



The

INDEPENDENT

WEDNESDAY 25 MARCH 2026

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ANNE McELVOY: THE NEW BBC BOSS ISN'T KNOWN FOR HIS NEWS SENSE



Bel Trew Inside the 'miracle' drug rollout that could end the Aids epidemic forever



Unesco monastery hit in rare daylight Russian drone attack on Ukraine

The 17th-century St Andrew's Church in Lviv was struck by one of 948 drones launched in just 24 hours

Pain at the pump: drivers pay £307m price of Trump's war

Rachel Reeves warns of 'significant' economic impact from Iran conflict but fails to announce any help for households facing higher bills even as average litre of petrol soars as high as 146.4p

DAN HAYGARTH AND DAVID MADDUX

Motorists in the UK have paid £307m more at the pumps since the US and Israel began their war against Iran – but Rachel Reeves last night said

there will be no extra help for millions struggling with rising costs. Crude oil prices have soared to more than \$100 a barrel in response to Iran's threat to attack supertankers passing through the vital Strait of Hormuz shipping route. The

chancellor shocked MPs by failing to announce any new measures for households to deal with the cost of living, despite warning the conflict will create "significant" challenges for Britain's economy, including inflation.



Editorials

Reeves leaves public in the dark over energy support

The International Energy Agency has warned that the present energy crisis, severe as it is, could become the worst in history. Given that, the chancellor of the Exchequer is right to undertake contingency planning now.

Yet as things stand with the public finances, she will find it impossible to help everyone. At this point, Ms Reeves can do no more than set out some of the principles that are guiding policy, and some relatively minor initiatives. There are too many unknowns to start setting price caps or quantifying subsidies, even if some measures can be implemented immediately.

The pressure on oil companies and their retail partners to be more transparent and resist the temptation to indulge in “price gouging” at the pumps, for example, will help households and businesses to keep costs down, as will the inevitable postponement of the planned hike in fuel duty of 5p a litre. Yet many of the measures she explained to parliament were in fact old rope.

She claims, for instance, that 90 per cent of outlets are signed up to the Fuel Finder apps, which were in fact launched in her last Budget. In some respects, the chancellor took 15 minutes to announce nothing at all.

Also of immediate concern is the inflation in the cost of fuel oil and liquefied petroleum gas in rural areas, especially Northern Ireland. Ms Reeves reiterated the subsidies already announced to help the most vulnerable households there.

That strategy of targeting help to those most in need, rather than adopting blanket schemes to keep gas and electricity bills lower than they would otherwise be, is sensible. It has attracted widespread support. The Treasury has learnt from experience after the dramatic spike in gas prices caused by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In terms of the international and domestic gas markets, that was an unprecedented event, and rippled through the entire economy, given that electricity charges are also linked to the price of gas.

There is another lesson to learn here. During the earlier part of the Ukraine shock, the Conservative ministers then in power, including Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, had no practical alternative other than to offer universal support. This

had the perverse effect of handing the largest subsidies to those in the larger houses with the biggest bills, which is to say mostly the better off. It was also extremely costly.

Ms Reeves gave no details about how any energy bill support schemes will work. Given how far away winter is and how uncertain the prospects are for peace in the Middle East, that is perhaps understandable.

Less understandably, however, she gave no indication whatsoever about the total scale of such support or the impact on the public finances, beyond offering her usual lines about her “iron-clad” fiscal rules (which have in fact proved to be fashioned from more pliable material).

She should have done so. The Office for Budget Responsibility put the total cost of energy support measures in 2022-23 at £51bn. Given that the chancellor has, at best, only some £24bn of “fiscal headroom” left, and the national debt is so high, not to mention increasingly expensive to service, it would have been better if she had been candid with the public.

What’s more, she should have plainly stated the truth: that she will not be able to do as much as her predecessors did, even – especially – if the war drags on and the energy crisis becomes more acute over the summer.

All of this brings into focus once again the other long-term strategic issues for public spending – long overdue investment in defence, and reform of welfare spending, driven by demographics. This may have to include the state retirement pension, the “triple lock”. Thus far, the government has failed to do much about these, so when a crisis such as this spike in fossil fuel costs comes along, there is that much less room for manoeuvre.

If Ms Reeves, as she hinted to the Commons, wants to ensure that her energy support schemes will be “fully funded”, unlike her predecessors’ attempts, then in due course she will have to present her case in exactly those terms – to detail how it will be paid for. Reform of the social security system is, in any case, even absent the present exigencies, essential if it is to continue to command necessary public support.

Somehow she and her senior colleagues are going to have to return to the issue this year and this time persuade her backbench colleagues to accept the need for change in order to save the welfare system, either from financial collapse or from the predations of a Reform UK administration, which will be less fastidious than the Starmer administration. The choices are stark, and made more acute by this crisis. Labour cannot avoid them for much longer.



Diesel price at three-year high as oil crisis deepens

Cost of filling up family car will continue to rise, warns RAC



Pain at the pump: the price of unleaded is at a two-year high as the government insists there is no shortage of fuel (PA)

DAN HAYGARTH
DAVID MADDOX

Motorists in the UK have paid an additional £300m at the pumps since the US and Israel began their war against Iran,

although Rachel Reeves said yesterday there will be no extra help for millions struggling with soaring bills.

Analysis by the RAC Foundation shows that price rises since the conflict began on 28 February have cost motorists an additional £307m for petrol and diesel.

It came as the chancellor shocked MPs by failing to announce any new measures to deal with the cost of living, despite warning that the conflict will create “significant” challenges for Britain’s economy, including inflation.

Oil prices have soared to more than \$100 a barrel in response to Iran’s stranglehold on tankers passing through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping route.

But Ms Reeves rebuffed demands – including from some Labour MPs – for emergency help for households facing higher energy bills.

Instead, she said she would meet supermarkets and banks later this week to discuss what help they can offer customers, while the Competition and Markets Authority is being given new powers to clamp down on price gouging.

She told MPs: “This is not a war that we started, nor is it a war that we joined... but it is a war that will have an impact on our country.”

Her statement was ridiculed by opposition MPs, with Tory shadow chancellor Sir Mel Stride saying: “Labour have no plan and hardworking families are paying the price. The chancellor must axe the fuel tax, drop the net zero dogma and open up the North Sea.”



Rachel Reeves in parliament yesterday (House of Commons)

New figures from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero showed prices at petrol pumps have risen again.

On 16 March, the average price of unleaded petrol at pumps in the UK was 140.28p per litre. For diesel, the average price stood at 158.78p per litre. Yesterday, the department announced the average price on 23 March was 144.16p for unleaded and 166.88p for diesel – a weekly rise of 3.9p and 8.1p for respectively. It is the highest price for diesel since March 2023 and the highest price for unleaded petrol since July 2024.

The RAC Foundation said its analysis showed prices were even higher, at 146.4p for petrol and 169.8p for diesel, as of Monday.

On Friday 27 February, the day before the conflict began, the price of a barrel of Brent crude oil was roughly \$72 while pump prices in the UK averaged 132.9p per litre for petrol and 142.4p per litre for diesel, the foundation said.

It took into account average daily pump prices and fuel consumption rates to calculate that UK drivers have spent an estimated £4.57bn on petrol and diesel since 28 February.

Its analysis found this figure would have been £4.27bn if pump prices had remained broadly stable. The charity described the £307m difference as a “direct cost” of the war and warned the figure would continue to rise “even if the conflict was resolved

tomorrow” because of the time lag between changes in the barrel price of oil and pump prices, as well as the time it will take to repair war damage to oil production, refining and distribution infrastructure.

Steve Gooding, director of the RAC Foundation, said: “This puts a financial price of the war not just for UK drivers but also the nation’s businesses. Whether you are running a household or a company, fuel prices make up a significant part of the budget.

“Even those who don’t drive will be impacted by higher transport costs as firms pass on their additional costs to their customers. All of which is adding to the cost of living crisis.”

In the Commons, Labour MP Andrew Cooper warned motorists were being “exploited by unscrupulous petrol retailers who are not letting a crisis go to waste”.



Vehicles queue to fill up at a petrol station in Bristol (PA)

He said one retailer in his Mid Cheshire constituency was selling unleaded fuel at 15p per litre more than the cheapest forecourt in the area.

Earlier, energy minister Michael Shanks said British drivers did not need to change their habits, despite suggestions from the International Energy Agency (IEA) aimed at conserving fuel.

The IEA has advised motorists across the world to reduce their speed on highways, share rides and work from home when possible to reduce how much petrol or diesel they use.

Asked on Times Radio if British drivers should change their habits, Mr Shanks said: “They should do everything as absolutely normal because there is no shortage of fuel anywhere in the country at the moment. We monitor this every single day, I look at the numbers personally. There’s no issue at all with that.”

The minister added: “People should go about their business as normal. That’s what the RAC and the AA have said. It’s really important people do that. There’s no shortage of fuel and everything is working as normal.”

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Iran vows to continue war as Trump talks up peace



An Iranian strike on central Israel yesterday damaged a housing block and several cars (Reuters)

MAIRA BUTT

Iran's military has vowed to fight until the bitter end against the US and Israel after rejecting Donald Trump's claims that America had been holding "productive" peace talks with Tehran.

A spokesperson for Iran's top military command said yesterday that its armed forces will not stop "until complete victory",

pouring cold water over Mr Trump's statements about a "five-day ceasefire".

However, Iranian officials conceded that the US had been in contact through mediators as pressure mounted for a resolution after weeks of upheaval across the Middle East. "We received points from the US through mediators and they are being reviewed," a senior military official told CBS.

Talks with Iran could happen soon as the US handed over a 15-point peace plan. The US and mediators, including Pakistan, Turkey, and Egypt, are said to be discussing the possibility of holding peace talks with Iran as early tomorrow.

The Pakistan prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, writing on X said that the nation "stands ready and honoured to be the host to facilitate meaningful and conclusive talks for a comprehensive settlement of the ongoing conflict".

It remains unclear who diplomats would be negotiating with after several top Iranian officials were killed in recent days, including security chief Ali Larijani. The newly appointed supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei has not been seen in public over security fears as Israel is likely to assassinate him.

Trump administration officials said the White House was considering Iran's parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf as a potential leader of talks. An Israeli official told Axios that special envoy Steve Witkoff and Mr Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner were negotiating with him instead of the new supreme leader.



Iran's parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf is reportedly being favoured to lead negotiations (Middle East Images)

Mr Ghalibaf has vehemently denied that Iran is in talks with the US and called such reports “fake news”.

However, despite Mr Trump's insistence that Iran wants to end the war “so badly”, the Pentagon is preparing to deploy 3,000 airborne soldiers to the Middle East. For More Papers Check Sanet.st A written order to deploy the 82nd Airborne Division is expected today. Potential operations could include seizing Kharg Island, Iran's main oil export hub.

The war of words follows Iran intensifying attacks against Israel and America's allies in the Gulf, with the Israeli military reporting missile attacks across the country yesterday, including several hits on Tel Aviv.

Saudi Arabia intercepted more than 20 drones in a fresh wave of attacks and Bahrain activated sirens while Kuwait responded to drone and missile attacks overnight.

Police in Iran said they arrested 466 individuals accused of “stirring public opinion” and “online propaganda in favour of the enemy”, according to IRNA, the state news agency.

Oil prices plummeted overnight after Mr Trump's overtures to diplomacy, but edged higher again yesterday morning, briefly touching \$100 a barrel.

Meanwhile, Israel's defence minister Israel Katz made his most ardent statement about Lebanon yet, declaring that ground troops would occupy southern Lebanon up to the Litani River.

In a meeting with the military chief of staff he said the military would "control the remaining bridges and the security zone up to the Litani", creating a "defensive buffer" similar to Gaza. He had previously threatened to "take" the territory if Hezbollah did not disarm.



Iran has rejected Trump's claim that the two nations were engaged in 'constructive' peace talks (AFP/Getty)

France warned Israel against a ground invasion of the country, where 1,029 people are reported to have been killed and around 1 million displaced.

Britain has not been far from the conflict with troops shooting down 14 drones overnight in the Middle East, the UK's defence ministry said.

HMS *Dragon* reached the eastern Mediterranean to fortify Cyprus' defences, having undergone a fortnight of critical training and assessment to ensure its 230 sailors are ready for the intensive pace of operations, the Royal Navy said.

The UK is expected to host an international conference on reopening the Strait of Hormuz, which has been brought to a standstill by the conflict.

More than 30 nations have signed a joint statement agreeing to collaborate on efforts to safeguard the channel and reopen it to commercial shipping.

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Trump wants out, Israelis do not. This is a win for Iran

With petrol prices surging at home, the US president wants to extract his country from the war he started, and he may leave Israel in the lurch, writes world affairs editor **Sam Kiley**



Tehran has taken note that Donald Trump is an unreliable ally to Nato members (Getty)

Determined to humiliate Donald Trump's efforts to extract his country from a war he started, Tehran launched waves of attacks across the Arabian Gulf and sneered at his peaceful overtures.

No matter that Pakistan has said it hopes to host direct talks between the US and Iran sometime this week, Iran's securocrats have seen an opportunity. Trump wants to get out of the conflict that Israel does not believe has achieved its aims.

Iran's regime has fomented instability across the Middle East for decades. It has killed Americans and many other Westerners, run Hezbollah in Lebanon, and backed Hamas in Gaza.

And yet the global perspective is that the war, which is already hobbling global fuel supplies and will have far greater economic consequences, is all the fault of America and Israel.

The ayatollahs blame the "Great Satan", the US, and "Little Satan", Israel, and even its enemies and rivals agree.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Germany's largely ceremonial president, waded in with his assessment of the war being prosecuted by Trump and Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, calling it a "politically disastrous mistake".

"In my view, this war is contrary to international law," said the Nato member's president.

Trump has variously claimed that Iran's nuclear capability had been "obliterated" last summer, that Tehran was on the verge of attacking Israel with nuclear weapons in February, and that 100 per cent of Iran's military capability had been destroyed, but that if it continued to throttle shipping in the Straits of Hormuz, then it would suffer even greater levels of destruction.



A Palestinian man climbs on the remnants of an Iranian missile that landed in the Israeli-occupied West Bank village of Hares yesterday (AFP/Getty)

The behaviour of the US president towards his allies in Nato – he has threatened to invade two of them and cut military support for Ukraine, which is holding off Russian invaders who have designs on Nato members – has been noted in Tehran.

The extremist theologians and terrorist-backing gangsters in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) have seen that Trump is an incoherent and unreliable ally.

“We were surprised by an American ally, who remains an ally, but who is becoming increasingly unpredictable and doesn’t even bother to inform us when they decide to launch military operations,” Fabien Mandon, the French army chief, told a security and defence forum in Paris.

“It has an impact on our security and it has an impact on our interests.”

That was mild stuff compared to what must be being said in the Tel Aviv headquarters of the Israeli defence ministry, where planners still have a very long list of targets they intend to attack in Iran, but can see the US president backing out of any greater role in bombing their enemy.

US aims in Iran are opaque: regime change, protection of civilian protesters, breaking the military, ending Iran’s nuclear

programme. The consequences of trying to do so have never been obscure, apart from to the White House.

That Iran would defend itself, survive the decapitation of its leadership, attack US allies in the Gulf and close the Straits of Hormuz were blindingly obvious. They were the risks that Israel was prepared to take in an effort to destroy a regime that threatens its existence.



A man stands on the rubbles of a destroyed building that was hit by an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyeh, southern Beirut (AP)

Israel has been asked by the US to hold off on attacking Iran's energy systems, alongside a five-day pause in US bombardment of power plants ordered by Trump. He said this was to allow talks to advance, which he claimed had gone well.

Iran was quick to insist there had been no direct negotiations and immediately launched attacks across the Gulf region, while it also continued to suffer strikes by the US and Israel across its territory.

With oil at times surging above \$110 (£82) a barrel and gas prices also skyrocketing because of the closure of the Strait, the Iranians know that the longer they can hang on, the greater the chance Trump will leave just Israel in the fight.

A fifth of the world's oil and gas usually travels through the 21-mile-wide chokepoint, where Iran now has its foot on the neck

of the global energy economy.

But between 25 and 30 per cent of the world's fertiliser also goes through this artery, and around 50 per cent of the world's urea, an essential ingredient in industrial fertilisers.

Trump is coming under pressure because of a surge in petrol prices at home. Global food production also hangs in the balance, and if, soon, farmers cannot get access to or afford to buy ingredients to make their crops flourish, there will be shortages, and the instability in the Middle East is certain to spread.



Rescue workers and first responders work at a residential building hit in an earlier US-Israeli strike in Tehran (AP)

For Israel, this is another reason to wipe out the regime in Tehran. The Iranian government's ability to survive and continue to fight means, to Netanyahu, that the only option is more war.

Trump saw no obvious downsides to attacking Iran. He did not see the economic consequences and diplomatic isolation, which have undermined him at home and made him look variously mad or dim abroad.

But they are swimming into focus now.

Iran is reportedly demanding that it be left with a sovereign choice of nuclear developments, keep its nuclear programme,

and see the back of American forces now based in the Gulf as conditions for a ceasefire.

Trump demands the opposite. US troops are heading to the Gulf. But he clearly wants out of the whole farrago.

That would leave Israel alone, unable to change Iran's regime, very short of victory and blamed by its recently acquired friends in the UAE and Bahrain for shattering their peace and economies for decades.

Tehran will see that as a win.

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There is a real danger Iran's missiles could reach the UK

Tehran's attempted strikes on the military base at Diego Garcia highlight Britain's vulnerability, says **Francis Tusa**



Children play beside a fragment of an Iranian ballistic missile that landed in a schoolyard in the West Bank on Monday (AP)

The Iranian missile attack towards the UK-owned (for the time being) base at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean should be a massive wake-up call for British politicians. Luckily, one missile disintegrated in flight, and another was shot down by a US Navy destroyer soon after launch. But the point has been made:

Tehran very likely has missiles that can reach almost every capital city in Europe. Some have defences to counter such a threat – the UK has none.

Which might come as a surprise to some who heard government ministers over the weekend saying that the UK has everything it needs to defend the country. Sadly, with a few nuanced exceptions, this is simply not true. The one area where the UK has a limited anti-ballistic missile capability is in the form of the Type 45 destroyer. The HMS *Diamond*'s Sampson radar and Aster missiles showed that they can shoot down some types of ballistic missiles in 2024.

But to provide anything close to effective missile defence for, say, London, a Type 45 would have to be sitting in the Thames Estuary 24/7 – not tied up at a quay in Portsmouth naval base. And this ship would just be protecting the southeast of England, and many other sites across the country would need protecting, not least the naval base at the Clyde, where the Royal Navy's ballistic missile submarines are based.



The HMS *Diamond* shot down ballistic missiles in 2024 – but the UK's fleet of Type 45s isn't very extensive (MoD/Crown Copyright)

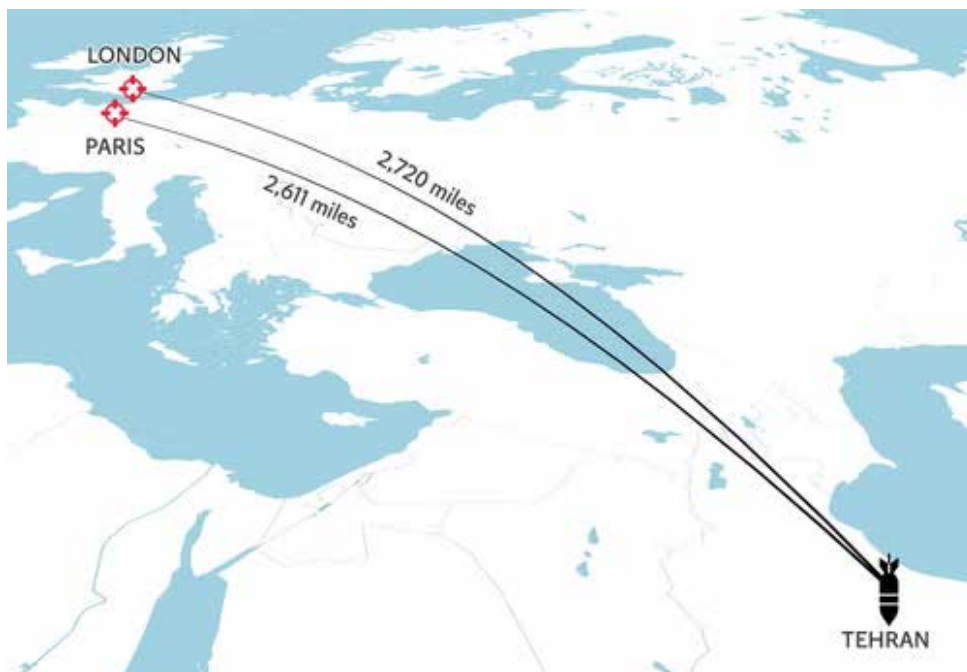
But with a total of six Type 45s, there aren't enough to provide anything like a coherent air defence of the UK – and it is a waste of a ship, which might be needed elsewhere. For serious protection of the UK against ballistic and cruise missiles, there

is a need for ground-based air defence, mainly surface-to-air missiles, but also anti-air guns.

Even if one discounts the ballistic missile threat from Iran, there is still a closer threat from Russia, which has made repeated blood-curdling threats against the UK. The UK is well within the range of Russia's large ballistic missile arsenal, and, again, there is little the UK could do to defend against such a threat.

The UAE government released an infographic over the weekend that showed that the country had been targeted by just under 1,800 drones and 352 ballistic missiles since the Iran war started – the UK doesn't even have 352 Aster SAMs in its arsenal, showing exactly how exposed the UK is to this type of attack. Three hundred and fifty-two ballistic missiles are 25 per cent of the number of German V-2 rockets fired at London and southeast England in eight months in 1944-45, but were fired over the space of two weeks.

It is estimated that in the first few days of the Iran war, the Gulf states fired more than 800 Patriot SAMs. Could some of the targets have been intercepted with cheaper systems? Absolutely! But if you want to protect critical infrastructure such as a refinery or oil storage, you use whatever you have to hand – it's expensive work. Eight hundred Patriot SAMs are at least \$3bn in value.



Another line trotted out by the UK government is that if there were some form of missile attack on Europe, or even on the UK, things are fine: our Nato allies would deal with whatever happened. But when you speak to those European militaries that operate SAMs such as Patriot or Aster, the answers are rather different.

There are no agreements or arrangements that would automatically see, say, Germany intercepting a ballistic missile heading for the UK. Actually, with missile stocks at critically low levels, most European nations have said that they would keep what they have to protect their own territory. Indeed, there is a degree of anger that the UK seems to be happy to freeload off European Nato. As regards missile defence, I've heard several European Nato militaries call the UK "scroungers".

In 2024 and 2025, European Nato countries announced procurement of well over \$15bn of new SAMs – the UK will currently not see significant spending on ground-based air defence until the 2030s.

The US indeed deployed what is known as "Aegis Ashore" in Romania in 2016. This has seen the radar and command system from the US Navy's Aegis system put into a fixed facility, rather than on a ship. Teamed with 24 Standard SM-3 anti-missile SAMs, it is intended to protect against some missile threats directed at Nato – Iran being the obvious candidate. There is a similar facility in Poland, too, but if there were to be a massive Russian missile launch against Nato, the magazine would be empty rapidly, and countries would have to rely on their own defence systems – and the UK has little to offer here.



Israeli soldiers stand next to a fragment of a missile fired from Iran and intercepted by an Israeli defence system last week (AP)

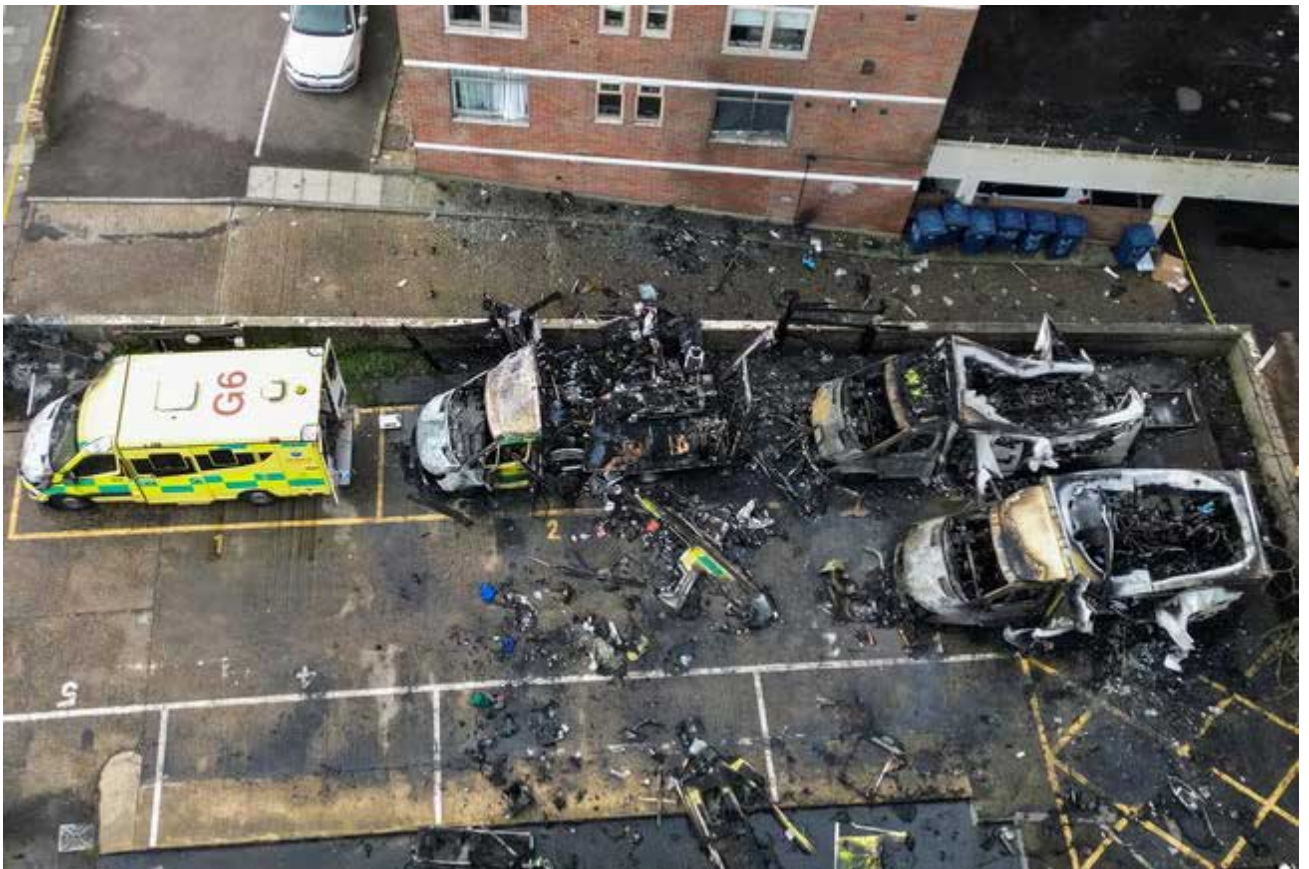
It is difficult to put over what many have seen as “normal”, that there are no direct threats to the UK, might no longer be the case – it is frightening, it is disconcerting. But what is worse: accepting that there are some new priorities for defence, or a situation in the future where the UK suffers serious damage and destruction from an enemy attack using a range of missiles and drones? In Europe, the acceptance that it is no longer “situation as usual” is solid – it is well understood that the era of the peace dividend is over.

The same is not true in the UK, and as was seen over the weekend, ministers were spreading the word that there were no threats to the UK, and that home soil was entirely safe from any threats, nothing to see here.

It is increasingly difficult to rationalise the very different behaviour of European governments towards homeland defence and the UK – either a couple of dozen European states are completely wrong about defence and the threats that they face, or they are right. So, is the UK an outlier, an anomaly as regards homeland defence, protection of the population and its facilities? At the moment, it is looking so.



Mystery veils ‘terror group’ claiming ambulance attack



Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamiya has deleted its short-lived Telegram page (AFP/Getty)

HOLLY BANCROFT

HOME AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

On 9 March, a post on the social media network Telegram, reportedly from a group called Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamiya (HAYI), announced the beginning of “military operations” against US and Israeli interests.

Then, on Monday, a Telegram channel purporting to represent the group – whose name translates as the Islamic Movement of the Companions of the Right – made an unsubstantiated claim of responsibility for an arson attack on four Jewish ambulances in Golders Green, northwest London.

By yesterday, the channel – which had less than 200 subscribers – had been deleted. The origins of the group remain unclear, although experts have said that their branding is similar to that of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its broader network.

Before the Telegram channel disappeared late on Monday night, it had posted videos of four other arson attacks around Europe – and shared information about an attack in the Czech Republic attributed to another group called the Earthquake Faction.

Some of the videos had been circulating in channels affiliated with Iraqi pro-Iranian militia beforehand, according to a digital analysis by researchers at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. One of the claimed attacks – against an unspecified site in Greece on 11 March – is likely to be disinformation, researchers believe.



Four seriously damaged ambulances in Golders Green, London (PA)

While security sources recognise HAYI's modus operandi, they do not recognise their name and cautioned against a rush to attribute the Golders Green attack. The Metropolitan Police have said that they are working to authenticate the claim of responsibility made by HAYI. It has not so far been designated as a terrorist incident.

In CCTV footage of the attack in London, three individuals can be seen setting light to an ambulance in the early hours of Monday morning. The ambulances were run by Jewish charity Hatzola and were parked in the car park of the Machzike Hadath Synagogue.

In posts to Telegram seen by *The Independent*, HAYI claimed responsibility for the ambulance attack in a video that contained text in Hebrew, English and Arabic. The text did not refer to the ambulances but instead said the target was the synagogue, which was described as “one of the main bastions of support for Israel in Britain”.

The group also shared a “final warning” to EU citizens to “immediately distance yourselves from all American and Zionist interests”. One video apparently claimed an attack outside an American bank near the World Trade Centre in Amsterdam earlier this month; another claimed to show fires being lit outside a Jewish school in Amsterdam.

The mayor of the Dutch capital said on 14 March that the explosion outside the school was a “deliberate attack against the Jewish community”.

Another unverified video claimed to show an explosion outside a synagogue in Rotterdam. Five young men, three aged 19, one 18 and one 17, have been arrested in relation to this explosion. Dutch authorities have said that it is too early to say whether the incidents are linked.



Firefighters tackled the blaze during which several oxygen canisters exploded (PA)

Russia, in particular, has pioneered the use of young recruits to carry out attacks in Europe in exchange for financial reward. But the chair of the UK's Intelligence and Security Committee said yesterday that the Iranian regime were also using proxies for its attacks abroad.

Labour peer Kevan Jones said this made tracking the perpetrators harder for the police as what “you are dealing with here is not necessarily just organised crime groups, but also people who are just paid”.

“It is an approach which the Russians are using,” he said. “For example, the attack last year on the warehouse in east London, many of those individuals who are not directly linked to any organised crime groups, are just paid money.”

Earlier this year, two Swedish citizens, who were aged 16 and 18 at the time of their offences, were jailed for throwing grenades at Israel's embassy in Denmark in October 2024.

The court ruled that the pair were part of a criminal network in Sweden, with prosecutors saying the organised criminals were acting as “the armed wing of a Middle Eastern terrorist organisation”.

The channel claiming to be HAYI also shared the apparent actions of a group called Earthquake Faction against a warehouse of an arms company in the Czech Republic. Czech authorities have launched an investigation into the fire and are treating it as a terror attack, according to local media.

Earthquake Faction have been issuing press releases about their apparent attack to UK journalists, claiming to be an “internationalist underground network that targets key sites critical to the Zionist entity”.



The area was cordoned off yesterday (AFP/Getty)

Analysis by Julian Lanches, junior research fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), found no known references to HAYI prior to 9 March, when a post of the group was circulated in a Telegram channel seemingly affiliated with an Iraqi pro-Iranian militia group.

Mr Lanches wrote: “The suspicious dissemination patterns raise the question whether HAYI is a genuine terrorist group or merely serves as a facade for Iranian hybrid operations that enable plausible deniability.”

He also highlighted inconsistencies, such as unsophisticated linguistic errors in the claim videos and the logo featuring a sniper rifle instead of the more typical AK-style imagery.

Mr Lanches suggested it pointed less to the “direct execution of attacks by Iranian intelligence operatives” and more towards “locally recruited actors”.

Roger Macmillan, former director of security at media company Iran International, said: “There is a lot of conjecture about the group at the moment. This is an organisation which really seems to have come to life after the joint US-Israeli attacks in Iran. It looks as though they’ve claimed responsibility for attacks across Europe, including Liege, Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

“In the first few days of their existence, it seemed to be other axis of resistance (Iran-linked) Telegram channels which were sharing the information. These attacks are there to instil fear. My gut feeling is that it is Iranian-backed.”

Dr Hans-Jacob Schindler, senior director of the Counter Extremism Project, emphasised that HAYI was unlikely to be a new terror group. Referring to their claims of attacks across Europe, Dr Schindler said: “Whether the perpetrators are connected, or whether it’s a framework the IRGC is giving them, is up for discussion.

“It’s much more powerful to say that a new terrorist group exists, but given they have claimed five attacks in four countries, it is unlikely that a new group would be able to set up that network within weeks. Posts like these create the impression that there is massive terror against Europe. These actors will post everything they can to insinuate that Europe has become very very unsafe.”

Jason Brodsky, policy director at the United Against Nuclear Iran, said: “Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamiyya’s branding on videos includes logos that are adopted from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its broader terror network.

“The IRGC has different options to choose from in activating these groups: it can activate sleeper cells in the United Kingdom or it can employ transnational criminal syndicates to target Israeli interests, Jewish organisations, and the Iranian diaspora.”

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Father held on indefinite jail term faces prison return



Thomas White, who has served 14 years for stealing a mobile phone, has been told he is going back to prison without a release date (Margaret White)

AMY-CLARE MARTIN

CRIME CORRESPONDENT

The family of a prisoner who set himself alight in desperation as his mental health crumbled while serving an indefinite jail term

is begging officials to halt plans to send him back to jail.

Thomas White was moved to a medium secure hospital unit last year following a major battle by his family, who watched him descend into psychosis as he languished in prison without a release date.

He was handed a controversial imprisonment for public protection (IPP) for street robbery of a mobile phone in 2012. A judge told him he must serve a minimum of two years, but he has now been incarcerated for almost 14.

The 43-year-old was last week told by doctors that they plan to return him to prison – still without a release date – within the next four weeks, after just six months of hospital care for a litany of mental health conditions. After his family complained, the move has been delayed, but officials insist he will be returned to custody.

His devastated sister, Pastor Clara White, fears he will quickly deteriorate back in prison on the hopeless sentence, which has been described as “psychological torture” by the United Nations.



Clara White, pictured with Lord David Blunkett, spent six years battling for brother to be treated in hospital (White family)

She told *The Independent* she feels officials are sending him back to be “tortured some more” after letting him “rest his nerves” during a brief spell in hospital.

She is calling for the justice secretary David Lammy, who must issue a warrant to permit his transfer, to “do the right thing” and prevent the move.

Her calls have been backed by Labour peer Lord Tony Woodley, who accused ministers of “heaping cruelty on top of injustice”, and a former deputy high court judge, who said it was “shamefully cruel”.

After hearing the news, a despondent White told his sister: “They are never going to let me go.”

White is one of around 233 prisoners serving IPP sentences who have been transferred to secure units, in many cases because the hopeless nature of the jail term has left them profoundly damaged. But as soon as they stabilise, they are back where they started: in prison without a release date.

The open-ended jail terms were scrapped in 2012, but not retrospectively, leaving thousands of inmates who were already sentenced incarcerated indefinitely.

In December last year almost 2,400 were still trapped on the jail terms and at least 94 people had taken their own lives in prison after losing hope of getting out.

Ms White had long campaigned for her brother’s hospital transfer – backed by *The Independent* – after he endured repeated mental health crises in prison, including setting himself alight and smashing his face on the cell floor.



Successive governments have refused to resentence IPP prisoners (Getty Images)

But she was dealt a fresh blow last week when clinicians informed her that he would be sent back to prison because it is the only place he can work towards release.

She insists the prison system failed her brother for 13 years before he was hospitalised, adding: “He’s doing better but he’ll go downhill from today, I think. It’s awful, sitting there knowing that any day that bus is coming to take you back to prison.

“I said to the doctor it’s not going to take long for him to revert back to how poorly he was before he went. I’m going to be applying again and fighting again to get him back in hospital. The hopelessness in him is so sad. It’s painful to see.”

Doctors at the secure unit have concluded White has learning difficulties, complex trauma, ADHD, a personality disorder and has suffered from drug-induced psychosis.

However two medical reports in 2024 laid bare the toll of the devastating IPP jail term on his mental health, warning that his “lengthy incarceration” was creating “impermeable barriers” to his recovery.



Lord Tony Woodley says the IPP jail term is 'not right and not fair' (Parliament TV)

Their mother, Margaret White, said she is praying for a miracle and says this will be her son's 14th transfer in as many years, after years of being bounced around prisons.

"I can't visit more prisons and watch my son disappear in front of my eyes all over again," she told *The Independent*.

Lord Woodley, who has repeatedly called for all IPP prisoners to be resentenced, urged the Ministry of Justice to "show some humanity".

"To send Thomas back to prison, the very place that made him so unwell, after just six months, is simply heaping cruelty on top of injustice," he said.

"I urge ministers to show some humanity and intervene to halt Thomas's transfer and urgently act to help all those still languishing on this cruel sentence by bringing it to an end, once and for all, with a resentencing or reconsideration exercise."

Nicholas Cooke KC, a former Old Bailey and deputy high court judge, said there is an "overwhelming moral and humanitarian case" for over-tariff IPP prisoners who have become mentally unwell to be dealt with by doctors, rather than the prison system.

He added: "They have, to use an old-fashioned term, 'paid their debt to society' and now should be treated like anyone else who

is suffering from mental illness.

“Transferring them to hospital, treating them and then sending them back to prison and the foreseeable prospect of consequent stress-related relapse is shamefully cruel to them and their families.

“There is also a practical reason for ending this shocking practice. It is the Mental Health Review Tribunal and not the Parole Board who are best placed in terms of experience and management tools to rehabilitate these individuals and minimise any risk to themselves and others in the community.”

White’s case is one of eight examples of IPP injustices raised in a major legal complaint to the UN’s special rapporteur on torture, Dr Alice Gill Edwards.

The application, filed last month, is the second submission to the UN over the jail terms. A separate complaint over five other IPP prisoners is already being investigated by the UN’s working group on arbitrary detention.

Any finding of degrading treatment or arbitrary detention would be a damning indictment of the government’s handling of the scandal.

A Ministry of Justice spokesperson said: “Protecting the public is our top priority and while it is right that IPP sentences were abolished, decisions about treatment and hospital discharge are clinical matters made by health service providers and based on clear medical evidence.

“All IPP prisoners treated under the Mental Health Act are entitled to aftercare when they leave hospital, whether returning to prison or going into the community. This support prepares them to cope with life outside hospital, reducing the risk of their mental health deteriorating.”



Couple sue over damp in Henry VIII's ex-residence



The King's Lodging property in Sandwich was bought in 1991 (Photos Champion News)

PAUL KEOGH

A retired couple are suing the Environment Agency for £4.5m over severe damp issues in their historic riverside home, a Tudor royal residence from which Henry VIII once surveyed his fleet before embarking for France. The case, currently before the Upper Tribunal in London, centres on claims that flood defence

work carried out by the agency caused catastrophic damage to the grade II-listed property.

Roger and Suzanne Brookhouse, keen amateur historians, purchased the King's Lodging in Sandwich, Kent, in 1991. The timber-framed medieval house on the banks of the River Stour boasts a rich history, notably hosting Henry VIII in 1520 as he prepared to sail for the Field of the Cloth of Gold summit with King Francis of France.

Despite its considerable age, the property was deemed in “satisfactory” condition in 2013. However, the couple alleges that subsequent flood defence work by the Environment Agency led to a significant rise in groundwater levels, resulting in widespread damp, cracked and bulging walls, and a ruined garden.

Their lawyers told the judge that the house has “suffered more in the last few years than it has done in the last few hundred”.



Amateur historian Suzanne Brookhouse outside the High Court

The £4.5m claim includes substantial sums for repairing the house and resolving the groundwater issues, alongside about £1.3m to reinstate their previously “thriving” garden and replace an outdoor swimming pool, which they contend was damaged beyond repair by river water in the surrounding soil.

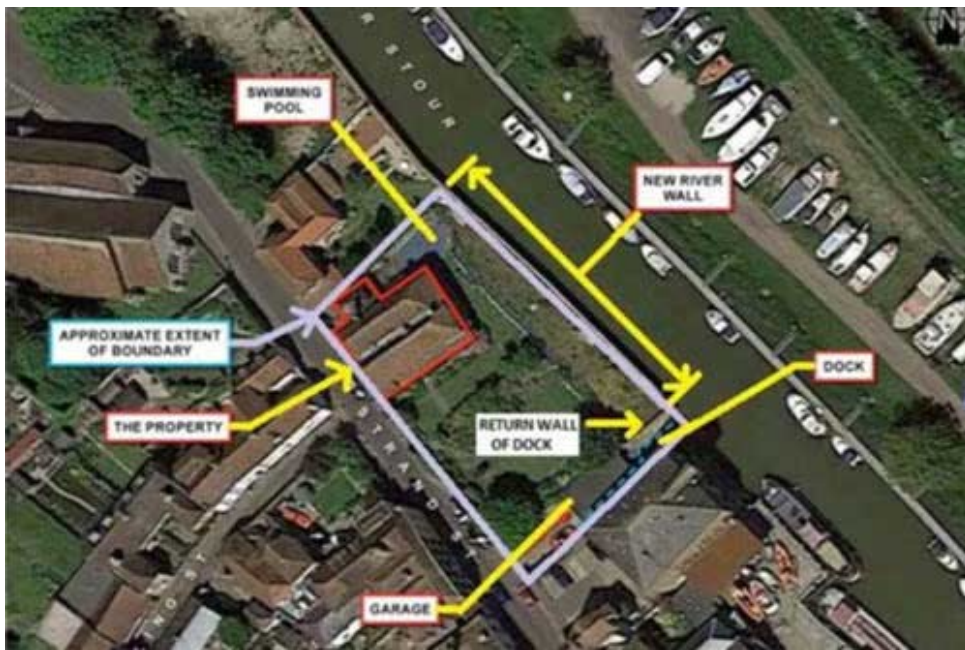
The Environment Agency, while accepting its liability to pay compensation, is contesting the amount, arguing that the sum requested is “excessive and disproportionate”. The agency highlights that the £4.5m claim is more than double the property’s maximum estimated value of £1.9m.

This week’s tribunal follows a 2023 ruling where a judge found the agency liable for the damage, concluding that its work had indeed caused higher groundwater levels. In that earlier decision, Upper Tribunal Judge Elizabeth Cooke recounted the property’s storied past and its more recent plight.

“In 1520, King Henry VIII stood at the window of the building now known as The King’s Lodging in Sandwich to review his fleet before setting sail for the Field of the Cloth of Gold,” Judge Cooke said. “From the same window today, the most striking feature is the wall between the property and the River Stour, built by the Environment Agency, as part of the Sandwich Town Tidal Defence Scheme. The claimants, Mr and Mrs Brookhouse, are the owners of The King’s Lodging and they say that their property has been damaged, and will continue to be damaged, by raised groundwater levels caused by the respondent’s works.”

The property had long been separated from the river by a wall, but in 2014 the agency constructed a new wall one metre further into the river, filling the space with drainage material. Following this, the Brookhouses reported regular water ingress into their garden, which Mr Brookhouse said had never previously been “boggy”.

They argue that the rise in groundwater means the house is now standing in wet ground, causing ongoing and future damage. Their garden, once “thriving”, is now unplatable due to water levels and salinity, and their 1980s swimming pool is beyond repair due to concrete movement.



An aerial plan showing the location of King's Lodging

Judge Cooke, after hearing expert evidence, ruled in the couple's favour, confirming that groundwater levels were up to a metre higher after the agency's work. She concluded: "The building at The King's Lodging has been damaged by the respondent's works and will be further damaged in the future."

Back in court this week, James Pereira KC, representing the couple, argued for the £4.5m compensation to cover damage and the cost of rectifying the groundwater rise. "The building appears to have suffered more in the last few years than it has done in the last few hundred," he told Judge Cooke.

He emphasised the couple's commitment to restoring their home, describing them as "custodians of this special place" with a "unique property" that holds national interest. Mr Pereira proposed installing sheet piles connected to the agency's flood wall with drainage valves as "the only adequately designed and costed proposal" for a "long-term sustainable future".

However, Galina Ward KC, for the Environment Agency, said that the Brookhouses' claims are excessive and lack sufficient evidence. Ms Ward added that the agency has always sought to deal fairly with the claimants and accepts compensation is due for the garden and house damage. She suggested that damage could be managed through "ordinary process of repair and

maintenance” and that any intervention to lower groundwater should be “as conservative as possible”. She also argued that the claim for a replacement swimming pool should be rejected, as it was “near the end of its useful life” in 2014.

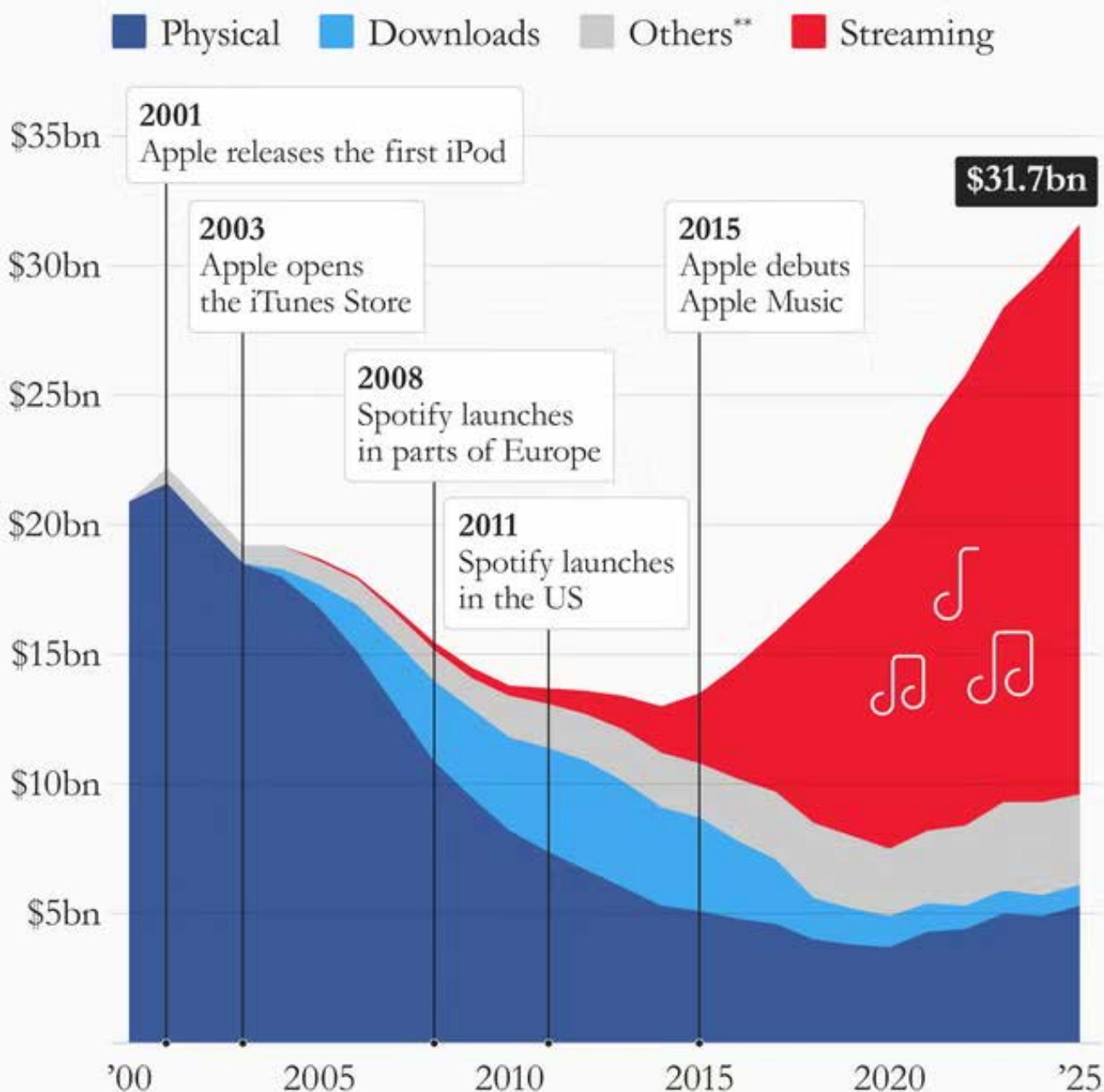
The trial, now focused solely on determining the compensation amount, continues.

Champion News

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By Numbers High tide for streaming

Global recorded music industry revenues*



*Not adjusted for inflation

**Includes performance rights and synchronisation revenues

Source: IFPI



 INDEPENDENT

statista 



Pictures of the Day



The only way is up

Nasa's Space Launch System rocket with the Orion spacecraft set for the Artemis 2 mission is seen on Launch Complex 39B at sunrise at the Kennedy Space Center, at Cape Canaveral, Florida. *AP*



Forget about potholes...

People cross a flooded portion of the road following heavy rains in Nyakach, western Kenya. *AP*



Spring-heeled

Boys play in a mustard field in Pampore, Indian Kashmir. *Reuters*



Stuck in a sandbank

A stranded humpback whale lies off the Baltic Sea coastal resort of Timmendorfer Strand, near Lubeck, northern Germany.

AFP/Getty



All ears

A hare hides in a field on the outskirts of Frankfurt, western Germany. *AP*

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Home news in brief



PC Bradley Corke died on Saturday after a car crash during an emergency call-out (Kent Police)

Family pay tribute to young officer

The family of a police officer who died after a car crash in Kent paid tribute yesterday. Pc Bradley Corke, 27, was described by his family as a “true gentleman” and “one of the finest young men ever to have walked this Earth”. He died on Saturday after the collision in Farningham, near Swanley, on Thursday.

A marked Ford Focus police car and Volkswagen Scirocco collided on the westbound A20 London Road at the junction with Button Street at about 7.45pm, Kent Police said. Pc Corke’s colleague was left in a critical condition and a member of the

public in the second vehicle was treated for serious injuries, the force said.

The officers had been travelling to an emergency incident in Swanley. In a statement, Pc Corke's family said: "Our beautiful boy, so cruelly taken away from us far too young. He was proud to be Pc Bradley Corke, and in turn we are proud of his dedication to the profession."

Royal Mail workers claim deception used to meet targets

Royal Mail postal workers are being asked to hide letters from senior bosses to give the appearance that delivery targets are being met, according to reports. Ten postal workers told the BBC that they are often told by managers to "take the mail for a ride" when a senior manager comes in to inspect the office.

One worker, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said: "Say we have a senior manager coming in from outside the delivery office, any mail that has been left would get hidden by the line managers. It gets put into a trolley and taken somewhere, and brought back to you the next day."

Concerns were raised earlier this month that Royal Mail is not meeting Ofcom targets for timeliness in its deliveries, potentially leading to millions of letters arriving late. There is a legal obligation to deliver first-class post six days a week.

The service said 91.6 per cent of second-class mail was delivered within three working days, while 77.5 per cent of first-class post was delivered the next working day between 29 September and 30 November.

A Royal Mail spokesperson said: "These claims do not reflect how our delivery operations work and we would take any suggestion that colleagues are hiding mail very seriously."

Trans girls must leave Girlguiding by September

Girlguiding has instructed its members that transgender girls must depart the organisation by early September. The directive

follows a previous announcement in December 2025, which said that transgender girls would no longer be eligible to join.

Described by Girlguiding at the time as a “difficult decision”, it came almost eight months after the April 2025 Supreme Court ruling, which said the words “woman” and “sex” in the Equality Act 2010 refer to a biological woman and biological sex.

Girlguiding said that since that ruling, it had undertaken “detailed considerations, expert legal advice and input from senior members, young members”, its council and board of trustees. In an update yesterday, the organisation said trans girls who are members can stay until 6 September.

Reform mayoral candidate suspended over Jewish group comments

Reform UK has suspended its Hampshire mayoral candidate after he appeared to liken a Jewish neighbourhood watch group to “Islamists on horseback” following an arson attack on Jewish community ambulances.

Chris Parry has been suspended pending investigation following the remarks about Shomrim, a voluntary patrol service, in a series of social media posts on Monday. He also reportedly described the members of the group as “cosplayers”, according to The Guardian, in a post which has since been deleted.

Mr Parry reportedly shared a post from former Brexit party leader Catherine Blaiklock, who had posted a picture of Shomrim vehicles with the caption: “Can Christian’s [sic] in Britain set up their own police and patrol certain neighbourhoods?”

Referring to Shomrim, he later posted: “They are a community organisation, not a legal entity. It’s the same with Islamists on horseback. But if it offends you, I’ll remove it.”

Mr Parry had been due to stand as Reform’s mayoral candidate in Hampshire and the Solent in 2028.



Inside the ‘miracle’ drug rollout that could end Aids

The closest the world has to an HIV vaccine is being rolled out in some of the worst-hit countries in the world. **Bel Trew** in Eswatini, southern Africa, meets those at the sharp end



A nurse administers lenacapavir – dubbed the ‘miracle’ drug – to Arianna, a teenage sex worker in Eswatini (Photos Bel Trew/The Independent)

Lianne was just 13 when she lost her parents to Aids. Newly orphaned, she had to find a way to keep herself and her younger sister alive. With no money to finish school, unable to find a job

and struggling to put food on the table, there was only one option – sex work.

Now 24, she knows the dangers in Eswatini, a kingdom in southern Africa once described as the epicentre of the HIV epidemic and a country still struggling with some of the highest infection rates in the world.

“Both my parents passed away. Hunger led me to join this work although I know it’s risky,” Lianne says, explaining that she earns under £25 a week. She is unable to acquire HIV preventative medication – known as PrEP – on her own.

But there is now hope in the form of lenacapavir – dubbed the “miracle” drug – which the United Nations hopes can protect millions of people like Lianne and even end the Aids epidemic altogether.

The twice-yearly injection – described by the head of the UN Aids agency as “the closest thing we have to a vaccine” – provides near complete protection against infection.

Lenacapavir is being introduced for the first time in nine of the most at-risk countries, including Eswatini, meaning Lianne was among the first people in the world to get the injection.

While it is a big step forward in HIV care, concerns have been raised about the extent of the rollout, with fears it will be ineffective if it is not introduced on a global scale.

The positive news about lenacapavir comes after last year’s devastating cuts to foreign aid spending by US president Donald Trump, which had previously funded around half of Eswatini’s HIV response.

For Lianne, it meant the abrupt closure of the mobile clinics that gave her access to potentially life-saving HIV prevention therapy for free.



Lenacapavir is so popular that they have already run out in Eswatini

The closures have had a deadly effect: a friend and fellow sex worker recently died after contracting HIV and losing access to life-sustaining medication.

“That is why I am so happy today, it’s protection,” she continues with relief, as she receives the brightly coloured yellow injection.

At the beginning of 2025, the world was on track to end the Aids pandemic by 2030.

But that was upended by unprecedented foreign aid cuts from the US, the UK and other European countries, which have created the biggest ever disruptions to HIV response, from testing to treatment and prevention.

If these aid cuts continue, there could be millions more deaths and infections, as well as double the number of medication-resistant strains, according to *The Independent’s* own modelling of data.

This makes the timing for the lenacapavir rollout critical. Developed by California-based biopharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, the UN believes the treatment, if properly deployed, could help bring about the end of the epidemic by reducing new infections to zero.

The current plan, funded by the Global Fund to Fight Aids, TB and Malaria, together with the US government and others, is to deliver lenacapavir to 2 million people by 2028.

Lenacapavir, which in wealthy countries can cost up to \$24,000 (£18,000) a year, is being simultaneously delivered to some of the poorest countries most at risk at a significantly reduced cost.

Life-sustaining antiretroviral therapy was infamously accessible in the West for a full decade before being rolled out in sub-Saharan Africa, costing countless lives and paving a way for the crisis today.



Eswatini, once dubbed the epicentre of the HIV epidemic, is now among the first countries in the world to roll out long-lasting PrEP injections

“This has been a defining moment for the Aids epidemic,” says Dianne Stewart from the Global Fund. “We have been fighting for equitable access to new tools since the beginning, and this is the first time in history that we have got it right.”

The first country to receive these jabs is Eswatini. Formerly known as Swaziland, it has worked hard to reduce new HIV infections from a peak of 21,000 per year 20 years ago to 4,000 in 2023, according to the UN.

But still around a quarter of Swazis aged between 15 and 49 are living with HIV, according to the latest data from the US Center for Disease Control.

David Maseko of HealthPlus for men, a charity working with key populations including LGBT+ communities, explains that the aid cuts shut all 15 mobile charity clinics that Lianne and others used.

That has meant there has been a soaring number of people – including some of the most at-risk communities – off their HIV medication and off PrEP – a problem unfolding across Sub-Saharan Africa.

“There are a lot of gaps now. We are even struggling to do community testing.”

For him, a twice-yearly injection that could help curb the recent surge in infections is “simply a game-changer”.

Arianna, 17, who was also forced into sex work after her mother died and she left an abusive home, agrees. “This is lifesaving for us,” she says as she gets the injection.

She explains that trying to get daily prevention PrEP pills from a public facility, where she could face prejudice as a sex worker, makes it near impossible, especially when they earn so little a week to cover transport.



MSF's Dr Diojki Bahati says there must be a comprehensive rollout of lenacapavir for it to be effective

“That is why today I decided to come here. To me, this is the best way to help myself, to survive.”

But there are concerns that without proper investment around the world to reach a critical mass of people protected globally, the impact will be limited.

For now, delivery is targeted at just nine countries, although there are plans to expand that. Lenacapavir has not yet been licensed or procured for delivery in large parts of Latin America, where infection rates are rising.

“We have seen in the past that piecemeal solutions, especially for infectious diseases, do not work,” adds Stewart from the Global Fund.

“As we saw during Covid, you cannot solve it in one country and think it is done while others do not have access.”

At a Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) clinic in a town outside the capital, country lead Dr Diojki Bahati says they were given only 50 doses to distribute and have had to turn patients away.

Even reaching 2 million people with lenacapavir over the next three years is “far below the global need”, he continues.

UNAIDS has said that to tackle the pandemic, the world needs to get 20 million people on PrEP in the next few years.

“Two million people over three years is less than 10 per cent of that target.”

He adds that there are no alternative procurement systems, especially for organisations like MSF, that he says have been denied the right to purchase directly.



Lianne, who lost both her parents to HIV and was forced to become a sex worker to support her and her sister, calls lenacapavir ‘life-saving’

In parallel, generic manufacturing licences have been granted to around six manufacturers in the coming year to supply 120 countries and territories.

“But that leaves quite a number of low- and middle-income countries where up to 20 per cent of new infections are happening,” he continues, such as Brazil, Peru and Mexico that participated in lenacapavir drug trial.

He says it is essential that the rollout is properly funded and supported by governments, even as they cut aid. It will ultimately be considerably cheaper in the long term.

In 2024, there were at least 1.3 million new HIV infections. Carmen Pérez Casas, from health initiative Unitaid, explains that these additional infections will cost an extra \$52m (£38.8m) per year if everyone is put on antiretroviral treatment, leading to a lifetime treatment cost of approximately \$2bn.

As transmission increases, this cost will accumulate exponentially over time.

“This is a fraction of what it could cost to deliver lenacapavir ... at the scale required to bend the curve of the epidemic,” she adds.

Back in the Eswatini clinic, the demand is clearly there. Lianne and Arianna breathe a sigh of relief after getting their jabs, knowing for now they are protected.

“We beg that they do not get tired of helping us,” says Lianne as she finishes her appointment. “If they are cutting the funding, it means we will be exposed and die of HIV. Please help.”

This article has been produced as part of The Independent's Rethinking Global Aid project

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Huge Russia drone attack kills 3 and injures dozens



A damaged apartment block in central Lviv yesterday after being hit by a Shahed drone (Reuters)

JESSIE WILLIAMS

A rare Russian daytime drone attack on Ukraine has killed at least three people, wounded 30 and set a building in the centuries-old centre of Lviv on fire.

More than 400 drones were launched in the middle of the day, Ukraine's air force said, an abrupt change from Russia's usual

tactic of launching similarly massive aerial attacks at night. Ukraine said Russia has launched 948 drones over a 24 hour period – the largest of the war so far

The daytime attack came after at least five people were killed and 27 injured in a wave of Russian drone attacks across Ukraine overnight.

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky said the daytime bombardment caused damage in 11 regions, including a residential building in Lviv's city centre.



Firefighters contained the blaze in the 17th-century monastery in Lviv (Reuters)

Mr Zelensky repeated calls for allies to urgently supply Kyiv with more air defence munitions, which are dwindling as the United States and Europe have shifted their focus to the war in Iran in recent weeks.

“The geopolitical situation has become more complicated due to the war against Iran, and this, unfortunately, bolsters Russia’s confidence,” Mr Zelensky said yesterday, adding that “the fundamental circumstances have not changed”.

“Russia is continuing this war and destabilisation in Europe, supporting the Iranian regime with intelligence data and thereby prolonging the war in that region, as well as preparing for new conflicts in the coming years.”

Along with aerial attacks, Moscow has stepped up its ground assaults along the 750-mile front line in the east and south, with 619 attacks in four days in mid-March.

The country is bracing for renewed attacks as weather conditions improve after a winter of Russian strikes on energy infrastructure, causing power and heating cuts, exacerbating the already-bitter Ukrainian winter.

The commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces, General Oleksander Syrskyi, said Russian troops had made multiple attempts in recent days to break through defensive lines.



People help an injured woman (AP)

“Fierce fighting unfolded along the entire line of contact,” he wrote on Telegram on Monday.

“The occupiers are attempting to bring up new units and are preparing to continue attacks,” Gen Syrskyi added.

He said the Russian military is trying to bring up new forces and is relying on poor spring weather conditions, like fog, to reduce the effectiveness of Ukrainian drone and artillery strikes for future attacks.

A Ukrainian military official expects Russia will begin using mobilised military personnel on 1 April, according to the

Institute for the Study of War (ISW), a Washington-based think tank.

Ukrainian Southern Defence Forces spokesperson Colonel Vladyslav Voloshyn told Ukrainian outlet Interfax Ukraine that Russia will begin moving all mobilised personnel currently in Crimea to Ukraine.



Several buildings were also struck in Poltava, Ukraine (Emergency Service of Ukraine)

The ISW also reported that Russia was moving heavy equipment to the frontline in preparation for an intensification of fighting as the weather warms, in what it believes is the beginning of their spring-summer offensive.

Michael Kofman, an analyst at the Carnegie Endowment in Washington DC, told *The Guardian*: “Usually there is a Russian wave of mechanised assaults around April, and they once again prove costly and ineffective.”

The latest attacks come after weekend talks between Ukrainian and US delegations in Florida yielded no tangible results.



World news in brief



A boat carrying aid, including food and medicine, arrives in Havana yesterday (AFP/Getty)

Volunteers break US blockade of Cuba

A ship with humanitarian aid arrived in Cuba yesterday loaded with solar panels, bicycles, food and medicine as the island's economic and energy crises deepen. Some 30 people were aboard the first of three ships expected to arrive in Cuba as it grapples with severe blackouts, a crumbling power grid and a US energy blockade.

“This type of economic warfare shouldn’t exist, this attitude of a pirate state that doesn’t respect international law,” activist Thiago Avila told reporters as he disembarked from the ship, christened *Granma 2.0* in homage to the ship that ferried revolutionary leader Fidel Castro to the island in 1956.

“These ships are a drop in an ocean of need... at the same time, it’s a gesture of solidarity,” Mr Avila said. The ship departed Puerto Progreso, in Merida, Mexico, last week and two others are heading to Cuba.

Pakistan tells cricket fans to watch matches at home

Pakistan has asked fans to watch its biggest cricket tournament at home rather than attend matches as the South Asian country scrambles to conserve fuel amid spiralling oil and gas shortages triggered by the US-Israeli war against Iran.

The Pakistan Super League, which runs from 26 March to 3 May, has cut its hosting venues from six to two, with all matches now staged in Lahore and Karachi. The Pakistan Cricket Board said an average of 30,000 spectators and support staff travelling every day for more than a month “would place significant strain on energy resources”.

The move is one of several emergency measures taken by Pakistan as fuel shortages deepen. The government has already closed schools for two weeks and raised the price of high-octane fuel by about 60 per cent, a levy expected to raise 9bn rupees a month in additional revenue.

More than 60 people killed as plane crashes in Amazon

At least 66 people were killed and dozens more injured after a Colombian military plane crashed into the Amazon rainforest moments after taking off. There were 128 people, mostly soldiers, on board the Lockheed Martin Hercules C-130 plane, which took off on Monday in Puerto Leguizamo, southern Colombia.

The plane was seen slowly descending to the ground shortly afterwards, in a section of dense jungle close to the border with Peru. Video footage taken shortly after shows the wreckage in flames and engulfed by smoke, with rescuers combing through the debris for survivors.

Onboard were 115 members of the Colombian army, 11 crew and two National Police. The cause of the crash is not yet known, and an investigation has been launched.

Tributes paid to pilots killed in LaGuardia crash

The two pilots who died after an Air Canada flight collided with a fire truck at New York's LaGuardia airport on Sunday were officially named yesterday. Antoine Forest and Mackenzie Gunther, the pilot and co-pilot respectively, were named by Port Authority executive director Kathryn Garcia.

Also in the cockpit was flight attendant Solange Tremblay, who was sitting in the plane's jump seat. Ms Tremblay was hurled 320 feet across the runway but miraculously survived.

The Bombardier CRJ-900, operated by Jazz Aviation, was arriving from Montreal with 76 passengers and crew when it struck the emergency vehicle on Runway 4 at approximately 11.40 pm. The truck had been cleared to cross the active runway while responding to a separate incident involving a United Airlines flight.

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The Beeb's new boss must not duck the hard questions



Matt Brittin can bring 'good vibes' after the corporation's annus horribilis (PA)

ANNE MCELVOY



Matt Brittin is the BBC's new director general – though not a name who has rocked TV or media circles hereto. The former Google executive mentioned that he has attended the industry event of the Edinburgh TV Festival “incognito”, which produced some amusement among veteran broadcast executives who joked that

he wouldn't have been widely recognised, even if he'd turned up "with a giant neon name badge".

It's an anecdote that underlines the cultural gap between the worlds of TV news and a culture in which the top broadcast executives tend to move in shoals from one organisation to another. It also hints at a wariness about now having a "tech bro" in the open-plan corner office where, as the director general, he will sit among the programme-makers of Broadcasting House.

Brittin, 57, looks a bit like an inquisitive mole, with his youthful fuzzy haircut and brooding brows. He smiles a lot – at least for now. I have bumped into him over the years in his former role as head of Google in Europe and as a fixture on the Davos convening scene. He has always seemed positive and cheerful, with a good grasp of how to hold the room while giving presentations about the future of tech and society. He is certainly less arrogant than the usual tech bro stereotype.

As someone who worked closely with him puts it, he's about "good vibes". That may be one of the reasons he impressed the BBC board browbeaten after an annus horribilis of Donald Trump litigation and rows over Gaza coverage, and the backwash of scandals around Huw Edwards and a court case looming into years of alleged sexual abuse by the DJ Tim Westwood.

But the challenges show no sign of abating.

Brittin will have to fend off brickbats for being too woke about trans rights and gender issues as well as accusations of shifting too far to the right in its coverage of Gaza. In the midst of upsetting all sides in the quest for an elusive impartiality, Brittin needs to tie down the terms of the BBC charter with the culture secretary, Lisa Nandy, while keeping one eye on Reform UK's claim that it only serves the metropolitan elite and deserves less licence fee support.

To clinch the job, he will have had to have answered what one board member describes as "the 20-point exam question" – how the BBC works with the streaming platforms, including YouTube, owned by Google's parent company, without ending

up trapped under the wheels of big tech interests. He also needs to figure out how to fulfil its founder Lord Reith's mission to "inform, educate and entertain" with its licence-fee business model while competing with deep-pocketed US competitors producing global hits.

Brittin won the job from a depleted field from which many industry players absented themselves. One leading figure at another major broadcast outlet who did not enter the race says: "The pay is not that good for the blood pressure damage."

Brittin's case for making the BBC more adaptive to the digital era will have secured his appointment, and he knows how to negotiate leverage in ways other contenders could not.

However, anyone following the ups and downs of the Davie years from his appointment in 2020 might see echoes of the outgoing director general in the new one – namely that he has no real editorial experience. This in turn means he will have a limited understanding of the pressures on the BBC's due impartiality model to withstand a more reactive and divisive mood in party politics and the country.

Brushfires and culture wars will surely greet Brittin, as they wore down Tim Davie



He also arrives with suspicion from Conservative and Reform quarters that, having worked on the business side at the left-leaning Trinity Mirror group and taken a role on a board overseeing the *Guardian* newspaper last year, he may bring certain assumptions with him. He definitely has a fan club: when he left, one colleague posted, "You role-modelled standing up for DEI."

But this ready embrace of corporate diversity and inclusion models is exactly the sort of assumption that raises more

questions than it answers in broadcast settings, and frequently fuels internal arguments about everything from news and current affairs coverage to a tendency for senior staff to hail from similarly social and geographic backgrounds with metropolitan, centre-leftish outlooks.

Brushfires and culture wars will surely greet Brittin, as they wore down Davie. They were in full effect even this week with the announcement of the death of Jenni Murray, one of its most beloved broadcasters. After Murray received internal criticism for her gender-critical views and ended an illustrious broadcast career on a sour note, the news of her passing didn't stop another bout of hostilities being unleashed.

By appointing a male director general, and with a male acting deputy, Rhodri Davies (a role hastily concocted by the board in its last crisis, which Brittin might want to shape to his own agenda), the gender balance at the top is awkward. Deborah Turness, the CEO of news, departed in a hurry with Davie. A desire to appoint the BBC's first female boss melted away due to a lack of credentialed women applying for the job.

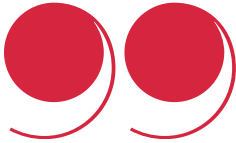
It is hard to see, then, the head of news job or a permanent deputy director general slot in this constellation not going to a woman. Esme Wren, head of Channel 4 News, is touted for the news head role, but Nick Sutton, head of Sky News platforms and a well-liked former editor at Radio 4, may also have an eye on a senior role. However, the findings from the recent BBC-commissioned report, which pointed out that it is seen as failing to support female broadcasters who thrive in their fifties and then mysteriously disappear from the airwaves in droves, will be hard to ignore.

The hope, of course, will be for Brittin to bring a fresh eye to its talent range – and halt the tendency to look inwards and make “Buggins’ turn” appointments on screen and behind the scenes. As a former champion rower, he is naturally competitive and steely behind the ready smile. However, as a director general who is not a journalist, he will need to show that he can ask the hard questions of the BBC's journalists and range of output with curiosity, or risk others doing that for him.

However, despite the grumbles of low expectations, I see an experienced team leader who can manage complexity and has the convening power to bring more openness of opinion and debate to a BBC which is used to conducting its debates behind closed doors.

When he joined Google in the early 2000s, at the height of tech optimism, its co-founder Larry Page advised Brittin to “put the best people you can on important work and get out of the way”. Getting out of the way is impossible for a director general. It’s a job in the limelight that comes with an ejector button attached. Brittin needs to strap in for the bumpy BBC ride. He’ll need more than vibes to get to the other side of a treacherous battlefield.

Anne McElvoy is executive editor at Politico and co-host of the podcast ‘Politics at Sam and Anne’s’



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You, too, can learn to become (ef)fluent in 'LinkedIn Speak'



LinkedInfluencers offer inspirational and motivational content on the platform (Getty/iStock)

STEPHEN ARMSTRONG



We live in exhausting times as unnecessary and depressing events refuse to stop assailing us, like 1,000 toddlers bawling in an out-of-town supermarket.

But there is a place where happiness and positivity live, and where nothing sad or downbeat or toddler-like is ever allowed

past the paywall. It's a bit like Oz, a bit like *Pleasantville* and a lot like *The Stepford Wives*. It's called LinkedIn and it's a safe space where any schmuck can launder their everyday life by "LinkedIn speaking" all the way to the very top.

"LinkedIn Speak" is probably the most powerful language on this planet. Even if it sounds like it's from another one.

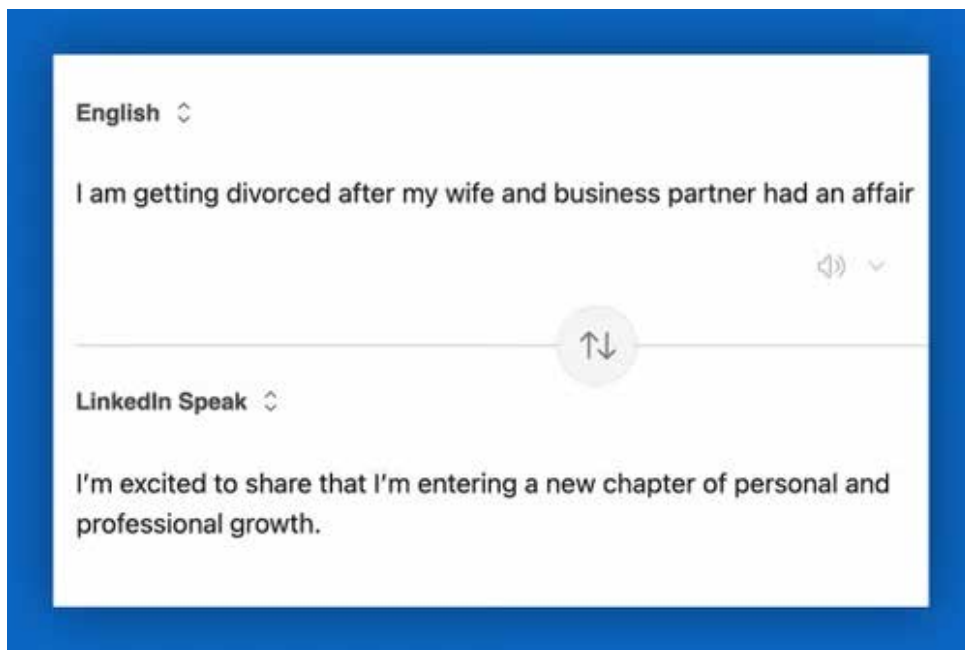
Of course, it's not easy to write in LinkedIn Speak. It takes hustle, a pinch of grind, and a lot of unfiltered humblebragging. Amol Rajan would be very good at LinkedIn Speak. At 5.30am, your alarm goes off. You don't hit snooze. You hit life. You roll out of bed, eyes still crusty from yesterday's hustle, and reach for your Huel shake – because breakfast is for people who don't have KPIs.

Or you say something like this: "Out with friends. Everyone orders alcohol. I order water. Say: 'I'm high on life'. Room goes silent. Then... something shifted. Here's what I learnt: When you stand for something, you instantly become interesting. That water order wasn't just a drink choice. It was a brand position."

Clearly, you have to be very successful to write in LinkedIn Speak. If you think my attempts at it sound unconvincing, well, clearly that's because I've not been very successful. Yet.

Fortunately, I soon will be. A new translation tool has been launched to help you decipher the corporate nonsense-speak on the professional networking site and write humblebrags with ease.

Kagi Translate has added LinkedIn Speak alongside Chinese, Russian and Japanese to help those who find the language of the social network hard to parse.



Kagi Translate has added LinkedIn Speak alongside Chinese, Russian and Japanese to help those who find the language of the social network hard to parse (Kagi Translate)

Thus, “I am getting divorced after my wife and business partner had an affair” becomes “I’m excited to share that I’m entering a new chapter of personal and professional growth. After some fundamental misalignments in my core partnerships, I’ve decided to pivot and focus on a solo venture. Grateful for the lessons and looking forward to connecting with like-minded leaders as I scale!”

The tool is as relentlessly positive as an avalanche with a smile. It will not be beaten. “I hate people” becomes “I’ve been reflecting on the importance of energy management and setting boundaries in our professional journeys.” And why use “hello” when you could “embrace the synergy of this moment”?

So if you once used LinkedIn to post your CV, get with the programme. A lot has changed. Launched in 2003 as a digital rolodex, personal branding through thought leadership arrived in 2014. This took on social network status during the pandemic, and since 2022, it’s become a business-based Instagram with its own thriving LinkedInfluencers using the site as their personal megaphone, offering inspirational and motivational content.

The result is challenging if you’re just looking for a new job, unless you use Kagi, where “I need a job because I’m lazy and

bored” becomes “a transformative new chapter in my professional journey,” where “after a period of intentional introspection and strategic recalibration” you’re “pivoting my focus toward high-impact opportunities that align with my unique cadence and personal workflow optimization”.

And if you’re perfectly fine but feel like a loser after half an hour reading LinkedIn rage-bait such as “You spend Sunday nights watching grown men fight over a ball. I’m making cold calls and catching up on emails. Will work on my business plan in a few minutes. How to win: zig when everyone else zags,” try reverse translating and you’ll see the writer means “honestly, I just don’t have a life”.

But while upspeaking LinkedIn is too much for sales managers in Ohio, it’s something the White House could certainly consider. If the US president is too scared to say, “I have led my country into an unpopular war and my allies have deserted me,” he could try:

“I am humbled to announce that I have successfully spearheaded a bold, high-stakes geopolitical initiative. As I navigated this strategic pivot, I encountered a recalibration of my partnership ecosystem. This provided me a unique opportunity to cultivate radical self-reliance. True leadership isn’t always about consensus – it’s about the courage to commit to a vision.” The hashtags speak for themselves.



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Our rare gem Mel rewrote the script for single women



Mel Schilling, the 'Married at First Sight' dating coach, died yesterday, aged 54, after being diagnosed with colon cancer in December 2023 (Channel 4)

OLIVIA PETTER



You meet a lot of people in my line of work. Rarely do those people leave such a lasting impression that you tell your friends and family about them. But with Mel Schilling, I couldn't help myself. She was like sunshine. And if you were lucky enough to feel her light on you, you wanted to share it with as many people as possible.

Yesterday, the *Married at First Sight* dating coach died aged 54 after being diagnosed with cancer in December 2023. Her husband, Gareth, announced the tragic news on Instagram, writing that she had “passed away peacefully today, surrounded by love”. He added: “To most of you, she was Mel Schilling – matriarch of *MAFS* and queen of reality TV. To Maddie and me, she was our wee Melsie: an incredible mum, role model, and soulmate.”

I’ve long been aware of Schilling’s lasting impact on *Married at First Sight*, which is where she built up her fierce fanbase by delivering honest, heartfelt, and empowering dating advice. But I first met her last year after she teamed up with her friend Elizabeth Day to launch an eight-week podcast series, *How to Date*, and I interviewed them both.

After spotting me at the launch party, she immediately bounded up to say hello and thank me for writing the piece, showering me with compliments and praise. We hugged and chatted for a few minutes about the dating landscape, podcasts, and modern love. This is rare, by the way; I’m lucky if the people I interview even acknowledge those pieces on social media, let alone seek me out in person at their own party.

But Mel was different. She was a deeply kind, warm, and genuine person – also rare in an industry reliant on transactional exchanges where everyone is either trying to get something from you, or look over your shoulder to find someone more important to speak to. Mel cared and helping other people mattered to her. It is why she was so good at her job and supported so many people in their search for love.

Her own story is unique. As Gareth wrote in his Instagram post, “this is a woman who became a new mum and a TV star at 42 – and nailed both”.

In many ways, she defied the limited cultural and societal scripts distributed to women. “I was single for my entire thirties,” she told *OK!*. “I wasn’t interested in anyone. I was busy travelling the world, working overseas, I was all about building my business and just living a great life.”

‘Self-compassion goes a long way,’ she told me. ‘Every dating disaster will tell you something important about what you do or don’t want in your next partner’



It wasn't until she was 39 that she met Gareth on a dating website. The two chatted long-distance for six weeks before meeting, with Mel based in Melbourne and Gareth, who is from Northern Ireland, based in Adelaide.

After a devastating miscarriage, Mel spoke openly about the experience, shedding light on an issue that many women go through in silence. Then the couple had their daughter, Maddie, 10, with the help of IVF. Meanwhile, Mel's career went from strength to strength; she moved from *MAFS Australia*, which she'd been on since 2016, to the UK's version in 2021.

When I interviewed Mel, she gave me some great dating advice I think about often. "Self-compassion goes a long way," she told me. "Every dating disaster will tell you something important about what you do or don't want in your next partner. Make sure the stories you are telling yourself about dating, relationships and partners are, if not positive, at least neutral. If they are negative or unhelpful, reframe them."

Few people speak about dating in such tender terms. But Mel knew how to help them find the best in themselves.

It broke my heart to read Mel's post just 13 days ago, in which she announced that the colon cancer she'd been diagnosed with had spread, and that, over Christmas, doctors informed her there was nothing more they could do.

It was a stark reminder that you never really know what someone is going through behind the scenes. In one snapshot, she showed us how precious time is and what is truly important. As Gareth put it: "Life can be beautiful, and life can be incredibly

cruel. But ultimately, life is fleeting, fragile, and tomorrow is promised to no one.” He continued: If you can do anything to honour Mel, please live life to the full, love your people well, and try not to sweat the small stuff.”

They are wise and astute words – and I’ll be abiding by them as much as I can. Because whatever Mel was putting out into the universe in the tragically short time she was here, it was very special indeed.



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Section 2/ The Longer Read

We quit our jobs to travel... now it's a 'job-apocalypse'

Young professionals returning from their 'sabbaticals' are faced with fierce competition, an AI-driven job market and a world where stability feels out of reach. **Helen Salter** reports



George left his job in 2025 after working for seven years as a civil engineer (Supplied)

Two years ago. Joe Wilson, a 27-year-old engineer from Bristol, quit his mechanical engineering job. After spending 10 months travelling around Latin America – which he'd saved for a year and a half to afford – he's now hoping to make a long-term move to Mexico City to live with his girlfriend, whom he met while

travelling. Unfortunately for Joe, he finds himself bearing the brunt of a job market that's in deepening trouble: "I'm back home as finding work in Mexico has been difficult; back here I can earn money doing odd jobs and bar work," he tells me.

"It's a tricky time, and especially when you're trying to look for something specific, especially if you're looking for something remote. I've got friends in similar positions that have been looking for months."

Joe is not alone. Getting a new job in 2026 is not for the faint-hearted, with official figures revealing that unemployment is holding at a near five-year high and that wage growth is continuing to slow. Jobs are also becoming harder to come by as companies decide to make operational cutbacks. Instead of training up juniors or taking on new hires, companies are prioritising automation through AI to plug skills gaps.

A survey by the British Standards Institution (BSI) of more than 850 business leaders across seven countries – the UK, the US, France, Germany, Australia, China and Japan – found that four in 10 (41 per cent) of bosses said AI was allowing them to cut the number of employees. With multiple headwinds hitting, we are heading into what some are dubbing the "job-apocalypse", and it's hardly surprising that "rejection spreadsheets" are popping up across social media as people reframe knockbacks as progress rather than failure.

Last year, I interviewed several twentysomethings who'd quit stable jobs to embark on a "mini retirement". Then, it seemed like every young person was – or at least knew someone who was – reevaluating their work-life balance, ditching the nine-to-five for an indefinite period of adventure and reflection. Travels have now been ticked off the bucket list, and with a new war raging in the Middle East, which is set to send inflation soaring and interest rates wobbling, reality is creeping back in. Suddenly, a solid nine-to-five job feels infinitely preferable to being unmoored without a stable income to rely on.



Joe Wilson's hoping to make a long-term move to Mexico City to live with his girlfriend, whom he met while travelling (Supplied)

George, 29, quit his job in Bristol at the start of 2025 after working for seven years as a civil engineer. Craving a longer break than a sabbatical, he walked out of his comfortable job and booked a one-way flight to Argentina. He used the time travelling to reflect on the kind of career he wanted, then moved in with his parents in Somerset and worked cash in hand to tide himself over. He's now reaching the one-year mark of official unemployment and is struggling to find a way back in.

"It's been challenging," George tells me. He had hoped to move to London for a fresh start, with a job that promised more creativity than his former role in civil engineering, but it has been a struggle. "I don't have direct experience in the role I'm now looking for in event design and construction, he tells me, "but the whole point of my break was to reassess my direction and explore something new."

George received an email last week from an international conference venue in London, from which he was hoping to

receive a job offer. It is pausing recruitment indefinitely due to a shift in demand/general concern about the economy/war.

It's not just young adults who are feeling the squeeze, however. It's an issue that's felt across the board – from graduates trying to get a foot on the ladder, to older workers who stepped away for a better work-life balance, or were made redundant and now fear their age is working against them in a job market that is as tough as they have ever known.

The rise of AI is a significant factor felt by candidates of all ages. “I think what's changed is that, because of AI, it's so easy to apply for jobs now,” Alice Stapleton, a career-change coach, tells me.



Were they wrong to believe that the grass is greener? Perhaps they'd have been better off watering the grass they were on by understanding why they were unhappy in a role instead of just walking away from it



“This means so many more are applying for the same role, making competition rife for each vacancy. It's tough to make yourself stand out. This is even harder if you're looking to change roles or industry,” she tells me. “Fewer employers are willing to take risks.”

For every role on offer, an average of 22 people are now competing for it, according to Totaljobs, and rising wages in an atmosphere of global insecurity are adding to the nervousness around hiring. “Connections and your network are key,” Alice

tells me. “You can’t rely on online applications only. It needs to be a multi-pronged approach.”

Official figures paint a gloomy picture for those out of work. A friend of mine has been out of full-time employment since autumn 2024, and has used their time off to travel and is now tutoring to stay financially afloat.

So, were workers too quick to walk out of a job they feel doesn’t serve them? Were they wrong to believe that the grass is greener? Perhaps they’d have been better off watering the grass they were on by understanding why they were unhappy in a role instead of just walking away from it. Had they just grown bored? Could they have set clearer boundaries or had those hard conversations with their manager instead? By shifting their perspective away from quitting, would they be in a better position now?

Back to my tutor friend. While she’s not in her dream job yet, she’d still rather be doing what she is now than be in the wrong job. Instead of accepting the first role that came their way, she has turned down several offers in different industries across the UK. Why? She’s still weighing up which career path is truly meant to be for her.

Leah Farmer, a life and leadership coach, tells me that when it comes to leaving versus staying, it’s rarely black and white. “Some workplaces are genuinely toxic. In those cases, I tell people to run, not walk, to get out as quickly as they can,” she tells me. “But a lot of people leave for less urgent reasons. It’s incredibly expensive to replace a good employee, so most managers would rather find a way to keep someone than lose them. But many employees leave emotionally before they’ve even tried to advocate for themselves. I often say, if you’re already thinking about leaving, what would it hurt to be honest and ask for what you need?”



'I've got friends that have been looking for work for months' (Getty)

Leah tells me that if a client knows they're going to move on eventually, she'll encourage them to ask questions such as 'What could I still learn here?', and 'Is there a skill I can build, a pattern I can break, a conversation I need to practice?'. "It might be technical. It might be about communication or leadership. Either way, take advantage of the known while you still have it," she says. "It's all part of building your reputation and strengthening your personal brand, even if you're doing it quietly while planning your next move."

If you do find yourself nervously checking LinkedIn a little more than you'd like, a practical step which Leah advises to improve your odds and make a successful return is to define your personal values. "Not the kind of values you write on a Post-it and never look at again, but the deep stuff that actually influences your decisions and behaviour," she says. "A lot of people talk about wanting alignment, but when I ask them to name their top three values, they struggle. Once they get clear, it becomes much easier to filter opportunities and know when something feels off. The clearer they are about what matters to them, the better decisions they make."

Despite the hardship of finding a job amid a hiring crisis and navigating a long-distance relationship, Joe still believes his mini-retirement wasn't the wrong thing to do. "I think quitting

has given me a great opportunity to learn what I want out of work and life,” he tells me. “I’m feeling a lot more motivated to try and start my own business, and less scared. I’d also love to continue to travel as much as possible – having a fully remote job is still the ideal situation for me.”

How does George look back on his decision to quit? “I’m fortunate that I can afford to live at the moment with little earnings, but in the interest of my long-term happiness, it’s given me a chance to think about the bigger picture for the first time ever.”

Things may be starting to look up for George, who has secured his first interview in London next week. “I hope to be more connected to my colleagues in my next role, feeling more alike to them may lead to more work, socialising and new friendships. Wouldn’t that be a happy ending!”

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Section 2



ON THIS DAY



The recently married John Lennon and Yoko Ono began their 'bed-in for peace' in the Presidential Suite of the Hilton Hotel, Amsterdam, on this day in 1969 (Getty)

1306: Robert Bruce was crowned King of Scots at Scone.

1655: Titan, Saturn's largest moon, was discovered by Dutch astronomer Christiaan Huygens.

1807: The Slave Trade Act became law. The act abolished the slave trade in Britain and Ireland.

1843: The Thames Tunnel, designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, opened to pedestrians between Rotherhithe and

Wapping in London.

1895: Italian troops invaded Abyssinia (Ethiopia).

1919: US president Woodrow Wilson's dream of a League of Nations became a reality after the League Covenant was adopted at the Paris Peace Conference.

1954: RCA manufactured the first colour TV set, featuring a 12.5in screen and costing \$1,000.

1955: US Customs seized copies of Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl" as obscene.

1957: Six nations (West Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) signed the Treaty of Rome to create the European Economic Community.

1969: A week after their marriage, John Lennon and Yoko Ono began their week-long "bed-in" peace protest at the Amsterdam Hilton Hotel.

1975: Saudi Arabia's King Faisal was assassinated by his nephew Prince Faisal Ibu Musaed, who was later executed for the killing.

1980: Robert Runcie was enthroned as the 102nd archbishop of Canterbury.

1980: The British Olympic Association announced it would defy the government and send athletes to the Olympic Games in Moscow despite the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, which caused a United States-led boycott of the Games.

1989: The Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race crews both had women coxes for the first time. Oxford won by two and a half lengths.

1992: Pakistan beat England by 22 runs to win the ICC Cricket World Cup in Melbourne, Australia.

1996: The EU's veterinarian committee banned the export of British beef and its by-products due to fears over mad cow disease (BSE).

2002: Kenneth Wolstenholme, the BBC football commentator responsible for the immortal 1966 World Cup final line, "Some

people are on the pitch... they think it's all over. It is now", died, aged 81.

On this day last year: An independent KC found "credible evidence of unlawful harassment of two women" by MP Rupert Lowe and "male members of his team", Reform UK said.

Birthdays

Richard O'Brien, actor/writer, 84; **Paul Michael Glaser**, actor, 83; **Sir Elton John**, singer/songwriter, 79; **Sarah Jessica Parker**, actor, 61; **Cathy Dennis**, singer/songwriter, 57; **Melanie Blatt**, singer, 51; **Lee Pace**, actor, 47; Oscar-winning actor **Mikey Madison**, 27.

PA

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Should we be worried about travel to Northern Cyprus?



Kyrenia harbour is one of the highlights of Northern Cyprus, a region that only Turkey recognises as an independent republic (Getty/iStock)

Q My daughter is going on holiday to my sister-in-law's apartment in Northern Cyprus. She is flying into Larnaca. Should we have any concerns considering the current situation in the Middle East?

Neil W

A I understand your concern. The UK has two sovereign bases in Cyprus. At the start of the Iran conflict, there were attempted

missile and drone attacks by Iran on one of those bases, RAF Akrotiri. This is close to the city of Limassol, but some distance from Larnaca. Airlines, including easyJet, suspended flights to Cyprus for several days, but have since resumed flying. “The flights are full,” I was told by the easyJet chief executive, Kenton Jarvis.

As Easter approaches, many thousands of British holidaymakers will be flying out to Cyprus. The most significant warning from the Foreign Office is directed at British nationals in the sovereign base areas, telling them to follow instructions from the base administration. The advice also notes: “Regional escalation poses significant security risks and has led to travel disruption.” However, there is no reason that I can see to be concerned about your daughter’s safety. She will, I presume, take one of the frequent buses direct from Larnaca airport to the capital, Nicosia, and walk across the green line that divides the official Republic of Cyprus from the self-styled Turkish republic of Northern Cyprus – recognised by no country other than Turkey.

Once in the breakaway enclave, she can continue her journey to your sister-in-law’s location. If there is any possible threat before or during her flight, the airlines will simply stay away. Should a further attack take place while she is there, all the evidence is that it will be aimed at military targets. Your daughter will be at a safe distance. And to demonstrate my confidence in travel to Cyprus, I have just booked a trip in May, which I am very much looking forward to.

Email your question to s@hols.tv or tweet @SimonCalder

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Section 2/ Art review

England, my England

A new Hurvin Anderson retrospective absorbingly fills the Tate's galleries with resonant depictions of barbershops, Black heroes and English suburbia, writes **Mark Hudson**



Razor sharp: Anderson's 'Shear Cut' from 2023 (Richard Ivey)

★★★★☆

Tate Britain, London

Born in the Handsworth area of Birmingham in 1965, the first British-born child of Jamaican parents, Hurvin Anderson got his first blast in the spotlight with a Turner Prize nomination in 2017. Since then, he's earned a reputation as one of Britain's

most skilful and genuinely experimental painters, building to this major Tate retrospective.

Anderson's mission, defined in the show's opening text, is "to see the Black vision", to "broaden out" the view of life in Britain, a place where, he says, "your vision shrinks somehow". For all this apparently subversive intent, Anderson is big on artistic virtues we like to think of as typically British: emotional reticence and a doggedly patient focus on what's in front of him. And he has created some of the most resonant images of English suburban life I can think of.

Sliding (2015), which dominates the first room, is a large-scale blizzard of dark green smears overlain with dripping yellow, that might be taken for a slightly ominous, Caribbean forest-scape, of which there are many later in the exhibition. But a glance into the background reveals what appear to be the neatly maintained paths and fences of an English suburban park. The painting is typical of Anderson in appearing at once very freeform and very precise, as though even the loosest dabs of paint were painstakingly thought out. Indeed, his decision to leave in some of the lines from the grid he used to transpose the original photograph to the large canvas, is at once a stylistic flourish and an attempt to honestly reveal his methods. What it brings to mind is about the least likely association imaginable: the dour English realism of the interwar Euston Road School, whose capturing of reality through quasi-mathematical "measured drawing" has left them probably the least cool phenomenon in 20th-century British art.

Anderson, however, is conscious of his position in a British tradition of observational painting. And if he generally works from photographs, rather than directly from reality, that perhaps explains his ability to imbue his images with the quality of memory.

The Banqueting Palace, completed only this year, which he describes as wanting to "recapture the walk home from school", captures the mood of a rainy English dusk to a tee. Blurry figures reflect in shining pavements, with the dark venue looming in the

background. Anderson's ability to craft atmosphere with layers of wash and drips with free overpainting is highly seductive.



Mondrian-like feel: 'Jersey' (Matt Greenwood/Tate)

Audition (1999), a view of a vast municipal swimming pool, peopled with sketchily drawn swimmers, like figures in an architect's diagram, is so evocative of a certain kind of slightly repressed, old-school English experience you can practically hear the echoing voices and taste the chlorine. People, generally, are few and far between in his paintings, seen from a distance or behind or deliberately blurred. Even in his depictions of barbershops, those classic venues for Black male bonding (anyone remember the early Nineties sitcom *Desmond's*?), the customers tend to be glimpsed in mirrors, when they appear at all.

In *Is It OK To Be Black?* (2005-6) his attention is on the images of Black heroes pinned to the barber's wall: Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and various boxers. But by *Fersey* (2008), these images have been reduced to blocks of single colours, distributed around the walls with a Mondrian-like feel for the precise balance of rectangles. Clumps of hair litter the floor around the empty chairs, while in *Essentials* (2017), only the abstract patterns of the posters remain.

If this is the only completely abstract image in the exhibition, there's a constant tension, a battle almost, between his figurative images and their abstract potential, with the unsettling sense that the human presence is mostly hidden, just out of view. This is particularly apparent in paintings of Jamaica, where lush foliage is overlain by the patterns of the security grills around affluent homes. Touches of vibrant colour, such as the splash of red across the deep greens of *Ashanti Blood* (2021), can evoke disquieting colonial memories – in this case, the local name for the red flowers alludes to the massacre of African slaves during a brutally suppressed uprising in 1761.

Discussing his experiences in the Caribbean, Anderson notes in the wall text that he has always been “intrigued by the idea of a no man's land, a kind of in-between space and what that might look like, what it might mean”.

On the strength of this fascinating exhibition, everywhere is a kind of no-man's land for Anderson. But it's that quality of detachment, even alienation that gives his painting its unique quality.

My only gripe is that the “meandering” chronology – the curators' term – makes it difficult to follow the development of Anderson's art, to see how he evolved his signature approach, or if he arrived with it fully formed and has simply stuck with it.

Yet this is an absorbing survey of an undoubtedly significant figure. If I was to say that Anderson is our best hope for a standard-bearer for the great British tradition of figurative painting represented by 20th-century greats such as Bacon, Freud, Auerbach and co, that might make him sound

conservative. Very far from it. The linking factor is a commitment to developing his craft, painting, that is quite humbling.

From Thursday until 23 August

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Section 2/ TV review



Clunes is far too good for this lurid Channel 5 drama

Adam White finds the sordid details of the recent saga mesh uneasily with the demand to make entertaining viewing of the one-off special 'Power: The Downfall of Huw Edwards'



In the headlines: Martin Clunes as the disgraced BBC newsreader (Photos Channel 5)

★★☆☆☆

Arriving ahead of Channel 5's one-off, ripped-from-the-headlines dramas about Kate McCann and murderer Tracie Andrews is *Power: The Downfall of Huw Edwards*, a lurid *Goosebumps* tale about Britain's most famous disgraced

newscaster. Tacky channel? Shot under a veil of secrecy before its announcement? Angry statements by Edwards to the *Daily Mail* condemning it? Check, check, check. But *Power* isn't quite as lowbrow as you might imagine.

Star Martin Clunes is in total go-for-broke mode in the title role, uncannily furrowing his brow to just the right degree and bringing overqualified Welsh-accented gravitas to a script that asks him to repeatedly sink to all kinds of mucky carnal urges. The project he's in, though, doesn't match him: it's the kind of rush-job TV lobotomy that satisfies nothing but a viewer's baser instincts. Likely out of legal necessity, *Power* doesn't illuminate as much as it recites, running down the gory basics of a too-recent news story that – at least based on Edwards's peeved statement – isn't resolved enough to sufficiently narrativise.

While a caption at the top of the show makes clear that “some scenes, characters and text messages have been dramatised” in *Power*, it's a largely by-the-book affair, one informed by court evidence and extensive interviews with the *Sun* journalists who first reported the story, as well as the then teenager to whom he paid £35,000 in exchange for sexual images and videos. Here, the teenager is named Ryan (played with skittish naivety by Osian Morgan), who connects with Edwards at the prompting of another teenager he meets on a dating site. That teenager is Alex Williams (played by Joseph Loane), who was already exchanging pornographic material with Edwards over WhatsApp – Williams was later handed a 12-month suspended sentence for possessing and distributing images of child sex abuse, including to Edwards.

Power depicts Edwards as a prickly and aggressive benefactor to a confused teenager, sending him gifts and buying him hotel stays. Edwards's emotions can turn on a dime. He chastises Ryan's grammar, throws a strop when asked about his relationship to his sexuality, and is quick to weaponise his fame and status whenever he feels cornered: “Earn your keep and know your fucking place,” he shouts down the phone. Reporters at *The Sun* are included to relay drab exposition and the legal ins and outs of investigative journalism (it's very “*Spotlight* for

Dummies”), while Williams is nothing if not a horror movie-style paedophile, sitting alone at his computer screen and cast in moody shadow, transferring photos to Edwards while dramatic music plays.



Ryan (Osian Morgan) connects with Edwards at the prompting of another teenager he meets on a dating site

It’s all, weirdly, a bit silly – the sordid details of this saga meshing uneasily with the demand to make *Power* entertaining television. A handful of moments seem included solely for the giggles they might inspire, from Edwards limply encouraging Ryan to call him “daddy”, to Ryan’s horrified stepfather exclaiming, “You’re telling me fucking Huw Edwards off the telly is gay for Ryan?” Hilarious! But this is, fundamentally, a story about men sending and receiving images of children being sexually abused. It requires a sensitivity that *Power* occasionally gestures to, but can’t sustain for the entirety of its 90-minute runtime.

In his statement yesterday, Edwards expressed sorrow for his involvement with Williams and reiterated that he had pleaded guilty to his crimes. But he notably didn’t express sorrow for his interactions with the 17-year-old, while stating that he is “making an effort to produce my own account of these terrible events”. Which is just what we need. He also claimed he wasn’t given enough time by *Power*’s production company to comment

on the show (a caption at the end of the programme reads that Edwards “declined”), while calling into question the legality of its existence. “It is difficult to see how this approach can be considered remotely responsible or fair, or be in compliance with key sections of the Ofcom code on broadcast standards,” he wrote. (In its own statement, Channel 5 said: “*Power: The Downfall of Huw Edwards* is based on extensive interviews with the victim, his family, the journalists who revealed his story, text exchanges between the victim and Edwards, and court reporting. It has been produced in accordance with Ofcom’s broadcasting code. All allegations made in the film were put to Huw Edwards via his solicitors six weeks before transmission.”)

But the back and forth, and Edwards’s claim to have “his side” of the events, leaves the story suddenly feeling unfinished, or at least more icky than it is already. And you can’t help but wonder what the use is of shows like this, which sift through publicly available information but can’t (or won’t) place it in a wider context or do anything beyond relay the facts – all for an audience asked to gasp and be disgusted. A quality Martin Clunes performance or not, it just doesn’t seem worth it.

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Business news in brief



Fever-Tree's annual profits slumped last year as the firm dealt with a number of extenuating factors, including US tariffs (Reuters)

Drinks brand warns of legal battle with Environment Agency

Premium mixer brand Fever-Tree has reported a 16 per cent decline in its annual profits, attributing the downturn to a contested £2.8m packaging tax and ongoing integration costs from its US partnership with Molson Coors.

The company's underlying earnings for 2025 fell to £42.4m, a significant drop from £50.7m in 2024. This figure includes a £2.8m provision, earmarked in anticipation of a potential loss in its legal battle against the Environment Agency.

Fever-Tree is challenging the Extended Producer Responsibility packaging tax, contending that certain glass bottles distributed to bars and restaurants should be exempt, but is setting aside cash for potential future liability. Fever-Tree said it had also seen a tariff impact as it was making the majority of US products in the UK after winding down a local US bottling contract ahead of the Molson Coors tie-up.

Results showed pre-tax profits fell to £29.9m from £35.5m in 2024 as underlying revenues rose 3 per cent on a constant currency basis to £375.3m.

B&Q owner hails ‘rapid progress’ as profits jump

Home improvement giant Kingfisher has revealed a jump in profits for the past year on the back of cost-saving efforts and “standout” performances from its B&Q and Screwfix brands.

The FTSE 100 group, which also owns French brand Castorama, revealed pre-tax profits rose by 23 per cent to £378m for the year to 31 January. Meanwhile, adjusted profits were up 6 per cent to £560m. It expects profits to grow again this year, guiding towards adjusted profits of between £565m and £625m for the current financial year.

Chief executive Thierry Garnier said he expects “limited” cost impact from the US-Israeli conflict with Iran. Total sales across the group grew by 1.3 per cent to £12.95bn for the year, linked to strong sales in the UK, with like-for-like growth of 3.3 per cent for B&Q and 3.2 per cent for Screwfix.

Revolut announces record annual profit

Fintech giant Revolut has announced a record annual profit of £1.7bn, alongside a significant surge in its customer base, as it reaffirms ambitious plans to reach 100 million customers globally by mid-2027.

The digital banking firm, which recently secured its long-awaited full banking licence in the UK, reported pre-tax profits

of £1.7bn, a substantial rise from £1.1bn in the preceding year. The company also applied for a banking licence in the US in March and currently operates as a licensed bank in over 30 of its 40 markets worldwide.

Nik Storonsky, co-founder and chief executive of Revolut, said: “We are proving that our technology-driven operating model continues to drive rapid expansion and record profitability.” The group has started rolling out current accounts to a small number of new UK customers and will expand this over the coming weeks.

Clearing bank fined £2m for misleading watchdog

The Bank of England’s banking watchdog has imposed a £2m fine on the Bank of London and its parent company, Oplyse Holdings, for “failing to act with integrity” and misleading the regulator regarding its financial position.

The Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) said the breaches were deemed to warrant a significantly higher penalty of £12m, the PRA reduced the fine to £2m after the companies demonstrated that “such a penalty would cause serious financial hardship”.

The clearing bank, launched in 2021 with an initial valuation of £820m, has faced considerable financial difficulties in recent years; latest accounts reveal widening losses, reaching almost £24m in 2024.

Notably, former Labour grandee Peter Mandelson served on the group’s board of directors until 2024. The Bank of London said the breaches took place under previous ownership and management.

PA



‘Egyptian King’ Salah calls time on his Anfield career

The third-highest scorer in Liverpool’s history, Mo Salah said he would ‘never walk alone’ as he confirmed his ninth season on Merseyside would be his last, writes **Jamie Braidwood**



Salah won his second Premier League title with Liverpool last season (AFP/Getty)

Mohamed Salah has announced that he will be leaving Liverpool at the end of the season.

The Egyptian, 33, is the third-highest scorer in Liverpool’s history and won two Premier Leagues, the Champions League,

the FA Cup, the League Cup and the Club World Cup in his nine years at Anfield.

The forward has shattered records at Liverpool since he was signed from Roma in 2017, scoring 255 goals in 435 appearances in all competitions, and was the unanimous player of the year as the Reds lifted the Premier League title last season. He signed a two-year contract extension towards the final weeks of last campaign, but Liverpool said an agreement has been reached to end that early.

This campaign has been more difficult for both Salah and Liverpool. The player gave an explosive interview to reporters in November, accusing the club of throwing him “under the bus”. He later apologised and will now be set for an emotional farewell ahead of the final weeks of the season.

“Hello, everyone. Unfortunately the day has come,” Salah said in a message posted on social media yesterday. “This is the first part of my farewell. I will be leaving Liverpool at the end of the season.

“I wanted to start by saying that I never imagined how deeply this club, this city, this people, would become part of my life. Liverpool is not just a football club, it’s a passion, it’s a history, it’s a spirit. I can’t explain in words to anyone not part of this club.

“We celebrated victory, we won the most important trophies, and we fought together through the hardest time in our life. I want to thank everyone who was part of this club throughout my time here, especially the teammates, past and present, and to the fans... I don’t have enough words: the support you showed me through the best time of my career and you stood by me in the toughest times, it’s something I will never forget. And something I will take with me always.



Salah is set for an emotional Liverpool farewell (Getty)

“Leaving is never easy. You gave me the best time of my life, I will be always one of you. This club will always be my home to me and to my family. Thank you for everything. Because of all of you, I will never walk alone.”

A statement from Liverpool read: “Mohamed Salah is to bring the curtain down on his illustrious career with Liverpool at the end of the 2025-26 season. The forward has reached an agreement with the Reds that will see him close a remarkable nine-year chapter at Anfield.

“Salah expressed his wish to make this announcement to the supporters at the earliest possible opportunity to provide transparency about his future due to his respect and gratitude for them.”

Salah could yet end his Liverpool career with more silverware, with Arne Slot’s side facing Manchester City in the FA Cup quarter-finals and Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League quarter-finals following the international break, although another Premier League title is beyond them after an underwhelming title defence overall.

But Salah’s place in Liverpool folklore is secure. Only Ian Rush and Roger Hunt have scored more goals for the Reds than the “Egyptian King”, who will leave Anfield as one of the club’s

greatest ever players. Last season, Salah became the fourth-highest scorer in Premier League history and is the top-scoring foreign player ever in the top-flight, with 191 goals.

A transformative figure in Liverpool's modern-day history, Salah was signed under Jurgen Klopp for around £37m in 2017 and played an instrumental role in the club's run to the Champions League final in his debut season in England.



The Egyptian scored in the 2019 Champions League final as Liverpool defeated Tottenham in Madrid (Reuters)

Disaster would strike in the final, with Salah injured in the early stages of Liverpool's 3-1 defeat to Real Madrid, but he would get his hands on his first trophy for the Reds a year later when he scored a penalty in the 2-0 victory over Tottenham in the 2019 final.

Forming a formidable front three along with Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino, Salah then helped fire Liverpool to a first league title in 30 years when Klopp's side romped to victory in the Covid-impacted campaign, lifting the Premier League title in front of an empty Anfield in July 2020.

A charge for an unprecedented quadruple resulted in more silverware in the Carabao Cup and FA Cup in 2021-22, but there was more heartbreak – to familiar foes – as Liverpool lost

another Champions League final to Real Madrid in Paris and were edged out by Pep Guardiola's Manchester City in the Premier League title race.

Klopp's departure at the end of 2022-23, after his own remarkable nine years at Anfield, was followed by another record-breaking campaign from Salah; he scored 29 goals and made 18 assists as Liverpool won their 20th league title in Slot's first season. With Salah's contract running out towards the end of last campaign, the confirmation of a two-year extension was celebrated, and the Egyptian marked Liverpool's title with a selfie in front of the Kop.

There has been a dramatic decline in Salah's output this term, however, with just five goals and six assists for a player who had always reached at least 18 Premier League goals in his eight previous seasons at Anfield. Liverpool may not be able to command a transfer fee, with Salah set to depart as a free agent this summer, but the memories left behind will be priceless.

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Tuchel left to ponder on a World Cup numbers game

The England manager has selected a 35-man squad for this month's internationals and still has plenty of thinking to do over who will make the cut this summer, writes **Richard Jolly**



How will Thomas Tuchel configure his squad for the tournament? (PA)

First, Thomas Tuchel could give out the good news. In a couple of months, the England manager will have to dispense the bad.

By naming 35 players in his squad to face Uruguay and Japan, and then adding Harvey Barnes and Ben White as replacements,

Tuchel is guaranteeing he will have to disappoint plenty when reducing that to the 26 who make his cut for the World Cup.

And yet, in a way, part of the German's task is how he goes from 23 to 26: the strategy involved in finding the last three members of his party. If Tuchel takes two players for every position, and has to choose a third goalkeeper, he has three other slots available: what should be his thinking in filling them?

A fifth centre-back?



Harry Maguire may get a recall for the World Cup with John Stones lacking match fitness (PA)

The logic of it may depend upon his best central defender. Because John Stones has played so little football for Manchester City, with no Premier League start since October, it would be a risk to take him as one of just four centre-backs, despite the excellent fitness records of Ezri Konsa and Marc Guehi. Selecting five could also aid the chances of the recalled Harry Maguire, who has spent spells on the sidelines himself in recent years. Few of Tuchel's full-backs are plausible centre-back options: only the late addition White and Reece James, his first-choice right-back, so that may be an added reason to go with five specialists in the middle.

Five full-backs?



Reece James missed out on the March squad due to a fresh hamstring injury (Getty)

James had spent longer on the sidelines than Stones in recent seasons, but, while he sits out the current squad, he has made 36 appearances this season. Before the Chelsea captain was hurt, the sense was that Tuchel was likelier to take four full-backs, in part because conceivably it still gives him three choices on either flank. Tino Livramento and Djed Spence can play on both sides of the back four, while he has used two centre-backs – in Konsa and Jarell Quansah – at right-back, plus Dan Burn can be the world's tallest left-back. It may count against Trent Alexander-Arnold that, with James cemented as the first-choice right-back, Tuchel seems to prefer versatility to a second specialist.

Five central midfielders?



Everton's James Garner offers another dimension for Tuchel (Getty)

Another area where it had looked like Tuchel would be content with a quartet. There are other ways of bolstering the contingent in the centre of the pitch: if Jude Bellingham is classed as a No 10, he can nevertheless operate in a deeper role, while Nico O'Reilly seems likely to travel as a left-back, but spent his youth in midfield, and has played there at times in 2026. But the call-up of James Garner offers another dimension and a different way of configuring his squad. Garner is a central midfielder by preference but has flourished for David Moyes in a series of roles. Take him to the World Cup as the fifth midfielder and the 25-year-old could double up as the third right-back. Or if Tuchel took both Kobbie Mainoo and Adam Wharton, he may have five out-and-out central midfielders.

Three No 10s?



England has strength in depth at No 10 (Getty)

It has looked a likely scenario, simply because of the depth of talent in the position. As it is, Tuchel may still have to omit a supposedly generational talent, in either Phil Foden or Cole Palmer, because Morgan Rogers and Bellingham – despite being excluded from the squad in October – seem shoo-ins. It would nevertheless appear imbalanced if Tuchel took four No 10s. The saving grace is that each is versatile: while Tuchel seems to want game-stretching width on the flanks, which is not Palmer's forte, he can play off the right. Foden was used in attack in November. Eberechi Eze has scored for England as a left-winger. Morgan Gibbs-White, only really a No 10, has faded from the picture.

A fifth winger?



Aiming high: Eberechi Eze could be the fifth winger that also has capabilities infield (PA)

Of course, Eze could be that fifth winger. If Tuchel only takes four, difficult decisions beckon. On the left, two of his favourites have been Anthony Gordon and Marcus Rashford, each offering similar pace, but Eze can come infield more; Barnes's addition to the group only complicates the equation. On the right, he has so far avoided making a definitive decision as to whether Noni Madueke or Jarrod Bowen is Bukayo Saka's immediate deputy.

A third striker?



Could Dominic Calvert-Lewin find his way into Tuchel's plans? (Getty)

Tuchel has three No 9s in his group: an intriguing element is that Ollie Watkins, often Harry Kane's understudy, is not one of them. If he remains out in the cold, it could seem a straight shootout between the two Dominics, Solanke and Calvert-Lewin, for the back-up role; it is harder to see both being chosen. There are other ways of finding another centre-forward: Foden did well as a false nine against Serbia in November, Bowen sometimes leads the line for West Ham, Gordon is now Newcastle's central figure, and Rashford has played more games than any as the spearhead of a side. Gareth Southgate took three centre-forwards to Euro 2024 – though Ivan Toney's selection was partly for his penalty-taking. Tuchel is more likely to go with two and to use one of his extra three picks elsewhere.

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Crucible keeps its crown – now the real work begins

A long-term deal sees the World Snooker Championship stay in Sheffield, writes **Luke Baker**, but all eyes are now on the venue's redevelopment project that will define its success



Theatre of dreams: staying at the Crucible and basking in the near half-century of snooker history baked into its very walls was always the right call (Getty)

Barry Hearn once said that he didn't want his tombstone to read: "This is the man who took the World Snooker Championship away from the Crucible." After yesterday's news, he can rest easy that won't be the case.

Snooker's most prestigious tournament is staying in Sheffield for the foreseeable future after a deal was struck to keep the event at the iconic Crucible Theatre until at least 2045, with an option to extend that to 2050. Even the seemingly ageless and endlessly dynamic Hearn won't still be pulling snooker's strings as he approaches his 100th birthday. Although if anyone can...

The old agreement was set to expire in 2027, on the 50th anniversary of the tournament's first trip to the Crucible in 1977, and the drumbeat of questions surrounding its future was growing ever louder the closer that deadline came, threatening to overshadow the tournament itself. A sentiment not helped, it must be said, by Hearn himself repeatedly making vague threats about taking the World Championship to Saudi Arabia or China or anywhere else unless Sheffield City Council stumped up more cash, redeveloped the theatre or offered any other variety of sweeteners.

And the 77-year-old's words carried weight. Although he ostensibly stepped aside as chair of the World Snooker Tour (WST) in 2021, his replacement Steve Dawson has neither the same charisma nor desire to engage with the media, meaning that Hearn, in his role as president of Matchroom Sport – the organisation that effectively runs the WST – remains the face of snooker from an administrative perspective and ultimately still holds the power.



The Crucible will remain the home of the World Snooker Championship (PA)

“I thought we didn’t have a home at one stage – I can’t tell you how pleased I am,” said Hearn of the new deal. “Snooker’s dream was to stay at the Crucible. This is the lifeblood of our sport and we cannot build something with the IP value of what the Crucible brings our sport.

“Without the Crucible, snooker just doesn’t look the same for me, an old man at the end of his career. I am so delighted that the rest of my life will be watching snooker at the Crucible.”

He would undoubtedly argue that his 2024 comments saying money “has the edge over history and heritage every time” or his ultimatum last year that Sheffield “has to come up with a way of showing us that they’re going to treat us with respect and give us the type of facilities we require”, otherwise the World Championship would be taken away, were simply good business.

And perhaps he is right. The gambit appears to have paid off. The World Championship’s future is now secure in Sheffield, and Hearn has got his wish for the Crucible to be transformed and redeveloped, with a £45m upgrade and expansion project scheduled to begin in 2028.

It’s a win-win for the sport. Staying at the Crucible and basking in the near half-century of snooker history baked into its very walls was always the right call. Hearn can extol the importance of money all he likes, but you can’t buy the echoes of the past that ooze from the venue.



Barry Hearn expressed his delight that the tournament was remaining in Sheffield (PA)

This is the arena where Alex Higgins wept to be united with his young daughter after his emotional 1982 World Championship triumph; where underdog Dennis Taylor snatched the unlikeliest of victories over the unbeatable Steve Davis on the final black in 1985 as 18.5 million people around the UK watched on TV; where people's champion Jimmy White had his heart broken in the final on six occasions; where Mark Selby claimed one of his four world titles on the same day his beloved Leicester City clinched the Premier League crown; where snooker's greatest genius Ronnie O'Sullivan has racked up a record-equalling seven world crowns; and where just last year, Zhao Xintong finally became China's first snooker world champion 20 years after the sport's boom in the country began in earnest.

You can feel the weight of those moments when you visit the venue. It's a snooker Mecca that thousands make the pilgrimage to every year and offers a connection to history that nowhere else can. Other venues would be bigger, flashier and probably more lucrative, given the 980-capacity theatre sells out pretty much every session across the fortnight, but that is not the sole factor.

Fiscal reality is important for any entertainment venture, but sport has never been a purely financial proposition; to claim it is fundamentally misses the point. Millions of people are emotionally invested in sport because of the history, narrative and meaning we attach to it. We *care*. Football clubs are meaningful to their local community; history-soaked venues connect people to the heart of their chosen sport.



The Crucible has snooker history oozing from it (Getty)

To attach importance to objects, moments, events and memories separates humans from animals. Without emotional investment, sport becomes the meaningless playing of silly games. And it is never meaningless. Just ask the millions enraptured every day.

To take the World Championship away from the Crucible would have been sacrilege, taking a sledgehammer to history for the sake of a few pounds. But now the future is secure, it *is* time to optimise the venue because the Crucible critics aren't completely wrong. When O'Sullivan describes it as "not fit for purpose", or Hossein Vafaei more starkly calls it "smelly" and compares it to a car garage, there is (some) validity to those claims.

It is not a world-class sports venue in 2026. The theatre is cramped, the spectator and player facilities are sub-par, there is almost no room to capitalise on the huge corporate interest around the event, and it means that snooker is forced to sell

itself short. That makes the proposed redevelopment absolutely crucial to the long-term health of the sport. Snooker's flagship annual event needs to be as prestigious as it can.

The £45m investment to transform the Crucible is said to be made up of £35m from the UK government and local government, plus £10m coming from the private sector and philanthropic partners. If it works, everyone benefits.



A rendering of how the redeveloped Crucible Theatre may look (World Snooker Tour)

The capacity will be increased by around 500 seats from the current 980, which will be a huge boon to WST and Sheffield's coffers, and spectator facilities will be improved. On paper, this is the ideal solution. The works are expected to take around 18 months to complete, starting in the summer of 2028, meaning the World Championship will move to an alternative temporary venue for one or perhaps two years.

When the threat of taking the tournament away from Sheffield was being bandied about, one of the major problems was that no concrete, viable alternative was ever put forward. Nebulous suggestions of Saudi Arabia, China, Berlin or Alexandra Palace in London were floated but with no firm plan. This temporary move is a golden opportunity to make one of these visions a reality – for a year or two.

Whatever way you dress it up, this is a hugely positive day for snooker, with the best outcome for all concerned. That should rightly be celebrated. But now the challenge is to ensure that the

Crucible redevelopment is a success – and big British infrastructure projects don't exactly have a flawless record in that area.

But for the true long-term health of snooker, this one simply has to work.

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Sports news in brief



Alessia Russo scores for Arsenal against Chelsea last night (AFP/Getty)

Arsenal lead in Champions League quarter-final first leg

Goals from Stina Blackstenius, Chloe Kelly and Alessia Russo gave Arsenal a 3-1 victory in the first leg of the all-London Women's Champions League quarter-final against Chelsea.

Lauren James scored a sublime goal to keep Chelsea in the tie, but defending champions Arsenal will take a healthy lead to Stamford Bridge for next week's return leg.

The Gunners went ahead after 22 minutes when Katie McCabe swung in a free-kick and Blackstenius headed home her first Champions League goal of the season.

They doubled their lead 10 minutes later when Beth Mead played a crossfield pass to England teammate Kelly, who took a touch before lashing a 20-yard drive underneath Blues keeper Hannah Hampton.

Chelsea did haul themselves back into the match when James wrapped her left foot around the ball 25 yards out and watched it curl spectacularly into the top corner.

But Russo restored the two-goal advantage when she was played in by Blackstenius, flicked the ball up and volleyed past Hampton for another special goal.

Ipswich faces fan backlash after Farage visit

Ipswich Town FC is facing a backlash after Reform UK leader Nigel Farage staged a photo opportunity at its Portman Road stadium. But the club is understood to have been unaware of the full extent of the event until social media posts emerged. No official invitation was extended by Ipswich to Mr Farage for the Monday event, it is understood.

Portman Road Events, which manages private tours of the stadium, is understood to have taken a booking on behalf of Reform for Monday afternoon. However, the Championship club only became aware of what was involved later that day when posts appeared on the party's official account.

Reform posted "Portman Road Awaits" on X on Monday evening, and Mr Farage followed up with a post yesterday morning. It came after Reform held a party rally at nearby Trinity Park. The club has declined to comment. However, some supporters have criticised them on X, with one describing it as "PR suicide for a family club".

Meanwhile, the Football Association's ambition for at least 25 per cent of England men's coaching staff to be from a non-white

background by 2028 is “utter woke nonsense”, a Reform MP has said.

Suella Braverman, who defected from the Conservatives to Reform earlier this year, has written to FA chief executive Mark Bullingham calling on the governing body to scrap the target.

Ms Braverman, who was sacked by Rishi Sunak as the home secretary and called anti-war marches “hate marches”, said: “There is no place for discrimination of any kind in our national game. Yet your DEI strategy does precisely that, it divides rather than unites.”

McCullum and Key ‘very lucky’ to keep jobs, says Vaughan

Former England cricket captain Michael Vaughan maintains both head coach Brendon McCullum and managing director Rob Key have been “very, very lucky” to keep their jobs following a disastrous away Ashes defeat.

After the English Cricket Board’s thorough review, McCullum and Key remain, while captain Ben Stokes also continues, but Vaughan was left baffled by the outcome.

He told the BBC’s *Test Match Special*: “I think they’re very, very lucky. There’s not many management groups that deliver something so poor away from home in an Ashes series and get the chance to carry on.

“They seem to me it’s like a football management team. I actually felt if one went, they all went. They’ve had some exciting times but they haven’t won enough. What England fans are looking for now is, what change (will happen)?”

Griezmann seals deal to join Orlando

Atletico Madrid have confirmed their all-time leading goalscorer Antoine Griezmann will join Major League Soccer side Orlando in the summer.

Atletico said Griezmann, who has scored 211 goals in 488 appearances for the LaLiga club, had recently travelled to Orlando with their permission to finalise a two-year contract, with the option of a further year.

Griezmann, a World Cup winner with France in 2018 and runner-up in 2022, joined Atletico from Real Sociedad in 2014. He became the world's sixth most expensive signing at the time when joining Barcelona for £107m in 2019 before returning to the Metropolitano Stadium in 2021.

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