



# THE UBER FILES

Leak reveals secret lobbying operation to conquer the world <sup>17</sup>

A week in the life of the world | *Global edition*  
15 JULY 2022 | VOL.207 No.3 | £4.95 | €7.99

# The Guardian Weekly



## Lies, damn lies

*How the truth caught up  
with Boris Johnson*

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**Shinzo Abe's legacy**  
Assassination stuns Japan <sup>30</sup>

**The longest wave**  
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The magic of road movies <sup>51</sup>





## **Eyewitness** *Space*

PHOTOGRAPH:  
NASA/GETTY

### **📍 The final frontier**

The first full-colour image from Nasa's James Webb space telescope shows the galaxy cluster SMACS 0723, picturing stars as they were up to 13bn years ago. Images from the most powerful telescope ever launched into space promise to reshape our understanding of the dawn of the universe.



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# Disgraced PM's fall, Uber's tactics exposed and a hellish holiday

**It was the kind of news week when several stories could have sat comfortably on the Guardian Weekly's cover.**

The Uber files leak, the assassination of Japan's former prime minister Shinzo Abe and the popular uprising in Sri Lanka were all huge stories in their own right. However, we lead with the political demise of Britain's prime minister, Boris Johnson, finally backed into a corner after dozens of his government ministers resigned. Jonathan Freedland charts the rise and fall of one of Britain's most colourful and controversial politicians, while Toby Helm reflects on the Conservative party's chaotic succession struggle.

**The big story** [Page 10](#) →

**The Uber files, a cache of more than 124,000 internal confidential documents** from the cab-hailing company which were leaked to the Guardian, lay bare ethically questionable practices through which the company barged its way into new markets. From page 17 you'll find a comprehensive overview, but the scale of the investigation was such that we could probably have filled an entire magazine with its extended revelations. For the full series, head to [theguardian.com/uberfiles](https://theguardian.com/uberfiles).

**Spotlight** [Page 17](#) →

**A voyage around South America's coastline was billed as the experience of a lifetime** - but for passengers on board the MS Zaandam, sick and marooned at sea during the first weeks of the Covid outbreak, it became memorable for the wrong reasons. Jonathan Franklin and Michael Smith report on the dream cruise that turned into a nightmare.

**Cabin fever** [Page 34](#) →



**On the cover** As Jonathan Freedland writes: "Lies and a brazen contempt for the rules powered his rise; lies and a brazen contempt for the rules brought his fall. Which means the political odyssey of Boris Johnson has a curious symmetry. Except that what began as defects in the personality of one man ended as defects in his party and his government."

*Photograph: Getty/Guardian Design*



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# Global report

Headlines from the last seven days

**GW**

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## 1 THE UBER FILES

### EU seeks clarification over lobbying revelations

The EU executive said it would write to its former vice-president Neelie Kroes “for clarification” following revelations that she secretly helped Uber lobby the Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, and a string of other politicians.

The European Commission faced calls to open an inquiry and “defend the EU’s integrity” in the wake of the reports, which showed that Kroes called Dutch government authorities about Uber less than six months after leaving her post as the top EU official on internet policy.

The calls were part of the growing fallout from the Uber files, a trove of 124,000 documents exposing ethically questionable practices that allowed the cab-hailing company to barge into new markets around the world.

The leak shines a light on Kroes, who promised to help the company arrange a meeting with a senior European Commission official, despite a ban on lobbying her former colleagues at the time.

Kroes denied any wrongdoing and said she did “not have any formal nor informal role” before May 2016, when it was announced she was to chair the company’s public policy advisory board.

**Spotlight Page 17** →



## 2 UNITED STATES



### Biden acts to protect reproductive healthcare

Joe Biden has signed an executive order offering protections to millions of American women denied the constitutional right to abortion. The move signals the start of a White House fightback after the supreme court last month struck down Roe v Wade, its landmark ruling that legalised abortion for almost 50 years.

In a White House address last Friday, the president condemned the court’s decision as “an exercise in raw political power”. The president’s executive order will safeguard access to reproductive healthcare services, including abortion and contraception. This includes access to medication abortions, also known as abortion pills, approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

**Spotlight Page 32** →

## 3 RUSSIA

### Basketball star pleads guilty at Moscow drug trial

US basketball star Brittney Griner pleaded guilty to drug possession and smuggling charges during her trial in Moscow. The athlete was detained in February at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport after vape canisters with cannabis oil were allegedly found in her luggage. She faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted of large-scale transportation of drugs. According to the Russian state news agency Tass, Griner’s translator told the court she said she had acted unintentionally because she packed in a hurry. Griner’s legal team in Russia said the guilty plea was “her decision”.

## 4 UKRAINE

### Russian rocket attack kills at least 34 in Chasiv Yar

At least 34 people were killed in a missile strike on a five-storey apartment block in Chasiv Yar, eastern Ukraine, as rescue teams continued to retrieve bodies from the rubble. According to Kyiv, the residential building was hit by Russian rockets fired from truck-borne systems late last Saturday.

Nine people were saved in the aftermath while Pavlo Kyrylenko, the governor of the Donetsk region that includes Chasiv Yar, said about three dozen people could still be trapped in the rubble.

Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, accused Moscow of deliberately targeting civilians. “Anyone who gives orders for such strikes, anyone who carries them out in ordinary cities, in residential areas, kills absolutely deliberately,” Zelenskiy said. “Punishment is inevitable for every Russian murderer.”

It was the latest strike in a recent burst of high-casualty attacks on residential structures leaving mass civilian casualties, although Russia contends it only targets Ukrainian military operations.

**Spotlight Page 24** →

## 5 UNITED STATES

### Bannon says is able to testify about Capitol raid

Steve Bannon, the onetime strategist to Donald Trump, indicated he could testify to the inquiry into the January 6 Capitol attack. The panel has sought Bannon’s testimony for months.

Bannon has said he was previously unable to comply with a subpoena from the panel because at the time, in a claim that has been disputed, the former president had asserted executive privilege over his testimony. But with Trump now willing to waive executive privilege, Bannon was in a position to initiate negotiations about a potential interview, his email said.

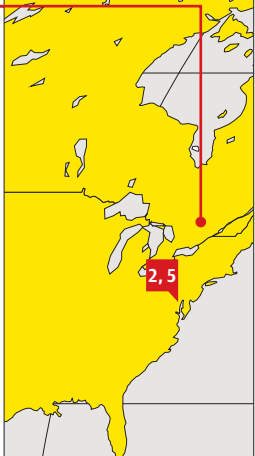


6 CANADA

**Police admit use of spyware to keep check on populace**

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the national police force, admitted that it routinely uses powerful spyware to watch citizens. The tools, which have been used on at least 10 investigations between 2018 and 2020, give the police access to text messages, email, photos, videos, audio files, calendar entries and financial records. The software can also remotely turn on the camera and microphone of a suspect's phone or laptop.

The RCMP, which has long evaded questions over its use of spyware, provided the information about its "on-device investigative tools" in response to a question from a Conservative MP about how the federal government collects data on its citizens.



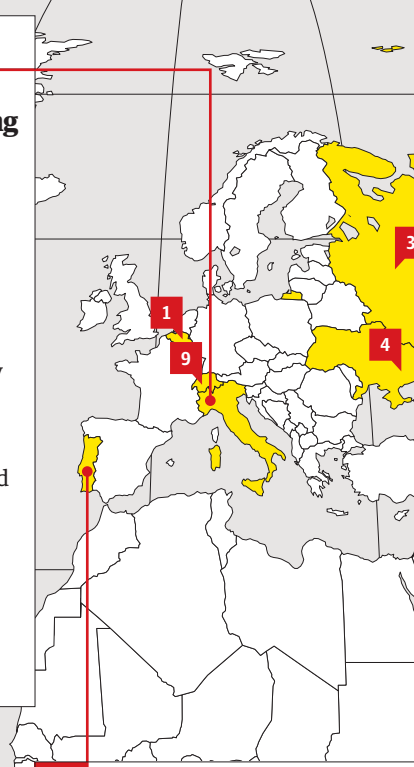
8 ITALY

**Genoa bridge collapse trial postponed after first hearing**

A trial of 59 defendants accused of manslaughter and undermining transport safety after dozens of people were killed when the Morandi Bridge in Genoa collapsed almost four years ago has been postponed until September.

The first hearing last Thursday lasted less than two hours. Judge Paolo Lepri said the hearing had ended "resoundingly prematurely" and that the second was scheduled for 12 September.

The Morandi Bridge collapsed during a storm on 14 August 2018, sending 43 people falling 45 metres to their deaths in one of the worst tragedies in modern Italian history.



10 PORTUGAL



**Dozens injured in wildfires as heatwave to intensify**

Wildfires have left at least 29 people injured as thousands of firefighters and dozens of aircraft were deployed in oppressive conditions. Authorities said 12 firefighters and 17 civilians had required medical treatment.

By last Sunday, more than 3,000 firefighters were tackling blazes, Portugal's civil protection agency said. The country is enduring a heatwave, with temperatures up to 43C forecast for this week.

On Sunday, the European Union activated its firefighting air fleet assistance programme, which allows member states to share resources to help Portugal.

7 BRAZIL



**Macaws return to the skies 20 years after 'extinction'**

A conservation project in Brazil is claiming success after the release of Spix's macaws into the wild. "The project is going extremely well," said biologist Tom White, of the US Fish and Wildlife Service and a technical adviser to the rescue project. "It's almost a month since we released the birds and all of them have survived."

*Cyanopsitta spixii*, which is noted for its grey head and vivid blue plumage, became extinct in its natural habitat 20 years ago. The birds that were released were bred from specimens living in collectors' cages.

9 SPORT

**Blatter and Platini cleared of fraud by Swiss court**

The former Fifa president Sepp Blatter has insisted he is "clean with my conscience and clean in my spirit" after being cleared of defrauding football's governing body by a Swiss court.

Michel Platini, a former captain and manager of the France national team who became a vice-president of football's world governing body, described his joy after his acquittal, saying the allegations had turned him from a legend to a "devil".

The two men, who were once among the most powerful figures in global sport, had denied the charges.

The complex case centred around a \$2m payment made from Fifa to Platini with Blatter's approval in 2011, for consultancy work a decade earlier.



11 NIGERIA

**Terrorists among hundreds freed during raid on prison**

Hundreds of prisoners, including scores of terrorists, were on the run in Nigeria after suspected Islamist militants attacked a prison near the capital, Abuja.

Gunmen armed with explosives blasted into Kuje medium-security prison, on the outskirts of Abuja, freeing nearly 900 of the 994 inmates, government officials said. More than 400 were still missing the next day, said Umar Abubakar, a spokesperson for the Nigerian Correctional Service.

One prison guard was killed in the attack, which was claimed by Islamic State.

12 TURKEY

**Lawyers accuse Ankara over Yazidi genocide**

Turkey should face charges at the international court of justice for being complicit in acts of genocide against the Yazidi people, while Syria and Iraq failed to prevent the killings, according to a report by the Yazidi Justice Committee, a group of human rights lawyers.

It is widely accepted that genocide was attempted against the Yazidis, a religious minority, from 2013 in Iraq and Syria. The report is the culmination of a three-year inquiry that investigated 13 countries. It concluded three had failed in their duty to take reasonable steps to prevent the genocide.

13 SOUTH AFRICA

**Separate shootings in bars kill 19 people in one day**

Gunmen used automatic rifles and powerful handguns to kill 15 people and injure eight in a mass shooting at a tavern in Johannesburg's Soweto township last Sunday. The same evening four people were killed and eight wounded by two gunman in a bar in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal province.

Police said the Soweto victims had been shot "at random" while they were drinking, contradicting early reports that they had been targeted specifically.

Such shootings are often linked to gangland vendettas or turf battles.

14 ISRAEL



**Ben & Jerry's sues parent company over Israeli deal**

Ben & Jerry's has sued its parent company, Unilever, to block the sale of its Israeli business to a local licensee, saying it was inconsistent with its values to sell its ice-cream in the occupied West Bank.

The complaint filed in the US district court in Manhattan said the sale, announced on 29 June, threatened to undermine the integrity of the brand, which the Ben & Jerry's board had retained independence to protect when Unilever acquired the business in 2000.



## Global report

## 15 SRI LANKA



### President's bid to flee is thwarted by airport staff

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's attempt to flee the country failed after airport staff stood in his way and forced him to beat a humiliating retreat. Rajapaksa, who is due to officially resign after months of demonstrations calling for him to step down, was reportedly trying to escape to Dubai on Monday night.

However, officials said immigration staff refused to let the president enter the VIP area of the airport to stamp his passport and he would not go through the ordinary queues for fear of being mobbed by the public.

As a result, Rajapaksa reportedly missed four flights to the United Arab Emirates, and he and his wife had to return to a nearby military base.

**Spotlight Page 22 →**

## 16 MACAU

### Casinos shut in bid to contain Covid outbreak

The world's biggest gambling hub shut all its casinos for the first time in more than two years as authorities struggle to contain the city's worst coronavirus outbreak.

Macau's 30-plus casinos, along with other non-essential businesses, shut for one week from Monday. People have been ordered to stay at home and police would monitor the streets, with stringent punishments for those who disobey.

Macau has recorded about 1,500 Covid infections since mid-June. About 19,000 people are in mandatory quarantine, according to government figures.

## 17 PAKISTAN

### Deluges cause more than 70 deaths in three weeks

At least 77 people died in rain-related incidents in the three weeks to 7 July, the country's minister for climate change said. The monsoon rains have also damaged homes, roads, bridges and power stations, Sherry Rehman told a news conference in the capital, Islamabad, as storms continued to lash the country.

Rehman said 39 of the 77 people died in Balochistan. TV footage showed vehicles swept away by deluges in the province. Heavy rain also lashed Islamabad and the eastern Punjab province.

Pakistan's president, Arif Alvi, expressed his grief at the loss of life. Streets and homes were flooded in Quetta, capital of Balochistan province, the provincial disaster management agency said.

Rehman said the recent rains in Pakistan were 87% heavier than the average downpour. She linked the new pattern to the changes in climate, saying Pakistan should be ready to face more flooding because the country's glaciers were melting at a faster pace. That was causing flash floods that had damaged infrastructure.

## 19 JAPAN

### Mourners pay respects to assassinated former PM

Family and friends of the former prime minister Shinzo Abe attended his funeral on Tuesday at a Buddhist temple in Tokyo while members of the public paid their respects outside, four days after he was shot dead while making a campaign speech.

Hundreds of people filed into Zojoji temple the previous evening to pay their respects to Abe, who was Japan's longest-serving prime minister - a conservative who inspired loyalty among supporters and loathing among his critics.

The ceremony was limited to family and close friends, with his widow, Akie, as chief mourner.

Abe spent a turbulent year as prime minister from 2006 and then almost eight years after his political comeback in 2012.

**Spotlight Page 30 →**



## 20 AUSTRALIA

### Canberra defensive over Beijing advice on relations

Anthony Albanese said Australia "doesn't respond to demands", after China listed four ways the relationship between the two countries could be improved. "We respond to our own national interest," Australia's prime minister said on Monday.

His comments followed last week's meeting on the sidelines of the G20 between Australia's foreign affairs minister, Penny Wong, and her Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi. Wang said the "root cause" of the friction was the former Coalition government portraying China as an "opponent" or a "threat".

## DEATHS



#### José Eduardo dos Santos

Angola's former president whose near-four-decade rule was marked by a brutal 27-year civil war. He died on 8 July, aged 79.

#### Luis Echeverria

Mexico's former president who from 1970 to 1976 oversaw the harshest years of a "dirty war" against dissidents. He died on 8 July, aged 100.

#### James Caan

Actor whose defining role was as Sonny Corleone in *The Godfather*. He died on 6 July, aged 82.

#### Monty Norman

Composer of the James Bond theme who made a great contribution to British musicals in the 1950s and 60s. He died on 11 July, aged 94.

#### Mohammad Barkindo

Nigerian oil industry veteran and secretary-general of Opec. He died on 5 July, aged 63.

#### Kazuki Takahashi

Artist whose manga comic series *Yu-Gi-Oh!* spawned a media franchise. He died on 6 July, aged 60.



## SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT



## PLASTICS

**Microplastics found in farm animals' meat and milk**

Microplastic contamination has been reported in beef and pork for the first time, as well as in the blood of cows and pigs on farms. Scientists at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in the Netherlands found the particles in three-quarters of meat and milk products tested and every blood sample in a pilot study. They were also found in every sample of animal pellet feed tested. The food products were packaged in plastic, which is another possible route.

The researchers reported microplastics in human blood for the first time in March, and used the same methods to test the animal products. The impact on human or farm animal health is unknown, but researchers are concerned because microplastics cause damage to human cells in the laboratory.

## MATHEMATICS

**Ukrainian professor wins 'Nobel prize of maths'**

A Ukrainian mathematician, Prof Maryna Viazovska, of the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne, and Prof James Maynard, from Oxford University, were among the winners of the Fields medal, considered the equivalent of a Nobel prize for mathematics. Hugo Duminil-Copin, of the University of Geneva and Institut des Hautes Études Scientifiques, and June

Huh of Princeton University were also presented with the award at a ceremony in Helsinki. Viazovska, who was born and grew up in Kyiv, is only the second woman to receive the award.

**The Guardian View** [Page 49](#) →

## CHEMISTRY

**Academics recreate lost smells from the past**

A group of chemists and historians want the lost smells of European history to be introduced to museums and tourist landmarks. Smell, they argue, has been unfairly ignored in academic attempts to understand the past.

Cecilia Bembibre, a lecturer in sustainable heritage at University College London, cited an example where a scent to match the odour of the dirty canals of old Amsterdam was created for an exhibition in The Hague. The Odeuropa consortium has its headquarters in Amsterdam, with research bases in Germany, Italy, France, Slovenia and the UK. The wider project, funded by a €2.8m (\$2.85m) EU grant in 2020, aims to establish a science of olfactory history.

## MARINE LIFE

**Film of southern fin whales sparks hope of recovery**

For the first time since whaling was banned, a group of southern fin whales have been filmed feeding in a "thrilling" spectacle, hailed as a sign of hope for the animal.

The ocean giants are second only to blue whales in length but were slaughtered to near-extinction during the 20th century. While scientists say numbers of southern fin whales have been slowly recovering since a 1976 whaling ban, there have been few sightings. But in scenes described by Helena Herr of the University of Hamburg, lead author of research published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, as "one of nature's greatest events", researchers captured footage of up to 150 southern fin whales in Antarctica.

◀ The discovery of microplastics in blood by scientists in the Netherlands shows they can move around the body and may lodge in organs  
DAVID KELLY

**Global report**  
*United Kingdom*

## CONSERVATIVES

**Candidates to replace Boris Johnson line up**

Britain's new prime minister will be confirmed on 5 September, it has been announced. The party's Westminster MPs will whittle the list of leadership hopefuls to two before a vote by Conservative members across the country.

The contest follows the resignation of Boris Johnson as party leader last week after a mass resignation of ministers who lost confidence in his error-strewn premiership. To streamline the competition, the 1922 Committee of Tory backbenchers on Monday opted to increase the number of backers that a candidate needed from eight to 20, and ruled that they would need at least 30 votes to get past the first round.

Former chancellor Rishi Sunak had secured the backing of nearly 40 MPs by Monday evening, while trade minister Penny Mordaunt (below), with 24, was given a boost by polling for Conservative Home on Monday night showing she was the preferred candidate among party members. The start of the leadership campaign was marked by Sunak saying he would not tell "comforting fairy tales" on the economy, while almost all other candidates were promising tax cuts.

The pound is at its lowest in two years amid growing concern over the strength of the British economy and political instability.

Economists said the tax-cutting proposals risked stoking inflation and inequality, while adding to government borrowing or requiring sweeping spending cuts. Sunak's camp believes some of the promises would lead to a fiscal black hole.

**The big story** [Page 10](#) →

**50**  
*The number of common toads discovered in nest boxes in trees up to 3 metres above ground, which surprised researchers as the amphibians are typically found on land or in water*





## Eyewitness

### Rock and roll

Competitors take part in the European Stone Stacking Championships 2022 on Eye Cave Beach in Dunbar, East Lothian, Scotland. The championships, which include an artistic event over four hours and a competition against the clock, are Europe's largest competition for stone-stacking and rock-balancing enthusiasts and artists. This year the event included a week-long land art festival with sand drawings and woodland sculpture.

JANE BARLOW/PA



## LABOUR

### Police clear Starmer and Rayner of lockdown breach

Keir Starmer and his deputy, Angela Rayner, were cleared by Durham constabulary of breaching lockdown rules over a beer and takeaway curry they had with staff during election campaigning last year, with officers concluding it was a legitimate work event.

In a relief for Labour, police said an investigation had concluded that the gathering in April 2021 was reasonably necessary for work purposes, and no fixed-penalty notices had been issued over it. Starmer and Rayner had promised to resign if they were fined, having called for Boris Johnson to step down after he was fined for attending a social event in breach of lockdown at No 10. Both always insisted no rules had been broken.

Durham constabulary initially said there was no case to answer after brief video footage emerged of the event in the office of the Durham MP, Mary Foy, during a byelection campaign for the nearby Hartlepool seat.

## SPORT

### Olympic hero reveals he was trafficked as child servant

Sir Mo Farah has revealed that he was illegally trafficked into Britain under the name of another child as a nine-year-old and forced into domestic servitude. The four-time Olympic champion previously said he left Somalia aged eight to join his father in London. However in a BBC documentary, the 39-year-old says he was trafficked to London by a stranger under a name taken from another child.

“Most people know me as Mo Farah, but it’s not my name or it’s not the reality,” he said. “The real story is I was born in Somaliland, north of Somalia, as Hussein Abdi Kahin. My parents never lived in the UK.”



## LAW

### Brazilian mine disaster case to be heard in England

More than 200,000 victims of Brazil's worst environmental disaster will have their case heard in a UK court, making it the largest group claim in English legal history. The lawsuit is against the Anglo-Australian miner BHP - one of the biggest companies in the world - for its part in the collapse of the Mariana dam in 2015, which released toxic waste down 640km of waterways along the Doce River. Claimants are seeking at least \$6bn in compensation.

The court of appeal released a 107-page judgment that BHP, which had its headquarters in England at the time of the dam's collapse, would have to account for its role in the disaster. An earlier ruling had said English courts would not hear the case. The latest judgment said compensation being paid in Brazil did not seem adequate. It stated: “The vast majority of claimants who have recovered damages have only received very modest sums in respect of moral damages.”



# 40%

*Growth in cargo bike sales in the past year, according to the Bicycle Association, as people and businesses seek cheaper and sometimes faster journeys in cities*



# THE FANTASY PRIME MINISTER





THE DOWNFALL

After the coup, the civil war

*Tory faultlines exposed, page 15 →*

Prime ministers in waiting?

*The leadership candidates, page 16 →*

# Dishonesty has been the one constant in Boris Johnson's career. In the end, the deceit proved too much to bear

By Jonathan Freedland

# Lies

and a brazen contempt for the rules powered his rise; lies and a brazen contempt for the rules brought his fall. Which means the political odyssey of Boris Johnson has a curious symmetry. Except that what began as defects in

▶ Boris Johnson announces his resignation  
DAN KITWOOD/GETTY

the personality of one man ended as defects in his party and his government, inflicting great damage on the entire country.

The lies that proved his undoing are now all too familiar. The last, fatal lie was his claim that he had not been told directly of complaints of sexual misconduct committed by the former deputy chief whip Chris Pincher, a claim rapidly exposed as false in a rare intervention from a former permanent secretary at the Foreign Office, Simon McDonald. It turned out that Johnson had indeed been briefed about Pincher, and that once again Johnson had not told the truth.

But last week, though that newest dishonesty was the last straw first for Sajid Javid, then minutes later for Rishi Sunak, and, over the dizzying 36 hours that followed, dozens of others, triggering a wave of resignations and withdrawals of backbench support that ultimately brought Johnson's removal, it was hardly what broke the Johnson premiership.

Instead, it was the pattern of repeated mendacity that proved too much to bear both for Johnson's previous chancellor and his hastily installed successor, his health secretary and a slew of more junior colleagues, a pattern so firmly established in the public mind that even his closest lieutenants could deny it no longer. Central to it is the scandal known as Partygate.

Johnson had stood before the country in one of the darkest hours of the postwar era and promised that we were all in this together, that the lockdown regulations that kept loved ones from each other, even as they drew their last breath, applied to everyone including him.

But, as the nation discovered nearly two years later, that was not true. He broke those rules, indeed he broke the law and "presided over a culture of casual law-breaking", in the words of an earlier resigner, the former minister and one-time ally Jesse Norman. All this in the very building where those laws were drawn up, seeing himself

as "free of the network of obligation which binds everyone else", to quote the Eton housemaster who had spotted that same trait in Johnson 40 years earlier. He lied again when he told parliament he was shocked and "sickened" to discover parties had taken place in Downing Street, when he knew all too well they had taken place because he attended those parties himself.

## Dishonesty and deceit

None of this was a surprise, because dishonesty has been the one constant through Johnson's career. Famously, he was sacked from his first job, at the Times, for making up a quote, and later he was sacked from Michael Howard's frontbench for lying to the then party leader about an affair.

Ordinarily, a reputation for serial deceit would close off the route to the top. Yet for Johnson it proved no obstacle at all. On the contrary, his route to No 10 was smoothed with lies. How come? What were the forces that propelled a man whose flaws were so clear and well documented into the most powerful job in the land?

At its most superficial, Johnson was lucky in his opponents. Leaders often emerge as chemical reactions to their predecessors: after Barack Obama, Donald Trump. Johnson was blessed to seek the Tory crown after the resignation of Theresa May. Bored with a leader who was dutiful, diligent and dull, Conservatives were ready for someone with some swash to his buckle.

That was bound to be Johnson. For more than two decades, he had been the Tories' guilty pleasure. They would mob him at party conference, giggling at his every scripted gag, delighting in every studied ruffling of the hair.

For years, the conventional wisdom had held that "Boris" was the obvious choice for jester but an improbable king. But after May, under whom the Tories won just 9% of the vote in the 2019 elections for the European parliament, they were ready to overlook all the obvious flaws and offer the throne to her polar opposite. →



◀ Outside No 10 with his partner Carrie Symmonds, later his wife  
PETER SUMMERS/GETTY



The political logic was straightforward. For all his defects, Johnson was hailed as the Heineken candidate, able to woo parts of the electorate other Conservatives could not reach. Had he not proved that in London, becoming mayor - twice - of an otherwise Labour city? Conservative MPs, even those who knew Johnson best and therefore disliked him most, elected him leader on that basis.

Apparent vindication came within six months, in December 2019, when Johnson bagged the Tories an 80-seat majority, their biggest win since 1987. His smashing of the “red wall”, after a campaign in which voters in traditional Labour seats jostled for selfies with him, seemed to prove he really could refresh parts of the country beyond the reach of his rivals.

In fact, there was no such effect. Polling data showed that Johnson was less popular at the last election than May had been in 2017. He had an approval rating of minus 20 (May’s had been minus seven). According to the election analyst Peter Kellner, “Johnson’s victory in 2019 owed less to his popularity than Jeremy Corbyn’s unpopularity.”

For while Johnson scored minus 20, Corbyn stood at minus 44 (24% satisfied, 68% dissatisfied). As so often, Johnson had proved lucky in his opponent. In London, he had twice run against Ken Livingstone. In 2019, he found himself for a third time in just over a decade facing a far-left candidate on whom public opinion had soured. In all three cases, Johnson did not need to be especially popular to win.

‘Getting Brexit done’

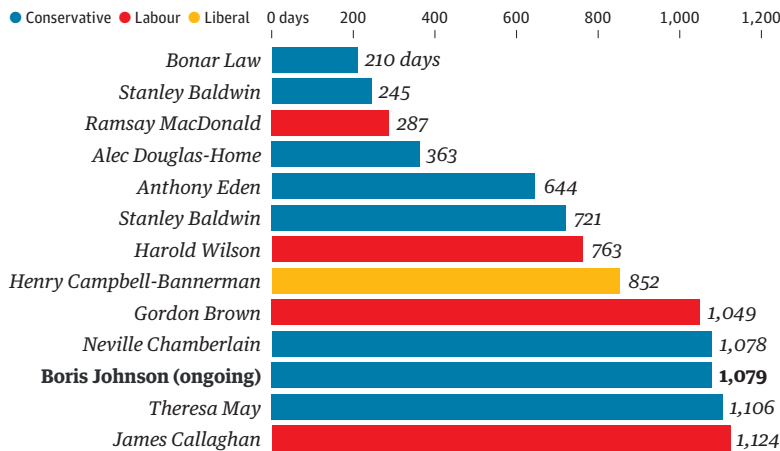
Which brings us to Brexit. On one reading, Johnson’s accession to Downing Street was foretold on 23 June 2016. Once the country had voted to leave the European Union, it was surely only a matter of time before a leaver led the country - and not just any leaver but the man who had made himself the face of the Brexit campaign.

In this view, the May premiership was no more than a three-year interregnum, a diversion from the path sketched out by fate, the detour created by the split in the leave camp triggered by Michael Gove’s last-minute repudiation of Johnson, when Gove declared that his former comrade-in-arms could not “provide the leadership” the country required (a betrayal for which Johnson exacted long-delayed revenge last week, sacking Gove and having his aides brand him “a snake”). Remainder May did her best, trying to mollify the Brexiters in her party, but it was always a doomed effort, especially once she lost her Commons majority in 2017. The coming of Mr Leave was an inevitability.

Once installed in No 10, and thanks to a strategy devised by Dominic Cummings, Johnson deployed Brexit to engineer an election in which he would win his own mandate.

Faced with a deadlocked Commons, Johnson resorted to ever more outrageous moves - illegally suspending parliament, expelling 21 Tory MPs who had defied him - which, Cummings would later admit, were designed to drive remainers crazy. (As Cummings saw it, remainers duly played the role he had scripted for them, as elitists

Days served as PM at time of Boris Johnson’s resignation announcement on 7 July



Note: single tenures shown in days. Baldwin, Wilson and Ramsay MacDonald served multiple terms

▶ Johnson plans to remain as prime minister until a new Tory leader is chosen  
TAYFUN SALCI/ZUMA/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

**Nesrine Malik**  
No amount of laundering will clean this up  
Page 48 →





◀ Dominic Cummings was seen as the eminence grise behind Johnson, until his downfall

VICTORIA JONES/PA

▼ On the stump with the Brexit battle bus during the referendum campaign in 2016

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY



## In the age of Trump and Brexit, bullshit artists became men of 'the people'

▲ Donald Trump recognised in Boris Johnson a kindred spirit

PETER NICHOLLS/AFP/GETTY

bent on thwarting the popular will.)

By the end of 2019, Johnson could go to the country casting himself as the only man who could end the stalemate and, at last, “get Brexit done”. It worked.

But a bogged-down Brexit, a charisma-free predecessor and unpopular Labour opponent were only the most visible forces at work in the rise of Boris Johnson. What also eased his ascent was a subtle but powerful shift.

It took its most florid form in the US, with the election of Trump - along with Brexit, the other great shock of 2016. Put simply, it was the arrival of a new variant of populist politics, one that carried a strain of celebrity culture. Trump had been a bigger star than Johnson - he had his own TV show, *The Apprentice*, while Johnson mainly had to make do with the odd panel appearance - but their appeal worked in similar ways.

Humour was central to it, not to entertain so much as to signal that the performer was different from all the other stuffed-shirt politicians. That had been Johnson's shtick for years: the messy hair, the untucked shirt,

the apparently ad-libbed - though usually meticulously crafted - remark. In his case, it almost certainly began as an attention-catching strategy, a way of standing out from the crowd, whether at Eton - turning a failure to learn his lines for a school production of *Richard II* into slapstick comedy - or when seeking the top job at the Oxford Union.

But by the time of the EU referendum, the shtick had turned into something else. It had acquired a political meaning, a way of signalling that he stood outside the usual conventions, that he was a maverick unafraid to break the rules. In 2016, it became part of a politics that sought to harness the energy of anti-politics, Johnson presenting himself as the fearless challenger to the Westminster consensus. Even - however improbably for a man of his resume - as the anti-establishment tribune of the people.

### Britain's Trump

It was quite a transformation from the liberal, vaguely cosmopolitan persona Johnson had constructed as mayor of London, a reinvention comparable to Trump's jettisoning of his past as a New York, pro-abortion-rights Democrat.

But by the end of 2016, both men had repositioned themselves as the embodiment of nationalist populism, railing against liberal elites and promising to restore a vanished past, whether it was to Make America Great Again or to Take Back Control.

The dishonesty was still there, distilled into the £350m (\$418m) figure on the side of Vote Leave's red bus, with

its false claim that Britain was sending that sum to the EU every week. Of course, lies about Europe were how Johnson had made his name back in the 1990s, as the *Telegraph's* correspondent in Brussels, from where he churned out a series of eye-catching fictions, from an EU attempt to straighten bananas to an imagined Italian request for EU approval of smaller condoms. Those years spent confirming *Telegraph* readers' prejudices, as well as their worst fears of an imminent European superstate, helped strengthen British Euroscepticism and rolled the pitch for 2016.

Now, though, Johnson's habitual mendacity was embedded in a larger political project, one that went far beyond Britain. “Post-truth” was one of the defining features of the new populism, often allied to a contempt for science, data and expertise.

So, naturally, Vote Leave waved aside the stats about economic self-harm, including those that spelled out how a Britain that removed itself from a single market of its closest neighbours would obviously end up poorer. If anyone who knew about trade raised an objection, they were told the country had “had enough of experts”.

For this form of populism Johnson was a perfect fit. His personal

**Poll position**  
Was Boris the people's PM?

**-20**

Johnson's net satisfaction rating before the 2019 election

**-44**

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's rating, fuelling the theory that Johnson won mainly due to his opponent's lack of popularity





◀ At a virtual press briefing at the height of the pandemic

JUSTIN TALLIS/AP

### *He was a familiar English archetype, the gentleman offering swagger in place of effort*

brand had long been a breezy disdain for the worker bees and “girly swots” who felt duty-bound to go through their papers, to read their briefs and master the details.

He had long been a familiar English archetype, the gentleman amateur offering fluency, confidence and swagger in place of effort, experience and attention to detail, and Brexit-era populism lent what had been mere character flaws – arrogance and laziness – a

patina of ideological intent.

In the age of Trump and Brexit, to be a congenital bullshit artist – as Johnson always had been – was to define yourself as a man of “the people” and their “instincts”, unrestrained by pettifogging niceties, heedless of the boring naysayers and their tedious facts, ready instead to take a stand against the know-all elites, establishment and experts. In that respect at least, the US president was not wrong when he recognised in Johnson a kindred spirit, “Britain Trump”.

It might even have worked, for a while at any rate. But then came coronavirus. Populists have no answer to a pandemic, for it requires the very things Johnson and his ilk lack and despise: hard work, a forensic grasp of detail, the wisdom of experts, human

empathy, a spirit of self-sacrifice and, above all, rules. Of course, he would not follow them. He never had. It had once been part of his appeal.

But with the revelations of lockdown partying in Downing Street, that same trait prompted public revulsion. The Sue Gray report, even long-delayed and reportedly diluted, with its accounts of round-the-clock partying, drunken brawls, wine-spattered walls and vomit – along with a Bullingdon Club contempt for the servants – brought a fresh wave of collective disgust. From that point on he was living on borrowed time. If it had not been the Pincher affair, it would have been something else.

In the end, Johnson, who had dreamed of a decade in Downing Street, will have occupied No 10 for a little over three years. (That’s if he gets his wish to stay until the autumn; if he is ejected sooner, he will fall short of that milestone and have been an even shorter-lived PM than May, a fact that will sting.)

But that still gave him time to do some lasting damage. Not just a mishandling of the pandemic that meant that at one stage Britain had recorded the highest death toll in Europe and the greatest economic blow in the G7, but something less measurable.

He turned the Tory party away from the values it once held dear, so that Johnson’s party cheerfully jeopardised the union, tramped on parliamentary sovereignty and even insulted the monarchy. He purged it of some of its best people and debased several of the great offices of state by filling them with obvious incompetents. Above all, he drained what remained of the public reservoir of trust.

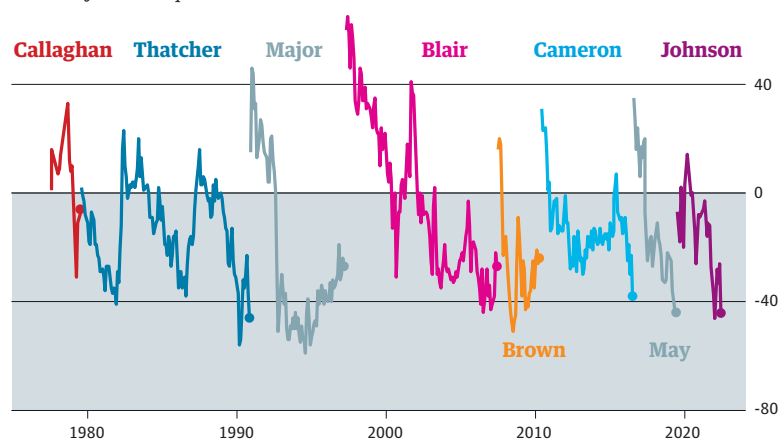
In the spring of 2020, Britons were ready to follow their prime minister into a long period of collective self-discipline, even at the expense of hardship and emotional pain. They did it because they believed him when he said we would all be doing it, every last one of us. The Queen believed it, which is why she sat alone as she buried her husband of 73 years. But it was not true.

That will leave its own legacy, in distrust and cynicism that will endure long after Boris Johnson leaves Downing Street, his brief but toxic spell in the office he craved since childhood finally over.

JONATHAN FREEDLAND IS A GUARDIAN COLUMNIST

### **With his net satisfaction rating of -44 in June, Johnson ends his tenure with the same popularity level as Theresa May**

*Net satisfaction in prime minister*



Source: Ipsos MORI. percentage of people unsatisfied subtracted from percentage of people satisfied



## THE SUCCESSION

## Who's next? Tories brace for a race to the bottom

Sunak is off to a strong start  
- but bad blood seems likely,  
whoever moves into No 10

By Toby Helm

Shortly after Boris Johnson struggled through prime minister's questions last Wednesday, as the list of resignations from his government grew, a senior Tory MP sat down in a quiet corner of the House of Commons and agonised alone over what to do.

He had been loyal to Johnson until then but could see the way the wind was blowing. "I really don't know," he said, grimacing and shaking his head when asked where he stood on the great question of the moment. "I know we can't go on like this. But I can't think of anything worse right now than a leadership contest."

Others preferred to consult colleagues. The corridors close to the

Commons chamber were lined with small groups of Conservative MPs holding hushed conversations. They were all agreed that, in many respects, this would be the worst of times to bring it all to a head - with a cost of living crisis and war in Ukraine both raging, to name but two of the issues facing the government.

But everyone was clear, it had gone too far. The coup against Johnson had a momentum that was unstoppable. What worried these Tory MPs most was not Johnson's fate but what would follow. "I think the party will struggle to survive this," said one former minister last week. "I think we will split."

The same MP said Johnson's electoral appeal had been so broad at the 2019 general election - thanks mainly to the "get Brexit done" slogan - that success had bred complacency.

The party had never really addressed how it could make a success of breaking into new areas that were less traditionally Tory, how it could govern for so wide a coalition of voters behind red and blue walls alike. "Are we big state or small state? High tax, low tax? How do we actually level up? It has all been left unresolved."

Getting rid of the PM, they realised, was just the beginning. A leadership contest would blow it all open, expose the faultlines, the unanswered questions from the Johnson era, and lay bare the personal ambitions of those who had long wanted to replace him.

A former Tory minister said last Friday he feared weeks of unseemly beauty parading, in which candidates indulged in policy "arms races" to

win support. "The worry is that it all descends into a Dutch auction with people promising lower and lower taxes, ever more Brexit hard lines on the Northern Ireland protocol and anti-woke this and that. It could all be quite damaging."

Others were quick to warn how personal it would become. Shortly after Johnson threw in the towel, the culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, a Johnson cheerleader to the last, warned that "the hounds of hell have been unleashed. People will shred each other to pieces in the media. It is going to be a bloodbath."

Zac Goldsmith, who was elevated to the Lords by Johnson, tweeted that his green agenda risked being forgotten: "Most of the likely contenders are people who, on the whole, couldn't give a shit about climate and nature."

By Monday the list of Tories who had made clear their intentions to stand included the former chancellor Rishi Sunak, whose resignation last Tuesday triggered dozens more departures from the government; his replacement as chancellor, Nadhim Zahawi; the foreign secretary, Liz Truss; the transport secretary, Grant Shapps; Tom Tugendhat, the chair of the foreign affairs select committee; the attorney general Suella Braverman; and Kemi Badenoch, who was levelling-up and equalities minister until she resigned last week.

Also throwing their hats into the ring were Sajid Javid, who as health secretary was first to quit the cabinet last week, ex-health secretary Jeremy Hunt, the trade minister Penny Mordaunt and backbencher Rehman Chishti.

Sunak is seen as the early favourite and was said to have at least 80 Tory MPs signed up behind his campaign. Announcing in a social media video his intention to stand, he said he wanted to "restore trust, rebuild the economy and reunite the country".

Inside Downing Street, where Johnson will remain in charge until early September, there is undisguised contempt for the ex-neighbour. One senior government source said that people in No 10 had been studying the Sunak launch video and his website, and concluded from some of its content that it was prepared months ago, not over the previous 48 hours as Sunak supporters maintained. It was obvious, they said, that it was part of a well organised plot. →

**I think that the party will struggle to survive this. I think we will split**

◀ Sunak is said to have at least 80 MPs signed up to his campaign

OLI SCARFF/AFP



One government insider said it was clear that Johnson and his people would not go quietly, and that their next task would be to stop Sunak at all costs.

The former vice-chair of the 1922 committee of Tory backbenchers, Sir Charles Walker, said last weekend that an ugly contest was inevitable: "Rishi and his camp will have to soak up a lot of anger over the days and weeks. Will that prevent him from becoming leader? Maybe not. Will it hamper him as prime minister? Definitely. However, whoever replaces Boris will suffer the same opprobrium to a great or less extent. They will get the wrath of the disappointed."

With all this in mind, Sir Graham Brady, chair of the 1922 committee, has

been at pains to shorten the succession contest so that a new Tory leader and prime minister can be chosen as soon as possible.

When Johnson phoned Brady at 8.30am last Thursday to tell him that he had finally decided to resign, he told him he wanted to hand over to his successor at the Tory conference at the beginning of October. Brady balked. He thought this was too long and urged Johnson to say in his resignation statement that he would go some time before the conference.

The executive of the 1922 committee this week began holding a series of votes by MPs with the aim of whittling down the candidates to just two by the time parliament goes into summer recess on 22 July.

**Rishi and his camp will have to soak up a lot of anger over the days and weeks**

Brady will meet the party's board to confirm a timetable for hustings across the country during late July and August, followed by voting by almost 200,000 party members. The new Tory leader and prime minister will be announced on 5 September.

With so much bad blood, Tory MPs and members will be relieved that the contest has been curtailed. But they will know that the wounds opened by the fall of Boris Johnson will not heal quickly.

"The defenestration of Margaret Thatcher three decades ago still causes resentment even today," said one Tory grandee. "I think this could be just as bad if not even worse." *Observer*

TOBY HELM IS THE OBSERVER'S POLITICAL EDITOR

## A FORM GUIDE TO BRITAIN'S POSSIBLE NEW PRIME MINISTERS

By Alexandra Topping

The race to become the next Conservative leader - and next British prime minister - is a crowded field. Under the rules, Tory MPs will select the top two candidates to be put before a vote of party members.

We run the rule over the leading candidates' personalities, pitches and positions on the emerging policy debates. Others may yet enter the race. One, **Rehman Chishti**, has no declared backers so far. *Best available odds as of 11 July*

**Kemi Badenoch**  
10/1

**Best known for:** Being a former levelling up and equalities minister, and



standing at the vanguard of the "war on woke".

**The pitch:** A fresh face determined to "focus on the essentials".

**Suella Braverman** 28/1  
**Best known for:** Being an attorney general with a devotion to Brexit and an obsession with getting "rid of all this woke rubbish".  
**The pitch:** A culture warrior who promises to destroy a "rights culture" that is "out of control".

**Jeremy Hunt**  
14/1  
**Best known for:** Being a

former health and foreign secretary who lost to Johnson last time round.  
**The pitch:** The one they should have picked last time.

**Sajid Javid** 18/1  
**Best known for:** Being a former chancellor and health secretary with a penchant for a power stance.  
**The pitch:** A low-tax, low-spend Tory, following a brief infatuation with higher spending on health and social care while health secretary.

**Penny Mordaunt** 3/1  
**Best known for:** It should probably be becoming the UK's first female defence secretary, if only for 85



days. Sadly, it's for being in the TV diving show *Splash*.  
**The pitch:** Fairly vague.

**Grant Shapps**  
50/1  
**Best known for:** Transport secretary who sported an incredible lockdown bouffant when the barber shops were shut.  
**The pitch:** Ambitious plans to make the UK the biggest economy in Europe by 2050.



**Rishi Sunak** 13/8  
**Best known for:** Being a super-rich former chancellor who wears expensive flip-flops, and once gave us all a half-price Nando's.  
**The pitch:** A serious man for serious times.

**Liz Truss** 4/1  
**Best known for:** Being a hawkish foreign secretary with a hatred of disgraceful cheese imports.  
**The pitch:** Told the Telegraph on Sunday: "It isn't right to be putting up taxes now. I would reverse the national insurance increase that came in during April, make sure we keep corporation tax competitive so



we can attract business and investment into Britain, and put the Covid debt on a longer-term footing."

**Tom Tugendhat**  
8/1  
**Best known for:** Condemning the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in August last year with the words: "This does not need to be defeat, but at the moment it damn well feels like it."  
**The pitch:** A former soldier



who would fight for Queen and country as PM, Tugendhat's message, on repeat, is that the country needs a "clean start" and his bib is spotless.

**Nadhim Zahawi**  
20/1  
**Best known for:** Being a smooth-operating education secretary who became Johnson's chancellor before telling him to resign.  
**The pitch:** A low-tax Tory with a compelling personal story - he was a child refugee - who promises to "steady the ship and to stabilise the economy".

ALEXANDRA TOPPING IS A REPORTER FOR THE GUARDIAN





*In-depth reporting  
and analysis*

**JAPAN**

**Nation reels  
after killing of  
Shinzo Abe**

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# Spotlight



SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

## Leak reveals tech firm's international lobbying operation

By Guardian staff

**A** leaked trove of confidential files has revealed the inside story of how the tech company Uber flouted laws, duped police, exploited violence against drivers and secretly lobbied governments during its aggressive global expansion.

The unprecedented leak to the Guardian of more than 124,000 documents - known as the Uber files - lays bare the ethically questionable practices that fuelled the company's transformation into one of Silicon Valley's most famous exports.

The leak spans a five-year period

when Uber was run by its co-founder Travis Kalanick, who tried to force the cab-hailing service into cities around the world, even if that meant breaching laws and taxi regulations.

During the fierce global opposition, the data shows how Uber tried to shore up support by discreetly courting prime ministers, presidents, billionaires, oligarchs and media barons.

Leaked messages suggest Uber executives were at the time under no illusions about the company's law-breaking, with one joking they had

Continued







become “pirates” and another conceding: “We’re just fucking illegal”.

The cache of files, which span 2013 to 2017, includes more than 83,000 emails, iMessages and WhatsApp messages, among them often frank and unvarnished communications between Kalanick and his top team.

In one exchange, Kalanick dismissed concerns from others that sending Uber drivers to a protest in France put them at risk from angry opponents in the taxi industry. “I think it’s worth it,” he said. “Violence guarantee[s] success.”

In a statement, Kalanick’s spokesperson said he “never suggested that Uber should take advantage of violence at the expense of driver safety”, and any suggestion he was involved in such activity would be completely false.

The leak contains texts between Kalanick and Emmanuel Macron, who secretly helped the company in France when he was economy minister, allowing Uber frequent and direct access to him and his staff. Macron, now French president, appears to have gone to extraordinary lengths to help Uber.

Privately, executives expressed barely disguised disdain for elected officials who were less receptive to Uber’s business model. After the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, who was the mayor of Hamburg at the time, resisted Uber lobbyists and insisted on paying drivers a minimum wage, an executive told colleagues he was “a real comedian”.

When then US vice-president Joe Biden was late to a 2016 meeting with the company at the World Economic Forum at Davos, Kalanick texted a colleague: “I’ve had my people let him know that every minute late he is, is one less minute he will have with me.”

After meeting Kalanick, Biden appears to have amended his prepared speech at Davos to refer to a chief executive whose company would give millions of workers “freedom to work as many hours as they wish, manage their own lives as they wish”.

The Guardian led a global investigation into the leaked files, sharing the data with media organisations around the world via the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). More than 180 journalists at

40 media outlets including Le Monde, the Washington Post and the BBC have been publishing a series of investigative reports about the tech company.

In a statement responding to the leak, Uber admitted to “mistakes and missteps”, but said it had been transformed since 2017 under the leadership of its current chief executive, Dara Khosrowshahi. “We have not and will not make excuses for past behaviour that is clearly not in line with our present values,” it said. “Instead, we ask the public to judge us by what we’ve done over the last five years and what we will do in the years to come.”

Kalanick’s spokesperson said Uber’s expansion initiatives were “led by over a hundred leaders in dozens of countries around the world and at all times under the direct oversight and with the full approval of Uber’s robust legal, policy and compliance groups”.

### ‘Weaponising’ drivers

The documents pull back the curtains on methods Uber used to lay foundations for its empire. One of the world’s largest work platforms, Uber is now a \$43bn company, making approximately 19m journeys a day.

The files cover Uber’s operations during a period in which the company became a global behemoth, bulldozing its cab-hailing service into many of the cities in which it still operates today. From Moscow to Johannesburg, bankrolled with venture capital funding, Uber heavily subsidised journeys, seducing drivers and passengers on to the app with incentives and pricing models that would not be sustainable.

Uber undercut established taxi and cab markets and put pressure on governments to rewrite laws to help pave the way for an app-based, gig-economy model of work.

In an attempt to quell the fierce opposition to the company and win changes to taxi and labour laws, Uber planned to spend an extraordinary \$90m in 2016 on lobbying and public relations, one document suggests.

Its strategy often involved going over the heads of city mayors and transport authorities. In addition to meeting Biden, Uber executives met Macron, former Irish Taoiseach Enda Kenny, former Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and George Osborne when he was UK chancellor.

In a statement, Osborne said it was explicit policy of the government

***‘When fires burn...  
This is a normal part  
of Uber’s business.  
Embrace the chaos’***



at the time to meet big tech companies and “persuade them to invest in Britain, and create jobs here”.

The documents indicate Uber was adept at finding unofficial routes to power, applying influence through friends or intermediaries, or seeking out encounters with politicians when aides and officials were not present.

It enlisted the backing of powerful figures by offering them prized financial stakes in the startup. And in an attempt to shape policy debates, it paid prominent academics hundreds of thousands of dollars to produce research that supported the company's claims about the benefits of its economic model.

Despite a well financed and dogged lobbying operation, Uber's efforts had mixed results. In some places it persuaded governments to rewrite laws. But elsewhere, the company found itself blocked by entrenched taxi industries, outgunned by local cab-hailing rivals or opposed by leftwing politicians who refused to budge.

When faced with opposition, Uber sought to turn it to its advantage, seizing upon it to fuel the narrative that its technology was disrupting antiquated transport systems.

As Uber launched across India, Kalanick's top executive in Asia urged managers to focus on growth, even when “fires start to burn”. “Know this is a normal part of Uber's business,” he said. “Embrace the chaos. It means you're doing something meaningful.”

Kalanick appeared to put that ethos into practice in January 2016, when Uber's attempts to upend markets in Europe led to angry protests in Belgium, Spain, Italy and France from taxi drivers.

Amid taxi strikes and riots in Paris, Kalanick told French executives to encourage Uber drivers to stage a counter-protest. Warned that doing so risked putting Uber drivers at risk of attacks from “extreme-right thugs”, Kalanick appeared to urge his team to press ahead. “I think it's worth it,” he said. “Violence guarantee[s] success. And these guys must be resisted, no? Agreed that right place and time must be thought out.”

Kalanick's spokesperson questioned the authenticity of some documents. She said Kalanick “never suggested that Uber should take advantage of violence at the expense of driver safety” and any suggestion that he was involved in such activity would be “completely false”.

Uber's spokesperson acknowledged past mistakes in the treatment of drivers but said no one, including Kalanick, wanted violence against Uber drivers. “There is much our former CEO said nearly a decade ago that we would certainly not condone today,” she said. “No one at Uber has ever been happy about violence against a driver.”

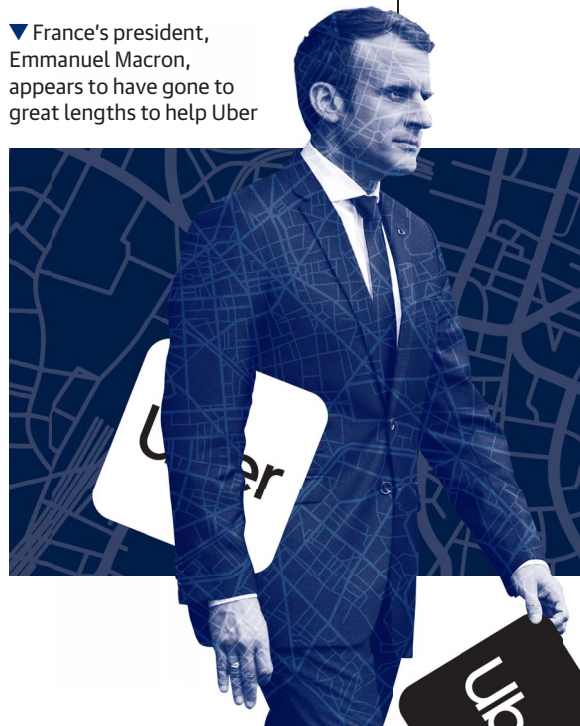
### The ‘kill switch’

Uber drivers were undoubtedly the target of assaults and sometimes murders by furious taxi drivers. Uber often characterised its opponents in the regulated taxi markets as operating a “cartel”. However, privately, Uber executives and staffers appear to have been in little doubt about the often rogue nature of their own operation.

In internal emails, staff referred to Uber's “other than legal status”, or other forms of active non-compliance with regulations. One senior executive wrote in an email: “We are not legal in many countries, we should avoid making antagonistic statements.” Commenting on the tactics the company was prepared to deploy to “avoid enforcement”, another executive wrote: “We have officially become pirates.”

Nairi Hourdajian, then Uber's head of global communications, put it even more bluntly in a message to a colleague in 2014, amid efforts to shut the company down in Thailand and India: “Sometimes we have problems because, well, we're just fucking illegal.” Contacted by the Guardian, Hourdajian declined to comment.

▼ France's president, Emmanuel Macron, appears to have gone to great lengths to help Uber



### In numbers *The Uber files*

● **124,000**  
Number of files leaked to the Guardian

● **83,000**  
Emails and messages in the cache

● **40**  
Number of countries that the leaked records cover, spanning 2013-2017

Kalanick's spokesperson accused the ICIJ of “pressing its false agenda” that he had “directed illegal or improper conduct”.

Uber's spokesperson said that, when it started, “ride-sharing regulations did not exist anywhere in the world” and transport laws were outdated for a smartphone era.

Across the world, police, transport officials and regulatory agencies sought to clamp down on Uber. Its offices in dozens of countries were repeatedly raided by authorities.

Against this backdrop, Uber developed sophisticated methods to thwart law enforcement. One was known internally as a “kill switch”. When an Uber office was raided, executives sent instructions to IT staff to cut off access to the company's main data systems, preventing authorities from gathering evidence. The files suggest the technique was deployed at least 12 times during raids in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, India, Hungary and Romania.

Kalanick's spokesperson said such “kill switch” protocols were common business practice and not designed to obstruct justice. The protocols, which did not delete data, were vetted and approved by Uber's legal department, and the former Uber chief executive was never charged in relation to obstruction of justice or a related offence.

Uber's spokesperson said its kill switch software “should never have been used to thwart legitimate regulatory action” and it had stopped using the system in 2017, when Khosrowshahi replaced Kalanick as CEO.

Another executive the leaked files suggest was involved in kill switch protocols was Pierre-Dimitri Gore-Coty, who ran Uber's operations in western Europe. He now runs Uber Eats, and sits on the company's 11-strong executive team. Gore-Coty said in a statement he regretted “some of the tactics used to get regulatory reform for ride-sharing in the early days”. Looking back, he said: “I was young and inexperienced and too often took direction from superiors with questionable ethics.”

Politicians now also face questions about whether they took direction from Uber executives. When a French police official in 2015 appeared to ban one of Uber's services in Marseille, Mark MacGann, Uber's chief lobbyist in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, turned to Uber's ally in the French cabinet. “I will look at this personally,” Macron texted back. “At this point, let's stay calm.”



## EXPLAINER

## Inside lane

### A guide to the cab-hailing firm's ruthless market tactics

By Guardian reporters



**What do the files reveal?**  
The cache of more than 124,000 internal confidential documents

from the tech firm, which were leaked to the Guardian, lays bare ethically questionable practices through which the company barged its way into new markets, often where existing laws or regulations made its operations illegal, before lobbying aggressively for those laws or regulations to be altered to accommodate it.

- As economy minister, Emmanuel Macron went to extraordinary lengths to support Uber and its campaign to disrupt France's closed-shop taxi industry, even telling the company he had brokered a "deal" with its opponents in the French cabinet.
- Senior executives at Uber ordered the use of a "kill switch" to prevent

police and regulators from accessing sensitive data during raids on its offices in at least six countries.

- Two of Barack Obama's most senior presidential campaign advisers, David Plouffe and Jim Messina, discussed helping Uber get to access leaders, officials and diplomats.
- The former vice-president of the European Commission, Neelie Kroes secretly helped Uber to lobby a string of top Dutch politicians, including the country's prime minister. Her relationship with the company was so sensitive that its top European lobbyist warned it was "highly confidential and should not be discussed outside this group".

**Why does the period covered by the leak matter?**

The five-year span covered by the data covered a crucial period of Uber's expansion. When the app first launched publicly in San Francisco in 2010, Uber customers could only hire luxury vehicles. The introduction of UberX in 2012, which enabled drivers to pick up passengers in their own cars, quickly gained traction and by early 2013 the service was operating in more than 30 locations - mostly in the US.

Uber then sought to rapidly expand abroad. The period covered by the leaked data was marked by frenzied growth, as Uber used record venture capital investments to subsidise journeys. By June 2017, when its controversial co-founder Travis Kalanick resigned as chief executive, Uber was operating in more than 600 locations. Kalanick's

replacement, Dara Khosrowshahi, set out to prove to shareholders that the company could deliver profitable growth. Five years later, Uber - now valued at \$45bn - provides on-demand transport in more than 10,000 cities.

**How have Uber and Travis Kalanick responded to the investigation?**

Uber's senior vice-president of public affairs, Jill Hazelbaker, said: "We have not and will not make excuses for past behaviour that is clearly not in line with our present values. Instead, we ask the public to judge us by what we've done over the last five years and what we will do in the years to come."

She continued: "Uber is now one of the largest platforms for work in the world and an integral part of everyday life for over 100 million people.

"We've moved from an era of confrontation to one of collaboration, demonstrating a willingness to come to the table and find common ground with former opponents, including labour unions and taxi companies."

In a separate statement, Travis Kalanick's spokesperson said he had "never authorised any actions or programs that would obstruct justice in any country", and he had "never suggested that Uber should take advantage of violence at the expense of driver safety. Any accusation that Mr Kalanick directed, engaged in, or was involved in any of these activities is completely false.

"The reality was that Uber's expansion initiatives were led by over a hundred leaders in dozens of countries around the world and at all times under the direct oversight and with the full approval of Uber's robust legal, policy, and compliance groups."

The spokesperson added: "When Mr Kalanick co-founded Uber in 2009, he and the rest of the Uber team pioneered an industry that has now become a verb. To do this required a change of the status quo, as Uber became a serious competitor in an industry where competition had been historically outlawed.

"As a natural and foreseeable result, entrenched industry interests all over the world fought to prevent the much-needed development of the transportation industry."

◀ The files cover a period when Uber went from plucky startup to global behemoth

GUARDIAN DESIGN



## 10k

The number of cities across the globe in which Uber provides on-demand transport

## 45bn

The current value in US\$ of Uber, which launched in 2010



OPINION

# There are good reasons for us all to be wary of disruptive innovation

## Rafael Behr

**T**here were taxis before there was Uber, just as there were bookshops before Amazon and friends before Facebook. A large part of innovation is new ways to deliver old ideas. Technology gives the innovator an edge by lowering costs, enabling nimbler delivery and outcompeting established traders who are stuck with obsolescent methods.

That is the foundational myth of Silicon Valley folklore. It was the story that Uber propagated about itself in the years of its most explosive growth from a service for hailing rides around San Francisco to a global tech powerhouse. Here was the archetypal digital disruption - an app to match demand to supply with a slickness that blew competition off the road.

When those competitors (licensed taxi drivers) complained, their objections were dismissed by the newcomer as the death rattle of monopolists and luddites who were getting in the way of progress.

There was then, and still is, an argument to be had about regulation that inhibits innovation, and when it needs to change in step with changing times. That debate looks somewhat different in the light of leaked communications, dating from between 2014 and 2017 and published this week by the Guardian, showing the ruthless, aggressive methods that Uber used to force entry into various markets around the world.

Its mercenary ethos is encapsulated in an exchange between senior executives discussing the threat to Uber

drivers from attack in Paris, when the city's established taxi operators went on strike. Travis Kalanick, Uber's co-founder and former chief executive, wanted his drivers to defy the strike with mass civil disobedience. When warned that this might provoke violent retaliation, Kalanick responded: "I think it's worth it. Violence guarantee[s] success."

The implication, which Uber denies, is that the company saw the threat to its drivers as part of a suite of public relations tools, alongside its many levers of private influence, to press for regulatory change. The scale of that operation, recruiting top politicians and power brokers to agitate for the company's interests, is breathtaking. (Also expensive. In 2016 alone, the company spent \$90m on lobbying.) Uber now says it is under different management with a different modus operandi. Kalanick left the company in 2017.

It's not unusual for an ambitious young company to pursue commercial interests with abrasive force. The Industrial Revolution generated phenomenal wealth for industrialists before there were laws against child labour. It took workers organising themselves into trade unions to bring a counterweight to forces that tended naturally towards mass exploitation and poverty pay. (Only last year, the UK supreme court upheld an employment tribunal ruling against Uber, which had claimed that it didn't need to provide its drivers with the minimum wage, paid leave or pensions because they were not technically categorised as workers.)

The success of liberal democracy - the best model yet devised for organising people into prosperous and free societies - depends on a balance between the wealth-generating impetus of the market and the obligations that politics must impose on business for the greater good. Today, the difference between mainstream left and right in economic policy has come down to the question of where to adjust the levels between those competing demands.

Periodically that distinction is declared irrelevant by the forward march of history. But it keeps bouncing back. The Marxist project to eliminate capitalism degenerated into tyranny and bankruptcy wherever it was tried in the 20th century. That failure was then seized as moral vindication by free-market fundamentalists. The Silicon Valley ethos combined California's gold-rush model of lawless capitalism with traces of utopian evangelism that the hippies had brought to San Francisco. The result was a cultish veneration of the internet startup.

The Uber files are a snapshot of a particular moment - the peak of political credulity and negligence around the growing power of tech companies. But the basic rules of the new digital economy turned out to be not so different from the old analogue ones.

The revelation of Uber's sharp practices tells a simple truth about the tech revolution. It is the same one that is told by the arduous working conditions in an Amazon warehouse and the poisoned reservoirs of public debate where Facebook discharges hatred and misinformation. The cost of innovation might be invisible to the consumer, but that doesn't mean it isn't there. And the job of democratic politicians is to be guardians of public interest, not the lubricants to private gain.

RAFAEL BEHR IS A GUARDIAN COLUMNIST AND LEADER WRITER



*The success of liberal democracy depends on a balance between the market and the greater good*





## House party Crowds invade leaders' luxury residences

By Hannah Ellis-Petersen

**T**he palatial colonial-era home was once frequented only by Sri Lanka's elite. But by last Sunday morning, Temple Trees, the formal residence of the prime minister, was "open to the public", according to a large sign graffitied at the entrance.

In the aftermath of the dramatic events of last Saturday, when tens of thousands of anti-government protesters stormed the state residences of the president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and the prime minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, it was among the political properties now defiantly occupied by ordinary Sri Lankans.

Sri Lanka's government has since said Rajapaksa would resign this week, paving the way for the appointment of a successor, amid reports that the beleaguered leader had attempted to flee the country on Monday.

Sri Lanka's parliament was due to reconvene this week and elect a new president by 20 July, according to the speaker of parliament. Protesters pledged to continue to occupy the homes and offices of both leaders until they had officially left office. The whereabouts of the president were unknown last Sunday, and by Tuesday he had still not formally addressed the country or published a letter of resignation.

Last Sunday morning, Temple Trees had been converted into a museum for the Sri Lankan people and a community kitchen, serving up free hot meals. People from all walks of life milled around freely. The official resident, Wickremesinghe, was nowhere to be seen, having been evacuated the previous day. His private residence had been set alight on Saturday night after the frustrations on the streets boiled over.

Soldiers and a heavy police presence remained around Colombo, and many were still reeling from violent

standoffs between security forces and protesters in which dozens of people, including journalists, were brutally beaten by police and hospitalised.

Scenes at Rajapaksa's official residence remained jubilant. People enjoyed the comfortable beds and well-stocked kitchen, though the outdoor swimming pool, which had been full of protesters last Saturday, had turned murky.

Some damage had been done, but efforts were being made to keep the house in good condition, with people seen sweeping floors and watering pot plants; handwritten warnings against any attempts to loot were posted up on the wall. Bundles of cash reportedly worth 15m Sri Lankan rupees (\$42,000) found stashed at the president's house were handed to security personnel.

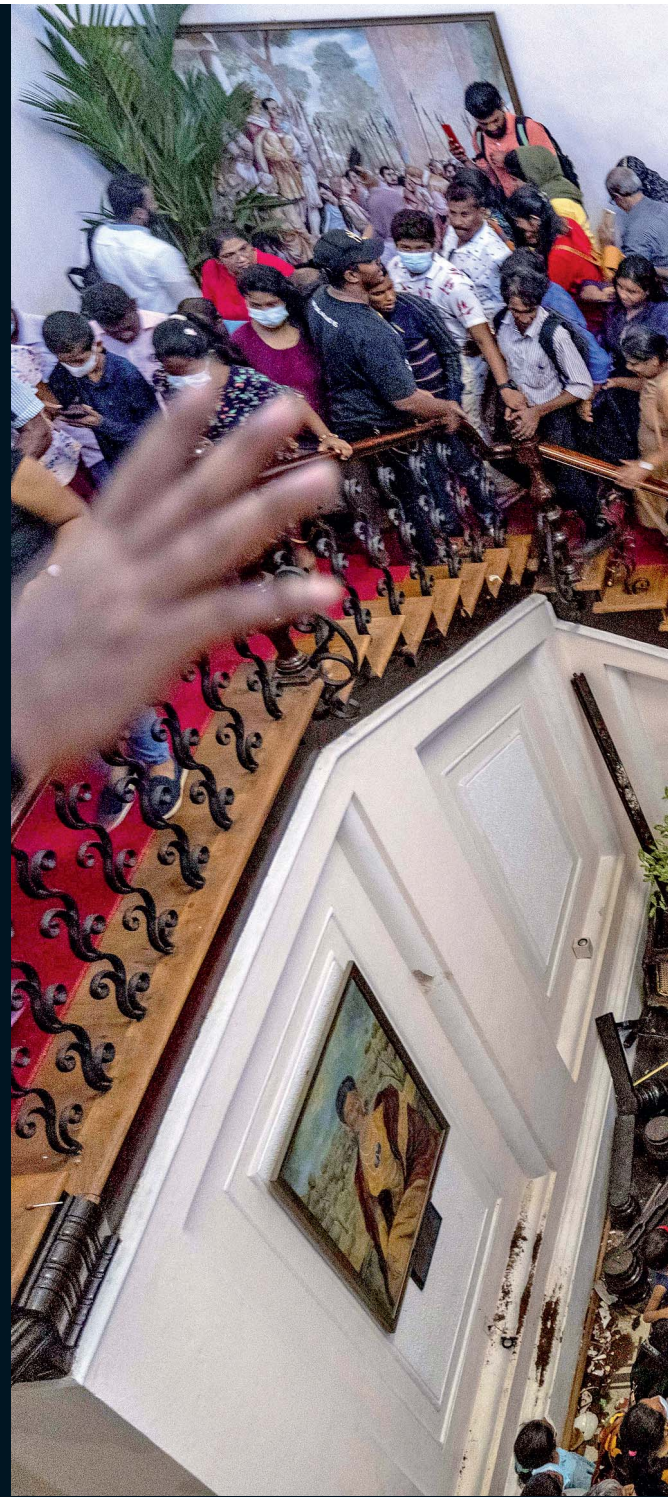
In videos shared on social media, protesters could be seen jokingly playing Rajapaksa's campaign song, The Hero That Works, on the polished piano in his house, and staging a mock meeting of the International Monetary Fund at the long conference table in the president's house.

BM Chandrawathi, a 61-year-old handkerchief seller, sauntered into a first-floor bedroom accompanied by her daughter and grandchildren. "I've never seen a place like this in my life," she told Reuters. "They enjoyed super luxury while we suffered. We were hoodwinked. I wanted my kids and grandkids to see the luxurious lifestyles they were enjoying."

Menus seized from the property also gave an insight into the culinary luxuries enjoyed by the president as two-thirds of Sri Lankans struggled to feed themselves due to the economic crisis. Lunch options recently enjoyed by the president included a roasted pumpkin soup, smoked salmon rosette, grilled lagoon prawns, marinated chicken with a demi-glace sauce, baked eggplant parmesan and hummus with pitta bread.

A celebratory party held by protesters who had overrun the president's administrative offices in Colombo went on well into the early hours. By last Sunday morning, it was decided the secretariat building would be opened up as a public library, and its corridors began to fill with donated books.

HANNAH ELLIS-PETERSEN IS THE GUARDIAN'S SOUTH ASIA CORRESPONDENT







📍 People throng President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's official residence in Colombo after it was stormed, swim in his pool and stand on a vandalised police water cannon truck at the entrance

RAFIQ MAQBOOL/ERANGA JAYAWARDENA/AP





UKRAINE

## Wise cracks Mykolaiv's leader uses humour to resist Putin

Taekwondo-practising  
governor loves to joke about  
the Russians but is serious  
about defeating his foe

By Lorenzo Tondo MYKOLAIV



**W**hen the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, ordered his troops to invade Ukraine on 24 February, Vitaliy Kim was still in bed sound asleep. “I was dreaming something, but can’t remember what, and when I woke up, everybody was panicking,” said Kim, the governor of the industrial region of Mykolaiv. “It was frightening. People were asking me what to do now.”

A few frantic hours later, after a Russian missile struck the airport about 15km from his office, Kim, who had been a successful developer, was already dressed in military clothes and ready to go to war.

From that moment on, the region of Mykolaiv would be hit by daily missile strikes. But while Moscow’s troops advanced towards its cities, with each blast Kim grew increasingly popular, one joke at a time.

His mockery of Russian forces released in his daily video messages on Telegram and on his social channels, even when the enemy was dangerously close, went viral and turned into memes. His face, printed on T-shirts, quickly became a symbol of resistance.

“Somehow, jokes are strategic,” Kim said. “They’re useful to civilians and military personnel. With this mockery, I’m trying to show that the Russian army is made of common people who make mistakes.”

From the first day, Mykolaiv, in the southern half of Ukraine, became a primary target. In March, Moscow had practically encircled the city and its port on the Buh River. Its forces had seized Mykolaiv’s airport and were advancing, with citizens piling up tyres and making molotov cocktails in preparation for street fighting.

One day, while Russian artillery was pounding the city with rockets and old Soviet missiles, Kim posted a photo on his Telegram channel showing the component from an antiquated Krug anti-aircraft missile system, designed in 1957, which had been found by rescue workers.

Below the image, he added: “I’m no weapons expert, but I feel like they’ll start throwing balalaikas at us soon,” referring to a typical Russian stringed musical instrument.

“It wasn’t hard to reunite Ukrainians when the war started. They did it in one day,” said Kim, whose father was a basketball coach of Korean ancestry. “It was that easy. Because to their



▲ Mykolaiv’s regional administration centre was hit in March, killing 38

ALESSIO MAMO

eyes, Russia is not just an army, it’s a true evil that is destroying everything in its path. They rape, kill and kidnap people. It was that easy to reunite in order to fight them back. Throughout our history, we have been fighting for our independence. The fight for freedom is in our DNA now.”

Mykolaiv has paid a heavy price for five months of war and resistance. Many citizens have been killed, and about 40% of its population has fled.

As the Observer talked to Kim, two Russian cruise missiles cut through the sky. “Welcome to Mykolaiv,” said a smiling soldier. “The Russians are actually late today,” he added.

After the Russians captured the Luhansk region, which along with Donetsk makes up the eastern Donbas, local authorities in Mykolaiv are bracing for an intensification of attacks.

“The battle over the south of Ukraine is still ahead of us and this is inevitable,” said Roman Kostenko, a member of Ukraine’s parliament and a special forces commander, who on day one of the war swapped his suit and tie for a uniform and hurried to Mykolaiv’s frontline.

“The Kremlin’s primary target was to take over the south and the east, and to return Ukraine into its sphere of influence,” said Kostenko. “But we didn’t let them, and that’s why they had to alter their plans and concentrate their major force in the east. Their target is to take our sea away from us.

***‘I’m no weapons expert but I feel like they’ll start throwing balalaikas at us soon’***

◀ Vitaliy Kim, governor of Mykolaiv

ALESSIO MAMO



They announced that these are their 'indigenous territories'.

"But the thing is, this cruel war is not even about a temporary loss of territories. It's about our people being killed, women, children. Ask Vitaliy Kim - he will show you what Russia did to the government building."

On 29 March, a Russian cruise missile struck Mykolaiv's regional administration centre, leaving dozens trapped under debris: 38 people died. The interior walls and hundreds of documents are still bloodstained.

Russian forces waited until people arrived for work before targeting the site. Kim was supposed to be there but had overslept that morning.

Kim has practised taekwondo for much of his life. "Taekwondo is about discipline and achieving your goals," he said. "You can apply this system in everyday life and in war too."

Before being suspended as honorary president of the International Judo Federation, Putin - a judo black belt - co-authored a book titled *Judo: History, Theory, Practice*.

Many Ukrainians and Kim's fans wonder about a match between the two. "I never thought about this," said Kim smiling. Then, pointing his finger at the skeleton of the government building, he added: "But looking at what he did to us, I wouldn't fight him in a ring. I would just take a gun and shoot him." *Observer*

LORENZO TONDO IS A GUARDIAN AND OBSERVER FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

### Towards the Black Sea

The bombardment of Mykolaiv is part of Russia's push to the coast

■ Russian control ■ Russian advances  
■ Areas where Ukraine has regained control



▲ The Nord Stream 1 pipeline supply is shut off every year for maintenance  
HANNIBAL HANSCHKE/REUTERS

GERMANY

# The chilling prospect of an end to gas on tap

By Kate Connolly BERLIN

**Warm winter plan**  
On a local level, as authorities battle with rising energy costs and the challenge of how to cope if households are left in the cold this winter, contingency plans are in place including shutting swimming pools, turning off street lamps and traffic lights, and housing citizens in industrial-scale dormitories. Erected for coronavirus patients, the makeshift wards have been described as "warm rooms" or "warmth islands".

Germany is braced for a potentially permanent halt to the flow of Russian gas with maintenance work having started on the Nord Stream 1 pipeline that brings the fuel to Europe's largest economy via the Baltic Sea.

The work, which started on Monday, is an annual event and requires the gas taps to be closed for 10 to 14 days. But never before in the 1,220km pipeline's decade-long history has Germany seriously been asking whether the flow will begin again.

Robert Habeck, Germany's economy minister, has not shied away from addressing the government's concerns. Last weekend, he spoke of the "nightmare scenario" that could occur.

"Everything is possible, everything can happen," Habeck told the broadcaster Deutschlandfunk. "It could be that the gas flows again, maybe more than before. It can also be the case that nothing comes."

"We need to honestly prepare for the worst-case scenario and do our best to try to deal with the situation."

Contingency plans are rapidly being drawn up across Germany, where there are genuine concerns that Moscow

may use the opportunity as a lever against the west in its war with Ukraine and permanently turn off supplies.

Russian gas is vital to the running of Germany's economy as well as keeping the majority of homes warm. Flows through the pipeline have been reduced in recent months and are at about 40% of the usual levels. Russia has blamed sanctions for the reduced flow, arguing they have hindered its access to spare parts.

Canada said, after consultation with Germany and the International Energy Agency, that it would issue a temporary exemption to sanctions against Russia in order to allow the return to Russia from Montreal of a repaired Russian turbine required for the maintenance work.

Last Friday, the Kremlin said it would increase gas supplies to Europe once the turbine was returned. Ukraine has objected, arguing it helps continue dependency on Russian gas.

But Canada's natural resources minister, Jonathan Wilkinson, said the permission was "time-limited" and would help "Europe's ability to access reliable and affordable energy as they continue to transition away from Russian oil and gas".

Since the start of the war in February, Germany has been working to reduce its dependence on Russian gas, including through the construction of liquefied natural gas ports.

Last week, emergency legislation completed its passage through both houses of parliament to allow the reactivation of mothballed coal-power plants, despite their carbon intensity.

The short-term goal is to attempt to replenish stocks in Germany's gas storage facilities for the winter. The longer-term target is to lessen dependency on gas by increasing the generation of renewable energy.

Plans are already in place to prioritise who would have access to gas in case of a cut. Hospitals and emergency services top the list, while households are ranked above most industries.

Demand for everything that heats without gas is at an unprecedented high, including electric and oil heaters, infrared panels and convectors, as well as basic camping stoves. Installers of wood-burning ovens and heat pumps report long waiting lists, a chronic lack of parts and a shortage of qualified personnel to install them.

KATE CONNOLLY IS THE GUARDIAN AND OBSERVER'S BERLIN CORRESPONDENT



GHANA

By Emmanuel  
Akinwotu ACCRA

## Cost of living crisis Accra's yam sellers feel the pinch

As in other parts of the world, soaring food and energy costs are hitting people hard, and many think the government is to blame



only once," said Oboh. "I wait until 2pm, in the middle of the day. Then I buy a heavy double portion of *banku* [a cassava-based dish] with fish and two packs of water. That's the only way I can provide for my children and make sure they eat even when I can't."

The crisis has heaped pressure on Ghana's government. Officials have stressed that the economic challenges are ripple effects of the war in Ukraine, which has disrupted global food chains. President Nana Akufo-Addo has stressed the war has compromised food security in Africa, echoing the concerns of other African leaders. Countries such as Ghana, heavily reliant on food imports, have been most vulnerable.

Yet many at the market lay the blame on government failings. To Appiah, the war in Ukraine is just the latest excuse. She said: "First, a few years after they came into power, the government said there were economic struggles all over the world, then they blamed the pandemic, now it's the Ukraine war, when we know they are the ones who have failed."

The cost of sending money to her parents in northern Ghana has risen owing to a levy adopted by the government last month. The 1.5% tax on all electronic transactions targets the use

***'Used to eat three times a day, now only once. That's how I can provide for my family'***

**O**n a quiet stretch amid the sprawling buzz of Kaneshie market in Accra, a group of traders sheltering under canopies from the blazing sun sell yams stacked along the roadside.

Rita Oboh, 32, has worked the spot, or one nearby, since she was six, following in the footsteps of her mother. "My mother lived good, really good," Oboh said with pride. "She built houses, she looked after everybody, her family, people who relied on her. She was successful."

But now times are lean, and the life Oboh's mother was able to build feels far out of reach. "This was a prosperous trade," said Oboh. "But now everything is a struggle."

Customers at Kaneshie scan trays of produce - bright red peppers and tomatoes, spinach, okra. Nearly all are

far more expensive than they used to be. Food prices in Ghana have risen by 30% over the past year. Energy costs have also climbed sharply and inflation is running at 27%, according to the country's statistics authorities.

As customers scrutinise their yams, Oboh and the other women - almost all the main or sole breadwinners of their homes - describe how a cost of living crisis has reshaped their lives.

"If people bought three before, now they only buy one," said 54-year-old Felicia Appiah. "I earn 20% of what I earned five years ago."

Not only has the price of the yams gone up, so have delivery costs and the bus fares to and from the market and home. As profits have dwindled, the women have gradually cut costs, including by eating less food.

"I used to eat three times a day, now

of mobile money payments, which are hugely popular in Ghana. The government has said the levy will raise 6.9bn cedis (\$850m) this year, a fraction of the \$46bn national debt.

The levy was in part a response to the lack of revenues Ghana was generating, according to officials. Yet it has not been enough. The government announced it planned formal talks with the International Monetary Fund to seek support, a situation it had sought to avoid. In May, Ghana's central bank raised interest rates to 19%, following similar moves by countries such as South Africa and Egypt.

Public sympathy for the government's financial challenges has largely diminished, amid anger at corruption scandals and the cost of some public projects. In the 2016 presidential election Akufo-Addo pledged to build a

▲ Felicia Appiah (left), Rita Oboh (second left) and two other yam traders at Kaneshie market in Accra

JUDE LARTEY



## Spotlight Asia Pacific

national cathedral, calling it the manifestation of a promise he had made to God and “an act of thanksgiving to the Almighty for his blessing, favour, grace and mercy on our nation”.

Designed by the renowned architect Sir David Adjaye, it is to be built on a 5.5-hectare compound in Osu, an affluent part of Accra. The government says the estimated \$350m cost will be paid for mainly by donors, though a recent allocation of \$3m of state funds for the project ignited outrage.

Ghana's minister of finance, Ken Ofori-Atta, dismissed the criticism, saying the outlay was “one one-thousandth” of government spending and that the cathedral would bring economic benefits. But Alex, a 27-year-old delivery rider, was sceptical. “I can't understand it. How do they reason that this is the best time to pour money into a cathedral?” he said.

In a few months he plans to move to Dubai or Doha to find work. “What I earn is not sufficient for me,” he said. “I have two siblings and someone else who I care for. I have to support them.”

“*I for lef Ghana*”, a phrase in pidgin meaning “I want to leave Ghana”, has become ubiquitous on social media, a humorous and bleak expression used by young people to describe dreams of looking for better prospects.

At Kaneshie, Appiah said all four of her children graduated from university but only one is employed. “If I had money I would send them abroad, because there is nothing for them to do here, no opportunities,” she said.

The market traders have incurred debts to buy wholesale produce, and the women have come to rely on each other for support. “I pray that things will get better,” said Appiah. “But for now I'm not convinced.”

EMMANUEL AKINWOTU IS  
THE GUARDIAN'S WEST AFRICA  
CORRESPONDENT



# 46bn

The size of  
Ghana's  
national debt,  
in US dollars

# 30%

The rise in food  
prices in Ghana  
over the past  
year; inflation is  
running at 27%

# 3m

Amount of  
state funds,  
in US dollars,  
allocated by  
the Ghanaian  
government to  
\$350m national  
cathedral project



NEW ZEALAND

◀ Boxes are prepared at an Auckland food bank FIONA GOODALL/GETTY

stretch budgets further, some going to extraordinary lengths - reportedly resorting to eating garden snails or using a water spray bottle instead of toilet paper - to cut down on costs.

But for others, tightening the purse strings is not an option - they simply do not have the money, and consequently families are going hungry.

A research article published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand* last month recorded the experiences of six sole-parent women suffering food insecurity. They detailed the daily struggle to feed themselves and their children, despite making sacrifices or budgeting.

“On a bad week, sometimes I won't eat at all just so there's enough for the kids,” said one woman, whose identity was kept private.

Each woman reported the stress of not being able to provide nutritious food for their children, of regularly missing meals and experiencing significant hunger so their children could eat and at times of relying on food banks or donations from extended family.

Organisations helping people in need are facing an unprecedented demand for food parcels.

The government's 2020-21 health survey showed about one in seven (14.9%) children lived in households where food runs out, similar numbers often eat less because of lack of money or food, while 12.2% of children lived in households that use food banks.

The women researchers spoke to felt the public was unaware about how dire the situation had become for some families and wondered how “their struggle could be so enduring, especially given New Zealand's relative affluence”, the study said.

The study highlighted food insecurity as a major ongoing public health issue in New Zealand.

Retiree Patricia Kahi, who lives north of Auckland with her recently retired husband, is another New Zealander feeling the strain. She has developed strict shopping regimes and savings techniques to ensure they can eat and have some left in the kitty for emergencies.

“You've got to be frugal ... you've got to save,” she said, “because things are not going to get better.”

EVA CORLETT IS A JOURNALIST  
BASED IN WELLINGTON

## Parents who go hungry to ensure their children eat

By Eva Corlett WELLINGTON

**S**ome nights, all Jessemy Evans has to eat is the leftovers on her toddler's plate. She has stopped buying meat, insulated her windows with plastic to save on heating and cancels activities requiring petrol use - but still each day is becoming tougher as the high cost of living in New Zealand bites.

“Everything is on the up but income is not going up in the same way - there is a deficit,” Evans said.

The relentless battle to cover housing and food costs is now harming Evans' mental health. The sacrifices she makes - particularly in nutrition - also create “a downward spiral”, she added. “It is on my mind all day, every day: how can we survive like this?”

Evans is one of a growing number of New Zealanders making hard choices as they struggle to make ends meet. Inflation is at its highest in 30 years, with annual food inflation at 6.8%, and at 10% for fruit and vegetables. Ipsos polling in June showed rising living costs have superseded Covid as the most pressing issue on New Zealanders' minds.

As a result, people are trying to

◀ Head porters in Accra march in protest over recent hardships

FRANCIS KOKOROKO/  
REUTERS

AFGHANISTAN

## Bookseller of Kabul seeks a new chapter in the UK

By Diane Taylor

**H**e was made famous by international bestseller *The Bookseller of Kabul*, and survived a succession of repressive regimes in Afghanistan. But two decades later he is living in a Home Office hotel in London, having fled the Taliban to claim asylum.

Shah Muhammad Rais, 69, arrived in the UK last September and claimed asylum at the airport. He is waiting for his case to be processed and is currently living alongside other asylum seekers from various conflict zones.

"The UK was the only door open to me to be safe from the Taliban," he told the Guardian.

Members of his family, including his nine children and four grandchildren, are scattered across different parts of the world. But his Kabul bookshop is still open following the Taliban takeover, along with an online bookstore.

Independent bookselling times are hard, though, and Rais is unsure if the shop, established in 1974 - which has endured almost five turbulent decades - can withstand the current challenges from the Taliban.

"Very few are buying books now," he said, sadly. One of the consequences of the Taliban takeover has



**Family portrait** Åsne Seierstad, a Norwegian journalist, travelled to Afghanistan soon after 9/11 and returned the next spring to write an account of life in the country through a portrait of the lives of bookseller Rais, his two wives and his family. The book was based on her observations after living with the family for five months.

**'I will keep the shop open as long as possible; maybe the Taliban will ban or destroy it'**

◀ **Shah Muhammad Rais**  
CHRISTIAN SINIBALDI

been a mass exodus of intellectuals and others who were part of the book-buying demographic when UK and US forces were in situ in Afghanistan.

"I will keep the bookshop open as long as possible; maybe the Taliban will ban it or destroy it," he said.

Rais has lived through different rules in Afghanistan and was twice imprisoned during the Soviet era. He says he experienced torture and mistreatment while he was in jail, including sleep deprivation and being forced to live in freezing conditions.

**Rais became famous following the publication of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, in 2002, which topped international sales charts and has been translated into dozens of languages. However, he and members of his family brought a legal action against the author and claimed the account was inaccurate and invasive.**

Following a protracted legal battle, an appeal court in Norway cleared the author of invading the privacy of the family and concluded the facts of the book were accurate.

Rais's bookshop is believed to have the largest collection of books about Afghanistan, expressing a variety of views of historical events. He said his aim has always been to reflect a plurality of views, rather than taking one side or another.

In his stock are many rare books that Rais has found safe hiding places for in case his shop is targeted.

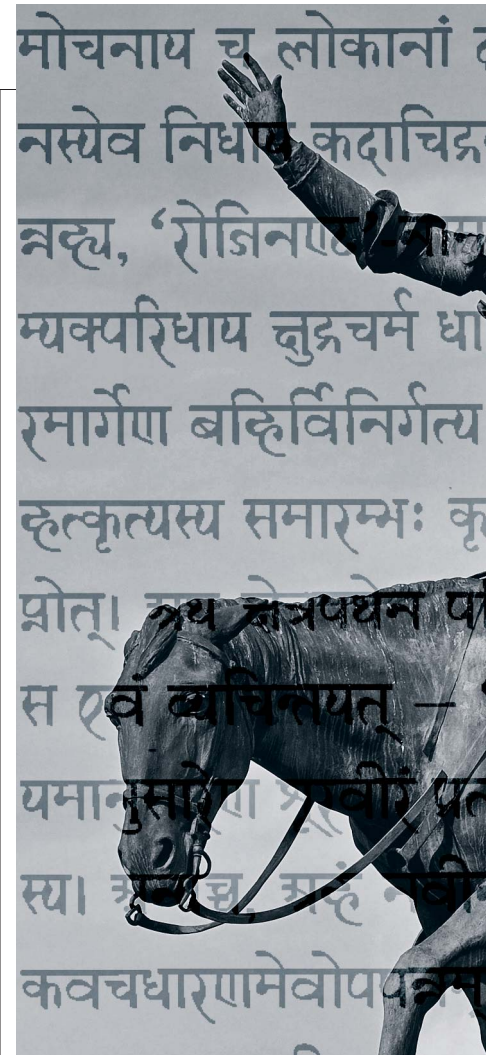
"I have secure places in Iran and Pakistan for some of the books," he said.

In better times his bookshop was a focal point for intellectuals from a variety of backgrounds to gather, listen to international news and debate political and philosophical matters.

Now Rais's future is uncertain as he anxiously awaits the outcome of his asylum claim. And particularly distressing for a lover of books, he now suffers from impaired vision. But his energy and enthusiasm is undimmed.

"If I am granted permission to work in the UK, I would love to open an Afghan reading room at the British Library. I'm writing a book on Afghan land, culture and history and would like to open a multicultural, multi-language bookshop here for people from the region - from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran. That is what I'm dreaming of."

DIANE TAYLOR WRITES FOR THE GUARDIAN ON HUMAN RIGHTS, RACISM AND CIVIL LIBERTIES



INDIA

## Knight's tale The Sanskrit journeys of Don Quixote

A long-lost translation from an English version of the literary classic has been rescued from oblivion

By Sam Jones MADRID





for the translation. Then came plans for a bilingual, side-by-side edition of Sanskrit and 18th-century English, accompanied by a Sanskrit audiobook and music.

The new version, which was published by Pune University's Indological Series, got a little lost when it emerged in 2019, not long before the Covid pandemic hit.

Oscar Pujol, the director of the Instituto Cervantes in Delhi and a fellow Sanskritist, regards the book as a feat of scholarship and wants it to have the attention it deserves: "What we have here is the world's first modern novel - one of the most read and published books in the world - rendered into one of the oldest languages in the world. I can't explain what it means to have this translation."

For Dimitrov, assistant professor at the Philipps University of Marburg in Germany, the text is a "fascinating and very high-quality" piece of translation and "an inter-cultural project".

But the letters between Stein and Keller, which are published in the book, speak eloquently of their passion for the project despite - or perhaps because of - the approaching horrors.

"War was coming and Stein was travelling from Oxford via Germany and he saw what was coming; what the Nazis were already preparing," said Dimitrov. "He was of Jewish origin and while he didn't suffer himself, his family did. He was quite aware of the bad times, but still they had this will to explore and to make all these intellectual efforts."

Similarly thrilled is Shastri's grandson, Surindar Nath Pandita.

"There was a vibrant interface of scholarship between western scholars and Kashmiri Sanskrit scholars, when much of Kashmir's classical literature was treated by the western hand," said Pandita. "However, translating Don Quixote was a singular exception because here the west wanted to embellish western literature by the treatment of Kashmiri hands."

For Pandita, the recovery of the "long-forgotten and forlorn manuscript" will also honour the friendships and intellects of the men who dreamed it into existence.

"This all happened because of an extremely intimate, lifelong, dedicated friendship," he said. "It's a great tribute to Indo-Spanish cultural ties."

SAM JONES IS THE GUARDIAN'S MADRID CORRESPONDENT

**T**here is an adjective that all too invitingly describes the wildly optimistic endeavours of the American book collector, the Hungarian-British explorer and the two Kashmiri pandits who, almost a century ago, took it upon themselves to translate Don Quixote into Sanskrit for the first time.

The same word might equally be applied to the efforts of the Bulgarian-born Indologist and Tibetologist who rescued that text from decades of oblivion.

In 1935, the wealthy book collector Carl Tilden Keller - whose shelves held Japanese, Mongolian and Icelandic translations of Cervantes's masterpiece - embarked on a quest for an Indian language version.

He enlisted his friend, Sir Marc Aurel Stein, an eminent orientalist, archaeologist and explorer who knew India well. "I am frank enough to admit that while I recognise the childishness of this desire of mine I am still extremely interested in having it carried out," Keller wrote to Stein in November 1935.

Dr Dragomir Dimitrov, the editor of a new dual English and Sanskrit edition presented at the Instituto

Cervantes in Delhi last week, puts it more bluntly: "Keller was aware that it was quite crazy."

The collector reckoned the learned and well-connected Stein would know the right men for the job - and he did.

On Keller's behalf, he commissioned the Kashmiri pandit - or Sanskrit scholar - Nityanand Shastri to undertake the translation. Despite being paralysed by a stroke, Shastri agreed and recruited another pandit, Jagadhar Zadoo, as co-translator.

Having no Spanish, the two scholars worked from an 18th-century English translation by the Irish painter and translator Charles Jarvis.

Almost exactly two years after Keller first expressed his childish desire, the pandits' labours were complete and Keller had eight chapters in "sweet and very precise Sanskrit".

When Keller died in 1955, the Sanskrit Quixote joined the collector's many other treasures in a bequest to Harvard University.

It lay forgotten in the university library until 2012 when Dimitrov, spurred by a 2002 article on the book written by Shastri's grandson, hunted it out and began thinking of identifying the English version used

▲ Statue of Don Quixote and his squire Sancho Panza in Brussels, Belgium

ALAMY

▼ Sanskrit scholar Nityanand Shastri was one of the two translators





JAPAN

# Shinzo Abe From force of change to prime minister

The long-serving conservative former leader, who was assassinated last week, was known for his signature 'Abenomics' economic policy

By Justin McCurry TOKYO

Sorrow and disbelief descended on Japan after the violent death of the former prime minister Shinzo Abe, the country's most influential politician of recent decades, who was shot while making a campaign speech in the western city of Nara last Friday.

Abe, 67, was pronounced dead early in the evening, prompting a flood of tributes from current and former world leaders, and anger that a politician could be gunned down in broad daylight in one of the world's safest societies two days before an election.

The suspect was named as Tetsuya Yamagami, a 41-year-old resident of Nara who spent three years in the maritime self-defence forces until 2005. Police believe he had crafted a homemade gun.

Japan's longest-serving leader will be remembered primarily for his political staying power, having returned to office in 2012, six years after being forced out by scandal and poor health.

His signature "Abenomics" policy, which sought to lift the world's third-biggest economy out of decades of stagnation, attracted more international attention than is usually given to Japanese leaders. On the foreign policy front, his support for a more prominent role for Japan's military to counter growing threats from North Korea and a more assertive China won praise in Washington but engendered suspicion in Beijing.

A conservative from a family with a strong political pedigree, Abe believed Japan should end decades of "masochistic" reflection over its role in the second world war - a revision-

ist approach that led to a dramatic deterioration in ties between Japan and South Korea.

Abe was 52 when he became Japan's youngest postwar prime minister in 2006. Some viewed him as a symbol of change but others regarded him as a product of the Japanese elite - a third-generation politician who had been groomed for leadership from a young age.

His brief first term was plagued by scandals and discord, and capped by an abrupt resignation. While he cited a chronic bowel complaint as the reason for stepping down, critics believed the political turmoil of the previous 12 months had been largely responsible for his downfall.

In 2012 he was given a rare second chance as prime minister after newly available drugs helped him to manage his symptoms. He pledged to revive a stagnant economy, revise the post-war "pacifist" constitution to give the military a bigger role, and instil conservative values in education. His return marked an end to a period of revolving-door politics during which Japanese leaders were sometimes replaced at a rate of one a year.

His Abenomics programme involved vast government spending, massive monetary easing and cutting red tape - an approach that contrasted with the austerity measures being introduced in other liberal democracies. He failed to boost the



low birthrate, but he oversaw changes to the labour market that vastly increased the number of women and foreigners in the workplace, albeit largely in temporary jobs with low pay.

He pushed through controversial consumption tax hikes to help finance nurseries and plug gaps in Japan's overstretched social security system. While there was some progress with reform, the economy's bigger structural problems were passed on to his successor, Yoshihide Suga, and the current prime minister, Fumio Kishida.



*His greatest regret was that he had been unable to revise the pacifist constitution*





▲ Abe (centre) and others celebrate after Tokyo was awarded the 2020 Olympics

KYODO NEWS/AP

▼ Shinzo Abe was a conservative from a family with a strong political pedigree

YOSHIO TSUNODA/AFLO/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

**A**be was instrumental in winning the 2020 Olympics for Tokyo after convincing officials at the International Olympic Committee in 2013 that the nuclear accident at Fukushima Daiichi was under control, two years after a triple meltdown at the power plant.

On the foreign policy front, Abe oversaw a slight thaw in relations with China, which had reached a historical low over competing claims to the disputed Senkaku islands in the East China Sea. But he left office with relations between Japan and South Korea in tatters after the two countries failed to resolve disputes over wartime sex slaves and forced labourers.

There was intransigence on both sides, but Abe's critics pointed to his denials of claims - including by victims - that Japanese troops coerced Korean women and girls into working in wartime brothels during Japan's 1910-1945 colonial rule over the Korean peninsula.

Abe went further than any other leader of a major economy to endear himself to the former US president Donald Trump, using their love of golf to underline the importance of Washington's security commitments to Japan in the face of a more assertive China and a nuclear-armed North Korea.

He became Japan's longest-serving prime minister in November 2019, but by the following summer public support had been eroded by his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic and a series of political scandals, including the arrest of his former justice minister.

Citing the return of the illness that had contributed to the premature end to his first term in office, Abe resigned.

His greatest regret as a politician was that he had been unable to fulfil his lifetime ambition of revising Japan's pacifist constitution, which prohibits the country from using force to resolve international disputes. In recent weeks he had voiced support for significant increases to the defence budget, citing Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a warning that Japan should stay vigilant in case of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

While the text of the US-authored constitution remains unchanged, Abe used his party's dominance in parliament to push through a law in 2015 that allows the armed forces to engage in collective self-defence - the right to come to the aid of an ally even when Japan itself is not attacked.

JUSTIN MCCURRY IS THE GUARDIAN'S TOKYO CORRESPONDENT

JAPAN

## Moonies linked to motive in shooting

By Justin McCurry NARA

**T**he mother of the man accused of assassinating Shinzo Abe is a member of the Unification church, which the suspect has cited as a motive for his fatal shooting of the former Japanese prime minister last week.

The church, whose members are colloquially known as Moonies, confirmed on Monday that the mother of Tetsuya Yamagami, who was detained moments after he shot Abe from behind during an election campaign speech last Friday, attends meetings about once a month.

Yamagami, 41, has told investigators he initially intended to target the church's leader, but that he had also intended to kill Abe, whom he claimed had promoted the church in Japan. His mother had made a "huge donation" to the church more than 20 years ago that had crippled the family's finances.

Tomihiko Tanaka, the president of the Japan branch of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification - more commonly known as the Unification church - declined to



▲ A mourner signs in front of a portrait photo of the former prime minister

comment on the donations, citing the police investigation into Abe's death in the western city of Nara.

Police confirmed that Yamagami held a grudge against a specific organisation, but have not named it.

Tanaka said neither Abe nor Yamagami were members of the church, which was founded in 1954 in South Korea by the Rev Sun Myung Moon, adding that the group would cooperate with the police investigation if asked.

Abe, a conservative who became Japan's longest-serving prime minister in 2019, delivered a congratulatory message via video link at a church event last year. Donald Trump is among other prominent figures to have addressed the group, known for its conservative views.

In a statement last Saturday, the church expressed "shock and grief" at Abe's death, describing him as a "globally respected statesman of Japan and active in building peace in Asia".

Abe's maternal grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, who served as prime minister from 1957 to 1960, was reportedly involved in setting up a political group linked to the Unification church, which shared his anti-communist views. The Kyodo news agency, citing investigative sources, said Yamagami had developed a deep resentment towards Kishi that he directed towards Abe.

The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, described Abe as a "man of vision" during an unscheduled trip to Tokyo on Monday, as the country's ruling party held muted celebrations following a resounding election victory.

The Liberal Democratic party (LDP), which Abe led for almost a decade, and its junior coalition partner, Komeito, increased their majority in the upper house last Sunday.

The LDP and Komeito won 76 of the 125 seats being contested in an election overshadowed by the first assassination of a Japanese leader in almost 90 years.

The election for seats in the less powerful chamber of Japan's parliament had no bearing on the makeup of the government, but was seen as a referendum on prime minister Fumio Kishida's first 10 months in office amid growing regional security concerns and the cost of living crisis.

At 52%, turnout was slightly up from three years earlier - a trend some analysts attributed to Abe's death - but the coalition's victory had been expected before he was killed.



UNITED STATES

## Spectre of one-term presidency haunts the White House

By Lauren Gambino WASHINGTON

At an Independence Day barbecue, crises swirling around him, Joe Biden declared that he had “never been more optimistic about America than I am today”. Of course there were challenges, grave ones, the US president told the military families assembled at the White House. But he gave a hopeful speech that reflected his often unshakable faith in the American experiment on the 246th anniversary of its founding. Yet many Americans, even his own supporters, no longer share the president’s confidence.

To many observers, Biden appears to be at a moment of profound crisis in his presidency: and one he is struggling to address. The spectre of Jimmy Carter – a one-term Democrat whose failure to win the 1980 election ushered in the Ronald Reagan era – is starting to haunt the Biden White House.

With decades-high inflation, near-weekly mass shootings, alarming disclosures about Donald Trump’s attempts to overturn his election defeat and successive supreme court rulings that shifted the political landscape sharply rightward, Biden’s upbeat speech struck even his fellow Democrats as ill-suited for what they view as a moment of existential peril for the country.

A new Monmouth poll captured the depth of America’s pessimism: just 10% of Americans believe the country is on the right track, compared with 88% who say it is on the wrong track. Confidence in institutions fell to record lows this year, according to the latest Gallup survey. The presidency and the supreme court suffered the most precipitous declines, while Congress drew the lowest levels of confidence of any institution, at just 7%.

“If that sunny optimism were paired with actual steps to secure the future that the president claims to be excited about, it would ring less hollow,” said Tré Easton, a progressive Democratic strategist.

Last month, a conservative supermajority on the supreme court ended the constitutional right to abortion, paving the way for new restrictions and bans in Republican-controlled states across the country. Meanwhile, democracy experts are sounding the alarm as Republican candidates who embraced conspiracy theories about the 2020 election win primary elections for key positions of power.

With control of Congress, governorships and statehouses at stake this November, many allies are pleading with Biden to lead with the urgency

◀ Joe Biden appears to be at a moment of crisis in his presidency

SAMUEL CORUM/AFP/GETTY

**Bad vibes**  
*A depth of pessimism*

**10%**

*The percentage of Americans who believe the country is on the right track*

**88%**

*The proportion of citizens who say America is on the wrong track*

**64%**

*The proportion of Democrat voters who don’t want Biden to stand for the presidency in 2024, according to a New York Times poll this week*

and force they believe this moment demands.

Last Friday Biden signed an executive order that the White House said would protect women seeking an abortion. The president said the supreme court’s decision was “an exercise in raw political power” and warned that Republicans would seek a national ban on abortion if they won control of Congress in November.

Before the signing ceremony, Bloomberg reported that the White House considered declaring a national public health emergency as some Democratic lawmakers and activists have urged, but ultimately decided against it. That caution, a hallmark of Biden’s decades-long political career, has frustrated many Democrats who fear democracy itself is under assault.

New reports of a White House struggling to respond to mounting challenges have even fuelled a discussion among Democrats over whether Biden should seek re-election in 2024. In recent weeks, speculation has mounted over potential alternatives. Among them the California governor, Gavin Newsom, has positioned himself as a pugnacious leader in the fight to protect abortion rights and the Illinois governor, JB Pritzker, offered a guttural response to the Independence Day shooting in his state that drew contrast with Biden’s more restrained approach.

The White House has rejected that criticism, arguing that Biden has responded – forcefully – to the mounting crises facing the nation. “The president showed urgency. He showed fury. He showed frustration,” said the White House press secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre, of Biden’s response to the recent mass shootings, adding that his leadership paved the way for a bipartisan gun safety compromise, breaking decades of gridlock in Washington over how to address gun violence.

Democrats’ fears come as the party faces a challenging electoral landscape, with forecasts of a Republican takeover of Congress in November.

Cristina Tzintzún Ramirez, the president and executive director of Next-Gen America, a youth-vote mobilisation organisation, said young people wanted bold leadership in Washington. Democrats must put “everything on the table” to keep an “ultra-rightwing and extremist minority from overtaking every major institution,” she said.

LAUREN GAMBINO IS POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT FOR GUARDIAN US



ANALYSIS  
MERGERS AND  
ACQUISITIONS

# Deal or no deal Can Elon Musk walk away from taking over Twitter?

By Dan Milmo

 Elon Musk has notified Twitter of his intention to back out of an agreed \$44bn takeover. The move sets the stage for a legal battle between the world's richest man and the social media platform. What is Musk's game, and will he succeed? Here's what could happen next.

**Why is Musk walking away?**  
The core of Musk's case centres on his belief that the number of spam bot accounts on Twitter's platform is much higher than the company's assertion of fewer than 5% of its daily active users.

The letter from lawyers for Musk, whose shares in his electric car business, Tesla, were going to help fund the deal, argues that

under-representing the number of spam accounts on the platform - something Twitter denies - constitutes a "company material adverse effect", effectively meaning something is seriously wrong at the business and it is worth nowhere near the \$54.20 a share agreed on.

**How strong is Musk's case?**  
The merger agreement contains a clause stating Twitter must provide Musk with all data and information the multimillionaire requests "for any reasonable business purpose related to the consummation of the transaction". This is a covenant in the deal - a promise to act in a certain way during the sale process - and a breach of it would allow Musk to walk away without sanction.

Legal experts question whether failure to provide more than has already been shared by Twitter regarding its bot count would be a breach. The agreement uses the word "reasonable" a lot when laying out what requests are acceptable.

"He is going to bear a burden of proving to the court that he had legitimate need for the information and that his requests

**Most similar disputes usually conclude with settlements that permit both sides to save face**

were reasonable," said Brian Quinn, an associate professor at Boston College law school.

**Does Musk have any other legal arguments?**  
His lawyers also argue Twitter broke the merger agreement by failing to seek Musk's consent when it fired two executives and laid off a third of its talent acquisition team (or HR department). The agreement states Musk must be told when Twitter is deviating from its obligation to conduct its business in the ordinary course and must "preserve substantially intact the material components of its current business organisation".

*Quinn believes this argument has some weight and the court will look at it.* But, he added: "My guess here is that the court will likely decide that these firings are more like ordinary business than not."

**What are Twitter's options?**  
The Twitter chair, Bret Taylor, said the company would "pursue legal action to enforce the merger agreement". If he does, the case will be heard in Delaware, the state with jurisdiction over the deal.

Quinn said he expected Twitter to file for a declaratory judgment that it did not violate the agreement and that Musk could not just walk away.

Experts also expect Twitter to seek an order from the court that Musk perform his obligations under the agreement - in other words that he buy the company. The company also has the option of seeking a \$1bn break fee from Musk, instead of forcing him to buy it.

**Is a settlement possible?**  
If Twitter wins its case, it could be forcing Musk to buy a business he doesn't want.

"Most similar disputes usually conclude with settlements that permit plaintiffs and defendants to save face," said Carl Tobias, Williams chair in law at the University of Richmond.

There is also the possibility that both sides agree a lower price, but Twitter's institutional shareholders may push back against that.

DAN MILMO IS THE GUARDIAN'S GLOBAL TECHNOLOGY EDITOR


**Banking on it**  
Musk could try to go down the financing route. The specific performance clause requires that the debt financing underpinning a substantial chunk of the deal "has been funded or will be funded at the closing". However, the banks' \$13bn funding commitment is also covered by a legal agreement, so Twitter can be expected to consider its legal options if Musk's banks try to pull out.

◀ If Twitter wins its case, it could force the world's richest man to buy a business he doesn't want

DADO RUVIC/REUTERS







**Stuck at sea**  
MS Zaandam  
off the coast of  
Panama City in  
late March 2020  
LUIS ACOSTA/AFP/GETTY

*When passengers boarded the MS Zaandam in March 2020, they were preparing for the holiday of a lifetime. Within a week they would be confined to their rooms on a ship not welcome in any port*

*By Jonathan Franklin and Michael Smith*

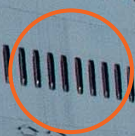




Zaanandam

ZANDAM

Cabin fever





## Cabin fever



O

IN THE FIVE-HOUR DRIVE TO THE DOCKS OF BUENOS Aires, Claudia Osiani thought hard: do I board the cruise ship or cancel my birthday voyage? With her husband, Juan, she discussed the recent spate of deadly virus outbreaks on cruise ships in Japan and California. “This cruise is different; it will be packed with locals,” Juan reassured her. He had sacrificed so much to provide Claudia with this fantasy of a 14-day voyage through the wilds of South America, and she loved him too much to let on that she was petrified at the thought of embarking.

It was early March 2020, and the first wave of the Covid-19 virus was spreading in Wuhan, China, and in Italy and Spain. In Argentina there were fewer than a dozen cases and it felt like a northern hemisphere issue. “We’re going so far south,” Claudia told Juan in the car. “It’s going to be a bunch of Argentinians on that ship, maybe some Chileans.”

At the docks they spotted their ship, the MS Zaandam. Named in May 2000, the Dutch-flagged vessel had the feel of an ocean liner of a bygone age. It was steeped in the nearly 150-year history of the Holland America Line, for decades the industry leader in service and style, and known in its marketing materials as “the Spotless Fleet”.

Claudia and Juan had been together for 42 years. Claudia was a stickler for detail and liked to swim and cycle. She was an experienced psychologist, and gregarious, open to speaking her mind, making grand gestures. Juan, a soft-spoken accountant, was in many ways her opposite. His mother was an immigrant from Bath, England; his father was from the Netherlands. But they’d made it work, raising three children who’d given them nine grandchildren.

As the couple boarded, they found that almost none of the passengers came from Argentina or South America. Their hopes of cruising with people from countries spared by this new deadly virus vanished. Aboard the Zaandam were 305 Americans, 295 Canadians, 105 French, 131 Australians and 229 UK citizens.

As more than 1,200 guests and almost 600 crew settled in, the Zaandam became a buzzing community with its 10 decks, eight bars, two pools, a casino, a mini tennis court, an art gallery, a library and a performance hall with a capacity for 500. As last-minute preparations to leave were made, dancers limbered up, magicians rehearsed, members of an a cappella choir belted out tunes and a team of massage therapists were busy kneading away knots from the stress of life onshore. Few passengers were monitoring the news channels that would have alerted them that on 8 March 2020, just 48 minutes before the Zaandam’s departure, the US state department posted a warning as unambiguous as it was unprecedented: “American citizens, especially with underlying conditions, should not travel by cruise ship.”

Aboard the Zaandam, the musicians tuned their instruments.

The cruise was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to visit the strait of Magellan, navigate the Beagle Channel, follow Darwin’s route, and then cruise up the west coast of South America for an excursion to Machu Picchu, high in the Peruvian Andes. They would end with a passage through the Panama Canal, island hop in the Caribbean and then disembark at Fort Lauderdale.

Down in the holds, the quartermasters went over the stores for the long trip. To feed all passengers and crew on a ship like the Zaandam for a long cruise typically required 60,000kg of vegetables, 40,000 eggs, 20,000 steaks, 16,000 cans of beer and soda, and hundreds of

cases of wine. In addition to these carefully itemised supplies, another traveller was aboard the ship - a deadly stowaway probably hiding in the lungs of a passenger or a crew member.

In the run-up to the Zaandam’s departure, Holland America medical experts had dispatched advice on how to protect against coronavirus. Dr Grant Tarling delivered updates in cheery short videos posted on corporate websites. “Given recent events and general inquiries we have received about travellers’ health,” said Tarling, looking into the camera in one video released in late February, a map of the world behind him, “you may want to bring your own thermometer.” Tarling, the company’s lead medic, also demonstrated the correct position to sneeze. “If you cough or sneeze, do it into a tissue or your bent elbow.” His third piece of advice was: “Buy travel insurance.” The doctor suggested passengers read the insurance coverage closely to “make sure it is the kind ‘cancel for any reason’ and covers many unexpected travel situations, such as medical care and evacuation”.

Back at corporate headquarters, Holland America and its owner, Carnival Corporation - the world’s largest travel and leisure conglomerate with more than 100,000 employees and a stock valuation in the billions - had already dealt with the virus on several other ships. Two Carnival ships - the Grand Princess and the Ruby Princess - had severe Covid outbreaks off the Pacific coasts of the US and Australia, respectively. The Diamond Princess had been hit hard in Japan a few weeks earlier, when hundreds were infected and at least nine people died.

Soon after boarding, Claudia noticed the first coughs. Once she tuned into the sound, it seemed to be everywhere. I can see these people are sick - anybody can, she thought.

Nine days into the cruise, as the world was locking down, Claudia marched down to the front desk, by the huge pipe organ. “How can the captain allow this? Allow people to gather in groups, so close to each other, if there is a pandemic all around?” she asked. Claudia urged the staff to take precautions, to protect the ship from Covid. She walked the ship, unnerved by all the older Europeans, Americans and Canadians gathering, seemingly oblivious to the threat. The gym, spa and hair salon were open, packed with people. This makes no sense, Claudia thought. Everywhere she glanced, she saw evidence of Carnival Corporation’s efforts to fulfil its brand slogan, Choose Fun.

In the tight crew quarters far closer to the waterline, workers began to succumb. Some told their supervisors; others soldiered on. Wiwit Widarto, the boat’s laundry supervisor, felt tired, his muscles aching. He assumed it must be his workload, working nonstop, 10-12 hours a day, in the sweltering confines of the cramped laundry rooms, trying to keep up. More passengers and crew were spending more and more time in their cabins, which translated into piles of soiled sheets, towels and napkins.

Crew members made valiant attempts to limit the outbreak, politely suggesting that passengers wash their hands or make use of the hand sanitiser stations. The self-serve buffets were shielded by Plexiglas, and servers were posted every few feet to ladle out the portions and minimise passengers’ contact with food. Even the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization were confused - was the virus able to live on surfaces? How long did it survive?

As the cruise entered the second week, fear was ruining the voyage for Claudia and Juan. Along with friends from Argentina, they drank tea in the dining room and avoided crowds. They were sitting near the sweeping main staircase - the one that always reminded Claudia of the one aboard the Titanic - when an announcement startled them.

“Good afternoon. This is your captain speaking from the bridge with an important announcement,” Captain Ane Smit began, addressing the entire ship. “I ask that everyone please listen closely.” The news



**“We must ask that you return to your rooms where, regrettably, we are going to have to ask you to remain**



**On dry land**  
Claudia Osiani at home in Argentina. She and her husband Juan's fortnight cruise turned into a seven-week ordeal

ALEJANDRO KIRCHUK

was grim. An influenza-like respiratory virus had sickened many passengers. “Out of an abundance of caution, we must ask that you return to your staterooms as soon as you are done with lunch,” the captain continued, “where, regrettably, we are going to have to ask you to remain.”

Many cabins had less space than a one-car garage. Dozens of rooms were windowless. Claudia sat in the cabin with Juan, nervously staring out of a salt-streaked porthole, or watching television. Relying on her experience as a psychologist, she knew that anxiety, fear and depression were all rising. The uncertainty ate away at her.

Instead of a comfortable crash pad for naps between happy hours and city tours, the cabin felt like a cell. Meals, once a highlight, were cloaked in anxiety. Lunch arrived via a disturbing, invisible operation. Claudia heard the sudden cry “Foooooooood!” then the clanking of a delivery cart as it was wheeled down the hall. Then at the next cabin, the cry “Foooooooood!”, and the next.

Opening the door, she found a tray on the floor. Using bath soap, she washed every fork, knife and plate. When the soap ran out, she switched to shower gel. Claudia and Juan eyed the food with suspicion. They chewed cautiously, enjoying not a bite, nor a sip of the complimentary red wine. Juan and Claudia were supposed to be disembarking in three days - their original itinerary was nearly over - but all schedules had been shredded.

Panicked by the outbreak, passengers insisted on special services; Widarto made a point of going to their cabins to personally change their sheets or exchange towels. Some guests were clearly sick, but he helped them as best he could. Adding to the workload, one after

another of Widarto's staff members fell ill. He ordered them to bed, which meant he and the remaining members of staff had to work even harder. After three decades on cruise ships, Widarto was a perfectionist. When he called his wife, Anny, back in Indonesia, she noticed his voice was different. “You have to go to medical, to the pharmacy,” Anny said, growing more concerned. “You have to get some help.”

Widarto explained that he'd gone to the medical centre, but all they had was paracetamol. Anny was shocked. Widarto told her he'd do his best, but just before hanging up, he shocked his wife. “Anny,” he said, “please pray for me.”

Widarto wore a mask and gloves when he could. Rumours flew about that Widarto had removed sheets from the bed of a guest so sickened that he was unable to walk and was transported to the medical centre in a wheelchair. Word was that the passenger had died, but no one could be sure.

Widarto faced more immediate challenges. He was losing staff at an alarming rate. Over the previous three days, they had kept getting sicker. Widarto was subdued as he confessed to a friend: “I can't taste anything.”

**A**

AS THE ZAANDAM STEAMED NORTH UP THE west coast of South America, country after country announced ever more strict precautions to protect their populations. None would take the chance of letting a cruise ship dock, despite intense efforts by the cruise line and diplomats to gain safe harbour. The crisis was growing by the day; an international pandemic - the first in a century - was declared, and airline travel was shutting down. The crew and passengers aboard the Zaandam were shunned. No one knew

much about the new Covid virus, but cruise ships were assumed to be giant incubators.

Warren Hall, a South African gynaecologist who was the chief medic on the Zaandam, oversaw a sparse medical staff in the bow end of one of the lower decks. At the entrance, there was a reception and two examination rooms. The medical centre had surgical tools and medicine at the ready for emergency procedures. Down a hallway, there were four inpatient rooms, fitted out like those in a hospital.

Medical staff were experienced in treating life-threatening illnesses far from land: fatal heart attacks and falls were common among the older passengers. But when patients were in a grave condition, the ship would typically rush to port and unload the stricken individual. Now, the infirmary was awash with coughing passengers and ill crew members who lined up in the corridor, waiting their turn. In each of the examination rooms, a patient lay supine. The coughing was incessant. The two doctors and four nurses were overwhelmed.

As the outbreak spread through the locked-down ship, family members of those trapped aboard launched social media campaigns to rescue their loved ones. They created a Facebook page and hundreds joined to share what they knew. Reporters began to interview passengers, and timelines were flooded with pleas for help.

With no chance to escape, Claudia returned to a familiar role: caretaking. She rang her friends on board and cheerfully chatted about the sun, the sea and the wind. Her top priority was an elderly couple who were relying on sleeping pills to cope with the stress of lockdown. She knew that in situations of extreme, prolonged stress or trauma, people tended to self-medicate with whatever





was at hand. Claudia was able to help put their minds at ease with soothing descriptions of scenes outside the cabin window in what she dubbed “weather therapy”.

A TV channel featured a live camera shot from the bow of the Zaandam, displaying the open ocean in a wide-angle panorama. Rather than bringing calm and tranquillity, the live feed further emphasised to Claudia that they were ploughing the seas, destination unknown. She felt as if she were incarcerated in some kind of surreal, vaguely luxurious floating prison.

In the medical centre, the patients got sicker and sicker. John Carter, a 75-year-old from Devon, was among the most gravely ill. For hours, he was in a critical condition. Dr Hall diagnosed bacterial pneumonia brought on by an unknown viral infection. As Carter’s breathing worsened, Hall threaded a tube into his lungs and connected him to a ventilator. Hall had 11 tanks of oxygen on board, and the ventilator was going through the supply rapidly. But it wasn’t enough, and Carter died. His grieving widow was only able to speak by phone with family. They issued a plea on her behalf: “She is obviously distressed and extremely frightened ... she is struggling ... and feeling unwell.”

Below decks, Widarto was trying to find the strength to call Anny. He felt too sick to work in the stifling heat. But, as always, guests called and called, requesting fresh sheets, or just needing to talk. Widarto felt obliged to go to their aid. He put on the best face he could for Anny as he called via WhatsApp. They exchanged hellos, and Widarto tried to calm Anny down, set her mind at ease. “Please don’t be sad,” he said. “You need to be a strong mum. For the kids.”

Anny pressed him, trying to find out what was wrong. Finally, Widarto confessed that his fever was rising, and the coughing was worse than ever. He thought the limited stocks of medicine were reserved for the ill passengers and was relying on home remedies, like hot tea with lemon. Then he interrupted the conversation: he had to go. A passenger had called, requesting a fresh blanket.

Anny was shocked. Why was he insisting on working? He seemed distant, taking his time before answering. “Please, please rest,” Anny pleaded. “Please. Don’t work while you’re feeling unwell.”

“I can’t. I can’t afford to do that,” Widarto finally responded. His voice trailed off. “Lots of my staff are falling ill. Someone’s got to work.”

“Please, stay strong,” Anny said; she was crying.

# E

ENTERING THE THIRD WEEK OF ITS ODYSSEY, THE Zaandam sailed further north up the coast of South America; a flurry of diplomatic notes whizzed back and forth as US, Canadian, French and British diplomats pressed the government of Ecuador to let the passengers get off. Thanks to a policy of hiring former navy admirals and coastguard commanders, the Holland America leadership worked smoothly with the diplomats - on many issues they spoke the same language, fought for the same goals.

But there was no assurance that Holland America could win permission to fly them home. “I’ll ask our team in Quito, but early signals are bad, as gov’t has shut down movement and borders,” wrote a US diplomat in an email.

Few options remained. Emergency medical flights were in short supply everywhere. Those with the means to pay \$25,000 or \$200,000 for a private escape had booked jets, helicopters and yachts for a swift retreat from the virus. Holland America had the cash to secure these flights, but what would be the use if the plane couldn’t land?

## “Small groups were let out for 15 minutes of fresh air, but seeing crew in masks added to the sense of danger

Navigators aboard the Zaandam, helped by Holland America executives onshore, began charting multiple options - would they be allowed through the Panama Canal? Should they head to a US port in San Diego? But the reality was clear: they were on a voyage to nowhere. Passengers largely obeyed the lockdown orders. At times, small groups would be ushered out for 15 minutes of fresh air, but seeing crew members in masks just added to the sense of danger. No one knew how many were infected, but little red stickers placed on the doors of those thought to have Covid marked the spread.

As the ship anchored off the coast of Panama, reinforcements finally arrived. Carnival Corporation had ordered the Zaandam’s sister ship the Rotterdam to rush down from Mexico. It carried essential crew and was empty of passengers. The plan was to dilute the problem by moving healthy passengers off the Zaandam and on to the Rotterdam. Medical supplies and personnel and support crew could also be brought aboard what was dubbed by the media as “The Pariah Ship”.

Claudia was praying that she and Juan would be allowed to transfer when she heard a knock. She opened the door and a crew member wearing a gown, gloves and a face mask delivered the good news: they were among the roughly 800 passengers cleared to leave. They gathered their suitcases and sat down in a small transfer boat known as a tender. Claudia was elated to be leaving. Their early precautions had worked, as neither she nor Juan were infected. Now they were on a circuitous but hopeful path back to Argentina.

On the Zaandam, however, the raging outbreak had struck down scores of crew and passengers. Then on 27 March, Captain Smit took to the airwaves again - this time with the grim news that four passengers had died. One was John Carter. Another man had collapsed on his way to the bathroom and died on the floor. Another had suffocated, unable to breathe as his lungs were destroyed by Covid. Medical personnel were swamped by calls and forced to run from one cabin to another, yet still the patients waited hours to be seen by a doctor.

As the Zaandam headed for Florida, mixed signals from the Trump administration stymied attempts by Holland America to find a way to get several dozen people in desperate need of medical care off the ships. It took endless rounds of negotiations between the cruise line, CDC officials, Florida state health authorities, the White House and diplomats from a dozen countries to finally develop an evacuation protocol that was acceptable to all.

On 2 April 2020, nearly a month after leaving Buenos Aires, a fleet of buses lined up on the docks of Port Everglades in Florida, and most passengers from both the Zaandam and Rotterdam were allowed to disembark. A row of ambulances was ready as well. One of the first people evacuated from the Zaandam was Widarto, fighting for his life. Hall had done what he could, but Widarto’s condition had deteriorated; he needed to go to ICU.

Within minutes, they moved Widarto down the gangway and into an ambulance. The ambulance sped off. A medical team at Broward





Health Medical Center in Fort Lauderdale was waiting for him. But doctors were not optimistic: in a video call, they told Anny that his lungs were filling with fluid, and that nothing they had done was stopping that deadly process. When that time came, the doctors could only revive him with the defibrillator, gambling that they could shock life back into his body. But that procedure could have devastating consequences, the doctor warned; he could end up paralysed. Anny had to make a choice: did she want him resuscitated? Or would it be kinder to let him die? She talked it over with her family and they agreed. “If he flatlines, let him die in peace,” she said. “That’s what God would want to happen. If God wanted him alive, he would be alive.” Anny was only able to see him on a video call before he died.

Two dozen passengers were medically evacuated, but hundreds more were deemed fit for travel. Bundled on to buses and dumped at airport terminals, they then crisscrossed the country and the world, and some carried the virus.

Although hundreds of passengers had walked off both the Zaandam and the Rotterdam, Claudia and Juan were told they could not disembark. Claudia waited for a few hours and then called reception. It took a moment to unravel what was happening. “Oh - we’re so, so sorry, but you will not be disembarking,” the receptionist announced cheerfully.

“What do you mean?” Claudia asked.

“There was a problem with your flight to Argentina. We need you to stay on the ship a little while longer, while we work out a solution.”

**T**HE ARGENTINIANS WERE STUCK IN BUREAUCRATIC gridlock. So, too, were the hundreds of crew, as the CDC had decided it was too dangerous to let potentially infected crew members into society. The Rotterdam and the Zaandam left Florida and abandoned US territorial waters, docking instead near the Bahamas.

Day after day, the two ships sailed in what pilots call “doughnut patterns” as crew and approximately nine passengers remained locked down. With the help of the cruise line, Claudia was untangling the logistics of organising a flight back to Argentina when the captain’s voice sounded loudly over the ship’s public intercom. He appeared to be giving orders exclusively to the crew.

“Personnel will now move to deck two,” the captain declared. Or that’s what Claudia thought he had said. “Deck two, Juan? That’s us, right?”

Soon, a powerful chemical smell wafted into their cabin. A pungent disinfectant stench burned the back of her throat, making her wince. Claudia grabbed a face mask and burst out of the cabin, desperate to breathe fresh air. With Juan, she ran to an exit and fell to the deck, gasping for air.

Claudia spotted a surveillance camera and ran toward the tiny lens, screaming in Spanish for help. Soon, one of the ship’s officers arrived. Claudia scolded him for accidentally trying to poison them as they disinfected the ship. Eventually they were transferred to a new room with a private balcony. Despite the upgrade, they

felt like orphans, forgotten on an empty cruise ship, with no sign of liberation.

For another three weeks, they circled the Caribbean waiting for the plane to fly them home. Claudia knew that her years as a psychologist provided exactly the emotional toolkit she would need to endure this confinement. What surprised her, however, was how hard it was to apply her skills to a new patient: herself.

Help came in the form of her 80-year-old neighbour, Tito from Uruguay, who, like clockwork every morning, strode out to his balcony, adjacent to Claudia and Juan’s room, and bellowed to the ocean: “Tooooooday ... can be a gooooooood daaaaaay! Let’s nail it!” Sometimes Claudia joined in the yelling.

Finally, the Argentinian government arranged for charters and sanitation “bubbles” that could safely bring those left back to Uruguay and Argentina. It was late April 2020, seven weeks after Claudia and Juan boarded what was supposed to be a two-week celebratory cruise.

In a statement, a representative of Holland America Line said: “As the world’s knowledge of Covid-19 evolved over time, Holland America Line aligned with guidelines from the CDC, the World Health Organization and other local health authorities.”

They said of the stories in this article: “While some claims do not match the recollection of our team members who were there, that should not diminish the importance of the story of Zaandam, its guests and crew, and people in all walks of life who dealt with the devastating first weeks of a mysterious virus. We mourn all who were lost to Covid-19, and we are thankful for those who helped bring our full fleet back to sailing today with a continued strong commitment to health and safety.”

When Claudia arrived back at her seaside apartment in Mar del Plata, Argentina was enduring the full brunt of the viral onslaught. Thousands were sick, a rigid lockdown in place. The official death toll stood at roughly 200.

Inside her home, instead of relief, Claudia felt vulnerable. Nothing was normal. Even the smell of her house had changed. Or had she?

Before the Zaandam odyssey, before Covid, Claudia and Juan had carefully selected an apartment with an ocean view. Their living-room windows framed a wide slice of the Atlantic but it felt like a mocking reminder, as if she was still trapped at sea. After one brief glance into the expanse of the waves, Claudia drew the curtain and told herself: “That’s enough ocean view for the moment.” ●

JONATHAN FRANKLIN IS THE GUARDIAN’S REPORTER IN CHILE; MICHAEL SMITH IS AN AWARD-WINNING WRITER AND AUTHOR *Cabin Fever* by Michael Smith and Jonathan Franklin is out now



#### Tragic death

Wiwit Widarto, the boat’s laundry supervisor, fell ill while working onboard and died when taken to hospital in Fort Lauderdale

COURTESY OF ANNY DOKO









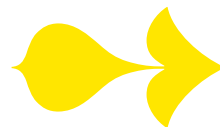
# The slow death of the Po

*Once feared for its flooding, the mighty Italian river is vanishing as a result of drought, industrialisation and other damaging interventions. Tobias Jones uncovers its fascinating history and culture*

**Sands of time**

People relax at sunset on the Po riverbed in Linarolo, Lombardy

LUCA BRUNO/AP





**I**taly's longest river, the Po, was once called the "king of rivers" ("*fluviorum rex*") by Virgil. It was considered mighty less for its length - it's only about 652 km long - than for its expanding girth: the countryside next to the river, the Padanian plain, was so flat that the Po was often less of a river than a slow-moving marsh, always flooding land dozens of kilometres either side of its porous banks.

Since it flows entirely in Italian territory - rising a few hundred metres inside the French-Italian border in the Cottian Alps and heading east until it reaches the Adriatic Sea just south of Venice - the Po is part of the national psyche. The poet Guido Ceronetti once wrote: "You need to understand the Po to understand Italy," but now - as northern Italy faces its worst drought in 70 years - the river is also a prism through which to glimpse the country's ecological emergency.

It has, in some places, completely disappeared this summer. Next to Saluzzo, upstream of Turin, I walked from one bank to the other without wetting my feet. There was only white gravel with buddleia where the "great river" was supposed to be. The Po has 141 tributaries, so further downstream the river does return. But in late June, the flow measured at Pontelagoscuro, near Ferrara, fell below an average of 145 cubic metres per second (the historic average flow for June is 1,805 cubic metres per second). At Cremona - roughly halfway along the Po - the water is more than 8 metres below "hydrographic zero".

Last week, the Italian government declared a state of emergency in five northern regions - Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia. Power stations and spas have been closed, ornamental fountains in Milan have been shut and daytime hosepipe bans are in place because water is simply evaporating faster than it falls.

The Adriatic Sea has come about 19km inland from the Po estuary, burning crops and salinating drinking water. The vast maize plantations used for cattle forage are yellowing. Hundreds of thousands of hectares along the Po basin are fallow this summer because of doubts about the reliability of irrigation for the "second planting".

The river is normally fairly full in June because of snow-melt, but the Italian Society of Environmental Geology recorded only a third of the average snowfall last winter (2.5 metres instead of 7.5 metres). The Gran Paradiso peak (in Piedmont/Aosta) had a snowfall of only 127cm this winter, compared with this century's average of 331cm. Even the glaciers are going: earlier this month at least 10 people were killed when a part of the Marmolada glacier broke free, causing a hailstorm of rocks and debris. Last week I went to Trentino, 2,200 metres above sea level, and the peaks around Folgarida and Madonna di Campiglio were stone grey rather than white. It was so warm at altitude that most people were walking only in vests.

**THE PO TELLS MANY OTHER STORIES** about the consequences of human inventiveness and cunning. The river was, for millennia, a vital transport hub, part of the trade route for Baltic amber in the bronze age. Romans navigated the Po from Adria (the town that gave the sea its name) to their

fortress in Turin. In the middle ages, dozens of rival *signorie* (baron states) fought for access to its banks to impose passage taxes and reinforce strategic defences: the Po was always a vast, soggy moat that invaders from the north, such as Hannibal, Attila or Barbarossa, had to cross. So the river became built up with brick castles, watchtowers, chains perpendicular to the flow and pump houses. At the end of the 19th century, there were, it's thought, 300 flour mills on the river and dozens of bridges made up of strapped-up barges.

But when you paddle and pedal the Po now, its banks are desolate. I travelled from the delta to the source over nine months by canoe, bike, foot and car, and it was an industrial rust belt. The discoloured hoppers of gravel-extraction operations and the chimneys of early 20th-century brick furnaces are now cracking and giving in to gravity. Because of the 1951 floods, 80,000 people from Polesine - just inland from the delta - emigrated elsewhere in the 1950s and there are grand houses all over the region overcome with ivy and figs. The castle at Stellata was fissured by the 2012 earthquake. Since you barely see anyone all day, it feels as if you're visiting Earth after the humans have gone.

The promise of silence and solitude was partly what drew me to the river in the first place. But I also wanted to understand the land where I live. My friends from La Bassa, the lowlands just north of Parma, go almost pagan in describing the sacredness of the river: to them, it is a hallowed container of folklore, legend and memory. They told me about mythological animals such as the Fojonco or villages where socialist violinists had squatted and bought out the local noble's farm. I followed the stories and slowly came to appreciate my friends' sense of loss.

The river was always both a donor and a thief, gifting land but also robbing it. It's commonly called a "traitor" or "promiscuous" because it had a habit of leaving its established bed and changing course. Settlements that were once on the left bank are now on the right, and vice versa. Near Valenza, there's a village called Alluvioni Cambiò ("flood-changed"). The river's deliverance of silt even became an instrument of expansionism: almost as soon as the house of Este at Ferrara died out in 1597, the Venetian republic radically altered the direction of the Po (1600-04), forcing it south with a 7km cut so that Ferrara's harbours became silted up and the Venetians could reclaim the land where the river had once run.

**“**Because land adjacent to the river frequently flooded, it was precarious and therefore affordable. It was somewhere the impoverished and dispossessed found shelter

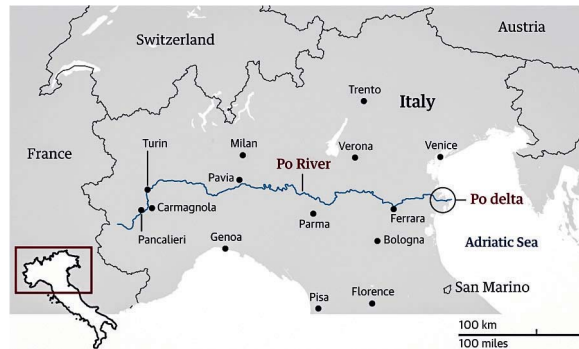


**■ Dry dock**  
The almost dry bed of the river Po at Castel San Giovanni, near Piacenza, in June  
PIERPAAOLO FERRERI/EPA





### The Po flows 652km across northern Italy



#### High waters

The Po floods the Murazzi area due to heavy rain in Turin in November 2019

ALESSANDRO DI MARCO/  
EPA



The word for land reclamation, the draining of the swamps and floodplains, is *bonifiche*, which implies a “making good”. Industrialisation meant that coal pump houses were capable of moving millions of litres in a day: through the 20th century, the number of *valli* - lagoons - was reduced from 50 to just 24; between 1957 and 1975, 18,000 hectares of the Mezzano lagoon disappeared.

Water removal meant the new lands were often below the level of the river. The discovery of methane in the 1920s and its extraction through following decades meant that land levels slipped another vital metre or two. The natural obedience of water to gravity was being challenged by human hubris. Mechanised banking of the river was now needed to protect the hard-won land because the Po became “perched”, meaning above the level of the surrounding countryside. In Polesine you go up to, not down to, the river.

The shrewd fishermen of Comacchio had once trapped and smoked eels (it was the subject of one of Sophia Loren’s earliest films, *The River Girl*), but the eels were becoming rarer because of the lack of habitat so the fishermen started farming clams, creating an industry in the postwar years worth an estimated €100m (\$101m) annually. Refrigerated vans now speed along the narrow roads on the delta, starting their journeys to the restaurants and markets of Europe.

Human intervention upended ecosystems: the coypu was introduced from South America for its fur, but when that industry ended, the *nutrie* had no predators and merrily multiplied. They now gnaw on the banks for roots, graze among the pumpkins and melons, and then plop into water,



gliding with their nostrils poking above the algal blooms.

Every industry along the Po seemed to stain or change it. Its waters were used to cool power stations, so red-and-white chimneys are often, along with pylons, the most prominent sights from the canoe. Star cucumber (known as *zucca pazza* or “mad pumpkin”) was introduced from the Americas to give shade to Italian orchards, but the plant went rogue and now covers the floodplains like a lumpy silk carpet. The ugly wels catfish has almost entirely eradicated the native sturgeon, source of the once-prized Po caviar. Canadian poplars were introduced and now stand like regimented troops, all parallel and perpendicular.

**THE RUIN OF THE RIVER** was almost total: as I paddled against the current, I would memorise the objects I saw: hay-baling plastic, tennis ball, Nerf gun bullet. What I didn’t see was even more alarming: pollution has improved from the high point in the mid-1990s (when the Po was estimated to disburse into the Adriatic every year 2,642kg of zinc, 1,154kg of copper, 1,312kg of lead, 944kg of chrome and 243kg of arsenic), but analysts still frequently see peaks in benzoylecgonine, a chemical excreted by cocaine users in urine, in the aftermath of high weekends.

During my journey the air quality was, if anything, even worse than that of the water. The polythene sky of the Padanian plain through winter is partly the result of thick fogs, but those fogs also occur because of the habit of drenching farmland in nitrogen fertilisers that then volatilise to form ammonium salts.

Fertiliser run-offs also cause those algal blooms because of eutrophication - which occurs when waters become overenriched with nutrients and minerals, typically from agriculture - in our ever-slower rivers. Most irrigation channels look like bowling creases.

But just as I began to despair about the ecological disaster of the river, something uplifting and intriguing emerged. Because land adjacent to the river frequently flooded, it was precarious and therefore affordable. It was somewhere the impoverished and dispossessed found shelter. The floodplains attracted outlaws because the Po always marked the border between rival jurisdictions and it was easy to slip across the river to avoid arrest. In the 19th century, live music was forbidden without a permit so various musical ensembles held concerts on bridges so that they could shuffle to one end or the other according to the police presence. One village next to the Po, Rea, possibly gets its name from a twist on “guilty” and another - Bergantino - probably comes from “brigand”.

“It’s as if there’s an anarchic and libertarian spirit that attracts particular individuals to the Po,” the documentary-maker and musician Alessandro Scillitani wrote recently. “People who have decided to live in their own way and thus have a vision of the world different to ours.” It’s something that has been noted for centuries, with all sorts of explanations: the Po just draws “personalities who are a bit strange”, says the photographer Riccardo Varini. “It’s a land of contraband ...”

As I tramped from one village to the next, I came across a subculture of puppeteers, musicians, fairground-ride inventors and naive artists. I noticed how many of Italy’s 20th-century film directors were either born along the banks of the Po or else kept coming back to the river for its simplicity and discernible lunacy. Films such as Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Il Grido* (*The Cry*) or





## The slow death of the Po



Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (Obsession) reinforced my sense that the river, passing through the most industrialised regions of Italy, was once a free enclave of vagabonds and itinerants. Both films were about loners living rough along its muddy banks. *Ossessione* was a liberal adaptation of James M Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

Because the river made land and possessions impermanent, over the centuries, many villagers decided to offer each other an effective insurance policy by holding land in common. At Coltaro, near Parma, the floodplains have been held communally by the villagers since 1588. Privatisations have eaten into the commonhold, but even today 1.3m sq metres are shared by the villagers, meaning each has about a hectare of land. At Trino, towards Turin, there's an extraordinary communal woodland that has been operative since the late 13th century: it's called "the woodland of fates" because the felling areas are assigned by drawing lots every autumn. The riverbanks were often the sites of socialist or surrealist communes and of lazarets (quarantine quarters), something given added resonance in our era of Covid and contagion.

It wasn't just cheap or precarious land that nurtured communalism. As Giulio Boccaletti shows in his eloquent 2021 book, *Water*, notions of citizenship and democracy have often been forged by the need to "develop institutions to manage the consequences of a sedentary life in a world of moving water". The Lombard League (an alliance of the usually fractious city states of northern Italy) was created in 1167 in part to reject the water-grab by Holy Roman emperor Frederick Barbarossa, who at the Diet of Roncaglia (1154-58) had claimed ownership of the Po, its precious waters and its fish.

After the construction of the Cavour canal, north of the Po, in the 1860s, the Italian rice industry became hydrologically viable, and sophisticated irrigation agreements were drawn up between the great monasteries and tenant farmers to flood the fields of Lomellina.

Here, too, the water forced social mobilisation: the exploitation of female manual labourers - the *mondine*, or weeders - gave rise to unionism and successful campaigns for an eight-hour day. The arduous 40-day weeding had a Lenten feel and the *mondine* had a playbook of bagpipey "Lombardy-blues" songs taken from the socialist, military, partisan and feminist repertoire. Now, though, there are no manual labourers left in these fields, only 20-metre booms, triangled like a crane arm, that spray weedkillers into the water.

☐ **Trickle down**  
Drone view of the Po in San Giorgio Piacentino. Northern Italy faces its worst drought in 70 years

MANUEL ROMANO/  
NURPHOTO/REX/  
SHUTTERSTOCK

## The fears of Po-side humans were always focused on floods but suddenly we now have exactly the opposite fear: not an excess, but a lack, of water

I was often drawn to the traces of the cottage industries that relied on the Po's waters. Carmagnola was the capital of international hemp trading from the 16th to 18th centuries. Its covered market was where hemp uniforms and ropes were sold to emissaries of the maritime republics of Genoa and Venice.

Hemp production was basic: the long stalks of *cannabis sativa* were rotted in the ditches so they could be stripped down, beaten, combed and spun. You can still see one or two long arcades where women and children twisted, soaked and scrubbed the rope. A few farmhouses have holes where poles were inserted like rigid clothes lines on which to dry fibres.

Just occasionally there were botanical connections between the Po and England. Pancalieri, south-west of Turin, is a tiny town. Even here, from where you can see the equilateral peak of Monviso at almost 4,000 metres, you're only 243 metres above sea level. Pancalieri's low-lying marshes (the name means "waning plain") made it ideal for a cottage industry that had thrived in the 1800s in the then Surrey village of Mitcham: the cultivation and distillation of lavender and mint and the transformation of their essences into cosmetics and tinctures.

Turin was the centre of Italian chemistry and various investors and farmers decided to imitate Mitcham's know-how and farm peppermint in the rich soils adjacent to the Pancaliera stream. Pancalieri, the town, now grows half of all Italian mint, the main client being the nearby confectionery giant Ferrero, producer of, among much else, Tic Tacs.

But the horror of writing a book about the natural world in 2022 is that everything has turned inside out. Almost all the images of the river through history are of a male thug ("a drunken father", according to Gianni Brera, the great sportswriter, who was born in San Zenone al Po). The fears of Po-side humans were always focused on floods, but suddenly centuries of architecture and literature seem redundant because we now we have exactly the opposite fear: not an excess, but a lack, of water. Even the mountain where the Po rises, Monviso, is crumbling as the glacial glues give way. My hike to the source was interrupted every hour by the roar of a small rockslide and the puff of smaragdite dust. Despite the damp mosses of the Alpine tundra, the Po is slimmer every year, less a drunken father now than an absent one. *Observer*

TOBIAS JONES IS A JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR BASED IN ITALY  
*The Po: An Elegy for Italy's Longest River*  
by Tobias Jones is out now



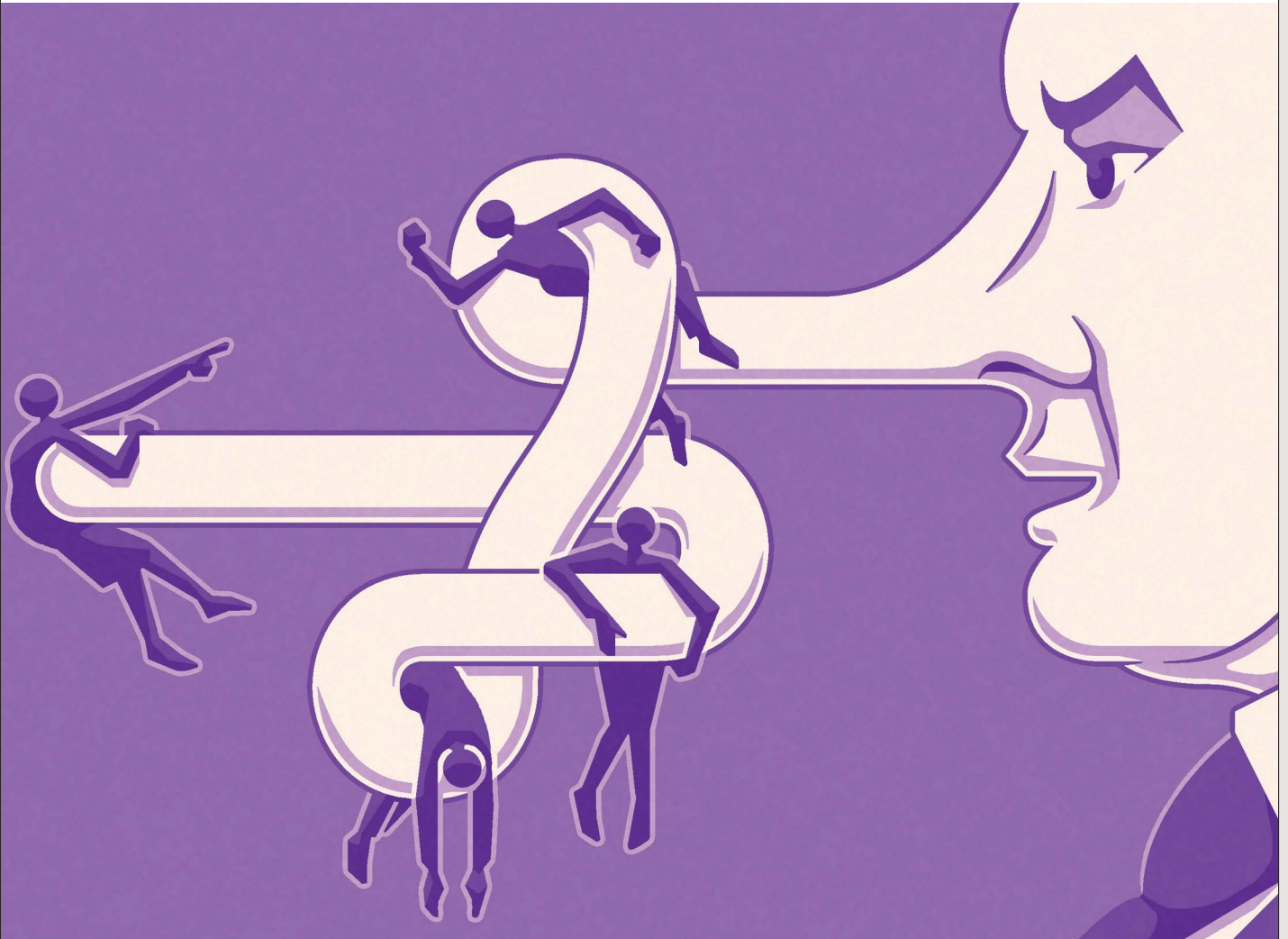


SAM VENIS

Could new countries be built online?

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# Opinion



POLITICS

*The west needs strong, trustworthy leaders to turn tide on autocrats*

**Simon Tisdall**



Illustration Matt Kenyon



**P**romoting his latest book, 99-year-old Henry Kissinger, the controversial former doyen of US foreign policymaking, bemoaned the low calibre of present-day political leadership. That's a bit stiff, coming from a man who was close to Richard Nixon, the only US president ever to resign in disgrace.

Yet Kissinger's rose-tinted praise for "strong" postwar leaders - Margaret Thatcher, France's Charles de Gaulle and West Germany's Konrad Adenauer are among his all-time greats - does not mean he was wrong in his pronouncement. With notable exceptions, the west's current crop is weak, uninspiring and untrustworthy.

This matters more than ever. If western democracies are to survive, let alone win, the global struggle against a rising authoritarian tide, personified by ruthless figures such as Vladimir Putin in Russia and Xi Jinping in China, they require leaders of skill, courage and integrity.

As Boris Johnson's shameless antics show, such qualities are frequently lacking or wholly absent at the highest levels. While few politicians in comparable countries stoop as low, Boris blight is not confined to Britain. Across the democratic sphere, there are gaping black holes where trust and vision should be.

Perhaps this is the unlovely norm. Perhaps mediocre politicians pursuing shoddy, self-serving deals and compromises is actually what keeps western liberal democracy staggering on. Who wants "strong" leaders if, like Thatcher, they divide and destroy in order to rule?

Yet with the world facing huge simultaneous crises over climate, biodiversity, hunger, migration, energy, Covid and war, who can afford pusillanimity at the top?

Few doubt Joe Biden's courage and integrity. How many people would have taken on the US presidency aged 78? In contrast to Donald Trump, he's a paradigm of probity. That said, fewer and fewer Americans appear impressed by his leadership skills 18 months in.

With his approval rating puddling at 38%, Biden faces lame duck humiliations if, as expected, Republicans win control of Congress in November.

In France, Emmanuel Macron has a similar problem. Re-elected president in an either-or contest with the far-right's Marine Le Pen, he promptly lost his parliamentary majority when voters were offered alternatives.

In Germany, Spain and Italy leaders are under fire for lack of ideas, or lack of nerve, by electorates who suspect they are not up to the job.

All the same, critics of Germany's "sulky sausage"



*Across the west, public trust and confidence in the institutions underpinning democracy is waning*

chancellor, Olaf Scholz, might reflect that his predecessor, Angela Merkel, was widely regarded as Europe's master politician. Until she quit. Her legacy, not least her coddling of Putin and disastrous energy policies, has since undergone radical reappraisal.

If lacklustre individuals are not solely to blame for underpowered western leadership, what else is? Disillusion with pan-European democracy plays a part. Most Europeans still like the idea of the EU. Public support increased after the Ukraine invasion.

Yet concrete achievements are few. Most recently, EU states have struggled to implement energy sanctions on Russia or fashion a united diplomatic stance.

A behind-the-scenes documentary, which records Macron's futile pre-invasion "phone diplomacy" with Putin, shows how readily a national leader may jettison European solidarity when it suits.

#### **Across the geopolitical west, public trust and confidence**

in the institutions underpinning democracy is waning, whether the issue is unrepresentative electoral systems, politicised judges, a discredited UN or the chronic inability of governments to deliver their promises.

Britain's is a cautionary tale. Johnson's serial dishonesty fed cynicism and apathy about politics and strained constitutional conventions to breaking point. Mini-Trump will soon be gone, but he did maxi-damage.

Institutional breakdown in the US has led some to ask whether the country is ungovernable. The 2020 "big lie" has done great harm, as has a partisan supreme court whose rulings on abortion, gun ownership and climate action defied majority opinion and common sense.

A new Gallup survey found public confidence in US institutions at a record average low of 27%. The presidency, Congress, courts, media, banks, churches and big tech are all less trusted than ever. In the US, as in the UK, government and public badly need to reconnect.

If the peoples of the west no longer believe their own myths, are not confident that democracy works, and lack faith in elected leaders, where does that leave the fight against authoritarianism? Last month's summit of the west's wealthiest countries heightened the sense of fighting a losing battle.

As Mark Malloch-Brown, a former UK minister and president of the Open Society Foundations, noted, G7 leaders failed to grasp the bigger picture. Focusing on Ukraine, they devoted only 90 minutes to the earth-shattering challenges of climate, food and health.

A reckoning is due. A critical showdown looms in November when the G7 leaders will run up against Ukraine war neutrals such as India, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia at the G20 summit in Bali. They have very different agendas.

What's coming is a definitive tug-of-war with Russia, China and their allies for power, influence and legitimacy across the unoccupied middle ground of a deconstructed, post-invasion world.

Is the future democratic? It's in the balance. Lack of leadership, plus lack of self-belief, may yet be the west's undoing ● *Observer*



TECHNOLOGY

# Could new countries really be founded on the internet?

## Sam Venis



**I**n *The Network State*, a buzzy new book by Balaji Srinivasan, the former chief technology officer of Coinbase, poses a devious question: how do you Larp (Live action role play) a country into existence?

Released provocatively in the US on 4 July, the book presents Srinivasan's case for a new model of digital statehood run and managed in the cloud. A network state, as he describes it, is a group of people who get together on the internet and decide that they're going to start a country. With a social network to connect them, a leader to unite them and a cryptocurrency to protect their assets, Srinivasan says a country can be born with laws, social services and all. A network state is a country that "anyone can start from your computer, beginning by building a following" - not unlike companies, cryptocurrencies or decentralised autonomous organisations (DAOs). Srinivasan asks, could such a state achieve recognition from the UN?

Just when we need leaders to solve our problems, Balaji argues, they are failing, and the reason isn't just corruption or incompetence - the reason is technological. Central government is no longer capable of addressing our needs because the world for which it was designed has changed. The internet has made place less important, so national borders seem arbitrary. And cryptocurrencies show that if enough people believe in the value of an idea you can create something worth trillions of dollars. Software has made it so a few engineers can outcompete nations (think hacker

groups). And, in the age of social networks, millions of anonymous people can fit into groups that coordinate together; just look at r/wallstreetbets and Gamestop.

"Very few institutions that predated the internet will survive the internet," Srinivasan said recently. So the solution, he argues, is to build an institution based on it. Here's how it works: a person on Twitter decides to start a country so they float the idea to pals and begin to gather recruits. They put together a vision statement and a list of values, and people begin to join and tell their friends. It starts off like a social network.

To make it happen, no wars need to be fought and no laws need to be violated. With rockstar leaders, these new states would obtain rights and recognition, breaking off from their home countries. First, there was Brexit; then movements like Wexit; now there's a new romantic vision of escape for techies - "Texit"?

**While the concept might bend our idea of nationality,** the fact remains that precursors already exist. Consider Dudeism, a religion based on a character from the 1998 film *The Big Lebowski*, with a reported population of 450,000 Dudeist priests. Or even, as Srinivasan points out, the state of Israel, which brought together a people scattered around the world and organised them around a common ideal. Many countries, Srinivasan says, have populations of around five to 10 million with economies

smaller than what an equal size of tech workers might produce. That a bunch of crypto bros might test their fate on an eccentric leader doesn't seem too far-fetched. And with over

650,000 Twitter followers - an army of young, tech-savvy and politically credulous acolytes - Srinivasan might just be the man to do it. Among the crypto-rich and the billionaire class this book will be positioned as a north star, levied to support the claim that technologists can run society better than the bureaucrats.

Of course, Srinivasan isn't the first technologist to offer a tarot reading of our tech-mediated future. In 2019, the theorist Aaron Bastani wrote another popular formulation, this one from the left, explaining how robots will make us all rich. His book *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* starts with the same general diagnoses: that we're going into the third industrial revolution, that we're at an epochal moment of human history, that technology has rendered our systems obsolete. But his conclusion is that we need more centralisation, not less. Let the robots do our work, the book argues, and let us enjoy the spoils. Hunger, disease, energy crises, jobs - these will all be relics of a scarce and squalid past that came before the age of abundance. The future is the nanny state, Bastani suggests - only better.

What these visions point to is a growing cleavage among people who call themselves futurists. There are those who imagine a world of centralisation, marked by super-blocs and mass redistribution of wealth. And there are those who claim that the world already mirrors old feudal systems. In this sort of vision, like the one offered by Srinivasan, rugged individualism is the outstanding moral code. And this book, or better yet, this playbook, is just the first attempt to make it official ●

\* **Sam Venis** is a writer based in New York

Illustration *Christophe Gowans*



UNITED  
KINGDOM

## *The Tory party can't just wash out its stains after Boris Johnson*

**Nesrine Malik**

**I**n most successful revolutions, there comes a moment when the dictator is ushered out of office by a powerful figure within their inner circle. During the Arab spring, the formula became familiar: a military commander would claim they could no longer stand by as a despotic president brutalised protesters. They would speak up, jettisoning their career for the sake of the nation, and would give a pious address about their love of country. Yet as the bitter aftermath of the Arab spring demonstrates, the person who deposes the dictator often helped to create them. They are not a saviour. In fact, they may be the next dictator.

The Tory party is now home to an entire cast of these

protagonists, who all claim they did the right thing for the sake of the nation. Over the next few weeks, Tory ministers will do and say anything they can to launder their reputations and heap responsibility for the catastrophic failure of this government on the head of Boris Johnson alone. Their resignation letters and tweets have all followed the same treacherous template.

"I can no longer, in good conscience, continue serving," wrote Sajid Javid, despite doing so through several scandals. Meanwhile Rishi Sunak believes the standards of "proper", "competent" and "serious" government must be upheld, as if he had not previously realised that Johnson was none of those things.

As Conservative MPs jostle to sell themselves as would-be Tory leaders, we are expected to believe Johnson rose to power entirely unassisted or enabled. Most implausibly of all, we are expected to believe that those who enthusiastically defended him when he lied, cheated and recklessly mismanaged a deadly pandemic are now to be trusted to lead us next.

Another paper-shredding exercise is playing out in those parts of the media that either could not stomach the Labour alternative at the time of the 2019 election, therefore giving Johnson a premiership by default, or were intoxicated by him in a climate of Brexit bravado and gleeful Corbyn-bashing. To both of these camps,

Illustration Sébastien Thibault



Johnson's worst traits were still preferable to any political alternative that remotely threatened the status quo on immigration, foreign policy or the chummy complicity between the government and the media.

Johnson's rise promised to boost a media that thrived along with him and his party on fear-mongering about immigrants, the EU and other villains such as children who needed free school lunches. Like those "principled" Tory MPs, the rightwing press continued to find excuses for Johnson, a man whose nature it knew all along, until it calculated that he was now no longer a "greased piglet" and instead a liability.

**Again, the clock resets and we are expected to move** on and believe that those who helped Johnson along the way feel as angry, disappointed and betrayed as the British people. Many will believe it. When unpopular leaders are ousted from office, in the vacuum of power their departure creates, king-makers and king predictors, eager to get in on the action, begin to make their bets on who will lead the country next. And so a frenzied horse commentary kicks off. The language of electoral race analysis has little use for the moral judgments that would expose the character of leadership contestants.

The news beat expunges the ghouls who are running to replace Johnson, declaring them "slick", "impressive" and "interesting politicians". Already, we are seeing profiles of candidates, endless polling that pits would-be Tory leaders against Keir Starmer and "who's up and who's down" commentary. The candidates are already being called upon to give their views on everything from taxation to trans issues, but few will be asked why, only weeks ago, they defended Johnson against lockdown partying allegations (Grant Shapps), supported him in last month's no confidence vote (Liz Truss) or backed him when calls for him to resign began in January (Javid).

Everybody shimmying away from the crime scene also benefits from the sheer momentum that drives the collective desire for a new start. After Johnson's cascade of scandals and two years of Covid bleakness, who wants to believe that the sickness in our politics and the frailty of our economy cannot be purged by getting rid of the single individual who had come to personify it? In removing Johnson from office, the right thing appears to have been done. Nobody wants to listen to the person arguing that the problem does not lie with a single individual, or that there has been no honour in Johnson's removal.

The profound changes we yearn for in politics will not be achieved by replacing one Tory leader with another. So long as this shock collar is triggered by the rightwing media and political establishment whenever structural reforms are proposed, little will change.

And so, as with all crises, at the moment when we are most susceptible to believing good news, we are sold the lie that the trouble is over and the culprits have been isolated. But it's not over. The only hope we have is to plant our feet and stand firm. There is not a single excuse to ever trust those who knew who Johnson was all along, and who inflicted him on the nation anyway ●

✳ **Nesrine Malik** is a *Guardian* columnist

## All work and no play might have made June a dull mathematician

**J**une Huh, a would-be poet who says he struggles to do more than three hours of focused work a day, last week became one of the latest recipients of the highest honour in mathematics, the Fields medal.

Rarely can a single sentence have contained so many apparent cultural contradictions. Maths is traditionally seen as a "hard" subject, requiring sustained concentration and regular practice. Some universities recommend students do not take gap years without following a programme to keep up to scratch.

Prof Huh's approach is different. For a few months in 2019, the Princeton academic revealed, all he did was reread books from his youth, including the novels of the Swiss-German polymath Hermann Hesse, a guru of the hippy-era search for authenticity. He emphasised the parallels between artists and mathematicians, saying that, in both cases, it felt "like you're grabbing something that's already there, rather than creating something in your mind".

Prof Huh's approach raises interesting questions for all of us. Most obviously, they challenge the two-cultures binary - the "gulf of mutual incomprehension" between science and the arts - which was hotly debated even when it was first proposed by CP Snow in 1959, but which is far from being superannuated.

More interestingly, in stressing the importance to his thinking of interactions with his environment - walking in the woods near his campus, for

instance - Prof Huh challenges received ideas not only about how work is best achieved but even what it is. He is good at "finding stuff", he said. What he finds, he puts together in unprecedented ways.

This is an embodied metaphor for the process that makes him such an original thinker. It connects with an influential article published in 1998 by the philosophers Andy Clark and David Chalmers. In *The Extended Mind*, they argued that the environment had an active role in driving cognitive processes, though their concept of environment included notepads, calculators or a group of people brainstorming around a table.

The point, which was picked up by Annie Murphy Paul (in her book also titled *The Extended Mind*) is that the human brain does not work in isolation. Moreover, it has not evolved to work in straight lines but in loops that actively engage its surroundings, including a body that is constantly feeding back sensory information: the cold sweat of fear, the prickle of excitement.

The structures commonly associated with productivity may even hamper thought: rather than putting in long hours at a desk, it might be more efficient to take a walk or even have a snooze.

This sort of thinking, so heretical to the instrumentalism of capitalist societies, loops back to the wisdom of poets. "Inspiration is as necessary in geometry as it is in poetry," wrote Alexander Pushkin. The mistake, now as then, is to see inspiration, or imagination, as a luxury. It isn't - it's essential ●



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**Tales from the frontline bring us full impact of war**

Your front page reportage is as instructive for what it conveys about the difficulty in reporting from Ukraine as it is with the story of that conflict itself (Big story, 17 June).

It's a reporting difficulty that has been around for some time. Ever since the unprecedented media candour in reporting the second Indochina war [Vietnam war], reportage on conflicts has tended to be significantly restrained, with the powers-that-be wanting the reality of war shrouded in as much secrecy as possible.

Your reporters have, despite such restrictions, been able to report first hand on the horrific nature of that conflict for Ukrainian soldiers and the strategic question as to whether, statistically, that conflict has reached a critical turning point.

And it is commendable that your two foreign correspondents - Isobel Koshiw and Luke Harding - had the journalistic courage to interview near the Ukrainian frontline.

Terence Hewton  
Adelaide, South Australia

● Christopher S Chivvis's article (It is in Ukraine's best interests to end this war, Opinion, 17 June) rightly suggests no one can win. No matter what, the warring parties can

only help themselves to a choice of pyrrhic victories, and the proverbial tail between their legs. The real winners of a protracted war are the weapon makers and the well-oiled war industry.

Some negotiation is badly called for, thus arresting the sacrifice of so many lives. What I fail to comprehend is why this undertaking should "require diplomatic leadership from Washington". Isn't this the same Washington that led and coerced its allies into "the brutal and unjustified invasion of Iraq" under false pretences in 2001? Helping rebuild Ukraine after the military conflict is certainly a grand idea. One would only hope it won't result in Ukraine as a fully fledged client state of America. Of course we mere mortals are never to find out who, other than President Putin, triggered this conflict; nor whose *casus belli* spell President Zelenskiy is under. Where on earth is peace holed up?  
Miguel A Cabezas  
Glenbrook, NSW, Australia

**Poorer countries deserve to have their voices heard**

Yet again, George Monbiot (It's within our power to unite everyone, Opinion, 1 July) offers us a reflection on the way forward for a sustainable, equitable and just future. For too long poorer countries

have been at the mercy of imperialist debt and "forced austerity and forced exploitation of fossil fuels", ably supported by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organization - all dominated by rich countries. The leadership to challenge the anomalies between rich and poor countries, coming from poorer nations, is to be saluted. As stated in the article, "climate campaigns are indivisible from global justice".  
Judith Morrison  
Nunawading, Victoria, Australia

**We are all affected by ageing in different ways**

While I agree that the problem of an ageing population (Grey Britain, Spotlight, 8 July) needs to be tackled, it should correct itself with time. As the bulge of elderly people moves up the chart and dies off, we could see a decline in the population but one that is rather more balanced than today.

The trouble with ageing is that it affects each of us differently. I knew men who were showing signs of middle age in their 20s. I think that employers have to be educated to treat their people as individuals, pensioning off or sidelining those who show signs of set, obstructive and/or erratic

behaviour or whose health and fitness irretrievably declines, retaining those who remain fit and healthy, receptive to new ideas and who are prepared to give younger people their heads. We are simply wasting human resources.

Incidentally, I deeply resent being described as "economically inactive". Every time I spend my pension I am contributing to the economy.  
Anthony J Cooper  
Gt Shelford, England, UK

**Men have an early role to play in abortion rights**

Robert Logan (Letters, 8 July) makes a good point about the responsibility of men to protest against the restriction of the right to abortion. The same point was made in a placard carried at a Melbourne rally: "Life begins with ejaculation. Mandate vasectomy."

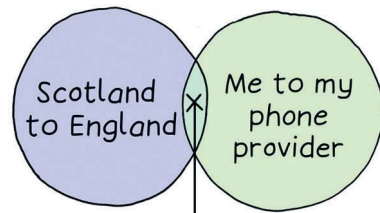
Dr Juliet Flesch  
Kew, Victoria, Australia

**CORRECTIONS**

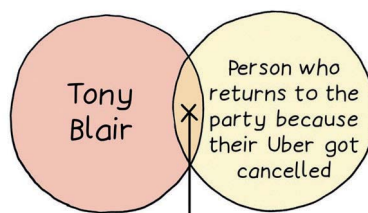
The suspect in the Fourth of July Chicago shooting (Global report, 8 July) is 21, not 22 as the police stated.

An Opinion article (8 July) about TikTok's involvement in Kenya should not have implied the writer had spoken directly to AFP about their fact-checking partnership.

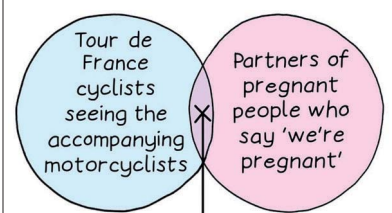
A WEEK IN VENN DIAGRAMS  
Edith Pritchett



Desperate to leave but they've made it as difficult as possible and keep talking about how long you've been together



Sorry we've all moved on from your presence



OSTENSIBLY SUPPORTIVE BUT REALLY UNDERLINING THE RATHER GAPING DISCREPANCY IN EFFORT





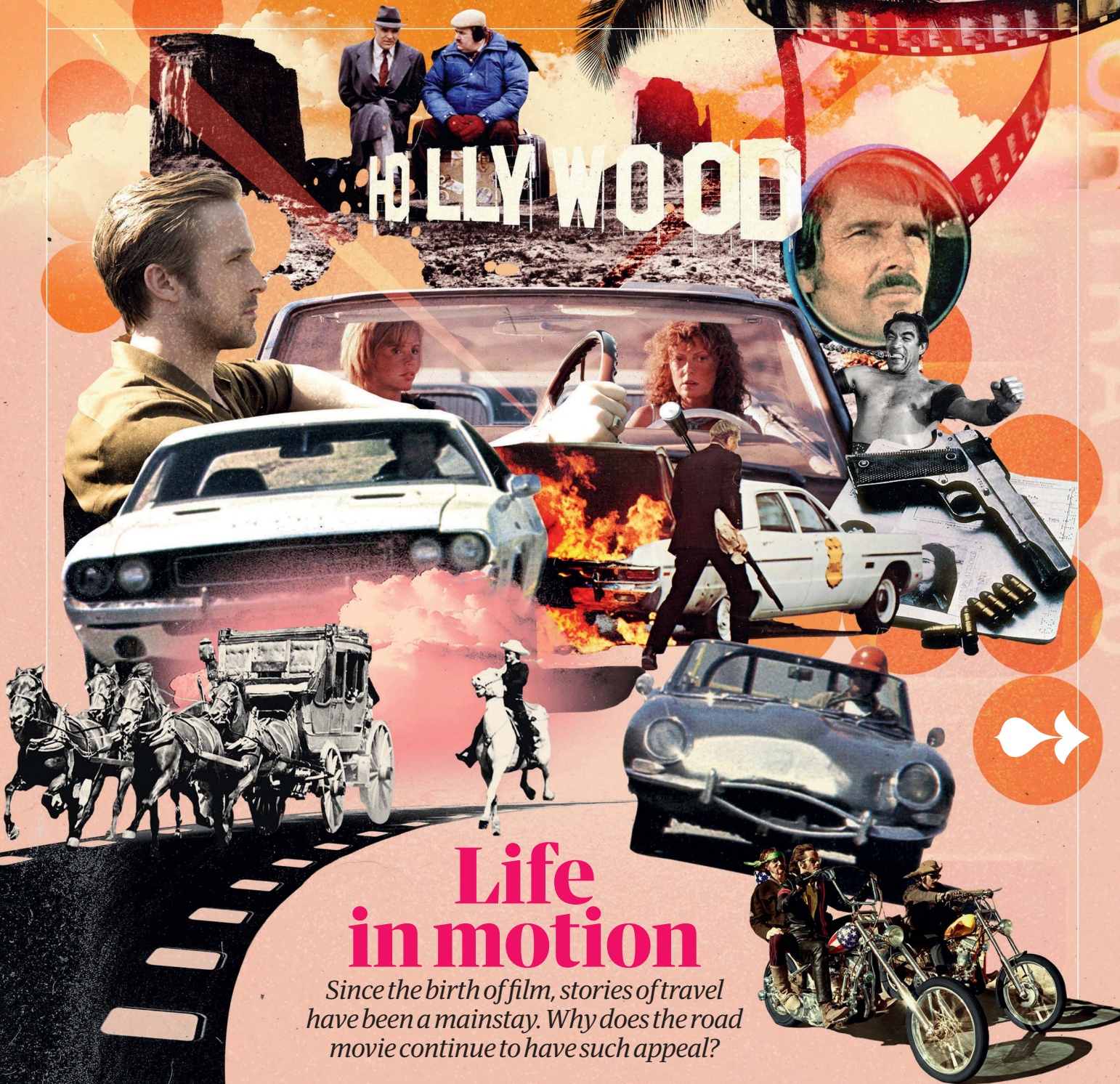
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ART  
The wonder  
of whales in  
the Hebrides

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# Culture

## HOLLYWOOD

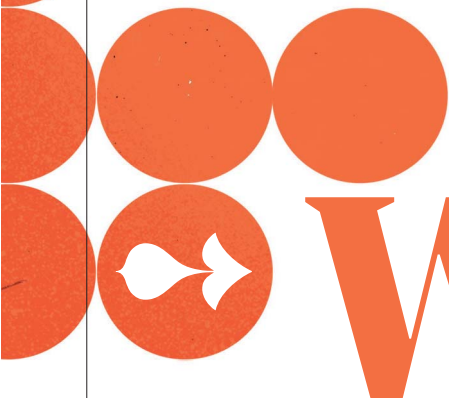


## Life in motion

Since the birth of film, stories of travel have been a mainstay. Why does the road movie continue to have such appeal?



By Geoff Dyer  
ILLUSTRATION  
By Eleanor  
Shakespeare



Wherever there is an actual physical journey there is inherent narrative interest. It doesn't matter whether the journey is on foot through the Australian outback (Walkabout) or in the Antarctic (Scott of the ...), on horseback (Lonesome Dove)

or covered wagon (um, Wagon Train), by boat (Apocalypse Now, Deliverance), train (Von Ryan's Express), aircraft or spaceship, car, or some permutation of any of the above: Planes, Trains and Automobiles. With jour, journey and journal(ism) sharing the same root, we're linguistically programmed to follow day-by-day accounts of journeys. Writing in 1849, Thomas De Quincey celebrated the unprecedented "velocity" of English mail coaches that revealed to him, first "the glory of motion: suggesting, at the same time, an under-sense, not unpleasurable, of possible though indefinite danger; second, through grand effects for the eye between lamp-light and the darkness upon solitary roads".

De Quincey used that phrase, "The Glory of Motion", as a subtitle for his essay, but one is tempted to insert "Pictures" at the end, for these 50 thrilled and thrilling pages are like a trailer ("Coming soon ...") for the invention of the aptly named movies - one of the first of which showed a train arriving at a station in 1895, though this arrival actually heralded a medium of departures, sending us into transports of delight as it whisked us off us to multiple elsewhere, real and imagined.

It quickly became evident that each form of transportation had its particular filmic advantages. Ships and planes mean there is not just a captive audience but a captive cast; since no one can safely leave, the mode of transport becomes a sealed world. Films such as Stagecoach (1939), the logical and geographical extension of De Quincey's draft treatment, show the dual advantages of a carriage that will, in time, become horseless: a group of characters thrown together in a cramped and jolting stage set, making more or less frequent stops and exposed, whether in repose or at a gallop, to multiple interactions with the hostile world in this back of the western beyond (a word to which we shall return). The difference with trains is that although a route is planned it is not fixed. (While filmic heists are planned, often meticulously, they tend to go better, as far as the audience is concerned, when they don't go as planned; in Sam Peckinpah's The Getaway, Steve McQueen and Ali MacGraw are reduced to travelling in the back of a garbage truck, which is not how either of them envisaged things panning out.) In real-world Los Angeles, the dream of automotive freedom meant that you became routinely stuck in traffic - as exuberantly celebrated at the start of La La Land - en route to the studio, but the lived frustration of gridlock only enhanced the siren song of the open road, as proclaimed in Walt Whitman's poem of the same name: "To see nothing anywhere but what you may reach

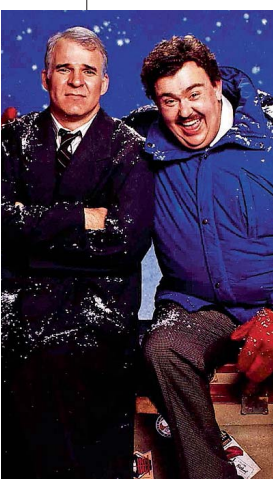


it and pass it." For film directors, this adds up to a perfect combination of tried and tested generic expectations and the liberty to surpass previous iterations, even if that means going, on occasion, completely off the rails.

The road movie, then, with its deep roots in the history of storytelling, is almost synonymous with the essence of film: the movieness-of-movie. So while it's tempting to talk about a new crop of road movies reinventing the genre - reinventing the steering wheel, so to speak - this is somewhat redundant since no genre has such an in-built readiness to adapt itself, in several senses, to changing fashions, social themes (Thelma & Louise, dangerously; Green Book, safely) or world events. (The miniseries Generation Kill, based on Evan Wright's non-fiction book about a bunch of Recon marines spearheading the invasion of Iraq, is, in essence, a militarised road movie.) Just as cars themselves are constantly being updated and marketed (in those films, otherwise known as car ads, which, minute for minute, might be the most expensive and pernicious ever made, deploying a stunning waste of intelligence, landscape and resources) so road movies reshape, remodel and trick themselves out according to shifting tastes around a defining core and fixed idea.

Shortly before I came of filmic age, the road movie had entered its countercultural existential phase. In Vanishing Point (1971), Barry Newman has to deliver a car from Denver, Colorado, to San Francisco in record time. To do this he needs - what else? - speed in order to whiz along in the alternative and lucrative slipstream generated by the runaway success of Easy Rider. Some kind of trippy white hipster rebel thing is going on as this Vietnam vet and ex-cop turned pedal-to-the-metal Sisyphus forms a radio alliance with a blind African American DJ called Super Soul who, broadcasting out of Nevada, updates Bazza on what the pigs pursuing him are up to. One of the things they're up to is turning up at SS's studio with a bunch of rednecks to trash the place and teach him a lesson. The lesson, I suppose, is that Super Soul got it vicariously right when he called Newman "the last American hero", though why this is so is anyone's guess.

Then, five years later, there was Kings of the Road, one of Wim Wenders's early films, before he fell victim to the kind of auto-piety whereby he discovered that the elusive deity he had been searching for (search as a form of worship being a common theme on the road) was actually himself. Anyway, those three black-and-white hours of Kings of the Road were weirdly compelling in a lugubrious, cloudy-



▲ Give thanks  
Steve Martin  
(left) and John  
Candy in Planes,  
Trains and  
Automobiles

UNITED ARCHIVES/  
ALAMY

► Centre stage  
John Wayne in  
Stagecoach

20THC FOX/EVERETT/REX



bong-water kind of way, but one moment is burned into the consciousness of anyone who slumped through it. That's right, the shot of the guy taking a hugely impressive dump in the great outdoors; it was like watching someone give birth to a snake. (McQueen and Newman would have had no truck with that kind of shit!) The fundamental effect - of the film as a whole, not just this uninhibited bit of fundament - was to prove that whereas in a chase-and-race such as Steven Spielberg's *Duel* (1971) you hurtled along in a state of fast and furious excitement, the meditative road movie could drift to a virtual standstill - and still keep going - anywhere.

Well, I say that but there is a tacit assumption that the road movie is a quintessentially American form. There are obvious practical reasons for this: you can drive for days or weeks without crossing national borders, but since that also holds good for Russia (where, coincidentally, this little journalistic road trip will end up), the real explanation is



the tautologous and hegemonic one that our idea of the road movie has been formed by ... American road movies! Following in the tracks of the historical pioneers heading towards the promised land of California, the direction of travel tends to be westward. In 1990, my girlfriend and I did a drive-away, picking up a car in New York and dropping it off at an address in LA 10 days later. We were meant to barrel along the most direct route (sticking to the script, as it were) but since no record had been kept of the original mileage we embarked on an epic and exhausting odyssey of relentless blacktop digression. We meandered through every kind of landscape and weather, all the time animated by the feeling that we were starring in our own unfiled road movie (complete with occasional hints of the dangers mentioned by De Q).

In this respect we were helped by a peculiarity of usage whereby although American cars have windshields, we were looking, Englishly, through a windscreen. The only thing needed to properly square the circle would have been to stop off at a drive-in movie where they were showing something such as *Lolita* with its noncey itinerary as sketched by Nabokov: "Independence, Missouri, the starting point of the Old Oregon Trail; and Abilene, Kansas, the home of the Wild Bill Something Rodeo. Distant mountains. Near mountains. More mountains; bluish beauties never attainable, or ever turning into inhabited hill after hill."

The combination of stunning natural beauty, mythic precedent and kitschy roadside Americana that so delighted Nabokov has proved irresistible to non-American directors

such as Andrea Arnold (*American Honey*) who get the chance to make a film that is also tacitly about the tradition of the road movies that they are contributing to. The myth is capable not only of withstanding disappointment or disillusionment but is, in part, sustained by it. A few years back, about to make the once-scenic drive from Austin, Texas, to San Antonio (of the Alamo fame), I was cautioned: "These days it's mainly just Bed, Bath and Beyond." This was an updated amendment to Louis Simpson's warning - in a poem dedicated to Whitman - that "The Open road goes to the used-car lot", but not even saturation retail can obliterate the promise of "beyond"; no amount of corporate encroachment can quite obscure the destination sign on Ken Kesey's Magic Bus, driven by Neal Cassady (of *On the Road* notoriety): "Furthur".

Obviously, the idea and possibility of the visual road trip has been extended fur beyond the US, to every corner of the Earth. Italy, for example, had Federico Fellini's *La Strada*. For us in Britain, there is a mini, rather wearisome ironic tradition of people trying to find an equivalent of Route 66 in what DH Lawrence called a country the size of someone's back garden. Being from a tiny island nation proved no obstacle to Japanese director Ryūsuke Hamaguchi in last year's profoundly (slow) moving version of Haruki Murakami's story *Drive My Car*, which enlarged geographical restriction to the point where the road - like the staged adaptation of Chekhov at the heart of the film - becomes indistinguishable from the vast mysteries of life itself. Or, as Whitman put it still more grandly: "To know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as roads for traveling souls."

The hold of the American landscape, you see, is difficult to escape. "Where are we?" are the first words spoken in Panah Panahi's forthcoming *Hit the Road* (see over). If the actor Pantea Panahiha weren't speaking Farsi, →



**No genre has such a readiness to adapt to changing fashions, social themes or world events**



▲ **Double act**  
Thelma & Louise

MGM/SPORTSPHOTO/  
ALLSTAR

◀◀ **Giving chase**  
Vanishing Point

PICTORIAL PRESS/ALAMY

◀ **Free spirits**  
Easy Rider

ALLSTAR/ALAMY

## ▼ Car trouble

A scene from *Hit the Road*

CAP/SFS/CAPITAL PICTURES

we'd assume, from the surrounding landscape, that we were in the badlands of the south-west United States. While his dad Jafar's delightful 2015 film *Taxi Tehran* raised the conceptual question of whether there can be an urban road movie, Panahi Jr cleverly counterposes wide-open spaces and intense claustrophobia. The opening shot is a severely restricted and expansive tour (de force) of the inside of a parked car and of the view from each of its windows that establishes the vehicle as the sun around which the filmed world revolves. It captures the infinite possibility of the road and the inherent confinement of travelling (with family members in this instance, including a kid so adorable one longed to see him thrown out of the window). Devotees of Panahi Sr might detect a whiff of parable in this demonstration of cinematic succession and the endless potential of the genre, but we'll close with a mention of something that could be taken as a sign at the end of the cinematic road.

In 2016, there was a brief theatrical release for *The Road Movie*, a compilation of dashcam footage from Russia, put together by Dmitrii Kalashnikov. Full of the kind of outlandish real-life craziness found on YouTube safaris, these short clips run the gamut of every conceivable genre: comedy, horror, caper, disaster, sci-fi and so on. It also accidentally deploys some of the trademark touches of the great auteurs of cinematic history. After a collision, a driver gets out of his car to confront the person responsible for the accident. In unconscious homage to Robert Bresson, the entire exchange takes place out of shot while the camera keeps its gaze fixed - unblinking and unthinking - on the empty road ahead. *Observer*

GEOFF DYER IS AN AUTHOR AND CRITIC

## “The idea and possibility of the visual road trip has been extended to every corner of the Earth

## ▼ Cam-dram

2016's *The Road Movie* used dashcam footage

THE ROAD MOVIE



03:38:35



## Direction of travel Iran's hit road trip movie

A rapturously received breakout hit at the Cannes film festival in 2021, *Hit the Road*, the debut film of Panah Panahi (the 38-year-old son of Iranian director Jafar Panahi), has had quite a journey since its premiere. The film, a tender, tragicomic road trip that crams a mother, a father, a brooding older son, a hyperactive six-year-old and an ailing dog into a people carrier travelling towards Iran's north-west, has accumulated prizes and glowing reviews globally.

But one place it has yet to be shown, officially at least, is Iran. Panahi, speaking from his home in Tehran, says: "I know that it won't have a [cinema] release in Iran and I have to give up on that dream. But they [the censors] keep you in limbo." Points of contention include the fact that a woman's singing voice can be heard when the actor who plays the mother sings along to a tape of pre-revolution Iranian pop. The censors also took issue with the "cursing". "But these are pretexts. It's not like if we make these changes, suddenly they will be fine with it. The problem is the very nature of the film, in that it is a film that is thought-provoking. They hate any film that makes people reflect."

The rigid framework of rules

Iranian film-makers have to abide by is one reason, Panahi explains, that cars and road movies are so common there. Panahi follows his father, and Abbas Kiarostami among others, in setting his film largely inside a vehicle.

"It's not a thematic device or an artistic choice, it's just how we live. There is nowhere you can have social peace. But inside your car, they won't come and bother you."

One of the censors' diktats states that women in cinema cannot be shown with their hair uncovered, which effectively means film-makers can't shoot domestic scenes without credibility issues. The city is also tricky as a location. "The streets of Tehran: there is so much tension, so much anger. So once you have eliminated those options, there is not much left. Taking a car, hitting the road to the countryside is what we all do."

The process of shooting within a car was not without its challenges, not least containing the boundless energy of the film's six-year-old child actor Rayan Sarlak, who bounces off the sides of the vehicle like a squash ball. "He was at the same time endearing and bringing a lot of joy, but he is tiring! One day, we had to drive from one location to another. He spoke so much, he was so super-excited, that at the end of the journey I was nearly crying from exhaustion." *Observer*

*Wendy Ide*  
*Hit the Road* has been released in the US; it is released in the UK on 29 July and in Australia on 25 August





# Whale tales

*Working with marine scientists, the military and other artists, Mhairi Killin has assembled an exhibition exploring the links between sound, people and the biggest creatures on the planet*

By Patrick Barkham

**W**hen a dead whale washed ashore on the Hebridean island of Iona in the summer of 2018, artist Mhairi Killin was as intrigued as many other islanders. “It’s a beauty spot and people walk there regularly - it wasn’t long before there was a bit of a buzz around the island that there was a whale,” she says. “That’s been the same since prehistory, when a whale ashore would be a source of food and oil and bone for artefacts.”

Why the whale had died was a mystery, which deepened when it was revealed to be one of more than 100 carcasses of mostly Cuvier’s beaked whales found on the west coasts of Scotland and Ireland. Scientists began investigating if military sonar could be responsible, giving Killin the subject for a collaborative exhibition, open to visitors on the Isle of Mull this summer.

On *Sonorous Seas* uses whale bones, sound recordings, video, poetry and objects derived from the stranded whales to examine the clash between our veneration for these enigmatic mammals and the way we increasingly fill oceans with noise - sonar in particular.

Killin, who has lived on Iona for 25 years, believes our fascination with whales comes from their mystery but also a sense of kinship. “We are connected to these non-human beings,” she says, “but because they are rarely sighted, there’s a mystery attached to them and their underworld.”

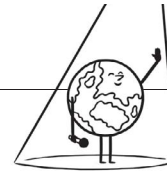
Beaked whales are some of the least-known mammals, breathing like us and yet capable of enduring depths of 3km, chasing squid in the dark ocean. In such blackness, the species is utterly dependent on sound to navigate, find food and communicate. These whales are rarely seen alive and yet they are part of a wealth of marine life off Scotland’s coast, an area of global importance for cetaceans where 24 species exist, more than a quarter of the whale and dolphin species found worldwide.

◀ **Deep listening** Killin’s exhibition, which includes collaborations with Glasgow-based musician Fergus Hall and Mull-based poet Miek Zwamborn, is founded on a research trip she took with the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) last year.

Twice a year, the HWDT undertakes a survey during Exercise Joint Warrior, the largest military exercise in Europe, in the North Atlantic off Scotland. The charity is gathering long-term data to understand how sonar from submarines in particular may damage cetacean life.

“Globally, whale and dolphin populations are facing huge pressures in the marine environment,” says Alison Lomax, the chief executive of HWDT. “The same kinds of problems - busy, noisy, polluted seas - are also a problem in Scottish waters. These animals are incredibly sensitive to noise.”

For 10 days, Killin sailed with scientists, listening intently to a hydrophone towed behind the small boat recording sounds in →



the sea. For one minute every 15 minutes over eight hours, Killin would listen to the hydrophone.

"It was an incredibly informative - I would say transformative - exercise in deep listening," she says. "I heard a dolphin whistle and snapping shrimp, tiny organisms that create noise like frying bacon." But she was surprised at the amount of human-generated sounds. "I heard boat noise, seal deterrents around fish farms, and lots of sonar. The sonar was very present - we could hear it without putting the headphones on," she says. "The sea is an industrialised soundscape."

Killin saw killer whales - and also encountered naval warships. During a military exercise, GPS in the area would be temporarily jammed. A military helicopter buzzed them, but Killin did not consider this as intimidation. "We were in their space, that was all," she says.

Unfortunately, the military is sometimes in the whales' space - and frequency - as well. Mid-frequency active sonar is in exactly the range that the deep-diving beak whales need to hear.

**A**ndrew Brownlow, the director of the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme, helped investigate the mass stranding of 2018. "The impact of noise on marine animals is not something that's easy to detect, either from the examination of living animals or the examination of bodies," he says. But a correlation between mass strandings of deep-diving mammals and naval activity has been established: the Canary Islands was once a hotspot for strandings but they ceased in 2004 after a moratorium on nearby naval exercises.

In the 2018 Scottish and Irish stranding, the bodies of the beaked whales were too decomposed to offer many clues about cause of death, but scientists studied winds and currents to deduce that the animals came from an Atlantic area known as Porcupine Bank, full of underwater valleys and rich in marine life. It is also a favoured location for hiding submarines and used for military manoeuvres by many nations.

Last year, the British navy admitted it had been operating in the area at the time the whales were stranded, acknowledged the risks that active sonar posed to marine life, funded research and took precautions to minimise risks, such as starting sound quietly before increasing the volume.

Killin is keen to draw our attention to the wonder of whales but her exhibition does not seek to conclude "military bad, whales good". "We understand the military has to carry out its exercises," she says. "So how can these two sets of values overlap in a way that is not damaging? That's what the work is about. I'm trying to bring people into the complexity of this issue. This is what artists can do - help us observe in a different way and perhaps gain a different perception."

PATRICK BARKHAM WRITES FOR THE GUARDIAN ON NATURAL HISTORY

*On Sonorous Seas is at An Tobar, Tobermory, Isle of Mull, until 27 August*

## MUSIC

**Seven Psalms**

Nick Cave and Warren Ellis  
(*Cave Things*)

★★★★☆

Clearly, faith was a topic that exercised Nick Cave during the pandemic: *Seven Psalms* features seven prayers, written in 2020, with a musical accompaniment by his chief collaborator, Warren Ellis. Releasing something like this would count as a dramatically leftfield turn for most major alt-rock artists, but then Cave has hardly shied away from the complex issue of faith. His changing thoughts about God are a kind of connective tissue that runs throughout his body of work.

*Seven Psalms* is a relatively minor release: 25 minutes long - with half of that consumed by an instrumental version of the seven short tracks on side one - and offered for sale alongside the pencils and greetings cards on Cave's merchandise website *Cave Things*. It feels a little like an addendum to last year's *Carnage*, which was also born out of lockdown and featured vocals that came close to spoken word, Cave incanting his lyrics as much as singing them against Ellis's constantly shifting backdrops.

It's an extremely powerful album - Cave and Ellis are superb writers, at the top of their game - even if you wonder how often you'll listen to it, or indeed, what one quite vocal section of his fanbase will make of it: "For fuck's sake, enough of the God and Jesus bullshit!" as one *Red Hand Files* correspondent protested last month. Cave answered that complaint thoughtfully and at length, with the calmness of an artist who must have known for some time that he's out on his own, occupying an entirely unique space, doing things no one else does.

Alexis Petridis

**Podcast of the week** *Mother Country Radicals*

Playwright Zayd Ayers revisits a childhood on the run from the FBI, thanks to his parents being part of terror group the Weather Underground. He interviews his parents and political figures to look at what we can learn from the radical groups of the 70s in a show that's personal, insightful and considered. *Alexi Duggins*



## FILM

**Thor: Love and Thunder**

Dir: Taika Waititi

★★★★☆

Taika Waititi has directed, and co-written with Jennifer Kaytin Robinson, an entertaining followup to his 2017 Marvel Cinematic Universe masterpiece, *Thor: Ragnarok*. Like the first film, it's a tongue-in-cheek cosmic spectacular, with some nice gags, big cameos and Chris Hemsworth returning as the great flaxen-haired Norse god.

In this instalment Thor has to confront evil Gorr the God Butcher, played by Christian Bale, who with his terrifying necro-sword is slaying divinities all over the shop.

The movie is effectively ruled by one cameo, the figure of Zeus, which it would be unsporting to reveal: our A-list guest star unveils one of his strangest accents yet, but also gets serious laughs, as the upstart Thor deprives him of his lightning bolt. And yet it has to be said that Marvel's comedy mode has become a bit of a reflex: a highly contained form of restricted self-satire or auto-undercutting that is always offset by the huge CGI intergalactic action scenes. But that isn't to say it isn't still funny, and *Thor* still delivers a mighty hammer-blow, or rather axe-blow, of fun. *Peter Bradshaw*  
*On general release worldwide*

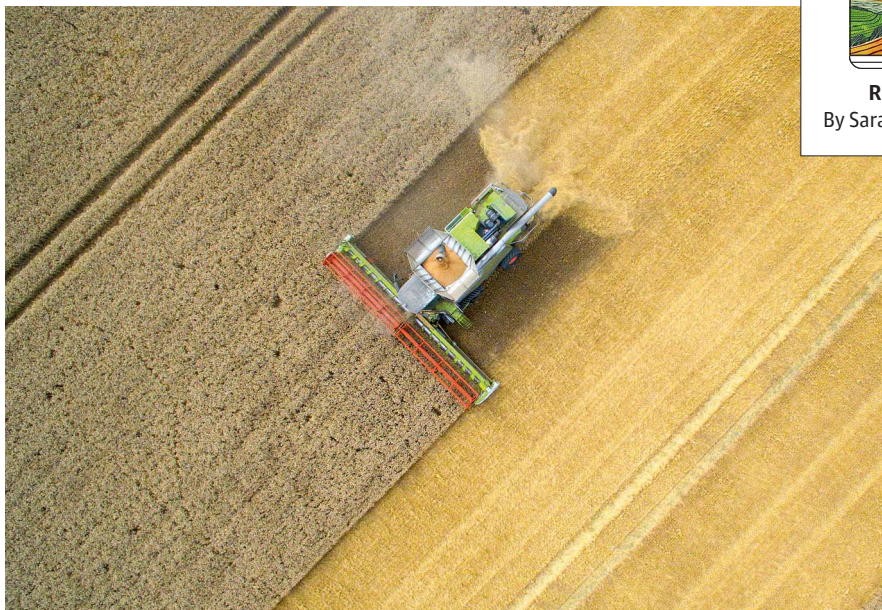


SCIENCE AND NATURE

**A growing problem**  
*Modern farming isn't working. George Monbiot and Sarah Langford propose contrasting solutions to make us think again*

By Amy Liptrot

▼ **Field day**  
Farming faces a time of crisis and change  
GRAEME ROBERTSON



**T**here was one day in each of the springs of my childhood when we moved the ewes and lambs from the fields around the house to land at the top of the farm. Neighbours, friends and sheepdogs as well as us kids were called on to help - the lively lambs would sometimes escape through fences or take wrong turns, needing to be rounded up or caught. Birds called all around us - bubbling curlews with their long-legged chicks running in the verges, a colony of arctic terns swooping above. In the earth of one of those fields, Dad found a sharpened stone tool, evidence of land worked for thousands of years.

Those days come to mind reading two books that challenge us to think again about farming - what it has come to mean and how it could be transformed. Sarah Langford's *Rooted*, with its case studies of agriculture over the past few decades, makes me thankful I grew up on the type of mixed family farm far less common than it once was. George Monbiot's *Regenesis* takes as its subject no less than the entire world's food production system and dares to imagine a world largely free of farming as we have known it.

"My grandfather Peter," Langford writes, "was a hero who fed a starving nation. Now his son Charlie, my uncle, is considered a villain, blamed for ecological catastrophe and with a legacy no one wants." From Langford's immediate family we move around England, meeting dairy farmers crushed by the low price supermarkets pay for milk, disillusioned pig farmers turning to mixed agriculture and small-scale organic farmers. The stories are often frustrating and heartbreaking: tales of falling incomes, BSE, foot and mouth, and

Covid. Langford is brilliant at explaining how complex economic forces impact on individuals. The book is absorbing, compassionate and should have a galvanising effect.

Langford and Monbiot represent two different sides of the fierce culture war about how to respond to climate change and biodiversity loss and what that means for our land. However, they are in close agreement about many of the main problems, such as soil depletion and the market pressures and industrialisation that cause suffering to livestock, wildlife and farmers alike.

*Regenesis* conveys a sense of urgency about these challenges, and has a huge scope. Monbiot thinks globally, looking beyond these shores to poorer nations. He makes startling connections between, for example, soya grown in South America and the British chickens to which it is fed, illustrating the concept of "ghost acres" - the area, outside its own land, that a farm requires in order to function.

Monbiot is not a farmer, which frees him to have an outsider's perspective. At the same time, he gives little consideration to the cultural side of farming, the realities of rewilding and its impact on rural populations. He criticises "conventional organic farming" and "foodies", which do not feel like the most important enemies. He looks at growing vegetables using "green manure" - cover crops and woodchip - instead of livestock dung. The book ends with a call for farm abolition, which, after a lot of meticulously evidenced thinking, feels like a risky leap.

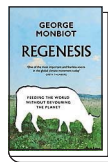
Despite it being hard to stomach for many of us from the countryside, Monbiot makes a convincing case. In desperate times, a shift to plant-based and even lab-grown food makes simple mathematical sense. Monbiot's arguments take account of the needs of everyone in society, not just those who can afford premium meat, and not just those of us in the UK.

But although the statistics in *Regenesis* are persuasive, the experiences described in *Rooted* counsel caution. New technology doesn't always deliver and can be dangerous. Livestock farming is not about to disappear, so regenerative methods have an important role to play. Both books explore the wonder and complexity of soil. They strike on several of the same solutions, including the "no-till" method of growing crops without ploughing, or the use of perennial grains. Both see the benefits of organic methods such as planting wildflowers to control pests.

At this time of crisis and change, we are lucky to have Langford and Monbiot thinking seriously about answers and exploring old ways and new.

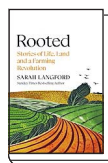
AMY LIPTROT IS THE AUTHOR OF *THE OUTFRAN*, A MEMOIR OF GROWING UP ON A SHEEP FARM IN ORKNEY

BOOKS OF THE WEEK



**Regenesis**

By George Monbiot



**Rooted**

By Sarah Langford

## FICTION

## A woman's place

*This thoughtful sequel to The Miniaturist contains pleasing echoes as it charts the lot of women in golden-age Amsterdam*

By Imogen Hermes Gowar



GEORGE PACHANTOURIS/GETTY

**W**hen we rejoin Nella Oortman, the heroine of Jessie Burton's blockbuster 2014 debut *The Miniaturist*, we find her almost as we left her. She still lives in her dead husband Johannes Brandt's home on the Herengracht canal in Amsterdam, along with Cornelia the cook, Johannes's once-enslaved manservant Otto, and Thea, the child Otto fathered with Johannes's steely sister, Marin. So far so familiar, but 18 years have passed: Nella is now 37 and baby Thea a young woman. The three unrelated adults have bonded into a family after the deaths of Marin and Johannes, but their fortunes are dwindling and the once lavish house has been stripped bare.

The family is a curiosity - "the black man who lives on the Herengracht, his mixed daughter, and the widow of the man drowned by the city for his supposed sins" - and Thea's status as a Black heiress is troubling to the upper-class Amsterdammers she mingles with, who must weigh her "whiff of scandal" against her stratospherically expensive and fashionable home. Nella is keen to solve the family's money problems by arranging her a lucrative marriage, but Thea resists. Just as her aunt once did, Thea believes in true love. Unlike Nella, she believes she's found it, in the arms of a handsome theatre set decorator.

The mirroring of these two teenage ingenues is the great strength of *The House of Fortune*: like Nella, Thea's background is one of foundering respectability; like Nella, Thea's fortune rests on her marriage; like Nella, Thea receives

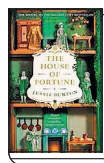
mysterious gifts from "the miniaturist", a shadowy craftswoman whose wax figures hint at young women's secrets and dreams. But where *The Miniaturist* centred young Nella's perspective without question, *The House of Fortune* frames Thea through her aunt's maturity and experience, revealing her as vulnerable, fallible, credulous. This distorted echo of Burton's debut is clever and satisfying: both Nella and Thea are meatier and more complex than the "plucky young heroine" so over-represented in historical fiction, and the novel is stronger for it.

Burton, older now too, is an acute observer.

While Thea finds her ageing family in their nightclothes "mortifying" - "I will never let my body flap about like that" - Nella suffers moments of envy towards the niece she raised, "a mixture of awe and irritation, and under that, a current of fear". The novel captures the surprise of ageing, the realisation that comes in our 30s that our die is cast, our wide-open potential narrowing. Nella has

dulled and slipped into the comfort of social patterns, arranging a high-status marriage for Thea despite her own unhappy experience.

The world of early 18th-century Amsterdam is knowledgeably evoked, but Nella's insistence that ladylike Thea "sees the world, but does not immerse herself in it" is telling. The Brandts regularly remind one another of "the ways of this city", and although "everyone knows how much Amsterdammers love a painting", Nella and Thea remain perplexed by the iconography of the Netherlands' golden age. Confronted with



**The House of Fortune**  
by Jessie Burton

## MEMOIR

## Hot spot

*A Chernobyl 'stalker' explains the desolate beauty and freedom that draws him back to the exclusion zone*

By Sam Jordison

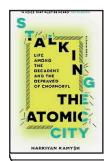
**T**he area around Chernobyl was once meant to be a paradise. "They even planned to build a promenade with bridges, street lights and musical entertainment. They already started to lay the foundation of new power plant units, the apotheosis of joy and happiness looming on the horizon," writes Markiyam Kamysh. "Until," he says with characteristic directness, "things got fucked and reactor number 4 blew the hell up".

Kamysh was born in 1988, two years after that calamity, the son of a nuclear physicist who had worked as a liquidator after the meltdown. The families of liquidators were given social benefits, and cheaper food - but this association was also a source of radioactive stigma, not to mention ill health. Kamysh's father died in 2003. A few years later Kamysh dropped out of university in Kyiv to dedicate himself to literature and the exploration of the exclusion zone around Chernobyl - as well as the disaster's fallout in his own psyche.

He also started leading other people into the forbidden territory

around the reactor, evading the police and ducking under wire fences, acting like a real-life version of the guides who take people to a forbidden area in Andrei Tarkovsky's mysterious sci-fi film *Stalker*. Kamysh undertook those trips for money, but in this account, which he wrote between 2012 and 2014, he also describes the fallout zone as somewhere he can "relax". He goes there to drink with friends, to celebrate New Year's Eve, to wander alone among the ruins. He brings back descriptions of empty streets, the "jungles" that are spreading across the landscape, the cries of wolves in the night.

Kamysh does not give in to the temptation to romanticise his encounters with these haunting surroundings. Instead, he narrates them with almost dismissive bravado: "You popped out somewhere between the checkpoint and the village, climbed over the barbed wire, ran across the meadow with all its pits, and stumbled, cursing, toward the ARSMS - a station that measures radiation (god forbid I'd have to write out its boring name in full here.)"



**Stalking the Atomic City**  
By Markiyam Kamysh



a carved misericord, Thea knows “there will be a moral, because this is the Old Church in Amsterdam”. This heavy-handed signposting had its place in *The Miniaturist*, since teenage Nella was a newcomer to the city, but Thea is a native.

The Brandts read sometimes like expats from the 21st century, coolly reflecting on the culture they exist alongside, internalising none of it. It makes the fiction easily digestible, these characters with their reassuringly modern sensibilities leading us gently through a problematic past; but there might have been a greater sense of challenge and jeopardy if the Brandts really were people of their time.

All this said, *The House of Fortune* is a worthy sequel, mature and thoughtful. There’s something comforting about its circularity. The plot would function without the reappearance of the miniaturist herself (she takes up scant page space, and we learn nothing new about her), but her little tokens unify the stories of Thea and Nella, invoking the past while hinting at the future. Hidebound Nella needs to break from convention; hotheaded Thea needs a greater sense of continuity: both must look backwards to move forward.

There’s a fine line between comfort and stagnation, Burton warns us. As the inscription on Marin’s tomb proclaims, “Things can change”, and building a new life may include embracing what we always had. We can return home, Burton tells us; whatever our age, we can “begin again with a seedling”.

IMOGEN HERMES GOWAR IS THE AUTHOR OF *THE MERMAID* AND *MRS HANCOCK*

Kamysh describes himself as a “degenerate”. On his trips into the zone he drinks and destroys. He makes fires with old physics textbooks and burns floorboards for heating. He smashes windows. He has a terrifying disregard for his own safety. He even jokes about meeting other stalkers in cancer wards in 20 years’ time. He can be brutally funny (credit for this must go partly to translators Hanna Leliv and Reilly Costigan-Humes), but he also demands serious attention. To those asking if he’s afraid of radiation, he says: “No. It’s only here that life won’t slip by for me, for I’m living it in the most exotic place on Earth.”

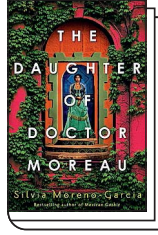
By the time we get to that explanation, late on in this remarkable book, Kamysh has made us understand why he thinks the zone around Chernobyl is so special, why - because of its desolate serenity, and the freedom it grants from the strictures of normal life - it may even be worth dying for. No mean feat. It’s all the more unsettling to read about this bargain with death now that invading Russian troops have also blundered into his poisoned paradise. At least Kamysh had a choice, strange as it may seem.

SAM JORDISON IS A JOURNALIST AND PUBLISHER

## BOOKS OF THE MONTH

*The best new science fiction, fantasy and horror releases*

By Lisa Tuttle



### The Daughter of Doctor Moreau

By Silvia Moreno-Garcia

Inspired by HG Wells’ classic tale, a version set not on an unknown island, but in Yucatán, Mexico, in 1871, after the native Mayan people had refused to work any longer for their European oppressors. This *Dr Moreau* is dependent on the landowning Izalde family for patronage. But the Izaldes grow impatient as Moreau’s promise to supply them with the ideal new workforce remains unfulfilled. Once again the author of Mexican gothic demonstrates her genius for genre mashups, combining contemporary political awareness with the appeal of a creepy gothic romance.

### Thrust

By Lidia Yuknavitch

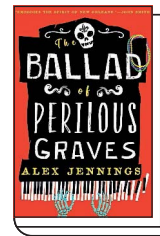
More like a long, disturbing dream than a novel of plot or character, the latest work from the author of *The Book of Joan* opens in 2085, on a boat of day trippers eager to view the almost entirely submerged Statue of Liberty. One is a child who can travel by water back and forth through time: she feels a duty to carry random objects to particular individuals in earlier periods. Key to the whole is the idea that human beings must

learn new ways of living and understanding: this extends to the very concept of narrative. Anyone expecting resolution or explanations will be frustrated, but for those willing to go with the flow it’s a fascinating, unsettling ride.

### Life Ceremony

By Sayaka Murata, translated by Ginny Tapley

The 13 stories by the Japanese author who became an international bestseller with *Convenience Store Woman* are mostly about alienation, exploring what it means to be “normal” through a close focus on characters, nearly always women, who do not conform to social expectations. In the title story, the narrator remembers that when she was a child, it was forbidden to eat human flesh, and wonders why no one questions the present tradition of marking every death with a ritual in which the flesh of the deceased is cooked and eaten. The author’s plain, clear, observational style makes the stories strangely believable, easy to read and hard to forget.

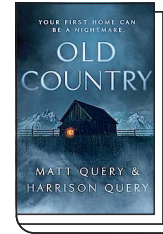


### The Ballad of Perilous Graves

By Alex Jennings

New Orleans is a city like no other, and Nola, a fabulous alternative version created in Jennings’ debut novel,

is a place where music is magic, trolley cars travel through the sky, ghosts and zombies mingle with street crazies, and citizens await the arrival of the next big storm. Perry Graves must find out who has been stealing the magical songs that have kept Nola safe. Meanwhile, Casey Ravel, a young trans man recently returned to the New Orleans we know, will discover his own connection to Nola. The two worlds of this gripping and inventive fantasy are so vividly depicted that reading it is a bit like taking a fabulous city break.



### Old Country

By Matt and Harrison Query

Harry and Sasha buy a small ranch in a remote part of Idaho and prepare to live their dream. All is pretty wonderful until their neighbours - who had seemed so sane and kind - warn them that the valley is cursed and give them instructions for rituals that must be followed to stay safe. Of course they don’t believe any of it; until the weird things start happening, just as predicted. This is classic supernatural horror, made freshly compelling with believable characters and perfect pacing. It is almost impossible to put down.

LISA TUTTLE IS A SCI-FI AUTHOR AND CRITIC

## ASK

Annalisa Barbieri

## How can I learn to stand up to my domineering in-laws?

I am a 48-year-old woman, and it recently occurred to me, like a bolt of lightning, that I'm unable to be assertive. I've just come back emotionally drained (again) from a weekend with my in-laws, having spent the entire time keeping a lid on my feelings in the interests of everyone getting on.

There are so many times when I just keep quiet to avoid conflict. For example, if my young children need reassurance at night, my in-laws say they are "too big" for that and they won't get any treats next day if they get up in the night.

A few years ago, my mother-in-law got drunk and made it clear that she could not understand what anyone, including my husband, saw in me. It was never resolved, and she never apologised. My husband is still desperate for his parents' approval and won't stand up to them. I've had to bury it all because I feel I have no other option.

It's not just with my in-laws - I can't stand up for myself at work or in other situations. Like lots

of women, I was brought up to be respectful, polite and "nice". I am afraid of getting angry, or crying, or being seen as a difficult woman. Am I being cowardly, and how can I change?

**I**wonder where you learned that being angry or "difficult" was not acceptable? When all we do is compromise, and others seemingly don't, it's very corrosive to self-esteem.

I spoke to psychotherapist Chris Mills. He felt there was actually much to celebrate in your "bolt of lightning". "You're going through a revolution," he says. "You won't be able to think about these situations in the same way."

That's an exciting development. Discovering your voice, and practising using it, isn't easy when you've kept quiet for so long. But with time I think you can reap big rewards.

Mills felt that you (and your husband) would benefit from therapy to unlearn these behaviours. "I don't think you're cowardly; you just haven't been taught those skills."

The skills aren't easy to acquire: lots of people struggle with them. One thing I've learned - and want to share - is to make the response the other person's responsibility. If you are caring and kind - it sounds as though you are - it's tempting to run through possible responses before you've even said anything. This is emotionally paralysing. You can't

pre-empt what people will say, nor are you responsible for it.

If you feel you are able, you could start small the next time you are with your in-laws. Reply to some dictatorial comment about how you raise your children with something like "I don't parent like that" - and leave it there. Don't over-explain or justify; silence, after saying your bit, is powerful. The first time is difficult, and you'll want to make it easier - but try not to.

Mills had an interesting perspective I want you to remember: "Your in-laws are not interested in giving approval, so it's pointless trying. What they rely on is people being afraid of them. It's a game no one but they can win."

Ideally, the adult child would stand up to them, but I understand that your husband doesn't feel he can. "I don't see your mother-in-law ever apologising for what she said to you," says Mills.

He says people are "often brought up a certain way that suits somebody else". It's time you discovered that what suits you has value. In the meantime, it's perfectly OK not to visit your in-laws if you don't want to, or to put boundaries around the time you spend with them. As for their son, he clearly does see something in you.

If you would like advice on a family matter, email [ask.annalisa@theguardian.com](mailto:ask.annalisa@theguardian.com). See [gu.com/letters-terms](http://gu.com/letters-terms) for terms and conditions

**Finding your voice and using it isn't easy when you've been quiet for so long**

## STEPHEN COLLINS



Stephen Collins COLLILLO.COM





## Brie careful! How can you tell when mouldy cheese is no gouda to eat?

Given that the blue part of blue cheese is mould and OK to eat, is it OK to eat other cheese, such as cheddar, if it's gone mouldy?

*Peter, Whitestone, Devon, England*

The thing is, cheese is basically mould. Take your example of blue: yes, the blue bits are mould, but so are the white ones. What we're really talking about is intentional mould versus mould that grows on the cheese, and for this, Dan Bliss, cheese buyer at Paxton & Whitfield, suggests thinking of your cheese as a petri dish: "It's alive with mould, whatever style of cheese it is."

Those moulds aren't necessarily going to do you harm, but they might affect the cheese's taste, Bliss says. "If it's surface mould, it's fine to cut off, but if it has begun to ingress into the taste of the cheese, be it a hard or a soft one, it's usually time to say goodbye." As Max Melvin, senior cheesemonger and head of education at La Fromagerie, notes: "If something is so awful you can't get it near your face, you probably wouldn't want to eat it."

Red moulds and "anything too actively yellow" are best avoided, Bliss advises, while "the greys, blues and whites" can be cut off a few millimetres from the mould's surface. But don't scrape it, as this may spread the mould across the cheese. "It's better to cut it off and stop that process." The same can be said for that fluffy

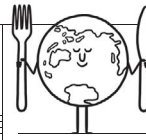
mould on a cut camembert or brie.

Cheddar can form mould near the rind as well as on the surface. "You might get characteristic cracks in the cheese," Melvin says, "which air can get into, and a blue mould similar to the one that grows in blue cheese can start forming." For some, this is, ahem, cracking news, while others don't like the flavour. It is, however, a different story with fresh cheese: "If you've got mould on that, it's an indication not to go any further," says Bliss, who recommends eating the likes of ricotta and mozzarella within a few days of opening.

Other cut cheeses typically keep for about 10 days, but storage is key. Bliss wraps hers in wax paper (or baking paper) and stores it in a plastic container in the fridge at below 8C. Put a sugar cube in there, too, to suck up any excess moisture.

However, "contamination is a probability game", Melvin says. "Cheese is generally low-risk, but obviously some are lower risk than others." Young children, elderly, pregnant or immunocompromised people should "generally stick to hard cheeses and be more cautious about the likes of mould and shelf-life". As in life, though, manage your own risk: "The French have been doing so rather successfully with mouldy cheese for centuries."

ANNA BERRILL IS ACTING DEPUTY EDITOR OF FEAST AT THE GUARDIAN. Got a culinary dilemma? Email [feast@theguardian.com](mailto:feast@theguardian.com)



THE WEEKLY RECIPE  
By Meera Sodha

## No 177 Thai-style pineapple fried rice

Prep 15 min

Cook 25 min

Serves 2

● VEGAN  
● DAIRY FREE  
● GLUTEN FREE

### Ingredients

500g leftover cooked rice, or 200g raw jasmine rice  
Rapeseed oil  
50g unsalted cashew nuts  
8 spring onions, trimmed and finely chopped  
½ tsp fine sea salt, or to taste  
2cm x 2cm piece fresh ginger, peeled and grated  
4 fat garlic cloves, peeled and minced  
2 red bird's eye chillies  
250g fresh pineapple flesh, cut into 2cm x 1cm cubes (from a pineapple weighing at least 800g)  
250g green beans, topped  
1 x 225g tin water chestnuts, drained (140g net)  
1 tbsp curry powder  
3 tbsp vegetarian stir-fry sauce  
3 tbsp light soy sauce

### To serve

1 big handful Thai basil leaves  
1 lime, cut into wedges

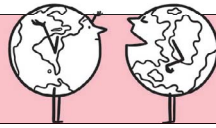
### Method

If you're making the rice from scratch, put the jasmine rice in a sieve and rinse really well under the cold tap until the water runs clear. Drain and put in a saucepan for which you have a tight-fitting lid. Cover with 340ml just-boiled water, bring back to a boil, then pop on the lid and drop the heat to a simmer. Cook for 12 minutes, then turn off the heat and leave, covered, to steam for five minutes. Spread the cooked rice on a large plate and leave to cool to room temperature; if you're not cooking it straight away, put the plate in the fridge uncovered.

Put a tablespoon of oil in a wide frying pan for which you have a lid and set it on a medium heat. When the oil is hot, add the cashews, fry, stirring, for a few minutes, until golden, then scoop out on to a plate. Put another couple of tablespoons of oil in the same pan and, when that's hot, add the spring onions and salt, and fry, stirring, for three minutes, until soft and neon green. Add the ginger, garlic and chillies, stir-fry for two minutes, then stir in the pineapple and fry for a minute. Add the green beans and the water chestnuts, mix well, then cover the pan and leave to cook for five or so minutes, until the beans are soft and bending; if the mixture starts to stick and the beans are not yet bendy, add a splash of water to the pan.

Stir in the curry powder, then pour in the stir-fry and soy sauces, and leave for a couple of minutes, for the ingredients to get to know each other. Add the cooked rice and mix in gently - I find a spaghetti fork helps me do this without breaking up the rice too much. Turn up the heat to high and fry hard for five minutes, turning halfway through. Once everything is piping hot, turn out on to a platter, scatter over the Thai basil leaves and fried cashews, and serve with lime wedges.





**QUIZ**

Thomas Eaton

- 1 What is the world's oldest island?
- 2 Which poet was called the John the Baptist of fascism?
- 3 Which building was damaged in 1687 when an ammunition dump exploded?
- 4 What is targeted in the US by the Rico Act?
- 5 A word that appears only once in a body of work is called what?
- 6 Who said: "I have to be seen to be believed"?
- 7 What is unusual, in economic terms, about a Giffen good?
- 8 Which daughter and father have been world No 1 and No 2 in golf and tennis respectively?

- What links:**  
**9** Duluth, MN; Chicago, IL; Bay City, MI; Buffalo, NY; Toronto?  
**10** Jennifer Hudson; Whoopi Goldberg; Audrey Hepburn; Rita Moreno?  
**11** Augustiner; Hacker-Pschorr; Hofbräu; Löwenbräu; Paulaner; Spaten?  
**12** Exposition; development; recapitulation?  
**13** Jean-François Champollion; Amelia Edwards; Flinders Petrie; Howard Carter?  
**14** Vostok 1; Freedom 7; Shenzhou 5?  
**15** Some Like it Hot; Coda; The Birdcage; Three Men and a Baby?

**PUZZLES**

Chris Maslanka

**1** Pembish is in a rowboat floating in the swimming pool. As water leaks into the boat through a tiny hole, will the level of the pool go up or down?

**2 Wordpool**

Find the correct definition: **CABRILLA**

- a) *matador's cape*
- b) *fringe on poncho*
- c) *species of sea bass*
- d) *female gaucho*

**3 E pluribus unum**

Rearrange **INNOCENT ACTOR** to make one word.

**4 Poles Apart**

Which insect makes a world of difference?

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**CHESS**

Leonard Barden

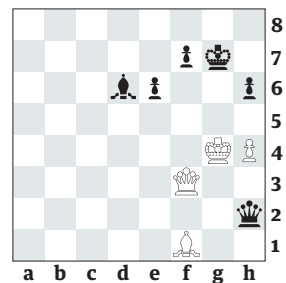
Magnus Carlsen has been given a Fide deadline of 20 July, International Chess Day, to decide whether he will defend his world championship title against the winner of the Candidates, Ian Nepomniachtchi.

This followed a four-hour meeting in Madrid last week between the Norwegian and the global body's two top officials, before Carlsen headed off to Las Vegas for the World Series of Poker.

Nepomniachtchi won the Candidates again by a two-point margin. The

Russian, playing under a neutral Fide flag, was unbeaten with 9.5/14 and led from start to finish, while China's world No 2 Ding Liren overtook the US streamer Hikaru Nakamura in the final round for second place.

**3823** Harmen Jonkman v Ian Nepomniachtchi, Wijk 2007. Black to move and win. Clue: it's mate in five by an all-checking sequence.



**EMOJI SPEAK**

Killian Fox

Guess the films that won big at the Oscars from the symbols.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

**Answers Quiz 1** Madagascar. **2** Gabriele d'Annunzio. **3** The Partisan. **4** Organised crime (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations). **5** Hapax (gomenon). **6** The Queen. **7** Demand rises as price rises. **8** Nelly and Peter Korda. **9** Cities on the Great Lakes Superior; Michigan; Huron; Erie; Ontario. **10** EGOTs (won Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony awards). **11** Munich's big six breweries. **12** Sonata form in music. **13** Pioneering Egyptologists. **14** First human spaceflights: USSR; US; China. **15** Hollywood movies inspired by French films: Fanfare d'Amour; La Famille Bélier; La Cage aux Folles; Trois hommes et un Couffin. **Maslanka 1** The water level stays the same. [The extra weight of water has to be supported by the displacement by the boat of the same weight of water.] **2 (c)**. **3** CONCENTRATION. **4** ANTI(ARCTIC). **Emoji 1** Slumdog Millionaire. **2** Titanic. **3** The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King. **4** The Last Emperor. **5** The English Patient.

**COUNTRY DIARY**

WEMBURY  
Devon, England

A pair of polka dot eyes on stalks peered out from the dark refuge, watching me through the shallow seawater. Several times this shy little creature had darted back from the open mouth of the shell.

I remained as still as I could, meeting the gaze of these black and white spotted discs. Bit by bit they emerged into the light, with thin antennae the colour of candied orange peel, claws flecked with light blue, and jointed legs, their pointed tips striped as if clad in sports socks.

The tiny crustacean stretched forwards, tilting its periwinkle home, finally righting itself, before trundling off like a clockwork toy beneath swags of seaweed.

This colourful hermit crab is a West Country rarity, which, until a few years ago, was thought to have disappeared from our shores. I would have overlooked such a gem were it not for the expertise of the staff at Devon Wildlife Trust leading the Wembury Marine Centre rockpool safari I had joined.

*Clibanarius erythropus* first colonised Cornwall in 1960. But the Torrey Canyon oil spill of 1967, and the ensuing cleanup using powerful detergents, virtually wiped out the local population. The few that survived disappeared by the late 1980s, only for the species to be rediscovered six years ago near Falmouth, and subsequently in other locations. Its return prompted a BBC competition to give the species a common name, with the winner being the St Piran's hermit crab - after Cornwall's patron saint, who, legend has it, was a hermit.

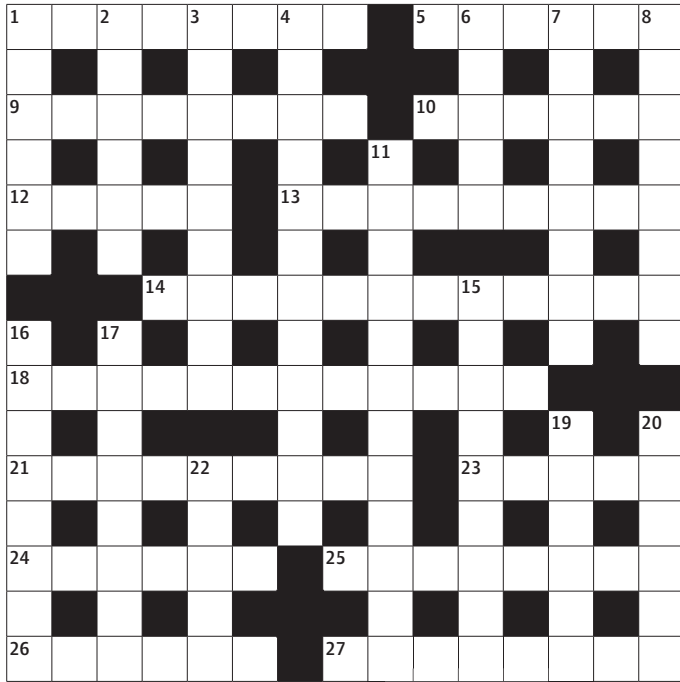
My rockpool safari group found all manner of curious critters. But the highlight of the excursion was the characterful St Piran's hermit crab, staring up at me with those crazy eyes. *Charlie Elder*



ILLUSTRATION: CLIFFORD HARPER

\* On the website [Notes and Queries theguardian.com/notes-and-queries](https://www.theguardian.com/notes-and-queries)





\* All solutions published next week

## The Weekly cryptic

No 28,801



By Tramp

### Across

- 1 Hitch and tie other side (8)
- 5 Too much work: left to retire (6)
- 9 The end of dog exercises, no lead on Rottweiler (8)
- 10 Part of meal: English course's not first class (6)
- 12 Speak over judge (5)
- 13 Put right in print; did press at first? (6,3)
- 14 Bum ciggy, ultimately nick matches for smoker? (7,5)
- 18 Feeling hand over male partners during sex (12)
- 21 So that till's working at the start (2,5,2)
- 23 That man will love welcome (5)
- 24 More work in university subject with top grade for college (6)
- 25 Down pop with son drinking last of Coke (8)
- 26 Catch up with nurse: hospital tackling chaos, mostly (6)
- 27 Bully in quiet school determined to bite head of year (5,3)

### Down

- 1 Change be enough? Bankers to count on the other hand (6)
- 2 American with his woman, perhaps overseas (6)
- 3 One helps you stop and live around playboy's house (5,4)
- 4 Supporting business, one is protected by Conservatives (12)
- 6 Stand up to grab bottom of chain for flush (5)
- 7 Private planes not primarily for flying (8)
- 8 Pass with extra study (8)
- 11 New couple getting away? Someone horny after some swapping (12)
- 15 Fake: tiny chest with boobs (9)
- 16 Faculty performing IT update (8)
- 17 Pierce upwards with hole in squash bottle (8)

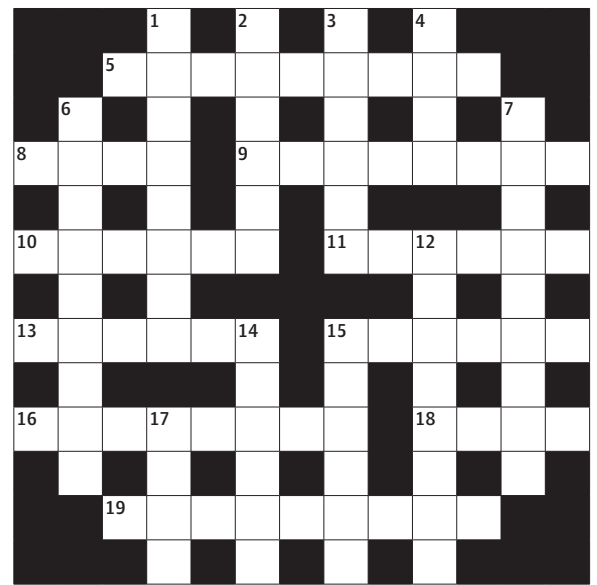
- 19 Cultured occasionally cheat in game (6)
- 20 Stays in my place (6)
- 22 Small flyer climbs and drops (5)

Solution No 28,795



## Quick crossword

No 16,274



### Across

- 5 Edgar Rice \_\_, creator of Tarzan (9)
- 8 Daybreak (4)
- 9 Exciting (8)
- 10 Restrict consumption of something scarce (6)
- 11 Manage - name (6)
- 13 Ban any (anag) - Indian national tree (6)
- 15 Vocal organ (6)
- 16 Swiss cheese (8)
- 18 Some time soon (4)
- 19 Slavery (9)

### Down

- 1 Amount (8)
- 2 Beginning (6)
- 3 City of the 1972 Olympic Games (6)
- 4 Flog (4)
- 6 Old mounted soldier - mamarants (anag) (3-2-4)

- 7 Alcove by an open fire (9)
- 12 Where the D-Day landings took place (8)
- 14 Relating to one's birthplace (6)
- 15 Vladimir Nabokov's novel about Humbert Humbert's obsession with a young girl (6)
- 17 Sharp-pointed duelling sword (4)

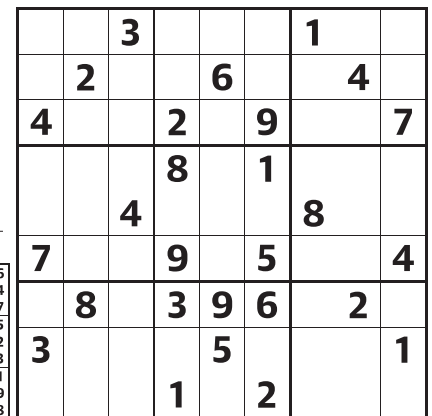
Solution No 16,268



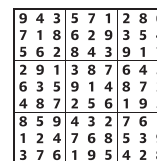
## Sudoku

Medium

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



Last week's solution



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