

Universal Register

Today is Record Store Day.

today

Brigitte Macron, pictured, first lady of France, 66; Prof Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, vice-chancellor, University of Cambridge (2010-17), 68;

Lyn Brown, Labour MP, shadow Treasury minister, 69; Rowan, geneticist, 1985 Nobel Prize, 8; Antonia Byatt, director, Literature Festival (2016-17), 59; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, Labour MP (1992-2010), 66; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, actor, *All Creatures Great and Small* (2019), 68; Edward Fox, actor, *The Jackal* (1973), 82; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, singer, *Let's Stay Together* (2019), 82; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, High Court judge, 2019-20, 98-99; Garry Kasparov, chess champion (1985-87), 1990, 1991; Prof Craig Mahoney, vice-chancellor, University of Edinburgh (2010-17), 66; Max Mosley, MP (1993-2009), 79; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, author and journalist, *My Family and Other Animals* (1981), 68; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, racehorse trainer, 67; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, actor, *Helloboy* (2004), 69; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, actor, *Spinal Column* (2010), 62; Chris Riddell, MP (2010-17), 62; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, children's laureate, *My Family and Other Animals* (1981), 68; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, justice, *Goodfellas* (2019), 68; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, SNP MSP for Glasgow North West, deputy first minister (2019-20), 68.

tomorrow

Dame DeAnne Julius, pictured, economist, founder member of the monetary policy committee of the Bank of England, 70; Ritchie Blackmore, rock musician, Deep Purple (1968-74), 69; Adrien Brody, actor, *The Pianist* (2002), 66; Peter Capaldi, actor, *Doctor Who* (2010-17), 61; Robert Carlyle, actor, *Trainspotting* (1996), 58; Georgina Paul, fashion designer, co-founder, *Topshop* (1984-87), 88; Sue Perkins, founder, the *Friday Night Dinner* (2010-17), 66; Georgina Paul, Olympic bronze medalist, 41; Dame Sue Hill, chief nurse, NHS England, 64; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, Court judge (2001-14), 75; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, president, Royal College of Physicians (2015-17), 67; Prof Leszek Borysiewicz, cellist, principal, Royal College of Music, 68; Loretta Semple, *Coal Miner's Daughter* (2019), 68; Gina Lollobrigida, model, 68; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, rugby union player, 69; John Sergeant, actor, *Mr Bates vs The Postman* (2015-17), 67; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, chief political correspondent, *The Daily Telegraph* (2010-17), 67; Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, Rt Rev David Urquhart, 67; Sir Gregory Campbell, master of Trinity College, 68.

of Indian nationalists were wounded when British troops opened fire on a crowd in Amritsar.

protect fools. Fools are capable fools." Larry Green, *Ringworld* (1970).



## Tory Choices

The Conservatives need to decide whether to become the party of no-deal Brexit or reconnect with younger people. They can't do both

Theresa May told MPs this week to use the Easter recess "to reflect on the decisions that have to be made swiftly on our return... so that we can leave the European Union with a deal as soon as possible". That looks like wishful thinking. One result of the EU's messy compromise offer of a six-month extension to Article 50, rather than the three months she wanted or the year that Germany proposed, is to make a swift resolution harder to achieve. The new delay may be too long to put pressure on parliament and looks too short to bring about the one thing needed to change the dynamic: Mrs May's departure. The danger is that the Tories are now stuck with her for six more months during which Brexit will remain in limbo.

The question, then, is what they do with that time. Our polling data published today underlines the urgency of this question. It shows that support for the Tories has plummeted to 28 per cent, down from 32 per cent a week ago and putting the party four percentage points behind Labour. At the same time, support for smaller parties has surged. The newly formed Brexit Party, launched by Nigel Farage yesterday, is on 8 per cent, Ukip is on 6 per cent and ChangeUK, the new party formed by Chuka Umunna and ten other defectors from the two main parties, is on 3 per cent. Ominously for

the Tories, their support falls to just 16 per cent when it comes to how people say they are likely to vote in the European parliament elections due to take place on May 23. If those elections go ahead, as now seems inevitable, smaller parties can expect to double their support.

There are two ways that the Conservatives could respond to this situation. One is to use the next six months to engage in a prolonged phony leadership contest during which the main contenders compete to woo the party's Brexit-supporting membership by parading their own headline credentials. This would be a recipe for the further radicalisation of the party, most likely leading to its emergence from the hiatus as the uncompromising party of no deal. Already there are signs of this happening as contenders declare their opposition to any form of compromise Brexit.

The alternative is to use any lull in Brexit progress over the next six months to try to set out compelling answers to the many other challenges facing Britain and which worry voters. Over the past two years the EU debate has sucked government attention from the country's other priorities. Thousands of civil servants have been diverted from departmental work to focus on Brexit preparations. Meanwhile, with weeks of this parliamentary

term still to run, the government has no major reform left on its legislative agenda. With a new Queen's Speech expected in July, ministers look alarmingly short of ideas.

Yet the Tories will need ideas if they are to have any chance of keeping a Corbyn government at bay when the next election comes. Labour is busily working on a new manifesto with policies designed to address real public concerns over rising knife crime, inadequate school funding, the growing crisis in local government budgets and the challenge of social care. Labour's solutions may be unworkable and ultimately economically ruinous but plan always beats no plan.

Doubling down on their status as a Brexit party may look like a sensible response to the challenge of Mr Farage's new group, which threatens to siphon away votes on the right, but it is likely to prove a blind alley for the Tories. New polling for the think tank Onward showed that only 6 per cent of 18-24-year-olds and 18 per cent of 25-49-year-olds think that a no-deal Brexit would be good for Britain. The only cohort in which a majority support no deal is those aged above 65. The conclusion seems clear enough. The Tories can either become the party of no-deal Brexit or they can try to connect with younger voters. They can't do both.

## Democracy at Large

900 million voters in India need economic reform and social cohesion

The world's largest exercise in democracy has begun. In India, over the next five weeks, until May 19, an electorate of 900 million eligible voters will go the polls to select their next prime minister. Before considering the virtues of the candidates on offer it is worth noting the virtues of the very event itself. When Indian democracy began in August 1947 it was regarded as an unlikely experiment. The founding fathers, Gandhi and Nehru, consciously created a secular state which could accommodate the linguistic, religious and regional variety of a vast country such as India but not many thought that it could last.

In fact it has not only lasted, it has thrived and it is a testament to the success of Indian democracy that the event beginning now is, in one sense, a traditional verdict on the incumbent prime minister, Narendra Modi. The leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was elected in 2014 on a promise to modernise the Indian economy, to fight corruption and to assert India's place in the world. The extent to which he has succeeded or failed is the biggest question posed.

In particular, the extent to which prosperity is

being distributed across India will be a point of debate. The national growth rate of 7 per cent per annum is significantly higher than it was during the long years of Congress rule before the liberalisation of 1991. Not everyone is seeing the benefit, though. Official data is unreliable but a government report recently suggested that unemployment is at 6.1 per cent, its highest rate in four decades. Rural incomes are also under pressure. India has a glut of crops and declining commodity prices have put many farmers into debt. The minimum income scheme offered by Congress may be attractive to them.

Yet, though the economy may prevail, there was always another aspect to Mr Modi's agenda for power. As a man with roots in the conservative Hindu nationalist movement, he was always feared as a divisive figure. Incidents have proliferated in which Muslims have been attacked for slaughtering cows and government condemnation has been slow to follow. Perhaps the most worrying and the most pervasive example of aggressive Hindu nationalism has been the way that the history

curriculum has been rewritten to silence Muslim voices.

Some fear that if Mr Modi is returned to power, which the early opinion polls suggest is likely, then this sectarian tendency might become clearer and more marked. The concern is that if Mr Modi is rewarded with a second term, India will become more divided between Hindus and Muslims and between upper and lower castes.

The dynastic tradition of the opposition Congress Party has contributed to the poor choice on offer to Indian voters. Mr Modi's not exactly convincing opponent for power, Rahul Gandhi, is the great-grandson of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. In the eighth decade of democracy India still does not have a modern social democratic party or a conservative party that would be instantly recognisable in most modern democracies.

It is not an appetising choice but the direction for India is clear, if any of the candidates can offer it. More economic reform coupled with an attempt to bring the country together socially would be a desirable programme. Whether any of the main parties have that to offer will now be seen.

## A Question of Attribution

Doubts over who painted *Salvator Mundi* highlight the opacity of the art market

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. But when it comes to art, so too is value. Paintings aren't like other investments, which promise to pay out an income that the market can put a price on. So when an unknown Saudi, assumed to be Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, chose to pay a world-record \$450 million in 2017 for a painting that had changed hands 14 years earlier for a mere \$117,500, who's to say that the buyer was wrong?

Except that the painting in question was no ordinary piece of art. It was *Salvator Mundi*, a work that Britain's National Gallery had recently attributed to Leonardo da Vinci. The buyer plainly

assumed he was acquiring a piece by a great genius. Yet it now appears there was more doubt than the National Gallery let on. *The Times* reports claims in a new book by an eminent scholar that when the gallery asked five experts to examine the painting in 2008, only two backed the firm attribution to Leonardo. The author claims that, based on his own conversations with the experts, one disagreed and two offered no comment.

That's hardly a sterling endorsement. Yet it is hard to imagine such vital information being withheld in the highly regulated spheres for other forms of investment. In the financial world, strict

disclosure rules govern the sale of any asset. The art world, in contrast, remains remarkably unregulated despite recent scandals. In 2011 the 165-year-old Knoedler gallery in New York closed after it emerged that it had been selling fake paintings for decades. The anonymity of the market has also made it notorious for money laundering. Money allegedly looted from Malaysian government accounts in the IMBD scandal was used to buy art.

Price isn't everything. Regardless of who painted *Salvator Mundi*, we trust that its latest owner enjoys looking at it. But the art market needs to be better regulated and more transparent.