

How animals really think ³⁴

Plus The rise of podcasting ⁴⁰

A week in the life of the world | *Global edition*
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The Guardian Weekly

The front line

Why the work of Bruno Pereira
and Dom Phillips in the Amazon must go on

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION → 10



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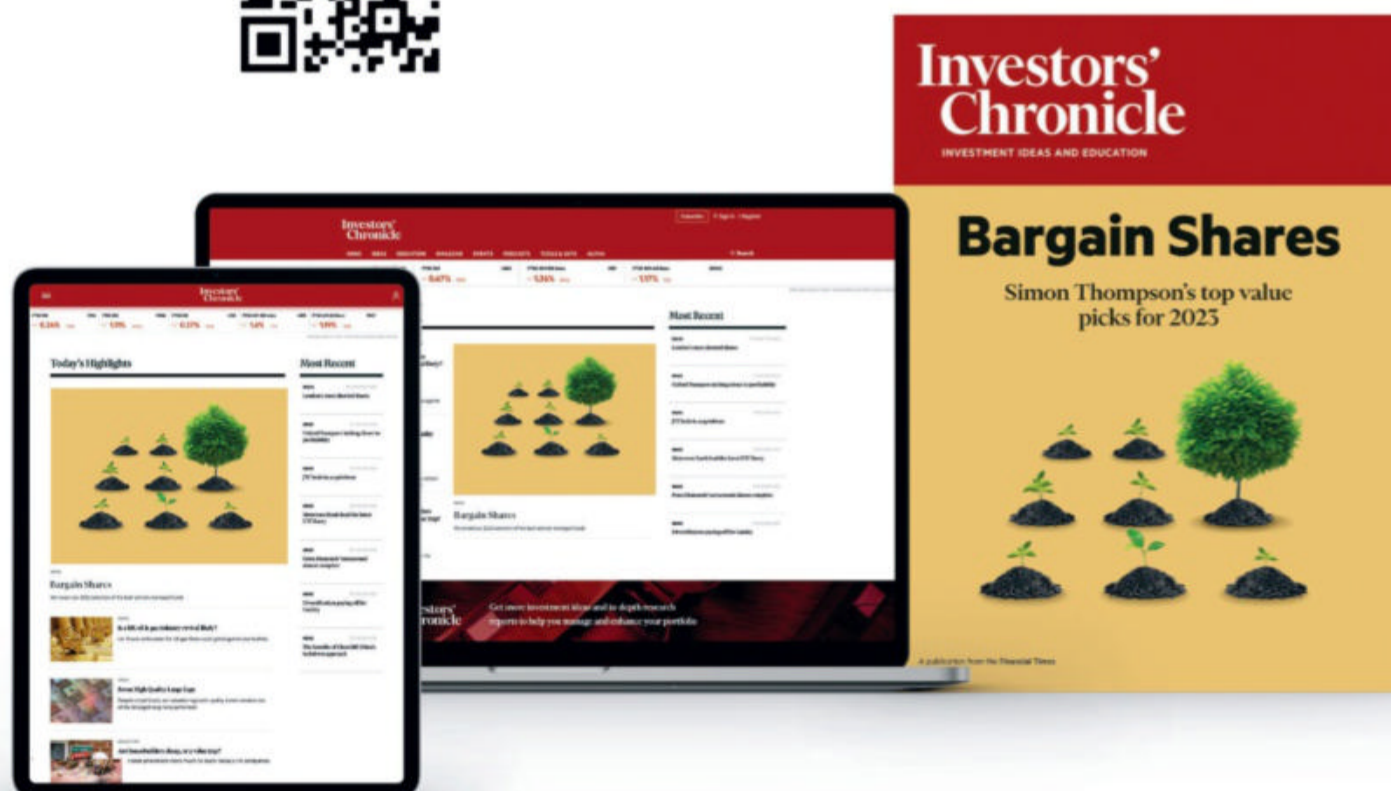
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Returning to the Amazon, dam collapse in Ukraine and the power of animal thought

A year ago, the Indigenous expert Bruno Pereira and Guardian contributor Dom Phillips were murdered in a remote area of the Brazilian Amazon. They had travelled there to meet with Indigenous activists who patrol the Javari valley to protect it from illegal fishing and mining gangs.

Their deaths laid bare the environmental devastation inflicted under Brazil's former president, Jair Bolsonaro, as well as the extreme threat to those who dare to disrupt the activities of exploitative industries in the region. That's why, in collaboration with an international consortium, the Guardian has published the Bruno and Dom project: a series that seeks to honour their work and continue it. You'll find a selection of pieces in this week's edition and the rest are available online - for more details turn to page 13.

The Bruno and Dom project [Page 10 →](#)

Evacuations were under way in southern Ukraine this week after flooding caused by the destruction of a major hydroelectric dam in Russian-controlled Kherson. The disaster came amid signs that Kyiv's long-awaited counterattack was taking shape. Julian Borger and Dan Sabbagh report from Kyiv.

Spotlight [Page 17 →](#)

Will we ever understand how - or what - animals are thinking? Adam Kirsch's fascinating long read explores new research about the capabilities of animal minds. Then, in a complete change of pace, Rachel Aroesti considers the global rise of podcasts, and how they have thrived by bringing a more intimate, engaging feel to audio journalism.

Features [From page 34 →](#)

Finally, there's an unusual byline in our Opinion section: the comic actor Rowan Atkinson, who explains why his love affair with electric cars has waned - and the steps we should take to reduce the environmental damage of the automobile industry.

Opinion [Page 48 →](#)

On the cover

As the Amazon Indigenous leader Beto Marubo writes for us this week: "Bruno and Dom have now become part of the oral history of all the peoples of the Javari valley. But Brazil runs the risk of forgetting, or even betraying them ... Can we count on our leaders in Brasilia to do the right thing?"

Photo illustration:

Alex Mellon/Guardian Design



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Global report

Headlines from the last seven days

GW

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1 UKRAINE

'No immediate nuclear risk' after collapse of dam

Ukrainian and UN experts said there seemed to be no immediate safety threat to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant from the collapse of the Nova Kakhovka dam, about 200km downstream.

The Ukrainian nuclear energy corporation, Energoatom, said in a statement that the situation at the plant was "under control", and the International Atomic Energy Agency said its experts at the site were monitoring the situation and there was "no immediate nuclear safety risk". But there are long term concerns over safety and the possibility the plant could be operated again.

The Ukrainian government accused Russia of blowing up the dam on the Dnipro River, and called for people living downstream to evacuate in the face of catastrophic flooding. The governor of the Kherson region, Oleksandr Prokudin, said about 16,000 people were in the "critical zone" on the Ukrainian-controlled right bank of the river.

The disaster happened on the second day of Ukrainian operations likely to mark the early stages of a counteroffensive. It could affect any Ukrainian plans for an amphibious assault across the river.

Spotlight Page 17 →



2 POLAND



Hundreds of thousands rally against rightwing leaders

Hundreds of thousands of people marched through central Warsaw to protest against the country's rightwing populist government before a delicately poised election due later in the year.

The Law and Justice (PiS) party came to power in 2015, since when it has eroded democratic norms, attacked the independent judiciary and launched campaigns against the LGBTQ+ community and reproductive rights.

"We're half a million people here, it's a record," said Donald Tusk, the former prime minister who leads the Civic Platform opposition grouping. He said the march last Sunday had been the biggest political gathering since Poland regained independence after the communist period.

3 UNITED STATES

Biden signs off debt ceiling bill, ending risk of default

Joe Biden signed off a bipartisan bill to solve the US debt ceiling crisis last Saturday, narrowly averting a catastrophic and unprecedented default. The president hailed the bill as "a big win for our economy and the American people".

The compromise package passed the Republican-led House and Democrat-led Senate last week. Biden acknowledged it leaves neither Republicans nor Democrats fully pleased with the outcome. But the result, after weeks of torturous negotiations, shelves the debt ceiling issue until 2025, after the next presidential election.

Spotlight Page 33 →

4 BRAZIL

Police charge 'mastermind' behind Amazon murders

Brazilian police have charged the alleged leader of a "transnational criminal organisation" with being the mastermind of the murders of Dom Phillips and Bruno Pereira in the Amazon one year ago.

Ruben Dario da Silva Villar is the alleged leader of a transnational illegal fishing network that operated in the border region between Brazil, Colombia and Peru.

Three local fishers are currently in prison awaiting trial on suspicion of murdering the British journalist and the Brazilian Indigenous expert who were shot dead while returning from a reporting trip to the remote Javari valley region on 5 June 2022.

Last Sunday, the Brazilian broadcaster TV Globo revealed that federal police had formally charged two more men over the murders. They are Silva Villar and Jânio Freitas de Souza, a fisher who is allegedly one of Silva Villar's henchmen.

Police charged Silva Villar with ordering the murders and the concealment of the bodies of the victims. Souza was charged with participation in both crimes.

Special investigation Page 10 →

5 UNITED STATES

Pence enters Republican race against old boss Trump

Mike Pence, who as Donald Trump's vice-president narrowly escaped harm at the hands of the January 6 rioters, declared his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination next year, pitting him against his former boss. The former congressman and Indiana governor, an evangelical conservative, enters a primary dominated by Trump, who enjoys commanding polling leads, well clear of his nearest challenger, the rightwing Florida governor, Ron DeSantis.

A Pence run has long been expected but he has not so far registered significantly in polling.

6 CANADA

Tenant halts developer's push to force her out

A tenant in a Montreal apartment block has halted a multimillion-dollar development in a standoff that has focused attention on the lack of affordable housing.

Property developer Mondev has been trying for years to persuade Carla White to move from her C\$400-a-month (\$300) apartment so it can demolish a row of mostly abandoned buildings and build 176 luxury apartments.

Under Quebec regulations, White's rent has been frozen to ensure it remains affordable.

The city's demolition committee has approved plans to tear down a number of buildings, including White's complex. But the committee also said the developer needed to find a solution for White.

7 NORWAY



Report exposes injustices against Indigenous people

A parliamentary commission has published a damning report on historic injustices against Sámi, Kvens and other Indigenous groups.

Norway's parliament set up the truth and reconciliation commission in 2018 to examine policies and activities relating to Indigenous people, including attempts to assimilate them.

It was mandated to look at the repercussions of the country's "Norwegianisation policy" on languages and culture, and social and mental health consequences for individuals and groups.

8 COLOMBIA

President's allies resign amid wiretapping scandal

Two of Gustavo Petro's political allies have resigned as the president's office was embroiled in a scandal involving a nanny, illegal wiretaps and a missing briefcase full of cash.

Petro's closest adviser, Laura Sarabia, and his power broker, Armando Benedetti, stepped down last Friday after an investigation into allegations made by Marellys Meza, the nanny to Sarabia's son.

Meza said she had been accused of stealing a briefcase containing \$7,000 from Sarabia's apartment. Last Thursday, Colombia's attorney general's office said intelligence services had tapped the phones of Meza and another domestic worker at Sarabia's home.

10 DENMARK



Truck driver arrested over mystery potato smash

A 57-year-old truck driver has been detained after loads of potatoes were found scattered on a bridge linking two Danish islands. The driver was held on suspicion of causing reckless endangerment to life.

The first spill was reported on the westbound side of the Storebaelt Bridge on Thursday. A similar incident happened on the eastbound side later. "It looks weird," police spokesperson Kenneth Taanquist said. "We are working on two hypotheses: it is either an accident or it ... has been done deliberately."

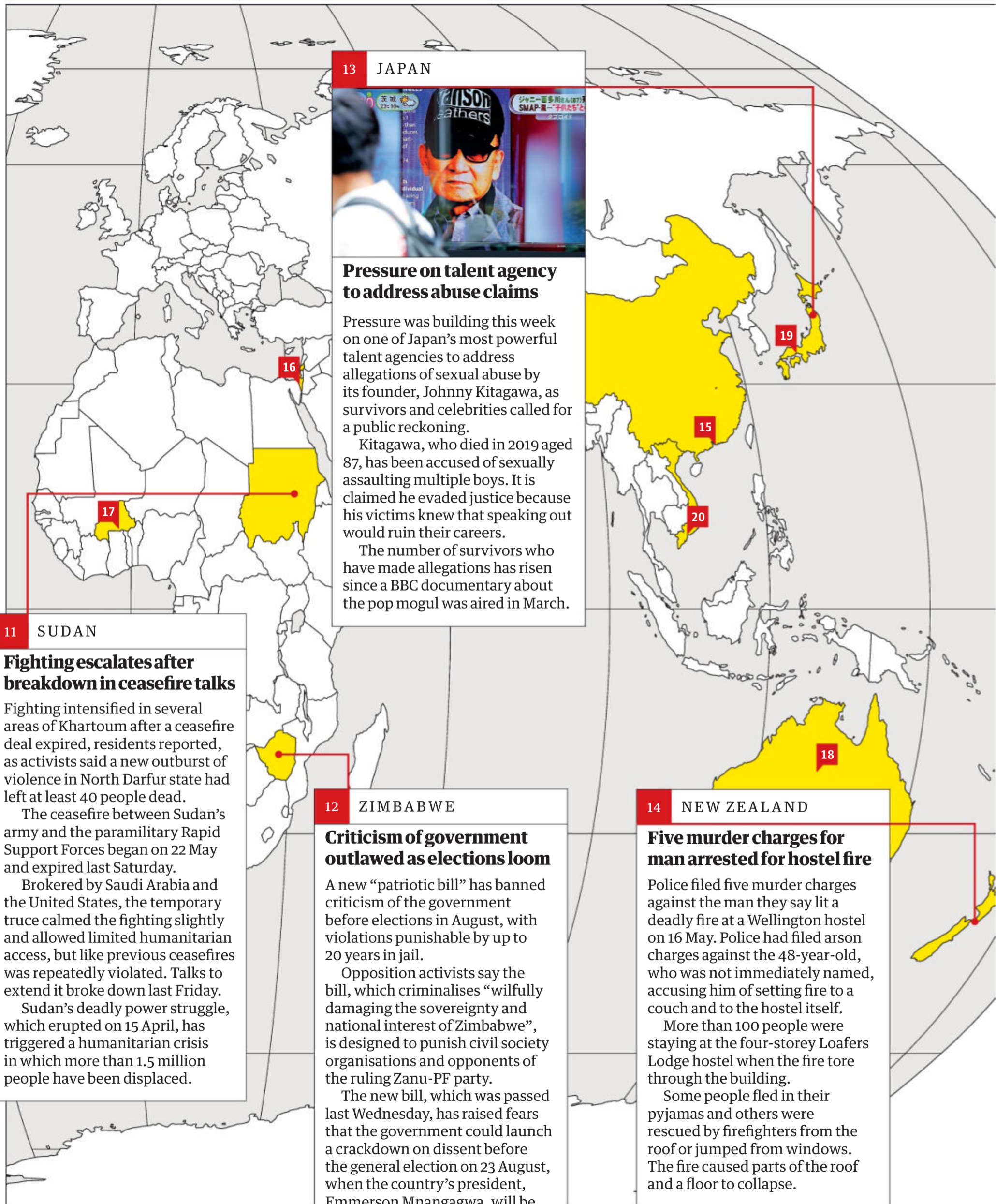
9 SERBIA

Thousands rally in Belgrade in anti-government protest

Tens of thousands of people gathered last Saturday for the fifth anti-government protest in recent weeks in the capital, Belgrade, after two shootings that killed 18 people, half of them children.

The "Serbia against violence" protests have evolved into some of the largest rallies since demonstrations triggered the fall of strongman Slobodan Milošević more than two decades ago.

The protests followed shootings in May that left 18 dead and wounded several others. Nine of the dead were students at a Belgrade elementary school who were gunned down by a 13-year-old pupil. A day later, a 21-year-old man killed eight outside Belgrade.



13 JAPAN



Pressure on talent agency to address abuse claims

Pressure was building this week on one of Japan's most powerful talent agencies to address allegations of sexual abuse by its founder, Johnny Kitagawa, as survivors and celebrities called for a public reckoning.

Kitagawa, who died in 2019 aged 87, has been accused of sexually assaulting multiple boys. It is claimed he evaded justice because his victims knew that speaking out would ruin their careers.

The number of survivors who have made allegations has risen since a BBC documentary about the pop mogul was aired in March.

11 SUDAN

Fighting escalates after breakdown in ceasefire talks

Fighting intensified in several areas of Khartoum after a ceasefire deal expired, residents reported, as activists said a new outburst of violence in North Darfur state had left at least 40 people dead.

The ceasefire between Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces began on 22 May and expired last Saturday.

Brokered by Saudi Arabia and the United States, the temporary truce calmed the fighting slightly and allowed limited humanitarian access, but like previous ceasefires was repeatedly violated. Talks to extend it broke down last Friday.

Sudan's deadly power struggle, which erupted on 15 April, has triggered a humanitarian crisis in which more than 1.5 million people have been displaced.

12 ZIMBABWE

Criticism of government outlawed as elections loom

A new "patriotic bill" has banned criticism of the government before elections in August, with violations punishable by up to 20 years in jail.

Opposition activists say the bill, which criminalises "wilfully damaging the sovereignty and national interest of Zimbabwe", is designed to punish civil society organisations and opponents of the ruling Zanu-PF party.

The new bill, which was passed last Wednesday, has raised fears that the government could launch a crackdown on dissent before the general election on 23 August, when the country's president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, will be seeking a second term.

14 NEW ZEALAND

Five murder charges for man arrested for hostel fire

Police filed five murder charges against the man they say lit a deadly fire at a Wellington hostel on 16 May. Police had filed arson charges against the 48-year-old, who was not immediately named, accusing him of setting fire to a couch and to the hostel itself.

More than 100 people were staying at the four-storey Loafers Lodge hostel when the fire tore through the building.

Some people fled in their pyjamas and others were rescued by firefighters from the roof or jumped from windows. The fire caused parts of the roof and a floor to collapse.

15 HONG KONG

**Arrests made on anniversary of Tiananmen Square**

Hong Kong police detained more than 20 people, including prominent pro-democracy figures, on the 34th anniversary of the bloody Tiananmen Square crackdown in China, while Chinese authorities tightened access to Tiananmen Square in central Beijing.

Police in Hong Kong said last Sunday they had detained 23 people aged between 20 and 74 who were suspected of “breaching the peace”. One woman, 53, was arrested for obstructing police officers.

Chan Po-ying, above, a veteran activist and head of the League of Social Democrats, was held briefly in a Hong Kong shopping district – an area that for years was the site of commemorations of the bloody 4 June 1989 crackdown in China.

17 BURKINA FASO

Crisis neglected as world's focus remains on Ukraine

The displacement of 2 million people has been named the world's most neglected crisis, while attention and aid has been focused on Ukraine, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

Burkina Faso has endured five years of conflict with militias – who have attacked water sources and forced school closures – now controlling up to 40% of the country's territory.

About 800,000 people in these areas have no access to services, according to the report, and a quarter of the population relies on humanitarian aid. The NRC said a siege on the city of Djibo means many have resorted to eating wild leaves to survive.

Ukraine received five times more media coverage and four times more funding than the world's 10 most crucial displacement crises, according to a report by the NRC.

“That this crisis is already so deeply neglected shows a failure of the international system to react to newly emerging crises,” said Jan Egeland, NRC's secretary general.

19 JAPAN

Vending machines to offer free food if earthquake hits

The country has extended natural disaster preparations to vending machines, which will offer free food and drink in the event of a major earthquake or typhoon.

Two machines have been installed in the western coastal city of Ako, in a region vulnerable to a powerful earthquake that is expected to hit the central and south-west Pacific coast in the next few decades.

The machines, which contain about 300 bottles and cans of soft drinks and 150 emergency food items, including nutritional supplements, have been installed near buildings that have been designated as evacuation shelters.

They are designed to unlock in the event of a heavy rain warning, or an evacuation order after an earthquake.



DEATHS



Ama Ata Aidoo
Ghanaian writer, academic and former education minister. She died on 31 May, aged 81.

Ilya Kabakov
Ukrainian-born conceptual artist considered to be one of the most influential of the Soviet Union. He died on 27 May, aged 89.

Kaija Saariaho
Acclaimed Finnish composer and musical modernist. She died on 2 June, aged 70.

Cynthia Weil
Lyricist who co-wrote pop classics including *You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'* and *On Broadway*. She died on 1 June, aged 82.

Jim Hines
Two-time Olympic gold-winning sprinter, the first man to run 100 metres in under 10 seconds. He died on 3 June, aged 76.

Joy McKean
Australian country music singer-songwriter, and wife and manager of Slim Dusty. She died on 25 May, aged 93.

16 PALESTINE

Boy, 3, shot by Israeli soldiers dies in hospital

A three-year-old Palestinian boy has died in hospital, four days after he was shot in the head by Israeli soldiers while riding in a car with his father in the occupied West Bank.

Mohammed al-Tamimi was airlifted to the Sheba hospital near Tel Aviv after the incident last Thursday night and remained in a critical condition until medical officials announced his death on Monday. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said troops had opened fire near the village of Nabi Saleh after Palestinian gunmen fired shots.

IDF officials later said that an investigation had been opened.

18 AUSTRALIA

Woman pardoned after 20 years in jail over child deaths

Kathleen Folbigg was pardoned and released after two decades in prison over the deaths of her four children, after a decision of the New South Wales attorney general, Michael Daley.

Folbigg, who maintained her innocence, had served 20 years of a 25-year sentence for murdering three of her children, and the manslaughter of one child.

Daley on Monday released findings by an inquiry into Folbigg's convictions, led by the former state chief justice Thomas Bathurst, who said he had reached “a firm view that there was reasonable doubt as to the guilt of Ms Folbigg”.

20 VIETNAM

Concern as climate activists arrested for 'tax evasion'

Police arrested an environmental activist after accusing her of tax evasion, charges that have been dismissed by critics as politically motivated.

Hoang Thi Minh Hong, a former chief executive of Change, an environmental NGO, was detained with her husband, Nam Hoang, and former staff members of Change in Ho Chi Minh City on Wednesday.

The detention came after the imprisonment of four activists under similar circumstances. Phil Robertson, from Human Rights Watch, said such use of tax law was a “troubling development”.



SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT



CLIMATE CRISIS

Research group catalogues range of threats facing planet

Human activity has pushed Earth into the danger zone in seven out of eight newly demarcated indicators of planetary safety and justice. A report by the Earth Commission group of scientists presents disturbing evidence that, beyond climate disruption, our planet faces growing crises of water availability, nutrient loading, ecosystem maintenance and aerosol pollution. These pose threats to the stability of life-support systems and worsen social equality. The study was published in Nature.

CONSERVATION

Selective ban on fishing ‘does not diminish catch overall’

Banning fishing in a Mexican marine park did not reduce the fishing catch. A study looked at whether banning commercial fishing from the Revillagigedo national park, which covers 147,000 sq km of Pacific Ocean west of Mexico, would reduce the country’s catch volumes. The authors said the finding showed that large marine protected areas (MPA) could contribute to a “more sustainable and equitable use of the ocean, without significant economic repercussions on the fishing industry”. Before fishing in the MPA was banned in 2017, Mexico’s \$1bn fishing sector had warned it could

reduce the catch of tuna and other pelagic fish by 20%. But catch data comparisons from the four years before and after the ban showed the MPA “had no causal effect on catches or area use, and therefore did not cause harm [to the Mexican fishing fleet]”, said Fabio Favoretto, a postdoctoral scholar at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego, California, and the lead author of the peer-reviewed study, published in Science Advances.

ASTRONOMY

Geyser on Saturn moon spits water at 300 litres per second

Astronomers have spotted an enormous plume of water vapour blasting out of Enceladus, a tiny moon of Saturn that is considered one of the most promising places to find life beyond Earth. The record-breaking plume reached nearly 10,000km into space and poured water into the void at an estimated rate of 300 litres a second. The study is being published in Nature Astronomy.

GREENHOUSE GASES

Rock powder spread on farmland captures CO₂

Research on the CO₂ uptake of Greenland rock flour, produced by the grinding under Greenland’s glaciers, estimated that 250kg of CO₂ can be trapped per tonne when the substance is spread on farm fields where natural chemical reactions break down the rock powder and lead to CO₂ from the air being fixed in new carbonate minerals. The researchers found about 8% of this had been achieved after the powder had been in soil for three years in Denmark. The scientists also calculated, in research published in the International Journal of Greenhouse Gas Control, that 27m tonnes of CO₂ could be captured if all farmland in Denmark was spread with the rock flour, an amount similar to the country’s total annual CO₂ emissions.

◀ Young girls pull containers of water in northern Kenya. Water flow is one of eight indicators of global health used in the analysis by the Earth Commission
BRIAN INGANGA/AP



0.5

Grams a day of flavanols needed for good brain function in older people, according to a new study - as present in a modest intake of tea, chocolate and apples

Global report
United Kingdom

GOVERNMENT

Covid inquiry challenge to be heard ‘very soon’

The high court will decide “very soon” whether ministers should be forced to hand over all unredacted files demanded by the Covid inquiry, MPs have been told. In an attempt to allay concerns of a cover-up, the Cabinet Office minister Jeremy Quin faced down fractious MPs on Monday and denied any political involvement in the scrutiny of such material. Legal action launched by the government last week had been expedited, he said, with the first hearing to go ahead “on or shortly after 30 June”. He claimed the government’s motive for the unprecedented move to try to limit the Covid inquiry’s powers had been “misinterpreted”. A judicial review is being sought by the Cabinet Office because it wants to avoid handing over the entire WhatsApp history of Boris Johnson and a former No 10 aide, Henry Cook, as well as the former prime minister’s notebooks. Whitehall bosses believe the government has the right to decide what evidence to redact before the files are handed over on the basis of being irrelevant.

Quin said the move to seek a judge’s ruling was to resolve a “genuine and sincere difference of opinion”. However, opposition MPs and some senior Tories voiced concerns that confidence in the inquiry could be hit by the government’s move. Quin said he “fully supports the vital work” of the inquiry, led by Heather Hallett, a retired court of appeal judge. He defended redacting “unambiguously irrelevant” WhatsApps - citing discussions about personal issues or unrelated policy.



Eyewitness**📷 Webs of influence**

Ermine moth caterpillars create ghostly scenes in a graveyard at All Saints church in the Berkshire village of Bisham. The insects spin webs to protect themselves from predators while they feed, grow and develop into adult moths. The webs disintegrate as summer progresses.

JILL MEAD

**LABOUR****Former civil servant cleared to take up role with Labour**

The former civil servant Sue Gray has been cleared to take up her new role as Keir Starmer's chief of staff later this year after a vetting board rejected calls for her to have a longer period of gardening leave.

Gray, who led the investigation into Partygate last year, took ministers by surprise with a plan to quit the civil service and work for Labour. The announcement triggered an inquiry and an expectation that restrictions would be placed on when she could take up the role and what she could do.

However, the Guardian understands that the government watchdog will say she should wait for six months, rather than the maximum two years it can recommend for senior officials.

The head of the civil service, Simon Case, as Gray's former boss in the Cabinet Office, had pushed for the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments to delay her starting the new job for the maximum two years.

TRANSPORT**Legal action over funding cuts to walking and cycling**

The government faces a legal challenge to its decision to cut investment in walking and cycling in England, over claims that the move bypassed legal processes and risks scuppering commitments made relating to the climate emergency and air pollution.

Lawyers acting for the Transport Action Network, a campaign group, have written to the Department for Transport to formally seek a judicial review of the 50% reduction in the money for active travel in England that was announced in March by Mark Harper, the transport secretary.

**WELFARE****Universal basic income to be trialled in England**

A universal basic income of £1,600 (\$2,000) a month is to be trialled in England for the first time. Thirty people will be paid without conditions each month for two years and will be observed to understand the effects on their lives. Two places have been selected for the scheme: central Jarrow, in north-east England, and East Finchley, in north London.

Will Stronge, director of research at the thinktank Autonomy, which is backing the plan, said: "We want to see what effect this unconditional lump sum has on people's mental and physical health, whether they choose to work or not. Our society is going to require some form of basic income in the coming years, given the tumult of climate change, tech disruption and industrial transition that lies ahead."

Advocates argue that it can provide a level of economic security to everyone. Others say it is expensive, and support should be targeted.

**400**

The length in metres of MSC Loreto, the world's largest container ship, which docked at Felixstowe last week. It can hold 24,346 containers, or 97m shoeboxes



A year on from the killings of Bruno Pereira and Dom Phillips in the Amazon, Indigenous activists are defending their land with new resolve

'We'll continue to fight'

**Work honoured**

All about the project
Page 13 →

800m trees cut down

Feeding demand for beef
Page 15 →

Under siege

Indigenous peoples at risk
Page 16 →

BRAZIL

By Tom Phillips RIO DE JANEIRO

Three assassins walked into a bar deep in the Brazilian Amazon one night last October. Beers flowed, tongues loosened and the men were overheard bragging about their latest job. “We’re looking for this Orlando bloke. We’ve come to kill him,” one of the inebriated hitmen apparently said, according to a tipoff conveyed to their target.

The Orlando in question was Orlando Possuelo, one of the Indigenous defenders who has been seeking to carry on the work of his colleague Bruno Pereira since Pereira was murdered along with the British journalist Dom Phillips near the Javari valley Indigenous territory last June.

The planned killing did not take place. Who ordered it is unclear. But Possuelo, who has had two close associates murdered in four years, admitted the warning had shaken him. “Normally, I’m fairly relaxed about the threats ... but there are days you wake up feeling a bit haunted,” he said.

One year after the killings of Pereira and Phillips – which laid bare the environmental devastation inflicted

📍 The Ituí and Itaquai rivers, inside the Javari valley Indigenous territory

RAFAEL VILELA/WASHINGTON POST/GETTY

Chapter Two

Protect and defend

Phillips, a longtime Guardian contributor, was killed while reporting on the embryonic work of an Indigenous patrol group that Pereira and Possuelo had helped create, called the Javari Valley Indigenous Monitoring Team, or EVU as it is known in Portuguese.

Its mission involved equipping Indigenous scouts with technology such as drones, GPS trackers and cameras. That equipment – coupled with their peerless knowledge of the rainforest – would help them detect crimes taking place within their territory, which is home to about 6,000 Indigenous people from the Kanamari, Kulina, Korubo, Marubo, Matis, Mayoruna and Tsohom-dyapa groups.

On a recent afternoon, dozens of Indigenous men, several still in their teens, arrived at EVU's base in Atalaia do Norte to sign up to defend their ancestral lands from a four-pronged assault: poachers and fishing gangs encroaching from the north, drug traffickers from the west, goldminers from the east and cattle ranchers from the south.

“What they did to Bruno and the journalist was so painful but we’re going to continue fighting our enemies until they can no longer bear it,” vowed 18-year-old Clenildo Kulina.

Kulina grew up in a village on the Curuçá River, five days from Atalaia by boat, and it was there that he first met Pereira. The Indigenous expert, then working for Brazil’s Indigenous protection agency, Funai, was passing through at the start of one of his grueling expeditions into the Javari’s jungles and ventured into the rainforest



▲ A protest in São Paulo demands justice for Dom Phillips and Bruno Pereira
RODRIGO PAIVA/GETTY

▼ Daman Matis, left, who took part in the search for Pereira and Phillips
JOÃO LAET



under Brazil’s former president, Jair Bolsonaro – Indigenous leaders and non-Indigenous allies such as Possuelo are intensifying their battle to protect the world’s greatest rainforest and the Indigenous peoples who have lived there since long before European explorers arrived in the 16th century.

The activists are defiant in the face of the many dangers of confronting the environmental criminals and organised crime groups who have tightened their grip on the Amazon region.

“If they kill me, I’ll go to heaven, because I’m defending my territory,” said Daman Matis, 27, who helps to police one of the waterways that illegal goldminers use to invade protected Indigenous lands.

Since taking power in January, Brazil’s president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, has strengthened efforts to protect Indigenous communities and the environment. It follows four years of chaos and destruction under Bolsonaro, during which deforestation and land invasions soared.

Six Indigenous territories have been

officially recognised, while federal police operatives, environmental special forces and army troops have been deployed to the Amazon to reassert control and send a message to the world about Brazil’s commitment to eradicating illegal deforestation and fighting the climate emergency. “[We want] to inaugurate a new era in the region,” said Humberto Freire, the head of Lula’s newly created federal police department for the environment and the Amazon.

In Atalaia do Norte, the remote river town to which Pereira and Phillips were travelling when they were ambushed, a colossal floating police base has taken up position, with a name hammering home that desire. Nova Era (New Era) is stamped in golden yellow letters on the black metal hull.

For all the good intentions, Indigenous communities and their champions remain under siege in the Javari territory, home to the largest concentration of isolated Indigenous groups.

“I’d really love you to tell the story of how everything’s fine now,” Possuelo told the Guardian’s reporters as they returned to the region for the first time since the double murder, as part of a collaborative investigation coordinated by Forbidden Stories paying tribute to the victims and the causes they held dear. “But the reality is that nothing’s changed.”

Possuelo’s bleak assessment does not mean the Javari’s Indigenous activists are giving up their fight. Far from it.



It’s dangerous [on forest patrol]. When you confront the invaders, they shoot

with Kulina's uncle and cousin to search for isolated Indigenous tribes they hoped to protect. Kulina was too young to join them and Pereira's death robbed him of the chance to work with him once he came of age. "But now I have this opportunity and I'm going to take advantage of it," he said. "If I have to die, it will be for our people."

Another young volunteer, Marcelo Chawan Kulina, also hoped to secure a place on one of the patrol teams that Pereira regarded as crucial to the survival of the Javari's tribes. "I feel anxious and a little bit afraid," the 25-year-old said. "It's dangerous. When you confront the invaders, they shoot."

But he said he saw no other way of resisting the illegal forces obliterating the natural resources of his rainforest home, an immense sprawl of coffee-coloured rivers and dense jungle. "They kill our animals and steal the fish from our lakes. I want this to stop," he said. "These invaders have seized control of Indigenous territory."

Chapter Three

Quest for justice

As a new generation of Indigenous activists position themselves on the frontline, prosecutors are working to bring the killers of Pereira and Phillips to justice. Three fishers are in high-security prisons awaiting trial for murder: two brothers called Amarildo and Oseney da Costa de Oliveira, and a third man, Jefferson da Silva Lima.

Amarildo, who is better known as Pelado, and Da Silva Lima first confessed to killing Phillips and Pereira after chasing the pair down the Itaquai River as they returned from a four-day reporting trip to the entrance of the Javari valley Indigenous territory, though they later changed their story.

"Why the fuck did you do this?" a third brother asked Pelado and Da Silva Lima as he helped them hide the victims' belongings and bodies, according to a confession made by Pelado 11 days after the killings.

Nearly a year later, the answer to that question remains confused. Pelado initially told police he had killed Pereira in a fit of anger, infuriated by the EVU's "persecution" of the fishers who live along the Itaquai. But recently he offered a different version, claiming they had only shot at Pereira after he had opened fire on them as they went out to fish. He denied it had been premeditated or ordered by someone else.

Speaking outside a courtroom in the city of Tabatinga, where a judge is considering whether the three men should face trial by jury, Oseney's wife, Raimundo Nonato, insisted her husband was innocent. She claims Pelado and Da Silva Lima opened fire in a "moment of rage" prompted by Pereira's dogged pursuit of fishers and poachers.

Last weekend police charged the alleged leader of a "transnational criminal organization" with being the mastermind of the murders. Ruben Dario da Silva Villar, the alleged leader of a transnational illegal fishing network that operated in the tri-border region between Brazil, Colombia and Peru, was charged with ordering the murders and the concealment of the bodies of the victims. Jânio Freitas de Souza, a fisher who was allegedly one of Silva Villar's henchmen along the Itaquai River where Phillips and Pereira were murdered, was charged with participation in both crimes.

Chapter Four

Javari's history of tension

Nonato's life story speaks to the profound and enduring tensions between the Javari's Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants. Decades ago, her father moved to the region from Brazil's impoverished north-east to work as a rubber tapper, at a time when the government was urging citizens to occupy what it falsely called a "land without men".

Nonato was born in 1984, in a river-side hamlet called Camboa, as conflict raged between the Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous incomers. Press cuttings from that era paint a picture of deadly tit-for-tat skirmishes between the Korubo, an Indigenous people known as the *caceteiros* (club carriers), loggers and rubber tappers.

Korubo warriors used wooden cudgels to bludgeon invaders to death. Loggers retaliated using guns and "gifts" of poison-laced food. Indigenous people were "gunned down like wild pigs", one Indigenous expert, Rieli Franciscato, told the newspaper O Globo, which estimated that hundreds of Korubo had been killed. Growing up in the jungle, Nonato caught fleeting glimpses of the Korubo. "They shave half their heads. They're funny-looking and really strong," she remembered. "I was scared of them."



Bruno Pereira, a Brazilian Indigenous expert, and Dom Phillips, a British journalist and longtime Guardian contributor, were killed on the Amazon's Itaquai River last June while returning from a reporting trip to the remote Javari valley region.

The attack prompted international outcry and cast a spotlight on the growing threat to the Amazon.

A year after their deaths, the Guardian has joined 15 other international news organisations in an investigation into organised crime and resource extraction in the Brazilian Amazon. The initiative has been coordinated by Forbidden Stories, the Paris-based non-profit whose mission is to continue the work of reporters who are threatened, censored or killed.

The goal of the project is to honour and pursue the work of Bruno and Dom, to highlight the importance of the Amazon and its people - and to suggest possible ways to save the Amazon.

For more articles in the series, scan the code below or visit theguardian.com/brunoanddom



► Bruno Pereira in the Javari valley, in a selfie that was found on his recovered phone



► Dom Phillips believed that Indigenous people held a vital role in protecting the Amazon



Nonato said she felt relief when, in the late 1990s, Brazil's government began expelling non-Indigenous outsiders, in an attempt to end the conflict. The eviction forced her family to move closer to Atalaia, where there were schools. Many, however, resented being kicked out, believing they were being robbed of the right to make a living off the Javari's abundant fish stocks, wildlife and wood.

In the ensuing years, there were a succession of armed attacks on a government protection base at the conflux of the Itaquai and Itui rivers, one of the main entry points to the Indigenous enclave.

The violence reached a peak with the fatal shooting of Maxciel Pereira dos Santos, an Indigenous protection agent who had worked closely with Pereira, in Tabatinga in 2019. His killers were never caught and the case appeared to have been forgotten until last year's murders thrust it back into the spotlight.

As the Javari valley was closed to outsiders, Pelado's family relocated to Ladário, the first riverside village outside the territory's border, on the banks of the Itaquai.

Chapter Five

One suspect's journey

One of the last photographs of Phillips - recovered by forensic scientists from one of Pereira's mobile phones - was taken in Ladário, two days before the men were killed, and shows the journalist sitting by the river in flip-flops and a blue T-shirt, chatting to a fisher who is Pelado's brother-in-law.

Pelado's uncle, Raimundo Bento da Costa, 53, remembers an energetic and solicitous teenager who liked to play football. "He wasn't the kind of guy who went around fighting and rowing with people," Costa said.

In 2002, when Pelado was 21, he was hired to take part in an expedition into the Javari commanded by Orlando Possuelo's father, the famed explorer Sydney Possuelo, in search of an Indigenous group known as the Flecheiros, or arrow people.

Scott Wallace, an American journalist and author who took part in that 76-day mission, first met Pelado on the Itaquai, upstream from where Pereira and Phillips were killed, and described "a very amiable, upbeat kid who laughed a lot, and seemed to get along with everyone".

Pelado was also an expert backwoodsman who built jungle camps and cleared fallen trees as the expedition advanced into the wilderness. "He'd just gotten married and his wife was expecting their first son, so he was really excited about the chance to join the expedition ... and the family he was looking forward to raising," Wallace said, recalling Pelado's exhilaration at the prospect of catching sight of the uncontacted Flecheiros.

But Pelado became a source of fear, not pride, along the Itaquai, according to local sources. His uncle said he had started organising illegal 15- to 20-day fishing expeditions into Indigenous lands, sneaking past the Funai guard post with half a dozen armed collaborators. Costa sensed his nephew had become consumed by greed. "He wanted to be the boss. He wanted to rule over that area," he said.

Bruno Pereira and the EVU's activists stood in the way, blocking Pelado's forays into the rainforest and reporting his activities to the police. "So he thought: if we kill him, everything will be fine," Costa said.

Leonardo Schmitt, the federal agent now running Atalaia's floating police base, expressed confidence that such



The land is part of our family [and] it's up to each of us to defend our territory



▲ Marcelo Chawan Kulina is undertaking vigilante training

JOÃO LAET

a crime would not be repeated after his team's arrival, but cautioned against underestimating "the nerve and audacity of these criminals".

A Rio native, Schmitt is in the Javari for an operation named after the tucandeira, a wasp-like Amazonian ant notorious for its sting. "It's a pretty appropriate symbol [of our mission]," Schmitt said as he toured around Atalaia do Norte in a speedboat, flanked by agents carrying assault rifles. "Our intention is to have a similarly striking presence."

Chapter Six

'The Indigenous are a courageous lot'

The EVU's Indigenous activists have chosen a different Amazonian symbol to represent their battle to remember and resist. In the storage room of their Atalaia HQ, four cherry-coloured planks of maçaranduba redwood lie on the floor, components for a memorial cross that friends plan to erect beside the Itaquai.

"It's the heart of the forest," said Carlos Travassos, an Indigenous specialist who is helping to train the EVU's patrol teams. "The idea is to mark ... the place where they were murdered ... to ensure it's never forgotten."

One evening last month, the store-room was a hive of activity as the EVU's newest volunteers prepared to travel into the rainforest for a five-day training session. "I'm a rookie ... but I'm not afraid," said Txema Matis, 23.

Paulo Marubo, an Indigenous leader who was close to Pereira, offered a pre-mission pep talk. "The land is part of our family [and] it's up to each of us to defend our territory. Let's get to work!"

The next day, the 25-strong crew headed to the dilapidated port where Pereira and Phillips had begun their final journey. They cast off into the Javari's dolphin-filled waters, heading west along the border with Peru, past an abandoned Peruvian police base torched by armed raiders.

Up on deck, Clenildo Kulina admitted there were risks involved in joining the struggle in which so many have died. But the teenager said he felt Pereira's spirit guiding him.

"He's here with us, isn't he?" Kulina said of Pereira, as swallows swooped over the bow. "We can feel that he is right here, among us - and I think that's where he will always remain."

TOM PHILLIPS IS THE GUARDIAN'S LATIN AMERICA CORRESPONDENT



BRAZIL

By Andrew Wasley, Elisângela Mendonça, Youssr Youssef and Robert Soutar

1.7m

Area of the Amazon, in hectares, that has been destroyed near meat plants that export beef

\$5bn

Value of sales generated in 2022 by Amazon meat plants owned by Brazil's big three beef operators

15

800m trees felled Vast forest loss linked to cattle farming

More than 800m trees have been cut down in the Amazon rainforest in six years to feed the world's appetite for Brazilian beef, according to a new investigation, despite dire warnings about the forest's importance in fighting the climate crisis.

▲ Cattle ranching is the main cause of deforestation in Brazil

JONNE RORIZ/
BLOOMBERG/GETTY

The investigation by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ), the Guardian, Repórter Brasil and Forbidden Stories shows vast forest loss linked to cattle farming.

Brazil's beef industry has consistently pledged to avoid farms linked to deforestation. However, the data suggests that 1.7m hectares of the Amazon was destroyed near meat plants exporting beef. Deforestation across Brazil soared between 2019 and 2022 under the then president, Jair Bolsonaro, with cattle ranching being the No 1 cause. The new administration of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has promised to curb the destruction.

Researchers at the AidEnvironment consultancy used satellite imagery, livestock movement records and other data to calculate estimated forest loss between 2017 and 2022 on thousands of ranches near more than 20 slaughterhouses owned by Brazil's big three beef operators - JBS, Marfrig and Minerva.

All the meat plants exported widely, including to the EU, the UK and China, the world's biggest buyer of Brazilian beef. The research focused on slaughterhouses in the states of Mato Grosso, Pará and Rondônia.

All three companies say they operate strict compliance procedures, in an open and honest manner, to ensure they meet sustainability goals.

AidEnvironment found that 13 meat plants owned by JBS were linked to ranches where there had been forest clearance, felling or burning. For Marfrig and Minerva, there were six and three plants respectively. According to a separate Guardian analysis, Amazon slaughterhouses belonging to these companies processed cattle worth more than \$5bn in 2022.

In cases where the full supply chain could be mapped, the study estimated that since 2017 there had been more than 100 instances of forest loss on farms that directly supplied company plants. More than 2,000 hectares of forest were apparently destroyed on one ranch between 2018 and 2021, which sold nearly 500 cattle to JBS.

Meat companies have long said monitoring movements in their supply chains is too difficult. Critics say this allows for "cattle laundering", where animals from a "dirty" deforesting ranch are trucked to a "clean" farm before slaughter.

TBIJ and Repórter Brasil worked with Dom Phillips and the Guardian to investigate cattle laundering in 2020.



Deforestation soared under Bolsonaro; Lula has promised to curb the destruction

The team appeared to show that cows from a farm under sanctions for illegal deforestation had been moved in JBS trucks to a second, "clean" farm. After the story was published, JBS stopped buying from the owner of both farms.

The new investigation found the owner now supplies Marfrig. One of his farms is under sanctions but remains part of the global beef supply chain.

Records appear to show that between 2021 and 2022, nearly 500 animals were moved along the exact route investigated in 2020. The cattle ended up at the same "clean" second farm, Estrela do Sangue, which has no embargos or sanctions. Separate documents appear to show dozens of animals moving from Estrela do Sangue farm to Marfrig's meat plant in Tangará da Serra. Last year, a TBIJ investigation linked the plant to the invasion of the Menku Indigenous territory in Brasnorte.

In a statement, Marfrig confirmed it had received cattle from the owner, saying: "With every transaction it makes, Marfrig checks the status of the cattle-supplying properties. At the time of slaughter, the farm in question was compliant with Marfrig's socio-environmental criteria." It added: "Marfrig condemns the practice referred to as 'cattle laundering'."

Minerva said it tracks the condition of the ranches, ensuring cattle it purchases "do not originate from properties with illegally deforested areas; possess environmental embargos or are overlapping with Indigenous lands and/or traditional communities and conservation units".

JBS queried the methodology used, adding that it blocked one farm, São Pedro do Guapore, "as soon as any irregularity was identified".

ANDREW WASLEY AND ELISÂNGELA MENDONÇA ARE REPORTERS AT THE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM; YOUSSEF YOUSSEF IS A REPORTER WITH FORBIDDEN STORIES; ROBERT SOUTAR IS MANAGING EDITOR OF DIÁLOGO CHINO



OPINION
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Danger zone

The Javari valley and its people are under threat – Lula must take bold action

By Beto Marubo

Among my people, the Marubo, knowledge is transmitted through oral history, passed down by elders throughout the centuries. For many generations these stories described the approach of people we call *nawas* – outsiders who always brought misfortune, usually in search of natural resources from the forests we inhabit.

My ancestors spoke of Catholic missionaries from Spain and Portugal, of Peruvian rubber barons and logging companies. The stories my generation tells are of fundamentalist evangelical missionaries, illegal miners and fishing gangs bankrolled by drug trafficking networks. This situation has made the Javari valley Indigenous territory, where the Marubo and six other contacted Indigenous peoples live, as well as 16 isolated groups, a dangerous place for Indigenous leaders and journalists.

It was here, on 5 June 2022, that one of these invaders murdered the Indigenous expert Bruno Pereira and the British journalist Dom Phillips, a longtime Guardian contributor. At the time, Bruno was working with me at the Javari valley Indigenous association, Univaja.

Thirty years ago, I travelled from my village, at the headwaters of the Curuçá River, to the city to learn the language and customs of the *nawa*. Ever since then I have worked to demarcate and protect our territory and its peoples. I met Bruno in 2010 when he joined my team

at the government Indigenous agency Funai. He was a different kind of *nawa* and became my rainforest brother.

The murders of Bruno and Dom appear to have been connected to the organised crime networks that smuggle drugs over Brazil's border with Peru and Colombia. Inside the Javari valley, criminals are engaged in illegal commercial fishing, hunting, logging and gold mining. Tonnes of game meat and fish are extracted each week, making food scarce for the Indigenous communities.

Bruno invited Dom to witness the situation in the Javari valley, convinced that high-quality journalism could bring this story to the world's attention. Their murders were the consequences of policies pushed by Jair Bolsonaro, a president who was undoubtedly the worst in decades when it comes to the environment.

The world was outraged by the tragedy. Influential leaders, in Brazil and overseas, demanded concrete measures. And at the end of last year we elected Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to replace Bolsonaro.

Lula invited Univaja to be part of his transition team. Our association represents the Marubo, Mayoruna, Matis, Kanamary and Kulina peoples, as well as the recently contacted Korubo and Tsohón-Djapa. We made practical proposals for ways the federal government could "reclaim the Javari" from the criminals.

In February, Indigenous leaders met with Lula's minister for Indigenous peoples, senior environmental officials and police authorities at Univaja's headquarters.

It was an important meeting but it has yet to produce effective action. A federal police team was sent to the region, but lacks the necessary resources. We Indigenous leaders call for – and hope to see – the environmental agency, Ibama, the army, navy and other security forces taking bold, conspicuous and coordinated action. Lula's work in the Javari must go beyond "good intentions", just as it has done in the face of the critical situation facing the Yanomami territory farther north.

The local circumstances that helped produce Bruno and Dom's deaths continue to threaten Indigenous leaders, as well as journalists and Indigenous experts.

Credible death threats mean I must still travel to the region accompanied by security forces. Unless our government acts, it will only be a matter of time before we see more tragic violence.

Bruno and Dom have now become part of the oral history of all the peoples of the Javari valley. But Brazil runs the risk of forgetting, or even betraying them.

In early May, our country's most-watched news programme gave the main murder suspect a platform to make far-fetched allegations against Bruno, claiming during a court hearing that the Indigenous expert had threatened him and shot first on the day he and Dom were killed. The confessed killer even claimed he was a "friend" of the isolated tribes.

In the meantime, Indigenous people remain under siege in their lands, waiting for answers from a country that closes its eyes to our plight.

Remote even by Amazonian standards, the Javari valley is a world away from the corridors of power in Brasília. Can we count on our leaders there to do the right thing?

BETO MARUBO IS A TECHNICAL COORDINATOR FOR UNIVAJA AND AN INDIGENOUS LEADER. AMONG THE MARUBO HE IS CALLED WINO KĒYSHĒNI

▲ Beto Marubo in the Javari valley
PAULO ZERO



Bruno and Dom have become part of the oral history of all the peoples of the valley

ITALY

Spy mystery surrounds fatal boat trip

Page 24 →

Spotlight



UKRAINE



Zelenskiy's troops attack in apparent precursor to new surge

By Julian Borger and Dan Sabbagh
KYIV

Ukrainian troops went on the attack at multiple points along the frontline in the Donetsk region on Monday, driving back Russian forces in at least two areas in what appeared to be the preliminary stages of Ukraine's long-anticipated counteroffensive.

Russia said on Tuesday it had thwarted another Ukrainian offensive in Donetsk, inflicting heavy losses.

In his nightly address, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy hailed the advances made by Ukraine's "warriors" after his government declared it had shifted to offensive operations in some sectors, with reports of intense

close-quarter fighting in several locations. He also welcomed what he called "the news we have been waiting for" from Bakhmut, without giving further details.

"I am grateful to each soldier, to all our defenders, men and women, who have given us today the news we have been waiting for. Fine job, soldiers in the Bakhmut sector!" Zelenskiy said.

Foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba told Reuters on Monday that Ukraine has enough weapons to begin the counteroffensive operation. Ukrainian officials described Monday's attacks as "local" actions, and rejected the Russian defence ministry's claims early on

▲ Ukrainian soldiers fire a howitzer towards Russian troops near the town of Avdiivka in Donetsk region

VIACHESLAV RATYNSKYI/
REUTERS

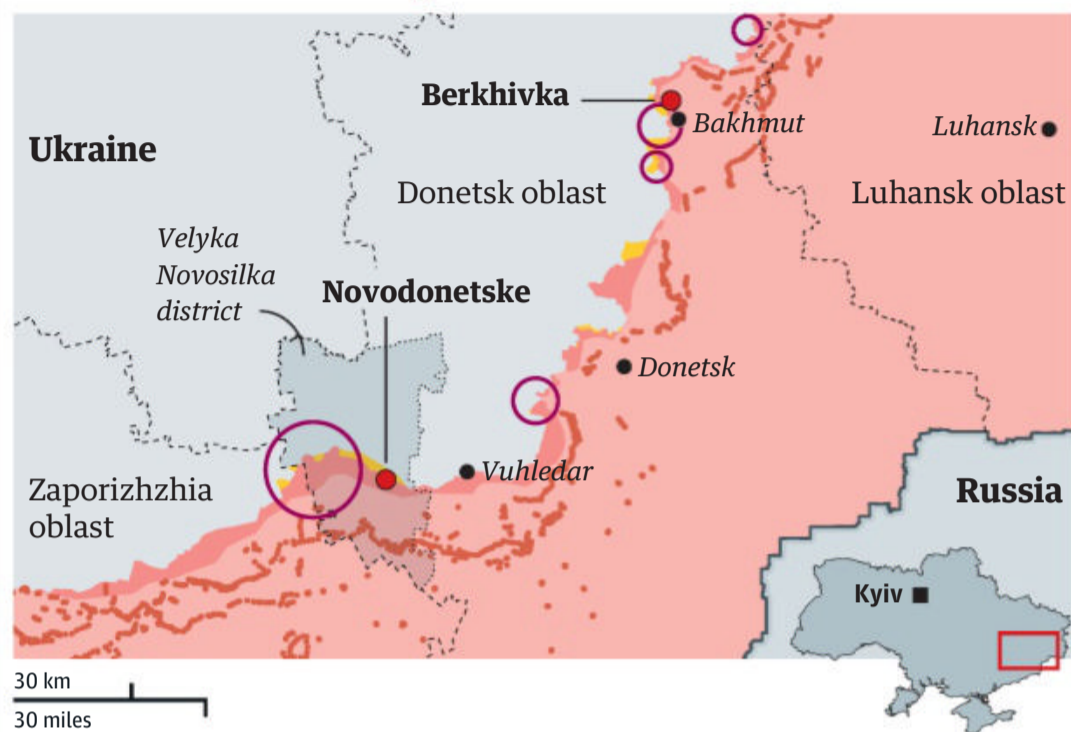
Continued



Gaining ground

Ukraine's troops began attacking Russian forces in Donetsk on Monday

● Russian-controlled territory ● Most recent Russian advances* ●●● Russian fortifications
● Areas where Ukraine has regained control ● Significant fighting in 24 hours to 10pm on Sunday



Source: The Institute for the Study of War with AEI's Critical Threats Project. *Areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control. Brady Africk, analysis of satellite imagery from Copernicus. Shows defences constructed or expanded since Russia's invasion last year, not an exhaustive list

Monday that the major counteroffensive had begun and had already been thwarted at high cost to the attackers.

On Tuesday, the Russian defence ministry claimed on Telegram that, "Having suffered heavy losses the day before, the Kiev regime reorganised the remnants of the 23rd and 31st mechanised brigades into separate consolidated units, which continued offensive operations."

The statement said Russian forces had inflicted huge personnel losses on attacking Ukrainian forces and destroyed 28 tanks, including eight Leopard main battle tanks and 109 armoured vehicles. It said total Ukrainian losses amounted to 1,500 troops.

But Moscow's earlier boasts of having repelled all the attacks were undermined by Russian militia leaders and military bloggers, who said Ukrainian forces had advanced around the city of Bakhmut in northern Donetsk and the village of Novodonetske in the west of the region.

"Well done, warriors! We see how hysterically Russia reacts to any step we take there, all positions we take. The enemy knows that Ukraine will win," Zelenskiy said in his Monday night video address.

The Ukraine offensive operations

did not appear to use much if any of the 12-brigade assault force that Ukraine has built up in recent months with the help of western training and equipment, suggesting they could be preliminary attacks aimed at probing and stretching Russian defences, in advance of a bigger push to come.

The attacks signalled the approach of a pivotal point in the war. If the Ukrainian counteroffensive liberates a significant swathe of territory and sets Russian forces back on their heels, it would offer hope of an early end to the conflict. Failure could doom Ukraine to a protracted gruelling struggle with no end in sight, and international pressure to cede territory.

Ukraine's deputy defence minister, Hanna Maliar, said the country's defence against Russia's all-out invasion, which began in February last year, included "counteroffensive actions".

"Therefore, in some areas we are moving to offensive actions," Maliar said on the Telegram messaging app.

The first sign of a new phase in the war came in the early hours of Monday morning with a Russian defence ministry statement saying Ukraine had attacked with six mechanised and two tank battalions from two brigades in five places along the Donetsk front.

Rebel offensive Ukraine-backed Russian rebels kept up their offensive inside the Russian region of Belgorod. The incursion launched last Thursday by the Freedom of Russia Legion and the Russian Volunteer Corps was aimed at the town of Shebekino, and on Monday the rebels claimed to have destroyed Russian armoured vehicles on the outskirts of town.

▼ Smoke rises after Russian shelling of the border town of Vovchansk, in Kharkiv region

VIACHESLAV RATYNSKYI/REUTERS



"The enemy's goal was to break through our defences in the most vulnerable, in its opinion, sector of the front," it said. "The enemy did not achieve its tasks, it had no success."

The official claim that the Ukrainian attacks had been repelled was called into question by contrary accounts from other Russian sources.

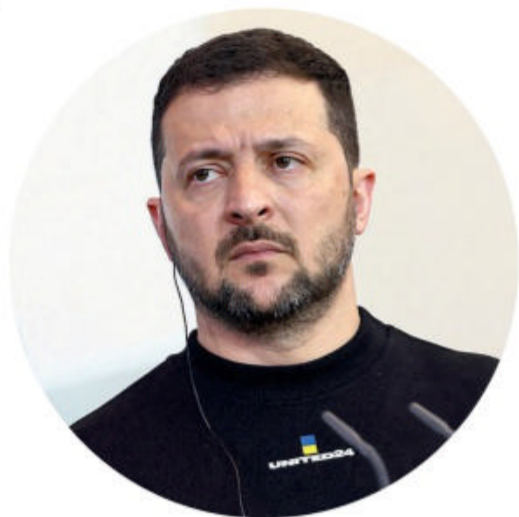
Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of the Wagner group of mercenaries who completed the capture of Bakhmut city last month, said on Monday that the Russian regular troops who had taken over Wagner positions had already lost Berkhivka, a settlement north of Bakhmut city.

Alexander Khodakovsky, the head of the pro-Moscow Vostok Battalion in the Donbas, said Ukrainian forces had also made gains south in western Donetsk region, south of the town of Velyka Novosilka. He described how a Ukrainian column with 30 armoured vehicles had been spotted in the area, but due to the "limited capacities" of Russian aerial reconnaissance, had been able to move and attack at another point, near the village of Novodonetske.

"The strike group ... reached the line of attack almost unnoticed," Khodakovsky said. Later on Monday, Khodakovsky reported that German-made Leopard tanks had been spotted among the attacking forces.

"The enemy, having felt our weak points, is stepping up his efforts," he said, adding: "Smelling the scent of success, the enemy will throw additional forces into the battle."

Igor Girkin, a Russian nationalist critic of the Kremlin and former "defence minister" in the Russian-installed authority in Donetsk, said it was clear Ukraine "has not yet made full use of his main forces".



▲ Volodymyr Zelenskyy hailed the advances made by Ukraine's 'warriors'

He added: "If the enemy's offensive has really begun, and is not a 'test of strength', the intensity of the battles will only increase in the coming days. The outcome of the battle is not yet completely predetermined - it is just beginning."

The US national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, predicted the Ukrainian counteroffensive would recapture "strategically significant territory".

"Exactly how much, in what places, that will be up to developments on the ground as the Ukrainians get this counteroffensive under way," Sullivan told CNN.

The Ukrainian operations came on the eve of the 79th anniversary of the D-day landings, and the leadership in Kyiv argued that the battle for Ukraine has similarly high stakes for the future of European democracy.

Zelenskyy looked relaxed as he hosted the British foreign secretary, James Cleverly, in Kyiv on Monday. He thanked the UK for "big support" in helping his country, by offering to train fighter pilots, and he asked for further help in "closing the sky" to make it safe from Russian missile and drone attacks.

The Ukrainian president did not mention the counteroffensive or the battlefield situation directly after the meeting, but his chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, tweeted a cryptic comment, saying: "True wisdom is to be able to convince the enemies they have already lost."

"Victory or defeat, it is born in heads first," he added, suggesting that winning or losing started as a state of mind.

JULIAN BORGER IS THE GUARDIAN'S WORLD AFFAIRS EDITOR;
DAN SABBAGH IS DEFENCE AND SECURITY CORRESPONDENT

▼ Damage to the Nova Kakhovka dam, near Kherson
AFP/GETTY

Troubled waters
Ukrainian military intelligence warned in November that Russia had conducted the main mining works on the dam as long ago as April 2022, but warned that the floodgates and supports of the dam were further primed in November. The bridge over the dam was one of only two crossings over the Dnipro south of Zaporizhzhia city before the war. The other was destroyed in November by the retreating Russians.

UKRAINE

Kyiv accuses Russia of blowing up critical dam

By Julian Borger and Dan Sabbagh
KYIV

The Ukrainian government accused Russia of blowing up the Nova Kakhovka dam on the Dnipro River, as the evacuation began of people living downstream in the face of potentially catastrophic flooding.

Aerial footage on social media on Tuesday showed most of the dam wall washed away and a massive surge of water heading downstream. The governor of Kherson, Oleksandr Prokudin, said that about 16,000 people were in the "critical zone" on the Ukrainian-controlled right bank of the river.

The disaster happened on the second day of Ukrainian operations likely to mark the early stages of a mass counteroffensive. It could affect any Ukrainian plans for an assault across the river.

"The purpose is obvious: to create insurmountable obstacles on the way of the advancing [Ukrainian army] ... to slow down the fair final of the war," a Ukrainian presidential adviser, Mikhaïlo Podolyak, said on Twitter. "On a vast territory, all life will be destroyed; many settlements will be ruined; colossal damage will be done

to the environment." Russian authorities in the town of Nova Kakhovka initially denied that anything had happened to the dam, then blamed the collapse on Ukrainian shelling. Interfax news agency quoted an unnamed official from the Kherson emergency services as saying that the dam had collapsed from structural weakness under water pressure.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called an emergency meeting of his national security council on Tuesday. "Russian terrorists," Zelenskyy said on Twitter. "The destruction of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant dam only confirms for the whole world that they must be expelled from every corner of Ukrainian land."

Last month, water levels in the reservoir reached a 30-year high, as the Russian occupiers had kept few sluice gates open. David Helms, a former US air force and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration meteorologist, said on Twitter: "The Russians allowed the reservoir to fill to record levels; if the dam failed 'naturally', it certainly failed due to 6 weeks of overtopping and stress on the structure."

The areas most under threat of flooding are the islands along the course of the Dnipro downstream of Nova Kakhovka and much of the Russian-held left bank in southern Kherson. Earlier modelling suggested Kherson city would not take the brunt, but the harbour, the docklands and an island in the south of the city are likely to be inundated. There were fears the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant upstream could lose access to water for cooling - although these were allayed by Ukrainian and UN experts on Tuesday - and that water supply to Crimea could also be severely affected.

Four of the six reactors at the nuclear plant are shut down, and two are on "hot shutdown", producing a small amount of energy for the plant itself and the neighbouring town. The International Atomic Energy Agency said in a tweet that its experts at the plant were monitoring the situation. It added there was "no immediate nuclear safety risk at plant".

Blowing up a dam can be considered a war crime, the Geneva conventions say, if it "may cause the release of dangerous forces and consequent severe losses among the civilian population," and the effects of a large release of water on people and homes remains for now dangerous but uncertain.



KOSOVO

Wave of violence hits north after mayoral elections

By Xhemajl Rexha ZUBIN POTOK and Jack Butcher

Sitting behind a bare black desk, in a small whitewashed room in northern Kosovo, village mayor Izmir Zeqiri is still getting used to the glare of international attention. “It wasn’t my intention to be a celebrity,” he said as his mobile phone rang on repeat. “We thought more people would run, and we didn’t imagine we could win.”

This isn’t false modesty. Zeqiri is one of a few hundred ethnic Albanians in the Serb-majority municipality of Zubin Potok, and his candidacy in April’s elections was a symbolic gesture. But when Serb List, the Belgrade-backed party that controls much of public life in the Serb-majority northern municipalities, decided to boycott the poll and ordered Serb voters to follow suit, Zeqiri was propelled into the eye of a storm.

He won 197 votes, on a turnout of 6%, 17 more than his only opponent, so last week he was sworn into office. Albanian mayors also took the oath in the three other northern municipalities after even lower turnouts.

The boycotting Serbs, furious at the prospect of being ruled by ethnic Albanians, took to the streets after the prime minister, Albin Kurti, ordered the new mayors to take up their posts. Tensions were so high officials had to be escorted into their offices by police.

Last week, Nato peacekeepers, concerned that clashes could escalate, sent troops to the town halls. They were met by demonstrators who included masked men with guns and explosives. The Z symbol now synonymous with Russia’s invasion of

Ukraine was also daubed across vehicles. Thirty Nato troops were injured.

Most western countries, including the UK and US, recognise Kosovo’s sovereignty but Serbia and its allies Russia and China do not. Serbs make up Kosovo’s largest minority, about 5% of its population, and they are a majority in the four northern municipalities.

Zeqiri, a grassroots political activist, sidestepped the worst of the unrest by ignoring the order from Kurti to take up office in the Zubin Potok town hall. He based himself in Çabër, an Albanian village where there were no protests.

Like many in Kosovo, he believes some protesters are linked to organised crime. “It was quite a stressful week,” he said, with understatement.

Journalists on the ground reported many attacks, threats and intimidation, which suggested more than a spontaneous grassroots uprising.

In Çabër, 62-year-old Eshref Ferizi welcomed the fresh approach, despite the violence. He hoped it would make life easier in the north of Kosovo, which has existed in a state of limbo since the war, under the de facto control of Belgrade. “We live with huge insecurity, in a constant state of stress about what is going to happen,” Ferizi said, as he walked his grandson to school. “In these last 20 years or so, we have never felt free like the rest of Kosovo.”

The latest unrest can be traced back to a dispute about car number plates. For many Serbs, using plates issued in Pristina is tantamount to recognising Kosovo’s independence. Kurti, who

Historical dispute Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, a decade after Serbian president Slobodan Milošević’s ethnic cleansing campaign against its majority Albanian population. That culminated in the 1998-99 war, which was ultimately ended by a Nato bombing campaign.

Kosovo clashes

North regions have seen violence



took power on an anti-corruption ticket in 2021 enforced the number plate rules. His agenda included a stance of “reciprocity” towards Serbia, after more than a decade of stop-start efforts to normalise relations under EU auspices.

Toby Vogel, a regional policy analyst who follows the western Balkans, also believes that while there were genuine expressions of anger from local Serbs, it is clear that at least some of last week’s violence was organised and directed elsewhere. “Nothing really happens in the Serb-majority municipalities without Belgrade’s approval or direction,” he said.

After further pressure from European and US leaders, Kurti has indicated that he is open to holding new local elections in the affected municipalities, but he insists there must be “an immediate end to violence by Belgrade-sponsored mobs”.

For now, the blue and yellow of Kosovo’s flag flutters for the first time above Zubin Potok’s main municipal building. But it would be easy to miss amid the Serbian red, white and blue that adorns almost every other lamp-post and balcony around the town’s central square.

Opposite, the three-storey public health centre has a Serbian flag draped from rooftop to street. Below, dozens of protesters shelter in makeshift camps, blasting out music that asserts Kosovo’s central role in Serbian folklore. One protester, who declined to be named, said she wanted the Kosovo police to leave. “Why are they here? This isn’t their place,” she said. “What’s that Kosovo flag doing there? We don’t want it. We have our own.” *Observer*

XHEMAJL REXHA IS A JOURNALIST; JACK BUTCHER IS A PRODUCER, EDITOR AND JOURNALIST



US members of the Nato-led peacekeeping force guard municipal offices in Leposavic
OGNEN TEOFILOVSKI/REUTERS



ANALYSIS
PAKISTAN

Army action Khan isolated as powerful military works to destroy party

By Hannah Ellis-Petersen DELHI
and Shah Meer Baloch ISLAMABAD



Imran Khan has cut an increasingly isolated figure in recent days.

Since Pakistan's former prime minister was released from jail, after a brief but explosive attempt to arrest him last month, his return has been marked by a mass exodus of the top leadership of his party.

Pervez Khattak, the former chief minister and defence minister, became the latest high-profile resignation from Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, last week. He followed Khan's former finance minister, his former human rights minister, information minister and shipping minister, who all left PTI in recent weeks. Dozens of other federal and state ministers have followed suit.

Most of those who have not defected are behind bars, including Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, the president of PTI, who was arrested at his home in Lahore last Thursday. Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Khan's former foreign minister, remains in prison after his arrest last month, along with several other key ministers and thousands of rank-and-file PTI members.

There is little question among analysts who is orchestrating the avalanche of resignations and arrests. Since Khan's relationship with the all-powerful military establishment fell apart and led to his fall from power, he has been on a crusade against the army leadership. He has accused them of attempting to assassinate him and of being behind his arrest in May, before he was released when the courts declared his detention illegal. PTI members and some analysts said the current army chief, Gen Asim Munir, is trying to break apart Khan's party before arresting him and putting him on trial in a military court. The likelihood of Khan being allowed to contest Pakistan's next election, due by October, is considered very slim by most people.

"This dramatic crackdown is a clear strategy by the military to break down all the support structures that Khan has," said Avinash Paliwal, an associate professor of international relations at Soas. "Once those structures are gone, Khan is next in line."

Paliwal said the military's behaviour followed a pattern that

stretches back to 1958, the year of Pakistan's first coup. Since then, the military has routinely asserted itself as the most powerful political player in Pakistan, either through direct rule or by controlling and masterminding behind the scenes. All of the country's most powerful political parties have fallen foul of military crackdowns and arrests. Before Khan, it was prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who was toppled from power in 2017.

Khan would not be the first prime minister to be put on trial by the military. In 1977, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was deposed in a coup, put on trial under martial law and executed.

The pressures imposed on senior figures, and those lower down the PTI ranks, have been stark. One senior party leader who was arrested last month and has since resigned from PTI described being handed over by police to the notorious military agency Inter-Services Intelligence. "They used multiple methods to pressure me to leave the party, but one of the worst was torture," he said, requesting anonymity over fear of the military.

Others in PTI have been rounded up and slapped with terrorism charges in relation to violent riots and protests that erupted on 9 May after Khan's arrest.

Human rights groups are concerned the military is conducting extrajudicial disappearances in an attempt to intimidate people aligned with PTI or who oppose the military. Those missing include Imran Riaz Khan, a pro-PTI journalist who has not been seen since 11 May, and Murad Akbar, the brother of former Khan-adviser Mirza Shahzad Akbar, who has not been seen since being picked up from his home on 28 May.

Analysts said the collapse of PTI is a reflection of the ideological weakness of the party under Khan, who failed to build any institutions within the party and relied solely on his own populist appeal to keep it together. A former senior party leader said there are talks about rebuilding PTI "minus Khan" to "save the party".

HANNAH ELLIS-PETERSEN IS THE GUARDIAN'S SOUTH ASIA CORRESPONDENT; SHAH MEER BALOCH COVERS PAKISTAN FOR THE GUARDIAN

◀ A poster in Rawalpindi denouncing former PM Imran Khan and his party members

SOHAIL SHAHZAD/EPA

**The
army has
routinely
asserted
itself as
the most
powerful
political
player in
Pakistan**

Police open criminal case over Odisha train disaster

By Hannah Ellis-Petersen

Police in the Indian state of Odisha have registered a criminal case of “death by negligence” relating to the train collision last Friday that killed 275 people, as critics accused the government of trying to shift blame for the disaster.

The report filed by police did not name any person as responsible but stated that “culpability of specific railway employees has not been ascertained, which will be unearthed during the investigation”.

According to preliminary reports, it was a signal failure that led the Coromandel Express train to switch tracks from the main line on to the loop line last Friday evening, where a stationary freight train was filled with heavy iron ore.

The trains collided at such force that carriages from the express, which was carrying more than 1,000 passengers, flipped on to the opposite tracks and derailed the oncoming Howrah superfast express train, with devastating consequences.

A massive rescue operation, involving the national disaster response force and hundreds of volunteers, continued for two days to pull survivors and bodies from the wreckage. Since then, relatives have struggled to locate the bodies of their loved ones, many of whom were badly disfigured.

The railways minister, Ashwini Vaishnaw, and the railway board said the investigation was focusing on a failure of the track management system, which coordinates and controls signals to oncoming trains and is meant to ensure they are directed to empty tracks. It appeared this automatic “interlocking system” had failed

last Friday, sending the Coromandel Express train down the loop track. However, Vaishnaw, who faced calls for his resignation, would not say if the failure was caused by a technical fault, human error or interference.

This system is in use across India’s entire 65,000km network. On Monday, the railway board ordered a widespread examination of the signalling system. The government also requested that the central bureau of investigation, a government agency, begin a criminal investigation into the collision, an indication that arrests could be made over the incident.

Visiting the site last Saturday, the prime minister, Narendra Modi, vowed that “those found guilty will be severely punished”. Political opponents accused the government of trying to shift focus on to an investigation into criminal negligence by an individual, rather than shouldering responsibility and examining safety issues.

It emerged that a similar incident, involving a failure of the interlocking system, had taken place in the state of Karnataka in February but the driver had noticed in time and stopped the train before it was sent down the wrong track, narrowly avoiding a crash.

The principal chief operations manager of south western railway had raised concerns over the failure at the time. In an internal letter sent to the railways minister, he warned there were “serious flaws in the system”.

In recent years, the government has spent billions modernising India’s railways, including the introduction of superfast trains, but spending on maintenance and basic safety measures and upgrades has been falling, while a lack of manpower has meant that allocated funds of track upgrades have not been spent. Mallikarjun Kharge, the president of the opposition Congress party, accused the government of “apathy and negligence” over rail safety and alleged that “red flags” were ignored.

On Monday morning, another freight train, carrying limestone, derailed in Odisha though no one was injured.

REUTERS





ITALY

Why were Italian and Israeli spies on fatal boat trip?

By Angela Giuffrida ROME
and Oliver Holmes

It reads like a pitch for a thriller. A group of tourists board a boat on a beautiful lake at the foot of the Alps. The boat capsizes in a sudden storm. Four drown as others swim to safety. In the days that follow, as authorities struggle to trace hotel bookings for the passengers, it emerges all were affiliated with the Italian and Israeli secret services.

In the days since Gooduria, a 16-metre houseboat, was swallowed up by Lake Maggiore, there has been growing speculation over what its passengers were doing in this corner of northern Italy.

Last Thursday, a police source working on the investigation confirmed

that eight of the boat's 21 passengers either currently or formerly served with Italy's secret service, and 13 had ties with Israel's.

Two of the victims - Claudio Alonzi, 62, and Tiziana Barnobi, 53 - had worked for the Italian intelligence authority. Another was a 50-year-old retired agent with Israel's Mossad spy agency. The fourth was Anya Bozhkova, originally from Russia, who was crewing the boat along with her Italian husband, Claudio Carminati, the boat's skipper. Carminati is being investigated over the deaths.

Carminati and Bozhkova ran a company called Love Lake and provided a "boat and breakfast" service on Gooduria, which only had a capacity for 15 passengers. The group boarded the boat, which was registered in the Netherlands, at the Piccaluga shipyard in Lisanza on the morning of Sunday 28 May for what was reported to have been a birthday celebration.

The police source said the group toured the Borromean islands, an archipelago on the western side of the lake, and stopped off for lunch on Isola dei Pescatori (Fishermen's Island). The boat capsized in a sudden and violent storm on the lake on the Sunday evening, with the survivors either swimming to shore or being pulled to safety by other vessels.

The investigation was only looking into the skipper's role in the accident and not the background of the agents or why they were in the area.

Reports in the Italian press alleged

21

Number of people who were aboard the Gooduria for its tour around Lake Maggiore. Eight passengers had ties with the Italian secret service while the remaining 13 had ties with the Israeli secret service

▶ The recovery operation for Gooduria on Lake Maggiore

MATTIA OZBOT/GETTY

that the group had met for work reasons, "to exchange information and documents" and that they only stayed on for a couple of days of leisure after the Israelis missed their flights home.

One theory, reported by Corriere della Sera, was that the agents were in Lake Maggiore to spy on Russian oligarchs, who have reportedly been buying villas and hotels in the area, circumventing the EU's financial sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine by funnelling money into Italy from Swiss bank accounts. Another theory was that the Israeli agents were monitoring contacts between Iranian firms and Italian ones based in Lombardy's industrial zone.

The agents who survived the tragedy left the next day. Two business jets were flown from Israel to Milan, according to flight trackers, possibly to swiftly return the surviving Israeli guests. It is unclear where they had been staying as, according to the Italian press, there was no trace of hotel bookings.

Israeli government censors briefly blocked reporting on the identity of the retired Mossad agent who drowned, amid confusion over what had happened and why he was in Italy. Italian news outlets had named him as Erez Shimoni and last week the Israeli prime minister's office finally confirmed the deceased had served in the Mossad spy agency but did not name him. Israeli agents often use fake names.

"The Mossad lost a dear friend, a devoted and professional worker who for decades dedicated his life to the security of the State of Israel, even after his retirement," the office said in a statement. "The Mossad mourns the loss and shares in the family's sorrow."

It added that "due to his service in the organisation, it is impossible to elaborate" on his activities.

The incident comes just two months after the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, visited Rome to boost ties with the far-right Meloni administration - the two countries already trade in military hardware.

It is not unusual for "retired" Israeli agents to be called up, and with reports that all of the passengers aboard the doomed boat were intelligence agents, there was speculation in Israel about whether the trip was truly for leisure or possibly part of a low-profile work trip.

ANGELA GIUFFRIDA IS THE GUARDIAN'S ROME CORRESPONDENT; OLIVER HOLMES IS A GUARDIAN JOURNALIST





UNITED KINGDOM

'Blue wall' Tories are falling out of love with the party

By Michael Savage

If you close your eyes and imagine an archetypal true blue Tory heartland, there is a good chance your mind's eye will conjure up something close to the quaint Surrey town of Godalming. Boutique bakeries and inviting tea rooms dot the immaculate high street, still festooned with union flag bunting from its coronation celebrations. It comes as no surprise to discover the MP is the UK chancellor of the exchequer, **Jeremy Hunt**.

Yet this seeming cliché of a Conservative fiefdom is under concerted electoral attack. Suddenly, no Tory stronghold in the area is deemed out of bounds. "If you didn't know any of the politics, you would probably assume this was a hardcore Tory place," conceded Paul Follows, the Liberal Democrat candidate, as he took his latest tour of Godalming high street. "But almost all of these really clichéd

Conservative places have not been so Conservative for a little while."

Unlikely as it might once have seemed, Hunt's South West Surrey constituency - in Tory hands since its formation in 1983 - has become one of the bricks in the "blue wall" of affluent, pro-remain Tory constituencies that the Lib Dems believe they can dislodge.

Attention on Hunt will only grow after the most obvious candidate for electoral defeat, former deputy prime minister Dominic Raab, announced he would not contest his more marginal Surrey constituency of Esher and Walton at the next election.

In 2017, when Follows joined Godalming town council, he was the only non-Conservative on it. Now the Tories have just two of 20 seats. Over the same period, the number of Tories on the local Waverley borough council has dwindled from about 50 to 10 after the disastrous local election results last month. Follows said the chaos of Boris Johnson's leadership, followed by the full-scale implosion of Liz Truss's tenure, have catalysed a longer-term decay in the foundations of this blue wall mainstay.

"The values of the people here have always been what they are now," said Follows. "That's pretty centrist, pretty moderate, very tolerant, pro-European, pretty compassionate and reasonable, very well educated. What they've seen is their party move to a really rightwing group."

It is not just campaigning Lib Dems who claim something significant could be brewing in these seats, and can be found across the home counties and the south-east of England. Many Conservatives are also concerned that in

the party's desperation to win swathes of traditionally Labour "red wall" seats in the Midlands and north, seats at the other end of its 2019 electoral coalition have been neglected.

Its embrace of Brexit and culture war battles never played well among blue wall voters, they warn, but the threat of Jeremy Corbyn kept them within the Tory tent last time. They argue that Keir Starmer provides less of a perceived threat, while rising mortgage costs and NHS problems now impinge on the lives of these voters.

According to a calculation by Oxford University's Prof Ben Ansell, the South West Surrey seat would now fall into Lib Dem hands on national polling averages. To make matters worse for Hunt, the constituency is being redrawn, which could make it more marginal.

"It's clear that these are kind of Sunak-sympathetic, Sunak-curious voters," said Ansell. "A full Sunak approach, which was less 'stop the boats' and more 'stop the culture war', might work. The problem is it will lose other parts of the country. The electoral sheet leaves either the feet or the head uncovered."

Given the turbulence since 2016 and the Tory party's embrace of Brexit and an iconoclastic radicalism that ended in Truss breaking the record for the shortest-serving prime minister, it should come as no surprise that the "small-c" conservative home counties feel ruffled.

Even without the demographic changes and the cost of living issues, the government would be struggling. Lib Dem canvassers also report finding more Labour-voting young couples in Godalming who have moved out of London. They can then be targeted as potential tactical voters. *Observer*

MICHAEL SAVAGE IS THE OBSERVER'S POLICY EDITOR



◀ Godalming, part of Jeremy Hunt's constituency, is now a Liberal Democrat target

ANDY HALL

'Almost all of these clichéd Tory places have not been so Tory for a little while'

Paul Follows
Lib Dem candidate



AUSTRALIA

The war hero who missed his own day of reckoning

Ben Roberts-Smith was lauded as the nation's most valorous soldier - until a judge ruled he probably murdered unarmed civilians in Afghanistan

By Ben Doherty SYDNEY

In the end, the attention was on the man who wasn't there. All two metres of Ben Roberts-Smith was glaringly absent from the packed, anxious room in Sydney's federal court building, as a judge quietly explained that the man once revered as the most famous soldier of his generation was, on the balance of probabilities, a murderer who callously killed unarmed civilians while serving in Australia's military in Afghanistan.

As the judgment came down, the Victoria Cross winner was far away on the Indonesian resort island of Bali.

Roberts-Smith had sued three Australian newspapers - the Age, the Sydney Morning Herald and the Canberra Times - for defamation, alleging stories they published in 2018 had falsely portrayed him as a murderer and a war criminal, a man "who broke the moral and legal rules of military engagement" and "disgraced" his country and its military. The newspapers defended their reporting as true.

Last Thursday, Roberts-Smith lost resoundingly. His case was uniformly dismissed. And with that will probably come a legal bill somewhere in the order of A\$35m (\$23m).

Almost defiantly, Roberts-Smith had attended every day of this trial that he brought to court, demanding his

▲ Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith 'broke the moral and legal rules over military engagement'

AAP

● *The Hayat Line provides free and confidential, culturally sensitive support for Muslim Australians on 1300 993 398. In Australia, support and counselling for veterans and their families is available 24 hours a day from Open Arms on 1800 011 046 or openarms.gov.au*

once-glittering reputation be restored. But on this day of reckoning all that was seen of him was a newspaper picture of him relaxing on that island resort. He was not in the building, not in the country, to hear the result.

In the quiet surrounds of courtroom one, more than 10 years and a world removed from the violence wrought in Afghan villages, Justice Anthony Besanko ruled that the newspapers had proved many elements of their defence and that Roberts-Smith had been shown to be a murderer and a war criminal.

In a village called Darwan in 2012, Roberts-Smith took a handcuffed prisoner named Ali Jan and marched him to the edge of a cliff. He walked away from Ali Jan before turning and striding towards him, kicking him in the chest and sending him backwards off the precipice. Ali Jan landed in a dry creek bed, alive but badly injured. Roberts-Smith and a comrade walked down to the injured man. Roberts-Smith ordered his subordinate to shoot him dead. And it was done.

Two further murders, at a bombed-out compound known as Whiskey 108 in 2009, were also proved. Two unarmed men - one elderly, the other with a prosthetic leg - were found hiding in a tunnel and taken prisoner. Roberts-Smith ordered the old man shot. He killed the disabled man with a machine gun. The man's prosthesis was kept as a souvenir by another soldier and used by Australian SAS troops as a drinking vessel at their on-base bar.

Besanko also found that the newspapers had, on the balance of probabilities, proven another imputation that Roberts-Smith was a "criminal" who "broke the moral and legal rules of military engagement" over an incident at Chenartu in 2012, which resulted in the killing of an Afghan man who was being held prisoner.

While two other allegations of murder were not proven, they were not necessary for their successful truth defence. As for an allegation of domestic violence allegedly committed by Roberts-Smith in 2018 against a woman with whom he was having an affair, the judge found this was not proved. But he ruled it could be defended as "contextually true" - it caused no further harm to Roberts-Smith's reputation - because of the gravity of the allegations the newspapers had already proven.

Besanko's summary of his judgment lacked the drama and pathos of the trial that has seized public attention across Australia and brought with it a national reckoning of the country's mission in Afghanistan. His summing-up was measured, and legalistic, in contrast to the extremes of the trial.

In the full judgment, delivered on Monday, Besanko said Roberts-Smith and the four witnesses he called were dishonest in their evidence.

More than 100 days of trial heard extraordinary evidence, along with allegations of "exhibition executions" and "kill counts", and of "blooding" rituals, where junior soldiers were coerced by their superiors into killing unarmed civilians.

Dramatically, three SAS soldiers accused of murder on separate missions refused in court to answer questions about what they did in Afghanistan, objecting on the grounds that any truthful answer they gave would be self-incriminatory.

In court one last Thursday, as the first ruling came down that an allegation of murder was proven, the two journalists at the centre of the case, Nick McKenzie and Chris Masters, audibly exhaled.

The extraordinary tension which had built in the courtroom was immediately, palpably punctured. The air appeared almost to rush out of the room. Roberts-Smith's lawyers sat at the bar table, their shoulders noticeably sagged. Throughout the case, the newspapers' legal team had maintained that, if they could prove one murder, they would have won, they would have proven that a man lionised as the living embodiment of Australia's Anzac legend was, in fact, nothing of the sort: he was a war criminal.

The judgment quietly unfurled further, more comprehensively in favour of the newspapers than even they had dared to hope.

Roberts-Smith has avenues of appeal through the federal court. But it remains to be seen, in the face of such an annihilation, whether he chooses to exercise that option.

"It's a day of justice," McKenzie said. "Some small justice for the Afghan victims of Ben Roberts-Smith ... [and] for those brave men of the SAS who stood up and told the truth about who Ben Roberts-Smith is: a war criminal, a bully, and a liar."

BEN DOHERTY IS A REPORTER FOR GUARDIAN AUSTRALIA

OPINION AUSTRALIA

The real victims This case shows foreign armies have failed my poor country

By Shadi Khan Saif



With a federal court judge finding that Ben Roberts-Smith, Australia's most decorated soldier, either murdered or was complicit in and responsible for the murder of unarmed civilians while serving in Afghanistan, Australia must turn its attention to the real victims of this conflict.

The judge in Roberts-Smith's failed defamation case found that, on the balance of probabilities, the newspapers that the former army corporal was suing had proven in their defence that Roberts-Smith kicked a handcuffed prisoner off a cliff in Uruzgan province in 2012 before ordering a subordinate Australian soldier to shoot the injured man dead.

The dusty province of Uruzgan where Australian armed forces served for more than a decade is one of the poorest in Afghanistan.

The case has been a reminder of the failures of foreign forces in



**Why
couldn't
the soldiers
have left
behind
a legacy of
support
and justice?**

▼ The Australian military had a presence in Uruzgan province for more than a decade

FEDERAL COURT
OF AUSTRALIA



Afghanistan, the country where I was born and from which I was forced to flee as a reporter in Kabul in 2021, leaving my wife and children behind. It has also been a reminder of how indifferent Australians can be towards events in the rest of the world.

The villagers of Uruzgan and the surrounding areas in Afghanistan where Roberts-Smith and his peers served were caught between Taliban insurgents and Nato forces for 20 years. After the chaotic fall of Kabul and withdrawal of foreign forces, they live a miserable life under the Taliban, which is peddling a gender-apartheid policy against women and girls. But the scars of the war that were inflicted by an "invading army" are, for many, much deeper than those created by the oppressive regime.

How will Australians be remembered in Afghanistan? Did the Australian deployment help, or did it make the lives of Afghans worse? Why couldn't Australia have left behind a legacy of support and justice rather than one tainted by allegations of atrocities?

Afghans of my generation knew Australia for its fabulous cricketers such as Shane Warne, Steve Waugh and Adam Gilchrist. Will the younger generation remember it for the soldiers who came in the name of war? Where war crimes are proven, will the victims get any compensation?

The strong testimonies by witnesses, Australian and Afghan, standing for justice in Roberts-Smith's defamation trial are worthy of acknowledgment. Sadly, people in Afghanistan will probably never get to hear those voices, and would probably not believe that people spoke up on their behalf through fearless journalism in Australia. I wish they could see the regard for human dignity that these witnesses and journalists have shown. It's a dignity that wasn't shown by Roberts-Smith, who - a court has determined - couldn't distinguish between unarmed local villagers and armed insurgents.

SHADI KHAN SAIF IS A JOURNALIST AND FORMER PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN CORRESPONDENT BASED IN MELBOURNE

GHANA

Rag trade Solve clothes waste crisis, dealers tell EU

By Isabel Choat

A group of secondhand clothes dealers from Ghana have visited Brussels to lobby for Europe-wide legislation to compel the fashion industry to help address the “environmental catastrophe” of dumping vast amounts of textiles in the west African country.

The traders from Kantamanto in Accra, one of the world’s largest second-hand clothing markets, met Alice Bah Kuhnke, an MEP with Sweden’s Green party, environmental organisations and representatives from the European Commission and the European Environment Bureau to argue that proposed extended producer responsibility (EPR) regulation should ensure Ghana receives funds towards managing the 100 tonnes of clothing discarded at the market every day.

Producers are obliged by EPR policies to contribute to the disposal of waste generated by their products. France is the only country in Europe with an EPR that covers the textile industry.

Critics say the policy does little for “end-of-line” countries such as Ghana – because the fee paid by clothing producers is low at just €0.06 (\$0.06) for each item, and the funds raised do not

Some of the millions of clothing items that arrive at Kantamanto market each week

MUNTAKA CHASANT/REX

Out of fashion
The trail of textiles

70%

Of the clothing waste from the market ends up in ditches and drains

6 cents

Contribution by clothes producers towards disposal of each item

6m

Better-quality items are sold or upcycled in the market every week

“follow exports” to countries such as Ghana, which are suffering the consequences of overproduction and consumption in wealthy countries.

The Kantamanto traders want the draft EPR policy to increase the fee to a minimum of €0.50 for each item, and to guarantee a fair portion of the money goes to the countries where the secondhand clothes end up, including at least 10% towards an environmental fund to clean up previous damage.

Kantamanto covers about 7 hectares of land, handling about 15m garments a week and providing work for about 30,000 people. Retailers buy and sort through bales of clothing. Most of it is either “deadstock” (clothes kept in warehouses and storerooms for years but never worn) or items donated to charities or left in recycling bins. About 6m of the better-quality items are sold or upcycled in the market every week.

But about 40% of the textiles are discarded as waste. The growth in “fast fashion” is pushing that figure up, and bringing a higher volume of lower-quality secondhand clothes. The drop in quality leads to more waste and erodes the traders’ earnings, sending many into debt.

“Kantamanto makes visible the problem that exists in Europe,” said Samuel Oteng, a designer and community engagement manager with the Or Foundation, a US environmental organisation based in Accra that works with Kantamanto. “But it also has the solutions,” he said. “I’ve seen the resilience of Kantamanto, but the support and recognition is not there.”

The traders want new legislation to acknowledge the role of Kantamanto’s workers in recycling the global north’s cast-offs. “Recirculating 6m items of clothing weekly is an astonishing feat. What leaves Kantamanto as waste does so largely because there is too much clothing, not because people are not working hard to manage it,” according to the Waste Landscape report, published by the Or Foundation in 2022.

Authorities transport waste from the market to Adepa dump, 50km north of Kantamanto, but they can only handle about 30% of the total amount of clothing waste and the remaining 70% ends up in ditches and drains, leaching dyes into the sea and rivers, and covering beaches with vast tangles of clothing.

ISABEL CHOAT IS A COMMISSIONING EDITOR FOR THE GUARDIAN’S GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT DESK



NIGER

Role of US military in question amid cycle of violence

By Nick Turse NIAMEY

“We fled here to Niamey with nothing. We don’t even know how to feed ourselves,” said Amadou as he sat outside a tiny concrete home on the fringe of Niger’s capital, recounting an attack on his village by government forces late last year.

According to Amadou, several members of his family, and others from their village near the border with Mali and Burkina Faso, the Nigerien military executed several village elders and





local leaders during the attack. They said it wasn't the first time that people from their village had been killed or injured by government troops. Amadou and others provided their full names and that of their village, but the Guardian has withheld those details for fear of potential retribution.

Amadou and the others are all members of the Fulani ethnic group – predominantly semi-nomadic Muslim cattle herders also known as the Peuhl who have long expressed discontent with their governments across the Sahel over neglect of their communities and their poor political representation.

As a stigmatised minority with limited economic prospects, they have been heavily recruited by the jihadist groups who have killed thousands in the region in recent years, leading to a self-reinforcing cycle of government abuse. “Our area is under jihadist domination, so the government believes that we are on the jihadists’ side,” Amadou said.

A neighbour from his village said she had fled with nothing but the clothes she was wearing. “I don’t even know if my sister is alive or dead,” she said. “They have been killing us, innocent people, and also our imams and leaders to break the pillars of our community.”

Amadou’s account raises questions

▲ Soldiers from Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Niger take part in US-sponsored exercises in Ivory Coast in March

LUC GNAGO/REUTERS

Troubled regions

The US state department points to alleged killings by the army in Diffa and Tillabéri

for Washington, which has developed a close relationship with the Nigerien military over the past two decades. US and other western officials have highlighted the dangers posed by jihadists and Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group in west Africa.

“In the Sahel right now, we have multiple violent extremist organisations that threaten the safety and security and prosperity of that region,” said Rear Admiral Milton Sands III, chief of US special operations command Africa (SocAfrica), on a conference call with reporters. “This is compounded, to an extent, by Wagner ... Wagner makes countries less stable and less secure.”

Sands and others often fail to mention that while regional insecurity has been increasing for 10 years, Wagner has only been locally active since about December 2021, while the US has been heavily involved for two decades.

In 2002, the US began providing Niger with counter-terrorism assistance and over the past decade has provided more than \$500m in security assistance, from armoured vehicles to surveillance aircraft, making it the largest recipient of state department military aid in west Africa and the second highest in sub-Saharan Africa.

Over the past decade, the number of US personnel deployed to Niger has jumped from 100 to 1,000. US troops have trained, advised, assisted and even fought alongside Nigerien troops. In 2017, for instance, four US soldiers were killed in an ambush by Islamic State fighters near the village of Tongo Tongo. The US has also built a number of military or CIA outposts, including several bases to launch armed drones.

The US has been joined in Niger by a host of foreign partners, among them Canadian commandos, and trainers

from African Union and European Union member states. This engagement extends across the region.

The counter-terrorism assistance has failed to stem sky-rocketing jihadist violence, however. Even the Pentagon admitted this. “With 2,737 violent events, the western Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger) experienced the largest escalation in violent events linked to militant Islamists over the past year of any region in Africa, a 36% increase,” reads a recent report by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, a US defence department research institution. “Fatalities in the Sahel involving militant Islamist groups rose even more rapidly, 63%.” All told, the Africa Center found attacks linked to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel had increased 3,500% since 2016.

Elizabeth Shackelford, a former US state department foreign service officer who served in several posts in Africa and is now a senior foreign policy fellow with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, said these metrics meant that hard questions must be asked. “More US security assistance isn’t leading to more security, and all signs suggest it plays a role in making matters worse,” she said. “Niger is supposed to be the success story for US counter-terrorism partnership in the region. If these are the wins, what do the losses look like?”

The international mentorship has also failed to curb a long history of abusive behaviour by the Nigerien armed forces. Sands had only good things to say about Niger’s military. “I’m encouraged by what I see from Nigerien special operations and the government of Niger,” he said. “They have an effective force ... and they’re exceptional partners.”

But the US state department is far less sanguine. “There were numerous reports of arbitrary or unlawful executions by authorities or their agents,” reads their most recent assessment of human rights in Niger. “For example, the armed forces were accused of summarily executing persons suspected of fighting with terrorist groups in the Diffa and Tillabéri regions.”

For those caught up in the violence, such as Amadou and his family, the future is bleak. “The jihadists are just bandits,” he said. “But we’re trapped between them and the government. Every time the government troops come, they either injure or kill people.”

NICK TURSE IS AN INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST





WELLBEING

Thirst impressions

Everyone agrees that we need some form of hydration - but is it safe to shun 'boring' water in favour of nothing but coffee, tea or juice?

By Lizzie Cernik

Guzzling water has become something of a badge of honour among celebrities, with Jennifer Aniston and Gwyneth Paltrow revealing they drink up to three litres a day. But not everyone finds it so easy. Florence Pugh, for one, announced that she found water "too boring". As well as the lack of flavour, the constant toilet breaks were "a waste of time". Pugh prefers orange juice, elderflower presses and tea.

What do the experts say? How much water should we be drinking every day - and is it just as healthy to get your hydration from other beverages?

Chester-based GP Chris Ritchieson says NHS guidelines suggest drinking about six to eight glasses of water a day, which is roughly two litres. "Although this is the general guidance, there is very little concrete research and evidence about the optimum amount of water to drink," he says. "People have different sensitivity levels to dehydration, so it could vary from person to person."

When dehydration symptoms do occur, they can be hard to spot, and easily confused with something else. "Not drinking enough can increase the risk of urinary tract infections and headaches, along with tiredness, confusion, passing darker urine, dry cracked skin and irregular bowel movements," says Ritchieson. It can also lead to low blood pressure or postural hypotension, a condition where standing up can cause sudden dizziness and falls.

Drinking more water can help to prevent health conditions such as migraines, frequent headaches and kidney stones.

While plain water is the healthiest source of hydration, Ritchieson says any non-alcoholic drink makes a contribution. When, in 2016, researchers at the University of Stirling monitored hydration levels in students for four hours after taking on different liquids, they found that a litre of instant coffee - and even beer - was as hydrating as the same amount of

water. But hydration levels remained highest of all, above water even, after drinking milk.

Although this is the general guidance, there is little concrete research and evidence about the optimum amount of water to drink. But it's not a good idea to drink many water alternatives on a regular basis. "Tea and coffee are diuretics, which means they make you go to the toilet more often," says Ritchieson. "Fizzy drinks, squashes and juices will also hydrate you, but we discourage people from drinking too much due to the high sugar content, which can lead to other health issues in the long term."

The caffeine in tea and coffee can cause other side-effects, according to Nishtha Patel, a functional medicine practitioner and clinical nutritionist. These include an increased heart rate and palpitations, anxiety, restlessness, insomnia, digestive problems such as nausea and diarrhoea, sleep disturbances, high blood pressure and caffeine addiction.

"It is recommended that we limit caffeine intake to about 400mg a day, which is equivalent to approximately four to five cups of coffee or eight to 10 cups of tea," she says.

When it comes to sugar, the NHS recommends consuming no more than 30g of "free sugars" a day, which includes natural sugars in fruit juice, honey and syrups as well as sugars added by food manufacturers.

Patel says some fizzy drinks or energy drinks contain enough sugar to take us over the daily recommended intake in just one serving. "Diet drinks are really not much better. They affect the gut microbiome and, like other ultra-processed foods, have been linked to other diseases, including memory decline and liver issues."

Fresh juices contain more nutrients than fizzy drinks, but Patel warns they can still easily take us over the recommended daily sugar allowance. "On average, an 8oz (230ml) serving of freshly squeezed orange juice contains around 20-25g of sugar. Consuming too much sugar, even from natural sources, can still have negative health effects and increase the risk of type 2 diabetes and obesity. Water hydrates us with zero calories."

If, like Pugh, you find drinking water "boring" or tasteless, the nutritional therapist Thalia Pellegrini recommends adding fruit or cucumber to a water jug and putting it in the fridge.

Drinkwise Know your limits

4-5
Recommended
daily maximum
cups of coffee

25
Grams of sugar
in a standard
glass of
orange juice



'Tea and coffee are diuretics, which means they make you go to the toilet more often'

Chris Ritchieson
GP

"That adds just enough flavour for some people," she says. "You can also try herbal teas and diluted fresh juices. If you really can't stand the taste of water, try adding squash. It does have a lot of sugar but it's better for you than going without fluids."

A diet with plenty of plants can help, as you'll get extra hydration from fruits and vegetables. "Some ingredients like celery, lettuce, tomatoes and watermelon are more than 90% water," she says. "You can also try eating plenty of peaches, pineapples, oranges and pears."

And what about the people who avoid drinking water because they worry about needing to visit the toilet often? Veerpal Sandhu, an advanced clinical pharmacist for GP surgeries in Essex, says this is especially common among pregnant women and elderly people, who may have more difficulty controlling their bladder. "Mostly people manage by not drinking too much before travelling, going out or

going to bed," she says. "One solution is to drink more when you are near available toilets. And there are pelvic floor exercises you can do to improve bladder control."

Sandhu points out that water is essential for human health. "It makes up over two-thirds of the healthy human body. It lubricates the joints and eyes, aids digestion, flushes out waste and toxins, and keeps the skin healthy."

It is, of course, possible to drink too much water. "As a result of some of the publicity - often from celebrities - about drinking more, we occasionally see people who have become unwell from drinking too much," says Ritchieson.

"Overhydrating can lead to a condition called hyponatremia, which means that your salt levels have become too diluted. This can cause headaches, dizziness and, in extreme cases, unconsciousness. If you're going to increase your water intake, I recommend doing it gradually and drinking little and often throughout the day."

How much water is too much will depend on the individual, and how fast they are drinking. "That's why we always recommend little and often," says Ritchieson. "The kidneys can eliminate 20 to 28 litres of water a day, but no more than about a litre an hour, so the important thing is to spread your intake out throughout the day."

"For most people, unless they are exercising, living in a hot climate or unwell, about 1.5 to three litres of water a day will always be enough."

LIZZIE CERNIK IS A FEATURES WRITER

▼ Fruit juices contain high levels of sugar so moderation is advised





◀ Revellers celebrate during last year's pride parade in Tampa, Florida

OCTAVIO JONES/GETTY

UNITED STATES



Organisers cancel Pride events in Florida amid safety fears

By Joseph Contreras MIAMI

Kristina Bozanich knew that this year's Pride month event in the Florida town of St Cloud would have to be modified to comply with a new law approved by Governor Ron DeSantis last month. One in a series of bills signed by DeSantis this year that escalated his assault on LGBTQ+ rights, the Protection of Children Act prohibits minors from attending "sexually explicit performances" and authorises the fining of businesses that allow children to attend and suspending or revoking their alcohol licences.

The inaugural Pride month event Bozanich organised in St Cloud last year featured an open-air parade and a drag show. This year, the 30-year-old photographer scheduled a private event at a gym that would include a drag show and would be open only to adults who had bought tickets.

News of the Protection of Children law and the appearance of a road sign in the nearby neighbourhood of Lake Nona that read "kill all gays" prompted all four drag performers to cancel. That forced Bozanich to scrap the event.

The passage of similar laws targeting drag performances in other Republican-controlled state legislatures has cast a pall over this year's Pride celebrations, including in Texas, Montana and Arkansas. Organisers in Tennessee are awaiting a federal judge's ruling on the constitutionality of state legislation that places restrictions on where "adult cabaret" can be staged.

A drag show scheduled to take place last week at Nellis air force base in Nevada was cancelled after Department of Defense officials advised organisers that the performance would contradict the defence secretary Lloyd Austin's recent congressional testimony that the Pentagon would not fund such events.

But with DeSantis having officially launched a presidential campaign last month, the spotlight remains on Florida. His administration foreshadowed the passage of the Protection of Children Act when it filed a complaint last March seeking to revoke the liquor licence of a Hyatt Regency hotel in Miami, after it hosted a Christmas drag queen show where children were reportedly among the audience.

A month later, a Pride parade in Port St Lucie was cancelled and related events were restricted to adults at least 21 years old. This year's Tampa Pride festival went ahead, but organisers decided to cancel a Pride on the River in autumn after sponsors expressed concerns over the outdoor setting.

"It's a very scary time for the LGBTQ+ community with the political climate right now," said Carrie West, a retired businessman and president of the Tampa Pride organisation. "With DeSantis running for president, he wants to make a name for himself by campaigning against us."

A deputy press secretary for the Florida governor declined an interview request from the Guardian. But on the day DeSantis signed into law five bills that will, among other actions, target the use of appropriate pronouns in school and prohibit minors from undergoing gender-affirming surgeries and obtaining puberty-blocking medication. Last year, the governor signed a "don't say gay" bill that bars instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity to children between kindergarten and third grade.

At a time when the NAACP has issued a travel advisory warning that "Florida is openly hostile toward African Americans, people of colour and LGBTQ+ individuals", some people are voting with their feet. Bozanich knows of a family living in St Cloud with a transgender child who will be fleeing the Sunshine state and one adult who has paused his gender transition and will be moving to California in 2024.

But many more members of **Florida's besieged LGBTQ+ community** are moving ahead with plans to celebrate Pride month. Led by Mayor Kenneth Welch, the city of St Petersburg kicked off events with a flag-raising ceremony last week and will hold three days of festivities in the last weekend of June. South Florida's longest-running Pride parade will be held in the Fort Lauderdale suburb of Wilton Manors on 17 June.

One of Florida's first openly gay lawmakers welcomes the forthright affirmation of his community's existence in some of the state's largest metropolitan areas. "We're hearing that, more often than not, our Pride events are going forward, regardless of the political environment," said Carlos Guillermo Smith, a senior policy adviser at Equality Florida who served three terms in the Florida House of Representatives between 2016 and 2022. "People are understanding that raising their flag high and proudly is an important act of political resistance. They aren't allowing themselves to be bullied out of continuing their Pride festivities as usual."

JOSEPH CONTRERAS IS A JOURNALIST BASED IN MIAMI

Diversity figures According to Equality Florida, the state's premier advocacy group for LGBTQ+ rights, the Sunshine state is home to an estimated 886,000 gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and non-binary people 13 years of age or older. They represent about 5% of Florida's workforce and 4.6% of the state's adult population.

ANALYSIS
UNITED STATES

Across the gap Why bipartisan Biden can claim victory in debt-limit deal

By David Smith WASHINGTON



Sometimes presidencies are about things that don't happen. Joe Biden will be breathing a sigh of relief that the economic asteroid hurtling towards planet Earth turned into a near miss: America is not going to default on his watch.

After a bipartisan deal to suspend the \$31.4tn debt ceiling passed the Republican-controlled House and the Democrat-controlled Senate, Biden could claim that in the age of polarisation, it takes an apostle of bipartisanship and a 36-year veteran of the Senate to reach across the aisle and make deals with his opponents. Only Biden, the argument goes, can bridge divides that seem unbridgeable in the age of Donald Trump.

Such deals come at a price, of course. For sure, there will be plenty of time to debate how Biden and Democrats could have played this episode better. They could have raised or abolished the debt limit when they had control of the White House and both chambers of Congress. Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia told the Politico website that if he could "do one thing different, it would have been raising the debt limit late last year".

The president may have also been lulled into a false sense of security by the shenanigans around Kevin McCarthy's election as House speaker in January. It took 15 ballots and implied a Republican majority mired in division and dysfunction. But Democrats underestimate Republicans' ability to fall into line at their peril.

McCarthy managed to steer his unwieldy coalition into passing a debt limit bill stuffed with conservative priorities and spending cuts. If Biden hoped that moderate Republicans would bow to logic - the debt limit is about spending that Congress has already authorised, not future appropriations - and break ranks, rather than embrace the apocalyptic prospect of default, he had to think again.

The president duly cancelled a trip to Australia and Papua New Guinea to hold talks with McCarthy. He deployed a negotiating team that included Shalanda Young, director of the Office of Management and

Budget, working such long hours that she admitted to reporters she had run out of clean clothes.

What emerged was a deal that protected Biden's legislative accomplishments including the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act, fending off Republican attempts to repeal the latter's green energy incentives. The White House also swept aside Republican proposals to slash funding for education, healthcare, law enforcement and social security.

The argument that "it could have been worse" is hardly an inspiring re-election slogan but the White House would contend that it is realistic in divided government. Young, a former staff director of the House appropriations committee, insisted: "Look, the House is not very different from when I was there. You have to have some faith in the governing majority, which I do, because I have a lot of respect for members on both sides of the aisle to do what's best for the American people. And that is not some Pollyannaish thing. I know them. And I've always thought we could get here if we let the extreme go away."

On the left, there was opposition from Pramila Jayapal, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others. They condemned work requirements for food aid programmes for some poor Americans, reduced funding for the Internal Revenue Service that could make life easier for wealthy tax cheats, and the speeding up of the permitting process for a natural gas pipeline in West Virginia (home of the conservative Democratic senator Joe Manchin).

But there was no mass revolt against Biden. Progressives understood "Maga Republicans" had taken the economy hostage and left Biden with no choice but to negotiate the ransom. Congressman Jamie Raskin said: "We need to make sure this kind of legislative extortion never happens again."

It was Biden's predecessor, Trump, who wrote a book entitled *The Art of the Deal*. But it is Biden who continues to exceed low expectations by finding common ground in the disappearing middle.

DAVID SMITH IS THE GUARDIAN'S WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF

The argument 'it could have been worse' is hardly an inspiring re-election slogan



◀ Joe Biden addresses the nation on averting default

JIM WATSON/
AFP/REUTERS

A close-up photograph of an elephant's head, focusing on its eye and the surrounding wrinkled skin. The skin is a mix of brown and grey tones, with deep, intricate wrinkles. The eye is large, dark, and highly reflective, showing a clear reflection of the surrounding environment, including trees and a bright sky. The text "The animal mind's eye" is overlaid in white, bold, serif font, centered horizontally and positioned slightly below the middle of the image.

The animal mind's eye



Can humans ever understand how animals think? Research is overturning assumptions about what creatures are capable of

By Adam Kirsch

Giraffes will eat courgettes if they have to, but they really prefer carrots. A team of researchers from Spain and Germany recently took advantage of this preference to investigate whether the animals are capable of statistical reasoning. In the experiment, a giraffe was shown two transparent containers holding a mixture of carrot and courgette slices. One container held mostly carrots, the other mostly courgettes. A researcher then took one slice from each container and offered them to the giraffe with closed hands, so it couldn't see which vegetable had been selected.

In repeated trials, the four test giraffes reliably chose the hand that had reached into the container with more carrots, showing they understood that the more carrots were in the container, the more likely it was that a carrot had been picked. Monkeys have passed similar tests, and human babies can do it at 12 months old. But giraffes' brains are much smaller than primates' relative to body size, so it was notable to see how well they grasped the concept.

Such discoveries are becoming less surprising every year, however, as a flood of new research overturns long-standing assumptions about what animal minds are and aren't capable of. A recent wave of popular books on animal cognition argue

Seen
A hippo in Jaime Duque park near the Colombian capital, Bogotá
AFP/GETTY





Humanity has justified its supremacy over all other animals by our intellectual superiority

that skills long assumed to be humanity's prerogative, from planning for the future to a sense of fairness, actually exist throughout the animal kingdom - and not just in primates or other mammals, but in birds, octopuses and beyond. In 2018, for instance, a team at the University of Buenos Aires found evidence that zebra finches, whose brains weigh half a gram, have dreams. Monitors attached to the birds' throats found that when they were asleep, their muscles sometimes moved in exactly the same pattern as when they were singing out loud; in other words, they seemed to be dreaming about singing.

In the 21st century, findings such as these are helping to drive a major shift in the way human beings think about animals - and about ourselves. Humanity has traditionally justified its supremacy over all other animals - the fact that we breed them and keep them in cages, rather than vice versa - by our intellectual superiority. According to Aristotle, humans are distinguished from other living things because only we possess a rational soul. We know our species as *Homo sapiens*, "wise man".

Yet at a time when humanity's self-image is largely shaped by fears of environmental devastation and nuclear war, combined with memories of historical atrocity, it is no longer so easy to say, with Hamlet, that man is "the paragon of animals" - the ideal that other creatures would imitate, if only they could. Nature may be "red in tooth and claw", but creatures whose weapons are teeth and claws can only kill each other one at a time. Only humans commit atrocities such as war, genocide and slavery - and what allows us to conceive and carry out such crimes is the very power of reason that we boast about.

In his 2022 book *If Nietzsche Were a Narwhal*, Justin Gregg, a specialist in dolphin communication, takes this mistrust of human reason to an extreme. The book's title encapsulates Gregg's argument: if Friedrich Nietzsche had been born a narwhal instead of a German philosopher, he would have been much better off, and given his intellectual influence on fascism, so would the world. By extension, the same is true of our whole species. "The planet does not love us as much as we love our intellect," Gregg writes. "We have generated more death and destruction for life on this planet than any other animal, past and present. Our many intellectual accomplishments are currently on track to produce our own extinction."

If human minds are incapable of solving the problems they create, then perhaps our salvation lies in encountering very different types of minds. The global popularity of the documentary *My Octopus Teacher*, released by Netflix in 2020, is just one example of the growing hunger for such encounters. In the film, the South African diver Craig Foster

spends months filming a female octopus in an underwater kelp forest, observing most of her life cycle. Foster presents himself as the anti-Jacques Cousteau; he doesn't go underwater to study the non-human, but to learn from it.

Humility is a traditional religious discipline, and there is a spiritual dimension to Foster's quest and to the film's success. On YouTube, where the trailer has been viewed 3.7m times, thousands of people testify that *My Octopus Teacher* made them weep, changed their understanding of the world and made them resolve to lead better lives. It's clear that, for modern people who seldom encounter animals except for pet cats and dogs, entering into a close relationship with a non-human mind can be a sacred experience.

The idea of the octopus as the non-human mind par excellence was popularised by the 2016 bestseller *Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness*, by Peter Godfrey-Smith. A philosopher rather than a marine biologist, Godfrey-Smith got an opportunity to see the creatures in action at a site off eastern Australia known to researchers as Octopolis. There he discovered that octopuses are "smart in the sense of being curious and flexible; they are adventurous, opportunistic", prone to making off with items such as tape measures and measuring stakes.

The fascination of the octopus is that while its behaviour seems recognisable in human terms as mischief or curiosity, its neural architecture is immensely different from ours. Since Darwin, humans have grown used to recognising ourselves in our fellow primates, whose brains and body plans are similar to our own. After all, humans and chimpanzees share a common ape ancestor that lived in Africa as recently as 6m years ago. Our most recent common ancestor with the octopus, by contrast, is a worm-like creature thought to have lived 500-600m years ago.

Because the mind of the octopus evolved in a completely different fashion from ours, it makes sense of the world in ways we can barely imagine. An octopus has 500m neurons, about as many as a dog, but most of these neurons are located not in the brain but in its eight arms, each of which can move, smell and perhaps even remember on its own. In Godfrey-Smith's words, an octopus is "probably the closest we will come to meeting an intelligent alien". When such a being encounters a human at the bottom of the ocean, what could it possibly make of us?

Homing in
Bees find their way home from a distance by detecting magnetic fields

NATURE COLLECTION/
ALAMY





For most of the 20th century, animal researchers wouldn't even have asked such a question, much less attempted to answer it. Under the influence of the American psychologist BF Skinner, scientific orthodoxy held that it was neither legitimate nor necessary to talk about what was going on in an animal's mind. Science, he argued, only deals with things that can be observed and measured, and we can't directly observe mental faculties even in ourselves, much less in animals. What we can observe is action and behaviour, and Skinner was able to modify the behaviour of rats using positive reinforcement, such as rewards of food, and negative reinforcement, such as electric shocks.

When Jane Goodall first went to study chimpanzees in Tanzania in the 1960s, the very notion of animal subjectivity was taboo. Her practice of giving names to the individual chimps she observed – such as David Greybeard, who her studies made famous – was frowned on as unscientific, since it suggested that they might be humanlike in other ways. The standard practice was to number them. “You cannot share your life with a dog or a cat,” Goodall later observed, “and not know perfectly well that animals have personalities and minds and feelings. You know it and I think every single one of those scientists knew it, too, but because they couldn't prove it, they didn't talk about it.”

Today, the pendulum has swung in the other direction. Scientists speak without embarrassment about animal minds and consciousness. In popular writing on the subject, Skinner appears only as a villain. In his 2016 book *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?*, the primatologist Frans de Waal discusses a mid-20th-century experiment in which researchers at a primate centre in Florida, educated in Skinner's methods, tried to train chimps the way he had trained rats, by withholding food. “Expressing no interest in cognition – the existence of which they didn't even acknowledge,” De Waal writes, the researchers “investigated reinforcement schedules and the punitive effect of time-outs”. The staff of the primate centre rebelled and started feeding the chimps in secret, causing Skinner to lament that “tender-hearted colleagues frustrated efforts

Eyeline

A horse, pictured competing in the World Equestrian Games in France

RÉGIS DUVIGNAU/
REUTERS

to reduce chimpanzees to a satisfactory state of deprivation”. You could hardly ask for a better example of how the arrogance of reason leads to cruelty.

Meanwhile, animals without “rational souls” are capable of demonstrating admirable qualities such as patience and self-restraint. Among humans, the ability to sacrifice immediate pleasure for future gain is called resisting temptation, and is taken as a sign of maturity. But De Waal shows that even birds are capable of it. In one experiment, an African grey parrot named Griffin was taught that if he resisted the urge to eat a serving of cereal, he would be rewarded after an unpredictable interval with food he liked better, such as cashew nuts. The bird was able to hold out 90% of the time, devising ways to distract himself by talking, preening his feathers or simply throwing the cup of cereal across the room. Such behaviours, De Waal notes, are quite similar to what human children do in the face of temptation.

More intriguing than the convergences between human and animal behaviour, however, are the profound differences in the way we perceive and experience the world. The reason why an encounter with an octopus can be awe-inspiring is that two species endowed with different senses and brains inhabit the same planet but very different realities.

Take the sense of smell. As humans, we learn about our surroundings primarily by seeing and hearing, while our ability to detect odours is fairly undeveloped. For many animals, the reverse is true. In his 2022 book *An Immense World*, the science journalist Ed Yong writes about an experiment by the researcher Lucy Bates involving African elephants. Bates found that if she took urine from an elephant in the rear of a herd and spread it on the ground in front of the herd, the elephants reacted with bewilderment and curiosity, knowing that the individual's distinctive odour was coming from the wrong place. For them, a smell out of place was as fundamental a violation of reality as a ghostly apparition would be for us.

Animals that perceive the world through scent, such as dogs, even have a different sense of time. We often talk about the importance of “living in the moment”, but in fact we have no other choice; since visual information reaches us at the speed of light, what we see around us are things as they existed an infinitesimal fraction of a second ago. When a dog smells, however, it is “not merely assessing the present but also reading the past and divining the future”, Yong writes. Odour molecules from a person or another dog can linger in a room long after the source is gone, or waft ahead before it appears. When a dog perks up long before its owner walks through the front door, smell can seem like a psychic power.

If giraffes can do statistical reasoning and parrots understand the concept of the future, then where does the distinctiveness of the human mind really lie? One favourite candidate is what psychologists call “theory of mind” – the ability to infer that each person is their own “I”, with independent experiences and private mental states. In *The Book of Minds*, the science writer Philip Ball describes the classic experiment that tests the development of this ability in children. A child and an adult watch as an object is hidden under one of three cups. Then the adult leaves the room and the child sees a second adult come in and move the object so it's under a different cup.

When the first adult returns, where does the child



expect they will look for the object? Very young children assume that the adult will know its new location, just as they do. Starting around age four, however, children start to understand that the adult only knows what they have seen themselves, so they expect them to look under the original, now empty cup. “Indeed,” Ball writes, “they will often delight in the deception: in their knowing what others don’t.”

Developing a theory of mind is necessary because we can never know what is going on inside other people in the same immediate way we know ourselves. Sane adults take for granted that other people have the same kind of inner life they do, but this remains a kind of assumption. René Descartes was one of the first philosophers to wrestle with this problem, in the 17th century. “What do I see from the window but hats and coats which may cover automatic machines?” he asked. “Yet I judge these to be men.” But Descartes didn’t extend the same benefit of the doubt to animals. Even more than Skinner, he saw them as automata without any inner experience, “*bêtes-machines*”. Ball notes that Descartes dissected live animals to study the circulation of the blood, “and dismissed any cries of pain that procedure elicited as a mere mechanical response, not unlike the screech of a poorly oiled axle”.

Four centuries later, De Waal complains that science still hasn’t overcome the tendency to draw a dividing line between the inner lives of humans and those of other creatures. The reason that scientists have focused on theory of mind, De Waal believes, is because no animal has been shown to possess it. Such “interspecific bragging contests”, he writes, are designed to flatter our sense of superiority. In fact, it seems that even here we’re not clear winners. According to Ball, recent attempts to replicate the theory-of-mind experiment with chimps and bonobos suggest that the majority of them pass the test, though the evidence is ambiguous: since the subjects can’t talk, researchers gauge their expectations by tracking their eye movements.

Even if other species were conclusively found to possess a theory of mind, of course, it would not challenge our monopoly on the kind of “rational soul” that produced the pyramids and monotheism, the theory of evolution and the intercontinental ballistic missile. As long as these quintessentially human accomplishments remain our standard for intellectual capacity, our place at the top of the mental ladder is assured.

But are we right to think of intelligence as a ladder in the first place? Maybe we should think, instead, in terms of what Ball calls “the space of possible minds” – the countless potential ways of understanding the world, some of which we may not even be able to imagine. In mapping this space, which could theoretically include computer and extra-

terrestrial minds as well as animal ones, “we are currently no better placed than the pre-Copernican astronomers who installed the Earth at the centre of the cosmos and arranged everything else in relation to it”, Ball observes. Until we know more about what kinds of minds are possible, it is sheer hubris to set up our own as the standard of excellence.

Xenophanes, a pre-Socratic philosopher, observed that if horses and oxen could draw pictures, they would make the gods look like horses and oxen. Similarly, if non-human beings could devise a test of intelligence, they might rank species according to, say, their ability to find their way home from a distance unaided. Bees do this by detecting magnetic fields, and dogs by following odours, while most modern humans would be helpless without a map or a GPS. “Earth is bursting with animal species that have hit on solutions for how to live a good life in ways that put the human species to shame,” Gregg says.

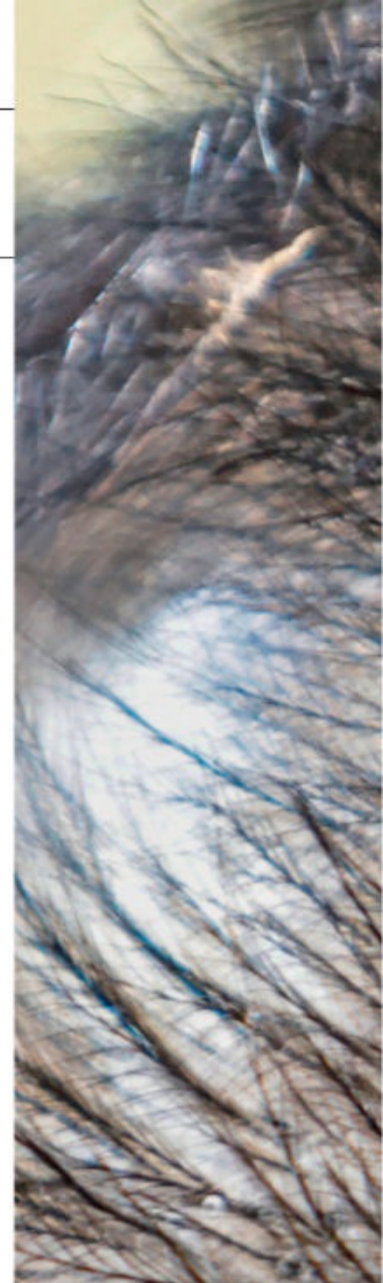
But if human and animal minds are so essentially different that we can never truly understand one another, then a troubling thought arises: we would be less like neighbours than inmates who occupy separate cells in the same prison. The kind of understanding Foster achieved with his octopus, or Goodall with her chimpanzees, would have to be written off as an anthropomorphising illusion, just as Skinner warned.

The possibility of true interspecies understanding is the subject of Thomas Nagel’s landmark 1974 essay *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?*, to which every writer on animal cognition pays their respects, sometimes wearily. Nagel, an American philosopher, concluded that humans can never really understand a bat’s inner experience. Even if I try to picture what it’s like to fly on webbed wings and hang upside down, all I can imagine is what it would be like for me to be a bat, not what it’s like for a bat to be a bat.

For Nagel, this conclusion has implications beyond animal psychology. It proves that mental life can never be reduced to things we can observe from the outside, whether that means the way we behave or the pattern of electrical impulses in our neurons. Subjectivity, what it feels like to exist, is so profoundly different from what we can observe scientifically that the two realms can’t even be described in the same language.

Few people have ever taken the challenge of Nagel’s essay as literally as Charles Foster in his 2016 book *Being a Beast*. A barrister and academic by profession, Foster set himself the challenge of entering the mental worlds of five animal species by living as much like them as possible. To be a fox, he writes: “I lay in a back yard in Bow, foodless and drinkless, urinating and defecating where I was, waiting for the night and treating as hostile the humans in the row houses all around.” To be a badger, he dug a trench in the side of a hill and lived inside it with his young son Tom, eating earthworms and inhaling dust. “Tom was filling tissues with silica and blood for a week,” Foster notes.

Foster welcomes all this damage and discomfort, but not in the spirit of a scientist doing fieldwork. Rather, he evokes the medieval flagellants who covered their backs with welts to purge themselves of sin. That Foster defines sin as a transgression against nature rather than God doesn’t make the concept any less religious. “Evolutionary biology is a numinous statement of the interconnectedness of things,” he writes, and his preaching translates easily into Christian terms: “Say, with Saint Francis, ‘Hello, Brother Ox,’ and mean it,” he demands.



Looking on
An emu at
Taronga zoo
in Sydney

JENNY EVANS/
GETTY



The octopus mind evolved differently. It makes sense of the world in ways we can barely imagine



Foster's way of seeking communion with the animals may be extreme, at times comically so, but his basic impulse is shared by many of today's students of animal cognition, and an increasing number of laypeople as well. Encountering an animal mind can perform the same function as a great work of art or a religious experience: it makes the familiar strange, reminding us that reality encompasses far more than we ordinarily think.

The great difference is that while a traditional religious experience can awaken human beings to God, an animal epiphany can awaken us to the fullness of this world. "What she taught me was to feel that you're part of this place, not a visitor," Foster says in the closing lines of *My Octopus Teacher*, and by "this place" he doesn't just mean a particular kelp forest, but the Earth itself. At first this might sound like an odd realisation: where else would human beings belong if not on our one and only planet?

But in the 21st century, it is clearly becoming harder for us to think of ourselves as genuinely belonging to the Earth. Whether we look back on our long history of driving other species to extinction, or forward to a future in which we extinguish ourselves through climate breakdown, many humans now see humanity as the greatest danger facing the Earth - a cancer that grows without limit, killing its host.

It is no coincidence that, at the same moment, tech visionaries have begun to think about our future in extra-terrestrial terms. Earth may be where humanity happened to evolve, they say, but our destiny calls us to other worlds. Elon Musk founded SpaceX in 2002 with the explicit goal of hastening humanity's colonisation of Mars. Other "trans-humanist" thinkers look forward to a fully virtual future, in which our minds leave our bodies behind and achieve immortality in the form of electromagnetic pulses.

These projects sound futuristic, but they are best understood as new expressions of a very old human anxiety.

**500
million**

The thinking power, in neurons, of an octopus; two-thirds of this is in its limbs not in its brain

We have always suffered from metaphysical claustrophobia - the sense that a cosmos containing no minds but our own was intolerably narrow. That is why, since prehistoric times, humans have populated Earth with other kinds of intelligences - from gods and angels to fairies, forest spirits and demons. All premodern cultures took the existence of such non-human minds for granted. In medieval Europe, Christian and Greek philosophical ideas gave rise to the doctrine of the "great chain of being", which held that the universe is populated by an unbroken series of creatures, all the way from plants at the bottom to God at the apex. Humanity stood in the middle, more intelligent than the animals but less than the angels, who came in many species, with different powers and purviews.

Filling the universe with hypothetical minds, superior to our own in wisdom and goodness, helps relieve our species' loneliness, giving us beings we could talk to, think about and strive to emulate. Our need for that kind of company in the universe hasn't gone away, though today we prefer to fill the region "above" us in the space of possible minds with advanced extraterrestrials and superpowered AIs - beings that are just as hypothetical as seraphim and cherubim, at least so far.

Our rising interest in animal minds can be seen as a way of filling in the regions "below" us as well. If an octopus is like an intelligent alien, as Godfrey-Smith writes, then we don't need to scan the skies so anxiously for an actual extraterrestrial. Yong quotes Elizabeth Jakob, an American spider expert, to the same effect: "We don't have to look to aliens from other planets ... We have animals that have a completely different interpretation of what the world is right next to us." Perhaps simply knowing that these other minds exist can help us make peace with the limitations of our own ●

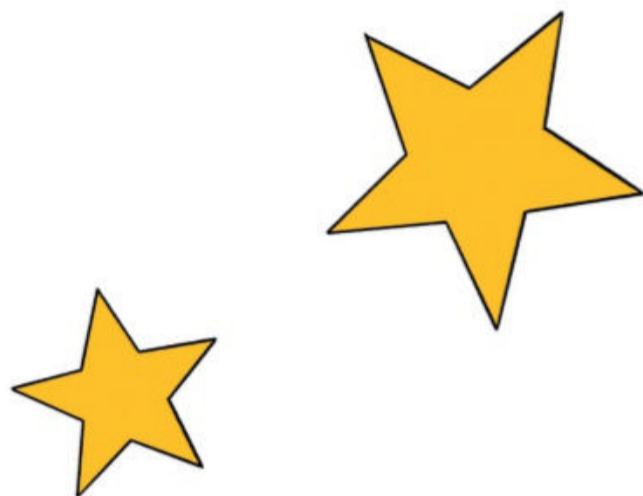
ADAM KIRSCH IS A POET AND LITERARY CRITIC

How
THE
PODCAST
CHANGED
POD
CULTURE

A vibrant, comic-style graphic with the text "How THE PODCAST CHANGED POD CULTURE" in bold, colorful, 3D block letters. The background is dark blue. Decorative elements include a laughing emoji, a large open mouth with a tongue sticking out, a magnifying glass over the letter "P" in "POD", a yellow star, a yellow starburst, a yellow star, and a yellow megaphone at the bottom right.

📺 Breakthrough

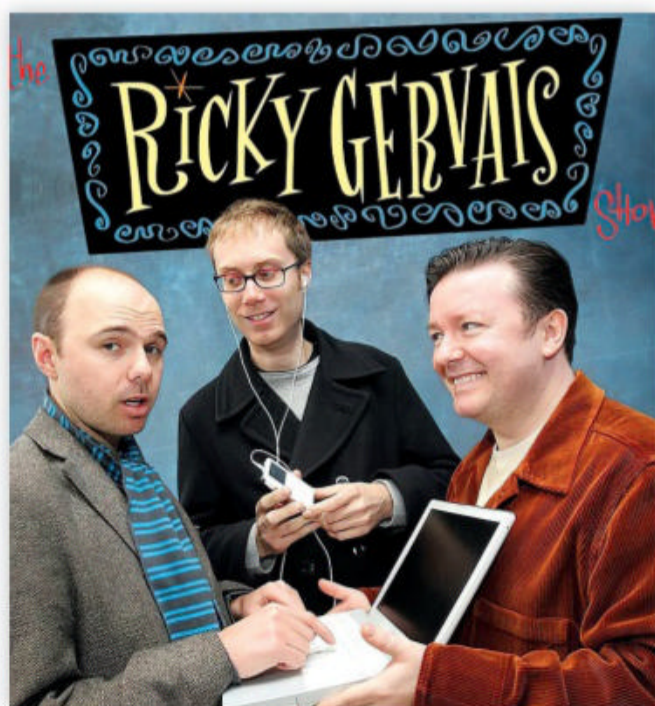
A This American Life spin-off, Serial (est 2014) gave investigative journalism new mass appeal



In 20 years, podcasting has upended pop culture in countless, unexpected ways – whether that's making comedy less gladiatorial, musicians more available, or giving us more content dedicated to our favourite things

By Rachel Aroesti

Illustrations by Toby Triumph



📺 Top of the pods

The Ricky Gervais Show was hosted by the Guardian in 2005. By the next year, it was the most popular podcast in the world

D

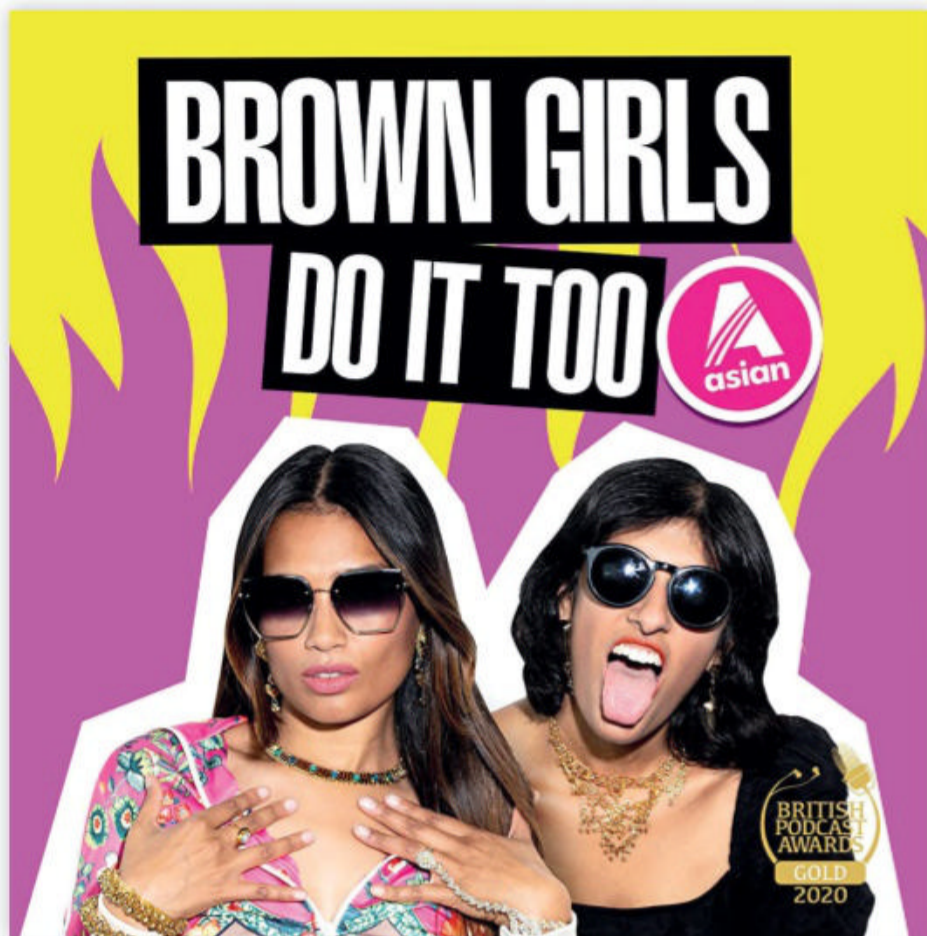
o you remember life before podcasts? Yes, obviously, is likely to be the short answer. Podcasting is still a relatively youthful medium, after all. In fact, it is exactly 20 years since the format's invention: Open Source – a politics and culture discussion show hosted by the journalist Christopher Lydon – debuted in 2003, and is widely considered the first-ever podcast. (Not that it was called podcasting at that point; the term was coined the following year by Ben Hammersley in an article for the Guardian.)

Yet if you are one of the many millions of people around the world who listen to podcasts – and especially if you're a heavy user like me (I listen while I am cleaning, cooking, eating, walking, on the bus, having a bath – essentially anything that doesn't require me to be producing words) – the art form will have subtly but comprehensively changed the flavour of your everyday life. For many of us, podcasts have become constant companions, fostering parasocial relationships, exposing us to candid conversations and unearthing thrilling, sometimes salacious, stories.

During their short lifespan – to put it in perspective, we are at the equivalent of 1950 where TV drama is concerned, and 1912 for widely available recorded music – podcasts have loudly made their presence felt. But their impact has stretched far beyond the podcast app on your phone. The form is also waging a stealthy campaign to remake pop culture: nudging comedy, television, film, celebrity and even music in new directions.

What was the first podcast you listened to? For a lot of people,





Laugh out loud

Podcasting has brought new levels of intimacy to the world of comedy, with series such as Poppy Jay and Rubina Pabani's *Brown Girls Do It Too*, and Rob Beckett and Josh Widdicombe's *Parenting Hell*



Instead of edginess, disruption and discomfort, podcasts rely on intimacy and repetition



myself included, the answer will be *The Ricky Gervais Show*. An edited, downloadable follow-up to the XFM radio programme Gervais presented alongside Stephen Merchant and Karl Pilkington, it was first released in 2005 via the Guardian's website. (Its on-demand delivery method is perhaps the most obvious factor that distinguishes a podcast from a radio show.) By 2006, *The Ricky Gervais Show* was the world's most popular podcast, averaging 261,670 downloads per week.

In a sense, we have barely moved on. That show's setup - comedically gifted pals shooting the proverbial - remains one of the most popular approaches for a hit podcast (*Parenting Hell*, *My Therapist Ghosted Me*, and *Wolf and Owl* are all fixtures of the podcasting top 10). And yet, in the intervening years, the podcast has transformed the comedy world itself.

While Gervais and Merchant were far from outsiders - having created one of the decade's biggest sitcoms, *The Office* - their model ended up breaking down barriers in the industry. Podcasts are generally a DIY medium and there are no official gatekeepers. "The beauty of podcasts is anyone can do it; you're not a slave to the commissioning process or doing it through the lens of an exec who doesn't really understand the lived experiences of a community," says Poppy Jay, a co-host of the award-winning *Brown Girls Do It Too*.

When they were growing up, Jay and her co-host, Rubina Pabani - who both have a background in factual TV production - felt comedy was something for other people. A perfect storm of British Asian familial expectations - being a comedian "is not even on the ticket", says Jay - and the very male Bollywood slapstick and aggressively white and male British standup they were exposed to growing up ("We always talk about how Jim Davidson was *the* idea of who should be funny") meant they "had no idea" who could make an entrance to that arena, says Pabani.

In short, were it not for podcasts, there is no way the pair would have found themselves professionally engaged in the business of making people laugh. And they inarguably are: last year, they embarked on a nationwide tour of the podcast's stage show, an hour of skits, storytelling and conversation. Now, Jay and Pabani are keen to continue down this road; their latest ambition is to perform standup as a double act.

Live podcasts attract punters "who have never come to see a live comedy show before", says Ophelia Francis, the head of live comedy at London venues 2Northdown and 21Soho. It follows that they also tend to be the most reliably popular events; "some of the biggest and quickest-selling shows that we've had at the venues". The accessible nature of podcasts means they attract a large audience keen to repay the hosts for all the hitherto free entertainment, and see a comedy show they are guaranteed to connect with thanks to their existing intimacy with the performers.

Often these live podcasts translate to bigger gigs than already successful comedian hosts would have sold in their day jobs: the wildly successful *Parenting Hell* podcast, presented by Rob Beckett and Josh Widdicombe, has recently been on an arena tour. Even the guests on high-profile podcasts such as *Off Menu* get a big boost to ticket sales, says Francis.

Podcasts haven't just ballooned audiences; they have helped change the content and tone of comedy. The medium is part of a shift away from the gladiatorial nature of 00s comedy, with its unforgiving club audiences and brutal panel shows, to an overtly friendlier world (most chat podcasts double as performative friendships). Ben Williams, the producer of James Acaster and Ed Gamble's *Off Menu*, one of the UK's most popular podcasts (where fans will know Williams as the Great Benito), agrees that podcasts have helped change the tenor of comedy from combative to collaborative. "That's the key difference: no one's trying to win anything on *Off Menu*."

As opposed to edginess, disruption and discomfort, podcasts rely on intimacy, repetition and familiarity. As Williams points out,

“podcasts are full of in-jokes where the more you’ve listened and the more you’ve engaged with it, the more you’re rewarded”. This high-exposure, high-volume model works better when the comedy stems not from finessed jokes but from comedians sharing cathartically frank revelations along with the humdrum minutiae of their lives. The classic sound engineer’s mic check question – “What did you have for breakfast?” – now counts as content.

When I spoke to Parenting Hell’s Widdicombe last year, he said the podcast had led to a broader shift in his approach: rather than his previous specialism of deliberately impersonal observational comedy, he found audiences responded better to something more direct and unfiltered. “When you’re talking more about your worries and your struggles, people respond in a completely different way. It took me 12 years to realise that I’m much funnier when I’m being honest about my life. So now I try to take that into other things.”

Podcasting has blurred the edges of the comic form itself: you don’t have to be a comedian to do comedy any more, and if you are a comedian, you no longer have to tell jokes to make audiences laugh and – perhaps more importantly – love you.

If The Ricky Gervais Show was not your gateway podcast, Serial probably was. Debuting in 2014, it followed journalist Sarah Koenig investigating the 1999 murder of Hae Min Lee, breaking records by becoming the first podcast to top 5m downloads that year. The following year it won a Peabody award and, in 2023, Adnan Syed, the man serving a life sentence for Lee’s murder, was released after the show highlighted flaws in the original case (though a Maryland appeals court has reinstated the murder conviction and Syed’s legal status remains uncertain).

Since Serial’s release, there have been multiple reports of impending TV adaptations, none of which have yet made it to air. But TV platforms – especially in the US – are increasingly busy with podcast adaptations. Aaron Hart is the head of TV and film at US firm Wondery; his job is to “transition” the podcast company’s true-crime – or “true-crime-adjacent” – wares into scripted series; previous star-studded successes have included The Shrink Next Door and Dr Death. For commissioners, the appeal of this podcast-to-drama model is myriad. Podcasts act as “proof of concept”, he says, demonstrating the story’s “basis of structure” and “propulsive narrative” – both crucial for binge-friendly streaming material.

Another advantage is the meticulous research that goes into producing a high-quality factual podcast (Wondery’s typically take six to nine months to make), which results in more richly detailed drama, says Hart. He also points out that he is often able to start the pitching process with A-list talent – who were won over by the original podcast – already on board.

All of this makes podcast adaptations attractive for networks and streaming platforms. Hart says a hit podcast’s “built-in audience” is also appealing, but doesn’t that mean the target viewership is already familiar with the plot? “It’s more insight: seeing how a certain event told within a podcast can be filled out more on the television side,” says Hart. “Audiences want to learn everything they can behind these stranger-than-fiction stories.”

“Everything” is the operative word. The true-crime boom has led to the same stories being told many times, over podcasts, documentaries, scripted dramas and multiple articles. Now, the trend is extending beyond known criminals and into the world of business: last year’s hit podcast-to-TV adaptations included Hart’s WeCrashed (about the fall of WeWork) and The Dropout (about fraudulent medical startup Theranos). This year, film is getting in on the act. The Ben Affleck movie Air chronicles the inception of Air Jordans; the rise and fall of BlackBerry has been dramatised; and Eva Longoria makes her film-directing debut with Flamin’ Hot, the origin story of the Cheetos flavour of the same name (yes, really).

The podcast model has popularised the documentation then



Most wanted
Dr Death is one of the many true crime or 'true crime-adjacent' podcasts picked up for TV or film adaptation

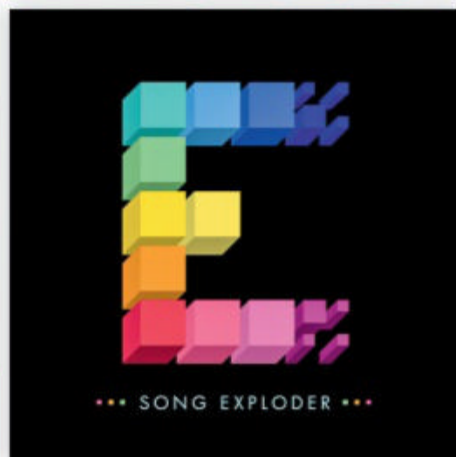
dramatisation of real stories, something that alongside the glut of reboots, prequels, adaptations and brand spin-offs forms part of a movement the New Yorker exasperatedly christened “the numbing rise of IP [intellectual property] TV”. All this repetition serves to highlight any small scrap of novelty. Like the comedian dropping a tiny but hitherto private snippet of information in a chat pod, if an adaptation can unearth even one unexplored detail, that may be enough to sate audiences.

Ruth Barnes is the director of Chalk & Blade, one of the UK’s first podcast-specific production companies. Its Obsessed With episodes act as companion shows for various BBC dramas, from Happy Valley to Killing Eve. Part of the aforementioned trend for wringing every last scrap of content from a story – in this case a fictional one – the podcast plays into the sort of pop culture fandom that was once the preserve of hardcore enthusiasts but is now pitched towards mass consumption. The internet may be responsible for making pop-culture geekery more intense and accessible, but podcasts have made it a form of entertainment. Barnes thinks the medium is uniquely suited to the job. “People have always wanted that much detail but there wasn’t the right medium. Now we have this medium that allows you to Hoover up as much as you want whenever you want and you don’t have to be sat still doing it.”

Podcasts cater to the part-time nerd, dedicated to soaking up knowledge ambiently. That’s because they are designed for passive consumption; a cause and symptom of our cracked attention spans, perfect for the age of optimisation and the cult of busyness. But podcasts are by no means background noise. They work hard to be engaging, often doing so using a strong authorial voice. Sometimes literally: just behind popularising true-crime podcasts and helping overturn a murder conviction, host Koenig’s distinctive vocal fry is Serial’s third most important legacy.

According to Jonny Taylor, the director of original documentary film at Netflix, “the relationship between podcasts and documentaries is completely symbiotic”. Podcasts “tend to have a real sense of journalistic voice”. When making the lockdown smash Tiger King, his team “spoke about podcasts lots. The whole way Tiger King is set up is like an investigation; someone started a journey not knowing where it was going to go. What podcasts have done is put that front and centre and really allow the listener to engage in that quest with the presenter.”





Podcasts have put investigation front and centre – allowing the listener to engage in the quest

Inside story

Some podcasts are companions to TV dramas, while others take listeners inside the creative processes in industries such as music or journalism



This combination of the author's journey coming to the fore and a move away from fancy production is linked: podcasts have encouraged pop culture to show its workings. On investigative podcasts such as *The Trojan Horse Affair* and *Sweet Bobby*, hosts narrate their journalistic triumphs and failures in what feels like real time (doorstepping someone who isn't home, unearthing an overlooked document).

It applies to music, too. *Song Exploder*, arguably the world's most successful music podcast, takes the form of a hyper-detailed making-of guided by the track's creator(s). On each episode of *Norah Jones Is Playing Along*, the singer-songwriter chats and jams with a fellow musician (guests have included Logic, Mavis Staples and Jeff Tweedy).

"We're letting the listener in on [the process of music-making] instead of trying to polish it up," says Jones. "There's mistakes in every one." Ideas from the collaborations – such as "different chord changes people come up with" – then find their way back into her solo output.

Demystification of music itself isn't the only advantage to an artist of having a podcast. Social media fuels pop fandom, yet it is often a highly manipulative and strangely opaque medium, whereas podcasts offer an opportunity to connect with supporters in a more comprehensive way: alongside Jones, pop stars with pods include George Ezra, Dua Lipa and Tom Grennan. "I do think if people are listening to it they get a better idea of who I am than probably ever in my career, through any other thing," says Jones.

Widdicombe, who also interviews celebrities on *Parenting Hell*, believes the podcast is the best place for honest conversation. "People give much better interviews on podcasts than you would ever see on TV. They're longer-form so it can be much more meandering, there's no studio audience you're worrying about and also, by dint of it not feeling like it's being filmed, I think people open up a lot more."

Podcasting is altering pop culture in interlaced and often rather ambivalent ways. It is making the arts more meritocratic and transparent, by exposing creative processes. By the same token, it thrives on candour – or at least the impression of it – meaning that, in every discipline, intimacy is becoming a must-have rather than a USP. Podcasts have also helped create a burgeoning class of casually obsessive consumers, searching for fresh crumbs of information thanks to an overexposure to the same true-crime (-adjacent) stories or the same hosts discussing their lives each week. That repetition also fuels a risk-averse TV landscape – where commissioners can hear their shows in full before they make them – and comedy world, where invention is superseded by familiarity.

Where do we go from here? According to numerous reports, we have reached "peak podcast", but the narrative is iffy. The *New York Times* sounded the alarm back in 2019, citing the huge quantity of shows being launched each month – but listenership has practically doubled since. This year, the idea that the overinflated podcast bubble is set to burst gained traction again, with *Vulture*'s Nicholas Quah warning that "2023 is going to hurt".

Yet even if the format does dwindle (which is highly unlikely; experts are forecasting continued audience growth), podcasts are already ahead of the game. For those invested in the industry's future, this is not a format with potentially fluctuating popularity, but a state of mind. Barnes considers them "more of an aesthetic" than a medium. "It's a freedom of speech thing, you can go deep and not be worried about being edited."

Next, she is focusing on podcasts as a visual format, rather than an audio one (already, filmed versions of quite a few podcasts are available to watch on YouTube). "Podcasts have got to be platform agnostic, but the content's got to be true to the core of what has made them so engaging, which is deeply personal and very authentic." With that increasingly elastic definition in mind, perhaps podcasts won't continue to influence pop culture – maybe they'll simply become it ●

RACHEL AROESTI IS A JOURNALIST SPECIALISING IN POP CULTURE

ROWAN ATKINSON

Our honeymoon
with electric cars
may be ending

Page 48 →

Opinion



EUROPE

*Europe's lurch to the right rolls on.
Only unity on the left can stop it*

Simon Tisdall



Illustration Bill Bragg

Why does the left keep losing? It's not a question liberals and progressives particularly want to confront, but look around. Reactionary parties of the political right and far right are once more on the rise and on the march across Europe, as shown again by last month's lopsided election results in Spain and Italy.

Each country is different, its circumstances unique. Yet a broad pattern is discernible. The common denominator is that parties of the European left, hard and soft, are too fractured and fractious to build winning coalitions that offer convincing alternative solutions to voters' problems. Like Spain and Italy, recent election outcomes in Greece, Turkey and Finland suggest the dominant issues for electorates are the cost of living, energy and inflation. Other shared worries include security, migration, climate and environment, and national identity.

In all these polls, rightwingers won outright or surged ahead. And it's not a new development. France's far-right leader, Marine Le Pen, gained a record 41.5% support in last year's presidential runoff. In Rome last autumn, Giorgia Meloni's "post-fascist" Brothers of Italy swept to national power. In Germany, Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats cling on, trailing far behind the opposition.

It's not as though rightwing conservatives, populists, nationalists and assorted radicals and extremists have all the answers. Anything but. Where they hold office, as in the UK, Hungary and Poland, they are often clueless and divided, too. But centrist and leftist parties are struggling to convince voters they can do any better.

In Greece last month, Kyriakos Mitsotakis's scandal-hit centre-right New Democracy party appeared vulnerable. Yet by stressing economic stability and vowing implacable hostility to migrants, it won more than double the votes of its leftist rival Aléxis Tsípras's Syriza, whose efforts to woo the centre ground flopped badly.

Hailing last month's Italian regional and municipal poll successes as proof her 2022 victory was no fluke, a gloating Meloni proclaimed the death of the left. "The centre-right ... confirms its consensus among the Italians, its entrenchment, its strength," she said. "There is a rightwing trend throughout the country," admitted Carlo Calenda of Italy's liberal Action party.

How may this Europe-wide tendency be reversed? Maybe resurrection for the left will be found in the example of Pedro Sánchez, Spain's prime minister and Socialist Workers' party (PSOE) leader. After crushing

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It's not as if rightwing conservatives, populists and assorted radicals and extremists have all the answers

poll setbacks in regions and cities last month, he called a snap general election for July. Sánchez hopes to force a showdown, offering voters a clear choice between a prospective alliance of the conservative People's party and the far-right Vox party, and a moderate, progressive PSOE-led coalition. It's a gamble.

His ultimatum also challenges Spain's divided left to get its act together. Both the populist, anti-austerity party, Podemos, and the new Sumar alliance are struggling to be heard. Vox, the third largest party nationally and distorting echo chamber for the Francisco Franco fascist era, trebled its share of councillors last month. Its success partly relies on a favoured hard-right tactic, used across Europe: the weaponisation of ethnic, racial, gender and regional difference. The first to congratulate Vox were Meloni and Hungary's autocrat, Viktor Orbán.

In trying to rally the left, Sánchez seeks to expose his opponents' divisiveness and hate-mongering. An alternative approach to neutralising the right is to absorb it - as attempted last month by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the Turkish opposition's presidential candidate. A veteran of many battles to unseat Turkey's authoritarian leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Kılıçdaroğlu is known for his support for religious toleration, inclusive approach to a Kurdish minority often demonised by the president, and open-minded, secularist and reformist outlook.

Yet in a desperate attempt to defeat Erdoğan in last month's second-round runoff, he cut a deal with an ultranationalist party and vowed to deport all 3.6 million Syrian refugees within a year. He also agreed not to reinstate elected Kurdish mayors deposed and jailed by Erdoğan - a betrayal of his Kurdish voters. He still lost.

Erdoğan's victory is largely explained by reliance on another rightwing electoral staple - the fear factor. Fear of foreigners, of the enemy within, of the other, of difference, apostasy, chaos, terror - it's an ugly tool exploited by far-right demagogues everywhere in lieu of honest argument.

In Finland's April election, scare tactics worked well for the radical nationalist-populist, anti-migrant Finns party. With 20% of the vote, it came second to the rightwing National Coalition party and is again on the brink of power. The highest-profile loser was the prime minister, Sanna Marin, darling of Europe's social democratic left. But Finland loses, too. Its next government may be the most regressively conservative since 1945. As was the

case in next-door Sweden after last year's election, the far right makes the political weather these days.

Orbán's law-breaking, minority-bashing, Russia-loving Hungarian regime is due to assume the rotating EU presidency next year. It dramatises the wider peril of the right's pan-European resurgence. Standoffs, disruption and a divisive boycott of daily EU business loom.

The radical right's resilience should ring alarm bells in Britain, too. By shifting rightwards in hopes of winning power, Starmer's Labour risks empowering its opponents. Better to draw a line like Sánchez, then set one's own agenda and trust voters to decide. Unity, plus well-defined, principled policy programmes, is the way the left stops losing - and learns to win again ● *Observer*

CULTURE

Fairytales reflect the morals of the age. It's no sin to rewrite them

Martha Gill



Should we update classic stories with modern morals? Two film-based kerfuffles have reopened the question. Reports that the next James Bond “won’t be white” have provoked a backlash, as did the launch of Disney’s *The Little Mermaid*, which features a black Ariel.

Negative “review bombing” of the film, which has been the target of criticism since its lead actor, Halle Bailey, was announced, caused the Internet Movie Database to make a rare intervention and change its ratings system. There is abhorrent racism on show here, but alongside it is a broader argument that 21st-century mores – diversity, sexual equality and so on – should not be shoehorned into old stories.

General outrage greeted “woke” updates to Roald Dahl books this year, and still periodically erupts over Disney remakes, most recently a forthcoming film with a Latina actor as Snow White, and a new Peter Pan & Wendy with “lost girls”. But updating classics is a part of literary culture. While the larger portion of the literary canon is carefully preserved, a slice of it has always been more flexible, to be reshaped as times change.

Fairytales have been updated for many hundreds of years. Cult figures such as Dracula, Frankenstein and Sherlock Holmes fit there too, as do superheroes. And so does Bond: the dramatic tension between James – a young cosmopolitan “dinosaur” – and the passing of time has always been part of the fun.

This tradition is a historical record of sorts. Look at the

fairy story through the ages and you get a twisty tale of dubious progress, a moral journey through the woods. You could say fairytales have always been politically correct – tweaked to reflect whatever morals a given cohort of parents most wanted to teach their children.

The earliest known versions were published in Venice in 1550, the cautionary tales of peasants in all their rapey gore – and then in the 1700s adapted by French aristocracy, with posh characters and upper-class mores. (An earlier version of Cinderella, in which she murders her stepmother, manipulates her father and requests magical help to meet the prince, was updated in the 1700s to make her more virtuously passive.)

By the 18th century, fairytales had gone out of fashion again; they were too pagan and otherworldly. Then came the Grimm brothers with their own moral agenda: patriotism. They sought to shore up German national identity by laying claim to “foundational” folk tales, adding dashes of local culture. They kept the violence, for authenticity, but cut out the sex.

Hans Christian Andersen reworked them with a streak of puritanism, forcing them in line with Christian values (obedience to your parents was a running theme). Then came Disney to take out the last remaining nasty bits and insert the morals of the day. Witness a (woke?) leap between 1950’s *Cinderella* and 1991’s *Beauty and the Beast*: the former embraces marriage

✱ **Martha Gill**
is an *Observer*
columnist

as female destiny; the latter puts up a weak fight, at least in the first few scenes. In the 1970s, second-wave feminism stamped itself on the

fairy tale, with burlesque rewrites, Angela Carter at the helm. And then in the 00s came racial diversity: 2009 saw Disney’s first black princess.

Those who demand fairytales stay “exactly as they were” are searching for a point in history that never existed. These folk stories have always been on the move, flitting from one incarnation to another.

In older Bond films, women tended to be ditzes – it was only in the 1990s that capable Bond girls appeared. Female secretaries have become full-blown agents, and non-white characters have climbed the hierarchy.

The idea that we are pasting over history is wrongheaded too. It is not as if old films or books have been burned, wiped from the internet or removed from libraries. With today’s propensity for writing things down, common since the 1500s, there is no reason to fear losing the “original” stories.

As for the suggestion that minority groups should make their own stories instead – this is a sly form of exclusion. Ancient universities and gentlemen’s clubs once made similar arguments; why couldn’t exiled individuals simply set up their own versions?

But here’s a thought to console those torn between tradition and progress: “quintessential” European folk tales already have roots outside the continent. After all, stories told by wildly different cultures often have striking similarities. Last month, the “very English” Beatrix Potter was accused of owing much to African folk tales – if true, this could do with some greater publicity. Ethnic diversity is not so modern after all ● *Observer*



TRANSPORT

I love electric cars and was an early adopter. But I'm feeling duped

Rowan Atkinson

Electric motoring is a subject about which I should, in theory, know something. My first university degree was in electrical and electronic engineering, with a subsequent master's in control systems. Combine this, perhaps surprising, academic pathway with a lifelong passion for the motorcar, and you can see why I was drawn into an early adoption of electric vehicles. I bought my first hybrid 18 years ago and my first pure electric car nine years ago and (notwithstanding the UK's poor electric charging infrastructure) have enjoyed my time with both. Electric vehicles may be a bit soulless, but they're

wonderful mechanisms: fast, quiet and, until recently, cheap to run. But increasingly, I feel duped. When you drill into the facts, electric motoring doesn't seem to be quite the environmental panacea to which it lays claim.

As you may know, the UK government has proposed a ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030. The problem with the initiative is that it seems to be based on conclusions drawn from only one part of a car's operating life: what comes out of the exhaust pipe. Electric cars, of course, have zero exhaust emissions, which is a welcome development, particularly in respect of air quality. But the bigger picture, which includes the car's manufacture, is different. In advance of the Cop26 climate conference in Glasgow in 2021, Volvo released figures claiming that greenhouse gas emissions during production of an electric car are 70% higher than when manufacturing a petrol one. How so? The problem lies with the lithium-ion batteries: they're heavy, many rare earth metals and huge amounts of energy are required to make them, and they only last about 10 years. It seems a perverse choice of hardware with which to lead the automobile's fight against the climate crisis.

Unsurprisingly, a lot of effort is going into finding something better. New, so-called solid-state batteries are being developed that should charge more quickly and could be about a third of the weight of the current

Illustration R Fresson

ones - but they are years away from being on sale. Hydrogen is emerging as an interesting alternative fuel, even though we are slow in developing a truly “green” way of manufacturing it. Such a system weighs half of an equivalent lithium-ion battery and you can refuel with hydrogen as fast as you can with petrol.

If the lithium-ion battery is an imperfect device for cars, it’s a complete non-starter for trucks because of its weight. JCB, which makes those yellow diggers, has made huge strides with hydrogen engines and hopes to begin production within a couple of years. If hydrogen wins the race to power trucks and filling stations stock it, it could become a popular choice for cars.

But let’s zoom out further and consider the whole life cycle of an automobile. The biggest problem we need to address in society’s relationship with the car is the “fast fashion” sales culture that has been the commercial template of the industry for decades. On average, we only keep our new cars for three years, driven mainly by the ubiquitous three-year leasing model. This seems an outrageously profligate use of natural resources when you consider what great condition a three-year-old car is in. If the first owners kept their cars for five years, the CO₂ emissions associated with production would be vastly reduced. We would have the same mobility in slightly older cars.

We need also to acknowledge what a great asset we have in the cars that already exist (there are nearly 1.5bn worldwide). In terms of manufacture, these cars have paid their environmental dues and, although it is sensible to reduce our reliance on them, it would seem right to look carefully at ways of retaining them while lowering their polluting effect. Fairly obviously, we could use them less. As an environmentalist once said to me, if you really need a car, buy an old one and use it as little as possible. A sensible thing to do would be to speed the development of synthetic fuel. The environmental problem with a petrol engine is the petrol, not the engine. Formula One is going to use synthetic fuel from 2026. With more development, it should be usable in all petrol-engine cars.

Increasingly, I’m feeling that our honeymoon with electric cars is coming to an end, and that’s no bad thing: we’re realising that a wider range of options need to be explored if we’re going to properly address the very serious environmental problems that our use of the motor car has created. We should keep developing hydrogen, as well as synthetic fuels, to save the scrapping of older cars that still have so much to give, while simultaneously promoting a quite different business model for the car industry, in which we keep our vehicles for longer.

Friends with an environmental conscience often ask me, as a car person, whether they should buy an electric car. I tend to say that if their car is an old diesel and they do a lot of city centre motoring, they should consider a change. But otherwise, hold fire for now. Electric propulsion will be of real, global environmental benefit one day, but that day has yet to dawn ●

Covid is no longer a global health emergency. But its impact will be felt for years

Once we could talk of nothing else. Now we barely speak of it at all. A leading Chinese epidemiologist has warned that there could be up to 65m cases of Covid-19 a week in his country by the end of June. Yet there appears to be little concern within China, and there is certainly little attention outside it. When the World Health Organization (WHO) declared last month that the Covid pandemic was no longer a global health emergency, the announcement was greeted with what seemed to be utter indifference.

A disease that claimed millions of lives, ravaged economies and upended societies has become an afterthought - though as the WHO’s director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, pointed out, it is still killing someone every three minutes.

But the silence is also, perhaps, a reflection of the pandemic’s enduring impact. It dominated our lives for so long that for many the instinctive reaction is to try to put it from their minds. The cost of living crisis, the war in Ukraine and the growing impact of the climate emergency have brought new worries.

To others, this silence can seem uncanny, even incomprehensible. On one estimate, 65 million people worldwide have experienced long Covid, though most have recovered. For those who are clinically vulnerable, the abandonment of precautions and lack of discussion of risks may make them feel less safe.


Health systems are struggling to recover. Tens of millions of children have

missed routine vaccinations. And economic consequences have played out around the world - bearing out a 2020 IMF analysis that found social unrest often arrives around a year after pandemics, because of lower economic growth and increased inequality.

A World Bank report released earlier this year warned of the decades-long consequences of reduced human capital. In Bangladesh, toddlers tested on their cognitive and social-emotional development in 2022 lagged far behind those tested pre-pandemic - a decline that the report suggests could translate into a 25% reduction in earnings as adults. The impacts were worse for children from poorer backgrounds. A global literacy survey has shown widespread significant declines in reading levels.

Amid the immense costs, there are perhaps some small gains. While mothers took on a disproportionate share of household labour in the pandemic, there are some signs that it may have encouraged a long-term shift towards greater paternal involvement in caregiving in the UK. Remote working has been a true boon to some employees.

Talking about what went right and wrong matters not only in trying to fix some of the ongoing damage from this pandemic, but also in preparing for the next one. It might allow us to better protect health workers or safeguard vulnerable children, minimise disruption to schooling or find better ways to ensure elderly people don’t lose social ties. Covid is still costing us. We should heed its lessons ●

50	<div>Opinion Letters</div> <div></div>				
WRITE TO US	<div><div>Letters for publication</div><div>weekly.letters@theguardian.com</div><div>Please include a full postal address and a reference to the article.</div><div>We may edit letters. Submission and publication of all letters is subject to our terms and conditions, see: THEGUARDIAN.COM/LETTERS-TERMS</div><div>Editorial</div><div>Editor: Graham Snowdon</div><div>Guardian Weekly, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU, UK</div><div>To contact the editor directly:</div><div>editorial.feedback@theguardian.com</div><div>Corrections</div><div>Our policy is to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please write to guardian.readers@theguardian.com or the readers' editor, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU, UK</div></div>	<div><div>The vital role played by immigrant professionals</div><div>The sound and fury over immigration is utterly wretched (Big story, 2 June). I am an immigrant. I arrived in the UK to study more than 20 years ago, and stayed on - to work, study some more, and then with settled status as the spouse of a British citizen.</div><div>The vitriol makes me feel more unwelcome now than at any time since I moved here. I wonder if those who recently took care of me as I had surgery feel the same way. Almost every step involved people who I think moved here as adults. And this is the thanks those professionals get: the "there are too many of you lot clogging up the system" venom, when in reality they are the ones propping up the whole edifice.</div><div>Priyanjali Malik London, England, UK</div><div>● I was going through my change when I came upon a 50p piece from the year 2020. The coin was inscribed with "Diversity built Britain". So much has changed in three years.</div><div>Peter Dewar London, England, UK</div><div>● Hannah Ellis-Petersen compares the number of Indian students choosing to go to the UK and those choosing the United States. This omits</div></div>	<div><div>an extremely popular destination for such students. Australia (like Canada) offers the same linguistic advantage and is considerably closer as well as being much less expensive.</div><div>Dr Juliet Flesch Kew, Victoria, Australia</div><div>Ministers need to swing into action over climate</div><div>"The fight to stay below 1.5C needs to feel like the next crusade," says Gaby Hinsliff (If swing voters took the climate crisis seriously, ministers would too, Opinion, 26 May). I agree - but dig a bit deeper into government messages and action. On the fight to make transport, homes and food zero carbon, the UK is frankly nowhere.</div><div>The worst-off half of the country is suffering from appalling bus services, impossible heating bills and shops where only unhealthy food is cheap. A lesson from the pandemic is about the power of having the government on TV every day, confirming the collective possibility of change. But our government has no intention of changing any of that, or of owning up to any problem, or investing in the quality of food, homes and transport to benefit people and planet. Who's going to tell the swing voters?</div><div>Jenny Patient Sheffield, England, UK</div></div>	<div><div>Building community action from the ground up</div><div>I was extremely heartened to read Sandra Laville's article about John Chweya building a coalition for global waste pickers (Scrap warrior, Spotlight, 19 May), who are responsible for most of our plastic "recycling".</div><div>I am sure people have thought about organising waste pickers from "the top", but a true coalition had to come from pickers themselves.</div><div>Joyce Yager Cashmere, Christchurch, New Zealand</div><div>Products of positivity can be seen around the world</div><div>Reading Polly Toynbee's analysis of the British class system brought back memories (Lessons from a privileged start in life, 26 May). I, too, grew up in the English middle class, but went to sea at 16. A dozen years later, I had married a local, so came ashore to live in New Zealand. I had thoughts of teaching but no university or training college qualifications. However, they were desperately short of teachers, so I eventually got a position no one else applied for; 34 years later I retired near the top of my profession.</div><div>I found in this country no particular class distinction. People were willing to let you have a go. It makes for self-reliant</div></div>	<div><div>and enterprising youngsters who can be found throughout the world, and they often have top jobs: one advantage of not being burdened with the cultural handicap that Polly Toynbee so accurately portrays.</div><div>Dennis Veal Timaru, Canterbury, New Zealand</div><div>Grate shop advice but you need to brie more realistic</div><div>In Kitchen aide (2 June), the final paragraph begins: "If you're still in any doubt, talk to your cheesemonger."</div><div>Cheesemonger? Where are they likely to be located - next to the candlestick maker?</div><div>Stupidest, and funniest, thing this week.</div><div>Janet Mattacks Barnston, England, UK</div><div>CORRECTIONS</div><div>A map of Turkey's presidential runoff results had the wrong legend (Spotlight, 2 June). Yellow areas were won by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and blue areas by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu.</div><div>It was emissions from power, not overall emissions, that the UK reduced faster than any other country between 2010 and 2020 (If swing voters took the climate crisis seriously, ministers would too, Opinion, 26 May).</div></div>
A WEEK IN VENN DIAGRAMS Edith Pritchett	<div><div>Global wealth concentrated in the hands of a few</div><div>Mugs in my bedroom</div><div>Hoarded to the detriment of everyone else</div></div>	<div><div>Boom in clean energy investment</div><div>Drunkenly putting a glass of water on your bedside table</div><div>Sadly not enough to reverse the damage done</div></div>	<div><div>Rishi trying to distance himself from Boris's government</div><div>Returning a scraped car to the car rental</div><div>Trying to pretend you played no part in it</div></div>		

STAGE

Actors dish the dirt on audiences that misbehave

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Culture

Freeze frames



How do the world's galleries stay fresh in shifting times?



By Vanessa
Thorpe

Everyone has a favourite. For some it might be John Singer Sargent's luminous 1885-6 image of two young girls hanging paper lanterns in a summer evening garden. Well, don't worry – despite all the fuss about Tate Britain's radical reorganisation, that pretty painting is still on the wall of the popular London art gallery.

Detractors of the big new rehang, such as the Guardian art critic Jonathan Jones, are accusing the gallery of instructing art lovers what to think. Others, in contrast, are praising curators for shaking up conventional views of British art and what it can show us.

One thing is certain, though: a collection built on the wealth of a colonial sugar merchant, and with a low proportion of female artists on show, had to find a fresh story to tell. So while Singer Sargent's well-to-do girls in their white summer dresses are still there, another striking lantern picture has joined the parade. Marianne Stokes's 1899 work, *A Fisher Girl's Light (A Pilgrim of Volendam Returning from Kevelaer)*, depicts a workaday scene in a poor girl's life from a female artist's perspective. What is more, the gallery is now boasting that, overall, half the contemporary works on show are by women.

The Tate rehang is one of a wave of important changes going on inside European and American art galleries and museums, as the heritage world shifts to reflect a wider range of contributors and address the glaring prejudices of the past. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, focus has moved from the Spanish master Diego Velázquez to the work of his enslaved Afro-Hispanic assistant, Juan de Pareja, an artist until now known largely only for the portrait painted of him.

"The Met's purchase of Velázquez's painting in 1971 made headlines, but scholars and the press said practically nothing about the man depicted," said David Pullins, an associate curator in the museum's department of European paintings, when the show opened last month.

And at the Hunterian, the London surgical museum, a recent rethink has altered its displays of anatomical oddities. The notorious Irish Giant, the huge skeleton of Charles Byrne, has been removed after 200 years and can now only be glimpsed in the background of a portrait of John Hunter, the man who bestowed the collection.

The museum also plans to run a string of "Hunterian Provocations" designed "to explore issues around the display of human remains and the acquisition of specimens during British colonial expansion".

Major museum rehangs, together with swings in emphasis, have always been staged periodically of course, sometimes controversially. But decisions being taken now are inevitably seen in the light of the "culture wars": battles being waged though no one claims to want to fight them.

The Financial Times welcomed the rehang of the Tate's free-to-view collection, but noted that the result "defiantly claims art as primarily social and political history". And among gallery visitors, the debate also seems to centre on how blunt the social arguments should be.

For Joy Francis, the executive director of Words of Colour and a co-curator at the Museum of Colour, a direct approach is a good thing. "Any attempt to redress inequity in arts and culture will get my attention," she said. "I'm glad Tate Britain has taken the steps to reflect artists of colour in its rehang and hope they will continue to step into the future embracing the reality of intersectionality. But it's also about what happens beyond the exhibition space in terms of [the] Tate's culture, approach to curation, commissioning

What's up and what's down



▲ Tate Britain, London

Hogarth's satires, including *O the Roast Beef of Old England*, are still on show but with added social context provided by a modern depiction of Georgian 'molly houses'.

GL ARCHIVE/ALAMY



▲ National Gallery, London

Two years ago, a refurbishment made room for the prominent display of a newly acquired work by Artemisia Gentileschi, *Esther Before Ahasuerus* (left), next to a work by her father, Orazio.

FACUNDO ARRIZABALAGA/EPA

and acquisition, which I hope will undergo its own radical revisioning and internal interrogation, so we hear different, bolder and less apologetic conversations about who is and isn't being represented in the art world."

Perhaps the most arresting changes at the Tate are the mini-interventions. Works by living artists have been dotted among the paintings from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, to highlight particular ideas and connections. A sculpture by Mona Hatoum underlines the contribution of migrant and refugee artists in Tudor Britain, while a drawing by Pablo Bronstein deliberately "resurfaces" the existence of queer communities in Georgian London.

For Jones, writing last month, the Tate's "worthy" efforts flow from the right set of principles but are "predictable and dull". "To try to pretend it still matters, Tate Britain ostentatiously 'rehangs' its collection every few years," he wrote. "Not a single such rehang has ever made a convincing, coherent case for British art - and the latest is no exception. Maybe it doesn't want to promote British art, for it seems to disapprove of much of it."

The use of Bronstein's modern treatment of molly houses to set a new context for Georgian work is a clear abuse for Jones. "What, for instance, has Tate Britain got against William Hogarth's pungent 18th-century satires that it has to 'correct' them with a contemporary piece by Pablo Bronstein celebrating Georgian London's molly houses?" he asked.

It was, however, Hogarth's 1748 painting *O the Roast Beef of Old England* that still held the attention of the renowned historian and presenter Simon Schama at a preview. Reserving judgment on the whole rehang, he pointed out that the resonant nationalist politics on display in the famous image of the gate of Calais, with its traditional side of beef apparently at the mercy of

hungry Frenchmen and sympathisers, while Hogarth has placed himself as an onlooker.

Politics is always in the texture of art, whether overtly or in the choice of subject and style. But Jones is concerned that artists with something blatantly political to say are being preferred to those with more oblique attitudes. He argues that the newly included work of the British women's rights campaigner Annie Swynnerton, while laudable, is not groundbreaking art.

Any rehang questions the purpose of a gallery: is it most important to offer challenging perspectives, to accurately represent the world or to showcase freewheeling talent? Such rival priorities are contested as much within the art world as by gallery-goers and probably always will be.

What we do get in the Tate rehang is a clear chronology. Not just in the progression of British art, but in an explicit timeline high on the wall of one gallery. The Grenadian uprising against British rule is marked up, nine years before the Battle of Trafalgar and 11 before the 1807 British ban on the trading of enslaved people.

Tim Marlow, chief executive of the Design Museum, is a fan of the Tate's latest exhibitions and regards it as natural that the same criteria apply to the permanent collection.

"The passion and shrillness of some of the responses just shows that people do still care," he said. "But looking at the past through the eyes of the present is a perfectly reasonable thing to do. Some inclusions may jar, but anything that makes you look again seems an intelligent thing to do."

"The suggestion that it's hectoring or that the labels are intrusive? Well, not at all. It's a broadly chronological look and there's a fluidity in the framework anyway that means that later sections can be added to or taken away from in the future." *Observer*

VANESSA THORPE IS THE OBSERVER'S ARTS CORRESPONDENT

Any shuffle of work on display questions the purpose of an art gallery: to offer a challenging perspective or to represent the world?



▲ Manchester Art Gallery

Curators took down *Hylas and the Nymphs* by Waterhouse for a time - the result of an intervention by the artist Sonia Boyce so the public could comment on its portrayal of topless female forms.

ALAMY



▲ Hunterian Museum, London

The Hunterian no longer displays Charles Byrne's skeleton due to concerns about his posthumous rights, though it is visible in Joshua Reynolds' portrait of John Hunter.

SCIENCE HISTORY IMAGES/ALAMY



▲ Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC

Portraits by the Spanish master Diego Velázquez have been exhibited alongside the work of his enslaved African-Hispanic assistant Juan de Pareja (Velázquez's portrayal above).

ALAMY/EPA



FILM

Cannes 2023 High marks in a year to be savoured

Few would deny Anatomy of a Fall the top prize – yet from Jonathan Glazer to Aki Kaurismaki to Wim Wenders, this was an outstanding festival

By Peter Bradshaw

▲ Screen success

Director Justine Triet receives the Palme d'Or from Jane Fonda

ERIC GAILLARD/REUTERS

► On the case

A scene from Anatomy of a Fall, an 'intelligent' courtroom drama

LES FILMS PELLÉAS

This Cannes has turned out to be mostly about love – about how love is thwarted, denied, misinterpreted, but also nurtured and how it survives.

Justine Triet's courtroom drama *Anatomy of a Fall* was not my choice for the Palme d'Or but what an excellent film it is: deeply intelligent and very grownup, and given an arrowhead of emotional force by its German star: Sandra Hüller, playing a writer in a dysfunctional relationship.

It absorbed and gripped me. Hüller's character is a woman whose unsatisfactory husband lies dead on the snowy path just outside their Alpine chalet having apparently fallen from the top window and hit his head on the way down. Was he pushed? Did he get his head wound before he fell? The movie wants to anatomise that fall in a court of law, but also anatomise the emotional descent of a failing marriage, subject to the awful gravity of disillusion. Hüller's writer is starved of love: or is it rather that she cannot express what she feels in the *ménage* in which she finds herself. A bracingly excellent choice for the Palme.



The Grand Prix went to a movie that had nothing to do with love: Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone of Interest*, tipped by many for the Palme; its success carries for British audiences an extra poignancy: it was adapted from the novel by Martin Amis, who died last month. It is a film whose icy clarity and diamond-hard brilliance hit Cannes festivalgoers between the eyes.

This was an overwhelmingly fierce film about the evil of the Holocaust, choosing to centre on the Bunuelian surreal nightmare of the Auschwitz camp commandant and his wife and family living a *gemütlich* happy life in his private quarters while just over the wall the horrific extermination is being carried out. I admit I was a little uneasy at the sleekness and pure style of the film being deployed in this cause. But it's a remarkable piece of film-making.

I admit to being a little unconvinced by the director's prize going to a film in the "foodie vein". The *Pot-au-Feu* was directed by the estimable Tran Anh Hùng: the story of a passionate gourmand, played by Benoît Magimel, and his equally devoted love for his cook, played with sweet delicacy by Juliette Binoche. He got the best possible performances from these two formidable French leads – but you need a very sweet tooth for this *grande bouffe* of classy gastronomic taste.

Aki Kaurismaki's Jury prize for his gentle, sweetly eccentric romantic comedy *Fallen Leaves* is gratifying. This is a thoroughgoing pleasure, if perhaps a slight one, and proof that Cannes juries are not wholly preoccupied with serious pictures. Not that this Finnish-set film is without seriousness: it reminded its audience that Finland shares a border with Russia and this country is in the frontline for any escalation of Vladimir Putin's war.

Koji Yakusho won the best actor prize for Wim Wenders's *Perfect Days* and clearly won the jury's hearts with his gentle, complex performance as the toilet cleaner who has a seraphically Zen acceptance of his modest life.

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's garrulous, densely considered drama *About Dry Grasses* was another of his absorbing and Chekhovian works; it was given a particular fierceness by Merve Dizdar, who wins best actress as a disabled woman Nuray, whom the conceited male lead – a teacher in trouble for an inappropriate relationship with a pupil – has got his eye on.

It's a treat to see the screenwriting prize go to Yuji Sakamoto for his work on Hirokazu Kore-eda's humane, demanding movie *Monster*, about the relationship between two boys and how it is misunderstood by the adult world.

This turned out to be an outstanding Cannes competition, and every single film on this list is to be savoured. A vintage year.

PETER BRADSHAW IS THE
GUARDIAN'S FILM CRITIC

Theatre-goers behaving badly

THEATRE

What's it like to star in a show when audiences are chatting, singing, watching football and opening lagers? Actors vent their anger at the 'Netflix mindset'

By Tom Ambrose

▼ The future?

Heathers, which now encourages singing along at specific performances

TRISTRAM KENTON

Punch-ups in the stalls. Drunken audience members singing and shouting over songs. Theatre-goers filming performances - or just watching something on their phones instead. These are just some of the examples of bad behaviour recently reported in theatres. What on earth is it like for actors to contend with such unruliness?

"I was in *Dreamgirls* and there would be fights in the audience," recalls the West End actor Marisha Wallace. "It was wild. It happened so often they had to get more security ... It's distracting when you're trying to sing, act and dance."

For Wallace, the *Dreamgirls* experience is a contrast to how audiences are responding to her current show, *Guys and Dolls*, at London's Bridge theatre. It's an immersive promenade production where some of the theatre-goers crowd around a series of moving stages. "It's interesting that the subject of audience behaviour has come up when I'm in a show where I am literally *in* the audience," she says. "We have amazing stage managers and hosts who are dressed as New York City cops and they police the crowd. The audience feel like they're a part of the show when they are that close to you." The effect, she adds, is that "they feel like they need to behave because they want the show to go on".

Alice Fearn has starred in the musicals *Wicked* and *Come from Away* and believes the "base level of acceptance" has fallen since theatres reopened after Covid. "What annoys me, as petty as it sounds, is someone's face being lit up by their phone," she says. "In a dark auditorium, it is like a beacon. People have watched football [on their phones] in Row A ... You also have people opening cans of lager."

Fearn is one of many in the industry who think audience behaviour has worsened since the pandemic lockdowns and is a result of people bringing a "Netflix mindset" - thinking they can talk, check phones and behave as they would in the comfort of their living rooms - into theatres. While attending a performance of *Pretty Woman* in the West End, Fearn says she saw audience members joining in with well-known lines from the original movie.

Charles Brunton, who originated the role of Emelius Browne in the recent *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* tour, remembers performing a key moment in the musical: "I'm doing this emotional ballad, which is quiet at the start, and someone gets their phone out. They're on WhatsApp and they start leaving a voice note saying: 'I'm just watching *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*, yeah I'm really enjoying it, I think it finishes in 10 minutes.' I can hear the entire conversation."

As well as watching people handing out sandwiches during poignant moments of the show ("I heard someone shouting: 'Do you want tuna and mayo or cheese and ham?'"), Brunton has been heckled. "There was one venue where audience disruption occurred at practically every show and I just felt like I wanted the week to be over," he says.

The actor Joaquin Pedro Valdes believes the root cause of audience disruption

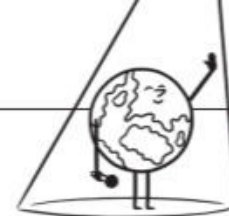


is drunkenness. “People are really empowered to sing along when they’re very drunk. There’s a level of intentional, almost malicious disruption that’s going on,” he says. Some productions known for attracting younger audiences, such as the musicals *& Juliet* (a jukebox show using producer Max Martin’s pop hits) and *Heathers* (based on the cult 1980s film), have held dedicated singalong performances during which fans were encouraged to join in. Erin Caldwell, who played Veronica Sawyer in *Heathers*, says the singalong left the cast “really overwhelmed”. “There’s a picture of me after the bows, head in hands, just crying because it was so emotional ... I wouldn’t be surprised if more shows do it in future.

“There’s lots of things with theatre etiquette that have to change. A big one for me is filming shows ... and it’s a really difficult challenge for front of house staff to manage.” Caldwell is now playing Jane Seymour in the touring production of *Six*. While it has the same etiquette rules as other musicals, it does allow fans to stand up and film its encore number, the *Megasix*. It gives them an opportunity, Caldwell says, to capture a “special memory” and also makes audiences less likely to take photos or videos during the rest of the show.

Perhaps the perceived decline in theatre audience behaviour reflects societal standards in general. That is the view of the veteran actor Janet Suzman. “What is being referred to is what people experience in a railway carriage,” she says, giving the example of a passenger talking very loudly into their phone. “They don’t seem to care that other people are disturbed. They don’t care about other people’s enjoyment.” Suzman suggests that “it’s always peer pressure that makes people behave better, isn’t it? If the audience got crosser with the disturbing element, that might make a difference.” This stalwart of the stage has sometimes done so while watching a play herself. “I have occasionally hissed a sort of old-lady ‘shush’ at somebody, which always works quite well. It’s pretty rare but the more vicious the ‘shush’, the quieter they will be.”

TOM AMBROSE IS A UK-BASED REPORTER



FILM

Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse

Dirs: Joaquim Dos Santos, Kemp Powers and Justin K Thompson

★★★★★

Is it possible to equal a film as inventive, bold and effortlessly cool as *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*? Yes. *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* is sublime. There’s not a frame of animation that isn’t dazzling. It takes the basic themes of the first film – adolescent isolation, communication breakdown – and builds whole worlds with them. It’s a dizzying onslaught of ideas and graphic references.

Phil Lord and Christopher Miller return as writers and producers, with a new directing team that includes Kemp Powers (Pixar’s *Soul*). Once again, the story focuses on fellow Spider-people Miles Morales (Shameik Moore) and Gwen Stacy (Hailee Steinfeld). New characters include Hobie (Daniel Kaluuya), a spider-punk anarchist whose design nods to Jamie Reid’s Sex Pistols aesthetic and Jamie Hewlett’s Gorillaz.

It’s densely plotted, but the soul of the film lies in the tiny human details: like the way Miles, about to gain access to an inner Spider-circle, bounces on his toes – still, at heart, an excited kid. *Observer Wendy Ide*

MUSIC

Jarak Qaribak

Dudu Tassa & Jonny Greenwood, World Circuit

★★★★★

On their debut album, Israeli bandleader Dudu Tassa and Radiohead guitarist Jonny Greenwood fashion their own imagining of a modern Middle Eastern songbook, enlisting guest vocalists to produce new arrangements of tracks from Jordan, Algeria, Egypt and Morocco.

Tassa’s group, Dudu Tassa and the Kuwaitis, have been performing versions of Iraqi standards since 2011, while Greenwood’s 2015 album with the Rajasthan Express, *Junun*, paired sufi vocals with north Indian brass instrumentation and drum machines. On *Jarak Qaribak* (Your Neighbour Is Your Friend), the duo create an enduring and engaging take on the love songs of the region.

The album introduces new instrumentation across its sequencing. Opener *Djit Nishrab* features the melismatic vocals of Egyptian singer Ahmed Doma, sticking to the song’s melodic arrangement with the addition of Greenwood’s trilling, fractal strings creating an underlying tension. Drum machines then enter the frame amid the chopped, dancefloor-adjacent samples of defiant love song *Taq ou-Dub*.

As the instrumentation fills out, the record gains momentum, featuring singer Safae Essafi soaring over a synth-funk backing on *Ahibak* and transforming the yearning ballad into a hopeful romance. On Jordanian folk song *Ya ’Anid Ya Yaba*, Greenwood channels Radiohead’s frenetic King of Limbs-era percussion as Tassa marshals synths and oud.

Rather than jar, these additions largely uplift the essence of their originals. *Ammar Kalia*

Podcast of the week *The Louis Theroux Podcast*

Louis Theroux’s lockdown venture into podcasting was a big hit for the BBC. His new Spotify show is still a charming attempt to get to the essence of celebrity guests. For his first episode, he talks to Shania Twain about divorce and medical mishaps, and Theroux reveals he’s a big fan of *Man! I Feel Like a Woman!* *Alexi Duggins*



FICTION

Home turf

A brilliantly funny, deeply sad portrait of an Irish family in financial and existential crisis from the Skippy Dies author

By Justine Jordan

▲ **Savage irony**
Paul Murray returns to well-off Dublin for his third novel

PATRICK BOLGER

Paul Murray's second book, *Skippy Dies*, was one of the standout novels of the previous decade: a riotously entertaining tragicomedy, set in a posh Dublin boys' school, in which bone-deep sorrow and pathos cut through the teenage hilarity and fart jokes. The Mark and the Void, 2015's tricky satire of both the banking crash and the difficult novel-writing business, strayed into meta-textual noodling but, with *The Bee Sting*, Murray is triumphantly back on home turf – troubled adolescents, regretful adults, secrets signposted and exquisitely revealed, each line soaked in irony ranging from the gentle to the savage.

At more than 600 pages, it is the story of a well-to-do Irish family in financial, emotional and existential trouble: Dickie Barnes, who has taken over his father's car showroom; his wife, Imelda, a local beauty; daughter Cassie, preparing for university; and 12-year-old son PJ. The after-effects of the financial crash have crippled the motor business and, now the money has run out, Dickie hides away while Imelda sells off their possessions. Cassie fears for her future; PJ fears divorce. We see the same few months through the eyes of each in turn, during floods and drought, as slow-building ecological disaster parallels the family's unfolding apocalypse.

The first section belongs to teenage Cassie, embroiled in a toxic friendship with golden girl Elaine. We're in similar territory to *Skippy Dies*, as Cassie and Elaine discover guys and booze; even more so in section two, as PJ mopes in the woods to escape the atmosphere at home and tries to avoid a beating from a bully. He is skewered by adolescence, caught between sweets and porn, fantastic facts about nature and dark fears for its future. If something that seemed as certain as parental

love and material security can crumble, why not the whole world?

What Murray conveys so sharply are the spaces between his characters, such as Cassie and her hapless boyfriend, Rowan. He effortlessly uncovers the tenderness behind Rowan's bravado: something he can't show and she can't see. Elaine's casually malicious manipulation of Cassie, as she yearns for and fumes at her, mounts over the course of the book to fever pitch.

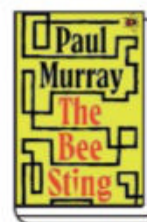
But we get beyond the realm of teenage angst, and the novel deepens and widens. Imelda's section is structured in the stream-of-consciousness phrasing made famous by Molly Bloom. The flashbacks to her childhood, raised in poverty with a violent father, are devastating. Imelda is Daddy's princess – and that's a dangerous thing to be, especially when rival hard men invade their run-down cottage, bent on revenge. For Imelda, unlike Dickie's family living in comfort, "life just came at you like a gang of lads getting out of a van". Her elevation into the middle classes feels like a fairytale. Like Molly Bloom, her memories are soaked in romance and melodrama, building to cinematic climaxes; Murray relishes the clichés and conventions of storytelling, both having his cake and laughing at it.

Imelda has divulged many wrong turns that led to the current crisis; now it's time to go inside the mind of Dickie, the quiet, unhappy family man hiding from his responsibilities in the woods. His section could stand as a whole different novel. The pacing of the book means that we live through hundreds of pages on tenterhooks, and the suspense and revelations keep coming until the end. This is a sprawling novel, but expertly foreshadowed and so intricately put together that many moments only take on resonance on a second reading.

Murray is exploring the way families can always sense the emotional temperature, even if they don't know where the fire is coming from. He is brilliant on fathers and sons, sibling rivalry, grief, self-sabotage and self-denial, as well as the weakness humans have for magical thinking. He can also create a laugh-out-loud moment.

Like *Skippy Dies*, *The Bee Sting* draws on Irish folklore about a traveller taken in by fairy folk to their great hall of riches under the hill, only to wake years later in a cold, unfamiliar world. He uses it as a figure for the unsustainable mania of the Celtic tiger, for the piercing nostalgia surrounding lost youth and shared fairytales that allowed this family to function. Towards the book's end, Imelda thinks back to the horrors of her childhood, the past she can never escape, all that has brought her to this present moment. "You would give anything to go back to it." You won't read a sadder, truer, funnier novel this year.

JUSTINE JORDAN IS THE GUARDIAN'S DEPUTY LITERARY EDITOR



BOOK OF THE WEEK
The Bee Sting
By Paul Murray

BIOGRAPHY

Loud and clear

The voice of a very English socialist, George Orwell, comes alive in a biography that draws out the writer's contradictions

By Blake Morrison

▼ **Writer at work**

George Orwell
in the 1940s

ULLSTEIN BILD/GETTY



Though he worked for the BBC for two and a half years and often spoke on air, no recording of George Orwell's voice has been found. Many friends and memoirists have described it, and his struggles to make himself audible (all the more so after a sniper's bullet went through his throat in Spain), but their accounts vary: was his voice high-pitched or husky, Old Etonian or a cockney drawl? DJ Taylor settles for calling it deadpan, but its elusiveness seems apt.

Orwell was one of the great voices of the 20th century. But the voice of the early novels isn't the voice of *Animal Farm* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. And the voice of the reporter, down and out among Kentish hop-pickers isn't the voice of *Tribune's* "As I Please" columnist. As Taylor says, Orwell remains an indispensable reference point today, whether the topic is CCTV, ID cards, cancel culture or Ukraine.

But in a changing moral climate, he has ceased to be Saintly George and become a murkier figure. He could be homophobic and antisemitic. For all his leftist meliorism, his first thought on having a son (Richard, through adoption) was about putting him down for Eton. One friend portrayed him as a violent sadist. Now, 120 years after his birth, how can we make sense of Orwell's contradictions?

This book is DJ Taylor's second shot at a biography: *The Life* came out in 2003; *The New Life*, eight chapters and 100 pages longer, draws on new caches of material, mostly letters. It doesn't offer shocking revelations. But nor is it a reprise of the first book, except for the short thematic interludes between the main chapters. The approach is fair-minded and scrupulous, with a schoolboy



Orwell:
The New Life
By DJ Taylor

passion underneath. Taylor first read Orwell at the age of 13 and has kept up with everything written about him since.

The key to Taylor's reading of Orwell is what happened to him in Spain. Though married to Eileen only six months before, he was determined to fight for the Republican cause and, on his return, became far more politically engaged. But he'd seen bullying and infighting too. For the rest of his life and in his two great novels, this was the war he fought, on behalf of a wholesome, English, sweetly C of E brand of socialism, as opposed to Stalinist totalitarianism.

Equally crucial was that sniper's bullet, which along with damp Catalan trench warfare damaged his already frail health. Born with defective bronchial tubes, he'd had bouts of pneumonia; after Spain he looked gaunt, haggard, primed for death. He hung on for 12 more years, but ill health is Taylor's refrain throughout. If he resists making Orwell a caricature of a

bohemian consumptive, doomed to die young, he can't disguise the stress and exhaustion Orwell endured in completing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Work was his refuge in times of crisis: in the first 20 months of the second world war he produced about 200 book, theatre and film reviews, quite aside from longer essays; and in the year after Eileen's sudden death, he filed 130 pieces. The novel took him longer, but his insistence on typing the final version himself, while seriously ill in bed on Jura, hastened his final collapse. "It isn't a book I would gamble on for a big sale," he told his publisher, with his usual self-disparagement. He couldn't have been more wrong.

If finishing the novel was his priority (work was *always* his priority), his second concern was

FICTION

Divide and rule

A masterpiece of Korean history, this epic political novel traces the country from Japanese occupation through partition

By Maya Jaggi

Arusting, bullet-riddled locomotive in the demilitarised zone that slices through the Korean peninsula gives this marvellous epic novel its enigmatic title. Captured during the Korean war of the early 1950s, the immobilised train pointing North has become a famous symbol of the frustrated yearning for reunification, a "commemorative fossil of the age of division". The train is an underlying motif within Hwang Sok-yong's masterpiece, a worker's-eye view of the 20th-century history surrounding Korea's partition, which draws deeply on his personal experience of labour and pro-democracy movements and his five-year stint in prison for breaching South Korean security laws by visiting the North in 1989.

Originally published in Korean in 2020, *Mater 2-10* opens in the 21st century with a laid-off factory worker, Yi Jino, staging a vertiginous "sit-in" on the catwalk round an industrial chimney. In a mountaineering tent

overlooking railway tracks, his sky-high protest stretches beyond a year while, far below, workers prostrate themselves in solidarity.

Jino's lone vigil - a powerful metaphor for struggle against overwhelming forces, including globalisation - is interspersed with hallucinatory flashbacks to a century of Korean history. The focus is on the Japanese colonial period of 1910 to 1945, when Korea's language was suppressed and its "slaves with no nation" forced to take Japanese names. The absorbing narrative shunts between grungy realism and what the author terms "mindam realism" - as the translators note, "halfway between folklore and plain talk". The result is oral history spiced with legendary exploits and ghostly appearances by forced labourers.

As activists plot sabotage and strikes over makgeolli liquor and steaming rice cakes, Japanese "thought police" and their Korean henchmen enact savage reprisals.



Mater 2-10
By Hwang
Sok-yong

to find a replacement wife. He'd been happy with the complaisant Eileen, though friends found it an odd match and it didn't stop him pursuing other women, least of all old flames from Southwold, where his parents lived: "Eileen said she wished I could sleep with you about twice a year," he wrote to one of them, "just to keep me happy."

The list of those he made passes at is long. His wooing was mostly hapless, but after Eileen died, and he had Richard to care for, his come-ons had a new focus and intensity: to one candidate, Anne, he wrote: "What I am really asking you is whether you would like to be the widow of a literary man." Anne declined but Sonia Brownell was more amenable. Gold-digger or Florence Nightingale? Opinions differ. She's treated sympathetically by Taylor, though she couldn't save her man. Orwell married her from his hospital bed and died 100 days later.

Some of the most rewarding passages, aside from those on Southwold, are about the practical Orwell, homesteader and handyman, at his best in a ramshackle cottage, keeping hens and goats, growing potatoes, pruning raspberries, selling eggs to the milkman. It's a strand Taylor links to the novels (where love is made in the countryside) and to Orwell's ideas of a utopian society.

The book is astute about all the other strands too – schoolboy, tramp, teacher, bookseller, broadcaster, propagandist for decency – and, by the standard of most lives, it's comparatively short. No further biography will be needed for the foreseeable future, though it seems that one or even two of Orwell's journals are lying in a Moscow archive. And who knows, maybe the BBC, which has an Orwell statue mounted outside Broadcasting House, will one day turn up a recording of his voice.

BLAKE MORRISON IS A WRITER AND JOURNALIST

The euphoria of liberation in 1945 proves short-lived. The day after Nagasaki was bombed, the USSR declared war on Japan, mounting a Red Army offensive in northern Korea. Yet, the novel contends, the US had already planned Korea's partition along the 38th parallel – wrecking food production and sundering families – as "a victorious US and a defeated Japan came together to confront their common enemy, the Soviet Union". In the US-backed South, no Koreans were invited to the exchange of flags, nor were Japanese war criminals tried. It was "really a handover of colonial rule".

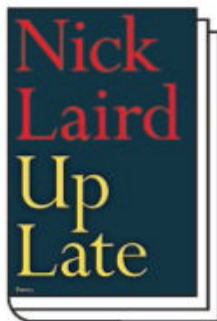
Mater 2-10 is a vital reminder that the cold war lives on in a divided Korea. It traces the roots of postwar persecution of labour activists smeared as "commies". Hwang's aim, he writes, was to plug a gap in Korean fiction, which typically reduces industrial workers to "historical specks of dust". Not only does he breathe life into vivid protagonists, but the novel so inhabits their perspective that we share the shock and disbelief as their hard-won freedom is snatched away.

MAYA JAGGI IS A JOURNALIST AND CRITIC

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

The best recent poetry

By Philip Terry



Up Late

By Nick Laird

Laird's fifth collection glimmers with angsty maturity as it manoeuvres between introspection and elegy. We meet God-as-Martian-poet contemplating his creation in Theodicy. If there are elements of Martian poetry, there is also a critique of this approach, suggesting the endless search for the magical in the everyday is tinged with solipsism: "thinking everything was magic / was the same as thinking nothing was". Elsewhere, Laird cracks open the poetry of sensitivity to reveal a raw sense of injustice "as the rich get richer and the poor get fucked". In the elegy for his father, Up Late, winner of the 2022 Forward prize for best single poem, the voice emerges with a stripped-back clarity, using words not to decorate, but simply to think with.

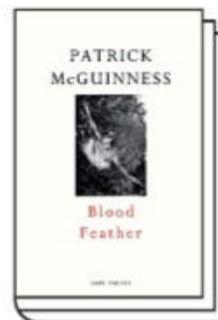


Women in Comfortable Shoes

By Selima Hill

The miniaturism of Martial and Emily

Dickinson is reinvented in this iridescent collection that brings together 11 sequences whose subjects range from girls misbehaving in convent schools to fridges contemplating death, a pair of bad-tempered sisters, a parrot and hair clips: "What I hated most were the clips / that lived and died in hundreds in her hair, / cascades of coloured clips with floral legs / incapable of understanding anything.". Over 254 pages, Hill creates a new kind of narrative poem, which has all the rewards of reading a good novel, yet retains poetry's unique ability to zoom in on minutiae, as when contemplating ants whizzing about like bumper cars.



Blood Feather

By Patrick McGuinness

In the Englishman's Home, McGuinness's arresting opener, plays on the unspoken phrase "an Englishman's home is his castle" to bring out the feeling of entrapment experienced by the arriving French speaker: "Little castles of milk teeth, / lined up to guard the helpless tongue - / ... / it's where you kept the language you arrived with. / You hid it all that time and now it's gone." The past for McGuinness is an irretrievable terrain, inhabiting the everyday with its ghostly present-absence, which we are able

to enter again as a tourist. The illuminating *dérives* of the finale, After the Flood, explore this further with in-situ jottings of journeys through mothballed Belgian stations, reminding us that the best poetry often never makes it from the notebook.



You Don't Have What It Takes to Be My Nemesis

By CAConrad

CAConrad sweeps across the Atlantic like a furious and raging whirlwind. Emerging from the queer visionary tradition of Whitman and Ginsberg, the cornerstone of CAConrad's practice is a series of rituals and instructions which their readers are invited to share in: "Sit outside under shelter of a doorway ... where you can easily touch, smell, taste, FEEL the storm. Lean your face into the weather ... with eyes closed while water fills the wells of your eyes." Other rituals involve CAConrad smearing themselves with dirt gathered from Emily Dickinson's garden or sitting for seven days in front of a Rothko. CAConrad's aim is to unplug from the corporate machine and reconnect themselves and their readers with the earth, animals and other people. This is poetry with real ambition that wants to hug us – it's big, it's queer and, like paprika, you can never have enough of it.

PHILIP TERRY IS A POET AND TRANSLATOR

ASK

Annalisa Barbieri



My boyfriend threatens to leave when I see my friends

I met my boyfriend a year ago, when I moved to his country for work. But I feel I'm going crazy and I don't know what to do.

One month after meeting, he had already said he loved me. One time, I told him I was meeting an old (male) friend and he said if I met him, he would break up with me. He has gone through my phone multiple times and has said he doesn't want me to meet my best girlfriend because he says she's disrespectful. He has said he doesn't want me to go out later than a certain time in the afternoon. He has said he hates my dog and has given me an ultimatum: him or the dog. He said he'd meet my family but cancelled at the last minute.

We've lived together for four months and he has threatened to leave me several times. He said I'm the biggest mistake of his life and has asked me to block my male contacts.

He said he had bought me a ring, but because I had lied to him, he didn't give it to me. When he was away for work, I decided to go on

a trip with a friend, and he went crazy. He can be very charming but I don't think his behaviour is normal. Can you help me?

You are correct. His behaviour isn't normal and you're definitely not going crazy. His behaviour is abusive and he's trying to control you. In the UK this sort of behaviour - coercive control - is a crime. I have omitted information to protect you as your safety is paramount.

You know, on some level, that his behaviour is wrong, but he's got you so confused that you're starting to question yourself. Controlling men can be very charming. They can also love-bomb you when they think you might be "getting away".

Controlling men (and women) seek to isolate their partners from friends and family. They often point out "faults" in these friends and family that you never noticed or which didn't concern you before. They can say things like, "If you love me you would/wouldn't do X," which is just another way of controlling your behaviour. And has nothing to do with love.

I went to Refuge, the largest domestic abuse organisation in the UK, to help me answer your letter. Even though I know you're not in the UK, the advice is largely the same where controlling partners are concerned, although, see later, we both urge you to contact a domestic abuse organisation closer to home.

A lot of people say: "But he

If you would like advice on a family matter, email ask.annalisa@theguardian.com. See theguardian.com/letters-terms-for-terms-and-conditions

doesn't hit me, it's not abuse." Abuse doesn't have to be physical. It is any sort of controlling behaviour, emotional, sexual or financial. It is where the person being abused and controlled is made to feel it's their fault, and so they doubt their sanity. If you feel you are changing your behaviour to appease your partner, or you are "treading on eggshells", this is also a good indicator. Or as Refuge said: "If any woman ever has a gut feeling that something is not right, then that usually means something is not right."

It's important that you realise (and I want you to repeat this to yourself) that no matter what you do, he is never going to be happy and he is never going to change. He is always going to try to blame you.

"Find someone," advises Refuge, "that you can trust to try and support you. Find a specialist organisation that deals with domestic abuse in your country."

Try to get a circle around you of people who know what's going on but - and this is so important and the reason we want you to contact a specialist organisation - you need to make a safe plan to leave him. This is because the biggest risk to a woman is when she tries to leave the relationship. I don't want to scare you but I do want you to be safe. An abuser's behaviour can escalate when a woman tries to get away. Useful links include refuge.org.uk and nationaldahelpline.org.uk. Call 999 or your country's emergency services if your life is in danger

You need to realise that no matter what you do, he will never change

STEPHEN COLLINS



Stephen Collins COLLINS.COM



Bring sparkle to the outdoors with fizzy spritzers and fruity vinegars

What are the best drinks for a picnic?
Rosie, London, England, UK

Picnic drinking (in moderation, of course) is a tricky business. First off, says Zoe Burgess, the founder of drinks consultancy Atelier Pip and author of *The Cocktail Cabinet*, there are the logistics, guests and food to contend with. Then, warns Mark Diacono, the author of *Herb, Spice and Sour*, “you don’t want to premix something in which one element is fizzy and another sharp [think lemon or lime juice], because it will totally lose its sharpness over time”. And you really don’t want anything too potent, Burgess says.

For these reasons, shrubs (or drinking vinegars) are good, especially when the summer fruit glut arrives, Burgess says: “Pick your fruit, then heat it with caster sugar and verjus, which has a much softer acid balance than cider or white-wine vinegar.” Bottle it and keep in the fridge or freezer, “ready to be topped with soda water and fresh lemon or lime juice”. Shrubs pair well with vodka and gin, too.

Diacono, meanwhile, would “be thinking hard about mojitos”. The classic is made with white rum, soda water, sugar, lime juice and mint but, in a picnic scenario, Diacono substitutes the sugar for mint syrup. “Take equal weights of sugar and boiling water and stir like crazy until the sugar dissolves. Lob in a big

handful of fresh mint and let it sit and infuse until the mix is lovely and minty.” Lift or strain out the herbs, decant into a bottle and “get that dead cold”. Before heading out, Diacono might mix rum and mint syrup “in a proportion of 5:1”, then “all you’ve got to do is [add] lime juice and soda water”. Fresh mint leaves and ice cubes are encouraged – but not 100% essential.

Cool pineapple-and-ginger punch will also hit the happy hour spot, says Maria Bradford, the author of *Sweet Salone*. She’s equally fond of “the lazy picnic”, which simply requires a supermarket sweep: “Lavender and coconut water are easy to mix, whether topped with elderflower tonic for a refreshing mocktail or with a little gin or vodka.” Much the same goes for Bradford’s mango lemonade, a staple from her homeland of Sierra Leone: “Pour that into a glass with prosecco for an exotic bellini.”

Burgess also embraces the bubbles, though in her case that would be in that perennial favourite, the spritz. “It’s a good place to start, because you can take a pre-batched Campari and sweet vermouth mix with you, then top with prosecco or soda water in the park.” Consider getting creative with any flavoured spirits and cordials you have knocking around.

ANNA BERRILL IS A FOOD WRITER
Got a culinary dilemma?
Email feast@theguardian.com



THE WEEKLY
RECIPE
By Rosie Sykes

No 221 Raspberry oat crumble slice

Prep	5 min
Cook	50 min
Serves	8-10

Ingredients
180g butter
200g oats
200g flour
150g soft light brown sugar
100g flaked almonds, or any other nut or seed of your choice
250g raspberries

Raspberries are a top-drawer fruit. Part of the rose family, they have a fragrant, bittersweet flavour and soft texture, with the crunch of the pips right at the end. They can, of course, be eaten raw with cream, and work well in a multitude of puddings, but they’re also fantastic in baking because, when cooked, they take on a lovely floral note. This is one of my most-baked recipes. It’s versatile, too, so you can change the fruit to almost anything you like; use gluten-free flour, if need be, and a nut or vegetable oil or a plant-based spread to make it vegan. I like a slice with a cup of tea, or served warm with cream or custard for a quick pudding.

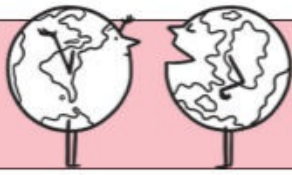
Method
Heat the oven to 190C (170C fan)/ gas 5, and melt the butter in a 25cm x 30cm baking tin.

Mix the oats, flour and sugar in a bowl, make a well in the centre, then pour in the melted butter and mix until it all comes together. Line the baking tin with greaseproof paper, then press in two-thirds of the oat mixture – make sure you push it down well, so it holds together like pastry. Bake for about 15 minutes, until golden.

In the meantime, mix the almonds into the remaining oat mixture. Once the base is cooked, strew the raspberries over the top, push them down a bit with a fork, then scatter over the remaining oat mixture and spread it out to cover – it’s OK if the odd raspberry peeps out here and there.

Bake for another 20-25 minutes, until the top is golden and the raspberries soft. Remove, transfer the tin to a wire rack and leave to cool. Once it’s completely cold, lift the cake out of the tin and cut into squares – it will keep in a sealed container for three to four days.





Notes and Queries

The long-running series that invites readers to send in questions and answers on anything and everything

QUIZ

Thomas Eaton

- 1 Which African country is named from the Portuguese for prawn?
- 2 Why was Janet Young unique in UK politics 1979-1990?
- 3 Which cult musician initiated No Music Day?
- 4 Which Truman Capote book was a pioneer of the true crime genre?
- 5 The Romito Bridge in Laterina is claimed to feature in which painting?
- 6 Egas Moniz won a Nobel prize for what discredited surgical procedure?
- 7 Which dynasty used the acrostic slogan AEIOU?

PUZZLES

Chris Maslanka

- 1 There are two 4-digit numbers whose first digit gives the number of 0s in it, the second digit the number of 1s, the 3rd the number of 2s and the 4th the number of 3s. Remind me what they are.

2 Wordpool

Find the correct definition:

- 8 What did wildcatters go in search of?
- 9 Destroyed by Babylonians, 587BC; rebuilt by Herod; destroyed by Romans, 70AD?
- 10 Robert Frost; Bonnie Raitt; Matt Damon; Bill Gates; Mark Zuckerberg?
- 11 Stranger Things; The Matrix; Fargo; Avengers: Endgame?
- 12 Lorne sausage; BSB dish; Times or Taksim; 1, 4, 9, 16, etc?
- 13 Edith Head; Milena Canonero; Colleen Atwood; Ruth E Carter?
- 14 Last Cocked Hat (5); Old Hickory (7); His Accidency (10); Rail Splitter (16)?
- 15 Yama; Anubis; Hades; Pluto; Hel?

RACLOIR

- a) raclette pot
- b) scrapyard
- c) prehistoric scraper
- d) rake used in Pétanque

3 Jumbles

Rearrange ANCESTRIES to make another word.

4 Word Centre

Identify this word from its centre:

HOPE

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CINEMA CONNECT

Killian Fox

Name the films and the person who connects them.



Answers Quiz 1 Cameroon. 2 Only woman appointed to the cabinet by Margaret Thatcher. 3 Bill Drummond (the KLF). 4 In Cold Blood. 5 Mona Lisa. 6 Lobotomy. 7 Habsburgs. 8 Oil. 9 Fates of Temples of Jerusalem. 10 Harvard dropouts. 11 Film/TV made by sibling partnerships. Duffers; Wachowskis; Coens; Russos. 12 Square square sausages; Square satellite dish; New York and Istanbul squares; square numbers. 13 Multiple Oscar-winning costume designers. 14 Nicknames of 19th-century US presidents: James Monroe; Andrew Jackson; John Tyler; Abraham Lincoln. 15 Gods/goddesses of the dead: Hindu; Egyptian; Greek; Roman; Norse. Cinema Connect Bride and Prejudice (2004), Clueless (1995) and Pride and Prejudice and Zombies (2016) are all based, directly or indirectly, on books by Jane Austen. Maslanka 1 2,020 and 1,110. 2 Wordpool c). 3 Jumbles RESISTANCE. 4 Word Centre ORTHOPEDIC.

COUNTRY DIARY

FLOW COUNTRY

Caithness and Sutherland, Scotland

The white flowers of the bogbean shake, sprinkling starlight over the bog, moving with the slightest wind. As the first colour of the morning fills in, it comes not just from above but below, where red mosses glint from the dark peat. *Sphagnum capillifolium*, acute-leaved, or red bog moss, forms dense hummocks, rising from the ground like an outward pulse of blood: a fleshy, silent circuitry.

Stretch upon stretch of red courses through the heather and bog myrtle. Shadows move in. Rain begins. Small circles form on the top of the bog pools as the sweet scent of myrtle washes through. The only sound is the rain hitting my coat and the pools. The only movement is the drop of the water and the cool brush of leaf into leaf, stem against stem.

I lower myself and listen. Here, by the bog, there is a squelch and a gurgle and a pop. Here, by the moss, is a sink and a suck and a thirst. Known hoarders, some sphagnum mosses can hold about 20 times their own weight in water. Most peatlands, above the water table, receive their only water from rainfall. There is an urgency to the drumming fall and its eager recipients. The water's volume increases with each passing minute. This close to the sphagnum is a sounding of what is often hidden. The bog is only quiet at human height. The moss is only silent from our distance.

I pull myself back up, following the trails of red bog moss through the heather. Its silent circuitry is now one of pops and tremors. Its exposed veins are flaming tributaries flashing by the rising pools. The bogbean quakes in the rain. The mosses soak, filled with light again. Day breaks. Rain slakes the yearning ground. Elizabeth-Jane Burnett



ILLUSTRATION: CLIFFORD HARPER

CHESS

Leonard Barden

Fabiano Caruana got off to a fine start at the Norway Chess elite event in Stavanger, where the US champion defeated Magnus Carlsen, the world No 1, in the opening round and was a clear leader after three of the nine rounds.

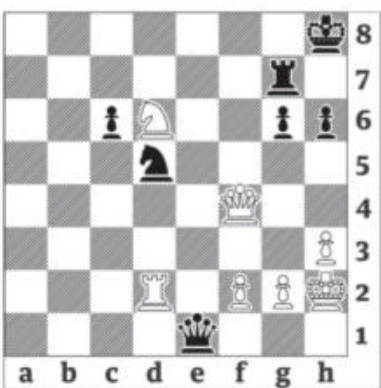
The Norwegian has won Stavanger for four years in a row, so his recovery chances should never be discounted.

It was Carlsen's first classical defeat against Caruana since 2015, a period that included their 2018 world title

match in London where all 12 classical games were drawn.

Looking ahead for possible future targets, an Argentine talent, Faustino Oro, has just set a world record for the youngest ever 2300 Fide rating, at nine years

3870 Magnus Carlsen v Alexander Morozevich, Biel 2006. White to move and win.



eight months. The record for the youngest 2400 Fide rating is held by Nodirbek Abdusattorov, who achieved it at 10 years five months, a year after the Uzbek defeated two grandmasters at the Agzamov Memorial in Tashkent.

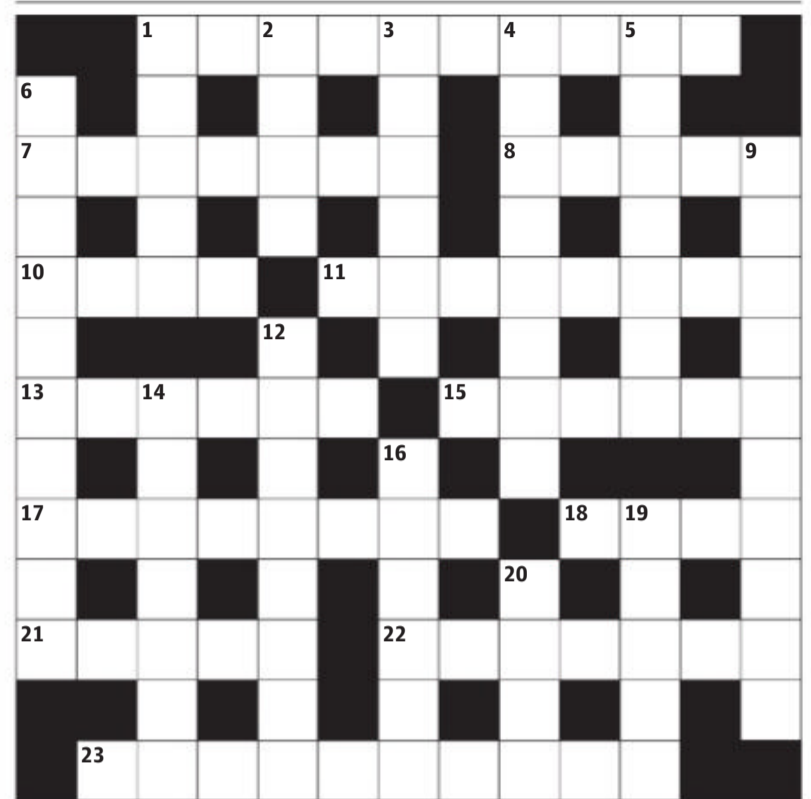
England's pre-teen talent Bodhana Sivanandan, eight, continues to be world No 1 girl for her age. She scored 4/7 in the women's championship, and recently gave her first simultaneous exhibition.

3870 1 Rxd5! cxd5 2 Qf8+ Kh7 Nb4 3 Qf4! also wins, but is slower. 5 Qxf6 wins. 1 Qxh6+ Kg2 2 Rb2! 4 Nf6 mate) Qe7 4 Nf6+ Qxf6 3 Ne8! (threats 4 Qxg7 mate and



Quick crossword

No 16,556



Across

- 1 Poisonous plant – edible marine snail (10)
- 7 Country completely surrounded by South Africa (7)
- 8 Goliath (5)
- 10 Chinese currency unit (4)
- 11 Hand-held firework (8)
- 13 Revolving (6)
- 15 Framework of stakes interwoven with branches to form a fence (6)
- 17 Second largest Channel Island (8)
- 18 Obscene stuff (4)
- 21 Recurrent theme (5)
- 22 Shakespeare's Moor (7)
- 23 Trouble spot (10)

Down

- 1 Conchiglie, Tagliatelle etc (5)
- 2 Swiss creator of a chain of elegant hotels, d. 1918 (4)
- 3 Loud hooting cries (6)
- 4 From Lagos? (8)
- 5 Pamphlet (7)

- 6 Ibsen, Miller or Chekhov? (10)
- 9 Early 20th-century American dance to ragtime music – try UK torte (anag) (6,4)
- 12 Royal female (8)
- 14 Plant of the pea family with clover-like leaves (7)
- 16 Recover (6)
- 19 Extract money by deceit (5)
- 20 From Bangkok? (4)

Solution No 16,550

B	A	C	K	S	P	A	C	E	B	B
I	I	E	O	J	U	N	E			
A	D	V	E	R	T	I	S	E	S	D
S	L	I	M	T	H	U	S			
D	S	S	T	O	I	C				
R	E	C	I	P	E	C	A	R	R	O
U	A	O								
M	A	T	Z	O	H	R	I	F	F	L
S	T	L	E	V	E	L	T	R		
T	E	E	S	R	D	A	F			
I	R	C	A	S	S	E	R	O	L	E
C	H	E	F	L	E	M	E			
K	D	A	D	N	A	U	S	E	A	M

Sudoku

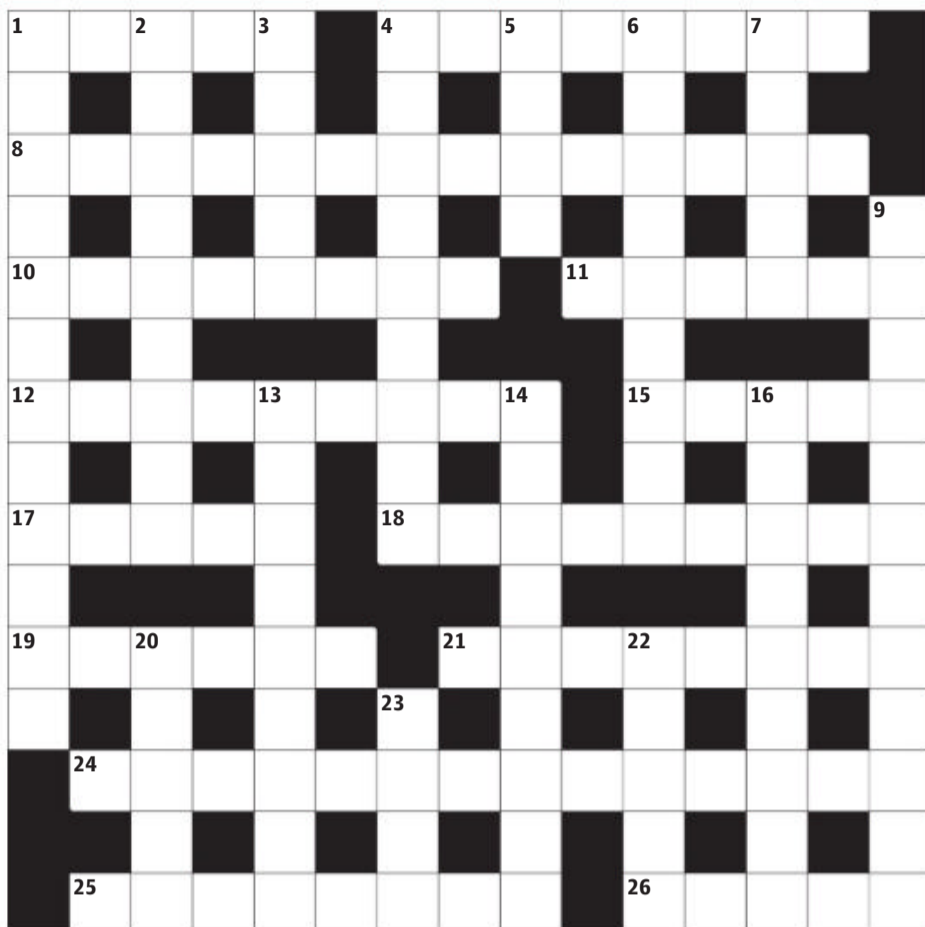
Easy

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

Last week's solution

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

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



* All solutions published next week

The Weekly cryptic

No 29,083



By Picaroon

Across

- 1 Shortening parts of legs to make bear a little lower (5)
- 4 Staff sign half-hearted complaint about naughty class (4,4)
- 8 After further endless fighting, lovers getting means to clear the air (10,4)
- 10 Broadway musical not getting bravo for dance (8)
- 11 Scientist's second wife leaving Stevenage or Basildon? (6)
- 12 Where to place volumes of luggage with caution, initially (9)
- 15 Without right, criticise golf hit from driver (5)
- 17 State of Massachusetts? Just a western part (5)
- 18 Back massage after sex welcomed by sweet redheads? (9)
- 19 Fool, say, losing heart where water is scarce (6)
- 21 Cross after hints about what a naughty child might throw (8)
- 24 Track gets pushed back, but for Elvis song (3,4,3,4)
- 25 Socialist banks in Newcastle investing Asian's cash capital (8)
- 26 Curvy figure initially lost kilo, say (5)

Down

- 1 Spirit shown by singer online getting b_ excited! (6,6)
- 2 Having a fondness for suits, bright soldier's overwhelmed by debts (9)
- 3 Bovid's dash over delta (5)
- 4 Cheers in prosperous periods, entertaining times ahead (7,2)
- 5 Rat out in spring after first sign of sun (4)

- 6 Whence we get stimulant, no longer taking three drugs after cocaine (6,3)
- 7 Surrealist painter of birds with head lowered (5)
- 9 Working outside of Hamburg to dig an oil well (2,1,4,5)
- 13 Creamy elastic clothing remains unlikely to get snapped (6-3)
- 14 Possible explosive bad mood stops Jack learning about religion (9)
- 16 American liked penning old language, being a flatterer (9)
- 20 Say nothing about group's aversion to effort (5)
- 22 Possible crossword feature: article on setter (5)
- 23 Scandinavian, Sicilian, Vienna, English, and Nimzo openings (4)

Solution No 29,077

		C		L			M		A	
	Y	E	L	L	O	W		B	I	G
	E		I		F		B		S	O
M	O	S	Q	U	I	T	O		C	A
M		U					O		R	I
C	A	R	E	O	F		K	E	E	P
N			I		K		A		E	Y
			D	O	U	B	L	E	E	N
	D		R		R		E		T	
R	U	S	T	L	E	U	P		S	A
R		H		G			I		O	G
R	E	C	O	I	L		N	U	M	E
S		D		A			G		A	S
S	P	O	U	S	E		S	C	H	E
	X		S				E		T	

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