

Daily Universal Register

France: President Macron campaigns in Le Havre for his re-election; Marine Le Pen, his opponent, holds a rally in Avignon.

Nature notes



A robin is building her nest in next door's small Irish yew tree. She's been at work for four days now. First, she brought in dead leaves from the nearby oak, then beak after beak of moss. This morning she's using pony paddock horse hair to line the nest. Although the females do the construction, the male is on hand to feed her. During the nest building and egg laying, he will provide about a third of the female's nutrition. Robin nests are usually 5-7ft above the ground and can be found in all sorts of weird and wonderful places: sheds, watering cans, boots, overly packed wheelie bins and under car bonnets. JONATHAN TULLOCH

Birthdays today



Gina McKee, pictured, actress, *Notting Hill* (1999), *Line of Duty* (2012), 58; **Ritchie Blackmore**, rock musician, Deep Purple and Rainbow, 77; **Adrien Brody**, actor, *The Pianist* (2002, Oscar), 49; **Peter Capaldi**, actor, *The Thick of It* (2005-12), 64; **Robert Carlyle**, actor, *Trainspotting* (1996), 61; **Georgina Chapman**, fashion designer, co-founder, Marchesa, 46; **Julie Christie**, actress, *Doctor Zhivago* (1965), 82; **Kenneth Cope**, actor, *Carry On at Your Convenience* (1971), 91; **Stuart Craig**, film production designer, the Harry Potter films, 80; **Sarah Michelle Gellar**, actress, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1996-2003), 45; **Paddy Hopkirk**, rally driver, winner of the 1964 Monte Carlo rally, life member of the British Racing Drivers' Club, 89; **Prof Dame Sue Hill**, chief scientific officer, NHS England, 67; **Dame DeAnne Julius**, economist, founder member, Bank of England monetary policy committee, 73; **Dr Terry Kemple**, president, Royal College of General Practitioners (2015-17), 70; **Prof Julian Lloyd Webber**, cellist, principal, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (2015-20), 71; **Loretta Lynn**, country singer, *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1970), 90; **Charles Mackay**, chairman, Opera Holland Park, Historic Royal Palaces (2006-15), Eurotunnel (2001-04), 82; **Ian McLauchlan**, rugby union player, Scotland (1969-79), 80; **Baroness (Susan) Masham of Ilton**, disability campaigner, 87; **Rear-Admiral Paul Methven**, director, Step (programme to develop a prototype fusion reactor), UK Atomic Energy Authority, 53; **John Sergeant**, journalist, BBC chief political correspondent (1992-2000), ITN political editor (2000-02), 78; **Frank Serpico**, whistleblowing New York police detective depicted in the film *Serpico* (1973), 86; **Baroness (Elizabeth) Symons of Vernham Dean**, minister of state for the Middle East (2003-05), 71; **Rt Rev David Urquhart**, bishop of Birmingham, 70; **Sir Gregory Winter**, biochemist, Nobel prizewinner (2018), master of Trinity College, Cambridge (2012-19), 71.

On this day

In 1471 Yorkists under Edward IV defeated the Lancastrians under the Earl of Warwick at the Battle of Barnet, north of London. The earl was killed and Edward IV secured the throne.

The last word

"In violence, we forget who we are." Mary McCarthy, American novelist and critic, in her essay collection *On the Contrary* (1961)



Price Predicament

A surge in inflation to a 30-year high of 7 per cent requires a prompt rise in interest rates. The costs of delay may prove deeply damaging

Not since 1992 have consumer prices in Britain been rising faster. The 12-month rate of inflation accelerated to 7 per cent in March, compared with 6.2 per cent in February. The squeeze on household living standards is set to intensify. Though there is a limit to how far policymakers can restrain inflationary pressures, that does not mean they are powerless. It is vital that the Bank of England convinces consumers, businesses and investors that it is in earnest in getting inflation under control and back to its target of 2 per cent a year. That will require further interest rate increases in the short term and a tightening of credit conditions.

The main reason why inflation now exceeds the Bank's target by 5 percentage points is a surge in commodity prices, aggravated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its impact on the price of petrol and diesel. Yet the rise in inflation is broad-based across sectors, with no significant downward pressures. The Office for Budget Responsibility projects inflation to reach a 40-year high of 8.7 per cent in the last quarter of this year. Millions of households and businesses face sharply higher gas and electricity bills in the next few months as the energy price cap has been lifted.

Accelerating inflation is especially damaging

for savers and those who rely on fixed incomes, such as many pensioners. Wage claims to keep pace with inflation will squeeze the margins of many businesses which have already suffered damage from the pandemic, and impose additional costs on taxpayers, who fund public-sector wages and salaries.

The Bank of England has already increased interest rates from a low of 0.15 per cent during the pandemic to 0.75 per cent. The case for caution in raising rates further would be that the Bank cannot directly affect the price of oil and other commodities on world markets, that it has a measure of flexibility in meeting its inflation target and that raising companies' cost of borrowing would impede their investment.

There is a strong case for rate increases even so. The Bank has kept them below 1 per cent continuously since 2009 in the wake of the financial crash. Conditions have now changed. Credibility in fighting inflation is hard to regain once lost, requiring even more drastic action later. This is what happened in the 1970s when governments in industrial economies responded to an oil price shock with a misguided attempt to stimulate demand. It meant they lost control of inflation.

The merit of inflation targeting, which Britain

adopted in 1992, is that it enables consumers, businesses and investors to make longer-term decisions. If they lose confidence in central bankers' ability to secure price stability, the wealth of the nation will suffer.

Admittedly, higher interest rates raise the cost of servicing government debt but the average life remaining of most UK government borrowing is more than ten years. It would take a long time before a rise in rates now would be reflected in the overall cost of state borrowing. Lenders have already raised mortgage rates in anticipation of higher inflation.

For a generation, western economies have enjoyed low inflation, owing in part to China's economic expansion and its exports of inexpensive consumer goods. The best-case scenario now is that a surge in prices proves to be a one-off, that commodity price pressures subside and that inflationary expectations do not become embedded in wage demands. For that to happen, households and the corporate sector need reassurance. An immediate rise in interest rates of 0.5 percentage points would not derail recovery from the pandemic and it would signal that the Bank is serious in meeting its mandate. The costs of delay may prove highly damaging.

Putin's Crimes

Western leaders should not get caught up in legalistic debates about genocide

No one in the West can seriously doubt that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is an act of barbarism, with reckless shelling of civilians and the murder of defenceless people. The world has been especially shocked by the killings in Bucha, the town near Kyiv that Karim Khan, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, visited yesterday with a view to investigating war crimes. Khan saw the mass grave behind a church where Ukrainians were exhuming 400 bodies, many of whom had been tortured before being killed. The question has now been raised whether this barbarism can be called genocide. President Biden initially raised the spectre when he said: "We'll let the lawyers decide internationally whether or not it qualifies, but it sure seems that way to me."

The context seemed to suggest it was an off-the-cuff remark rather than a considered one. Yet Mr Biden did not retract this remark, and nor did his officials. On the contrary, he later said that evidence of genocidal acts by Russian troops was mounting. Yesterday President Macron of France implicitly rebuffed these comments, saying "verbal escalation" would not help end the war. He

cautioned that it was best to be careful in employing the terminology of genocide, for "the Ukrainians and Russians are brotherly peoples".

This has not helped clarify the matter, though American officials have long been wary of using the term "genocide" about international conflicts. The United Nations Genocide Convention of 1948, of which the United States is a signatory, mandates intervention when genocide is formally identified. However, Nato members are at pains to stress they are not direct participants in the war in Ukraine, as it would be dangerous to engage in military operations against a nuclear-armed power when they themselves are not under attack. Their support for Kyiv extends to supplying as much lethal aid as possible so that Ukrainian forces can fight the war themselves.

For that reason Mr Biden's comments may appear an escalation in tensions. Yet they express justified outrage about President Putin's atrocities. It is not because of international condemnation that Russian forces are committing abominable acts in Ukraine. The targeting of hospitals and the murder and rape of civilians are a deliberate strat-

egy to instil terror among Ukrainians. It is not only Mr Biden who has raised the question of genocide. Boris Johnson has likewise said Russian atrocities do not "look far short of genocide".

This is surely right. The concept of genocide, a term that was coined during the Second World War, refers not only to the attempted annihilation of every member of an ethnic group, as in the Holocaust of European Jewry. It can also refer, according to the Genocide Convention, to an intent to destroy "in part" a national grouping. It is immaterial if the aggressors and the victims are "brotherly". The aggression by Serbs against Bosnian Muslims in the 1990s involved genocidal crimes, and western governments' reluctance to describe them as such had the perverse consequence of downplaying a humanitarian crisis.

That mistake must not happen in western support for Ukraine. Putin leads a rogue regime whose fraudulent propaganda itself testifies to the depravity of its assault. There is no extenuation for these crimes, and there should be no holding back in accurate description of them for the sake of diplomatic politesse.

Bone Weary

New evidence suggests dogs may be healthier on a vegan diet

Although the present popularity of veganism among humans is well-documented, the fact that dogs are also getting in on the no-meat, no-dairy fashion will come as a surprise to many. The vegan pet food market, worth £7 billion in 2020, is predicted to double by the end of the decade. While to date much of the growth may be explained by vegan owners conscripting their canine to the cause, scientific evidence suggesting a vegan diet is actually a healthy option for humans' best friend will surely result in a new breed of previously sceptical converts.

A study at the University of Winchester has

found that dogs on a vegan diet are about a third less likely to require medication than dogs who stuck with standard meat-based pet food. Owners were also more likely to report their tofu terriers to be in good health.

Tricky as it may be to picture a rottweiler tucking into a nut roast, or an alsatian's slavering jaws fastening around a mushroom Wellington with chickpeas on the side, the evidence is that dogs do not bemoan the absence of animal products in their bowls. While admittedly canine capacity for conversation is limited, none of the vegan dogs in the study showed signs of distress. After all, as any

labrador lover will attest, some breeds have been eating absolutely anything for centuries.

Maybe the image of the dog as a relentlessly carnivorous hunter is outdated. Maybe butchers' dogs aren't so fit after all. Certainly, dogs evolved from wolves, yet the key word is evolved, which denotes a continuing process. Besides, even wolves will eat soft fruits and grass when pushed. If science can formulate nutritionally complete vegan alternatives to conventional pet food, and these alternatives help dogs lead healthier and longer lives, then the move away from meat can only be welcomed. Cats, however, may prove a harder sell.