



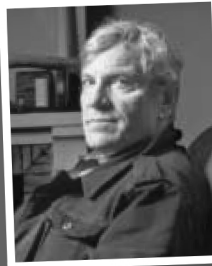
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First for rugby

England storm to record 44-8 win over France Sport, pages 60-64



Silver fox, moi?
How to be a
65-year-old
heart-throb Times2

UK sends aircraft carrier to Pacific in show of strength to China

Lucy Fisher Defence Correspondent

Britain's new aircraft carrier will be sent to China's backyard in a show of strength as President Xi's government increasingly disputes Pacific waters.

Gavin Williamson, the defence secretary, will say today that Britain must be ready "to use hard power" to protect its interests. He will warn that

Russia and China are blurring the boundaries between peace and war and declare that Britain must stand up to those who "flout international law", a principle that "may lead to us intervene ourselves".

He will unveil details of a global tour that the new aircraft carrier, one of two costing a combined £6.2 billion, will undertake, carrying two squadrons of

British and American F-35 multirole stealth fighter jets. HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, the country's largest ever warship, will be sent to the Middle East and Mediterranean, as well as the Pacific, where the Royal Navy narrowly avoided a clash with the Chinese. Last summer Beijing accused London of provocation after the Royal Navy warship HMS *Albion* sailed near the contested

Paracel islands in the South China Sea. China responded by sending a frigate and two helicopters but the attempt to escort HMS *Albion* out of the waters failed and it continued its passage.

The South China Sea is the world's busiest commercial shipping route. In 2017 Boris Johnson, then foreign secretary, signalled that the carrier would be used to conduct "freedom of naviga-

tion" operations there. In recent months other Royal Navy vessels have joined the US in exercises there but avoided entering the 12-mile zone around disputed territory claimed by China.

Last year the USS *Decatur* came within 41 metres of a Chinese destroyer, ratcheting up tensions. And in response to Beijing reneging on its 2015 promise Continued on page 2, col 5

Soft Brexit talks with Labour risk cabinet split

PM asks Corbyn to explain customs union plan

Kate Devlin
Chief Political Correspondent

Theresa May opened the door last night to a soft Brexit by engaging with Jeremy Corbyn on a customs union in a move that puts her at risk of losing the support of members of her cabinet.

In a letter to the Labour leader, the prime minister suggested that their parties hold further talks on the issue of a permanent customs union in an attempt to win support from Labour MPs for her Brexit plan.

She also offered guarantees on environmental and employment laws, addressing more of the opposition's central demands. Mrs May was warned, however, that by reaching out to Labour, she could prompt an exodus of ministers.

Liz Truss, chief secretary to the Treasury, failed to rule out quitting government if Mrs May backed Labour's customs union demands. Sources close to another cabinet minister said a core belief was that "a customs union was not Brexit".

Mrs May is also desperately trying to buy herself more time to renegotiate her deal with Brussels after it was heavily rejected in the Commons last month. She announced that a vote in parliament this Thursday would not be the last chance that MPs had to try to take a no-deal Brexit off the table. On February 27 they will be able to put forward plans to wrest control of the process away from the prime minister.

No 10 was unable to say when it

would put the vital "meaningful vote" on the full deal to the Commons. This has led to fears that Mrs May is trying to run down the clock in an attempt to pressurise MPs into backing it.

Britain is due to leave the EU on March 29, and if no agreement with Brussels has been signed by then, and if there is no extension to the Article 50 exit process, Britain will leave without a deal. Many MPs warn that this would be disastrous.

The Labour front bench is trying to force Mrs May to hold the meaningful vote before the end of the month; it emerged yesterday that the party was trying to draw the Speaker into the plan. It wants John Bercow to allow MPs to find the government in contempt of parliament if it fails to offer the vote.

In her letter to Mr Corbyn, published late last night, Mrs May suggests that their parties hold further talks.

A source said that the prime minister wanted MPs to vote Brexit through parliament as soon as possible and was holding out an olive branch to Mr Corbyn. But he added that Mrs May was keen to understand more about the opposition's customs union demands.

Although she did not rule out a customs union in her letter, she said that part of her deal with Brussels, the political declaration, already offers "the benefits of a customs union".

"I am not clear why you believe it would be preferable to seek a say in future EU trade deals rather than the ability to strike our own deals," she Continued on page 2, col 3



Royal favourite The Duchess of Cambridge arriving at the Baftas at the Albert Hall last night. Olivia Colman was named best actress for her role as Queen Anne. Page 3

Britons take a generous view of filthy rich

Oliver Moody Berlin

"We are intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich as long as they pay their taxes," the New Labour business secretary Peter Mandelson once said.

For all the modern rhetoric of smouldering public resentment against the super-rich, a German study suggests that a clear majority of Britons still share Lord Mandelson's sentiment.

A detailed survey of attitudes towards the wealthy in different countries shows that Britain is a considerably friendlier place for millionaires than its neighbours, and more easygoing than even the US. British millennials appear more kindly disposed towards the rich than any other age group, with older generations more sceptical.

Rainer Zitelmann, an economic historian in Berlin, commissioned the poll of 4,000 people in Britain, the US, France and Germany. Overall, Britons displayed the lowest level of "social envy". One in five agreed with a statement that "the super-rich, who always want more power, are to blame for many of the world's problems", compared with a quarter of Americans, a third of the French and half of Germans.

In another question, designed to measure schadenfreude, participants were asked to imagine a scenario in which a millionaire had lost a fortune through a risky investment. The British were inclined to be sympathetic by a margin of 38 to 22 per cent, while the Americans and the Germans were almost equally divided on the question.

"It was extraordinary," Dr Zitelmann said. "We developed a social envy coefficient, which measures the proportion of 'enviers' to 'non-enviers' in a society. France and Britain were at opposite ends of the spectrum."

One part of the survey asked whether people would support "drastically" curtailing the income of well-paid executives and distributing the money among their workers so that each received an extra few pounds a month. In Britain 29 per cent were in favour. In France the figure was 54 per cent.

The results appear in Dr Zitelmann's book *Society and the Rich*, which will be published in English this year. Leading article, page 29

Daily Universal Register

UK: Gavin Williamson, defence secretary, gives a speech in London about global threats; the British Horseracing Authority will decide whether to resume racing on Wednesday after an equine flu outbreak.

Nature notes



As usual, the elder trees, which are often more like large bushes, are the first to show the green glimmer of opening leaf-buds.

Very soon we shall have leaves, which are very like ash leaves, on the twigs. These early buds and leaves attract woodpigeons, which are practically vegetarians, and greatly like to eat fresh, sweet vegetable matter. They are heavy birds that wobble about as they lean forward on the grey twigs, and often have to prevent themselves from tumbling off by waving their wings. Elder twigs are full of a very soft pith, which has traditionally been used by jewellers for cleaning the mechanism in watches. The pith crumbles away in older twigs, which are left hollow, and have been used for making pea-shooters and whistles. Later in the year, of course, elder is valued for its white flowers that make a cordial, and its dark purple berries with which wine is made.

DERWENT MAY

Birthdays today



General Sir Nicholas Carter, pictured, chief of the defence staff, 60; Lord (Richard) Allan of Hallam, vice-president (policy solutions), Facebook, 53; Jennifer Aniston, actress, *Friends* (1994-2004), 50; Jeb Bush, politician, 2016 Republican presidential candidate who withdrew from the campaign, 66; Peter Conrad, literary scholar, author, *How the World Was Won: The Americanization of Everywhere* (2014), 71; Sheryl Crow, singer, *All I Wanna Do* (1993), 57; Natalie Dormer, actress, *Game of Thrones* (2012-16), 37; Sir Neil Garnham, High Court judge, 60; Anu Giri, executive director, the Dance Umbrella festival, 51; Bryan Gould, Labour MP (1974-79, 1983-94), 80; Dame Elisabeth Hoodless, executive director, Community Service Volunteers (1986-2011), 78; Michael Jackson, chief executive, Channel 4 (1997-2001), 61; Damian Lewis, actor, *Wolf Hall* (2015), 48; Carey Lowell, actress, *Licence to Kill* (1989), 58; Deborah Meaden, entrepreneur, *Dragons' Den* investor, 60; Maurice Mounsdon, flight lieutenant, who fought during the Battle of Britain, 101; Dame Mary Quant, fashion designer, popularised the miniskirt and hotpants, 85; Sarah Palin, Republican vice-presidential candidate (2008), 55; Neil Primrose, Earl of Rosebery, 90; Lord (Philip) Sales, Justice of the Supreme Court, 57; Baroness (Patricia) Sharples, Conservative Party politician, 96; Dennis Skinner, Labour MP for Bolsover (since 1970), 87; Kelly Slater, surfer, 11-time World Surf League champion, 48; Colonel Piers Storie-Pugh, chief executive, Not Forgotten Association (2011-16), 69; Sir Malcolm Walker, chairman and chief executive, Iceland Foods, 73.

On this day

In 1990 Nelson Mandela was released from prison in South Africa after 27 years in captivity.

The last word

"Railway termini. They are our gates to the glorious and the unknown. Through them we pass out into adventure and sunshine, to them, alas! we return." EM Forster, novelist, *Howards End* (1910).



Witness Protection

Charities have asked the police to stop releasing without bail those suspected of violent crime. Suspects also deserve the security of formal arrest

Those who report crimes should be able to do so without a fear of harassment or revenge attack by those whom they name. It is therefore of concern that police are allowing people suspected of serious crimes the scope to contact their accusers. This is the subject of a formal complaint to police by domestic violence charities, which accuses them of failing victims by allowing those suspected of rape and sexual offences to be released without limits on their behaviour. They are right to raise the problem: change is needed.

The charities, led by the Centre for Women's Justice, are to lodge a supercomplaint, a method by which certain organisations can point out harmful patterns in policing, demanding that the police make a change to their policy. The complaint concerns a worrying trend: the number of suspected criminals placed on bail has fallen sharply. Bail allows police to put strict constraints on suspects, meaning, for example, that they can be stopped from contacting their accusers. Instead, the police now tend to release suspects "under investigation", a far more lenient matter, which leaves victims and the general public at risk.

In one such case, that of Mary, a man accused of violence and rape was released without bail, allowing him to continue threatening his partner

without legal consequence. Once released, he graphically described killing her with a knife and physically attacked her father. The events also had the effect of disheartening her in her efforts to further involve the police. It took two years from her first complaint for her partner to be arrested and placed on bail.

This deeply worrying problem is a result of two developments. The first is a creeping informality in the way suspects are treated. Arrests are falling, and instead police are inviting hundreds of thousands of suspects, including for rape, to appear as "voluntary witnesses", a more casual interview which does not lead to bail. As witnesses, they are less likely to be assessed by doctors or mental health practitioners. They may also be less likely to be accompanied by a lawyer.

The other is the outcome of reforms passed in 2017, which sought to limit the time suspects spent languishing on bail, but which have had the unintended consequence of dissuading police from placing anyone on bail at all. These reforms meant a good deal more paperwork for officers, forcing them to re-approve an individual's bail after set periods of time, and many have responded by refraining from the process altogether. A year on, the use of bail in cases such as sexual

assault and rape has fallen by more than 70 per cent.

The 2017 reforms had understandable motives. Previously, bail could be extended indefinitely — a rule intended to help police with investigations, but which, in effect, gave them little incentive to press ahead. This meant that innocent people could have suspicion hanging over them for years. But the reforms were executed poorly: they did not change the time limits of investigations, and have instead incentivised forces into more risky practices.

The police should comply with this request to change the rules. It should be obvious that people will be put at risk if suspects accused of violence are freed without controls. But officers have shown that they are not to be trusted with allocating bail on a case-by-case basis. A blanket rule, stipulating that those accused of serious crimes are never released without strict constraints, would be better.

The new rules should be applied more widely than cases of domestic violence: when a suspect is released into the community without bail it risks considerable harm. Police cannot be relied upon to make the right call when there is an incentive to cut corners — they must instead be forced to do so. Future reformers should take heed.

The Brexit Brink

The prime minister can delay a meaningful vote, but not for long

A fortnight ago parliament unequivocally told the government that it should return to Brussels and reopen negotiations over the manner in which Britain is to leave the European Union. By a narrow majority, MPs signalled that they would be prepared to pass the withdrawal agreement already negotiated by the prime minister if changes were made to the Irish backstop. It is an open question whether this is achievable at all, but it is deeply unlikely to be achievable by Thursday.

Valentine's Day, even so, is the next parliamentary Brexit flashpoint. Yet again, it will be a day of high drama and uncertain implication, with a debate having been promised by Theresa May mainly as a strategy for avoiding losing control at the last one. EU officials since have offered occasional warm words, along with occasional cold words about very warm places, but no obvious progress has been made. Rather than a "meaningful vote", Mrs May plans a "neutral motion" on Thursday, which allows debate but carries no legal force. Her fear will be of amendments, forcing either a delay to Brexit, or a softer Brexit than her party will stand.

Once again, Mrs May wishes for more time. The

shadow Brexit secretary, Sir Keir Starmer, voiced his fear yesterday that the prime minister's plan is to "run down the clock", denying parliament a truly meaningful vote until after the European summit of March 21. This would be barely a week before the UK's exit from the EU. By this point, without movement from Europe, parliament would effectively have a choice between the prime minister's deal that it has rejected already, or no deal at all. Parliament, the PM hopes, would blink.

This is a risky strategy. In their last bout of meaningless meaningfulness a fortnight ago, parliament did indeed vote by a slim majority to reject a no-deal Brexit in principle, but the vote was non-binding and best regarded as aspirational. It may also be the EU's strategy, with Angela Merkel reportedly suggesting at the time that people needed "to look into the abyss before a deal is done at five to midnight". Yet going right to the wire without a deal is in neither Britain's interests, nor the EU's. Alongside the dismay that uncertainty will cause to businesses, such steely brinkmanship augurs ill for any future relationship.

According to reports, Mrs May hopes to defer

any binding parliamentary vote until February 27. In an interview with *The Sunday Times*, Sir Keir suggested that Labour would propose an amendment this week that would compel the government to hold one by that date. By then, the prime minister would have had a month in which to seek renegotiation over the Irish backstop. After two years of fog, Labour's own position on Brexit came into focus last week, with a clear preference for a permanent customs union. Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, has already said that the promise of such a customs union is the only thing likely to make the EU reopen the subject of the backstop.

This, rather than a no-deal Brexit, is the real likely alternative to Mrs May's deal, and her own party's Brexit hardliners should know it. The prime minister still maintains that she can make her own deal sweeter by finding a route towards legally binding changes to the backstop that will win them over. Parliament can afford to wait another fortnight to find out if she is right. There is no particular reason why it should wait any longer.

Easy Money

British people really are intensely relaxed about the filthy rich

"Have you heard," said John, to Jeremy, "that the rich aren't on borrowed time at all?"

"The rich," said Jeremy, to John, "don't have to borrow anything."

"No," said John, to Jeremy, "you misunderstand. There was a survey in the paper. British people are less hostile to the rich than French people or Germans or even Americans. In fact, they're hardly hostile to them at all. And I'm not sure what we're going to do."

"Obviously I'm against hostility to anyone," said Jeremy, to John. "And other forms of racism. But this comes as a shock. I suppose that's why we

never had the guillotine? Or a violent revolution?"

"So far," said John, to Jeremy. "But yes. And it also explains why people cheer the royal family. Despite their being a retrograde manifestation of deferential false consciousness."

"Which is obviously quite different," said Jeremy, to John, "from why they cheer me."

"Apparently," said John, to Jeremy, "Germans think the rich are egotistic, materialistic, and arrogant. While Brits think they are intelligent, bold and hard-working."

"But I don't know anybody who thinks that," said Jeremy, to John.

"Nor me," said John, to Jeremy. "And worse still, the young like the rich even more than the old do."

"Somebody," said Jeremy, to John, "must have made a mistake."

"And get this," said John, to Jeremy. "Only one in five people in Britain agrees with the statement that 'the super-rich, who always want more power, are to blame for many of the world's problems'."

"But who," said Jeremy, to John, "would members of the Labour Party blame instead?"

"I rather think," said John, to Jeremy, "that we probably ought not to get into all that."

"Fair point," said Jeremy, to John.