerability. At times, he said: 'You know, it's not in my DNA.' And it was! I didn't want him to be sort of Irish and ebullient and Boston. He was very childlike, in a way. I'm very proud of what he did, because I believe that he loved those snails." Another big chuckle.

Yet despite his years shuttling between Provence and Los Angeles, when you speak to Lyne, it is as if he could be sitting next door. "He does seem extremely English," says Whittrock. "I remember being a bit shocked that this is the guy who made Unfaithful. There is a kind of civility to him that's an interesting juxtaposition to the movies he makes. Maybe that's why they can become heightened and not fall into the muck. There's a purity. He does intellectualise, even though the movies are so visceral."

I put this to Lyne, who bats it back amicably. "Well, there's no need to be rude! If he thought I was unpleasant, I wouldn't get a lot out of him! And Finn was wonderful. I really dragged him through the mud, but he was so sweet."

And off he goes again: mild-mannered and happy, telling another story about how fantastic an actor was. After Whittock, it is the turn of Tim Robbins. He remembers an especially intense scene with him in Jacob's Ladder. The cameraman was crying and he told Robbins he was wonderful. "I remember his eyes were all bloodshot from yelling and he said to me: 'I know.'

"And in that moment, I really loved the man. I just really fucking loved him for what he'd given me. When you get something good out of an actor, you feel you've taken a piece of him – literally a lump of him – that he'll never get back. You've got it! The movie's got it! He gave me that! The feeling's so marvellous. That's why I do it."

And suddenly Lyne doesn't look like Bill Murray any more. He looks Hannibal Lecter at his sinister best. *Deep Water is on Amazon Prime Video from 18 March.*

PHOTOGRAPH: ARCHIVE PHOTOS/PARAMOUNT/ALLSTAR

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Porcupine Tree (from left): Richard Barbieri, Steven Wilson and Gavin Harrison

A prickly reunion

Porcupine Tree fizzled out 12 years ago when Steven Wilson called it a day and didn't think to let his bandmates know. Now they're back, but, as they tell **Michael Hann**, this could be a new beginning – or the end

In Air Studios in London early this year, I watch three men play music together for the first time since October 2010. When they walked off the stage at the Royal Albert Hall nearly 12 years ago, two of the three members had assumed that the band remained a going concern. But Steven Wilson, their frontman and guitarist, had decided that was it for the group, at least for the time being. Only he hadn't told his bandmates. Or their management. Or their label. Or anyone.

Wilson had begun Porcupine Tree in 1987 as a lark – a pastiche of old English psychedelic rock, along the lines of XTC's Dukes of Stratosphear. But he felt hemmed in. What had started as a side project had become the thing people knew him for – and expected him to deliver more of. "I'd started to think: 'This is not what I'm supposed to do,'" Wilson says over a video call, a few days after that in-person get-together. "Certainly, this wasn't supposed to be the all-encompassing dominant strand of my professional life. I wanted to go off and work with other musicians; I wanted to do other styles of music."

He says he felt resented by the drummer, Gavin Harrison, and the keyboard player, Richard Barbieri, for being the one who got all the attention; he felt his musicianship was being judged. "I didn't feel particularly liked or respected in the band – or at least if they did have respect, it was never vocalised."

So Wilson didn't bother saying anything to them. He just left, leaving Porcupine Tree as a perpetual loose end. For a couple of years, the other two waited for Wilson to return. But then they read interviews in which he would talk about his solo career and deny any interest in their band.

"You can't help but feel bitter and hurt," says Barbieri, who found himself in the same situation as when David Sylvian walked away from Japan at the end of 1982. "You get to a point of critical and commercial success and, at that very point, it's just dragged away. And, of course, it's not easy for the members to just carry on. It requires a lot of time before you step back into a career. But for the person at the front, they carry on with the same manager, the same record label, the same fanbase, the same publisher, the same promoter, the same agent. So it's very painless for them. But it leaves people behind who spent as much time working as they did, so it's tough."

Harrison lived near Wilson and from 2012 they jammed every so often, so he was less fussed by the interviews. "I'd think: 'Well, I had a cup of tea with him last week and he didn't say anything like that to me.' But I think, from Steven's point of view, it was somewhat of an internal competition between a band he started and himself, between the two different things going on in his mind, and I think he wanted the audience to at least not focus on when Porcupine Tree was coming back and focus on his solo career."

Wilson's continual refusal to address Porcupine Tree's future meant that the band's legend grew in their absence. They became the

prog rock band that got away (not something that would necessarily have pleased Wilson, who hates the term).

After such a long time apart, one might expect a certain sloppiness, but to the lay listener there is none of that. On the other side of the glass, the trio appear to be in perfect sync as they run through Harridan, the opening track of their new album, Closure/Continuation. The bass and drums wrap around each other like vines, intricate and entwined, and keyboards break like waves over them. It is complex, thorny but melodic music. And then the three players stop, exchange words quietly and start again. For the couple of hours I watch, that is what they do: run through one song, over and over again.

Closure/Continuation has been in the making since the days when Porcupine Tree appeared to be over. The jams Wilson and Harrison had undertaken over the past decade were revisited during lockdown. Tapes that Barbieri had sent to Wilson in later years had been worked up into songs. The three men did all the recording in their own homes – hence them not having played together since 2010 – and ended up making their new album without anyone knowing.

The album title reflects their uncertainty over the band's future. "We didn't have to make this record," Wilson says. "It's not as if we've come back because we've been offered $10m to tour America. We've not come back because our solo careers have failed. We thought it'd be fun and we had some good material. I think that's partly reflected in the title of the album: I genuinely don't know whether this is closure or the start of another continuing strand of the band's career.

"If it is closure, I think it's a really nice way to do it. Or we might call each other up a year from now and say: 'Hey, that was fun. Should we do it again?' My guess is probably the former. I think it probably is the last record we'll make and probably the last tour we'll do."

Barbieri says: "I know Steven will go into solo mode once this is over. And it depends where that takes him. Porcupine Tree can only really come from Steven wanting to be part of it. I'm quite happy if it is closure. I'm quite comfortable with that. Because we've made a good album. And I think we're going to end on a good vibe between the three of us. There's not going to be any kind of negative feelings."

That said, being in a group isn't easy. Wilson talks about the Venn diagram in any band – where what music they can actually play is limited to the intersection of their tastes – and how it circumscribes ambition. By the end of the first time round, he says, "we ended up having this archetype of a Porcupine Tree song: little bit of a metal riff, emotional vocals, chorus, then a clever bit in the middle, then some tricky time signature stuff for the musos. By the time we got to that last album, that last tour, it just wasn't interesting enough for me any more."

Porcupine Tree's last gig, at the Royal Albert Hall in 2010; Wilson playing in 2019 (below)

It frustrated the others, too. Harrison loves soul, funk and jazz, but there was no room for that. Barbieri, too, noticed that his preferred "very minimalist and slowly evolving atmospheric approach" is not of huge interest to the other two. At least, they all agree, Closure/Continuation is made up largely of true co-writes, rather than being driven by Wilson with lesser contributions from the other two.

Then there is the amount of effort involved. Barbieri, 64, frets about his concentration span. For Harrison, 58, the physicality of his drumming is a more pressing issue. "How much longer can I really carry on playing this kind of music at this kind of level? Other bands I've been playing in don't require such heavy, physical playing. Porcupine Tree was always the hardest-hitting job that I did. In King Crimson [of which he has been a member since 2014], a lot of the members were well over 70, and I don't picture me playing the drums like this in my 70s."

In Air Studios, you can see what he means. As the trio work through Harridan, Harrison's drumming is that mixture of precision and thunder that seems physically impossible; Barbieri – the best soundscaper since Brian Eno, says Wilson – washes the music like a watercolourist; Wilson drives it forward on the bass, before tracking his vocals on his own. "Singers always want to be in a different room when they sing," Barbieri tells Harrison in the control room. "I had one who had to be in a different country."

> **You can't help but feel bitter and hurt. You get success and it's dragged away**
> Richard Barbieri

When Porcupine Tree play live in public again, it will be to bigger crowds than ever before; arenas await. And when the tour ends and the three of them leave the stage, who knows if it will be the last time? "Maybe it will be a closure to the whole thing," Harrison says. "I'm not saying we're going to break up in 2022. But 2010 was a weird sort of ending – or not-ending. It would be nice to go out with a bang. If that's what it's gonna be."

Closure/Continuation is released on Music For Nations on 24 June.

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALEX LAKE; LASSE HOILE; GETTY IMAGES

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'I was a bit of a brat about marriage'

A proposal at a Jenny Hval gig stunned the avant garde pop star so much that she wrote her new album about it, she tells **Rachel Aroesti**

'Getting down on one knee – it was so performative'

In the autumn of 2019, Jenny Hval's Paris show was interrupted by a rival spectacle – an impressive achievement, considering that a Hval gig is quite the extravaganza. Over the years, the experimental Norwegian singer-songwriter has been joined on stage by a huge inflatable clam, a projected image of a pregnant Angelina Jolie and a flower-throwing, banana-eating man. Yet it was something rather run of the mill that stole the audience's attention on that evening: an in-crowd marriage proposal.

Years later, Hval is still reeling from witnessing that "very normcore display of romantic love" at one of her envelope-pushing shows. In fact, the ordeal had such a profound impact on the 41-year-old that she begins her eighth album, Classic Objects, by reliving it. "It was so programmed, so calm and so very performative – choreographed, getting down on one knee and all that," she says from her home office in Oslo, looking Nordically stylish in a blue polo neck and blue jumper. Hval felt it was especially jarring – even ironic – because at the time she was performing her album The Practice of Love, a record expressly concerned with love that exists outside the bounds of romance and marriage: "Love that isn't given language or ritual in mainstream society," she explains.

There was another reason Hval couldn't stop thinking about the proposal. Its conventionality perturbed her, which felt slightly hypocritical, considering she had recently got married. That she did something as traditional as tying the knot may surprise those familiar with her provocative, radical oeuvre: a collection of eerily intimate records that combine ominous synthscapes with high-pitched, sometimes skin-crawlingly delicate, vocals. Her lyrics about bodily fluids, pornography and masturbation can be eyebrow-raising, but Hval isn't so much interested in shock value as in undertaking an interrogation of women's place in society (on one track, she refers to cupcakes as "the huge capitalist clit").

Hval was against marriage as a younger woman. "I was a bit of a brat with that earlier on in my life. I was arguing with people who enjoyed marriage, being quite political and structural about it." As she explains in Year of Love, a dreamy number with a stilted groove that opens her new album, she agreed to what she calls a "patriarchal cornerstone" only for the contractual advantages. "So my partner would be able to inherit my huge fortune," she says. "Of almost nothing."

Afterwards, she admits, she didn't feel particularly conflicted. During our conversation, she repeatedly refers to marriage as "sweet". I get the sense that letting go of preconceptions has been an unexpected boon of the ageing process for Hval. "The older you get, the more you're going to challenge those black-and-white ideas that you had as a younger person, simply because you experience more things, you meet more people, you need to respect more people," she says. "The older you get, the more complicated your life is,because you've done this and you've done that, anything could be [unearthed] to invalidate everything you say, and there's something great about that, I think. You don't make sense any more.

"It's like before you've signed your first record contract; nobody can say you decided to let down your subculture and go to the industry, so it's easy to criticise others. But I like that life and time make us less coherent."

Classic Objects isn't wholly preoccupied with marriage. Hval's pandemic experience looms large, with the legal restrictions placed on artistic performance providing plenty of food for thought. The fact that live music events were halted gave her the impression that her work was generally considered "dangerous yet unimportant" – the perfect perspective, she says, for "any authoritarian government" wanting to make changes to society.

Even as things open up again, Hval is concerned that the music industry is continuing its slide into a "more conservative" mindset, with the economic toll of multiple lockdowns cementing the shift. In order to guarantee ticket sales, venues that "started out as subcultural hubs" are now "hosting bands that are already signed and touring the world", she says. The datafication of music also rewards existing success. "There are so many numbers – they can distort good creative decisions."

> **The older you get, the more you challenge those ideas you had as a younger person**

Mind the clam ... Hval on stage in Birmingham in 2017

Yet lockdown had its perks. Hval felt the physical benefits of pausing her itinerant lifestyle; she has coeliac disease and felt liberated from the constant challenge of finding suitable food while on tour. She also entered a period of cosy domesticity, spending time with her husband, who got very into fermenting food and looking after their puppy – a task that led to the semi-passive consumption of endless trashy movies, the only sufficiently undemanding art form.

Hval came to the conclusion that she "would be quite happy to be a hermit artist", but a recent return to live performance reminded her that touring's sacrifices are accompanied by a unique joy. "There's some kind of magic about being on stage that I only remember [when I'm there]," she says. "There are some parts of me that only exist in that stage moment."

Instead of turning her into a permanent recluse, the pandemic, and the change of pace it required, fed into a new approach to songwriting: "simple stories" to echo her experience of a simpler life. The lyrics in Classic Objects are more immediately intelligible than on her previous offerings, but pared-back Hval is still rich and complex. The gorgeously searching, organ-backed American Coffee references everything from Guy Debord and her mother's fear of driving to watching French cinema while suffering from a brutal UTI. She admits her songs "did get more adventurous than I anticipated", which, in retrospect, she is relieved about. "Otherwise I think I would have written something that I didn't actually agree with."

This month, Hval is heading out on tour – and taking this more straightforward approach with her. It doesn't sound like there will be much room for sealife-themed inflatables this time around; instead, she has decided to embrace the idea of humans playing music together in a room. "I feel like I've worked with challenging what a concert is for so long that I forgot the strengths of being in a band and doing a music performance," she says with a smile. "So I'm really excited about that, although it sounds like it's going to be a boring show."

This seems unlikely. Hval might have toned down the outrageousness – and perhaps even mellowed with age – but you get the sense this boundary-pushing musician couldn't do boring if she tried.

Classic Objects is out now on 4AD.

PHOTOGRAPHS: JENNY BERGER MYHRE; MARIA JEFFERIS/REDFERNS

You Rexy thing

Simon Rex dabbled in porn, had a rap hit and toured with Charlie Sheen. Now, strangest of all, Red Rocket has turned him into a respected actor, he tells **Ryan Gilbey**

What must it be like to have a penis the size of a draught excluder? "I wouldn't know, dude!" says Simon Rex. The one the actor models in the new comedy Red Rocket, in which he plays a disreputable middle-aged former porn star named Mikey Saber, is in fact a prosthetic. Rex's actual penis is there for all to see in several porn videos he made as a callow, cocky 18-year-old back in the early 90s. Until this week, though, he was being coy about whether that was really him in Red Rocket's nude scenes. Now, as he puts it, "the dick is out of the bag".

Having established that the recording of our video call won't be uploaded anywhere – "Cos I look like I just got thrown off a balcony," he says, running a hand through scruffy hair – he relaxes into a chatty, chipper mood. He is speaking from his Los Angeles hotel room on the morning after he was named best male lead actor at the Independent Spirit awards. Kristen Stewart presented his prize, then looked on admiringly as the 47-year-old reflected on a career that was "in the toilet" before he got the call from Sean Baker, director of The Florida Project, inviting him to come to Texas to make Red Rocket.

That was September 2020, and the film was to be shot guerrilla-style: shoestring budget, Covid restrictions, a skeleton crew of 10, no permits. That seat-of-the-pants scrappiness suits the material. In the opening scene, Mikey arrives in his old Gulf Coast suburb after many years in LA. Battered, bruised and on his uppers, he begs a spot on his ex's sofa, starts dealing weed, and proceeds to groom a 17-year-old for possible porn stardom.

"When I read the script, I thought: 'Why is anyone going to care what happens to this guy?'" says Rex, popping a grape in his mouth. "I knew my only job was to get the audience to like him. I had to make him boyish and charming." This he does in abundance, leavening the character's toxicity with an indefatigable vim and optimism. It helps that Mikey is often a hapless figure. In one scene, he flees naked down the street in the middle of the night, draught excluder flapping comically. "We were in a very bad neighbourhood in Texas, the cops driving by. I'm sitting in a van at two in the morning, naked except for a robe and a fake dick, going: 'Is the coast clear?' It was crazy, man. But it all helped. When you see me running down the street scared, I really was running down the street scared. That wasn't acting."

Mikey is a kind of Peter Porn: the stud who never grew up. "Usually in a movie you're watching a character arc," says Rex. "They begin somewhere, they change, and that's what is interesting. But Mikey is going in circles. Not too many movies have a despicable lead character who you root for, but who doesn't change. We all know this person: we've dated them, worked with them. Maybe we *are* them."

Some even voted for one: Red Rocket is set during the 2016 presidential campaign, with Mikey something of a minor Donald Trump. "They're both delusional American narcissists. Trump is a byproduct of the problem, which is America and capitalism and greed. It's not like he came out of a vacuum. Mikey is the same, he just doesn't have Trump's success."

Rex's performance would be audacious by any measure. Even more remarkably, though, he has done nothing in his decades-long career to suggest he had it in him. A former model, rapper and MTV VJ, he is the missing link between Paris Hilton (he swears they never dated), Meghan Markle (ditto), Adrien Brody (who encouraged him to rap), Mark Ronson (who DJ'd while Rex strutted up and down the catwalks of Paris and Milan) and Charlie Sheen (who took Rex under his wing).

He went on to be an agreeable clown in US sitcoms and web series, although quality control has not been his strongest suit. "I wasn't killing it," he says. He was paid handsomely for three instalments of the execrable Scary Movie franchise, where slapstick was his stock in trade: he gets kicked in the balls by an alien, throws a small child into a ceiling fan, and tries to rouse a corpse in an open casket, having misunderstood the word "wake". In The Karate Dog, from 2005, he teams up with a computer-animated mutt; they pee side-by-side at a urinal. In one of his last gigs prior to Red Rocket, he is the green-haired villain Dark Jokester in the Marvel parody Avengers of Justice: Farce Wars; other characters include "Tony Starch" and "Beaverine".

Did he ever suspect he was capable of something as good as Red Rocket? "Yes," he shoots back. "I always believed in myself, but I don't think anyone else saw it in me. You're so lucky in this town to get a shitty bad job. The phone just wasn't ringing." That has changed now. "I'm getting, like, Steven Spielberg auditions. It's very rare that this sort of thing happens. I don't want to put myself with John Travolta or Mickey Rourke, because they were A-list movie stars and I wasn't ever that. But they had comebacks too. I think we Americans like a comeback story." Ask him how he got here and he will respond with a shopping list of happy accidents.

PHOTOGRAPHS: INVISION/AP; ALAMY; FILMMAGIC; AP; MIRAMAX/ALLSTAR

> **Once you leave your seat at the Hollywood table, it's hard to get it back. It's a small table**

"Everything has always fallen into my lap. My philosophy is: no plan is the best plan."

The only son of Bay Area hippies who divorced when he was two, Rex weathered a turbulent childhood with an alcoholic stepfather, then went straight from high school into a forklift job at a potato sack factory. He met a Penthouse model and moved in to a one-bedroom apartment with her and her two-year-old child. To pay his half of the rent, Rex agreed to appear in a handful of solo porn videos. "At the time, I was so young and dumb that I thought it was cool," he says. "At 18, you don't make good decisions."

He is accustomed to people mentioning those videos, and concedes it has all fed helpfully into the marketing of Red Rocket. "Sean told me: 'I cast you because of your talent but there's definitely a meta thing happening with your backstory.' I'm OK with that." Though he is sanguine about the whole affair, he hopes it will "dissolve" the more he keeps working. He looks surprised, however, to learn that the continuity announcer at the Independent Spirit awards made a reference to it ("Rex got his start in pornographic films ...") while he was walking up to collect his award. "Oh, they said that?" he asks, not quite concealing his disappointment. "I didn't know that."

Accompanying that same girlfriend to a modelling audition, Rex got a rather luckier break: the agency snapped him up instead. "I would never be dumb enough to *try* to be a model, but they sent me to Milan, then to New York and Paris." MTV executives invited him to be a VJ. "I told them I had no journalistic experience, had never been on TV. They said: 'You're hired.'" Tupac Shakur complimented him in the middle of an interview – "I've been watching you, you're good," the late rapper told him – and the director Gus Van Sant invited him to audition for a part in Good Will Hunting. "I go in and sit down with him and Matt Damon. We're doing a reading and then Gus stops me in the middle and says: 'Simon, this is really bad, you're not ready.' Matt Damon is laughing and I'm embarrassed. Gus says: 'But don't worry, you have something. Trust me. Go to acting school.'"

The ride of his life ... Rex in Red Rocket, in which he plays an ex-porn star

Even once the money was rolling in from sitcoms and Scary Movies – "I made tons in the early 2000s, bought a house in the Hills, bought a Porsche" – the quality jobs were not. Disenchanted with the business, he started a rap project with two friends as a joke, and christened himself Dirt Nasty. The conceit was that the group would "turn everything on its head. So instead of rapping about selling drugs, we rapped about *buying* drugs. That was the joke. We were the customers."

> **Several UK tabloids offered him $70,000 to claim he had slept with Meghan Markle**

Their fans were "white, mostly female. When we started, we were like: 'Everyone's always rapping to other dudes about being tough and cool. What about if we were rapping to girls?'" They supported Red Hot Chili Peppers on tour, and had a platinum-selling hit ("A million fucking units!") with the song My Dick. The lyrics were comprised of one boast after another: "My dick cost a late-night fee / Your dick got the HIV ... My dick, size of a pumpkin / Your dick look like Macaulay Culkin." Mikey Saber would have approved.

There were two downsides to this tomfoolery. First, everyone kept confusing Rex with his onstage character. Second, it capsized his acting prospects. "My agents would phone about an audition and I'd say: 'I'm in Poland with the Chili Peppers.' Once you leave your seat at the Hollywood table, it's hard to get it back. It's a small table." With few acting roles on the horizon, he found it hard to decline the offers he was getting for gigs, even once he felt too old to be a rapper. My Dick had become a pain in the butt.

There were other distractions along the way. Several UK tabloids offered him $70,000 to claim he had slept with Markle, with whom he appeared in a 2005 episode of the sitcom Cuts; their off-screen interactions never got further than one platonic lunch. "I was broke as fuck! I really needed the money. But I'll be on food stamps before I do that." Markle wrote him a thank-you letter. "She said: 'It's nice to know there are still good people.'" He has it framed in his home out in Joshua Tree.

(Left to right) Rex as one half of Dirt Nasty; as an MTV VJ; and with Anna Farris and Charlie Sheen in Scary Movie 3

Perhaps few events in his life have been as bizarre as the time he accompanied Charlie Sheen on his 20-date live tour (My Violent Torpedo of Truth) in 2011. "That was a weird one, man. That was a fucking circus." Sheen, with whom he became friends on Scary Movie 3, "was up on stage every night talking shit. Then a pro baseball player would come on and play catch with him, then I'd do a Dirt Nasty song. It was a shitshow." When did he first realise it wasn't going well? "When the crowd starting chanting: 'Refund! Refund!'"

Despite that, he marvels now at the memory of flying from gig to gig on private jets, staying at Ritz-Carltons and the like. "Charlie would tell me: 'Order everything on the menu. Lobster, steak, whatever. Use the spa every day, get a facial, get a massage.' I said: 'I don't wanna waste your money.' He said: 'Simon, I make more in one day of Two and a Half Men reruns than you could possibly imagine. Spend all of it.'"

He talks admiringly of Sheen being "the last of the Hollywood bad boys" and seems torn between lamenting the end of that public wildness and profligacy, and recognising that "society has moved on, and it's a good thing that it has. Even though I don't approve of cancel culture and virtue signalling and all of that."

Rex has moved on, too. It would be poignant to hear him talking about missing his "young, athletic" physique if he didn't look so trim and taut, and if he wasn't now in receipt of something which had eluded him for so long: respect. "When people used to ask me what I did, and I told them I was an actor, I always felt like I was bullshitting," he says. "For the first time now, I can say it and feel proud because I think I did a good job." The old Simon Rex may be dead but the new one is killing it.

Red Rocket is in cinemas today.

The Black Cop

A tale of identity, discrimination, and institutional bias in the Met

Gamal 'G' Turawa's memories tell a multi-layered story; one of a homophobic, racially charged young police officer who became an openly gay, anti-racism campaigner. BAFTA nominated Guardian documentary, The Black Cop, paints an intimate, nuanced portrait of Turawa's life and career.

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The Guardian DOCUMENTARIES

Peter Bradshaw's film of the week

Great Freedom

Gay prison drama finds inner liberty is the key

★★★★☆

Dir *Sebastian Meise*

Starring *Franz Rogowski, Georg Friedrich, Anton von Lucke*

117 mins **Cert** *18*

Grosse Freiheit (Great Freedom) is the name of the Fassbinder-ish gay bar in this film with a dungeon-style sex club beneath: director and co-writer Sebastian Meise leaves it to us to gauge the exact level of irony in his title. It is visited by Hans, to whom 36-year-old German actor Franz Rogowski (above) brings his typically intense, coiled and opaque personality. It is 1969, just after the West German government has decriminalised gay sex. Hans, recently out of jail for this crime, wanders the subterranean sex-filled corridors with an unfathomable smile. Perhaps he sees their resemblance to prison, whose interiors themselves resemble the public lavatories where Hans broke the law, that prison to which lifer Hans had an institutionalised loyalty, part of the lost generations of gay men whose entire lives were pointlessly consumed.

Great Freedom is a formidably intelligent and well-acted prison movie and also a love story – or perhaps a paradoxically platonic bromance, stretching from the end of the second world war to the moon landing. Hans had been sent to the concentration camps in wartime and in 1945 finds himself back in prison with his number tattooed on his arm. Throughout the film, his civilian existence – his non-prison life – is mostly a mystery. We don't know about his family or whatever jobs he's been (briefly) doing. But we do know that he had a love affair with Oskar (Thomas Prenn) who is in prison with him in the 1950s. In the 60s, Hans has a prison moment with Leo (Anton von Lucke), the young teacher arrested with him in the toilet, and for whom Hans makes a self-sacrificial gesture to secure his freedom.

Hans's real relationship is with his cellmate, a stolid straight man called Viktor (Georg Friedrich), like Hans a recidivist veteran of the system who is initially overwhelmed with homophobic disgust at Hans, but then feels compassion on seeing his tattoo. As their friendship develops, Viktor (after glumly pondering his collection of straight porn) gruffly asks if Hans might, on what both men understand to be a strictly prison basis, attend to his personal needs. Poignantly, in fact tragically, both Viktor and Hans have a sense of themselves which is frozen in the 1940s: prison is for them their only life, certainly their only erotic life. Yet freedom, of a kind, has been available from within.

A Banquet

★★★★☆

Dir *Ruth Paxton*

Starring *Sienna Guillory, Jessica Alexander, Ruby Stokes*

97 mins **Cert** *15*

Scottish film-maker Ruth Paxton makes a very smart feature debut with this genuinely uncanny psychological horror-satire written by Justin Bull, about body image and the eating disorder from hell. Sienna Guillory is excellent as the well-to-do Holly, a single mum who cares deeply about her two teen daughters Betsey (Jessica Alexander) and Izzy (Ruby Stokes).

Just when the family's life seems picture perfect, a strange self-questioning malaise sets in. Betsey has a nasty experience with drugs, appears to have an epiphany under a blood-red moon and from then on, she never eats another thing – but stays at exactly the same weight. Holly yells at her: "You have anorexia! And do you know who gets it? Entitled middle-class white girls!"

But Betsey's shrewdly unsentimental gran (a nice performance from Lindsay Duncan) compares Betsey to the Japanese mythic monster, the *Futakuchi-onna*, the woman with a second mouth hidden under her hair at the back of her head. Is Betsey a vampiric daemon, secretly consuming her family's psychic happiness to keep her own weight up? Or is there another, more rational explanation? Paxton's movie sketches out the sinister dread just under the happy-family surface; she is in expert control of her film, achieving her effects with economy and force. It is really unnerving.

Red Rocket

★★★★☆

Dir *Sean Baker*

Starring *Simon Rex, Bree Elrod, Suzanna Son*

131 mins **Cert** *18*

Sean Baker has given us an adult American pastoral, a comedy of brazen survivalist chutzpah and another study of tough lives at the margins, close in spirit to his lo-fi breakthrough Tangerine.

Rapper, comedian and one-time porn performer Simon Rex gives a very entertaining performance as a washed-up adult movie actor with the unsubtle professional name of Mikey Saber. His career in LA has gone south. Now, with no money and sporting bruises from unexplained disputes with business associates, Mikey sheepishly returns home to Texas City, Texas, where he infuriates his abandoned wife and former leading lady, Lexi (Bree Elrod), by asking if he can crash with her.

After an unconvincing attempt to get a respectable job, Mikey starts dealing weed, resumes conjugal relations with Lexi and regales everyone with stories about the glamorous porn career he intends to revive. But then he falls in love with Strawberry (Suzanna Son), a young woman who works at the doughnut store. With the certainty of James Mason encountering Judy Garland in A Star Is Born, Mikey is convinced that Strawberry is a natural in his business and his ticket back to the triple-X big time.

The year is 2016, Hillary Clinton is facing off with Donald Trump for the US presidency, and it is tempting to read Mikey as the embodiment of Trump. Mikey is a fast-talking hustler with the predator-parasite's instinct for drawing other people into his orbit. There is an awful moment when he has a humiliating encounter with the parents of Strawberry's ex-boyfriend.

For all this, there is something poignant, even sympathetic about Mikey and Strawberry; Baker lets us see that it would be sad if they wound up back in Texas City, but just as sad if they made it to Los Angeles. You can picture Mikey growing old like the local people in Texas City, who are so very unimpressed to see him back.

Games

Gran Turismo 7

PlayStation 4/5

★★★★☆

At first glance, Gran Turismo 7 offers much the same experience as the original game did back in 1997; there have been some tweaks under the hood, but this old motor is still running. While it remains compatible with the PlayStation 4, on PS5 this is a jaw-slackeningly beautiful game, a true technical showcase.

The time you spend out on the track, whether alone or in the cleverly regulated multiplayer mode, is a pleasure. The handling model, the core of any racing sim, remains hugely engaging, and the changing time of day and weather conditions are nothing less than a full-blown atmospheric simulation. Arriving at an event with no idea of the conditions you will encounter extends the novelty of the already generous cars and circuits available. That said, neither of the two British circuits, Brands Hatch and Goodwood, support wet weather at all, which does beg the question: has series creator Kazunori Yamauchi ever visited the UK?

Your route through the early part of the game is tightly controlled and punctuated with educational mini-lectures on significant or enduring aspects of car culture. Yamauchi evidently sees preservation of this culture as a solemn responsibility.

Less forgivably, earning money can be painfully slow, and the most desirable cars are phenomenally expensive and often only fleetingly available.

It's reassuring that despite ever-greater technical refinement, Gran Turismo's unique, eccentric character remains intact. Keeping this distinctive spirit alive in the era of 4K and 60 frames a second, GT7 feels both fresh and comfortingly familiar.

Mike Channell

Alexis Petridis's album of the week

Rex Orange County Who Cares?

Sad boy-next-door plays it gratingly safe

Pop

Label Sony

★★☆☆☆

It takes exactly 31 seconds from the start of his third album for Alex O'Connor to inform listeners that he's feeling stressed and "so depressed". Those familiar with O'Connor's oeuvre as Rex Orange County might suggest that's very much par for the course. Feeling stressed and depressed is O'Connor's thing. He's stressed and depressed about girls, about his friendships, about his musical career and, on a song called 7am, about forgetting to shut the blinds before he went to bed. He even has a weird habit of sounding upset when he's hymning a blossoming new romance: "I can't believe you've come and saved me."

Even by the standards of sensitive "sad boi" singer-songwriters, O'Connor writes about his feelings in a curiously direct and unadorned way. Set to simple piano accompaniments, his lyrics frequently resemble too-much-information social media posts. ("So you want to be happy too? / What are you supposed to do?" he sings on Who Cares?'s title track.)

This, one suspects, is the secret of Rex Orange County's considerable success: his back catalogue is thick with singles that have gone gold or platinum without actually making the charts, a discombobulating phenomenon that indicates an awful lot of streams spread over a long period of time. As has been established in recent years, what a lot of teen and tween listeners now want from pop is relatability, and they come no more relatable than O'Connor with his boy-next-door image, his unvarnished diary-entry lyrics and his frequent suggestions that stardom is all a bit much and he'd be happier living a more normal life: "I'm not cut out for this and I keep wanting to call it quits," he sings on 7am. If you want an indication of the age group his music attracts, he's about to release an "anniversary" edition of his album Apricot Princess, celebrating its fifth birthday. Snort if you want at the idea of mistily recalling the halcyon era of 2017, but for a chunk of his audience, five years ago probably does seem like the distant past – and a simpler time at that.

Musically, there's a hint of vintage soul about his approach on Who Cares?: the squelchy synth bass on Open a Window could have stepped off an early 80s R&B hit. But with his tasteful string arrangements, his electric piano and his mid-Atlantic accent – "I'm alone witchoo," he cries, as people from Hampshire villages so often do – what O'Connor really recalls is the poppier end of 70s soft rock: Andrew Gold, Leo Sayer, Dean Friedman. For all the 2020s sheen, the samples and the guest appearance from Tyler, the Creator (O'Connor guested on his album Flower Boy in the halcyon era of 2017), it doesn't take a huge leap to picture him singing most of Who Cares? on Top of the Pops, perched at a keyboard in a cheesecloth shirt, before an audience waiting patiently for Showaddywaddy to come on and liven things up.

Like his soft-rock forebears, at his best, O'Connor seems to be part of a lineage of pop craftsmen for whom melody trumps everything – you don't need edge or lyrical fireworks if you can come up with a tune as strong as Open the Window or as cute as Making Time. But at his worst, it sounds limp and insubstantial, compounded by the thin production and his voice, which can tend to the whiny. The effect is often flattening: "I kept opening my door just to see if you would walk through," he sings on The Shade, sounding less like a man rendered irrational by love than someone waiting for a Deliveroo.

It's music so redolent of the current appetite for safe pop, and of a specific demographic, that you wonder what the future holds for O'Connor. Perhaps he'll grow and develop alongside his fans. Perhaps he'll come good on one of his many threats to pack it all in. If success really makes him as unhappy as he keeps claiming it does, he's clearly going to be stressed and depressed for the foreseeable future: more unvarnished grist to the songwriting mill.

More reviews at theguardian.com/music

Folk album of the month

Artist Arun Sood

Album Searching Erskine

Label Blackford Hill Audio

★★★★☆

Born to a Scottish mother and a Punjabi father, Arun Sood grew up hearing tales of his grandmother's life on Vallay, a tiny Hebridean island accessed only at low tide from the coast of North Uist. Grandma was Katie MacNaughton, who never forgot the songs and the sounds she heard there. Neither has her grandson. Sood has revisited the island, his family's memories and folk tunes to make this beautiful album. It includes interviews, field recordings, and fascinating manipulations of traditional music. Cailin Mo Rùin-sa, a Gaelic song sung by Sood's uncle on the night that he died, appears three times: voiced belly-deep on He Was Drowned, played on the chanter of a bagpipe on Lachlan's Drones, and performed in an English translation by Rachel Sermanni on the final track, Crossing. Arun's daughter's foetal heartbeat provides the pulse of that track, heritage passed on. A gorgeous accompanying book adds photographs, art and philosophical thinking to this fascinating exploration of music and memory. **Jude Rogers**

Pop

Artist Shenseea

Album Alpha

Label Interscope

★★★☆☆

Even taking into account dancehall's sexually explicit lyrical tradition, Shenseea's debut album is staggeringly profane. Sometimes this is pushed to the point of unintentional comedy (romantic slow jam Deserve It finds room for the line "put that pussy in a hearse every time") but usually it feels like a suitable accompaniment to the uninhibited, thundering energy of her music. Shenseea also knows how to entertain a guest – Beenie Man shines on Henkel Glue; 21 Savage's tightly controlled mumblings slot nicely into R U That. In fact, she works so well with others that the final solo numbers drag slightly in comparison. Nevertheless, you can't help but feel you're in the presence of Jamaican dancehall's next big crossover star. **Rachel Aroesti**

Classical

Artist Asmik Grigorian/Lukas Geniušas

Album Dissonance: Rachmaninov

Label Alpha Classics

★★★★★

"Small pieces of opera" is how the soprano Asmik Grigorian describes the Rachmaninov romances on this, her debut recital recording, and in these performances with Lukas Geniušas that's exactly how they come across: 19 self-contained scenes that drip with drama. Grigorian's tone is at its fullest, all velvet-wrapped steel, and Geniušas does not give the impression of holding back; in Spring Waters, there's a thrilling few moments as the surging piano torrents briefly threaten to overwhelm the voice. Quieter passages bring more tenderness than most singers of Grigorian's power can summon without the voice losing its poise. Rachmaninov is a composer in whose work Geniušas has shone as a soloist; here, as a duet partner, he has an attentive ear for the detail of what Grigorian wants to achieve. **Erica Jeal**

Remembrance of things past ... Samuel L Jackson as Ptolemy Grey

Review The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey, Apple TV+

Samuel L Jackson gives a career-best performance in dementia drama

★★★☆☆

Lucy Mangan

A shuffling, broken-down Samuel L Jackson is quite a sight. In The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey, he plays the eponymous Grey, a man suffering from rapidly progressing dementia, living in hermitic squalor despite the best efforts of his loving great-nephew Reggie (Omar Benson Miller), who is a last, fragile link with the outside world until he is killed in an unsolved shooting.

And yet he holds your attention as firmly as he ever did as the biblically monologuing Jules in Pulp Fiction, or as Nick Fury in the MCU or – of course – as FBI agent Neville Flynn trying to keep track of all those snakes on that plane in 2006's enduring masterpiece Snakes on a Plane. In his moments of lucidity, Ptolemy is frightened of the ever-changing world. In the rest he is distraught, burdened by unknown horrors and haunted by people and fragmented scenes from his childhood in the Jim Crow south. It is a rounded and unsparing portrait of dementia and to see the 73-year-old actor offer up such a vulnerable performance after a career largely built on dazzling us with the opposite adds a poignancy all of its own.

Jackson's portrayal of a man whose life is fading away from him is one of two reasons to stick with The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey. The other is Ptolemy's growing relationship with his niece's best friend's daughter Robyn (on a good day he remembers all of this), who gradually comes to take Reggie's place. What she lacks in initial tenderness she more than makes up for in her ability to tackle his disgusting bathroom and blocked toilet. Greater love hath no one.

Robyn is played by Dominique Fishback, who is simply astonishing. Going toe-to-toe with Jackson in her first main television role, hers is a mesmerising and complex depiction of a young woman hardened by a tough start in life – and with the hair-trigger fighting instincts to prove it – who nevertheless cares for the old man, to whom she is no actual relation, and who is able to blossom in her own way under his attention.

This core relationship and its evolving dynamic is what, I suspect, will keep most people watching while Plot with a capital P starts to billow round them. Ptolemy signs up to an experimental treatment invented and administered by a pushy research doctor (Walton Goggins) – a kind of limited Limitless pill that will restore him to himself but only briefly and leave him worse off thereafter. As it kicks in, it allows Ptolemy to become the charismatic raconteur he once was (and Jackson to bust out his more typical moves) while piecing together and coming to terms with his traumatic past, which includes witnessing the lynching of his uncle and mentor Coydog McCann (Damon Gupton), investigating Reggie's murder and tracing the stolen treasure for which his uncle was killed. Throughout, he fends off family members and officials who seek to spoil and sever his and Robyn's friendship.

It's a lot – although the magical pill aspect is at least not dwelt on too heavily and allowed to add a full sci-fi vibe to the brew as well – and not all of it is worth it. There are some very extraneous bits indeed, such as the local drug addict who tries to attack Ptolemy every time he leaves his house. She seems to be there to do nothing but help explain his isolation before Robyn comes along, and to add tension to various scenes. The conclusion – Ptolemy redeemed, Robyn's self-image remade, the good generally ending happily, the bad unhappily – is unremarkable and clearly destined pretty much from the opening episode. It feels like there is a better, shorter story here, stripped of the schmaltz that, however hard they try to banish hit, seems to creep inevitably into American tales of friendship (especially between young and old) and any wrestling with the indignities of age. It would benefit from focusing more tightly on the two main characters and the realities of their lives separately and together.

But it is in many ways a career-best performance from Jackson (and from Fishback, though we must hope that hers is merely the first of many to come), and there is joy to seeing it in what must have been a passion project for him, as a longtime supporter of Alzheimer's charities. He executive produces and has had the rights to the Walter Mosley book the series is based on for nearly a decade. If it turns out to be something of a swansong – or at least, his non-MCU swansong – it would be a fine one to go out on.

Grantchester
9pm, ITV

Still going strong seven seasons in, the detective period drama is on the brink of the swinging 60s. But first: another whodunnit. This time, Lord Edmund Fitzgerald is found dead as a doornail in the grounds of a crumbling estate. The Rev Will Davenport and DI Geordie Keating (played by Tom Brittney and Robson Green, *above*) are, reliably, on the case but are at loggerheads with Geordie's new boss. They soon look into the victim's romantic past to find clues.

Hollie Richardson

And another thing

'The dress' is back on social media and still all I see is white and gold. Can someone please make a programme explaining this whole thing and finally LET ME REST?

Inside Culture With Mary Beard
7.30pm, BBC Two
Emma Thompson crying along to a Joni Mitchell song in the film Love Actually is a powerful scene that has broken many a viewer's heart – but why? Beard speaks with the actor herself to unpick the role that crying plays in art and in real life. **HR**

Becoming ... Nathan Drake
8.40pm, BBC Three
After putting his own spin on Spidey, Hollywood's favourite new dreamboat, Tom Holland, tackles another beloved character – rascally tomb robber Nathan Drake in the recent Uncharted movie. Here, he talks to Ali Plumb about acting opposite an intimidatingly buff Mark Wahlberg.
Graeme Virtue

Your Garden Made Perfect
9pm, BBC Two
Strapping on the VR headsets and saying "Oooh!" this week are Lisa and Justin from Wokingham, who want their big square of featureless lawn to be transformed into a private sanctuary. Valuable lessons on zoning and imaginative planting ensue.
Jack Seale

Dating No Filter
10pm, Sky Max
"She's dressed like a chocolate finger!" "He looks like a fit Weasley – Ron's sexy cousin!" Tonight's episode of comedians commentating on couples' dates is yet another grab bag of hilarious quotes. Will the singletons find love on their journey? Who cares? This show is all about the quips from comics.
Alexi Duggins

The Graham Norton Show
10.45pm, BBC One
Friday nights without Norton? Almost unimaginable – but we've reached the last in the current series. The highlights reel surely boasts Adele being very Adele and Martin Freeman on the question asked by Love Actually fans. **HR**

BBC One

6.0 **Breakfast** (T) **9.15** Morning Live (T) **10.0** Crimewatch Live (T) **10.45** Caught Red Handed (T) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **12.15** Bargain Hunt (T) **1.0** News (T) **1.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **1.45** Shakespeare & Hathaway: Private Investigators (T) (R) **2.30** The Repair Shop (T) **3.0** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **3.45** Garden Rescue (T) (R) **4.30** Antiques Road Trip (T) (R) **5.15** Pointless (T) (R) **6.0** News (T) **6.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **7.0** The One Show (T)

7.30 **Live Six Nations Rugby Union** (T) Wales v France (kick-off 8pm). Gabby Logan presents all the action from the fourth and penultimate fixture for both teams, held at Principality Stadium.

10.10 **News** (T)
10.35 **Regional News** (T) Weather
10.45 **The Graham Norton Show** (T) Highlights from the series.
11.35 **Six Nations Sin Bin** (T)
12.05 FILM **The Witches of Eastwick** (1987) Fantasy comedy, starring Jack Nicholson, Cher, Michelle Pfeiffer and Susan Sarandon. **2.0** Weather **2.05** News (T)

BBC Two

6.30 **Marcus Wareing's Tales from a Kitchen Garden** (T) (R) **7.0** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **8.0** Sign Zone: The Repair Shop (T) (R) **9.0** News (T) **12.15** Politics UK (T) **1.0** FILM It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World (1963) (T) **3.30** Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is (T) (R) **4.15** Sicily: Wonder of the Mediterranean (T) (R) **5.15** Flog It! (T) (R) **6.0** Richard Osman's House of Games (T) **6.30** Marcus Wareing's Tales from a Kitchen Garden (T) **7.0** MOTDx (T) **7.30** Inside Culture With Mary Beard (T)

8.0 **Gardeners' World** (T) New series. At Longmeadow, Monty Don embarks on an exciting new project, sows perennial seeds and gives a tree-planting masterclass.
9.0 **Your Garden Made Perfect** (T) Wokingham residents Lisa and Justin want to make more of their home's outside plot. Last in the series.

10.0 **Live at the Apollo** (T) (R) Darren Harriott introduces comedy by Jessica Fostekew and Stephen Bailey.
10.30 **Newsnight** (T) Weather
11.05 **The Real Peaky Blinders** (T) (R) Birmingham gang history.
12.05 **Sign Zone** Panorama: Manchester Arena Bombing – Saffie's Story (R) **12.35** Great Coastal Railway Journeys (R)

ITV

6.0 **Good Morning Britain** (T) **9.0** Lorraine (T) **10.0** This Morning (T) **12.30** Loose Women (T) **1.30** News and Weather (T) **1.55** Local News and Weather (T) **2.0** Dickinson's Real Deal (T) (R) **3.0** Lingo (T) (R) **4.0** Tipping Point (T) **5.0** The Chase (T) **6.0** Local News and Weather (T) **6.30** News and Weather (T) **7.30** Emmerdale (T)

8.0 **Coronation Street** (T) Abi is given a rude awakening by the police.
9.0 **Grantchester** (T) New series. The dead body of Lord Edmund Fitzgerald is found in the grounds of Fitzgerald Estate. Detective drama set in the 1950s, starring Robson Green, Tom Brittney and Tessa Peake-Jones.

10.0 **News** (T) Weather
10.30 **Local News** (T) Weather
10.45 FILM **Rocky IV** (Sylvester Stallone, 1985) (T) Drama, starring Sylvester Stallone and Dolph Lundgren.
12.25 **Shop: Ideal World 3.0** Winning Combination (T) (R) **3.50** Unwind With ITV **5.05** Masterpiece With Alan Titchmarsh (T) (R)

Channel 4

6.0 **Winter Paralympics Live** (T) **8.0** Winter Paralympics Breakfast (T) **9.0** Frasier (T) (R) **10.30** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **11.25** News (T) **11.30** Coast vs Country (T) (R) **12.30** Steph's Packed Lunch (T) **2.10** Countdown (T) **3.0** Crufts 2022 (T) **4.0** A New Life in the Sun: Where Are They Now? (T) **5.0** Four in a Bed (T) **5.30** Come Dine With Me (T) **6.0** The Simpsons (T) (R) **6.30** Hollyoaks (T) (R) **7.0** News (T) **7.30** Winter Paralympics: Today in Beijing (T)

8.0 **Crufts 2022** (T) Clare Balding presents as the second day of the event concludes. Group judging has reached the Hounds group, with only one canine winning a chance to be named Best in Show.
9.0 **Gogglebox** (T) The armchair critics share their opinions on what they have been watching during the week.

10.0 **The Last Leg** (T) Satire with Adam Hills, Josh Widdicombe and Alex Brooker.
11.05 **8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown** (T) (R) Jon Richardson and Tom Allen take on Sean Lock and Rosie Jones in the gameshow.
12.05 **Jimmy Carr's I Literally Just Told You** (T) (R) **1.0** Winter Paralympics Live (T)

Channel 5

6.0 **Milkshake! 9.15** Jeremy Vine (T) **12.15** Nightmare Tenants, Slum Landlords (T) (R) **1.10** News (T) **1.15** Home and Away (T) **1.45** Neighbours (T) **2.15** FILM Killer in the Attic (David DeCoteau, 2021) (T) **4.0** Filthy House SOS (T) (R) **5.0** News (T) **6.0** Neighbours (T) (R) **6.30** Eggheads (T) **7.0** World's Most Scenic River Journeys (T) **7.55** News (T)

8.0 **Susan Calman's Grand Day Out in Wales** (T) (R) The comedian ventures along the Pembroke coast in Wales, starting in Cardigan.
9.0 **A&E After Dark** (T) The night staff at Hull Royal Infirmary try to save the life of 47-year-old Jane, who has a heart rate more than double the average.

10.0 **Abba's 30 Greatest Moments** (T) (R) Documentary celebrating the career of the Swedish pop foursome.
12.05 **All-Time Favourite Abba Songs** (T) (R) **1.45** The Live Casino Show (T) **3.50** 1992: Britain's Biggest Hits (T) (R) **5.10** House Doctor (T) (R) **5.35** Peppa Pig (T) (R) **5.40** Paw Patrol (T) (R)

BBC Four

7.0 **Harry Belafonte: Live at the BBC** (T) (R) A 1977 performance by the American singer-songwriter. **7.50** Sounds of the 60s (T) (R)

8.0 **TOTP: 1992** (T) (R) With Shakespears Sister, Enya, Prince and Elton John.
8.30 **TOTP: 1992** (T) (R) With the Shamen, Kris Kross, Betty Boo, Madness and Roxette.
9.0 **John Denver: Country Boy** (T) (R) Documentary exploring the life and legacy of American singer-songwriter John Denver.

10.0 **John Denver in Person** (T) (R) Concert recorded in 1976.
10.55 **Country & Beyond With the Shires** (T) (R) Music selection.
11.55 **Michael Kiwanuka and Laura Marling at 6 Music Festival** (T) (R) Sets from 2021.
12.55 **TOTP: 1992** (R) **1.25** TOTP: 1992 (R) **1.55** Country Kings at the BBC (R) **2.55** Harry Belafonte: Live at the BBC

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm MasterChef Australia **8.35** The Catch Up **8.40** Becoming ... Nathan Drake **9.0** Life and Death in the Warehouse **10.0** FILM The Big Sick (2017) **11.55** RuPaul's Drag Race: UK Versus the World **12.55** Gassed Up **1.45** Zen Motoring **1.55** Nail Bar Boys **2.25** Life and Death in the Warehouse **3.30** Split Up in Care: Life Without Siblings

Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.10** Sin City Motors **8.0** Timber Kings **9.0** Storage Hunters UK **9.30** Storage Hunters UK **10.0** Eddie Eats America **10.30** Eddie Eats America **11.0** Travel Man: 48 Hours in Dubrovnik **11.30** Travel Man: 48 Hours in Krakow **12.0** Red Bull Soapbox Race **1.0** Fast Justice **2.0** Travel Man: 48 Hours in Bergen **2.30** Travel Man: 48 Hours in Madrid **3.0** Rick Stein's Road to Mexico **4.0** Red Bull Soapbox Race **5.0** Rick Stein's Road to Mexico **6.0** Taskmaster **7.0** Richard Osman's House of Games **7.40** Room 101 **8.20** Would I Lie to You? **9.0** Have I Got a Bit More News for You **10.0** QI **10.40** Mock the Week **11.20** Meet the Richardsons **12.0** Hypothetical **12.40** QI **1.20** Would I Lie to You? **2.0** Live at the Apollo **2.50** This Country **3.20** This Country **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am Hollyoaks **7.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **9.0** Married at First Sight Australia **10.30** The Big Bang Theory **11.0** Young Sheldon **12.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **1.0** The Big Bang Theory **3.0** Young Sheldon **4.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **5.0** The Big Bang Theory **7.0** Hollyoaks **7.30** The Big Bang Theory **8.0** FILM Knight and Day (2010) **10.10** Naked Attraction **12.20** First Dates: Valentine's Special **1.25** Gogglebox **2.25** Naked Attraction **3.20** Below Deck: Mediterranean **4.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA

Film4

11.0am FILM The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell (1955) **1.10** FILM Santa Fe Passage (1955) **3.0** FILM The Tall T (1957) **4.35** FILM Carry on Nurse (1959) **6.20** FILM The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2 (2015) **9.0** FILM Red (2010) **11.15** FILM The Cabin in the Woods (2012) **1.05** FILM Shot Caller (2017)

ITV2

6.0am Dress to Impress **7.0** The Ellen DeGeneres Show **8.0** You've Been Framed! Gold **9.0** Secret Crush **10.0** Dress to Impress **11.0** Love Bites **12.0** Supermarket Sweep **1.0** Tipping Point: Lucky Stars **2.0** Rolling in It **3.0** The Ellen DeGeneres Show **4.0** The Masked Singer US **5.0** You've Been Framed! **6.0** Celebrity Catchphrase **7.0** Superstore **7.30** Superstore **8.0** Bob's Burgers **9.0** FILM 22 Jump Street (2014) **11.15** Family Guy **11.45** Family Guy **12.15** American Dad! **12.40** American Dad! **1.10** Bob's Burgers **2.05** Superstore **2.30** Superstore **2.55** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **3.20** Unwind With ITV **3.30** Teleshopping

Sky Max

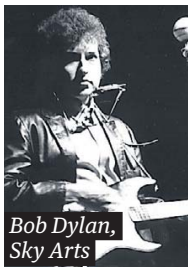
6.0am Stargate SG-1 **7.0** Stargate SG-1 **8.0** Supergirl **9.0** DC's Legends of Tomorrow **10.0** The Flash **11.0** NCIS: New Orleans **12.0** NCIS: New Orleans **1.0** Hawaii Five-0 **2.0** S.W.A.T **3.0** DC's Legends of Tomorrow **4.0** Arrow **5.0** The Flash **6.0** Stargate SG-1 **7.0** Stargate SG-1 **8.0** A League of Their Own **9.0** Rob & Romesh vs Team GB: Part 1 **10.0** Dating No Filter **10.30** Brassic **11.30** Brassic **12.30** Fast & Furious' Greatest Moments **1.30** Road Wars **2.0** The Blacklist **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** Stop, Search, Seize

Sky Arts

6.0am Darbar Festival 2018 **7.0** Hollywood in Vienna: A Night at the Oscars **9.0** Tales of the Unexpected **9.30** Tales of the Unexpected **10.0** Discovering: Donald Sutherland **11.0** Discovering: Iron Maiden **11.30** Discovering: Muse **12.0** What Was Virginia Woolf Afraid of? **1.0** Tales of the Unexpected **1.30** Tales of the Unexpected **2.0** Discovering: Dirk Bogarde **3.0** The Big Design Challenge **4.0** Hollywood Gossip **5.0** Tales of the Unexpected **5.30** Tales of the Unexpected **6.0** Discovering: Charles Laughton **7.0** Classic Albums: The Wailers – Catch a Fire **8.0** Johnny Cash: Song By Song **8.30** Johnny Cash: Song By Song **9.0** Laura Marling: Live at Union Chapel **10.25** Bob Dylan: The Other Side of the Mirror **12.0** Isle of Wight Festival Greatest Hits **12.30** Isle of Wight Festival Greatest Hits **1.0** Tina Turner: One Last Time – Live at Wembley Stadium **3.0** FILM Tina (2021) **5.05** The Art of Architecture

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Storm City **8.0** CSI: Crime Scene Investigation **9.0** The Newsroom **10.05** The Sopranos **12.25** Game of Thrones **1.30** Totti: One Captain **3.30** Ray Donovan **5.40** The Sopranos **7.50** Game of Thrones **9.0** I Hate Suzie **11.05** Succession **12.15** True Blood **1.25** True Blood **3.40** In Treatment **4.10** Storm City


Bob Dylan, Sky Arts

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.0** Essential Classics **12.0** Composer of the Week: Henriëtte Bosmans (5/5) **1.0** Lunchtime Concert. From the 2021 Schwetzingen festival, the Brentano Quartet play Schubert's String Quartet No 15 in G, D887. **2.0** Afternoon Concert. Includes Max Bruch's Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra with pianists Minsoo Sohn and Jiyeong Mun and the KBS SO. **4.30** The Listening Service (R) **5.0** In Tune **7.0** In Tune Mixtape **7.30** In Concert. Josep Pons conducts the BBC SO in Hans Krasa's Overture for Small Orchestra, Pavel Haas's Study for String Orchestra, Ervin Schulhoff's Symphony No 5 and Viktor Ullmann's Der Kaiser von Atlantis Op 49b, including soloists Thomas Johannes, Derrick Ballard, Oliver Johnston, Robert Murray and Soraya Mafi. **10.0** The Verb **10.45** The Essay: Fashion Stories. Lauren Working considers examples of cavalier style. (5/5) **11.0** Late Junction. A mixtape from Mexican-American composer and producer Debit. **1.0** Piano Flow With Tokio Myers **2.0** Gameplay **3.0** Through the Night

Radio 4

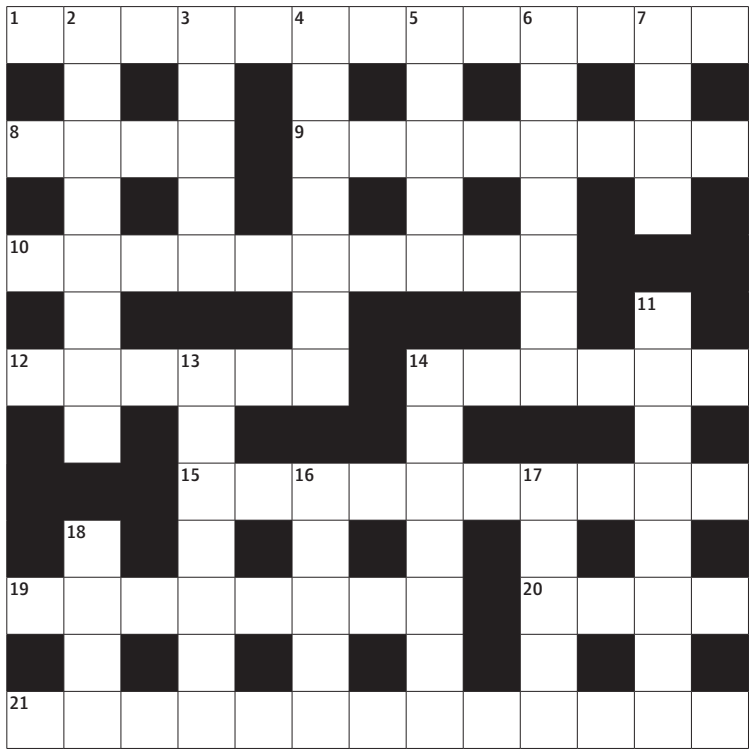
6.0am Today **8.31** (LW) Yesterday in Parliament **9.0** Desert Island Discs (R) **9.45** (LW) Daily Service **9.45** (FM) Death By Conspiracy? What Gary's story reveals about today's world. (10/10) **10.0** Woman's Hour **11.0** The Smugglers' Trail. Sue Mitchell and Rob Lawrie investigate human trafficking. (1/3) **11.30** Ankle Tag (R) **12.0** News **12.01** (LW) Shipping Forecast **12.04** Sea Change (5/10) **12.18** You and Yours **12.57** Weather **1.0** The World at One **1.45** The Museums That Make Us. Museum & Tasglann nan Eilean, Stornoway. (5/20) **2.0** The Archers (R) **2.15** Who Is Aldrich Kemp? Drama, by Julian Simpson. (4/5) **2.45** Helen Lewis: Great Wives (R) **3.0** Gardeners' Question Time **3.45** After Wonderland (R) **4.0** Last Word **4.30** Feedback **5.0** PM **5.54** (LW) Shipping Forecast **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.30** The Now Show **7.0** Past Forward: A Century of Sound (R) **7.15** Add to Playlist **8.0** Any Questions? **8.50** A Point of View **9.0** The Museums That Make Us: Omnibus (1/2) **9.59** Weather **10.0** The World Tonight **10.45** Book at Bedtime: Sea Change (R) **11.0** A Good Read (R) **11.30** Today in Parliament **12.0** News and Weather **12.30** Death By Conspiracy? (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.20** Shipping **5.30** News **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45** Lent Talks (R)

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am Hercule Poirot: Death on the Nile (5/5) **6.30** Killing Orders (1/6) **7.0** Welcome to Our Village, Please Invade Carefully (5/6) **7.30** Now You're Asking With Marian Keyes and Tara Flynn (9/10) **8.0** Dad's Army (12/20) **8.30** Second Thoughts (5/6) **9.0** Whispers (6/6) **9.30** Girlies (3/4) **10.0** The French Lieutenant's Woman (2/2) **11.0** Podcast Radio Hour **12.0** Dad's Army (12/20) **12.30** Second Thoughts (5/6) **1.0** Hercule Poirot: Death on the Nile (5/5) **1.30** Killing Orders (1/6) **2.0** The Librarian (10/10) **2.15** The L Shaped Room (10/10) **2.30** Tempus Fugit **3.0** The French Lieutenant's Woman (2/2) **4.0** Whispers (6/6) **4.30** Girlies (3/4) **5.0** Welcome to Our Village ... (5/6) **5.30** Now You're Asking With Marian Keyes and Tara Flynn (9/10) **4.30** Girlies (3/4) **5.0** Welcome to Our Village, Please Invade Carefully (5/6) **5.30** Now You're Asking With Marian Keyes and Tara Flynn (9/10) **6.0** The Case of Charles Dexter Ward (5/18) **6.15** And Another Thing (5/10) **6.30** And the Academy Award Goes To (1/4) **7.0** Dad's Army (12/20) **7.30** Second Thoughts (5/6) **8.0** Hercule Poirot: Death on the Nile (5/5) **8.30** Killing Orders (1/6) **9.0** Podcast Radio Hour **10.0** Now You're Asking With Marian Keyes and Tara Flynn (9/10) **10.30** Mark Watson's Live Address to the Nation (2/6) **11.0** Radio Shuttleworth (3/5) **11.30** My Teenage Diary (5/6) **12.0** The Case of Charles Dexter Ward (5/18) **12.15** And Another Thing (5/10) **12.30** And the Academy Award Goes To (1/4) **1.0** Hercule Poirot: Death on the Nile (5/5) **1.30** Killing Orders (1/6) **2.0** The Librarian (10/10) **2.15** The L Shaped Room (10/10) **2.30** Tempus Fugit **3.0** The French Lieutenant's Woman (2/2) **4.0** Whispers (6/6) **4.30** Girlies (3/4) **5.0** Welcome to Our Village ... (5/6) **5.30** Now You're Asking With Marian Keyes and Tara Flynn (9/10)

TODAY'S PET CORNER ANSWER **RICHARD NIXON**

Quick crossword no 16,175



Across

1 Hardness of some northerners who won't be ground down? (9,4)
8 Pavement edge (4)
9 Official coming to the end of period in office? (4,4)
10 Shop selling 15 (3-7)
12 Playground item (6)
14 Australian marsupial (which Americans begin with an 'O') (6)
15 Rum, whisky etc (4,6)
19 Befitting an angel (8)
20 Stake (that may be upped?) (4)
21 Pupil's proper dress (6,7)

Down

2 Nourish excessively (8)
3 Asian capital (5)
4 Sacred animal for Hindus? (4,3)
5 Ancient Italian (5)
6 Profane (7)
7 Irritating skin sensation (4)
11 International train service from St Pancras (8)
13 Playful composition (7)
14 Fish-scooping waterbird (7)
16 Revolt (5)
17 Drink heartily (5)
18 Elegant (4)

Stuck? For help call 0906 200 83 83. Calls cost £1.10 per minute, plus your phone company's access charge. Service supplied by ATS. Call 0330 333 6946 for customer service (charged at standard rate).To buy puzzle books, visit guardianbookshop.com or call 0330 333 6846.

Sudoku no 5,571

Hard. Fill the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9.

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

Suguru

Fill the grid so that each square in an outlined block contains a digit. A block of 2 squares contains the digits 1 and 2, a block of three squares contains the digits 1, 2 and 3, and so on. No same digit appears in neighbouring squares, not even diagonally.

		3	1		
		5	4		
2					
		5			
			3		
	4				2

Wordsearch

Can you find 15 words associated with karaoke in the grid? Words can run forwards, backwards, vertically or diagonally, but always in a straight, unbroken line.

M	B	K	M	P	V	A	D	T
O	L	S	A	G	A	E	S	H
O	S	R	C	K	N	I	R	D
R	T	C	H	R	L	O	E	I
Y	E	A	I	E	E	S	S	D
L	C	N	N	R	U	E	U	M
T	I	E	E	A	Y	E	N	S
C	O	D	L	R	T	L	E	T
A	V	P	U	O	R	G	I	A
N	P	S	I	N	G	I	N	G
A	L	T	B	O	O	T	H	E

Yesterday's solutions

Sudoku no 5,570

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

Suguru

1	4	1	4	1	2
5	2	5	3	5	3
3	1	4	1	4	2
2	5	2	5	3	5
4	3	4	1	2	1
2	1	2	3	4	3

Wordsearch

L	E	H	D	I	N	N	E	R
C	S	M	F	E	H	C	B	G
O	R	T	V	M	U	L	N	N
F	U	A	A	I	E	I	D	I
F	O	L	S	R	K	N	W	K
E	C	I	A	O	T	A	U	P
E	N	L	O	I	I	E	A	A
E	O	B	T	T	C	H	R	N
A	L	D	E	S	S	E	R	T
G	M	R	E	N	I	W	P	O
T	G	N	I	V	R	E	S	S

Solution no 16,174

■	N	A	R	R	O	W	G	A	U	G	E	■	■	■
S	■	S	■	E	■	H	■	D	■	L	■	P	■	■
U	N	S	E	L	F	I	S	H	■	A	X	E	■	■
P	■	■	■	A	■	F	■	O	■	M	■	R	■	■
E	N	J	O	Y	■	F	A	C	E	O	F	F	■	■
R	■	A	■	E	■	Y	■	■	■	R	■	U	■	■
F	A	C	A	D	E	■	N	O	G	G	I	N	■	■
I	■	A	■	■	■	D	■	U	■	A	■	C	■	■
C	U	R	E	T	T	E	■	T	E	N	E	T	■	■
I	■	A	■	H	■	N	■	C	■	■	■	O	■	■
A	W	N	■	R	E	S	E	R	V	O	I	R	■	■
L	■	D	■	O	■	E	■	O	■	W	■	Y	■	■
■	B	A	R	B	E	R	S	P	O	L	E	■	■	■

Word wheel
RAINWATER

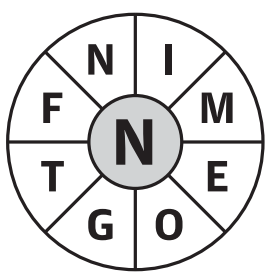
Pet corner

Which US President had an Irish setter called King Timahoe?

a. Ronald Reagan
b. Richard Nixon
c. Gerald Ford
d. Jimmy Carter
*Answer top right**

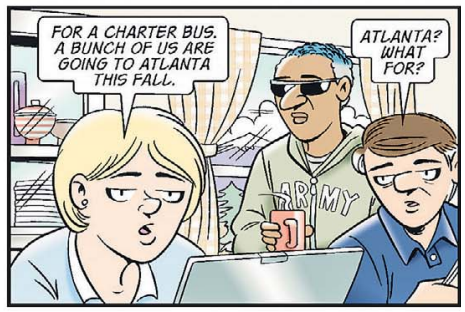
Word wheel

Find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each must use the central letter and at least two others. Letters may be used only once. You may not use plurals, foreign words or proper nouns. There is at least one nine-letter word to be found. TARGET: Excellent-39. Good-32. Average-24.



Garry Trudeau

Doonesbury



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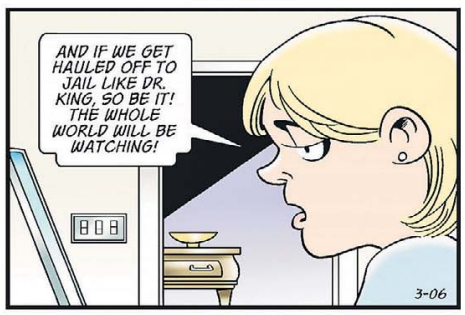
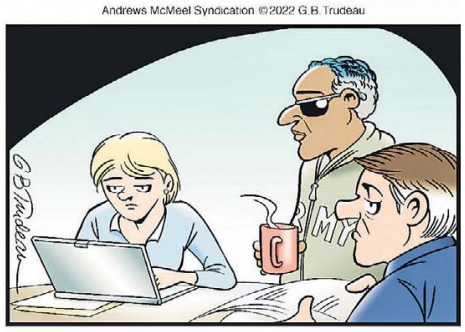
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