

## Daily Universal Register

UK: Red alerts for snow in Wales and the southwest; the governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, delivers a speech at the Scottish Economic Conference. France: Paris Fashion Week continues.

## Nature notes



If you look at the glossy green holly leaves at this time of the year, you may find mysterious yellow-brownish patches, like puffy

blisters, on them. It means that you have discovered the larvae of holly leaf-miners. The leaf-miners are small black flies that with their ovipositors lay eggs in the leaves. The larvae feed on the leaves from inside, and by now they are about 3mm long. They will emerge as new flies from their hideouts, or "mines", in May — if they are lucky. For they have enemies. Parasitical gall wasps find the larvae and lay their eggs in them, and the wasps' larvae eat the leaf-miner larvae so it ends up being a wasp, not a fly, that eventually comes out of a hole in the leaves. The flies' larvae have further enemies in blue tits, who also discover them and peck through the discoloured leaves to get at them. However, the blue tits have their own problems, because they have to avoid the sharp prickles on the holly leaves to reach their prey. DERWENT MAY

## Birthdays today



Daniel Craig, pictured, actor, *Spectre* (2015), 50; Alexander Armstrong, comedian, presenter, *Pointless* (since 2009), and singer, 48; Pat Arrowsmith, campaigner, 88; Kevin Curren, tennis player, 60; Nathalie Emmanuel, actress, *Game of Thrones* (2013-17), 29; Mikhail Gorbachev, president of the Soviet Union (1990-91), 87; Laird Hamilton, co-inventor of tow-in surfing, 54; John Irving, novelist, *The World According to Garp*, (1978), 76; Elizabeth Jagger, model, 34; Dame Naomi James, yachtswoman, 69; Jon Bon Jovi, rock singer, *Livin' on a Prayer* (1986), 56; Ricardo Lagos, president of Chile (2000-06), 80; George Layton, actor, *It Ain't Half Hot Mum* (1974-75), 75; Chris Martin, singer, Coldplay, *Paradise* (2011), 41; William "Billy" McNeill, footballer and manager, 78; Sir John Peace, lord-lieutenant of Nottinghamshire, chancellor of Nottingham Trent University, chairman, Burberry, Standard Chartered (2009-16), 69; Lord (Mark) Price, minister for trade policy (2016-17), deputy chairman, John Lewis Partnership (2013-16), 57; James Purnell, director, BBC radio and education, and former Labour cabinet minister, 48; Harry Redknapp, football manager, 71; Andrew Strauss, director, England Cricket, and England cricket captain (2009-12), 41; Sir John Tusa, broadcaster, managing director, Barbican Centre (1995-2007), 82; JPR Williams, rugby union player, Wales (1969-81), 69; Chris Woakes, cricketer, Warwickshire and England, 29; Tom Wolfe, novelist, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), 87; Ian Woosnam, golfer, 60.

## On this day

In 1949 James Gallagher and his 13-strong crew completed the first round-the-world non-stop flight; in 1956 Morocco declared its political independence from France; in 1958 the British Trans-Antarctic Expedition, led by Dr Vivian Fuchs, completed the first surface crossing of Antarctica.

## The last word

"A difference of taste in jokes is a great strain on the affections." George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (1876).



## New Nukes. Old Threats

Putin is playing to the gallery with boasts about terrifying new nuclear weapons. He should recall the lessons of the Cold War, and learn from them

Like Blofeld but with a larger audience, President Putin has warned the world that he could destroy it if provoked. In a sense this has been true of every Russian leader since Stalin, but Mr Putin's boasting of new nuclear weapons systems cannot be dismissed simply as bluster. There is little doubt that Russia has made progress developing weapons capable of evading American anti-missile defence systems. There is even less doubt that the two former Cold War adversaries are drifting back into an arms race in which the risks of conflagration could quickly outweigh the benefits of mutual deterrence.

Those risks include the proliferation of nuclear materials and technology to rogue states and terrorists; the erosion of arms reduction treaties that have limited the scale of US and Russian nuclear stockpiles since the age of detente; and potentially catastrophic errors of the kind that recently led to a full-scale missile alert being broadcast to the state of Hawaii.

Mr Putin complains that Nato has encroached too far towards what he regards as Russia's sphere of influence in eastern Europe and the Caucasus. He hopes that his talk of menacing new weapons of mass destruction will force the western alliance to listen to such concerns. Unfortunately his

nostalgia for Soviet thinking and Soviet-style strength is blinding him to the real lesson of that era, which is that this sort of arms race is not one that Russia can win.

His presentation to both houses of the Russian parliament included videos that might have been comical were their subject not so serious. One spliced together footage of a mobile intercontinental ballistic missile launcher with an animation of a new multiple warhead delivery system in which each warhead seemed to be heading for President Trump's holiday mansion in Florida.

Mr Putin's claim is that this system can penetrate any anti-missile defence to strike anywhere in the world within an hour. It recalls similar claims made on behalf of an earlier Russian missile in 2005, the Topol M, whose manoeuvrable warheads were said to be able to change course on re-entering the atmosphere.

Then, as now, an important part of Mr Putin's audience was domestic. Later this month he faces Russian voters in an election he is certain to win but which he intends nonetheless to serve as a rousing show of support for yet another six-year instalment of Putinism. His rebuilding of Russia's armed forces has played well politically so far, partly because he has been able to deploy them

without western opposition in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria. At the same time he spent heavily on Russia's nuclear arsenal while Barack Obama's priority as president was to cut the American stockpile to its smallest size since the 1950s.

Mr Obama's successor is of a very different hue. Mr Trump has vowed to spend hundreds of billions of dollars modernising the US nuclear deterrent, which featured prominently in his State of the Union address in January. Last month a new US "nuclear posture review" set out priorities for "the world as it is, not as we wish it to be". This is a world, Mr Trump's national security staff declared, that needed to deal with "the return of great power competition". To that end America is developing not only its anti-missile defences but a new generation of tactical nuclear weapons specifically to counter the Russian threat.

This is a posture crafted by hawks for a president who seeks above all to project strength, and with good reason. Since the end of the Cold War China has emerged as a third nuclear superpower, and one that is not bound by any nuclear treaties. Mr Putin cannot expect much let up from Mr Trump in a new arms race he can only lose. Both leaders should huff and puff less and give more time to old-fashioned arms reduction talks.

## Pregnant Pause

Early pregnancy has costs, but young people should know that waiting does too

The decline of teenage pregnancy in Britain in recent years is a stunning policy success that may not be wholly to do with policy. In 1998, for every 1,000 girls under the age of 18, 47 would get pregnant, only a small decline from three decades earlier. Today the figure is closer to 21, the lowest since the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

The plunge began in earnest after 2007 and coincided with a drive to cut numbers by the Labour government of the time. Yet while British numbers are now considerably closer to the western European norm (albeit still higher), a fall in teenage pregnancies across the same period is common in most advanced nations. Rates of adolescent drinking and drug use have also fallen, probably for similar reasons. Possibly the best contraceptive yet invented is the smartphone.

A high rate of teenage pregnancy is fairly understood as a societal ill, with the Office for National Statistics linking births to under-18s with a greater likelihood of poor education, health and poverty. Teenage pregnancy is both a symptom of social dysfunction and a cause of it. Historically it is also an inheritable condition, with some studies sug-

gesting that the daughters of adolescent mothers were between twice and three times more likely to become adolescent mothers themselves.

Nobody could regret the hard-won success in limiting teenage pregnancies, whether governments or apps are the cause. Yet as we report today, a group of medics, fertility experts and campaigners is petitioning the government to include as much focus in compulsory sex education on how and when one should get pregnant as on how and when one should not. In 1976, the average age of starting motherhood was 26. Today it is 30 and rising. Teaching teenagers how easy it is to get pregnant accidentally may have given rise to an erroneous belief in how easy it is to do so deliberately. Delaying childbirth until the late 30s or early 40s has come to be regarded by many as a risk-free option. It is not.

The Fertility Education Initiative suggests that media narratives about IVF have led many young women to vastly overestimate its success rate. A third of women believe that between 10 and 20 per cent of babies are conceived artificially; the true figure is closer to 2 per cent. Many celebrities

appear to conceive children effortlessly well into their forties, yet their stories often omit expensive and emotionally painful medical battles. Professor Geeta Nargund, a consultant gynaecologist, speaks of "shock and agony" on the faces of women who realise they have waited too long. Even when successful, the cost to the NHS of older conceptions can be considerable.

Childbirth is far more a personal choice than a societal duty, and the best parents are willing, loving and committed ones, regardless of age or biology. In a society committed to workplace equality, moreover, the pressures towards later childbirth are immense. Despite an overhaul of the law, male take-up of parental leave remains low and women may reasonably fear punctuating not-yet-established careers with time away from the workplace. Cities, simultaneously, are increasingly expensive places, often making delays in parenthood an economic necessity. Yet it is only fair to ensure that young people are also aware of the limits of their own fertility. If a family is part of their life plans, they should not wait too long in putting that smartphone down.

## Press Gang

Scrapping another inquiry into newspaper standards strikes a blow for free speech

Legislation to regulate printing presses lapsed in England in 1695. The government's decision yesterday to scrap the second part of the Leveson inquiry into press standards is likely to be a comparably historic blow for freedom of the press. Most significantly, Matt Hancock, the culture secretary, said the government would seek repeal of Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, which might have imposed harsh penalties on newspapers that declined to join a state-sponsored press regulator. Both moves are hugely welcome, yet the threat to free speech that has been headed off should never have emerged.

The first part of Sir Brian Leveson's inquiry dealt with the culture and ethics of the press. The second was planned to address the press and policy. Section 40 would have forced most newspaper publishers to pay the costs of libel claimants regardless of whether or not the claimant won. It would have encouraged vexatious claims that a newspaper could escape only by signing up to Impress, the supposedly independent regulator approved under the post-Leveson royal charter, with its own arbitration scheme.

The idea was a corrosive abridgment of press freedom. Impress is funded by private donors,

chief among them Max Mosley, revealed this week as the publisher of a virulent racist pamphlet in his youth. In addition, peers have tabled amendments to the Data Protection Bill that would have the effect of concealing Mr Mosley's extensive largesse for Impress. They should be voted down.

Thus do well-intended measures on entirely separate matters have the potential to curb free speech. The post-Leveson architecture of press regulation stands exposed as iniquitous and illiberal. Impress should get no further public funds. And press liberty should never again be treated by policymakers with such insouciant disregard.