

Daily Universal Register

UK: The UK Independence Party annual conference opens in Torquay, Devon, with the new party leader due to be announced today; the Office for National Statistics publishes final figures for UK second quarter economic growth.

Nature notes



Pink-footed geese are starting to fill the skies in some places in Scotland and the north of England. They are the most abundant

of the wintering geese, with about 350,000 coming here every year. These are birds arriving from Greenland and Iceland, where they nested on cliff ledges to avoid the attentions of arctic foxes. They will settle here for the winter on lochs and estuaries, with many coming down the east coast as far as Norfolk. Pink-foots are relatively small geese, pinkish-brown with a darker head. They fly in large flocks, sometimes V-shaped, making high-pitched “wink, wink” calls. These flocks are a spectacular sight when they sweep inland at dawn to feed in the fields. If you put your hands behind your ears as they approach in the air, their calls turn into a mighty roar. They feed on discarded potatoes and sugar beet. If they rise up in alarm all together, their wings make an equally gigantic roar.

DERWENT MAY

Birthdays today



Chris Broad, pictured, cricketer, England (1984-89), 60; Sharon Ament, director, Museum of London, 55; Michelle Bachelet, president of Chile, 66; Robert Benton, screenwriter and film director, *Kramer vs Kramer* (1979), 85; Silvio Berlusconi, media tycoon and politician, former prime minister of Italy, 81; Alfie Boe, tenor, 44; Richard Bonyngue, conductor, 87; Lord (Sebastian) Coe, president, International Association of Athletics Federations, two-time Olympic gold medallist (1980, 1984), 61; Mackenzie Crook, actor, *The Office* (2001-03) and *The Pirates of the Caribbean* film series (2003-07), 46; Gareth Davies, rugby union player, Wales (1978-85), chairman, Welsh Rugby Union and Millennium Stadium, 62; Sandie Dawe, chief executive, VisitBritain (2009-14), 62; Prof Sir Richard J Evans, president, Wolfson College, Cambridge, 70; Julia Gillard, prime minister of Australia (2010-13), 56; Patricia Hodge, actress, *Miranda* (2009-15), 71; Sir Henry Keswick, chairman, Jardine Matheson, 79; Jerry Lee Lewis, singer and pianist, *Great Balls of Fire* (1957), 82; Emily Lloyd, actress, *Wish You Were Here* (1987), 47; Ian McShane, actor, *Lovejoy* (1986-94), 75; Stephen Platt, editor, *New Statesman and Society* (1991-96), 63; Jacob Simon, editor, Walpole Society, chief curator, National Portrait Gallery (2001-11), 71; Andy Slaughter, Labour MP for Hammersmith, shadow housing minister (2016-June 2017), 57; Sarah Tyacke, chief executive, National Archives (1992-2005), 72; Lech Walesa, president of Poland (1990-95), 74; Robert Webb, actor and writer, *Peep Show* (2003-15), 45; Amy Williams, skeleton racer, Olympic gold medallist (2010), 35.

On this day

In 1979 Pope John Paul II arrived in Ireland for the first papal visit to the country.

The last word

“Next to the originator of a good sentence is the first quoter of it.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, philosopher and poet, *Letters and Social Aims* (1876).



Fast and Loose

Michael O’Leary appears to think Ryanair is so big it can bend the rules on passenger rights to breaking point. He has another think coming

Ten days ago Michael O’Leary apologised for a wave of flight cancellations by Ryanair, sitting under the slogan “Always Getting Better”. Steadily getting worse would have been more accurate. Mr O’Leary’s airline has now announced another 18,000 cancellations, inconveniencing hundreds of thousands of customers, losing the trust of the flying public and exhausting the patience of pilots who say they are leaving the company “in droves”.

In his confessional last week Mr O’Leary boasted that “when we make a mess in Ryanair we come out with our hands up”. This suggestion of complete transparency is itself misleading. Under EU rules the airline is required to rebook passengers with other firms where necessary, pay reasonable expenses and make these rights clear to those affected. It has fulfilled none of these obligations. Instead its strategy appears to be to trade on customers’ limited appetite for small print and bend the rules in its favour by stretching them to the limit.

Andrew Haines, head of the Civil Aviation Authority, says he is furious. He has every right to be. Ryanair has seven days to comply with the rules. If it continues to drag its feet and quibble about passengers’ rights Mr Haines must follow through on his repeated warnings and seek the

maximum possible penalty in the courts. A regulator with no teeth serves no one.

Ryanair’s business model is based on four ideas. It keeps maintenance costs to a minimum by using only one type of aircraft. It keeps operational costs down by using small regional airports with low landing fees. It attracts high volumes of business with low fares, and adds revenue with add-ons such as charges for drinks and checked bags.

This model has served it well. Ryanair is the biggest low-cost airline in Europe, with 400 aircraft, more than 4,000 pilots and estimated profits this year of between £1.2 and £1.25 billion. It has not changed this forecast in view of the cancellations, which affect just 1 per cent of its scheduled flights.

Mr O’Leary is a colourful personality with no shortage of admirers, especially in his native Ireland, for having built his company from the ground up since 1985. Some of these admirers argue that in air travel as in the buying of a suit the customer should expect no more or less than what he or she pays for. Where legroom, luggage space and in-flight meals and entertainment are concerned this is true. No frills means no frills.

Cancelled flights are different. Airlines promise to carry passengers from A to B and the rules on redress when they fail to do so must be the same

for everyone. The reward for Ryanair of offering sometimes absurdly low ticket prices is high passenger volume, but it comes with a responsibility when those passengers are stranded or left out of pocket. This is not a responsibility that can be dodged with bluster or blarney.

Ryanair claims to be abiding by the regulations on passenger rights known as EU 261. It is not. These rules require an airline to rebook passengers from cancelled flights on other airlines at its own expense if rebooking on its own flights in a reasonable timeframe is impossible. This is clearly the case where flights have been scrapped for the whole winter. Rival airlines are almost always more expensive than Ryanair, which is why it would prefer to give passengers fixed-value vouchers. Of course it would. That does not make such an approach reasonable, fair or legal.

The airline claims that the root of its crisis is pilots’ holiday timetabling. In reality it is losing flight crew for lack of full-time contracts that are standard elsewhere in the industry. Many are captains who give newcomers vital training. Shortcuts on training are never acceptable and cancelled flights are better than unsafe ones, but there is no such thing as an airline that is too big or too cheap to play by the rules.

Racing Nowhere

Ethnic prejudice in the United Kingdom has changed but may not have declined

Is Britain still a racist country? The latest data from the social research institute NatCen shows an ever increasing acceptance in most expected liberal directions. The number of people who say that same-sex relationships are “not wrong at all”, for example, has risen steadily for many years. Yet, when it comes to racism, something odd is happening. When people were asked whether they, personally, were racially prejudiced, figures show no consistent decline.

At the turn of the millennium, admittedly after a drop since the 1980s, 25 per cent of people considered themselves prejudiced. Earlier this year, 26 per cent of people did. In the interim it has been as high as 38 per cent, but never lower than it was 17 years ago. “Given that racial prejudice is not generally perceived as a positive characteristic,” the report notes, “there is good reason to assume that the actual proportion of the British public who are racially prejudiced may be higher.”

There is an optimistic temptation to assume that a degree of liberal self-flagellation is occurring here, with some describing themselves as prejudiced as a progressive acknowledgement of their

own failings. This would mean that those most likely to call themselves prejudiced are, in fact, the least likely to be so.

The data, alas, does not bear this out. NatCen found that being male, Conservative and having voted Leave in the EU referendum made respondents more likely to self-identify as prejudiced, and such groups do not tend towards liberal self-flagellation. A survey in 2014 found considerable proportions believing that “some races or ethnic groups are born less intelligent” (18 per cent) and “some races or ethnic groups are born working harder” (44 per cent). If these are not racist views, then the word “racism” has no meaning at all.

Few could call Britain a racial utopia, with ethnic minorities still under-represented in boardrooms and professions and over-represented in statistics of disadvantage and the criminal justice system. Yet a generation ago, racist taunts were commonplace in playgrounds and often unacted upon; today they could be grounds for expulsion and front-page newspaper stories. In 2002, when already the MP for Henley, Boris Johnson used the word “picaninnies” to describe Africans with

“watermelon smiles” in a newspaper column. It feels unthinkable that a member of parliament could survive writing such a thing today, and unlikely that any newspaper would publish it. Television, music, cinema, and sport grow ever more diverse. In 2014 the Office for National Statistics reported that one in ten couples are inter-ethnic. Has none of it affected attitudes at all?

This seems hard to swallow. Possibly our understanding of prejudice itself could use a little updating. In 2013, when the question was last asked, 50 and 46 per cent of people, respectively, believed that “most white Britons” would “mind a lot” if a close relative married somebody Asian or black. Thirty years earlier those figures were 77 per cent and 79 per cent. Yet also in 2013, 70 per cent of people believed that the same group would “mind a lot” a close relative marrying a Muslim.

Britain thinks of itself as a nation in which tolerance and liberalism are forever marching forwards. In some respects this is true, and perhaps in a manner which these striking figures only poorly reflect. They should be a jolt, even so, from our complacency. We are not yet who we ought to be.

Distinctly Unimpressive

Britain’s ‘official’ press regulator is becoming a national joke

The press is powerful. With power comes responsibility, and the public has a right to know that there is a fair and independent mechanism for sanctioning the press when it is flagrantly irresponsible. This is the basic rationale for press regulation, which is otherwise close to being a contradiction in terms. To do its job the press must be free, and press freedom includes, of course, the freedom to offend and express a point of view. Any plausible press regulator should not just understand this but make the case vigorously and often.

Jonathan Heawood has been doing the opposite, which is unfortunate because he is chief executive

of Impress, Britain’s only “official” press regulator. In an extraordinary and profane series of tweets and retweets last year Mr Heawood, a former *Observer* journalist, took personal aim at *The Sun* and the editor of the *Daily Mail*, and appeared to endorse the idea that the world view of the latter was akin to fascism.

Mr Heawood has been admonished in an internal report for bringing Impress into disrepute and potentially breaching its requirement to be open to all publishers on “non-discriminatory terms”. He clearly isn’t. Even so, Impress has so far left him in post on the grounds that he has deleted his

Twitter account and the newspapers he loathes don’t want to be members of Impress anyway.

The Press Recognition Panel, which regulates press regulators, will take a view on the Impress report soon. It should not agonise too long. Impress’s official status was already questionable in view of its dependence on funding from Max Mosely, the ex-Formula One boss and privacy campaigner. Now it is clear that the body is led by a man on an anti-tabloid mission. One more reason to leave press regulation to the Independent Press Standards Organisation, the only regulator to count any national papers among its members.