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How many new homes have been added in your area and what is the government's target?

3. Inside Air Force One as new era beckons for presidential plane

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New era beckons for Air Force One after Qatari offer - but what's it like inside?

19 hours ago Share Save Anthony Zurcher On board Air Force One Share Save

Getty Images

Most journalists travelling with the US president don't see much of the interior of Air Force One, the presidential jet. The press cabin is in the back of the plane, accessible by a rear set of steps and a quick turn of a corner. To reach the presidential suite at the front of the plane would require negotiating with the armed Secret Service agents in the next-door cabin. On Donald Trump's trip to the Middle East this week, when the future of the famous plane was a huge talking point, Fox News host Sean Hannity had priority seating and access to the president to conduct an in-flight interview. But the rest of us in the travelling press pool were consigned to our small section of the plane. It was a whirlwind trip, hitting three nations in three nights, half a world away. The president described it as an "endurance test" - one that his staff and those of us in the press pool had to manage, as well. The presidential jet is not a bad way to fly, however. The 14 seats are comfortable, roughly on par with a first-class domestic flight. There's a bathroom and a table with snacks (including the coveted Air Force One-branded M&Ms bearing the president's signature, which aren't available anywhere else). Qatar's Air Force One offer angers Trump supporters

Is Trump allowed to accept 747 gift? The cabin has a pair of television monitors - usually tuned to the president's preferred cable news channel (CNN during Joe Biden's term; Fox News for Trump). On occasion, they've been set to a football game or other sporting events. For longer flights, the on-board kitchen serves plated meals (the president eats from a different, fancier menu). On short hops, there's usually food in a takeaway bag.

Watch: President Trump takes a question from the BBC's Anthony Zurcher on board

But the interior of this famous aircraft could soon undergo a radical refit if, as looks likely, Trump accepts the Qatari offer to supply a new "palace in the sky" - the biggest foreign gift ever received by a US president. Technically, "Air Force One" is a radio call sign, the designation for any Air Force aircra

ft with the US president aboard. The small prop plane Lyndon Baines Johnson took from Austin to his Texas ranch in the 1960s was Air Force One, too. But the Air Force One most people picture, the one featured in the Harrison Ford action film, is the Boeing 747-200b with water blue, steel blue and white paint set against a chrome underbody - a colour scheme picked out by First Lady Jackie Kennedy in 1962. Currently there are two of these 747s in the Air Force passenger fleet, in use since 1990. Needless to say, technology – both in aircraft design and everything else – has come a long way in the ensuing years. The planes have been upgraded, but the costs of maintaining the airframe and engines are growing. The aircraft are showing their age.

This has clearly irked the current White House occupant – the only president to own his own jet, or for that matter, his own airline, prior to taking office. "I leave now and get onto a 42-year-old Boeing," he said, exaggerating the plane's age during an industry briefing on Thursday in Abu Dhabi. "But new ones are coming." Coming, but not soon enough for Trump. During his first term, he touted an updated presidential aircraft, made by Boeing, that was in the works. He even picked out his own colour palette, scrapping Kennedy's design for a red-white-and-blue livery. He proudly displays a model of that jet in the Oval Office. Originally planned to be delivered by 2021, delays and cost overruns for the estimated $4bn construction programme have made it less likely that the two new planes on order will be available for much, if any, of Trump's second term in office, which expires in January 2029. He has tasked tech multi-billionaire Elon Musk with speeding up the process and reportedly groused in private that he is embarrassed to travel in such an outdated plane.

Getty Images Jackie Kennedy watches Lyndon Johnson being sworn in as president on board after the assassination of her husband, JFK, in 1963

That explains why the president has become enamoured with the prospect of a seemingly more immediate solution to his air transport woes – courtesy of the Persian Gulf nation of Qatar. News of Qatar's offer of a lavish $400m (£301m) 747-8 made headlines last week, but the gift apparently has been in the works for months. Trump surreptitiously visited the aircraft in question in mid-February, just a few weeks after the start of his second term in office. Aside from the legal and ethical concerns of such a substantial gift – raised by critics and some allies of the president - converting a foreign 747 for use by an American president creates a number of technical challenges. The aircraft would have to be

made capable of in-flight refuelling and retrofitted with a sophisticated package of communications and security equipment. The current models have systems built to withstand the electromagnetic pulse of a nuclear explosion.

Getty Images President Obama making calls on board in 2012

Such a refitting process, says aviation analyst Richard Aboulafia, managing director of AeroDynamic Advisory, would take years, until 2030 at least. "They have to assume the jet has been left unattended in a dangerous place for 13 years," he says. "Which means it's not enough to take the plane apart. You also have to take every single component apart." The plane would need additional power to run its new systems, and its interior might have to be rearranged. Chances are there's no press cabin in the flying palace as originally designed. Mark Cancian, a senior adviser with the Center for Strategic and International Studies' Defense and Security Department, says the costs of such retrofitting could easily run to $1bn (£750m). He adds, however, that Trump could waive some, or all, of the security modifications if he so chooses. "He's the president," he said.

When the Air Force ultimately does retire its current crop of 747s, it will put to pasture an aircraft that have been part of fabric of American history for decades. One that transported President Bill Clinton, along with former Presidents Jimmy Carter and George HW Bush, to Israel for Yitzhak Rabin's funeral in 1995. After the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, George W Bush took to the skies in Air Force One and stayed aloft for hours, refuelling mid-air, until his security team determined it was safe for him to land and address the nation, before ultimately returning to Washington.

Getty Images President George W Bush directing the 9/11 response from Air Force One hours after the attacks

4. Latest News & Updates

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[redacted]

Is Britain really inching back towards the EU?

The summit between the UK and EU on 19 May will be the first since Brexit - the very idea of it has polarised opinions

5. Breaking news, video and the latest top stories from the U.S. and arou

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'We'd given up' - PSV champions as Ajax slump costs them title

PSV are Eredivisie champions for a second consecutive season as they finish one point ahead of second-placed Ajax, whose late-season collapse cost them.

6. Kashmir: Four days that took India and Pakistan to the brink

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgvr4r5d2qo



Relief in Kashmir - but BBC hears from families on both sides mourning the dead

18 hours ago Share Save. Farhat Javed in Pakistan-administered Kashmir & Aamir Peer Zada in India-administered Kashmir BBC World Service & BBC News Share S

ave

BBC

Sixteen-year-old Nimra stood outside, rooted to the spot, as the Indian missiles that had woken her a moment ago rained down on the mosque a few metres from her house in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. She watched one tear the minaret off the top of the building. But she failed to realise she, too, had been struck - in the chest. When the family reached the relative safety of her aunt's house nearby, someone turned on a phone torch. "My aunt gasped. There was blood on my frock. It was pink and white but now soaked in red. I hadn't seen it before." Again they ran. "I was running but my hand was pressed on my chest the whole time. I didn't want to take it off. I thought if I let go, everything inside me would come out." A piece of shrapnel was lodged near her heart, she later discovered. A few hours later, in Poonch, Indian-administered Kashmir, a different family was dodging shelling which Pakistan had launched in response to India's missile strikes. "When the firing began, everyone ran for their lives - children clinging to their parents in fear," said MN Sudhan, 72. "Some families managed to leave for Jammu in their vehicles. We also decided to escape. But barely 10 minutes into our journey, a shell landed near our vehicle. The shrapnel tore through the car. My grandson died on the spot." "Our future was shattered at that [very] moment," Mr Sudhan said of 13-year-old Vihaan's death. "Now we're left with nothing but grief. I have witnessed two wars between India and Pakistan, but never in my life have I seen shelling as intense as this."

Reuters Vihaan's mother (centre) mourns her son at a cremation ground in Poonch

Nimra and Vihaan were among many of the villagers caught up in the deadliest attacks for several years in a decades-long conflict between two of the world's nuclear powers - India and Pakistan. Both sides administer the Himalayan region in part but claim it in full. Both governments deny targeting civilians, but BBC journalists in the region have spoken to families caught up in the violence. The strike that injured Nimra was part of India's armed response after a militant attack killed 26 people - mostly Indian tourists - last month at a beauty spot in India-administered Kashmir. Police there claimed militants included at least two Pakistan nationals. Pakistan has asked India for evidence of this, and has called for an independent inquiry into who was behind the a

tt ack. What foll owed was f our days of tit-for-tat shelling and drone atta cks, i ntensi f yi n g each day and culminating i n missile str ikes o n military bases, whi ch thr eatened t o tip over into full-blo W n confli ct. Then, sudde nl y, a ceasefir e bro k ered by th e US and other int ernational players on 1 Ø May brought the t W o nucl ear p owers back from the brink.

TASEER BEYG / BBC Nimra s till has shrapnel lodged ins i de her b o dy

Famili e s on both s i des o f the Line of Control (L oC) - the de facto border in K ashmir - told us they had had loved ones ki l led and property destroyed. At l ea st 16 peopl e are report e d to have been killed on the Indian side, wh l e Pak ista n claims 4 Ø civilian dea t hs, though it rema i n s u nc l ear how many were directl y caused b y the shel l ing. We al so heard f r om Indian and Paki s tani governme nt insi der s about the mood in their respective admi nistrat i ons as the conflict escal at ed. In Delhi ' s corridors of power, the atmosphere was i n itially jubilant, an Ind i an governm e nt source told t he BBC. Its missile attacks on targets in Pakis t an-ad mi nister e d Kashmir and in Paki stan itself - i ncludi n g the Bilal Mosque in M u z af f arab a d, which India cla i ms is a mi l itant camp, though Paki s tan d enies th is - were deemed a success. " t h e stri k es... were not limited to P akistani-admini s t ered Kashmir o r along the Li n e of C ontrol," an Indian g o vernment source told the BBC. "We w e nt deep - even into t he Pakistani side of P unj ab, which has al ways been Pakistan ' s r ed li n e." But th e Pakis t ani mi litary had been pr e pare d, a s o urce from the P a kistan Air Force told the BBC. Days e arlier, the Pakist ani government said it was expecting a n a t ack. "We knew something was coming, and we were absolutely ready," one officer said, speaking on condition of anonym i t y. He sai d I ndian f i ghte r jet s approac h ed Pakist a ni territory and th e air force was under instructions t o shoot down any that crossed into its airspace or d ropped a payl o ad. Pakistan claims to have shot down five Indian jets that night, something Indi a has r emained silent on. "We were well p repared, a nd hones t ly , W e we r e also lucky," the source s a id - hi s account repeated b y two othe r s ources. But Mr Sudhan, Vi haan ' s gr andfather, sai d there had been n o warning t o stay indoor s or evac u ate. "Why didn ' t they inf or m us? We, the people, are ca ught in th e mi d dl e." It is li k ely t hat no evac u at ion order s had b een iss ued because the I nd ian go v ernment neede d to keep the m ilitary s trike s confi dential, though the local administration had, fo l l owing the Ap r il militant atta ck, directed locals to clean out community bunkers as a precaut i onary m e asure. A day after the initial mis s ile strikes, Thurs d ay, b o th sides launched drone at tacks, though they each accused the other of m a king th e first mov e. India began t o evacuate thousan d s of village r s along the Indian sid e of the L o C. Just after

21:00 that evening, the Khan family in Indian-administered Kashmir decided they must flee their home in Uri, 270km (168 miles) to the north of Poonch. Most of their neighbours had already left. But after travelling for just 10 minutes, their vehicle was struck by shrapnel from a shell, fatally injuring 47-year-old Nargis. Her sister-in-law Hafeeza was seriously injured. They headed to the nearest hospital, only to find the gates locked. "I somehow climbed the hospital wall and called out for help, telling them we had injured people with us. Only then did the staff come out and open the gate. As soon as they did, I collapsed. The doctors were terrified by the ongoing shelling and had closed everything out of fear," Hafeeza said. Hafeeza's sister-in-law Nargis is survived by six children. The youngest daughter Sanam, 20, said the first hospital they went to was not equipped to help, and as they headed to another, her mother died of her injuries.

SYED SHAHRIYAR / BBC Sanam's mother Nargis was fatally struck by shrapnel

"A piece of shrapnel had torn through her face. My clothes were soaked in her blood...We kept talking to her, urging her to stay with us. But she passed away on the way." Since a ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan in 2021 there had been relative peace in the region, locals told the BBC. For the first time in years, they had been able to live normal lives, they said, and now this sense of security was destroyed. Sanam, who lost her mother, said: "I appeal to both governments - if you're heading into war, at least secure your civilians. Prepare... Those who sit in comfort and demand war - they should be sent to the borders. Let them witness what it really means. Let them lose someone before their eyes." Sajjad Shafi, the representative for Uri in the regional government, said he had acted as promptly as possible. "The moment I got the news that India has attacked, I got in touch with people and started moving them out." After two days of attacks and counter attacks, the Indian government source said there was now a "clear sense in...power corridors that things were escalating but we were ready. "We were ready because India had spent the last 10 years acquiring and building strategic military assets - missiles, warheads and defence systems." On the international stage, there had been consternation that the tensions would not be de-escalated by the US, despite its diplomatic overtures during India and Pakistan's previous Kashmir clashes. US Vice President JD Vance said a potential war would be "none of our business". This statement came as no surprise, the Indian government source told the BBC. At that stage, "it was clear the US didn't want to get involved". By the following day, Friday, shelling had become more intense. Muhammed Shafi was at home with his wife in

Shankot village in the Neelum Valley, Pakistan-administered Kashmir, on the LoC. The 30-year-old was standing in the doorway, just a few steps away from where his son was playing; his wife standing in their courtyard.

TASEER BEYG / BBC Muhammed's wife was killed by a strike very close to their house

"I remember looking up and seeing a mortar shell coming from a distance. In the blink of an eye, it struck her. She didn't even have time to scream. One second She was there, and the next, she was gone. Her face... her head... there was nothing left. Just a cloud of smoke and dust. My ears went numb. Everything went silent. I didn't even realise I was screaming. "That night, her body lay there, right in our home. The entire village was hiding in bunkers. The shelling continued all night, and I stayed beside her, weeping. I held her hand for as long as I could." One of those in a bunker was his niece, 18-year-old Umaima. She and her family were holed up in the shelter for four days, on and off, in brutal conditions. "There were six or seven of us packed into it," she said. "The other bunker was already full. There's no place to lie down in there - some people stood, others sat. There was no drinking water, no food," with people shouting, crying and reciting prayers in the pitch black. Also in a bunker, in the Leepa Valley, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir - one of the most militarised and vulnerable valleys in the region - was Shams Ur Rehman and family. It is Shams' own bunker, but that night he shared it with 36 other people, he said. Leepa is surrounded on three sides by the LOC and Indian-administered territory, so Shams was used to living with cross-border tensions. But he was not prepared for the complete destruction of his house. He left the bunker at three in the morning to survey the scene. "Everything was gone. Wooden beams and debris from the house were scattered everywhere. The blast was so powerful, the shockwave pushed in the main wall. The metal sheets on the roof were shredded. The entire structure shifted - by at least two inches.

TASEER BEYG / BBC Shams Ur Rehman's house now has to be rebuilt after it was hit by three shells

"A house is a person's life's work. You're always trying to improve it - but in the end, it's all gone in seconds." Four hours later, back in the Neelum Valley, Umaima and her family also emerged on Saturday 10 May to a transformed landscape. "We came out of the bunker at seven in the morning. That's when we saw - nothing was left." As Umaima surveyed the ruins of her village, India and Pakist

an's forces that day were trading ever more destructive blows - firing missiles at each other's military installations, which both sides accused the other of instigating. India had targeted three Pakistani air bases, including one in Rawalpindi - the garrison city that houses the Pakistan Army's General Headquarters. "This was a red line crossed," said one Pakistani officer. "The prime minister gave the go-ahead to the army chief. We already had a plan, and our forces were desperately ready to execute it...For anyone in uniform, it was one of those unforgettable days."

TASEER BEYG / BBC The Neelum valley lies along the Line of Control in Pakistan-administered territory

Pakistan hit back at Indian military installations. On the diplomatic front, this was seen as a moment to highlight the issue of Kashmir on the international stage, an official in the Pakistan foreign office told the BBC. "It was non-stop. Endless meetings, coordination, and back-to-back calls to and from other countries for both foreign minister and then the prime minister. We welcomed mediation offers from the US, the Saudis, the Iranians, or anyone who could help de-escalate." On the Indian side, the Pahalgam attack on 22 April had already prompted External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to speak to at least 17 world leaders or diplomats, including UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. In most of these conversations, he has tweeted, the emphasis had been on the "cross-border terrorist attack" and focused on building a case to hold the perpetrators accountable for the attack. Then, on Saturday afternoon local time, in the aftermath of the latest missile exchanges, came a diplomatic breakthrough out of nowhere. US President Donald Trump took to social media to reveal that a ceasefire had been agreed. "After a long night of talks mediated by the United States, I am pleased to announce that India and Pakistan have agreed to a FULL AND IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE. "Congratulations to both Countries on using Common Sense and Great Intelligence," he wrote on social media platform Truth Social. India has since downplayed Washington's role in the ceasefire and it has rejected that trade was used as a lever to achieve this. Behind the scenes, US mediators, diplomatic backchannels and regional players, including the US, the UK and Saudi Arabia, had proved critical in negotiating the climbdown, experts say. "We hit Pakistani strategic bases deep inside their territory and that must have worried the US," the Indian government source believes. In Pahalgam, the site of the militant gun attack that sparked the crisis, the search is still on for the perpetrators.

Getty Images Pahalgam was an area popular with tourists

Vinay Narwal, a 26-year-old Indian Navy officer, was on his honeymoon in Pahalgam when he was killed. He had got married just a week before the attack. A photo of Vinay's wife Himanshi, sitting near her husband's body following the attack, has been widely shared on social media. His grandfather Hawa Singh Narwal wants "exemplary punishment" for the killers. "This terrorism should end. Today, I lost my grandson. Tomorrow, someone else will lose their loved one," he said.

SYED SHAHRIYAR / BBC Rayees used to lead treks in Pahalgam

A witness to the attack's aftermath, Rayees Ahmad Bhat, who used to lead pony treks to the beauty spot where the shootings took place, said his industry was now in ruins. "The attackers may have killed tourists that day, but we - the people of Pahalgam - are dying every day since. They've stained the name of this peaceful town... Pahalgam is terrorised, and its people broken." The attack was a huge shock for a government which had begun to actively promote tourism in stunningly picturesque Kashmir, famed for its lush valleys, lakes and snow-capped mountains.

7. Pope meets Ukraine's Zelensky after inauguration Mass

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2x02l95zno



Pope meets Zelensky after inauguration Mass

Zelensky thanked the Pope for being a 'clear voice in defence' of peace in Ukraine

Zelensky, US Vice President JD Vance and the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio

were among dignitaries in attendance.

Addressing thousands in St Peter's Square, the Pope used his inaugural Mass to highlight concerns about the war in Ukraine, also warning against marginalisation of the poor and autocracy.

Posting on Telegram after the meeting, Zelensky thanked the new Catholic leader for his "support for Ukraine" and "clear voice in defence of a just and lasting peace".

Watch: Thousands attend Leo XIV's inauguration Mass

Thousands of pilgrims stood in reverence as the pope received the symbols of office, blessed the people and issued a strong call for unity.

He also said he would seek to govern "without ever yielding to the temptation to be an autocrat".

The Pope used his Mass to criticise "hatred, violence, prejudice, the fear of difference, and an economic paradigm that exploits the Earth's resources and marginalises the poorest".

Last week, Pope Leo offered the Vatican as a venue for possible peace talks after Russian President Vladimir Putin turned down Zelensky's offer to meet face-to-face in Turkey for negotiations.

The pontiff was pictured shaking hands with the Ukrainian leader, who also thanked the Vatican for "its readiness to become a platform for direct negotiations between Ukraine and Russia."

Before the Mass, there were cheers from the crowd when the pontiff appeared in his popemobile as it drove around St Peter's Square and down Via della Conciliazione to the river Tiber and back.

There was a strong sense of excitement in the square. Michelle, from Germany, told the BBC she "came on purpose to see the Pope".

"I arrived yesterday in the morning and I'm leaving in a few hours, so I don't have much time. It's very crazy because there's so many people. I wanted to se

e the Pope."

Many of the tens of thousands attending were Catholics, but tourists also came to be part of the historic occasion.

Joe from Missouri in the United States said: "We're on vacation, but it's great timing. We're here to see the Pope's inaugural mass. It's very special. I'm glad we came early."

He said he was "extra proud" to see the first Pope from the United States. "That was a surprise. He's gonna be a wonderful Pope. I am not Catholic, but I grew up Catholic, but this is just inspiring no matter what denomination of Christian you are."

Also in the crowds was Pia, from Chile, a professor of philosophy at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. She told the BBC she felt there was "a new hope in the church".

Pia said that among the Pope's first words when he was elected was "Let the peace be with you", the words of Jesus. And then he said "don't be afraid".

"He knows what the world and the church needs. A church that is preaching hope, preaching peace. I think many people are waiting for that," she said.

The Pope's official inauguration followed the Mass, with a pallium garment - a white woolen band - placed on the pope's shoulders, and fixed in place with three pins to represent the nails on the cross.

Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle of the Philippines then placed on the pope's finger the Ring of the Fisherman, a symbol of the papacy which bears an image of St Peter.

Pope Leo then took the book of the gospels to bless the people.

8. Australian Matthew Radalj tells of life in China prison

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c629664xp57o



'You start to go crazy': The Australian who survived five years in a Chinese prison

19 hours ago Share Save Stephen McDonell China correspondent Reporting from Beijing Share Save

EPA Australian Matthew Radalj was held for five years in a Beijing detention centre, similar to the one pictured above in 2012

Sharing a dirty cell with a dozen others, constant sleep deprivation, cells with lights on 24-hours a day; poor hygiene and forced labour. These are some of what prisoners in Chinese jails are subjected to, according to Australian citizen Matthew Radalj, who spent five years at the Beijing No 2 prison – a facility used for international inmates. Radalj, who is now living outside China, has decided to go public about his experience, and described undergoing and witnessing severe physical punishment, forced labour, food deprivation and psychological torture. The BBC has been able to corroborate Radalj's testimony with several former prisoners who were behind bars at the same time he was. Many requested anonymity, because they feared retribution on loved ones still living inside the country. Others said they just wanted to try to forget the experience and move on. The Chinese government has not responded to the BBC's request for comment.

A harsh introduction

"I was in really bad shape when I arrived. They beat me for two days straight in the first police station that I was in. I hadn't slept or eaten or had water for 48 hours and then I was forced to sign a big stack of documents," said Radalj of his introduction to imprisonment in China, which began with his arrest on 2 January, 2020. The former Beijing resident claims he was wrongfully convicted after a fight with shopkeepers at an electronics market, following a dispute over the agreed price to fix a mobile phone screen. He claims he ended up signing a false confession to robbery, after being told it would be pointless to try to defend his innocence in a system with an almost 100% criminal conviction rate and in the hope that this would reduce the time of his incarceration. Court documents indicate that this worked at least to some extent, earning him a four-year sentence. Once in prison, he said he first had to spend many months in a separate detention centre where he was subjected to a more brutal "transition phase".

Matthew Radalj Radalj had lived in Beijing for a number of years when he was arrested in January 2020

During this time prisoners must follow extremely harsh rules in what he described as horrific conditions. "We were banned from showering or cleaning ourselves, sometimes for months at a time. Even the toilet could be used only at specific allotted times, and they were filthy - waste from the toilets above would constantly drip down on to us." Eventually he was admitted to the "normal" prison where inmates had to bunk together in crowded cells and where the lights were never turned off. You also ate in the same room, he said. According to Radalj, African and Pakistani prisoners made up the largest groups in the facility, but there were also men being held from Afghanistan, Britain, the US, Latin America, North Korea and Taiwan. Most of them had been convicted for acting as drug mules.

The 'good behaviour' points system

Radalj said that prisoners were regularly subjected to forms of what he described as psychological torture. One of these was the "good behaviour points system" which was a way – at least in theory – to reduce your sentence. Prisoners could obtain a maximum of 100 good behaviour points per month for doing things like studying Communist Party literature, working in the prison factory or snitching on other prisoners. Once 4,200 points were accumulated, they could in theory be used to reduce prison time. If you do the maths, that would mean a prisoner would have to get maximum points every single month for three-and-half years before this could start to work. Radalj said that in reality it was used as a means of psychological torture and manipulation. He claims the guards would deliberately wait till an inmate had almost reached this goal and then penalise them on any one of a huge list of possible infractions which would cancel out points at the crucial time. These infractions included - but were not limited to - hoarding or sharing food with other prisoners, walking "incorrectly" in the hallway by straying from a line painted on the ground, hanging socks on a bed incorrectly, or even standing too close to the window.

AFP/Getty The gates to Beijing No. 2 prison, pictured in 2012, where Radlj was held

Other prisoners who spoke about the points system to the BBC described it as a mi

nd game designed to crush spirits. Former British prisoner Peter Humphrey, who spent two years in detention in Shanghai, said his facility had a similar points calculation and reduction system which was manipulated to control prisoners and block sentence reductions. "There were cameras everywhere, even three to a cell," he said. "If you crossed a line marked on the ground and were caught by a guard or on camera, you would be punished. The same if you didn't make your bed properly to military standard or didn't place your toothbrush in the right place in the cell. "There was also group pressure on prisoners with entire cell groups punished if one prisoner did any of these things." One ex-inmate told the BBC that in his five years in prison, he never once saw the points actually used to mitigate a sentence. Radalj said that there were a number of prisoners - including himself - who didn't bother with the points system. So authorities resorted to other means of applying psychological pressure. These included cutting time off monthly family phone calls or the reduction of other perceived benefits.

Food As Control

But the most common daily punishment involved the reduction of food. The BBC has been told by numerous former inmates that the meals at Beijing's No 2 Prison were mostly made up of cabbage in dirty water which sometimes also had bits of carrot and, if they were lucky, small slivers of meat. They were also given mantou - a plain northern Chinese bread. Most of the prisoners were malnourished, Radalj added. Another prisoner described how inmates ate a lot of mantou, as they were always hungry. He said that their diets were so low in nutrition - and they could only exercise outside for half an hour each week - that they developed flimsy upper bodies but retained bloated looking stomachs from consuming so much of the mantou. Prisoners were given the opportunity to supplement their diet by buying meagre extra rations, if money from relatives had been put into what were called their "accounts": essentially a prison record of funds delivered to purchase provisions like soap or toothpaste. They could also use this to purchase items like instant noodles or soy milk powder. But even this "privilege" could be taken away. Radalj said he was blocked from making any extra purchases for 14 months because he refused to work in the prison factory, where inmates were expected to assemble basic goods for companies or compile propaganda leaflets for the ruling Communist Party.

AFP/Getty Images Media were given rare access to see inside another Beijing prison - No 1 - back in 2012

To make things worse, they were made to work on a "farm", where they did manage to grow a lot of vegetables, but were never allowed to eat them. Radalj said the farm was displayed to a visiting justice minister as an example of how impressive prison life was. But, he said, it was all for show. "We would be growing tomatoes, potatoes, cabbages and okra and then – at the end of the season – they would put it all into a big hole and bury it," he added. "And if you were caught with a chilli or a cucumber in general population you would go straight to solitary confinement for eight months." Another prisoner said they would occasionally suddenly receive protein, like a chicken leg, to make their diet look better when officials visited the prison. Humphrey said there were similar food restrictions in his Shanghai prison, adding that this led to power struggles among the inmates: "The kitchen was run by prison labour. Those who worked there stole the best stuff and it could then be distributed." Radalj described a battle between African and Taiwanese groups in Beijing's Prison No 2 over this issue. The Nigerian inmates were working in the kitchen and "were getting small benefits, like a bag of apples once a month or some yogurt or a couple of bananas", he said.

Courtesy Matthew Radalj Radalj, pictured with his father, says he has a responsibility to those still imprisoned

Then the Mandarin-speaking Taiwanese inmates were able to convince the guards to let them take over, giving them control of precious extra food items. This led to a large brawl, and Radalj said he was caught in the middle of it. He was sent to solitary confinement for 194 days after hitting another prisoner. Inside solitary, he finally had the lights turned off only to realise he'd be with very little light nearly all of the time, giving him the opposite sensory problem. His small food ration was also cut in half. There were no reading materials and there was nobody to talk to while he was held in a bare room of 1.2 by 1.8 metres (4ft by 6ft) for half a year. "You start to go crazy, whether you like it or not, and that's what solitary is designed to do...So you've got to decide very quickly whether your room is really, really small, or really, really big. "After four months, you just start talking to yourself all the time. The guards would come by and ask 'Hey, are you okay?'. And you're like, 'Why?'. They replied, 'because you're laughing'." Then, Radalj said, he would respond, in his own mind: "It's none of your business."

Another feature of Chinese prison life, according to Radalji, was the fake "pro

paganda" moments officials would stage for Chinese media or visiting officials to paint a rosy picture of conditions there. He said, at one point, a "computer suite" was set up. "They got everyone together and told us that we'd get our own email address and that we would be able to send emails. They then filmed three Nigerian guys using these computers." The three prisoners apparently looked confused because the computers were not actually connected to the internet - but the guards had told them to just "pretend". "Everything was filmed to present a fake image of prisoners with access to computers," Radalj said. But, he claims, soon after the photo opportunity, the computers were wrapped up in plastic and never touched again.

The memoirs

Courtesy Matthew Radalj Radalj kept a journal in prison (pictured) detailing his time behind bars

Throughout much of the ordeal, Radalj had been secretly keeping a journal by peeling open Covid masks and writing tiny sentences inside, with the help of some North Korean prisoners, who have also since been released. "I would be writing, and the Koreans would say: 'No smaller...smaller!'." Radalj said many of the prisoners had no way of letting their families know they were in jail. Some had not made phone calls to their relatives because no money had been placed in their accounts for phone calls. For others, their embassies had not registered family telephone numbers for the prison phone system. Only calls to officially approved numbers worked. So, after word got round that the Australian was planning to try to smuggle his notes out, they passed on details to connect with their families. "I had 60 or 70 people hoping I could contact their loved ones after I got out to tell them what was happening."

He wrapped the pieces of Covid mask as tight as he could with sticky tape hoarded from the factory and tried to swallow the egg-sized bundle without the guards seeing. But he couldn't keep it down. The guards saw what was happening on camera and started asking, "Why are you vomiting? Why do you keep gagging? What's wrong?" So, he gave up and hid the bundle instead. When he was about to leave on 5 October 2024, he was given his old clothes which had been ripped five years earlier in the struggle over his initial arrest. There was a tear in the lining of his jacket and he quickly dropped the notes inside before a guard could see him. Radalj said he thinks someone told the prison officers of his plan because they searched his room and questioned him before he left. "Did you forget some

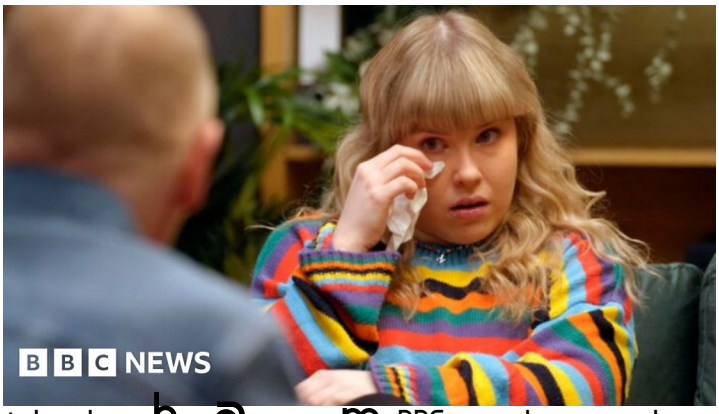
thing?" the guards asked. "They trashed all my belongings. I was thinking they're gonna take me back to solitary confinement. There will be new charges." But the guard holding his clothes never knew the secret journal had been slipped inside. "They were like, 'Get out of here!'. And it wasn't until I was on the plane, and we had already left, and the seat belt sign was switched off, that I reached into my jacket to check." The notes were still there.

Life After Prison

Courtesy Matthew Radalj Radalj married his long-time girlfriend after finally making it back home

9. inside the therapy room

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg5vyv6dnmgo



Inside the therapy room a BBC watches as three lives change

19 hours ago Share Save Nick Triggle • @nicktriggle Health correspondent Share Save

BBC / Twenty Twenty Productions Ltd Nicole went to therapy because she has a fear of driving

Nicole enters the therapist's room and clutches what she calls her hugging pillow. She admits to being nervous about sitting down with a stranger to discuss her mental health. She is 31, lives in London and works as chiropractic assistant. She suffers from anxiety when she drives. "There are so many things that so quickly go through my head," she says. "How far away is it? What is the route? I somehow forget how to drive." She suffers from panic attacks and her fear of driving means she is constantly cancelling plans. But, over the cour

se of six sessions with psychotherapist Owen O'Kane, it becomes clear her problems are much deeper than just a fear of driving.

Digging around in the mind

Every week, one in six of the UK population experience mental health problems such as depression and anxiety and every year more than 1.2 million people seek help from the NHS talking therapies service, with many more paying for support privately. This form of therapy is most commonly used for anxiety and depression, but can also help with a range of other problems, including body image dysmorphia, obsessive compulsive disorder and post traumatic stress disorder. It does not work for everyone: research suggests one-third of people do not benefit. The BBC has followed 12 people, featured in the series Change Your Mind, Change Your Life, who each received six support sessions from therapists. The therapists have used a combination of different talking therapy approaches, including cognitive behavioural therapy which focuses on changing the way we think and behave, alongside other techniques to improve relationships and process trauma. What it reveals is striking: How understanding and learning to manage the mind has the power to transform lives.

BBC / Twenty Twenty Productions Ltd Owen O'Kane says being a therapist is a bit like being a detective

"You're not stuck with the brain you've got," says Owen O'Kane, who has worked in the field for 25 years. He describes his job as like detective work: "People come with what seems to be a reasonable story, but the interesting thing is that very often the story and emotions don't match. I guess what we are doing is digging around a little bit."

'I completely hated myself'

Over their sessions, Owen digs deeper into Nicole's anxiety. At one point she weeps. She admits in the past she has "completely hated" herself. She worries about what people think of her and is socially anxious: "I don't feel good enough to be there. I might say something wrong. I need people to like me." Owen questions why she feels like this: "As human beings we like the nice emotions. We like feeling happy, joy, being in love." but he says some people try to avoid or suppress emotions like fear, dread and sadness, and that can cause anxiety. Instead, he says it is healthier to accept them and accept them as safe.

When people get to that point, he says, they start to feel empowered: "They realise they're not going to be overwhelmed." Speaking outside the therapy room, Nicole says: "I'm shocked. He got my number straight away. I would see vulnerability as a negative thing, but it's not." Asked to describe herself she uses words such as kind, thoughtful, determined and enthusiastic: "I am not a bad person," she tells Owen. She says she has learned a lot: "Most importantly I found I wasn't being kind to myself. That was really eye-opening." Owen says this is typical of many people he treats: "When people get to these crossroads, when they wake up and realise what they are doing, that's a gold dust moment for me."

'I had stroke in my early 30s'

James likewise learned to think about himself differently thanks to therapy. A 39-year-old father-of-one who works in finance, he struggles with anxiety and, in particular, worries about making mistakes at work. That fear is so debilitating he doesn't make it to work sometimes. He has been supported by Prof Steve Peters, a psychiatrist who explains perfectionism is at the root of his problems: "If we think it's the end of the world if we make a mistake, it paralyses you." James was once an athlete, playing semi-professional football and competing in athletics before specialising in the bobsleigh. He was training for trials for the Great Britain team when he had a stroke eight years ago: "With a flick of a switch, I lost everything," he says. "It made me feel a lesser man." Now he fears under-performing at work and losing his job.

BBC / Twenty Twenty Productions Ltd James had a stroke in his early 30s

Over the course of the sessions, Prof Peters explains the key is James's belief system. First, he gives some seemingly simple advice: "Put your feet on the floor, stand up and walk," he says. Focusing on the basic task of moving, in James's case moving so he can get to work, enables someone caught up in catastrophic thinking to block out the negative thoughts that stop them doing something. In later sessions, James and Prof Peters explore what could be behind his problems. James tells Prof Peters about his childhood and how his father would criticise him to push him to improve. Prof Peters explains how James believes that to please you cannot make errors and then the devastating stroke he suffered at a young age has triggered an absolute desire for things to never go wrong again. He tells James he needs to make "peace with himself" by defining himself not by performance but by values and behaviours. He too asks James

to describe himself and James replies he is hard-working, honest, engaging, friendly and as someone who would put others first. Over the course of his sessions, James's way of thinking changes: "I can look at myself in the mirror and feel my value and my worth," he explains.

'My mum died when I was 15'

Anjalee's struggles are somewhat different. They relate to one traumatic event in childhood – her mother died suddenly when she was 15. Now a mother herself, with three children under five, she has struggled emotionally. She has sleepless nights, a tight chest and feels emotionally disconnected. It is worse than any physical pain, says the 34-year-old: "Becoming a mother has reopening everything I've tried to suppress." Her first birth was particularly traumatic. She developed sepsis – the condition her mother died from: "I thought I was not going to survive," she says. Her psychotherapist, Julia Samuel, explains to Anjalee she has not been able to process what has happened and, as a result, the trauma has stayed with her. When her mother died, Anjalee was in the middle of exams and had two younger siblings, leaving her without time to grieve.

BBC / Twenty Twenty Productions Ltd Anjalee felt emotionally disconnected before she went to therapy

10. PK Rosy: The forgotten Indian actor who lost her legacy to caste oppre

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c30q1rvqn17o



India's forgotten actor who lost her legacy to caste oppression

18 hours ago Share Save Bimal Thankachan and Divya Uppal BBC India YouTube team Share Save

Illustration by Puneet Kumar In the absence of a verified photograph of PK Rosy , the BBC commissioned an illustrator to create this image

At a time when women's participation in the film industry was frowned upon, a young woman dared to dream differently. In 1920s pre-independence India, PK Rosy became the first female lead in Malayalam-language cinema, in what is now the Southern state of Kerala. She starred in a movie called Vigathakumaran, or The Lost Child, in the 1920s. But instead of being remembered as a pioneer, her story was buried - erased by caste discrimination and social backlash. Rosy belonged to a lower-caste community and faced intense criticism for portraying an upper-caste woman in Vigathakumaran. Almost a hundred years later, there is no surviving evidence of Rosy's role. The film's reel was destroyed and the cast and crew have all died. Only a few pictures of the film from a contested press release dated October 1930 survive, along with an unverified black-and-white photo popularised by local newspapers as Rosy's only portrait. Even a Google Doodle celebrating her 120th birthday used an illustration similar to the woman in the photograph. But Rosy's nephew and others who have researched her life told the BBC that they could not conclusively say that it is her in the picture . PK Rosy was born as Rajamma in the early 1900s in the erstwhile kingdom of Travancore, now Kerala. She belonged to a family of grass cutters from the Pulaya community, part of the Dalits, who are at the bottom of India's harsh caste hierarchy and have been historically oppressed. "People from the Pulaya community were considered slave labour and auctioned off with land," says Malavika Binny, a professor of history at Kannur University. "They were considered the 'lowliest'. They were flogged, raped, tied to trees and set on fire for any so-called transgressions," she adds. Despite the dire social challenges, Rosy chose to dream differently.

Illustration by Puneet Kumar A scene in Vigathakumaran showed the hero picking a flower from the heroine's hair and kissing it

She was supported by her uncle, who was a theatre artist himself, and with his help Rosy entered the field of entertainment. "There are few available facts about Rosy's life, but it is known that she was popular for her performances in local plays," says Vinu Abraham, the author of The Lost Heroine, a novel based on Rosy's life. While her acting skills earned admiration, it was rare for a Dalit Woman to take up acting at the time. "She was likely aware of the fact that this was a new arena and making herself visible was important," says Prof Binny. She soon became a well-known figure in local theatre circles and her tale

nt caught the eye of director JC Daniel, who was then searching for a lead actor for his film- a character named Sarojini. Daniel was aware of Rosy's caste identity and chose to cast her in the role. "She was paid five rupees a day for 10 days of filming," said Mr Abraham. "This was a substantial amount of money in the 1920s." On the day of the film's premiere, Rosy and her family were barred from attending the screening. They were stopped because they were Dalits, Rosy's nephew Biju Govindan says. And so began a chain of events that pushed Rosy out of the public eye and her home. "The crowd that came to watch the movie were provoked by two things: Rosy playing an upper-caste woman and the hero picking a flower from her hair and kissing it in one scene," said Mr Abraham. "They started throwing rocks at the screen and chased Daniel away," he added. There are differing accounts of the extent of the damage to the the atre but what is clear is the toll the incident took on both Rosy and Daniel.

Poster of the movie Vigathakumaran Buried in debt after the failure of his film Vigathakumaran, JC Daniel never made another movie

11. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/world/asia/india



Why India could not stop IMF bailout to Pakistan

As one of 25 member groups on the IMF board, India's influence at the fund is limited, say experts.

12. Rowdy and rich, here's what Preakness says about the US economy

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c2lk0zq7kg5o



What One of America's most lively sporting events says about the economy

17 hours ago Share Save Brandon Drenon BBC News, reporting from Pimlico Share Save

BBC/Brandon Drenon

A woman balancing a dozen cocktails on a tray atop her head inched carefully through the steadily building crowds and chaos on Saturday morning at the Pimlico Race Course clubhouse. "How much is that," a man in purple trousers yelled towards her, the glassware inches above her eyebrow clanking as she paused. "Twenty dollars," she replied. Ray De Rubin repeated the number in disbelief, mumbled an expletive under his breath, then said: "I'll take two." He and his mother were at Pimlico for the first time - here to wager on US horse racing's esteemed Preakness Stakes on its 150th anniversary. Just two weeks ago, during his 14th trip to the Kentucky Derby, he won big. "This is the exact same outfit I wore on Derby day. Same Underwear, same socks, same hat," he said. "I still got my Derby wristband on." His wager at Pimlico? "I can't tell you. I don't want the IRS coming after me," he said with a grin. On the other side of Pimlico – just beyond the thousand-dollar seats, champagne flutes, and air-conditioned tents on the infield – five thoroughbreds idled behind the starting line. Mr De Rubin had bets on three of them. There was a brief moment of quiet before the race. Then the gates flung open, and the horses took off. Mr De Rubin, eyes fixed on the screens above, stood frozen. But only for a moment. "I get really loud when I watch the race. I put a lot of work into this," he said.

BBC/Brandon Drenon Ray De Rubin scans through the betting app on his iPad inside Pimlico's Clubhouse

Tradition, but under a shadow

One of three annual thoroughbred races - along with the Kentucky Derby and the Belmont Stakes - that make up what is known as the Triple Crown, the Preakness Stakes has long been known as one of the most glamorously bacchanal events in US sports. Held at the Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore, Maryland, it brings together the rowdy and the rich. But this year, its traditions have been thrown into question. In his second term as president, Donald Trump has enforced swift, dramatic economic policy changes, leading to significant consumer pessimism.

Virtually no corner of the American market has been spared - from the fast-food hamburger to the Preakness Stakes. Much of the current market-rattling turmoil is a result of Trump's sweeping global tariffs, announced on 2 April. Dubbed "Liberation Day", he said the new economic strategy would usher in "the golden age of America". Instead, in the 48 hours after his announcement, the S&P 500 had its worst two-day sell-off in years, as trillions of dollars were wiped from the stock market. Three weeks later, the International Monetary Fund warned of a global recession. Even McDonald's reported a drop in sales, which the burger chain's CEO attributed to customers "grappling with uncertainty". But while the stock market has mostly recovered following tariff agreements with the UK and China, the tariffs' impact may be just beginning; mega corporations like Walmart and Amazon recently warned of price increases.

BBC/Brandon Drenon

BBC/Brandon Drenon

But at Pimlico, the State of Maryland is betting big, with plans to demolish the track right after Saturday's event and rebuild a new course in its place, plus a state-of-the-art training facility. The tariffs' shadow looms here, too. "We expect there to be some kind of impact," the Maryland Stadium Authority told the BBC in a statement. But for now, they said the effects on the half-billion dollar project remains unclear. Aside from tariffs, horse race attendance has shrunk in recent years. Just over 46,000 people attended the Preakness in 2024, down from the 131,000 that attended in 2019. The Derby drew a much larger crowd of roughly 150,000 this year but was still well under its peak of 170,000 in 2015. Bill Carstanjen, CEO of the Derby's home, Churchill Downs, said a dip in sales this year was due to buyer "hesitancy" that "correlates perfectly" with Trump's tariffs. "We didn't have the endless pool of demand that we've seen in prior years," Mr Carstanjen told the Lexington Herald.

'A little reprieve'

Still, gambling records this year were broken at the Derby and Preakness. Over a week before the Preakness and before the horses running were finalised, a Preakness record of $348,000 was wagered on betting futures, up from last year's record of $260,000. All just a drop in the bucket compared to the millions that will be wagered by the time the last horse crosses the finish line. University of Kentucky economics professor Justin Balthrop told the BBC that a rise in ga

mbling also could be a sign of economic distress. "People who reach a certain level of despair will start to take on more risk, in an effort to literally gamble their way back to a place where they feel like they can be more comfortable," Professor Balthrop said. "You combine that with this idea that maybe they are so pessimistic, that this gives them the dopamine rush or endorphin release."

BBC/Brandon Drenon Anthony Walker is attending his first Preakness Stakes

Waiting in a long line on Pimlico's infield, Anthony Walker was among those looking for "a little reprieve". He was glad "to be able to take a few hours away from all that instability" in the stock market as well as the disruption caused by Trump's downsizing of the federal government. Mr Walker planned to gamble – "you can't come to the race without putting a little something out there" – but a bit less than he might have in more certain times. "I'm wagering 50% less, for sure," he estimated. "Because of what's happening in the economy – the way this administration is taking a wrecking ball to the longstanding traditions and institutions that give credence to the American way of life." At the Preakness, there are still endless ways to get a quick dose of gambling-induced dopamine. Even for as little as 10 cents. "I've seen a 10 cent (wager) pay $75,000," said Peter Rotondo, who heads racing and wagering for 1/ST, the organisation running Preakness. To do so, one would have to wager on what's called a superfecta: correctly guessing which four horses will place in the top four in the exact order, odds that are about on par with getting struck by lightning. "That's the beauty of the super," Mr Rotondo said.

BBC/Brandon Drenon

'The most salacious party in Sports'

The pricey cocktail Mr De Rubin grumbled about is the Black-Eyed Susan, also Maryland's official flower. The crazed concoction - bourbon, vodka, and a splash of mixers - leaves one to wonder whether it's truly a tribute to the state flower or a wink to the likely black eye after having too many. The drink is one of many traditions at the annual event. There's also the decades-old Tiffany & Co-made trophy called the Woodlawn Vase, considered "the most valuable trophy in sports". Made of 30lb of sterling silver, it's valued at an estimated $4m (£3m), and thus is kept in a museum most of the year. The Preakness winner leaves with a replica. But for many, the Preakness wouldn't be the Preakness without

t the party on the infield. "I went a lot in my 20s and 30s. It was an absolutely crazy party," Bobby Duke, 51, said in an email to the BBC. "In 1998, a guy jumped the fence and tried to punch a horse while racing. It's on YouTube." Though Pimlico always had offerings for elegant, fans like Mr Duke fondly remember piling into the infield for "the most salacious party on the sports calendar", as ESPN once put it, where patrons would race across a long row of port-a-potty while dodging beer cans hurled at them by inebriated onlookers. (That tradition ended around 2009, when Pimlico stopped its BYOB policy.) Maryland officials said the new Pimlico will become a year-round racing facility, and hopefully bring an economic boost to the low-income Park Heights neighbourhood surrounding it.

BBC/Brandon Drenon

Watch the horses, not the stock market

13. Northern Ireland Politics

https://www.bbc.com/news/northern_ireland/northern_ireland_politics



TUV MLA's questioning of witness ruled not a breach of code

A complaint had been lodged by Age NI after some of its staff appeared before the committee last October.

14. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/world/middle_east



Israeli 'bunker buster' bombs used in Gaza hospital strike, experts say

CCTV footage obtained and verified by the BBC shows the moment before impact and the immediate aftermath. Munitions experts told BBC Verify that the strikes and destruction are consistent with the use of so-called "bunker buster" bombs - designed to hit underground targets. BBC Verify's Merlyn Thomas has more.

15. Elton John brands government 'absolute losers' over AI copyright plans

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8jg0348yvxo



Elton John brands government 'losers' over AI copyright plans

12 hours ago Share Save Laura Kuenssberg • @bbclaurak Presenter, Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg Share Save

Sir Elton John angry at 'criminal' AI plans for artists

Sir Elton John described the government as "absolute losers" and said he feels "incredibly betrayed" over plans to exempt technology firms from copyright laws. Speaking exclusively to Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg, he said if ministers go ahead with plans to allow AI firms to use artists' content without paying, they would be "committing theft, thievery on a high scale". This week the government rejected proposals from the House of Lords to force AI companies to disclose what material they were using to develop their programmes. A government spokesperson said that "no changes" to copyright laws would be "considered unless we are completely satisfied they work for creators".

Generative AI programmes mine, or learn, from vast amounts of data like text, images, or music online to generate new content which feels like it has been made by a human. Sir Elton said the "danger" is that, for young artists, "th

ey haven't got the resources ... to fight big tech [firms]". "It's criminal, in that I feel incredibly betrayed," he added.

"The House of Lords did a vote, and it was more than two to one in our favour," he said. "The government just looked at it as if to say, 'Hmm, well the old people ... like me can afford it.'" On Monday, the House of Lords voted by a 147 majority to amend the Data (Use and Access) Bill to add transparency requirements, which aim to ensure copyright holders have to give permission for their work to be used. But on Wednesday MPs in the House of Commons voted to reject this change, meaning the bill will continue to go back and forth between the two Houses until they reach an agreement on it. Sir Elton warned the government was on course to "rob young people of their legacy and their income", adding that he thought the government was "just being absolute losers, and I'm very angry about it". The singer said that Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer needed to "wise up" and described Technology Secretary Peter Kyle as "a bit of a moron". He said if the government does not change its plans, he would be ready to take ministers to court, saying that "we'll fight it all the way".

Sir Elton John spoke to the BBC's Laura Kuenssberg alongside playwright James Graham

Speaking alongside the 78-year-old, playwright James Graham said ministers "do understand the value of creativity... but what's frustrating is either the complacency or the willingness to let Silicon Valley tech bros get it all their own way". The chief executive of UK music, Tom Kiehl, told the BBC that the government is "on the brink" of offering up the country's music industry "as a sacrificial lamb in its efforts to cosy up to American-based tech giants". He added that the prime minister "must not sell" the next generation of singers, songwriters, musicians, and music creators "down the river and allow all that talent to be crushed by letting soulless AI bots plunder their work". Ahead of the vote in the House of Lords, Sir Elton joined more than 400 British musicians, writers, and artists in signing a letter calling on the prime minister to update copyright laws in a way that protects them from artificial intelligence. Beatles singer Sir Paul McCartney, who also signed the letter, previously told the BBC there was a risk AI would create a "Wild West" in which artists' copyright was not properly protected. A government spokesperson said it wants the UK's creative industries and AI companies to "flourish, which is why we're consulting on a package of measures that we hope will work for both sectors". The spokesperson said it was "vital" the government worked through responses to a cons

ultation on proposals to allow developers to use creators' content unless rights holders elected to "opt out". They added that it was "equally important that we put in the groundwork now as we consider the next steps". "That is why we have committed to publishing a report and economic impact assessment - exploring the broad range of issues and options on all sides of the debate."

Sign up for the Off Air with Laura K newsletter to get Laura Kuenssberg's expert political insight and inside stories every Thursday.

16. Latest News & Updates

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Israeli 'bunker buster' bombs used in Gaza hospital strike, experts say

CCTV footage obtained and verified by the BBC shows the moment before impact and the immediate aftermath. Munitions experts told BBC Verify that the strikes and destruction are consistent with the use of so-called "bunker buster" bombs - designed to hit underground targets. BBC Verify's Merlyn Thomas has more.

17. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/world/asia/china



US says 'deal' reached with China after trade talks

The US treasury secretary calls the talks "productive", while China's vice premier describes them as "candid".

18. Ros Atkins on... Trump's deals in the Gulf

https://www.bbc.com/news/videos/clyzn0zwy32o



This week, Donald Trump completed a three-country trip to the Gulf.

And he put a major emphasis on deals being done - with the US and with US businesses. But the trip also put a spotlight on the president's own business interests.

The BBC's Analysis Editor Ros Atkins takes a look.

Produced by Catherine Karelli. Graphics by Mark Edwards.

19. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/world/africa

Blank questions, power cuts and a suicide: Nigeria's exams fiasco

Nearly 80% of the 1.9 million students who sat the exams did not get high enough marks to get into University.

20. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/scotland/scotland_politics



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21. Princess Eugenie speaks about childhood scoliosis surgery

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0ln0wlklzko



Princess Eugenie opens up about childhood back surgery

3 hours ago Share Save Hollie Cole BBC News Share Save

Getty Images The King's niece had scoliosis surgery when she was aged 12

Princess Eugenie has said she "couldn't get out of bed or do anything for my

self" while recovering after scoliosis surgery as a child. In an interview with the Sunday Telegraph, the King's niece opened up about her surgery, saying that she felt "very embarrassed" ahead of the operation and later struggled with the emotional impact of post-surgery care. Surgeons inserted titanium rods into her spine to correct a curvature caused by scoliosis when she was 12 years old and she spent 10 days on her back after the operation. She said that her mother, the Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, helped her see the post-surgery scar on her back as a "badge of honour".

Scoliosis is a condition where the spine twists and curves to the side. The cause of it is often unknown, and commonly starts in children aged between 10 and 15, according to the NHS. Eugenie was treated at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, in north London, and it was four months before she was able to return to school after it. "I had a corner room in the hospital with two windows looking out over a car park," the 35-year-old said. "I was too young to notice I couldn't get outside; all I cared about was where my parents and sister were. "But I do remember watching someone waving to my incredible red-haired nurse through the window and having this feeling that I couldn't reach them," she said. "I couldn't get out of bed or do anything for myself." Speaking about how she felt ahead of the operation, she said she felt "very embarrassed about the whole thing". "I remember being woken up really early before my surgery – I pulled my blanket over my head. I said: 'I don't want to see anyone and I don't want them to see me'," she said. The operation left a visible scar on her back and she said her mother helped to "train" her brain to think that "scars are cool".

AFP/Getty Images For her wedding in 2018, Eugenie wore a wedding dress that showed her scar from surgery

"She was amazing. She'd ask me if she could show it to people, then she'd turn me around and say, 'my daughter is superhuman, you've got to check our her scar'," Eugenie said. "All of sudden it was a badge of honour – a cool thing I had," she added. "It became a positive memory, a part of me, that I could do something with in the future. I could help heal other people." The princess's wedding dress in 2018 showed the scar at the top of her back and ahead of the wedding, she spoke of the importance of showing "people your scars". Speaking to ITV's This Morning at the time, she described it as a "lovely way to honour the people who looked after me and a way of standing up for young people who also go through this". "I think you can change the way beauty is, and you can sho

wpeople your scars and I think it's really special to stand up for that," she added.

22. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/politics



Is Britain really inching back towards the EU?

The summit between the UK and EU on 19 May will be the first since Brexit - the very idea of it has polarised opinions

23. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/wales



New charges to tackle congestion at popular beach

Beachgoers at Llanddwyn Beach on Anglesey, north Wales will soon pay up to £15 for parking.

24. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/northern_ireland



Safety call after fatal falls more than double in NI

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents says the rise in fatalities is "truly shocking".

25. Russia launches biggest drone attack since invasion began, says Ukr

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1ldm42eyzmo



Russia launched war's largest drone attack ahead of Putin-Trump call, Ukraine says

58 minutes ago Share Save Danai Nesta Kupemba BBC News Share Save

Reuters Residents survey the damage to their homes after a Russian drone strike on Saturday night on suburbs Outside of Kyiv

Ukraine says Russia has launched its biggest drone attack since the full-scale invasion began, targeting several regions including Kyiv, where one woman died. The barrage came just a day before a scheduled call between Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The US President has been urging a ceasefire. Russia and Ukraine held their first face-to-face talks in more than three years on Friday in Turkey, agreeing a new prisoner swap deal but little else. Ukraine's air force said Russia had launched 273 drones by 08:00 Sunday (05:00 GMT) targeting the central Kyiv region, and Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk regions in the east.

It said 88 drones were intercepted and another 128 went astray "without negative consequences". The strikes killed one person in Obukhiv district in the Kyiv region, and injured at least three others - one of whom was a four-year-old child - officials reported. The previous largest drone attack from Russia happe

ned on the third anniversary of the full-scale invasion on 23 February, when Moscow launched 267 drones. Russia's military said it had intercepted 25 Ukrainian drones overnight and on Sunday morning. Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz said on Sunday that he and leaders of the UK, France, and Poland would have a virtual meeting with Trump before his conversation with Putin on Monday morning. The four leaders jointly visited Ukraine over two weeks ago to spearhead calls for a 30-day-ceasefire, backed by the so-called "coalition of the willing". Ukraine's intelligence agency has said it believes Russia could be planning to carry out a "training and combat" launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile overnight, as an attempted intimidation. Russia has not responded to the claim.

Reuters Firefighters at a site outside Kyiv that was hit on Sunday morning

26. Pop culture re-invented the Menendez brothers

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c79ed21xyyro



Pop culture re-invented the Menendez brothers - now their fate may rest with one man

18 hours ago Share Save Anna Foguy BBC News Regan Morris BBC News, Los Angeles Share Save

Getty Images

It was once unthinkable that Lyle and Erik Menendez, the men who murdered their wealthy parents by shooting them 16 times, would get the sympathy and forgiveness of the masses. Their claims of sexual abuse at the hands of their father were mocked by prosecutors and comedians alike, from late-night TV to jokes at the Academy Awards. But 35 years later - thanks in part to TikTok, Netflix

and stars like Kim Kardashian - the Menendez brothers have a new generation of supporters - many who were not even born in 1989, the year the brothers ambushed their parents with shotguns in their Beverly Hills mansion. At the time of their trials, the brothers were portrayed as greedy, entitled monsters who went on a $700,000 (£526,0000) spending spree in the weeks after the murders. Now, with a growing understanding of trauma and sexual abuse, many are more sympathetic - and that might just give the brothers a chance at freedom. This week, a Los Angeles judge reduced the brothers' sentence to include the possibility of parole, which could be granted at a hearing next month. Their fate will then be in the hands of California's Parole Board and, ultimately, Governor Gavin Newsom, who will be weighing the shifting public opinion about the divisive case with his own political ambitions.

Watch: "Redemption is possible" - Family and attorney of Menendez brothers react to resentencing

How did we get here?

In 1989, Erik and Lyle Menendez burst into their Beverly Hills living room, both toting loaded shotguns, and opened fire on their parents, who were watching television. The crime would go unsolved for months. They got tickets for the James Bond film License to Kill as an alibi and told law enforcement and members of the news media, who were covering the execution of the wealthy, high-powered couple in their mansion, that perhaps the mafia was to blame. Meanwhile, they bought a new Porsche, Jeep, Rolex watches and other luxury items with cash from their parents' estate. They weren't caught until police got word of their admissions to a psychologist. Even at the time, their crime was divisive - the first trial ended in a mistrial after the jury couldn't reach a verdict. After the second, they were sentenced to life without parole. During both trials, the brothers were characterised as bad boys and spoiled children who were motivated to kill their parents out of hatred and hopes to acquire their $14 million estate. Saturday Night Live and other late-night shows mocked the pair's defence in court – including tearful testimony about their alleged sexual abuse, which prosecutors dubbed the "abuse excuse" - and documentary titles from that decade included phrases like "the bad sons" and "American sons, American murderers". Appeal after appeal was denied but last year, everything seemed to change. New evidence about the alleged sexual abuse had surfaced and Netflix released a drama that captured the attention of a whole new generation. Soon, documentaries about the case included titles with words like "misjudged" and "b

oys betrayed". TikTokers discussed the case with their followers. Reality star Kim Kardashian, a criminal justice advocate who has helped free imprisoned people, penned an opinion piece publicly backing their bid for freedom. "Back then, there were limited resources for victims of sexual abuse, particularly for boys," Kardashian wrote in the NBC piece. In the 1990s, society did not have the same understanding we do today of trauma, sexual abuse and harassment, Whitney Phillips, a University of Oregon professor who studies true crime, told the BBC. That gap in understanding was especially pronounced for boys who were abused, she added. But after the MeToo movement, there was more cultural space created for people to speak about these experiences, she said. "Not only does it create a permission structure," Prof Phillips said of people feeling encouraged to speak out about harassment and abuse, "in some ways it creates an incentive structure to feature stories about trauma". Adding to that is the change in how the public views criminal justice, with more emphasis on rehabilitation and reducing prison populations instead of the tough-on-crime mentality that dominated Los Angeles at the end of the 20th Century. "The lock people up forever attitude of the 1990s is fortunately long gone," said Robert Rand, a journalist who met and interviewed the brothers before they were arrested and uncovered new evidence in 2018 - a letter Erik had written as a teenager to a cousin about his father's sexual abuse. In a documentary Mr Rand produced about the killings, released in 2023, a former member of the boy band called Menudo alleged that the brothers' father, Jose Menendez - who was an executive at RCA Records - had raped him when he was 14 years old. The accusation further bolstered the brothers' claims of abuse. The new testimonies helped give new life to the brothers' claims, and provided a catalyst for what Prof Phillips called a "hurricane" of interest and support, from the Netflix drama to Kardashian's op-ed. "The things that get really big online are things that have lots of sources of energy," she said. Even Lyle Menendez noted the sea change. "The followers who are younger that are on that sort of TikTok social media generation, they really have tremendous hope," Lyle Menendez said at a court hearing. "I'm not as hopeless as I was as a 21-year-old, that's for sure. Obviously, I feel more hope when society seems to be understanding these experiences and sex abuse better."

Getty Images The fate of the brothers rests with California Gov Gavin Newsom, who is thought to be a potential US presidential contender

Where do the Menendez brothers go from here?

27. Michael Gaines: Man arrested on suspicion of murdering missing farm

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg4v1z115kxo



Man arrested on suspicion of murdering missing farmer

2 hours ago Share Save Share Save

An Garda Síochána Michael Gaine, 56, has been missing for more than eight weeks

A man has been arrested on suspicion of murder by Irish police investigating the disappearance of farmer Michael Gaine. It comes a day after gardaí (Irish police) searching a site near Mr Gaine's farm confirmed they had found partial human remains. Mr Gaine, 56, has been missing for more than eight weeks. He was initially treated as a missing person's case before it was upgraded to a homicide on 29 April. The man, in his 50s, is being held in custody as searches and technical examinations at the site near Mr Gaine's farm continue.

On Saturday, gardaí said DNA analysis would be carried out on the human remains before they can be identified. Mr Gaine, a sheep and cattle farmer, was reported missing from his home near Kenmare on Friday, 21 March. He was last seen in the County Kerry town the previous day. He lived in the remote Carrig East area close the Molls Gap beauty spot along the renowned Ring of Kerry. Last month, Michael Gaine's wife Janice told Irish broadcaster RTÉ that he "loved his home, he loved his farm, he loved animals" adding that his disappearance was "totally out of character".

Kenmare community 'horrified'

28. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/england



'I was refused service in a cafe because of my face'

Amit Ghose says he still experiences abuse as an adult, but he has come to accept the way he looks.

29. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/world/asia

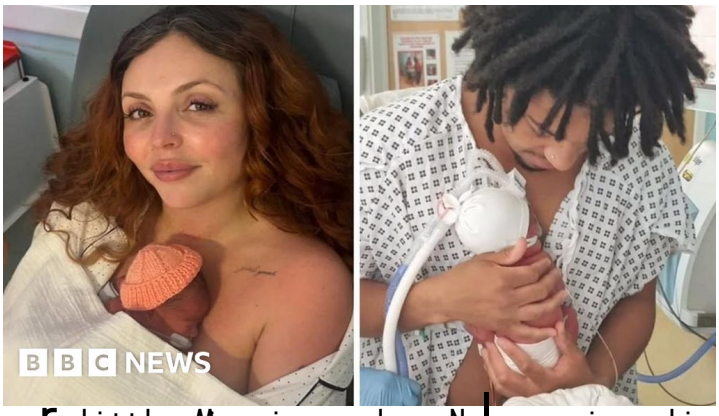


How India and Pakistan share one of the world's most dangerous borders

Living along the LoC - the volatile India-Pakistan border - means life in a fragile limbo between war and peace.

30. Former Little Mix singer Jesy Nelson gives birth to twins

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c628x34pwqvo



Former Little Mix singer Jesy Nelson gives birth to twins

6 hours ago Share Save Evan O'Byrne Mulligan BBC News Share Save

Jesy Nelson/Instagram Jesy Nelson said her and her partner Zion Foster were 'so blessed'

Former Little Mix singer Jesy Nelson has announced the birth of her twin daughters. In a post on Instagram, the 33-year-old said that two girls were born prematurely at 31 weeks on Thursday but said they were "healthy and fighting strong". Nelson said her and her partner Zion Foster were "so blessed" and had "never felt more in love", sharing pictures of them holding the girls in hospital. They have been named Ocean Jade and Story Monroe Nelson-Foster.

Nelson wrote: "So, our beautiful baby girls decided to come at 31 weeks plus five days. "It all happened so quickly, but we are so blessed that they are here with us, healthy and fighting strong. We've never felt more in love." Nelson previously revealed she had experienced rare complications during the twin pregnancy, which was first announced in January. In March, she said she had undergone a "successful" operation to prevent complications related to twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome (TTTS). The condition is caused by abnormal connecting blood vessels in the twins' placenta which leads to an imbalanced blood flow from one twin, known as the donor, to the recipient twin, leaving one baby with a greater blood volume than the other.

Nelson left Little Mix in 2020, saying she needed to protect her mental health

31. The best photos from Eurovision 2025

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ceqgjpl84pvo



The best photos from Eurovision Song Contest 2025

The Eurovision Song Contest brought the drama as 26 countries battled it out for the trophy.

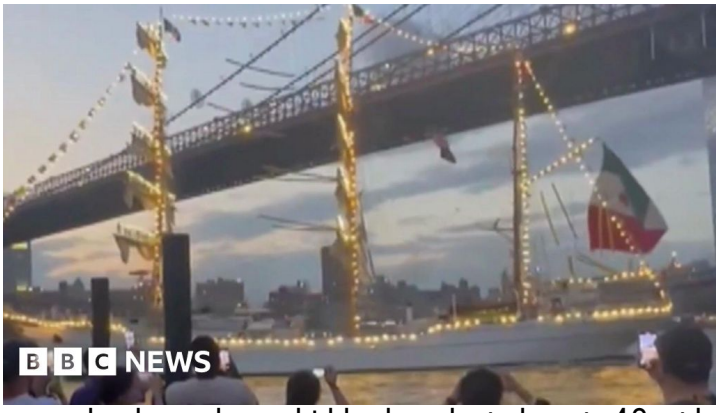
The night saw wacky songs, fabulous outfits and high-tempo dancing.

It eventually came down to tense stand off during the results between Austria and Israel, with Austria eventually taking the Eurovision trophy.

Here are the best photos from the night:

32. Video shows ship crashing into Brooklyn Bridge

https://www.bbc.com/news/videos/cp85lx1zxe0o



Two people have been killed and at least 19 others injured after a tall Mexican Navy training sail boat crashed into New York City's Brooklyn Bridge, the city mayor has said.

Eric Adams said the Cuauhtémoc lost power before the collision on Saturday evening. US officials said 277 people were on board the vessel, which was on a goodwill visit.

33. Brexit: UK-EU summit could 'reduce Irish Sea border impact'

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgnpyj2py9o



'Our business needs Irish Sea border reset'

13 hours ago Share Save John Campbell BBC NI economics and business editor Share Save

BBC Laura Graham-Brown said that new sea border rules on parcels have made the situation much worse

A UK-EU summit is likely to pave the way for a deal which could substantially reduce the impact of the Irish Sea border. The UK wants to reset its post-Brexit relationship with the European Union (EU) after years of tension. Monday's summit is expected to include an "agreement to agree" on trade issues, including the trade in food and agricultural products. If a full agri-food deal follows, potentially later this year, that will reduce the need for checks and controls on products being sent from GB to Northern Ireland.

It could mean the end of 'Not for EU' labelling and the removal of most physical checks on goods.

One food business in Belfast said the reset cannot come soon enough and that immediate measures are needed to help small firms. BBC News NI first spoke to the owners of Arcadia Deli in 2020 before the sea border started to be implemented. They have faced continuous struggles with the processes needed to get products from GB. Co-owner Laura Graham-Brown said that new sea border rules on parcels have made the situation much worse in the last month. "Our partners in England have decided they are not supplying Northern Ireland until further notice until they can get some clarification on how to make it easier," she said. "That is our biggest distributor so it is starting to tell on our counter as it becomes increasingly empty."

She said she would welcome any deal that improves the situation but said something needs to change soon. "All we want to do is sell cheese and olives. In order to keep stocking our shelves we need something to happen fairly quickly," she said. There are no guarantees about the scope of the agreement being negotiated and, on its own, it would not eliminate the sea border. Stuart Anderson from NI Chamber of Commerce said businesses would take time to analyse the detail of any deal. "NI Chamber has been calling on the UK government to reach an agreement that is ambitious enough to substantially reduce bureaucracy for all operators in our agri food supply chain," he said.

Getty Images The summit is expected to include an "agreement to agree" on trade issues, including the trade in food

It comes as a poll from Queen's University Belfast suggests dwindling unionist support for Northern Ireland's current Brexit deal, the Windsor Framework. Professor David Phinnemore said there was an "evident drop" in the already limited unionist support that exists for the Windsor Framework particularly among those identifying as "slightly unionist". Support among that group has fallen from 51% to 26% over the last year. Prof Phinnimore said: "If that trend is to be reversed, a closer UK-EU relationship needs to deliver on reducing obstacles to the GB-NI movement of goods."

What has the UK government said?

The Labour government made a manifesto commitment to seek a new agri-food agreement with the EU which, it said, would aim to "eliminate most border checks created by the Tory Brexit deal". The deal would apply to the UK as a whole but would have the biggest impact in Northern Ireland. That is because NI is still effectively inside the EU's single market for goods but its supermarkets are mainly supplied from the UK. The Centre for European Reform (CER), a think tank, said that an agri-food deal would not be of "great macroeconomic significance" for the UK as a whole but that NI would be a "major beneficiary". It added: "The closer UK regulations come to those of the EU, the less is the need for border controls on goods crossing the Irish Sea from Great Britain to Northern Ireland."

Reuters For many Unionists the Irish Sea border is a constitutional affront which undermines NI's place in the UK

What is the Irish Sea border?

The Irish Sea border continues to have an impact on Northern Ireland's politics and its economy. It came about as the result of a Brexit deal between the EU and UK in 2019, which was revised in 2023, and is now known as the Windsor Framework. It was agreed that the most practical way to keep the border open between NI and the Republic of Ireland was for NI to follow many EU laws on the regulation of goods. This means that goods coming from the rest of the UK into NI face checks and controls to ensure they meet EU rules. For many nationalists in NI, this is a necessary compromise to minimise the impact of B

rexit on the island of Ireland. For many unionists it is a constitutional affront which undermines NI's place in the UK. The largest unionist party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), prevented NI's power-sharing government from operating between 2022 and 2024 in protest.

How could an agri-food deal change things?

Agri-food deals from the EU fall into two broad categories: New Zealand-style or Swiss-style. The EU's deal with New Zealand means that each party recognises that the other has high food standards and so the frequency of checks on products and paperwork is reduced. However, New Zealand still sets its own standards and a proportion of goods are still checked as they enter the EU. By contrast there are no regulatory border controls for trade in agri-food products between Switzerland and the EU. But the Swiss only have this deal because they agreed to follow EU rules almost to the letter, without much say in setting those rules. Switzerland is obliged to modify its laws in response to changes in EU legislation, what is known as dynamic alignment, and accept oversight from the European Court of Justice. A Swiss-style deal would mean controls on GB food products entering NI could be effectively ended. The EU has previously said this deal would be on offer to the UK but the government had retained an ambivalent stance on whether it would accept this. However in recent weeks ministers have been careful not to rule it out. Such a deal will face opposition from Brexit supporters who say it would involve surrendering powers which were returned to the UK after it left the EU.

What border processes would remain?

34. Saunas, espresso and null points: A look back at Eurovision 2025

https://www.bbc.com/news/videos/cd0ln1m54vzo



Austrian singer JJ won the Eurovision Song Contest in Basel, Switzerland, with Israel taking second place.

In a typically colourful contest, Sweden sung about saunas, while Estonia shared a love of coffee.

The UK's entry from Remember Monday failed to pick up any votes from viewers despite faring pretty well with the judges.

35. Latest News & Updates

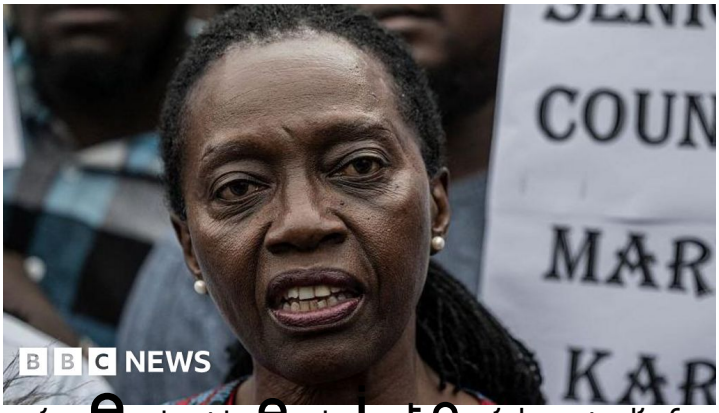
https://www.bbc.com/news/in_pictures

We set the theme, you take the pictures

Each week, we ask you to send in your pictures on a set theme and a selection of these are then published each Thursday on our In pictures page

36. Kenya's Martha Karua 'deported' from Tanzania ahead of Tundu Liss

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czdynd8l4pqo



Kenya's ex-justice minister 'deported' from Tanzania

Martha Karua was interrogated for several hours by Tanzanian authorities, her party says

Karua is a respected human rights advocate, and a vocal critic of what she calls "democratic backsliding" in East Africa.

Lissu, who is the leader of Tanzania's main opposition Chadema party, is due to appear in court on Monday after being charged with treason last month.

Two colleagues accompanying her were also reportedly detained and deported after flying in from neighbouring Kenya. Tanzanian authorities have not yet commented.

Leading Kenyan lawyer and the country's former Justice Minister Martha Karua says she has been deported from Tanzania to prevent her from attending the court case of opposition leader Tundu Lissu.

She has also been representing Ugandan opposition politician Kizza Besigye, who was kidnapped in Kenya last year and taken back to his home country to face treason charges.

Like Lissu, he denies the charges, arguing that they are politically motivated.

Karua served as Kenya's justice minister from 2005 to 2009, and was the running-mate of former Prime Minister Raila Odinga in his failed presidential bid in elections in 2022.

She launched her own opposition party, the People's Liberation Party (PLP), earlier this year.

The PLP said that she - along with fellow Kenyan lawyer Gloria Kimani and human rights campaigner Lynn Ngugi - were subjected to "hours of unwarranted interrogation", before being deported.

Condemning the incident, Chadema general secretary John Mnyika said: "The solution to hiding the shame of a false treason case is not to detain foreign lawyers, but to drop the case altogether."

The Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition said it was shocked by the what it called the "arbitrary arrests", as Karua had been allowed into Tanzania to observe proceedings when Lissu appeared in court on 15 April.

Human rights groups have been increasingly concerned about a crackdown on the opposition in Tanzania ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections due in October.

Lissu cannot seek bail because he has been charged with treason, a crime for which the maximum sentence is death.

He survived an assassination attempt in 2017 after being shot 16 times.

The opposition leader was arrested in April after he held a rally under under the slogan "No Reforms, No Election".

He is demanding sweeping changes, saying Tanzania's current laws do not allow for free and fair elections. The government denies the allegation.

Since his arrest, his Chadema party has been barred from contesting the October poll after it refused to to comply with the electoral commission's requirement to sign a code of conduct.

The document requires parties and their supporters to "behave well", and to "maintain peace and harmony" during the elections.

Chadema sees the code of conduct as a ploy to contain the opposition, and for state repression to continue.

The CCM party, which has governed Tanzania since 1977, is expected to retain power following the latest developments.

President Samia Suluhu Hassan is expected to be its presidential candidate.

She was widely praised for giving Tanzanians greater political freedom when she took office in 2021 following the death of the incumbent, John Magufuli.

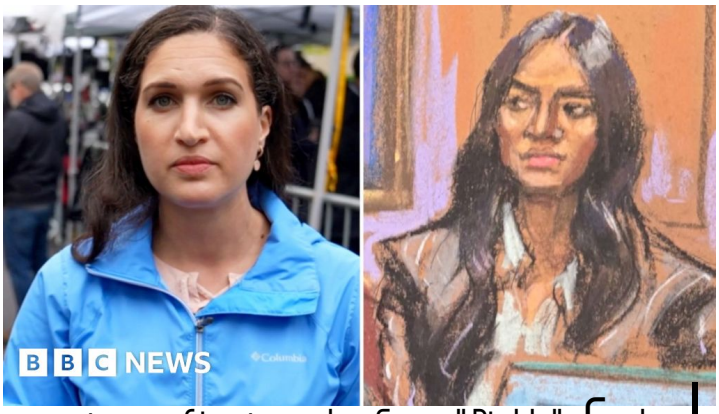
Her critics say Tanzania is once again seeing the repression that characterised

Magufuli's rule. The government denies the allegation.

Additional reporting by Humphrey Mgonja in Nairobi

37. How Diddy's lawyers used freak-off texts against Cassie

https://www.bbc.com/news/videos/c2d54g6rkkyo



After a tense first week, Sean "Diddy" Combs lawyers finished their cross-examination on the prosecution's star witness, his former girlfriend Cassie Ventura.

Combs faces charges of racketeering, sex trafficking and transportation to engage in prostitution. The rapper has denied all of them.

The BBC's Nada Tawfik explains what happened when lawyers brought up old text messages exchanged between Combs and Ventura.

38. In depth and expert analysis from BBC News

https://www.bbc.com/news/bbcindepth



The divides behind the scenes in the Vatican ahead of the conclave

Pope Francis's efforts to shake up the workings of the Church should be built on by the next pope, according to some - but his critics are less convinced

39. Minister 'pushing' for deal over UK use of EU passport e-gates

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgeg1302d19o



Minister 'pushing' for deal over use of EU passport e-gates

6 hours ago Share Save Jennifer McKiernan • @_JennyMcKiernan Political reporter, BBC News Share Save

BBC

The government is pushing for a deal that would allow UK passport holders to use EU airport e-gates, a minister has confirmed. Nick Thomas-Symonds, who said negotiations were in the "very final hours" ahead of a UK-EU summit in London, described stopping people being stuck in border queues as a "very sensible objective". Asked whether the UK would have to follow more EU rules in some areas as part of any deals, the European relations minister told the BBC's Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg "it will mean taking a sovereign choice as to... the common standards we wish to align". Conservative MP Alex Burghart claimed the government's proposed deal with the EU could mean the UK becoming a "rule taker".

The UK and EU will hold their first bilateral summit since Brexit on Monday, described by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer as a "really significant moment". Sir Keir is expected to announce a deal when he meets European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa. Announcements around trade and security have been expected to include British access to a 150 billion euro (£125 billion) EU defence fund, in what could be a

boost for UK defence companies. But reports suggest there could also be agreements on allowing British travellers to use e-gates at European airports, cutting red tape on food exports and imports, and setting up a youth mobility scheme with the EU. Thomas-Symonds, who is leading the negotiations, said he was driven by "ruthless pragmatism" and focused on jobs, lower household bills and stronger borders. The minister also said the government would assess whether to contribute money to EU projects on a case-by-case basis, saying it would "consider each one on its merits". Asked whether he was confident British travellers would be able to use EU e-gates at European airports, Thomas-Symonds said: "I'm certainly pushing for people to be able to go through far more quickly. "I think we can all agree that not being stuck in queues and having more time to spend, whether it's on holiday or work trips, having more time to do what you want ... would be a very sensible objective." The minister said he was confident about a deal on food, but added "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed". He added: "We know we've had lorries waiting for 16 hours, fresh food in the back not able to be exported because frankly it's just going off, red tape, all the certifications that are required, we absolutely want to reduce that."

Burghart told the programme his main concern was the government signing up to EU standards and becoming "a rule taker - one of the things we specifically left behind when we left the EU". He said the government had not ruled out "dynamic alignment", which would see the UK and EU maintain equivalent regulatory standards on food and trade, despite the UK not being "in the room" when future decisions are taken. He added: "As the government hasn't ruled that out we have to assume it's very firmly on the table and is about to happen. "And if it is about to happen, then that is a surrender of some of Britain's sovereignty and we won't stand for it". On a deal around whether young people from the EU can come to live and work in the UK and vice versa, Thomas-Symonds insisted he was negotiating around "a smart and controlled scheme", adding "nobody is remotely suggesting that's freedom of movement. That's a red line for us". The minister did not respond directly to questioning on whether there would be a cap on numbers or time-limited visas, such as in existing schemes with Australia and Canada, but did stress "that control element is hugely important". He also denied there were plans to exempt student numbers from overall migration figures and added "anything agreed - and I stress this is in sensitive final hours - will be consistent with reducing the level of net migration as we've promised".

Appearing on the same programme, Liberal Democrat MP Calum Miller said he was "troubled by the sense the government isn't seizing this moment, in the context of

a changed environment, to really go further" on EU relations. The party's spokesperson for foreign affairs said "setting ourselves on an ambitious path towards a customs union is the best way to give some certainty to British businesses". Miller also claimed removing red tape between the UK and EU could be worth £25bn, and a customs union could increase the revenue further. Reform UK leader Nigel Farage claimed an EU deal that included a youth mobility scheme and extending fishing rights for the EU in British waters would mean that "to a large extent, Starmer will be betraying Brexit" and he would "get rid of it" if he was prime minister. Speaking to BBC Radio 4's Broadcasting House, Farage said a youth mobility scheme would be "free movement of people to the under 30s" and "we know that'll be a one-way street - way more people will come here than will go in the other direction". Farage suggested a deal on defence would mean "we're going to see by the looks of it British soldiers under an EU flag" before adding "EU cooperation absolutely, under an EU flag, no".

40. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/uk



How assisted dying laws across the UK could change

Separate bills which would let terminally ill people end their life are being considered at Westminster and in Scotland.

41. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/war-in-ukraine



Trump: Nothing's going to happen until Putin and I get together

The BBC asked President Trump whether he was disappointed by the level of the delegation that Russia sent to Turkey.

42. Israeli forces besiege Gaza hospital as Hamas offers truce terms

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy90d929yyno



Israeli forces besiege Gaza hospital as Hamas offers truce terms

This week has also seen the deadliest wave of air strikes on Gaza in months.

Israel's military said it had launched "extensive ground operations" over the past day as part of a new offensive aimed at destroying Hamas which it has called "Operation Gideon's Chariots".

Medical staff and patients at the Indonesian Hospital, in Beit Lahia, came under "heavy fire... preventing the arrival of patients, medical staff, and supplies", the ministry said on Sunday.

Israeli forces have besieged a hospital in northern Gaza as they continue an offensive to seize territory in the Strip, the Hamas-run health ministry has said.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said it troops were fighting "terrorist infrastructure sites" in northern Gaza, including the area near to the Indonesian hospital.

The health ministry said three public hospitals were now "out of action" in the North Gaza governorate. At least 67 people have died and 361 have been injure

d in the last 24 hours, it said.

Speaking to the BBC on Sunday, Mohammed Salha, director of the al-Awda private hospital in northern Gaza, said the closure of the Indonesian Hospital would have an impact on the care he was able to provide.

He said al-Awda depended on the Indonesian Hospital for stores of oxygen and for its intensive care unit.

Mr Salha added that there had been a bombing near his hospital overnight causing "a lot of damage" to the facility that staff were attempting to quickly repair.

On Tuesday, Israeli strikes had hit two of the largest hospitals in Khan Younis, the Nasser Medical Complex and European Hospital.

The Israeli military accused Hamas of hiding a command and control centre beneath European Hospital, and said it conducted a "precise strike" on "Hamas terrorists".

Israeli media reported the target of the strike was senior Hamas figure Mohammed Sinwar - the younger brother of the former Hamas leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar.

Israeli strikes on Saturday hit the southern city of Khan Younis again, as well as towns in the north of Gaza, including Beit Lahia and the Jabalia refugee camp, the health ministry and rescuers from the civil defence forces said.

Thousands of people have been killed since Israel resumed its strikes on 18 March, following the collapse of a fragile ceasefire which lasted two months.

Israel's military has said the expansion of its campaign is aimed at "achieving all the war's objectives" including releasing hostages and "the defeat of Hamas".

Aid agencies have warned about the risk of famine among Gaza's 2.1 million population, as footage and accounts emerge of emaciated children suffering malnutrition. Israel has been blocking supplies of food and other aid from entering the territory for 10 weeks.

New indirect talks aimed at securing a ceasefire were held on Saturday in Qatar, just hours after Israel launched its major new offensive.

Hamas offered to release nine hostages in exchange for a 60-day truce, a Palestinian official told the BBC.

The official said the new proposed deal would also allow the entry of 400 aid trucks a day, and the evacuation of medical patients from Gaza. Israel, in turn, has demanded proof of life and detailed information about all remaining hostages.

Israel said prior to the talks that it would not withdraw troops from Gaza or commit to an end to the war.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier this month promised a major military escalation in the war to occupy and control swathes of Gaza, force the Palestinian population to the south of the territory, and "destroy" Hamas.

The war was triggered by the Hamas-led attacks on southern Israel on 7 October 2023, which saw about 1,200 people killed and more than 250 taken hostage.

Some 58 hostages remain in Gaza, up to 23 of whom are believed to be alive.

More than 53,000 Palestinians have been killed during Israel's military campaign in Gaza.

43. US & Canada

https://www.bbc.com/news/us-canada



'To Easy LoL' - New Orleans jail break may have been inside job

The inmates ripped a toilet from the wall and escaped through a hole before running across a highway.

44. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/scotland

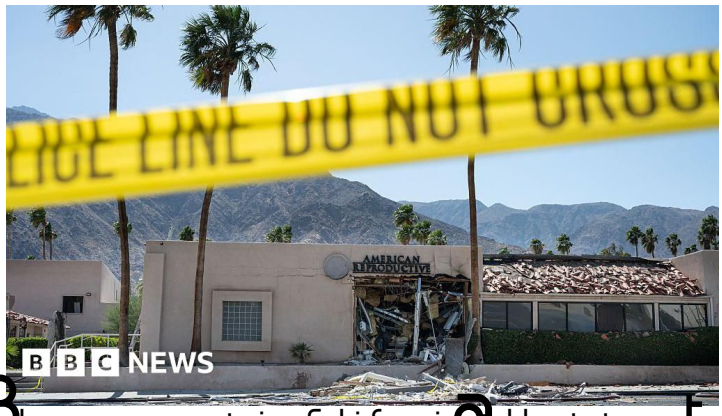


Surgeon inquiry spends £1m before hearing evidence

The inquiry into disgraced Tayside brain surgeon Sam Eljamel was launched last month and has racked up £1.05m in costs so far.

45. FBI identifies suspect in fatal Palm Springs fertility clinic blast

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c787j90wp6po



FBI says suspect in California blast targeted fertility clinic

6 minutes ago Share Save Nadine Yousif BBC News Share Save

AFP via Getty Images

Authorities have identified the suspect in a deadly car blast that targeted a fertility clinic in Palm Springs, California as Guy Edward Bartkus, a 25-year-old man they said "had nihilistic ideations". The FBI said they believe he is the sole fatality in the incident. They said on Sunday that he detonated explosives outside the clinic and tried to livestream the attack, but investigators are still piecing together his movements before the explosion. The blast happened just before 11:00 local time (19:00 BST) on Saturday, less than a mile from downtown Palm Springs, near several businesses including the American Reproductive Centers (ARC). The clinic said no-one from the facility was harmed.

The FBI had called the attack an "intentional act of terrorism". They believe the suspect deliberately targeted the in vitro fertilisation (IVF) facility. They added they are reviewing a manifesto they believe is linked to Bartkus. Police said Bartkus is a resident of Twentynine Palms, home to a large marine base about an hour away from Palm Springs. The FBI has executed a search warrant on his residence in Twentynine Palms, they said. Nearby residents had been evacuated. Police stressed that there is no on-going threat to the public, both at the site of the blast and near the suspect's home. The blast was a result of a large vehicle-borne improvised explosive device, law enforcement sources told BBC's US partner CBS News. Akil Davis, the FBI's assistant director in the Los Angeles field office, said the suspect used a 2010 silver Ford Fusion sedan in the attack. Mr Davis said the FBI is still looking for the public's help to piece together the suspect's whereabouts before the blast, and will remain on scene for the next day or two to continue their investigation.

FBI The FBI identified the suspect in the Palm Springs blast as 25-year-old Guy Edward Bartkus

46. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/wales/wales_politics



Conservatives pledge to drive down Welsh NHS waits

They will promise to reduce waits for treatment to no more than a year if they win power next May.

47. Latest News & Updates

https://www.bbc.com/news/world/latin_america

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48. UK and EU haggle over key points before first summit since Brexit

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckg4r54kd8do



Defence deals and palace invites: UK and EU haggle before first summit since Brexit

18 hours ago Share Save Katya Adler Europe editor Share Save

EPA-EFE/REX/Shutterstock

"Don't expect miracles. But do know - everyone wants this to work." On Monday in London the EU and UK hold their first bilateral summit since Brexit. Symbolically, this is a big moment. Officials and analysts I speak to, on and off the record, like the individual I just quoted, are quick to point out difficulties that exist between the two sides. But all acknowledge the bilateral bitterness provoked by Brexit is no more. It's been eviscerated by the gravity of global events. Concerns about Russia and China, the war in Ukraine, the shock of the US under Donald Trump no longer prioritising European defence, plus a growing sense of voter insecurity is propelling the two powers to work closer together.

"Failure to do so, in the current international context, would not be a good look," says Anand Menon, director of the think tank UK in a Changing Europe. Most European countries realise that, he adds: "Even the French." More than most EU countries, France has been playing hardball in pre-summit negotiations. Is it a coincidence that as talks went to the wire before Monday's summit, the UK announced that France's president has been invited for his first state visit? King Charles and Queen Camilla will host Emmanuel Macron and his wife at Windsor Castle in July. A UK attempt to butter up the French leader, perhaps? "It'll be interesting to see if they can agree common language [for a summit agreement]," says Georgina Wright, European policy expert at the Institut Montaigne. "Everyone in the EU wants closer relations with the UK right now and France doesn't want to be seen as the one country blocking closer UK-EU cooperation. But that does not mean that Paris is willing to give up on core interests." Interests like fishing rights in UK waters and bidding for EU defence contracts.

The Telegraph/PA French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte have been invited to the UK for a state visit

Negotiating - or to be more accurate - haggling over the "meat" of the summit will, I'm told, continue till the last moment. On the day itself, we can expect three separate announcements: A joint declaration that addresses the worrying geopolitical situation and emphasises UK-EU shared foreign policy priorities - such as supporting Ukraine, keeping up pressure on Russia, and ending civilian suffering in Gaza

An EU-UK security and defence pact

A package of measures targeted at removing some trade barriers between the EU and

UK that have come about because of Brexit

Closer economic ties to Europe

These trade measures are the "reset" of relations with the EU that UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has promised since his party won a general election last summer. They are far from an economic gamechanger for the UK, though. Hardly what you'd call ambitious. Destroying all trade barriers with the EU is impossible if the Labour government keeps to its own "red lines" of not rejoining the bloc's customs union or single market. Despite promising to prioritise UK economic growth, and polls suggesting the majority of Britons want to do more trade with the EU, Labour will feel hemmed in by the increasingly popular, Eurosceptic Reform Party. It performed well in recent local elections in the UK. While some in Labour (quietly) admit they are tempted by a customs union with the EU to boost growth, any economic benefits would likely not be apparent to voters before the next UK election. Party members fear they would risk being punished at the polls, amidst accusations by the opposition Conservatives and Reform that the government would have betrayed Brexit. These concerns make the Starmer government "more cautious, less bold", says Mr Menon.

So what will be agreed at the summit?

The UK is taking a sector-by-sector approach to try to reduce costly trade barriers with the EU. Many EU-UK negotiating hours have gone into agreeing a plant and animal health deal, known as an SPS agreement. This will facilitate the export and import of meat and plant products between the EU and UK and help reduce post-Brexit trade complications between Northern Ireland and Britain. In exchange, the EU insists the UK must agree to following any new SPS rules introduced in the future and accept a role for the European Court of Justice in policing the agreement. Those conditions will likely be unpopular with ardent Brexit supporters. They might also put backs up in Washington and complicate the UK doing a wider future deal on agriculture with the US, as the UK would be tied to stringent EU standards.

PA A new fishing agreement for UK waters is needed as the current one expires next year

But the Labour government knows public opinion polls suggest most people in the UK prioritise trade with the EU over the US. Currently the EU counts for

41% of UK exports; the US for 21%. The UK government will probably insist the SPS agreement is good for the British economy. Though animal and plant exports and imports are, in fact, a small part of overall GDP. In reality "growth is a bit of a red herring here", says Mr Menon. On the EU side, the French, backed by other fishing nations like the Netherlands and Denmark, have taken a tough stance in these talks - refusing to sign up unless the UK agrees to long-term EU fishing rights in UK waters. The current post-Brexit fishing agreement expires next year.

Free-er movement for some

The reset we'll hear about at Monday's summit will also include a "mobility" section. Starmer will get his ask, for the EU to recognise UK professional qualifications, to encourage cross-border business. There will also be a reduction in visa restrictions for UK musicians travelling and performing in the EU. In exchange, the EU - and Germany, most passionately - wants a youth mobility scheme, allowing young EU citizens to travel, study, and even work in the UK. The UK has similar schemes with Canada, Australia, South Korea and Japan, amongst others. But this has been tricky to agree. Reducing migration figures is a number one priority for the Labour government. It's a hot-button issue and the UK Home Office will seek to toughen conditions and limit EU numbers.

Negotiations are ongoing but, according to EU sources, the scheme already has a name: YES, or Youth Experience Scheme. Some areas of negotiation are more advanced than others. This will be reflected in Monday's announcement. There will also be talk at the summit of plans to tackle illegal migration, cooperate on carbon border taxes, and simplify energy trading between the EU and UK. Reducing EU-UK trade barriers on chemicals and pharmaceutical goods is also a UK ambition, as is getting access to EU databases, like the Schengen Information System, to better track down criminals. But for now, at least, the EU is saying no to that. If it makes an exception for the UK, other non-EU countries will demand the same, it insists. Of course, it's in the interest of both sides to fight cross-border crime. The UK argues the current state of the world calls for more flexible thinking from Brussels.

Defence and security complications

The case for more flexible thinking is also something the UK is calling for when it comes to Monday's defence and security pact with the EU. The EU and UK

already work closely together on Russian sanctions and defending Ukraine. And the pact isn't a legally binding document, so how complicated can these talks be, you may ask? The answer is pretty complicated. The UK wants its defence companies to be allowed to bid for contracts under the EU's new re-armament scheme, SAFE (Security Action for Europe). "The UK has earned the right to access such a deal because of the leadership it's shown over Ukraine," says international defence expert Sophia Gaston, a visiting fellow at King's College London.

PA Some believe the UK has earned the right to bid for EU arms contracts due to its leadership over Ukraine

"Britain is a serious player both in traditional defence capabilities, like producing munitions, and in cutting edge defence innovation, where new growth and energy is. "If the UK has access to the emerging EU defence programmes, it can contribute to mass and pace. [The War in Ukraine] has shown that both are needed." But Ms Gaston admits, UK companies getting the go-ahead from Brussels is a "messy" process. "Re-Arm EU", as Brussels dubs its new drive, is still a work in progress, spurred by rapidly changing geopolitics, including fears the US will withdraw at least some of the crucial security support Europe has relied on since World War Two. This is not yet a fully formed EU strategy that the UK can "pay to play" a part in, as it has done post-Brexit with the EU's research and innovation scheme Horizon, for example. An agreement with the UK in this defence industrial context will be brand new and bespoke. And it's getting political.

Signing the security pact on Monday is just a step in the process. France wants to severely restrict non-EU companies bidding for the bloc's defence contracts, including the UK but Canadian and American firms too. If the EU is spending its taxpayers' money on defence, it argues it should be spent with EU companies to help boost EU economies. Paris also says, in this rapidly changing world of shifting alliances and allegiances, the EU should be self-reliant, not dependent on suppliers outside the bloc. Sceptics suspect France, which has a sophisticated defence industry, of wanting to hoover up lucrative EU contracts for itself. But it looks like it is losing the internal EU argument, with the Nordics, the Baltics, Poland, Italy and the Netherlands favouring more openness on defence contracts, and particularly with the EU's biggest economic power, Germany, championing the UK. "Germany and France have very different attitudes towards the UK," says German economist Armin Steinbach from think tank Bruegel. Germany will always put relations with EU heavyweights France and Poland fi

rst, says Mr Steinbach. But he believes the UK will be helped in defence and economic negotiations with the EU by new German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who argues "a unified Europe is the absolute priority in the current geopolitical setting".

Huge challenge of defence cooperation

49. UK Eurovision entry played outside Buckingham Palace

https://www.bbc.com/news/videos/c5y520wlj6po



The Band of the Irish Guards played a rendition of the UK's Eurovision entry Outside Buckingham Palace on Saturday morning, ahead of the song contest final in Switzerland.

The Royal Family shared this video on X saying: "Wishing Remember Monday the very best of luck in the Eurovision Final in Basel this evening!"

Viewers in the UK can watch the band perform What the Hell Just Happened? on BBC One and BBC iPlayer from 20:00 BST, with live updates on the BBC News website.

50. Two dead as Mexican Navy ship crashes into Brooklyn Bridge

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c991n8p4pdyo



Two dead as Mexican Navy ship crashes into Brooklyn Bridge

Video shows ship crashing into Brooklyn Bridge

Brooklyn resident Nick Corso, who witnessed the accident, said the area erupted in panic. There was "lots of screaming, some sailors hanging from the masts," he told AFP.

Footage shows the ship's towering masts clip the bridge as it passed under the structure. Crew members were standing on the masts as they snapped and fell to the deck, authorities said.

Police said the Cuauhtémoc, with 277 people on board, lost power on Saturday as the captain was manoeuvring the vessel, forcing it to head for the bridge abutment on the Brooklyn side.

Two people have been killed and at least 19 others injured after a tall Mexican Navy training sailing ship crashed into New York City's Brooklyn Bridge.

Damaged masts on the Mexican Navy training ship Cuauhtémoc after it crashed into New York City's Brooklyn Bridge

New York City Mayor Eric Adams confirmed on X that two people died and two of the 19 injured were in critical condition.

Brooklyn Bridge did not suffer any major damage and was reopened after a preliminary inspection.

Police said they believed "mechanical malfunction" and a power cut had caused the collision.

The New York Coast Guard said the Cuauhtémoc lost all three masts. All personnel on the ship had been accounted for and no-one had fallen in the water.

Crowds fled from the water's edge as the ship hit the bridge.

Another witness, Kelvin Flores, told the BBC he was at work when he saw the crash.

He came out into the street to find a lot of "commotion and a lot of chaos" with fire engines and police trying to reach the scene but the roads clogged with traffic.

"Just seeing the actual damage was insane," he said. "People carrying stretchers... they were trying to get the injured out."

Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum said she was deeply saddened by the loss of two crew members in the accident.

The Cuauhtémoc was towed from the scene after the crash.

The vessel, which measures 297 feet long (91m) and 40 feet (12m) wide, according to the Mexican navy, sailed for the first time in 1982.

Each year it sets sail at the end of classes at the naval military school to finish cadets' training.

This year it left the Mexican port of Acapulco on 6 April, the navy said. Its final destination was intended to be Iceland. Among its scheduled stops along the way was Aberdeen, Scotland, for the city's Tall Ships race in July.

Police said the Cuauhtémoc's mast height was 48.2m (158ft). The New York transport department's website says the bridge has a 135ft clearance at its centre.

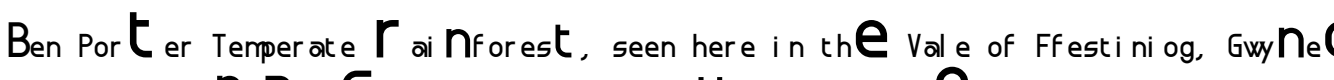
51. Celtic rainforest in Wales facing extinction crisis, ecologists warns

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c7873ynnn57o



Celtic rainforest facing species 'extinction crisis'

12 hours ago Share Save Paul Pigott BBC News Share Save



Ben Porter Temperate rainforest, seen here in the Vale of Ffestiniog, Gwynedd, is found in areas subject to the influence of the sea

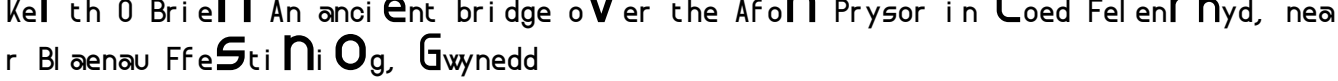
An "extinction crisis" is happening in Britain's temperate rainforests where some of the world's rarest mosses, lichens and liverworts are vanishing, ecologists have warned. Also known as Celtic rainforests, temperate rainforests are found primarily along the UK's western coasts. A survey of Welsh rainforests in 2024 found only 22% were in a good condition due to pollution, fragmentation and invasive species. "When this tree came down, in a flash we lost a species," said ecologist Sabine Nouvet about a 500-year-old oak in Eryri National Park, also known as Snowdonia, which fell during Storm Darragh in December.

The tree was home to one of the UK's best known populations of a rare lichen, the loss of which was "symbolic of the species crisis, the extinction crisis, that we are facing now", said Ms Nouvet.

Ms Nouvet, a rainforest advisor with Plant Life, a member of the Alliance for Wales' Rainforests, said the fallen tree's bark was once home to more than 60 types of lichen. The rarest was the minuscule rinodina isidioides - its tiny structures, when seen through a hand lens, resemble its common name, skeletal fingers. It lives only on trees at least 300 years old and in conditions found exclusively in the rain-soaked valleys of western Ireland and Britain.

Skeletal fingers lichen attached to other trees with garden netting could help the species to survive, Ms Nouvet says

Temperate rainforests occur on less than 1% of the planet's surface and Wales has internationally important examples of the habitat. The special habitat's twisted branches, dappled light and moss-covered understorey once covered much of the country, but is now only found in isolated areas including the Woodland Trust's Coed Felenrhyd near Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd.



Keith O Brien An ancient bridge over the Afon Prysor in Coed Felenrhyd, near Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd

December's storm "hammered the forests around here", said Ms Nouvet. She said a

t least six ancient trees, described as "grandmothers" of the forest, were lost in Coed Felenrhyd. The presence of skeletal finger on one of those trees indicated "that this Valley has got clean air, it has ancient forest, that this tree was, for some reason, really old and then we lost it", she added.

Isobelle Hotchkiss Coedwig Dyfi Site of Special Scientific Interest, near Machynlleth in Powys

There is hope the skeletal finger species can hang on in the valley after clippings were relocated to five other old trees nearby. Ms Nouvet said the aim was for the clippings to seed the bark below, but the process could take up to a decade. There is about 33,024 hectares, or 46,000 football pitches, of rainforest left in Wales. Storms are just one of the threats to ancient woodlands such as Coed Felenrhyd which, according to the State of Wales Rainforest report, cover just 4.3% of country's rainforest landscape.

Waterfalls like this one in Afon Prysor gorge, in Eryri National Park, create the humidity that temperate rainforest species need to thrive

Much of this rainforest lacks connectivity to similar habitats because it is surrounded by farmland or woodlands planted with non-native species. Some are grazed inappropriately, the survey said, and many are affected by rhododendrons that smother the forest floor in a dense shade that native species cannot tolerate. Farmer and retired forester Aled Thomas said the Celtic rainforest had been "grazed since the beginning of time", leading to the formation of these woodlands. But conservation efforts in the past saw many ancient woodlands fenced off. "They have grown wild with invasive species coming in so none of the natural flowers associated with this type of woodland have been present," Mr Thomas explained.

Farmer Aled Thomas says grazing small Dexter cows in parts of the rainforest is helping to restore native species

Mr Thomas grazes small Dexter cattle in Coed y Gribin, a pocket of rainforest managed by the RSPB near Dolgellau. "They will provide a habitat for a much more diverse species range by their hooves marking the ground, driving in acorns, rolling on the ground and they'll graze anything and everything," he said. "They eat brambles like they are having supper." Each animal is fitted with a GPS tracker and an alarm that trains them to keep to areas that need grazing and

away from sensitive parts of the forest. "The landscape has changed dramatically because the cows have been here for about three seasons and you notice there's very little bracken and there are bluebells coming up." Mr Thomas said farms with more woodlands were the key to linking up isolated parts of the rainforest. "You just don't need a field for growing cows, you can grow food by grazing in woodland and the benefits from that are huge to the forest and the farm."

'People don't realise it's here'

52. Shropshire photographer captures beauty of back garden wildlife

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c80kve8kr4no



Back garden's wildlife beauty captured over decade

18 hours ago Share Save Vanessa Pearce BBC News, West Midlands Share Save

Andrew Fusek Peters Photographer Andrew Fusek Peters Captured a goldfinch with rainbow-effect wings in his Shropshire garden

A photographer has spent a decade carrying out "garden safaris" in order to capture the diversity and beauty of Britain's back garden wildlife. The images, including battling birds and squabbling squirrels, showed just what could be found "under our noses", said Andrew Fusek Peters. "I wanted to celebrate the everyday stories and reveal the beauty of our birds, mammals and insects that live alongside us," the Shropshire photographer added. Hundreds of his images feature in a new book.

Andrew Fusek Peters Two red squirrels were captured fighting in a back garden on the Isle of Wight

The majority of the photographs were taken in his "modest" garden, and local village of Lydbury. "You don't have to travel to nature reserves or mountains," he said. "I sometimes get snobbery from the big photographers who go to Africa and do the lions and tigers, or Greenland for the Polar bears," he explained. "And they think I'm somehow inferior because I do blue tits in the garden."

Andrew Fusek Peters The photographer set up a hide on a domestic lawn to capture this rare image of a mother hare suckling her leveret

But, he added, capturing rare images such as a hare feeding her leveret on someone's back lawn was "just amazing". "At the time I took it, that had been photographed maybe less than 10 times in the world," he said. "It was sheer gold on my memory card." He had also travelled to other parts of the UK in order to capture other "extraordinary moments," including a fox family playing in Clapham, south London, and a pair of red squirrels on the Isle of Wight.

Andrew Fusek Peters This pair of brightly coloured bramblings fighting over food was one of the photographer's favourite shots

Mr Fusek Peters started concentrating on his own garden wildlife after a diagnosis of bowel cancer in 2018, perfecting a technique to "make time stop" to get shots of birds and butterflies taking off and in mid flight. Using his kitchen as a hide, he has also taken rare pictures of birds - showing the effect of diffraction on their wings, giving a rainbow effect. "This winter I got a woodpecker and a nuthatch" he said, adding the images were "extraordinary". "Everyone's going to accuse me of using AI, but it's not - it's actually scientific." He added he was "one of the few in the world" to have taken such images. "I just seem to have this blessed luck when I concentrate on what's out of the kitchen window."

AndrewFUsek Peters This image of a nuthatch is among the collection

The book was also a "rallying cry" to transform "over-manicured spaces into more wildlife friendly havens," he said. "These places are important, I think they really are," he added. "As we know with climate change and with what's happening with habitat a lot of species are really suffering, and that includes our garden visitors so it's important to showcase them. "They are just as important as all the wonderful creatures of the jungle and the desert," he added.

Andrew Fusek Peters A fox family plays in Clapham, South London

Andrew Fusek Peters This image of a ruby tailed wasp is included in the book

Springwatch presenter Iolo Williams said of the book, Garden Safaris: "Andrew makes the ordinary look extraordinary – stunning photography which helps to emphasise the importance of our gardens for wildlife." "I think this is the best compliment I've ever had," the photographer commented.

Andrew Fusek Peters A male pied flycatcher is captured bringing food to the nest

Andrew Fusek Peters The photographer said it took six days to capture this image of a bank vole in his back garden

Garden Safari is published by Graffeg Books

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53. Facial disfigurements: 'I was refused service in a cafe because of my

https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy4k8l5y5j1o



'I Was refused service in a cafe because of my face'

18 hours ago Share Save Vanessa Pearce BBC News, West Midlands Share Save

BBC Amit Ghose was born with Neurofibromatosis type 1

Subjected to brutal bullying as a child, Amit Ghose says he still has to deal w

ith constant staring, pointing and comments, and has even been refused service in a cafe because of his face. The 35-year-old from Birmingham described how visiting an independent coffee shop in London recently "everyone was staring at me, and it was like they'd almost seen a ghost". "The person serving looked at me and said: 'Oh, we're not serving any more'. "She turned around and walked off. But clearly, clearly they were still serving."

Amit was born with Neurofibromatosis type 1, a condition that causes non-cancerous tumours to grow along nerves. But after "learning acceptance" of his facial disfigurement he now shares his motivational story in schools with the aim of helping children "embrace their personalities and celebrate who they are".

Amit Ghose Amit Ghose had surgery to remove his eye when he was 11

Another recent experience of abuse spurred him on to self publish a children's book, Born Different. "I had a couple of individuals come over to me in a park and ask me what happened to my face, and I thought they were just being curious," he said. "But actually they started laughing, giggling, saying: 'Oh my God, if I had a face like you I wouldn't even come out my house'." He said the encounter "really upset" him "and I thought to myself, I need to do something about this. I need to get this book out. Now is the right time". "If I had this book when I was a young child, I think it would have helped me."

Amit Ghose After suffering bullying at school it was joining the cricket team that helped him make friends

Amit had his left eye surgically removed at the age of 11, leading to further facial disfigurement as well as abuse and bullying. In the run up to Halloween one year, a child at school told him "you don't need a Halloween mask, you've got one for life", he recalled. "That broke me to the point where I did not accept the left hand side of my face," he said. "For a very, very long time I hid the face, I just was not comfortable showing it to the world at all."

Looking back, he said he had not understood the depth of depression and anxiety he experienced then. "Other children not wanting to come and sit next to me or hiding behind their parents all had a mental effect on me," he said. At school, cricket was his passion and it was through playing the game that he eventually made friends. "Cricket helped me become Amit, that boy who plays cricket,

from Amit, the boy who has a funny face," he explained.

Amit Ghose The motivational speaker said he hoped the book would help children celebrate who they were

But, he said, even as an adult he still experienced "constant staring". "The pointing, the tapping the friend next to them saying 'have you seen that guy's face', that is also constant," he said. "But there is kindness out there as well, and that needs highlighting."

'This is me, take it or leave it'

It was his wife Piyali who eventually taught him the "art of acceptance," he explained. "Really that I've got to accept myself before others can accept me," he added. She also persuaded him to start sharing his story on social media. "I thought TikTok was all about singing and dancing, and I thought maybe not, but she convinced me. "I created a video and I said to the world: 'I want to take you all on a journey to help and support and inspire you using my lived experiences.'" He started his account in early 2023, and has since gone on to gain almost 200,000 followers and millions of likes. "Me helping people on social media by sharing my story has helped me become more accepting of myself. "Now I say to the world, this is me, take it or leave it."

Amit Ghose Amit says his wife Piyali persuaded him to share his story on social media

At about the same time, he left his job at a law firm to take up motivational speaking full time. Helping young people felt so much more important, he said. He is also about to launch a podcast in which he speaks to others who have had similar experiences, including Oliver Bromley who was ejected from a restaurant because staff said he was "scaring the customers". "We're going to have lots of fun and inspire a lot of people," he said. "Disability or no disability, visible difference or no visible difference, we all have insecurities, we all have things that we're faced with, and challenges we're faced with. "I just want to give this narrative to people that if we truly celebrate who we are, accept who we are, fall in love with who we are, then we can be more confident."

54. What the hell happened to UK Eurovision entry Remember Monday?

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Eurovision: 'What the Hell Just Happened' to the UK entry?

17 hours ago Share Save Mark Savage Music Correspondent Reporting from Basel, Switzerland Share Save

Getty Images Remember Monday went into the contest with high hopes, but it was not to be

Oh no, not again. For the third year in a row, the UK has crashed out at Eurovision, taking 19th place out of a possible 26. It feels particularly cruel this time because our contestants, Remember Monday, got a lot of things right with their song, What the Hell Just Happened. Most notably, they could sing - and I mean, really, really sing. Lauren, Holly and Charlotte hit every harmony in their song, What The Hell Just Happened, with pinpoint precision, drawing on a decade of West End experience that's seen them star in everything from Matilda to Phantom Of The Opera. After toe-curling performances from Olly Alexander in 2024 and Mae Muller in 2023, their vocals were as strong as a lion's roar. So strong, in fact, that they caught the attention of former Eurovision winner Conchita Wurst. "Harmonising on the Eurovision stage has hardly worked out in the past, but they're spot on," Conchita enthused before the final. "Their confidence is incredible. You immediately trust them, because when you feel the artist is nervous, you get nervous as a viewer. But they are just so light and so sharp." So what went wrong?

Watch: Key moments from Eurovision 2025

The chief culprit, if I'm honest, was the song. A manic mish-mash of musical styles, it sped up in the verses, and slowed down for the choruses, with all the consistency of a jelly in a heatwave. That's not to say it's a bad piece of writing. Indeed, all of the UK's 88 points came from professional juries of songwriters, whose job it is to recognise compositional craft. Italy even gave us the top score of 12. Grazie mille! They'll have recognised all the clever British touches the band crammed in - Elton John-style piano crescendos, a Beatles-esque mellotron riff, and a vocal callback to George Michael's Freedom '90. The lyrics were witty, too. Reminiscent of Katy Perry's Last Friday Night (TGIF), or If I Were a Bell from Guys and Dolls, it was all about the drunken mistakes you make while trying to get over an ex. "Broke a heel, lost my keys, scraped my knee / When I fell from the chandelier." In three short minutes, the trio rattled off half a dozen memorable hooks, all imbued with the unbreakable b

ond of their friendship. But as seasoned Eurovision watcher Jonathan Vautrey noted, the song was simply too busy. "It's hard to latch on to exactly what they're selling when you're too busy reeling from the constant whiplash of hearing an almost brand new song every 30 seconds," he wrote on the Wiwibloggs fansite last month.. "Although I've been able to settle into the entry overtime, and now appreciate the theatricality of it all, first impressions matter at Eurovision." That's an opinion I heard more than once. But still, I had hope.

Catching a tram to Basel's St Jackobshalle arena on Saturday, I was stopped by a Swedish woman who'd spotted my UK media pass. She wanted to tell me how she'd dismissed Remember Monday's song when auditioning this year's Eurovision songs on Spotify. Then she saw their spirited performance in the semi-final "and I understood". Good enough for one vote, then. So why didn't more people connect with it? The staging was put together by Ace Bowerman, who is one of the UK's most respected creative directors - responsible for Blackpink's Born Pink world tour and Dua Lipa's lockdown spectacular, Studio 2054. Speaking before the final, she told me the performance deliberately made a virtue of the girls' friendship. "As soon as I met them, I was like, 'Please be my friend!'" she told me, "They are electric people, they have such a special bond. So the one thing I want everybody to take away from the performance is how much fun they are - because the audience will want to be their friends as well." It was camp and fun, but lacked the scale of Finland's Erika Vikman, who soared above the audience on a giant phallic microphone, or the drama of Austrian winner JJ, who was tossed around the stage in the stormy sea of his own emotions.

Getty Images JJ's staging was simple but powerful - did the UK try to do too much?

"The UK's staging wasn't flat at all but, as with the song, it was maybe a bit too much," says Alexander Beijar, Eurovision reporter at Finnish broadcaster Yle. "It was like, we have three minutes, and we'll show you everything we can do on this stage. We'll start in bed, we'll dance on a chandelier, we'll strut down the catwalk, and we'll end up in the bed again in the end. "I think maybe tone it down just a nod for next year. "Then again, as a Finn, with the biggest microphone you can find in the whole of Switzerland, maybe I shouldn't give advice!"

Was it political?

And what about that wrinkly old Eurovision chestnuts Politics? Vote trading is an age-old tradition at the contest. Since Sweden first took part in 1958, for example, more than one-fifth of its votes have come from Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. But the situation is complicated. Political tensions persist in the Balkans, "but the cultural connections seem to have trumped the political divisions", Dean Vuletic, author of Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest, recently told the AFP news agency. "I would say that this is because these countries do share a music industry."

Getty Images Remember Monday have a summer of festival appearances and concerts to look forward to, all booked before they were announced as this year's Eurovision act

The UK's music industry isn't particularly well integrated with Europe, tending to ride roughshod over its less influential neighbours. When it comes to friendly neighbours, our reputation took a hit after Brexit - although Luxembourg has always been a reliable source of votes, for reasons that aren't 100% clear. But here's the thing: You can only Vote for a country in Eurovision, not against it. Remember Monday were good, but were they good enough to make your personal Top 10? If so, then great – you'd have given them some points. Otherwise, it's a struggle to accrue any momentum. In the end, that was Remember Monday's fate: Another zero-point disappointment. So where does that leave the UK going into next year?

Graham Norton and Scott Mills gave Remember Monday their seal of approval on BBC Radio 2

Well, we laid good foundations. Remember Monday didn't come with a copycat Eurodance hit, or an insipid ballad. The vocals were strong. The staging conveyed personality. Their energy was infectious and they made friends across Europe, becoming great ambassadors for the UK in the contest. Their 88 jury points almost doubled last year's score. We just have to find a way to get the public vote back on side. In other words, we shouldn't be too down on the band themselves, as Scott Mills and Graham Norton discussed on Radio 2 this weekend. "I thought they were spectacular, so I don't really mind where they place, because it's not embarrassing," said Mills. "I'm with you," Norton agreed. "They're so likeable. Whatever happens, they walk away heads held high." Mills cautioned against the creeping allure of cynicism. "There's a section of fans [who] will complain ever

y year, whatever the UK does: 'Oh, the song's too generic, the vocals aren't great.' "We could send Adele and they'd have something horrible to say. "But the whole thing about Eurovision is that it's fun and it's joy through music...so please don't spoil it. Go and be miserable somewhere else." And that's exactly the attitude we need. The UK's never going to attract world-class talent if all we do is look down on the contest and approach it with a defeatist attitude.

Luckily, three people have already put their names in the ring for next year. "Listen," said Remember Monday's Lauren Byrne when I bumped into her backstage on Thursday. "If we do really badly, we're just gonna keep coming back until we win." We'll remember, Remember Monday. See you in Vienna next year.