

Opinion A moment's silence, please, for the death of Mark Zuckerberg's metaverse

John Naughton

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Monday 15 May 2023

theguardian.com/us
Published in New York, United States



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US edition

The Guardian



▲ Donald Trump at a rally in Robstown, Texas. The ex-president has accused Joe Biden of turning 'once-great cities into cesspools of bloodshed and crime'. Photograph: Brandon Bell/Getty Images

Stark warning over Republicans' 'dehumanizing' rhetoric on crime

Adam Gabbatt

Republican and rightwing rhetoric over the state of crime in the US could spark a rise in violent incidents and worsen the country's mass incarceration problem, experts say, as "tough-on-crime" political ads and messaging seem set to play a large role in the 2024 election.

Violent crime was a huge focus for Republican candidates during the 2022 midterm elections. Republicans spent about \$50m on crime ads in the two months leading up to those elections, the ads pushing a dystopian vision of cities ridden by murder, robbery and assault, and of Democratic politicians unwilling to act.

As the 2024 contest heaves into view, it is clear that Republicans plan to follow the same playbook.

"Joe Biden and the defund-the-police Democrats have turned our once-great cities into cesspools of bloodshed and crime," Trump said in

a recent campaign video.

Trump said if elected president he would order police forces to reinstate "stop and frisk" - a police tactic which has been shown to disproportionately target young Black men - and said he wanted to introduce the death penalty for drug dealers.

Ron DeSantis, the Florida governor who is expected to be Trump's closest rival for the Republican presidential nomination, has also leaned into tough-on-crime rhetoric and policy. Last month, DeSantis signed a law lowering the death penalty threshold in Florida, allowing people convicted of certain crimes to be sentenced to death if eight or more jury members recommend it.

"They think that's the way to score political victories," said Udi Ofer, a professor at Princeton University and the former deputy national political director of the American Civil Liberties Union.

"I think there's a bit of a knee-jerk, and, quite frankly, lazy attitude

that tough-on-crime is the only way to win an election, despite the fact that we have so much evidence today that shows there are other ways."

There is also an element of Republicans, and, Ofer said, some Democrats, pouncing on an increase in violent crime during the Covid pandemic.

The Brennan Center for Justice found that the number of murders per 100,000 people rose by nearly 30% nationwide in 2020, while aggravated assault rose by 11.4%. The rate of murder rose in big cities, which tend to vote Democratic and which are repeatedly demonized by Republicans and the rightwing media. But it also rose across the rest of the country.

"So-called red states actually saw some of the highest murder rates of all," the Brennan Center said.

Since that peak, most types of violent crime have now dropped. Crime declined in 35 large cities in 2022, according to the Council on Criminal Justice, although rates remain higher than

pre-pandemic levels. Still, the rate of homicide in major cities was about half that of historic peaks in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The 1980s was when tough-on-crime rhetoric "exploded", Ofer said. It culminated in the election of prosecutors who promised more convictions and longer sentences.

The impact, Ofer said, was "an exponential growth in incarceration" in the US. About 300,000 people were in prisons and jails in 1973, but by 2009 that number had grown to 2.2m - making the US the largest incarcerator in the world.

"This was a result of hundreds of new laws and practices at the local level, at the state level, at the federal level, including new mandatory minimum laws, more cash bail and pre-trial detention, and more aggressive prosecutorial and policing practices," Ofer said.

In this crime crackdown, not everyone was treated equally. Black people

have been historically more likely to be arrested than white people, which led to higher rates of incarceration. A 2003 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that in 2001 "an estimated 16.6% of adult black males were current or former State or Federal prisoners". Just 2.6% of adult white males had been incarcerated.

Some progress has been made in the last two decades. By 2020 the number of people in jail or prison was down to 1.2 million - meaning the US still has the fifth highest incarceration rate in the world - but the obsession with tackling crime, through measures including more arrests, more prosecutions and more imprisonments, could see a reversal.

"We are on the verge again of seeing the types of policies that devastated particularly low-income communities of color grow again as it did in the 1980s and 1990s."

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Republicans have led the charge on crime rhetoric, Ofer said. But now Democrats are getting in on the act - "we are seeing a growing movement within the Democratic party pushing for more tough-on-crime policies", Ofer said.

The rhetoric and fearmongering over crime has led, in part, to an expansion of "stand-your-ground" laws in the US. In the past 10 years, 14 states in the US have added some form of the law, which can rule that people determined to have acted in self-defense can escape prosecution for actions up to and including murder.

A 2022 investigation by Reveal found that 38 states now have some version of "stand your ground" - and the

laws have proved devastating: a study published in 2022 found that the legislation was linked with an 8-11% increase in homicides.

Ironically, given the accusation from the right that Democrats are too soft on crime, it appears to be traditionally "red states" that have the more serious crime problem.

"The murder rate in the 25 states that voted for Donald Trump has exceeded the murder rate in the 25 states that voted for Joe Biden in every year from 2000 to 2020," Third Way, a US thinktank, reported in January. Third Way also found that in 2020 murder rates "were 40% higher in Trump-voting states than Biden-voting states".

Although Republicans harangued Democrats over crime in the 2020 midterms, the strategy seems to have

had mixed success. Republicans largely underperformed in those elections, and Ofer pointed to the success of progressive prosecutors across the country as evidence that a tough-on-crime message is not always a successful route to take.

As well as the impact on incarceration and violent offenses, the tough-on-crime approach can also lead to the demonization of certain communities, said Stephen Piggott, a researcher at Western States Center, a non-profit organization which works to strengthen democracy.

Republican talking points about the danger of immigrants and people who live in inner cities could be behind an increase in attacks on minority groups. "In recent years, there's been a real mainstreaming of both violent

and dehumanizing rhetoric, and it's espoused by elected officials and media personalities," Piggott said.

"And it's really served to kind of normalize this political violence. When you have individuals with large platforms, like elected officials and media personalities, and they're talking about things like an impending civil war, it could lead to folks kind of taking that to heart and then acting on it."

The number of hate crimes in the US increased by 12% in 2021, according to the FBI, although the true number is likely to be much higher, given data from some of America's largest cities was not included in the FBI's report.

About 65% of the hate-crime victims were targeted because of their race, according to the report, while 16% were targeted over their sexual orienta-

tation and 14% of cases involved religious bias.

"So there are direct consequences on the ground for people of color, immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community," Piggott said.

"There's a lot of impact going on right now."

There are direct consequences on the ground for people of color, immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community

Stephen Piggott

Climate crisis deniers target scientists for vicious abuse on Musk's Twitter

Anna Fazackerley

Some of the UK's top scientists are struggling to deal with what they describe as a huge rise in abuse from climate crisis deniers on Twitter since the social media platform was taken over by Elon Musk last year.

Since then, key figures who ensured "trusted" content was prioritised have been sacked, according to one scientist, and Twitter's sustainability arm has vanished. At the same time several users with millions of followers who propagate false statements about the climate emergency, including Donald Trump and rightwing culture warrior Jordan Peterson, have had their accounts reinstated.

Climate scientists say the change has been stark, and they are fighting to make themselves heard over a "barage" of often hostile comments.

"There's been a massive change," said Mark Maslin, professor of earth system science at University College London and the author of popular books including *How to Save Our Planet*. "I get so much abuse and rude comments now. It's happening to all of us, but I challenge the climate deniers so I've been really targeted."



▲ British scientists are concerned that the real effects of the climate crisis, such as this wildfire in Alberta, Canada, earlier this month, are not reaching the public. Photograph: Alberta Wildfire/Reuters

Maslin says he used to have regular meetings with Sean Boyle, Twitter's former head of sustainability, who was laid off in Musk's mass cull of staff shortly after he took over in April 2022. Maslin said Boyle discussed the platform's work to develop ways of ensuring that trusted information was pushed to the top.

"They were using climate change as a good test bed, because it was fairly clear who the good and bad actors were," Maslin said. "But he was sacked and Twitter became the wild west."

Maslin said he will stay on the platform and push back against conspiracy theories with scientific evidence. "I want people to understand there are solutions. There is a real need for us to be on social media defending the truth, however nasty the responses get."

But not all scientists have found standing up to regular hostility an easy feat. Doug McNeall, a statistician working on climate change at the Met Office Hadley Centre at Exeter University, said he had blocked or muted many accounts on Twitter even before Musk's

arrival. "I got to the point where it was definitely affecting my mental health," he said.

"I spent years debating quite strongly with climate sceptics, including people I assume were paid," he added. "But there can be a real personal cost interacting over a long time with people who are abusing you."

McNeall said it was hard for scientists to work out how to cut through the false information on Twitter. "I just can't tell if people are seeing disinformation or getting good scientific information about what is happening," he said. "That's really worrying."

Ed Hawkins, professor of climate science at Reading University, who has 94,000 Twitter followers, said he had seen a "huge increase" in tweets from climate-denier accounts, often involving conspiracy theories or long-debunked topics. "A larger fraction of the comments are personal and abusive," he said. "Any mildly popular tweet from a climate scientist is now targeted for a barrage of replies."

Hawkins has noticed that many denier accounts have paid subscriptions to Twitter and therefore appear higher up in the replies. "It appears to be a coordinated effort [by climate change deniers] to make it appear as



▲ Professor Mark Maslin says Twitter is now the 'wild west' for climate scientists. Photograph: Mark Maslin

though climate denial is more prevalent than it really is," he said.

Professor Richard Betts, chair of climate impacts at Exeter University and head of climate impacts at the Hadley Centre, said: "Outright hostility has increased in recent weeks. It's mostly just people saying you're talking rubbish. They don't want a conversation."

A survey of 468 international climate scientists published by campaign group Global Witness last month found that prominent scientists were the most likely to face abuse, with half of those who had published at least 10 papers reporting they had suffered online harassment as a result of their climate work. One in eight female scientists who reported abuse had been threatened with sexual violence.

Twitter was approached for comment but did not respond.

Calm prevails at US-Mexico border after Title 42 migration restrictions lifted

Victoria Bekiempis and Maya Yang

The US-Mexico border saw surprising calm one full day after pandemic-era immigration restrictions known as Title 42 were lifted and replaced by new Biden administration policies intending to block unlawful crossings while establishing a legal means of entering the US, according to reports.

The seeming quiet stands in stark contrast to fear-mongering promoted by many conservatives including the Texas governor, Greg Abbott. The

Republican politician accused Biden of "laying down the welcome mat to people across the entire world" and deployed "specially trained soldiers" to the border.

On the border, it seemed like aspiring immigrants were waiting patiently for an opportunity to enter the US. Many migrants in Mexico, across the river from El Paso, Texas, kept an eye on their mobile phones hoping to receive an appointment to request entry into the US, instead of crossing without permission.

The US Department of Homeland Security said officials have not seen any

dramatic increase in immigration, according to the Associated Press.

"I hope it's a little better and that the appointments are streamlined a little more," Jeremy Depablos, of Venezuela, reportedly said.

Depablos, who is with seven cousins attempting to enter the US, has been in Ciudad Juárez for a month. He said he did not want to cross the border unlawfully, concerned about deportation. "We have to do it the legal way."

Daniel Mora, a reverend in El Paso, Texas, Kennji Kizuka, the International Rescue Committee's director of asylum policy, said that it has been "remarkably quiet" following Title 42's

buted by US immigration officials, which warned they had a "last chance" to seek processing. They largely left, AP said.

The city's mayor, Oscar Leeser, said that 1,800 migrants submitted to immigration authorities. Melissa López, who works as executive director for Diocesan Migrant and Refugee Services at El Paso, remarked that many migrants were willing to follow the new rules.

Speaking to the Guardian from El Paso, Texas, Kennji Kizuka, the International Rescue Committee's director of asylum policy, said that it has been "remarkably quiet" following Title 42's

expiration.

"It's really quiet. After midnight, we were waiting on the El Paso side and there was hardly anyone who came to the port of entry. Along the border, there wasn't a rush of people trying to cross at other points," he said.

"Title 42 has in some ways ended with a whimper and it's not what I think many politicians ... [and] what a lot of the media expected ... We're also waiting to see what comes next and hoping that it could be a more humane process," he added.

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The Title 42 restrictions expired just before midnight on Thursday. Some 10,000 people entered the US from Mexico on Thursday, which is a "historically large number", the New York Times said. As of early Friday morning, US border authorities had 24,000 migrants in their custody, topping the maximum capacity of 18-20,000 in custody, per the Times.

Title 42, enacted by the Trump administration in March 2020, permitted border officials to swiftly return asylum seekers across the US-Mexico border with the intention of stopping the spread of Covid-19, according to AP.

Although Title 42 kept many immigrants from pursuing asylum, there were no legal consequences if they were expelled. Biden's rules, in contrast, effectively prohibit migrants from claiming asylum if they did not first seek it online, or pursue protection in countries they traveled through en route to the US.

Asylum seekers who are permitted entry into the US will also be subject to onerous rules such as GPS monitoring and curfews; migrants who are thrown out can be prohibited from coming into



▲ Reports from the border described people waiting patiently for an opportunity to enter the US. Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty Images

this country for five years and potentially face criminal charges. The situation was not as calm in southern Mexico, however, with migrants trying to hop on US-bound freight trains, AP reported.

Meanwhile, in Ciudad Juárez, there

was confusion among many migrants following the expiration of Title 42 and the Biden administration's new rules.

"We did see ... people from different countries approaching our team with questions, for example, on how CBP One works," Everardo Esquivel, the

IRC's senior communications officer for Latin America, told the Guardian, referring to the US Customs and Border Protection app.

"We met a family from Ecuador on Wednesday and they had just arrived in the city a couple of days before ...

DNA evidence reveals family man in Australia was teenage killer who escaped Nebraska jail

Edward Helmore

William Leslie Arnold was just 16 years old in 1958 when he killed his parents and buried them in the backyard after they refused to let him borrow the family car to take his girlfriend to a drive-in movie showing of *The Undead*.

Arnold went about his life in and around Omaha, Nebraska, telling everyone - even family members - that his parents had taken a trip. Two weeks later he was arrested, confessed to the killings and led investigators to his parents' makeshift gravesite.

The following year he was sentenced to two life sentences in the Nebraska state penitentiary. And that - most people expected - should have been that.

But by the time Arnold died in 2010 in Brisbane, Australia, his life had taken a series of very unexpected turns. For one, he'd escaped prison in 1967, in what the prison warden said was one of the "cleanest" escapes in his experience, and then gone on the run for half a century.

Last week, the US Marshals Service announced that he died, aged 67, not as William Arnold but under the alias of John Vincent Damon. Between his escape - with another prisoner, James Harding, using masks used to fool guards who conducted daily head counts at the prison - and his death, he'd lived as much-loved family man, marrying twice and fathering two children.

Immediately after the escape, the pair travelled by bus to Chicago where they split up. Harding was captured within a year but Arnold vanished. He married within three months and



▲ William Leslie Arnold's escape from prison in 1967 was one of the 'cleanest' the prison warden said he'd experienced. Photograph: US Marshals Service

became a father, moved to Miami and to California, divorced, then moved to New Zealand in 1978 and finally to Australia, where he worked as a salesman.

The FBI worked on Arnold's case into the 1990s, then handed it back to the Nebraska department of corrections who passed it over the US Marshals Service. And there his case stayed, gathering dust, until Geoff Britton, chief of the office of law enforcement support in California, set his mind to solving it.

When Britton started working on it, Arnold had been on the run for more than three decades. Britton became obsessed and worked the case for nine years from 2004 to 2013 at the state of Nebraska department of correctional

services.

"To kill your parents over the use of the car to go to the movies - that's not normal. It made me wonder if something else was going on," he told CNN last week.

In 2020, the case was handed over to Matthew Westover, a deputy marshal in Nebraska. "One of the guys left the office, and [when you leave] you have to hand over your cases. So one of my buddies gave me this case, as kind of a joke, you know, like 'you're never going to find this guy,'" Westover told CNN.

The deputy read up on the case, in particular "The Mystery of Leslie Arnold", published in the Omaha World-Herald by reporter Henry Cordes in 2017. Cordes had portrayed Arnold

sympathetically - as a good student who had a difficult relationship with his parents and shot them after an argument with his mother over his girlfriend.

For the eight years Arnold was in prison he'd been a model inmate, a dedicated musician who could have qualified for early release. With some irony, the men's escape was made through the window of the prison music room, and over a 12ft fence using a T-shirt slung over it to protect them from razor wire.

"From day one, I was hooked," Westover told the network.

The marshal drove five hours to see to James Arnold, Arnold's young brother who gave a DNA sample that

and they had been hearing different information on how to use the app so they didn't have much clarity. They didn't know properly what was going to happen after 11 May," Esquivel said.

The new rules have prompted extensive criticism from politicians and immigration advocates. Republicans have seized on the policy change to slam Biden's approach to immigration in advance of the 2024 election.

Donald Trump, the Republican presidential frontrunner who this week was found liable for sexual abuse, was among the chorus of Republican critics. "You're gonna have tens of thousands of people pouring into our country," Donald Trump said of Title 42's expiration during his CNN town hall.

Some Democrats have also slammed Biden's policies as too stringent. "It's evident that there's been an unmistakable shift in the president's immigration policy," Politico quoted the Illinois Democratic congressman Chuy García as saying. "I know that the administration is in a tough spot, but it's beyond disappointing to see them trying to appease Republicans on immigration."

Westover referenced across an ancestry site. Nothing came up for two years until he received an alert of a match and an email from a man in Chicago who said he was looking for his biological father.

The man has asked not to be identified, but he told the investigators he knew his father as John Damon, and Damon had told him he was an orphan. The man asked who his father was and why he'd been in prison. "So I had to tell him," Westover said. "I told him, 'Well, he was an orphan. He didn't lie about that, but he killed his parents, that's why he was an orphan.'"

Arnold's son told CNN: "There's no warning label on the DNA test kit telling you that you might not like what you find," he said. "But I don't regret doing it, and I'm glad I now know the truth about my dad."

According to CeCe Moore, genetic genealogist at Parabon Nanolabs, the case is unusual in the sense that law enforcement, who may be unable to find a match in small, government-linked databases including the national DNA index, are not usually able to access large, commercial genealogy services.

"It's an unusual story only because it's one of the first that used this approach successfully, but it's not unique," she said. "It's always interesting to hear the other side of the story - what does somebody who escapes from prison do with the rest of their life?"

The big three commercial genealogy databases - AncestryDNA, 23andMe and MyHeritage - do not permit law enforcement to put crime scene or unidentified remains DNA into

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their system under their terms of service. But if a family member - in this case Arnold's brother - permits it, a search run through the 40m DNA signatures in the commercial database can return a "hit" in hours. US marshals have not said which database they used.

"What makes this case unique is

they're using a living person's DNA to fish for this escapee or his family through shared DNA," Moore said. "There was nothing to stop them using the large databases because the younger brother was willing to put his DNA in the databases and allowing law enforcement to access them."

Moore said her company's job tracking missing people would be made easier if the commercial services re-

laxed their restrictions. "For the jobs I do, which is identifying murderers and rapists, and Jane and John Does, we would be able to work more efficiently. At the moment, these cases can take years to solve."

The approach the Marshal Service used to track Arnold could now, in theory, be used to track dozens of unsolved mysteries, including the men who escaped from Alcatraz - assum-

ing they survived the swim across San Francisco Bay and fathered children - or the missing hijacker known as DB Cooper.

"Some may never have had children but there's always going to be a certain percentage that did and eventually a number of the cases will be solved," said Moore.

Still, the fascinating story of William Leslie Arnold has its own twist. Brit-

ton told CNN he thinks the escapee "became the parent who he wanted to be, or the one he wished he had". Arnold's son concurs: "Although it's shocking to know that his life began with a terrible crime, his legacy is so much more than that."

● This article was amended on 14 May 2023 to correct the year when the murders took place. It was in 1958, not 1957.

Erdogan's grip on power tested as Turkey votes in pivotal election

Ruth Michaelson and Deniz Barış Narlı in Istanbul

Turkey was heading to the polls on Sunday, with 64 million citizens casting their vote in an election that could end Recep Tayyip Erdogan's two decades in power.

Polls have increasingly shown Erdogan's competitor for the presidency Kemal Kilicdaroglu in the lead, with both candidates racing to get more than 50% of the vote in order to avoid a runoff vote in two weeks' time.

A weighted poll of all Turkish election polls, 600 Vekil, predicted a 63% chance of a Kilicdaroglu victory. The same polls have increasingly suggested that Erdogan's governing coalition, led by his Justice and Development party (AKP), could lose its majority in parliament.

Turkey's six-party opposition coalition is vying to win both a parliamentary majority and the presidency in order to enact sweeping reforms, overhauling two decades of Erdogan policies and returning Turkey to parliamentary democracy.

"We promise democracy. Democracy is a very beautiful, wonderful thing," said Kilicdaroglu, who has campaigned as an answer to Turkey's increasingly polarised political environment and what his supporters say is Erdogan's divisive rhetoric.

This message resonated with some voters. "Turkey will get the democracy it deserves soon," said 33-year-old Sevin, who was certain that the opposition were on the verge of victory. "We are going to have a country where people are not discriminated against, where there is rule of law, and justice."

Erdogan has fallen behind in the polls as voters react to the results of 20 years of his rule, including a brutal economic crisis that caused the lira to devalue by half last year alone and soaring inflation.

Criticism of his government increased after a slow and patchy state response to deadly twin earthquakes in the country's south-east that killed more than 50,000 people and destroyed homes and infrastructure across 11 provinces.

Many younger voters said they had turned their back on the AKP, expressing excitement that they could vote out the only political leader they had known in their adult lives. In the Istanbul district of Kasimpasa, where Erdogan grew up, three voters in their mid-20s said they were all voting for the opposition Republican People's party (CHP).

"No one in Gen Z votes for the AKP," said 26-year-old Evin. "Erdogan could



▲ Ballot paper in Erzurum, Turkey. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

absolutely lose, I don't believe he can win, there isn't even a 1% chance." Her friend Fatima agreed. "The situation here changed after the earthquake," she said. "It's different this time. The earthquake was the breaking point for society."

Erdogan has increasingly used his rallies to castigate his political opponents as enemies of the state. He has said each member of the six-party opposition coalition is LGBT, and broadcast an alleged deepfake video of banned Kurdish militants declaring their support for Kilicdaroglu at a rally just one week before the vote.

Kurdish voters, courted by Kilicdaroglu in a rare move as part of his efforts to unite a broad base of opponents to defeat Erdogan, appeared overjoyed at the prospect that he could be voted out.

"Our only aim is to take him down," said Ilhan Pekgoz outside a polling station in Istanbul. "Because if he doesn't go this time, he will never go. Kurdish voters will take him down!"

"This time he's going," his friend agreed, before leaving to go and cast his ballot.

Pekgoz said he decided to vote for Kilicdaroglu when jailed Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtas threw his support behind the 74-year-old CHP political candidate.

"I support Kilicdaroglu because I want Demirtas released, and the release of all other political prisoners. The economy has already collapsed," he said.

Kilicdaroglu, a member of Turkey's Alevi religious minority, says he intends to build a more inclusive society and step back from Erdogan's heavy-handed control of public institutions

and the media.

Kilicdaroglu has also promised to deport millions of Syrian and Afghan refugees who sought shelter in Turkey from conflicts at home.

The prospect of either Kilicdaroglu or Erdogan reaching the 50% threshold increased just days before the ballot, after one of the four candidates, Muhamrem Ince, dropped out following the release of what he alleged was a false sex tape created with deepfake technology and footage from "an Israeli porn site".

Kilicdaroglu later accused Russia of election interference and creating deepfake videos, declaring: "If you want the continuation of our friendship after 15 May, get your hands off the Turkish state. We are still in favour of cooperation and friendship."

Turnout for the vote is expected to be high, while the CHP, the largest opposition party, is running a parallel vote count it hopes will ensure electoral integrity, posting observers to watch over every ballot box across the country.

Supporters of Erdogan and the AKP rebuffed concerns about Turkey's ongoing economic crisis and repeated their claim there was a need for the country to remain unified, alluding to the country's deep political polarisation as well as concerns that Erdogan's reign might be nearing its end.

"It's a time for unity," said 51-year-old Veysel Isinal, who had just left a polling station in Istanbul where he had cast his ballot for Erdogan, as he has done in every election since 2002.

"I believe the president will win re-election - if he doesn't that would be bad for the country," he said. In an echo of Erdogan's attacks on those he has often labelled enemies of the state,

he said: "The opposition could release Demirtas, and this affected my choice."

Asked whether he would be willing to take to the streets if asked by the AKP following a loss, he replied: "We will do what justice and fairness require."

A CHP official, Canan Kaftancioğlu, said: "The most important moments will be when the polls close and when the vote counting begins. For this we have organised a digital system, so poll watchers take pictures [of each ballot] and send them to CHP headquarters in Ankara and Istanbul."

"We are going to give the actual result to people and hoping it will be a good result for us."

Kaftancioğlu organised similar efforts to protect the vote in Istanbul's contested mayoral election in 2019 and was banned from politics last year for insulting Erdogan.

"There's a hard and unsettling fact here in Turkey, ballot box security, and we have to make this happen," she said. "As a Turkish citizen, I am bitter about this. There's a power that wants to steal votes, and this power is the government."

Observers argue that Erdogan's near total control of the media environment, as well as influence on key institutions such as the supreme election council (YSK), provide him with an upper hand, but not total control of the vote.

Nate Schenckan of Freedom House, a Washington-based pro-democracy group, said: "This is where issues around whether this is a free and fair election come in."

"Do functioning democratic institutions remain viable despite the enormous pressure they've been put under the past 10 years, including a

number of significant electoral violations?

"But at the same time, people argue credibly that the actual process of voting, balloting and political culture remain strong, so therefore an unpopular president running a ruinous economic policy can actually lose. That's the question: can he, and will he let himself?"

A day before the vote, Twitter announced that "in response to legal process and to ensure Twitter remains available to the people of Turkey, we have taken action to restrict access to some content in Turkey today".

The blocking appeared to affect at least one account of critics of the Turkish state based outside of the country, although no further clarification was provided.

The government also resisted pressure from the opposition to allow those registered to vote within the 11 provinces destroyed by the earthquakes earlier this year to change their addresses, forcing thousands to return to their destroyed towns in order to be able to cast their ballots. The millions of potential votes cast across the affected area are expected to affect the outcome of the election.

"For Turkish democracy as of this morning, according to information I gathered from the interior ministry, the process has been running smoothly. The most important aspect was voting in the earthquake zones, there's no issue there as well. It's important that people vote without hesitation," said Erdogan when casting his ballot in Istanbul.

Despite the opposition offering some free transportation or even paying out of pocket for their family members to travel, many voters said the cost of the travel was simply too high for them to make it back in order to vote.

"There was supposed to be a boat to take us, but out of almost 1,000 people [the CHP] picked only around 100 so I couldn't get there," said Barış Yasar from the town of Samandağ in Turkey's southernmost province, Hatay. "I can't afford at least 3,000 TL (£123) just to go and come back there, so now I'm hoping for the best."

Others who had remained in the earthquake zone said they felt the votes cast there could sway the overall result.

"My district won't support Erdogan because we saw people die when the earthquake happened - people died but no rescue teams arrived on time. They left people to die, screaming and asking for help," said one man in Hatay who asked to remain anonymous.

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He said that he had long voted

for the opposition, but his district had previously supported Erdogan and the AKP.

"All the people I know want to get rid of Erdogan," he said. "My fear is that the government will manipulate the re-

sults if they see that they're losing, or that people who support them will fight in the streets. People think it's not going

to be a normal night."

Gaza ceasefire ends five days of fighting that left dozens dead

Hazem Balousha in Gaza City and Bethan McKernan in Jerusalem

Relative calm has returned to the blockaded Gaza Strip after a ceasefire that has ended five days of cross-frontier fire between Israel and militant groups in the coastal enclave that killed 33 Palestinians and two people in Israel.

A truce mediated by Egyptian officials that went into effect at 10pm (8pm BST) on Saturday night appeared to hold, despite the firing of a rocket towards southern Israel on Sunday evening that Palestinian factions said had launched due to a "technical error".

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said it responded with tank artillery fire that hit two military sites belonging to Palestinian Islamic Jihad. No injuries were reported.

The latest conflagration between Israel and Islamic Jihad, the second largest militant group in the strip after Hamas, began overnight on Tuesday, when the IDF launched surprise air-strikes targeting the homes of three of the faction's commanders, despite a fragile ceasefire in place since a day of cross-frontier fire the week before.

The violence - the most significant bout of fighting in the region in months - left 33 Palestinians dead, including at least 10 civilians, and killed an Israeli woman and a Palestinian man from Gaza working in Israel.

On Saturday night, ambulances and fire engines drove in convoy while Palestinians gathered in the streets to celebrate.

On Sunday morning, fishers returned to the water, and the two crossings with Israel were reopened, allowing patients from Gaza to access medical care outside the strip for the first time in days, and medicine, food and



▲ Palestinians inspect the rubble of their homes in Gaza on Sunday. Photograph: Mohammed Abed/AFP/Getty Images

fuel to make its way in.

Medics said 190 people had been wounded in Gaza and 30 in Israel, seven with injuries resulting from Palestinian rocket fire and the rest while heading to shelters. In Gaza, more than 50 homes were destroyed and about 950 people displaced by the violence, local officials said.

Israeli schools near the Gaza periphery remained closed on Sunday, with all restrictions expected to be lifted by Sunday night.

In Deir al-Balah, a conservative town in the centre of the Gaza Strip, residents ventured out on Sunday morning for the first time in days to inspect the damage.

Yahya Abu Obeid, 55, lost his home after it was targeted by Israeli strikes in the 2014 war, rebuilding it three years later. This week, the two-storey building was destroyed again, leaving the

construction worker and nine members of his extended family homeless.

"We live with a great injustice. I do not know if or when this house will be rebuilt. This is a civilian house, what is the military benefit in destroying it? Nothing. What do [the Israelis] want from us?" he said.

An apartment belonging to neighbour Youssef Sarsour, married with two children, was also severely damaged in the attack.

"I don't have any money to rebuild and some homes from 2014, they still were not rebuilt," the 32-year-old said.

"Our life is difficult in every sense of the word. We live in harsh conditions ... there is poverty, and on top of all this there are wars and destruction."

Israel and Islamic Jihad have both warned they would not hesitate to resume fire if the other side violated the agreement. Tensions have flared in

the last week since the death on hunger strike in Israeli custody of Khader Adnan, a prominent political figure affiliated with the group.

Gaza's population has next to no freedom of movement, and healthcare, electricity, sanitation and other crucial infrastructure have all but collapsed in the 16 years since Israel and Egypt imposed a strict blockade after a take-over by Hamas, the powerful Palestinian Islamist movement. Since 2007, the two sides have fought four devastating wars and several smaller confrontations.

Hamas has largely stayed on the sidelines during recent flare-ups. A joint statement from the factions claiming responsibility for retaliatory fire described it as a "broad response", but Israeli officials appear to have calculated that the more powerful group did not want to risk a return to full-blown

conflict.

"Quiet will be met with quiet," the office of the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, said in a statement. "If Israel is attacked or threatened, it will continue to do everything it needs to in order to defend itself."

Tariq Salmi, an Islamic Jihad spokesperson, said if Israel "commits any foolish act or any assassination ... the resistance will resume where it left off".

The escalation has been claimed as a victory by both sides.

"This may become a problem for Hamas. Islamic Jihad has become a strong competitor in terms of confrontation with Israel ... they are the ones leading the confrontation with Israel four times since 2019, not Hamas," said Mukhamar Abu Saada, a professor of political science professor at Azhar University in Gaza City.

"It could constitute a threat to Hamas and its popularity among Palestinians who support military action."

Tensions in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have soared over the past year: more than 130 Palestinians and at least 20 Israelis and foreigners have been killed in 2023 so far across Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The region remains on edge ahead of Jerusalem Day on Thursday, in which thousands of Israeli religious nationalists are expected to parade through Muslim areas in the heart of the divided holy city, a move seen as deeply provocative by the Palestinians.

The annual flag march takes place around sunset on the date Israel celebrates the capture and later annexation of East Jerusalem in the 1967 war, a step that has never been internationally recognised.

Thousands evacuated as Cyclone Mocha makes landfall in Myanmar

Associated Press

Thousands of people have been evacuated to monasteries, pagodas and schools in Myanmar, seeking shelter from a powerful storm that tore the roofs off buildings and killed at least three people.

Cyclone Mocha made landfall near Sittwe township in Rakhine state on Sunday with wind speeds of up to 130 mph (209 km/h), the country's meteorological department said.

Myanmar's military information office said the storm had damaged homes, electricity infrastructure, mobile phone masts, boats and lamp posts in Sittwe, Kyaukpyu, and Gwa

towships. It said the storm also tore roofs off sports facilities on the Coco Islands, about 260 miles (418km) southwest of the country's largest city, Yangon.

Rakhine-based media reported that streets and the basements of houses in Sittwe's low-lying areas had been flooded. Much of the area is cut off from phone and internet services.

In videos collected by local media before communications were cut off, deep water races through streets while wind lashes trees and pulls boards off roofs. Rakhine-based media reported that streets were flooded, trapping people in low-lying areas in their homes as worried relatives outside the township appealed for rescue.

More than 4,000 of Sittwe's 300,000 residents were evacuated to other cities, and more than 20,000 people were sheltering in monasteries, pagodas and schools on higher ground in the city, said Tin Nyein Oo, who is volunteering in Sittwe's shelters.

Lin Lin, the head of a local charity, said earlier that there was not enough food in the shelters after more people than expected arrived.

Several deaths were reported as a result of the storm. A rescue team from eastern Shan state announced on its Facebook page that it had recovered the bodies of a couple buried when a landslide hit their house in Tachileik township. Local media reported that a man was crushed to death when a tree

fell on him in Pyin Oo Lwin township in central Mandalay region.

Myanmar state television reported that the military government was preparing to send food, medicine and medical personnel to the storm-hit area. After battering Rakhine, the cyclone weakened and was forecast to hit the north-western state of Chin and the central regions on Monday.

Authorities in the Bangladeshi city of Cox's Bazar, which lies in the storm's predicted path, said they had evacuated about 1.27 million people. By early afternoon, however, it appeared the storm would mostly miss the country as it veered east, according to Azizur Rahman, the director of the country's meteorological department.

"The level of risk has reduced to a great extent in Bangladesh," he told reporters.

Strong winds with rains continued in Saint Martin's Island in the Bay of Bengal, it was reported, with leading Bengali-language daily Prothom Alo saying about a dozen islanders were injured and around 300 homes destroyed or damaged. One woman was critically wounded, it said.

UN agencies and aid workers in Bangladesh had positioned tons of dry food and dozens of ambulances with mobile medical teams in refugee camps that house more than a million Rohingya people who fled persecution in

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Myanmar.

In May 2008, Cyclone Nargis hit

Myanmar with a storm surge that devastated populated areas around the

Irrawaddy River delta. At least 138,000 people died and tens of thousands

of homes and other buildings were washed away.

Imran Khan calls for 'freedom' protests across Pakistan

Agence France-Presse

Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan has called for nationwide "freedom" protests on Sunday after his brief arrest and detention last week triggered deadly unrest.

The one-time cricket superstar - who has been tied up in dozens of legal cases since being ousted from power in April 2022 - was freed on bail on Friday after his detention was declared unlawful by the supreme court.

Enraged by the arrest, supporters set fire to government buildings, blocked roads and damaged property belonging to the military, which they blame for Khan's downfall.

"Freedom does not come easily. You have to snatch it. You have to sacrifice for it," he said on YouTube on Saturday night.

He called for his supporters to hold protests "at the end of your streets and villages" across the country on Sunday, and announced a return to campaigning on Wednesday for immediate elections.



▲ Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan is escorted by police officers to appear in court in Islamabad. Photograph: Anjum Naveed/AP

For months the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party leader has waged a campaign of defiance against the military.

His arrest on Tuesday came just hours after he was rebuked for claiming senior officials were involved in an assassination attempt against him in

2022.

Pakistan's powerful military has directly ruled the country off and on for nearly half of its 75-year history, and

continues to wield power over the political system.

"The army chief's actions have made our military bad. It is because of him, not because of me," Khan said from his home in Lahore, although it was unclear whether he meant the serving chief, or his predecessor, whom Khan has held responsible for his ouster.

He previously told reporters that "one man, the army chief" was behind his arrest.

But Khan distanced himself from the attacks against the military's installations at the protests, denying his party workers were involved and calling for an independent investigation into the violence.

The army, which denies the accusations made by Khan, on Saturday warned against attempts to create "misperceptions" against the institution.

At least nine people died in the unrest last week with hundreds of police officers injured and more than 4,000 people detained, according to authorities.

Legal defense fund raises over \$1m for accused in Jordan Neely subway death

Victoria Bekiempis

An online fundraiser for Daniel Penny, who placed fellow subway rider Jordan Neely in a fatal chokehold in a case that has come to symbolize fears over crime, racism and vigilantism, has raised more than \$1m for his legal defense.

The fundraiser for Daniel Penny, a white former marine, who was charged on Friday with second-degree manslaughter in the death of Neely, who is Black, is on GiveSendGo. The Christian fundraising website has also hosted drives for rightwing vigilante Kyle Rittenhouse and far-right groups, including January 6 insurrectionists.

"Funds are being raised to pay Mr Penny's legal fees incurred from any criminal charges filed and any future civil lawsuits that may arise, as well as expenses related to his defense. All contributions are greatly appreciated," the fundraising page said.

The campaign, which is listed as being created by Penny's attorneys, Raiser & Kenniff, PC, claims that any proceeds exceeding the costs of his legal expenses will be donated to a "mental health advocacy program in New York City". The firm's co-found-



▲ Daniel Penny, 24, is escorted in handcuffs by the NYPD after turning himself in to the authorities. Photograph: Michael Nigro/Pacific Press/Shutterstock

er, Steven M Raiser, confirmed that his company started the campaign.

Neely's killing nearly two weeks ago spurred extensive anger across New York City and the US, with his death underscoring ongoing racial and eco-

nomic inequality, and the country's lagging mental healthcare and social services. Moreover, Neely's death has renewed attention on crime - despite low crime rates in New York City - and vigilantism.

Penny has attracted the support of a broad swathe of the US right, including senior Republicans like rightwing Florida governor Ron DeSantis, who called Penny a "good Samaritan" for his actions.

The fatal encounter unfolded when Neely - who had struggled with homelessness and mental illness - walked onto a Manhattan subway train car shouting that he was tired, hungry and ready to die. A video recorded by a freelance journalist captured riders holding Neely against the floor.

Penny kept Neely in a chokehold long after Neely stopped moving and at least one rider implored him to release the man. Police officials found Neely unconscious, and he was pronounced dead at hospital. The city's medical examiner deemed Neely's death a homicide.

While police officers detained Penny and questioned him following the incident, they quickly released him, spurring public outcry and intense scrutiny over that decision. The Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg, announced on Thursday that Penny would be arraigned on a second-degree manslaughter charge and he surrendered to police on Friday. He appeared in court shortly thereafter and was released on \$100,000 bail.

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Thailand election day arrives with hope of unseating junta generals from power

Rebecca Ratcliffe and Thitipol Panyalimpanun in Bangkok

Thais voted on Sunday in an election that could lead to the defeat of the military-backed leader who has ruled the country for almost a decade.

However, a skewed election system means the shape of the new government is "very unpredictable", say analysts, and it is not clear if pro-democracy candidates will succeed in unseating the generals.

Since 2014, Thailand has been ruled by Prayuth Chan-o-cha, a former army chief who first came to power in a coup and who was later elected prime minister. A staunch royalist and conservative, Prayuth has run a strongly nationalistic election campaign, warning that opposition parties' promised reform will bring chaos.

Polling, however, has suggested that many voters do want change. Pheu Thai, the party associated with the exiled former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, is expected to win the most seats. At Pheu Thai's final big rally on Friday, his daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra, one of the party's three prime ministerial candidates, told crowds that Sunday would be a "historic day" where Thailand will move "from junta rule to democratic rule".

Move Forward, the most progressive opposition party, has also enjoyed late surges in polling after capturing strong support from young voters during its campaigns. Younger generations have been drawn to its pledge to demilitarise politics and break up monopolies. It is also the only party to promise to reform the lese majeste law, under which criticism of Thailand's powerful monarchy can lead to 15 years in prison.



▲ Paetongtarn Shinawatra, daughter of Thaksin Shinawatra, among supporters at an election rally with Srettha Thavisin, who has said he wants to be Thailand's next prime minister. Photograph: Jorge Silva/Reuters

Sunday's election is the first to be held after youth-led mass protests in 2020 shocked the establishment by calling not only for the removal of Prayuth, but also for the influence and wealth of the monarchy to be curbed - criticising an institution previously considered untouchable. Campaigning has featured unprecedented discussion of the lese majeste law, a new fault line in Thai politics. "It's the first time in history that every political party has to talk about their stance on this sensitive topic," said Prajak Kongkirati, a political scientist at Thammasat University in Bangkok.

This year's election is "not only a referendum on the military, but the whole establishment", he said, citing the increased questioning of the royal family's role in society. The vote, Prajak

said, "will be a crucial step for Thailand to return to democracy". But he added: "The path may not be smooth."

Parties will be competing for 500 seats in the House of Representatives on Sunday, but even if opposition parties do well, they may not be able to take power. A future prime minister will be voted on jointly by the elected lower house and the senate - the latter's 250 members having been appointed by the military after the last coup.

Parties such as Pheu Thai will almost certainly need to form alliances to overcome this hurdle.

"The electoral results can be predicted easily, but the government formation is very unpredictable," said Siripan Nogsuan Sawasdee, a political scientist at Chulalongkorn University, who added that unlikely partnerships

are still possible.

Kasinee Sudatip, 52, a voter in Khlong Toei, Bangkok, said she was so excited for Sunday's election, she could barely sleep the night before. She has always supported Pheu Thai and will vote for them again, she said, adding that she wanted democracy back.

The economy was much better under Thaksin, she added. "Poor people gained a lot of benefits. They introduced the 30 baht for the health treatment and also for funds for education," she said, referring to Thailand's universal healthcare scheme.

Surangkana Kornsawat, 27, who works in a beauty clinic, who also voted in Khlong Toei, Bangkok, said she was supporting Move Forward. "I want to see a new future Thailand - for new people to come and work for the coun-

try," she said, adding she was tired of the ruling military-backed party. "I've been feeling the impact of them for eight years and it's really bad. It's a lot - too much to say. The electricity bill is high, the economy is bad."

She wanted democratic change, she added, including reform of the lese majesty law. If Pheu Thai won, that would also be ok, she added: "I'm just anti-dictatorship".

Opposition candidates could face extra-parliamentary moves that would keep them from power. Last week, a complaint was filed against Pita Limjaroenrat, leader of Move Forward, claiming that he owns undeclared shares in a media company. He has denied any wrongdoing.

Complaints have also been filed against Pheu Thai.

Pheu Thai's campaign this year has been boosted by Thaksin's daughter Paetongtarn, who has helped revive nostalgia for her father.

However, at a rally on Friday night her fellow candidate Srettha Thavisin, a property tycoon, declared that he wanted "to serve as Thailand's 30th prime minister", prompting speculation that he could be the party's primary candidate for leader.

Thaksin, who remains a polarising figure, lives in exile to avoid legal charges. However, he has repeatedly commented that he would like to return - a prospect that analysts say could bring about political instability.

For two decades, Thai politics have been shaped by division between Pheu Thai's Shinawatra family versus the conservative military establishment. The power struggle between the two sides has resulted in long-running street protests and two military coups.

Unusual early heatwave set to sweep Pacific north-west of US

Maya Yang

An unusually early heatwave is set to sweep through the Pacific north-west of the US this weekend as the region braces for potentially record-breaking temperatures.

On Saturday, the National Weather Service (NWS) warned that "much above average to record heat building [will occur] across the Pacific northwest" as temperatures reach the high 80s and 90s degrees Fahrenheit, with the warmth expected to spread into the Rockies and Great Plains by early next week.

The NWS has issued a heat advisory for parts of Oregon and Washington that is expected to last until Sunday night.

"Hot temperatures may cause heat illnesses to occur," the NWS said, adding that residents should drink plenty of fluids, stay in air-conditioned rooms, keep out of the sun, and check up on



▲ Last July at least 14 people in Oregon were thought to have died in a heatwave. Photograph: Mathieu Lewis-Rolland/Reuters

relatives and neighbors. It also warned

that young children and pets should

never be left unattended in vehicles

under any circumstances.

Washington's King county, where Seattle is located, has directed transportation operators including bus drivers to let people ride for free if they are looking to cool off or are headed to a cooling center, the Associated Press reports.

The heatwave is expected to worsen wildfires that are currently burning in western Canada. On Thursday, 75 active wildfires burned in Alberta, with 23 listed as out of control. The fires have already displaced thousands of residents and many more are being placed under evacuation orders.

According to NWS meteorologist Daniel Hartsock, the rise in the region's temperature comes as a result of an intense high-pressure system similar to the "heat dome" that trapped hot air across the region in a record-breaking heatwave two years ago.

"We're looking at temperatures 20

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to 25 degrees above normal, so that's definitely not very common," Hartsock told Oregon Public Broadcasting, adding that the average high is around

70F (21C) in mid-May.

Last July, at least 14 people in Oregon were suspected to have died as a result of a blistering heatwave that spread across the Pacific north-west as then governor Kate Brown de-

clared a state of emergency in 25 counties across the state.

In 2021, more than 100 people died from Oregon's heatwave, mostly due to a lack of air-conditioning, heat stroke and heat-caused heart attacks. The

heatwave, which saw temperatures as high as 118F (40C) across the Pacific north-west, was described by experts as a 1-in-1,000-year event.

● This article was amended on 14 May 2023 to give the correct high-

est temperature recorded in the 2021 Oregon heatwave.

Florida teacher allegedly investigated for showing students film Strange World

Victoria Bekiempis

Florida education officials allegedly told a school teacher that she was under a misconduct investigation after, her friend claimed, she showed students the Disney animated film Strange World.

The purported investigation following this alleged showing of Strange World comes amid rightwing Republican governor Ron DeSantis's attacks on educators that include book censorship and limitations on discussions of race and sex as he jockeys for his party's presidential nomination with "anti-woke" talking points.

"My friend showed Disney's Strange World in a Florida classroom and one student reported it to their parents. Now she's under investigation by the state," Carl Zee tweeted on 11 May. "Florida is not safe for teachers, DO NOT MOVE HERE."

The film involves a group of explorers who try saving a "mysterious land from losing its vital energy source", per Variety. It also has a prominent gay character - a rarity in children's animation.

Zee included a photo of a letter from the Florida department of education, stating that "following receipt



▲ DeSantis has claimed, without evidence, that there is 'indoctrination in our schools'. Photograph: Daniel A Varela/AP

of a receipt of a complaint, this office has determined an investigation is warranted into allegations that you engaged in inappropriate conduct".

"If you have evidentiary witnesses or documents pertinent to the case, send them to this office no later than two weeks from receipt of this letter," the alleged missive continues. CBR.com

first reported on Zee's Tweet.

The alleged letter does not state specific allegations against this teacher. The Florida department of education did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In response to a Twitter user who said that teachers who break the law find themselves under investigation,

Zee wrote: "She has signed permission from every parent in the classroom to show Disney & Dreamworks movies in class, even offering lines to specify specific movies parents didn't want shown.

Not one exception was written down, so no she didn't break the law. Try again, doofus."

News of the alleged investigation

is in keeping with Florida teachers' concerns that they are being stymied and intimidated by new legislation championed by DeSantis. He has claimed, without evidence, that there is "indoctrination in our schools" and allowed his press secretary to claim that teachers are "grooming" pupils.

A new Florida law has effectively resulted in book bans, with classrooms and libraries removing books over concerns they contain "inappropriate" content.

One high school English teacher in Palm Bay, Florida, told the Guardian that a librarian took away a third of the books in his classroom - among them a collection of Emily Dickinson's poems, which was not on her list of green-lighted books.

DeSantis has also assailed Disney as a company after the entertainment titan pushed back against his "don't say gay" legislation. He hit back at Disney by signing a bill that took away Disney's status as a self-governing special district near Orlando.

Disney fought back against DeSantis, filing a federal lawsuit contending that he retaliated against the company for expressing its first amendment right to free speech. In the suit, Disney is asking to stop the governor's attempted takeover of the special district.

Thirteen-year-old girl punches shark in Florida to escape attack

Victoria Bekiempis

A 13-year-old girl escaped a shark attack at a Florida beach Thursday by punching the aggressive, predatory creature.

The teen, Ella Reed, told South Florida's Local 10 News, was sitting in waist-deep water, alongside a friend, when she was struck by intense, sharp pain.

"The shark itself was so powerful," Reed reportedly said. "That was what I felt the most because it was hitting my stomach really hard."

Reed said that she punched the shark when it came over to her. While the shark swam away, it returned almost immediately. "It wouldn't leave me alone, so I had to use my arm and use my hand too, so it got my arm and my finger," Reed told the station.

Reed then shouted for her brother and mom. "It was insane because she was totally covered in blood pretty much from head to toe so she couldn't really see what went on," her mother remarked. "She was shaking, but she was



▲ A bull shark. Florida is the shark bite capital of the world. Photograph: Joseph Prezioso/AFP/Getty Images

calm."

Reed - who was bitten in the sto-

mach, arm, knee and finger - received 19 stitches, Local 10 reported. "I was

kinda in shock about everything that happened, so I wasn't really in pain be-

cause the adrenaline was through the roof," Reed said.

Reed thinks that she was attacked by a bull shark measuring from some 5 to 6 feet. "It was clear water so you never really know what's going to happen," said Reed, who plans on returning to the water.

Florida is the shark bite capital of the world, according to the University of Florida's international shark attack file. Of the 57 unprovoked shark bites recorded in 2022, Florida tallied 16.

While there were no shark bite-related fatalities in Florida last year, they did result in two amputations. Most of unprovoked shark bites across the globe took place in the US and Australia.

While there were five deadly attacks in 2022, the data marked a decline from nine fatalities in 2021 and 10 in 2020. "Generally speaking, the number of sharks in the world's oceans has decreased, which may have contributed to recent lulls," said Gavin Naylor, of the Florida Museum of Natural History.

Scientists criticise Nasa for scaling back mission to explore beyond Pluto

Robin McKie Observer Science Editor

It may have reached the edge of the solar system and travelled more than 5 billion miles through space, but the New Horizons spacecraft is causing major ripples on Earth. A dispute has erupted between scientists and US space officials in the wake of Nasa's decision to stop funding next year for the vessel's main mission.

The move was described as "misguided and unfortunate" by Alan Stern, New Horizons's principal investigator.

"Scientifically, this is a mistake," he told the *Observer*. Several other senior scientists have backed him.

Nasa has said it is not going to shut down the spacecraft completely but will provide some funding so that the craft can continue to study space weather and other phenomena. But its prime task - the study of planet composition - will be halted.

New Horizons was designed to study the Kuiper belt, a doughnut-shaped ring of icy objects left over from the formation of the sun's planets billions of years ago. For decades, researchers dreamed of getting a close-up of some of these fossils of the solar system's birth, but were thwarted by their remoteness. New Horizons was built to put that right.

Launched from Cape Canaveral in January 2006, the probe used a flyby of the giant planet Jupiter to increase its velocity to more than 30,000mph, reaching Pluto, the largest Kuiper belt object, on 14 July 2015, and beaming



▲ An artist's impression of the New Horizons space probe. Photograph: UIG/Getty Images

data back to Earth. These messages took more than four hours to reach mission control, even though they were being transmitted at the speed of light. They revealed spectacular images of towering water-ice mountains and vast plains of frozen nitrogen.

Pluto was also discovered to have a thin, blue atmosphere, while a reddish-brown cap of material on its largest moon, Charon, was found to be composed of organic molecules that could be important ingredients of life. For a world in such a remote orbit around the sun, the dwarf planet and its moons proved surprisingly energetic.

After sweeping past Pluto and

Charon, New Horizons plunged on into the Kuiper belt, and on 1 January 2019 swept close to Arrokoth, the most distant and the most primitive object ever explored by a spacecraft. Images showed that Arrokoth - a Native American term that means "sky" in the Powhatan-Algonquin language - consisted of two lobes that probably formed separately before gently merging within a cloud of particles early in the history of our solar system.

This finding, in combination with observations of other Kuiper belt objects by New Horizons, was crucial.

"It taught us so much about fundamental properties of planetary for-

mation. It was completely transformational," said Michele Bannister, a planetary scientist at University of Canterbury, New Zealand, in the journal *Nature* last week.

This point was backed by Stern, who said: "The Kuiper belt is made up of planetesimals, the building blocks of planets. Thanks to the data that was sent back by New Horizons, we now understand the way that these building blocks combine and coalesce and start the process of planetary formation. This is fundamentally important to understanding our own solar system and planets around other stars."

New Horizons had been scheduled

to take another four or five years to complete its journey through the Kuiper belt - named after the Dutch-American astronomer Gerard Kuiper, who proposed its existence in a paper in 1951. During this journey, it was hoped that it could rendezvous with another planetesimal like Arrokoth.

But finding such a target near its path through the belt has been tricky.

"It is extremely hard to find another suitable object to get near but we have been trying really hard to find one," said Stern.

"I think there is some frustration at Nasa that we don't have another flyby target as yet, and I understand that frustration. We are working as hard as we can to put that right but it is such a tough problem. However, cutting off our funding only guarantees that there will never be another flyby target."

New Horizons cost more than \$800m (£650m) to build and fly to Pluto and beyond. Mission control costs have come in at about \$10m a year. By shifting the mission away from planetary science and scrutiny of the Kuiper belt and by concentrating instead on heliophysics, the physics of the sun and its connection with the solar system, several million dollars are likely to be trimmed from that annual budget.

"It's a false economy," said Stern. "New Horizons can still do great science for the rest of its time in the Kuiper belt. But stopping it next year is both premature scientifically and unwise from the standpoint of fiscal policy. I am very concerned about this, and it is fair to say that I am in good company."

Boris Johnson's disciples gathered to sing the old hymns. But are they a real threat to Sunak?

Michael Savage, Policy Editor

It was billed as the launch of a campaign to hand more power to Tory members. It was not, its organisers repeatedly insisted, a group aiming to reinstall Boris Johnson as party leader - or cause trouble for Rishi Sunak. It was about "taking back control" of the Conservative party for the grassroots.

Yet as the Conservative Democratic Organisation (CDO) met for its inaugural gathering in a sunny Bournemouth on Saturday, it was less than 15 minutes after Tory MP Andrea Jenkyns had belted out the national anthem that Johnson's name was first uttered on stage.

His close ally and local MP, Conor Burns, said the party owed him a "debt of gratitude" for delivering Brexit. Meanwhile, two boxes labelled "Team Boris" and "Team Rishi" were placed outside the conference hall, and attendees were invited to drop a ping-pong ball into one or the other to indicate



▲ Former home secretary Priti Patel was among those lining up to kick Rishi Sunak at the Conservative Democratic Organisation conference yesterday. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

their allegiance.

Soon after Burns's appearance, Tory donor Peter Cruddas got up to attack the "plotting", "secret meetings" and "collusion" that led to Johnson being removed by MPs. He and other speakers called for more rightwing policies that, they said, party members craved. Crud-

das suggested the party under Sunak was now overseeing "the reversal of the 2019 manifesto" and becoming "a centre-left party ... of higher taxes".

Whatever its motives, the key question for Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ) is whether this group and its members - who gathered for

what felt like a party conference from a previous age - is a real threat to the sense of calm and order that Sunak has sought to bring to his party after a year of ferocious infighting. Or is it simply a small army of pro-Johnson disciples that will have little impact?

If nothing else, the event suggests there is still a radical strain in the Conservative party's bloodstream that could well play a significant role in the next leadership contest, should Sunak depart soon after the general election.

It is not the only event signalling a greater degree of organisation from the right. The Bournemouth gathering comes before a three-day conference by the global "national conservatism" group, which has its roots in the US right. A similar cast list is likely to trumpet the Liz Truss-style agenda of low taxes that is becoming the main concern for many on the Tory right. In reality, even MPs close to Johnson find it hard to envisage him making a comeback before an election - and also struggle to see him wanting to take on



▲ Jacob Rees-Mogg attacked the recent U-turn on EU laws. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

the thankless task of leading the party in opposition. Yet the more significant concern for Sunak is the personnel who attended the Bournemouth bash - and the threat they pose to his plan to restore order to a party that has torn itself apart in recent times.

Former cabinet ministers Jacob Rees-Mogg, Priti Patel and Nadine Dorries attended - and while there might be agreement that Sunak is safe in his post, they are just some members of a group of MPs with the ability to make

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life seriously difficult for the PM. From their utterances in Bournemouth, it appears that Sunak will have to achieve a turnaround with a constant hum of discontent in the background.

In one of the most direct warnings from a senior figure, Patel, the former home secretary, received a standing ovation as she warned the party was in decline - and called on those present to defend Johnson's 2019 manifesto, which she warned was being torn up by the current leader.

Rees-Mogg, to great applause, said that the government's recent U-turn over axing all EU regulations by the end of the year was "not exactly a sign of strength", and called for labour regulations to be removed and "supply-side reforms" brought in. He also, however, made it clear that the party would "be toast" if it tried to change leaders again.

"It would make us look ridiculous," he said.

Jenkyns said some of her Tory colleagues belonged in the Lib Dems. Stewart Jackson, the former MP and now Tory peer, said Johnson's mandate had been thrown away.

Dorries, the former culture secretary and one of Johnson's biggest backers, was the most passionate in defending the former prime minister's record, but also the most cutting in her analysis of the party under Sunak. "We are going backwards," she said, saying the performance since the 2019 election had been an "astonishing political tumble".

There were other notable rumblings in the last week. Guto Harri, Johnson's former communications chief, revealed in a podcast that the former prime minister had been so angry at what he saw as Sunak's betrayal in helping to topple him that he wanted to send him

a video calling him something unrepeatable.

Then business and trade secretary Kemi Badenoch made a provocative appearance in the Commons after the government's decision to do a U-turn on a plan to end EU laws by the end of the year. Her decision to hit back at attacks from the European Research Group of pro-Brexit Tory MPs, rather than attempt to keep them onside, has gone down incredibly badly. Senior ERG figures said the episode had made it more likely that the group could join forces with Labour over certain issues to defeat the government.

These concerns on the right show the tightrope Sunak is walking. They are also coming despite the fact that one of the few political positives for the PM is the absence of a real electoral threat on the Tory right flank. The Reform party, created from the Brexit party, performed poorly where it ran in

this month's local elections. "Without Nigel [Farage] coming back, I just don't see that there is a real threat there," said one senior Tory sympathetic to the idea of Johnson's return.

While there is no doubt that those in Bournemouth represent a chunk of the Tory membership frustrated by the lack of Brexit progress and what they see as a "woke" mainstream agenda, experts suggest there is little evidence of an electoral bounty from the agenda they offer.

"Because the Conservative party has become a radical right party, it means that it's probably squeezed that vote about as much as it can," said Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London.

"There aren't that many voters out there who will come flocking to the party if it moves any further in that direction. It has probably mined all the voters there are to mine. But that threat from Farage

remains, if Richard Tice [the current Reform leader] were to step back."

In Bournemouth, it was tempting to think that Conservative MPs were now sitting atop a membership that was far to the right of them, creating the kind of imbalance that saw Labour members deliver Jeremy Corbyn, a leader out of sync with the parliamentary party.

But Bale questioned that conclusion. "I think people overstate the degree to which the Conservative party membership is much more rightwing than the parliamentary party. I think there is still quite a lot of love for Boris there, but that's as much about the cult of personality than policy."

"You're always going to get politicians who like the limelight travelling to where they will get applause and a lot of love, but that doesn't mean the membership as a whole is prepared to become enlisted in Boris's zombie army."

Revealed: richer graduates in England will pay less for degree than poorer students

Jon Ungoed-Thomas

The government's student loan reforms will benefit the country's best-paid graduates at the expense of nursing graduates, teachers and other lower- and middle-income earners, new research reveals.

Under the biggest reforms of student loans in England for more than a decade, many lower-paid earners face an increase in their total lifetime repayments of more than £30,000. Meanwhile, the highest-earning graduates will see their lifetime repayments fall on average by £25,000 compared with the previous arrangements, according to an analysis by the economic consultancy London Economics.

The research forecasts that a graduate earning £37,000 by 2030 would pay back £63,100 over the course of their career, while a graduate earning £70,000 would pay back just £55,000.

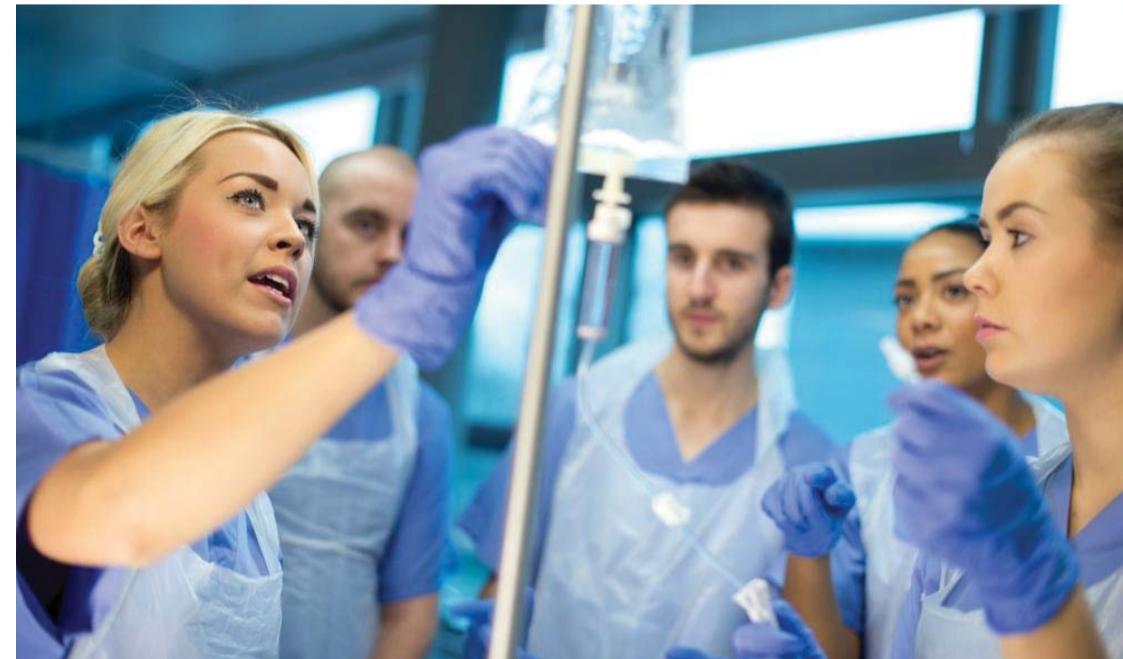
Gavan Conlon, a senior partner at London Economics, said: "This is effectively a massive subsidy to predominantly white, predominantly male graduates. It's deeply regressive."

Patricia Marquis, Royal College of Nursing director for England, said: "These changes are a disgrace and will blatantly disproportionately affect nursing staff."

"It means nurses will be paying back their student debt sooner, more of it, and for longer. At a time when there is a recruitment and retention crisis in the NHS, this will only exacerbate it."

Student funding and tuition fees have become big political issues for all the main parties. Labour leader Keir Starmer has confirmed he has dropped his pledge to abolish tuition fees, but has said his party will "set out a fairer solution" in the coming weeks. Many young voters struggling in the cost of living crisis are now turning away from the Tories.

The government's own impact assessment said the student loan reforms were more likely to have



▲ Nurses will be among those graduates facing higher repayments under the new arrangements, called a 'disgrace' by the RCN England director, Patricia Marquis. Photograph: sturti/Getty Images

a "negative impact" on certain groups, including women, lower earners and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. A House of Lords scrutiny committee has warned the reforms contradict the government's levelling-up agenda.

The Welsh government announced this month that it will not implement the reforms despite historically aligning its student support system with England. It said the measures would "disproportionately" affect women graduates and "benefit the highest earners".

Liz Emerson, chief executive of the Intergenerational Foundation, which promotes the interests of younger and future generations, said: "These reforms will entrench inequality. The only winners will be the best-paid graduates."

Ministers announced a package of reforms in February 2022 that include new loan arrangements for students from 1 August this year, but the full consequences of the changes have

become clearer from recent modelling.

The reforms extend the repayment period from 30 to 40 years, cut the salary threshold at which payments are made to £25,000 and reduce interest rates on the repayment of the loan to retail price index (RPI) inflation. Graduates repay 9% of their income above the threshold.

Ministers say the measures will increase the number of graduates who pay off their loans in their entirety, cutting taxpayer support for student loans from 44p in the pound to as low as 23p in the pound. The average debt of first degree graduates on graduation is about £50,800, according to figures calculated by London Economics.

The reforms also affect those who have already graduated. Those who took out loans from 1 September 2012 to 31 July 2023 will have the repayment threshold frozen at £27,295 until 2024/25. It will mean they will end up paying more of their income towards their loans than if the threshold had risen in line with inflation.

The lower threshold at which repayments start, and the 40-year repayment period for new borrowers, mean lower- and middle-income earners will now pay significantly more. It means in many cases that lower earners will pay more in total than the best-paid graduates, paying back the loans and more accumulated interest over a longer period.

The measures form part of the government's response to Sir Philip Augar's review of post-18 education and funding published in May 2019. The review recommended reintroducing maintenance grants for disadvantaged students, but this was not adopted.

Nearly all nursing graduates will face a significant increase in their lifetime loan repayments. For male nurses, average lifetime repayments are expected to increase by £17,600, from £24,400 to £42,000; for women, the increase stands at £15,300, from £10,700 to £26,000, according to forecasts by London Economics. The government's own figures reveal that lower-paid earn-

ers will see total repayments increase by up to 174%.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies says the reforms may make university less attractive for those who don't expect to be high earners. "In these reforms, lower earners pay more and higher earners pay less," said Ben Waltmann, senior research economist at the IFS. "Lower to middle earners like teachers and nurses will lose out the most."

Chloe Field, vice president for higher education at the National Union of Students, said: "This is yet more evidence the current system is failing students, and society more widely. On top of the pitiful maintenance loan increases, which have failed to keep pace with inflation, and have left students at the mercy of the cost of living crisis, we believe a major overhaul is needed."

Officials say that while lifetime repayments will decrease for the highest earners under the new arrangements, the lowest earners will still be required to contribute the least. It says the system is "progressive overall", that any adverse impact on particular groups is as a result of their lifetime earnings, and "overall the equality impacts are mixed".

A Department for Education spokesperson said: "It is important that we have a sustainable student finance system that is fair to students and taxpayers."

"We have cut interest rates to RPI only so that new borrowers will not repay more than they originally borrowed, when adjusted for inflation. Through these reforms, more than half of borrowers will repay their loans in full, compared to the current rate of 20%."

"To help students who need further support, we have made an additional £15m available, increasing our student premium funding to £276m this academic year."

Single-use vapes sparking surge in fires at UK waste plants

James Tapper

Disposable vapes are behind a dramatic rise in fires at recycling plants over the last year, raising the risk of a major blaze releasing toxic fumes and polluting air, industry experts warn.

Recycling firms are now dealing with so many vapes that they are struggling to insure their facilities. Some are now using artificial intelligence to detect vapes and their lithium-ion batteries, as well as installing thermal imaging cameras and automatic foam jets.

The hazardous material dealt with at waste and recycling plants means they can potentially cause fires similar to 2020's Bradford tyre fire which burned for a week and forced 20 schools to close and required every firefighter in West Yorkshire.

Around 1.3m single-use vapes are now thrown away each week in the UK - an extraordinary rise since the first was sold in 2019 - and many are dumped by the roadside or in general waste. They contain lithium-ion batteries, which easily catch fire if broken, and some vapers have suffered life-changing injuries after theirs have exploded.

Research by Material Focus, a non-



▲ The lithium-ion batteries in vapes catch fire easily if broken. Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

profit organisation which runs the Recycle Your Electricals campaign, found that more than 700 fires in bin lorries and recycling centres were caused by batteries that had been dumped into general waste.

Grundon, which recycles around 80,000 tonnes of household and municipal waste a year, has seen an increase in the number of disposable vapes being picked up by road sweeping vehicles, whose circular brushes usually collect leaves and stones.

"They're sold as disposable so people just throw them on the floor,"

said Owen George, division manager for Grundon. "We didn't see any about a year or so ago, but now they're everywhere. We probably pick out 100 to 150 on an eight-hour shift. And they're just the ones we catch."

The ones they don't catch can end up in their non-recyclable waste stream with items such as Pringles cans, plastic wrappers and disposable coffee cups. These are chopped and packed into bales, a process that can break open a lithium-ion battery, which can then easily catch fire. Grundon has had three or four fires in the past year alone at just

one site.

"We've managed to put them out, but the frequency is really growing," George said. "It's not just us - it's affecting everyone in the industry."

Grundon has installed fire detection equipment costing about £250,000 at each of its facilities. "We've put in thermal-imaging cameras and, in some places, we've got automated cannons that lock on to the fire and hit it with water and foam to put it out."

Insurers have become reluctant to cover the waste industry because of the fire risk, with premiums growing and expensive fire safety systems now a requirement. Artificial intelligence is another option.

About 70% of UK recycling facilities now use AI developed by Greyparrot.

"We have a box that has a camera inside and we take continuous images of the waste stream, then use AI to detect and analyse those images," said Mikela Druckman, Greyparrot's chief executive.

The system can recognise 67 types of material which can then be sorted - iron and steel can be picked up magnetically, while lighter PET plastic bottles can be blown off with a burst of air.

"We're doing several projects, mainly in Austria but now also in the



▲ Some disposable vapes at Grundon waste management recycling plant in Slough. Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

UK, where we're identifying batteries in the waste stream," Druckman said.

Justin Guest, co-founder of Archipelago Eco, which invests in recycling technology, said that banning vapes would be "a blunt instrument", adding: "It doesn't solve the problem because it's not just vapes - there are batteries in so many things now. People will always get stuff and throw it away."

"There will be some other consumer craze that comes along and these materials will always find their way into the waste stream. So you need safeguards, and you need technology to solve that problem."

About 1.38m single-use vapes are now sold in the UK each year, containing enough lithium for about 1,200 electric vehicle batteries.

What happens when leaders disregard the truth? Putin and Trump are about to find out

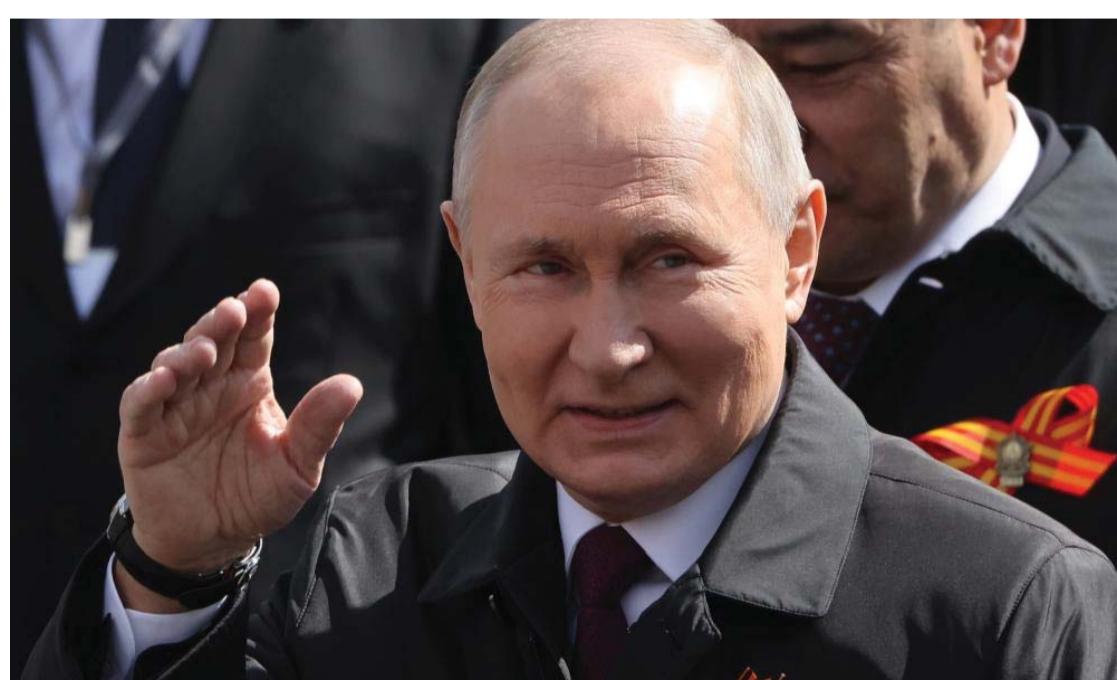
Peter Pomerantsev

The powerful were meant to be afraid of the truth. Journalists were meant to "hold truth to power". Evidence was meant to destroy wrongdoers as sunlight does a vampire. Find the evidence, the logic went, and the powerful could be shamed and brought to justice.

Historically, the powerful would try to censor and suppress the facts. The Nazis tried to keep the truth about their atrocities hidden. The Soviet leadership would howl with embarrassment when dissidents passed information about conditions in the gulag to the outside world. Richard Nixon was brought down after the facts of his bugging his political opponents, and his ensuing cover-up, were brought to light.

But what happens when the powerful stop being scared of the truth, indeed flaunt their disregard for it - as we see in the behaviour of Russia's Vladimir Putin and America's Donald Trump? Why has shame disappeared and why does impunity reign? Are we now helpless to hold the powerful to account?

In the US last week, Trump was again lying "bigly" and brazenly. At a televised CNN town hall event, the journalist Katie Collins tried to rein him in with ropes of evidence and rational argument but he just revelled in rejecting any truth or logic. According to Trump, the presidential elec-



▲ Russian President Vladimir Putin waves while visiting the Victory Day Red Square Parade on 9 May 2023, in Moscow. Photograph: Getty Images

tion that he lost in 2020 was "rigged", despite there being no proof for any such claims; the reporter E Jean Carroll, whom a civil jury found Trump guilty of defaming and sexually abusing, was just a "whack job"; when Collins pulled him up over the classified documents that Trump had removed from the White House, he dismissed her as a "nasty person". The audience in New Hampshire, full of Trump fans, whooped and cheered. Instead of being "held to account" with the truth, Trump had a field day showing how he didn't

give a hoot about it. Why do his supporters enjoy this so much?

There is, first of all, a powerful relief that comes from throwing off the weight of facts, the constraints of glum reality.

Facts are generally unpleasant things, but they are useful for politicians who are trying to establish some sort of proof that their big policy is working.

But Trump had no stable policies: he can be righter than right, and then pivot left when it suits him. Ever since

Florida governor Ron DeSantis, his rival to head the Republican party, has tried to show he is more conservative than Trump - and most Americans - on issues such as abortion, Trump has made himself look more liberal.

Nor has Trump any ideals that you could shame him into having betrayed. Instead, he appeals to a sense of pure resentment, where throwing off all forms of authority and responsibility - the authority of logic, ideals, rational policies, the "elites" - is what makes him attractive to people.

In a democracy such as the US, however, reality can take revenge. Trump's rejection of the facts about Covid cost him the 2020 election. Every month, more court cases pile up against him: most seriously, for (allegedly) trying to force officials in Georgia to count more votes in his favour in 2020. Fox News, the Trump-supporting television network that has knowingly peddled conspiracy theories supporting his claims of a "rigged" election, has just paid out \$787m (£633m) to the company it accused of falsifying votes.

Putin has fewer restraints. Unlike previous warmongering dictators, he doesn't even try to hide his atrocities and intent to commit genocide in Ukraine. Putin and his propagandists speak openly about their desire to destroy Ukrainian identity and sovereignty, of abducting Ukrainian children and forcibly re-educating them. The Russian army shells maternity hospitals, obliterates civilian infrastructure and entire cities. Putin wants to show he can mass murder openly, and there is nothing anyone can do about it. He wants to open a chasm between truth and justice so the connection between the two is utterly ruptured.

But the Russian invasion of Ukraine could also be a turning point: Putin's plague of impunity is starting to be confronted by innovative initiatives great and small.

Since the war started, I've been working with journalists and lawyers at

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the Reckoning Project to help "quick-en" justice around atrocities. Lawyers and journalists don't often work together - but in this case we are both on the same side. Teams of Ukrainian reporters trained in international human rights law are gathering evidence of atrocities on the ground through testimonies from victims. We then create media content based on this evidence for "the court of public opinion", while our legal team develops cases. Usually, war crimes cases come long after a conflict ends; in this war, however, we need to construct them as it rages.

But when we think about justice we

need to go beyond old-fashioned cases of war crimes, where a general or politician is brought to trial. While that is obviously important, waiting for it can take a long time. Moreover, some of the Putin elite are only too proud to be accused of atrocities: it shows their loyalty to the leader. We need to broaden our concept of how justice can be achieved.

One of the more innovative ideas floated recently comes from Ilona Khmeleva, of the Economic Security Council of Ukraine, and the British law firm McCue Jury. They propose an economic justice tribunal. This will adjudicate on how to seize the international assets of the Russian state and its oligarchs, and distribute them to specific

victims of Russian aggression.

I would add (billion-dollar) fines against western companies and enablers that continue to support Putin's war machine despite sanctions. Such a tribunal would both give tangible compensation to victims and undermine the corrupt, global system that Putin has created and whose existence he uses to prove how entrenched his power is. Putin's domestic propaganda is always trumpeting how many supporters it has across the world: from Viktor Orbán in Hungary to Trump in the US. President Joe Biden had tried to isolate us, the argument goes, but he's too weak and everyone needs our oil, gas and metals.

Polls in Russia show that Russians tend to believe anyone who is in authority: truth is not a value in itself, but a subset of power. As one recent poll by the Open Minds Institute concludes, Russians tend towards "belief that the government is right, solely because it is the government and it has power". If Putin can show he is powerful, through impunity globally and victory on the battlefield, then he is "believed". Defeat him on the battlefield, undermine his system in the courts, and his power to define reality will slip. It's not just truth that leads to justice, it's justice that leads to truth.

● Peter Pomerantsev is the author of *Nothing Is True and Everything Is*

Possible: Adventures in Modern Russia

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 250 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at observer.letters@observer.co.uk

Putin wants to open a chasm between truth and justice so the connection between the two is utterly ruptured

A moment's silence, please, for the death of Mark Zuckerberg's metaverse

John Naughton

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to remember the metaverse, which was quietly laid to rest a few weeks ago by its grieving adoptive parent, one Mark Zuckerberg. Those of you with long memories will remember how, in October 2021, Zuck (as he is known to his friends) excitedly announced the arrival of his new adoptee, to which he had playfully assigned the nickname "The Future".

So delighted was he that he had even renamed his family home in her honour. Henceforth, what was formerly called "Facebook" would be known as "Meta". In a presentation at the company's annual conference, Zuckerberg announced the name change and detailed how his child would grow up to be a new version of cyberspace. She "will be the successor to the mobile internet", he told a stunned audience of credulous hacks and cynical Wall Street analysts. "We'll be able to feel present - like we're right there with people no matter how far apart we actually are." And no expense would be spared in ensuring that his child would fulfil her destiny.

On that last matter, at least, Zuck was as good as his word. He set out to hire 10,000 engineers in Europe alone and blow uncountable piles of money to ensure this vision would become a reality. Up to the end of last October, the project had soaked up \$36bn (about £30bn), with little to show for it but an expensive video in which Zuck (who always manages to look like his virtual-reality avatar) talked about how good it was going to be - "the experiences you're going to have, what the crea-



▲ Mark Zuckerberg speaks to an avatar of himself in the metaverse, October 2021. Photograph: Meta/Reuters

tive economy will build and the technology that needs to be invented". Note that last phrase: what actually emerged was a virtual-reality platform called Horizon Worlds, accessible only via naff and clunky Oculus headsets (think an uncomfortable version of Zoom) and a virtual wasteland populated by textureless, featureless, legless avatars and landscapes that, as *Forbes* put it, "look like bad Roblox levels".

Sadly, Zuck's promising adoptee turned out to be a sickly, feeble child. And so, on or about 18 March, he quietly had her put down. For he had just discovered that a new candidate for the role of The Future had suddenly arrived, and he was chagrined to realise that while he had been nursing the weakling, he had not noticed the newcomer on the block. It went by the name "AI", and now Meta was lagging

behind in the race to get to *this* new Future.

In those circumstances, you'd have thought someone who had just blown \$36bn of his company's money in the pursuit of a personal obsession would have been a mite apologetic, wouldn't you? Not a bit of it. Why? Because he has absolute control over the company. In case you think I'm exaggerating, here's the relevant section in the company's annual SEC filing:

"Mark Zuckerberg, our founder, chairman, and CEO, is able to exercise voting rights with respect to a majority of the voting power of our outstanding capital stock and therefore has the ability to control the outcome of all matters submitted to our stockholders for approval, including the election of directors and any merger, consolidation, or sale of all or substantially all of our

assets. This concentrated control could delay, defer, or prevent a change of control, merger, consolidation, or sale of all or substantially all of our assets that our other stockholders support, or conversely this concentrated control could result in the consummation of such a transaction that our other stockholders do not support ... In addition, Mr Zuckerberg has the ability to control the management and major strategic investments of our company as a result of his position as our CEO and his ability to control the election or, in some cases, the replacement of our directors."

Translation: he can do what he likes - including selling the company over the heads of its board of directors - and nobody could stop him. It's clear that at least some shareholders had become restive about Zuckerberg's pursuit of a fatuous virtual-reality fantasy, but that

unease was mitigated by the fact that other parts of the company - boring, old-fashioned Facebook, for example, or Instagram (once it got over its near-death experience called TikTok) - continued to make healthy profits.

But what if he now decides to bet the ranch on large language models and AI? And does so in a time when the old, profitable lines of business are beginning to flag? Suppose that, next time, the unstoppable supreme leader brings the entire edifice down? In which case, the world would finally realise that it is Zuckerberg, not Rupert Murdoch, who is the Citizen Kane *de nos jours*. Just think: the Zuckerberg story could fill a gap in the market: after all, *Succession* will soon come to an end. We just need a new Orson Welles to play the lead.

What I've been reading

Been in a bunker? If you missed the coronation, then Helen Lewis's account in the *Atlantic* provides ample compensation.

Are you satisfied? "On Generative AI and Satisficing" is an insightful Substack post by Dave Karpf.

Brains still win William Deresiewicz has written a reassuring essay on the Persuasion platform called "Why AI will never rival human creativity".

You'd have thought someone who had blown \$36bn in the pursuit of a personal obsession would have been a mite apologetic

Big tech says it can boost productivity, but AI won't solve meetings madness

Gene Marks

Meetings, more meetings. A Zoom call. A Google Hangout. Another meeting.

Answering emails. Have you checked Slack? Did you sign off on those expenses in Concur? Ever feel too busy at work to get any actual work done? Well, apparently you are right. According

to a new report from Microsoft, our workplaces have a serious productivity problem.

The study - which surveyed nearly 31,000 full-time employed or self-em-

ployed workers across 31 markets between 1 February 2023 and 14 March 2023 - found that 64% say they struggle with having the time and energy to do their job. Meetings overload is the big-

gest productivity killer. Respondents to the survey said that meetings are their "number one productivity disruptor"

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with more than two-thirds saying they likely wouldn't even be missed if they weren't there.

Other data supports Microsoft's study. A recently released report from EY-Parthenon using data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, found that American worker productivity plunged by 2.7% in the first quarter of 2023 compared with the same period last year, marking the fifth consecutive quarter that worker productivity has dropped.

Unsurprisingly, Microsoft, with its enormous investment in AI tools like ChatGPT, says that AI is the solution. Never mind that it was Microsoft's own technology - Teams, Office, Outlook - that promised productivity savings and delivered the opposite. Still, we're to put our faith in the technocrats of Redmond to solve these problems with their new tools that will "radically rethink the workday" and "free up time and energy, protect focus time for the creative work that leads to innovation".

Don't believe it.

Microsoft's AI push won't do much to solve the productivity problem, given the company's history and our love of creating work for work's sake.

So what's the answer to the productivity puzzle? Big tech and big companies need to look no further than Main Street. Small businesses have



▲ A study shows that meetings overload is a productivity killer. Photograph: Jasmin Merdan/Alamy

been showing the world how to be productive for years. They've been getting their work done with fewer people.

Just last week the National Federation of Independent Businesses reported that "small business owners

continue to struggle to find workers, with 45% (seasonally adjusted) of all owners reporting job openings they could not fill in the current period".

Given that retail, restaurants, services and even manufacturing indus-

tries have recovered from the pandemic and most of my clients are busier than ever, how are they getting this work done when they've got fewer employees?

The answer's easy: they give their

workers more autonomy.

Visit a business with fewer than 100 employees and you will find the people there at their desks, behind the counter, in front of a stove or operating a machine. There are fewer meetings. There are fewer rules. There's more flexibility. Employees are given more latitude to make their own choices. Decisions are made without committees and with the information available. Hiring is done on an educated hunch. Investments are made with more of a gut feeling. Technology is used when it's absolutely clear that it can save time and make money.

Microsoft laments the lack of innovation in corporate America. That's because even the most trivial of decisions needs 27 meetings to approve it. Not so at a smaller company. Innovation happens because it needs to happen. Ideas that have the potential to save and make money are approved faster and then implemented quickly.

Microsoft would have you believe that buying its AI technology will solve corporate America's productivity issues. AI will definitely make a difference soon. But it's not too little technology that's the problem.

Gene Marks is a columnist, author and small business owner. His company, the Marks Group PC, provides technology and financial management services to SMBs in the US and abroad.

The culture of mistrust is bleeding into our personal lives. No wonder there's a sex recession

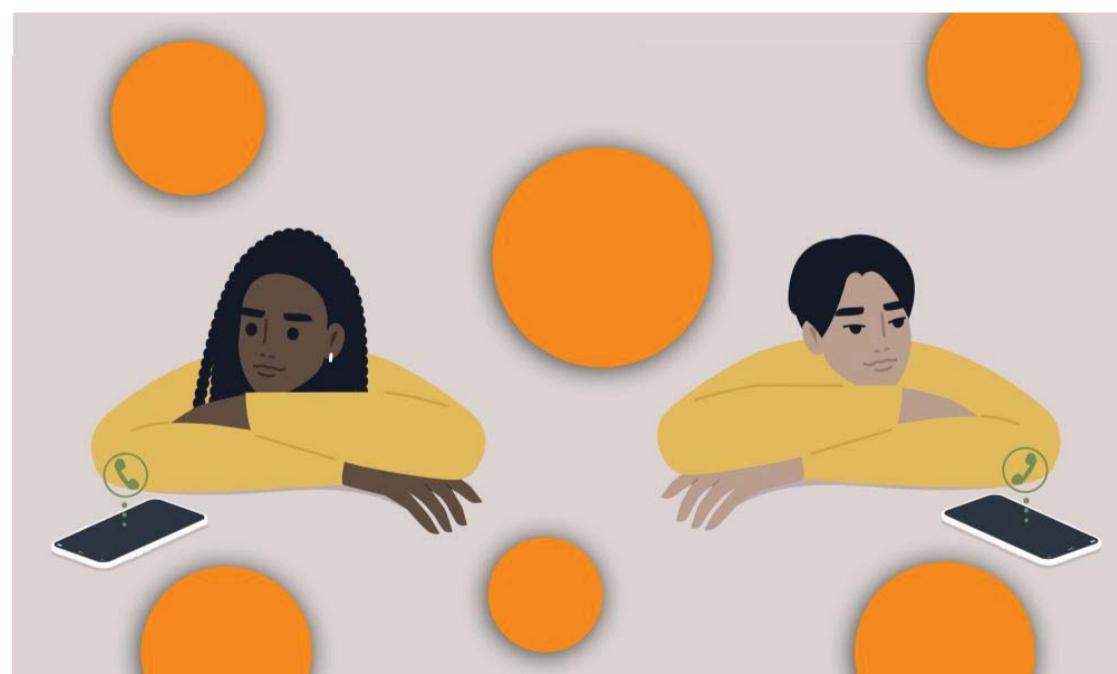
Van Badham

The western drift away from seeking moral instruction from the church is understandable; the morality plays staged every day on Reddit's infamous "Am I the Asshole?" threads are far more entertaining.

A few weeks ago, a post went viral in which the author seeks a public verdict on the question "AITA for asking my roommates to remove their dildos from the bathroom mirror in a way that was not kind?" The young poster had responded to the presence of newly washed sex toys in a shared space with a disgusted hostility and the dildo-owning flatmate complained the poster should have requested the removal more politely.

This brash - and now VERY public - story of objects once unlikely to be mentioned outside (ahem) the most personal of circumstances appears at the same time US magazine the Atlantic has been discussing "America's intimacy problem".

Researchers in the US have noticed a decline in secure attachments between individuals. Growing numbers of Americans find themselves either avoiding or incapable of maintaining intimate social relationships, with the consequence being loneliness and isolation. Psychologists report that even when their clients do want the security and comfort of meaningful connections, "there's a lot of confusion and fear



▲ In a cultural moment where liberalised attitudes towards sex and sexuality have destigmatised so many forms of sexual behaviour, younger generations appear to be growing less sexually intimate. Composite: nadia_bormotova/Getty Images/iStockphoto

in terms of how to get there".

In a cultural moment where liberalised attitudes towards sex and sexuality have destigmatised so many forms of sexual behaviour, younger generations appear to be growing less sexually intimate.

It's not an exclusively American problem. In Australia, younger generations have also been in a "sex recession" for years. Figures compiled in 2020 revealed 40% of people in the 18-24 age bracket had never had a sexual partner. Disturbingly, some of those who know sexual contact may

not necessarily know it with intimacy, but with coercion.

Sociologists and other researchers have speculated that social media is driving this. From chat to porn, the new networks provide on-demand experiences of connection that resemble in-person interactions without sharing the awkward, human rhythms of the real-world thing. The digital allure is of relationships that can be curated, controlled and contained.

Simultaneously, the portability of image-capture technology has facilitated an era of relentless self-surveil-

lance. Powerful forces incentivise the exploitation of the personal, from the monetisation of the influencer to the desperate social competition for online attention.

The digital paradigm has come to contain us. To admit one is messy, inexperienced, scared, human-shaped or in any way truly vulnerable is an act of trust before another person and we've all learned by now to never trust anything pretending to be a person on the internet. Maybe the culture of mistrust fostered on the internet is what's bleeding into our external lives? The

relentless exposure of it renders any revelation of frailty a dangerous prospect.

Meanwhile, experiments such as Arthur Aron's "36 questions that lead to love" established that it's the mutual revelation of vulnerability that creates our most intimate bonds.

The terror is valid. The personal cost is incalculable.

Recently I received the sad news that an old theatre friend had passed away, and far too young. We lived on separate continents and had not been in touch for quite some time.

This news of his death, though, has shattered me. The memory that replays itself dates from 19 years ago: we'd stumbled into my apartment to crash after an all-night drunken adventure, and in his besottedness he found himself unable to remove his contact lenses. He asked for help. My careful fingers peeled the plastic droplets from the eyeballs of my prone-on-the-spare-bed, fully clothed friend and it remains one of the most intimate experiences I've had with another human being. It changed the channel of our relationship - not into anything romantic, but into another kind of closeness that remains tricky to explain.

The pain of loss I'm feeling now is the price humans pay for the intensity of these connections.

Restless and raging at the sky in the wake of too many recent deaths, I'm yet to be convinced that the worst flatmate or view-aggregating Tokfluencer

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doesn't yearn for the intimacy of a profound friendship, or a loving family, or

true romantic love.

For those who may find themselves insecurely attached and sad about it, some gentle guidance: it's not our social

performances that leave an indelible impression behind us - it's the risk taken to trust someone else when we are in our greatest vulnerability. It's in

these moments we become immortal to each other.

● Van Badham is a Guardian Australia columnist

What a Czechoslovakian doll taught me about happiness – and its dark side

Lea Ypi

When I was a child in communist Albania, happiness was called Aniushka. Aniushka was a large Czechoslovak doll that belonged to my neighbours. They were party members who had been allowed to travel to Prague at one point, and brought Aniushka back to decorate their bedroom. She was not on sale in any Albanian shop.

She had thick, black hair done up in a chignon, and wore an imperial-looking, orange satin dress adorned with lace. Her lips were bright red, and she had deep blue eyes, and long, dark eyelashes that gave her a dreamy expression. She sat majestically on the bed with the sides of her dress unfolded over the mattress, giving the plain, communist furniture a solemn, Habsburg air. I would stare for hours, longing to touch her. Sometimes, I sat on a chair by the bedroom doorstep – which was as close to her as I was allowed to get – and we talked about whether she might like, one day, to become a toy rather than an ornament.

After the fall of communism, many people started upgrading their houses, and buying new, western-style beds and cupboards. Aniushka's time was up, too, and my neighbours asked if I might like to have the doll. "You loved it so much when you were little," they said. But I no longer wanted it. Perhaps I was too old for toys. Perhaps it was difficult to imagine imperial Aniushka placed anywhere other than on top of my neighbours' austere communist bed. But perhaps also because there is something



▲ Illustration by Carmen Casado

unsettling about the memory of strong desires that, with time, fade as if they had never been as strong, or as if they had never been ours.

Did Aniushka truly represent happiness, or is it in the nature of happiness that our idea of it centres on those things that are by nature inaccessible?

The German poet Johann W Goethe thought so. Happiness, he said, is a ball after which we run wherever it rolls, and we push it with our feet when it stops. Ball or doll, I find his view plausible. I am perplexed when the pursuit of happiness is presented as some kind of obvious insight we're all supposed to share. Take a popular saying that became a fixture on people's T-shirts in Albania just after the end of the cold

war, accompanied by a smiley yellow face: "Don't worry, be happy." Why? It's hard to see what would be left of happiness once you remove the worry. Every action involves a mixture of self-doubt, inconsistent effort, temptation by evil, unreliability of satisfaction. If you abstract from all that in the pursuit of happiness, one can barely define what's left as happiness at all.

Things become even more perplexing (and somewhat disturbing) when the pursuit of happiness is elevated from an individual goal to become the foundation of political life. Take the declaration of independence of the United States of America, in which it is presented as a "self-evident truth", an inalienable right with which all *men* have been endowed. A

critic might argue that there is a fundamental problem with exclusion here. The historical accuracy of that judgment is philosophically mirrored in the flaws of a moral theory that promotes "the greatest happiness of the greatest number". That is one of the most famous sentences of Jeremy Bentham, the founding father of utilitarianism, and one of the greatest influences on liberal economic thought. What about the smallest number, one might ask? What about those who don't know what their happiness is? Can one measure happiness? Can one person's happiness really be pursued without causing misery to another? What if it were in the nature of happiness to encapsulate the satisfaction of desires that are always comparative and relational,

and incidentally destructive?

There is only one view of happiness that I find persuasive – but it is only persuasive because it is not about happiness at all. The Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant argued that happiness can never be a guiding principle of action, it is at most something we can hope to enjoy if we fulfil our duties. We do what is right only because it is the right thing to do, not in the expectation of rewards. Happiness may (or may not) come as a result of virtuous behaviour, but one should not make it a condition for knowing how to act.

Some find this view unbearably sad, unbearably Protestant, or unbearably both. Doesn't it drain the joy out of life, they ask, to turn our relationship to others into a list of moral obligations that relegates feelings and satisfaction to second place?

But I've always found the view both liberating and empowering. You focus on the world as a whole, and you engage with others, aware of your finitude, cognisant of the arbitrariness of inclinations and of the contingency of desires. It encourages one to accept worrying and appreciate striving, and to seek the meaning of life beyond individual pleasure. I also don't think it's sad at all. And anyway, what could be more terrifying than "Don't worry, be happy", the command to pursue something that is by definition out of reach?

Lea Ypi is a professor in political theory in the government department at the London School of Economics

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 250 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at observer.letters@observer.co.uk

More than 300,000 Syrian civilians died. Any attempt to rehabilitate Assad is utterly shameful

Simon Tisdall

The grotesque rehabilitation of Bashar al-Assad's regime – Syria's criminal president has been cordially invited to this week's Arab League summit in Saudi Arabia – makes sense to cynical Arab governments. They hope to reduce Damascus's dependence on Iran, encourage refugees to return, halt state-sponsored drug rackets and cash in on reconstruction.

But from a human perspective, their decision is utterly shameful. More

than 300,000 civilians have died since Assad turned his guns on Syria's 2011 Arab spring pro-democracy uprising. About 14 million people, half Syria's population, have fled their homes. Most who remain are short of food. Then came February's earthquakes.

The conflict is far from over. Hundreds more civilians have been killed and injured in Syrian government and Russian air strikes, cluster bomb and rocket attacks on displacement camps in north-western Idlib, in Dar'a and Hama, and in northern Aleppo, according to the UN Human Rights Council's latest report. "These and other attacks may amount to war crimes," it

said. "Arbitrary arrests and torture, enforced disappearances and deaths in detention continue," the UN warned. "Returnees saw their homes looted or property confiscated... It's abundantly clear Syria is still not a safe place to return to." Islamist militia were also guilty of egregious abuses, it said.

War crimes and crimes against humanity, including use of chemical weapons, are well-documented in Syria. Yet there is no prospect of Assad facing justice. Fellow tyrant Vladimir Putin was swiftly indicted by the International criminal court over Ukraine. So why not the butcher of Damas-

cus? It's an inexplicable omission. Instead, Assad is to be feted, forgiven and rewarded by authoritarian Gulf plutocrats who seemingly care more about oil prices, palaces and Premier League soccer clubs than the lives, wellbeing and human rights of fellow Arabs.

It's not only the neighbours. In Syria, there's plenty of shame to share. The US and allies bottled a direct intervention in 2013 that could have stopped the slaughter. That let in Iran and the Russians, and ensured Assad's survival. Western sanctions aimed at toppling the regime hurt civilians instead.

Looking for an upside, analysts suggest Assad's return to the Arab fold,

coupled with the Chinese-brokered rapprochement between his ally, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, may spawn a homegrown Middle East security order. Widening detente could potentially pacify Yemen, stabilise Lebanon and relieve Jordan's and Turkey's refugee burden.

This proposition should be handled with care. Latest developments accelerate the sidelining of America in a region it once dominated, and leave western policy in tatters. Israel's own, unedifying attempts at "normalisation" – by building alliances with Gulf autocracies to counter Iran and

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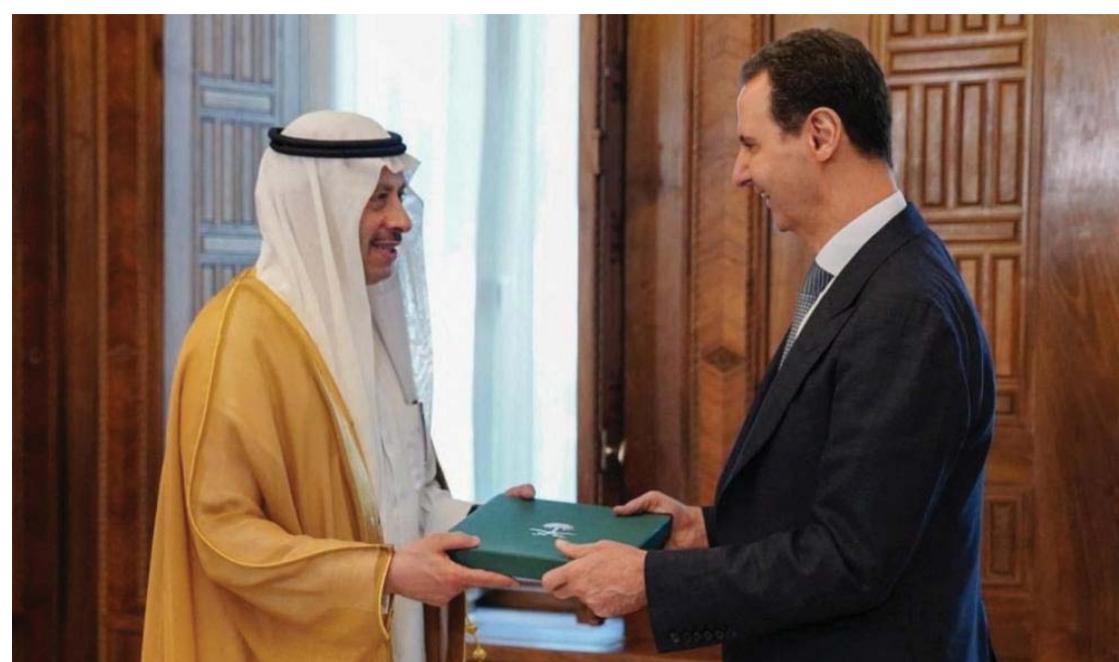
confederates such as Hezbollah - are imperilled if not confounded. China's leverage will grow. Beijing's amoral outlook resonates in the Gulf.

Is a new era of Arab-Persian amity and unity a plausible prospect or mere wishful thinking? Assad's Syria will remain deeply unstable whatever happens - divided between the partially Turkish-occupied north-west, where jihadists roam free; the Kurdish-governed north-east, viscerally hostile to Damascus; and the mostly regime-controlled centre and south. Its people remain at constant risk.

"Syria today is a multi-ring circus where armed forces from Turkey, the US, Russia and Iran engage in clandestine conflict with no obvious objective," Charles Glass, the veteran American correspondent, reported from Damascus. The Israel Defence Forces may also be added to that list.

The Arab League's unconditional invitation ignores this febrile reality. Antony Blinken, US secretary of state, reiterated the western view, based on a 2015 UN resolution, that a peaceful transition involving free elections and Assad's defenestration was the "only viable solution to ending the conflict". Sounds good - except it's more wishful thinking.

Iran-Saudi detente should be treated sceptically, too. Iran's internationally ostracised, domestically reviled mullahs are out for what they can get. Their disruptive behaviour will not



▲ Cordial relations are growing between Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and Saudi Arabia's King Salman. Photograph: Embassy Of Saudi Arabia In Jordan/Reuters

change. For its part, Riyadh wants to avoid being drawn into a full-on fight with Tehran - if Israel were to attack Iran's nuclear sites. It no longer trusts the US to defend it.

The Saudis also look askance at anti-hijab and economic protests that have rocked Iran for months. Lacking democratic legitimacy themselves, they fear insurrection. Iran-Saudi detente is designed to bolster the rulers. It will do nothing in either country to advance justice and equality for the ruled. In any case, the idea that entrenched

historical and religious rivalries can be successfully suppressed for long seems highly fanciful.

It's striking nonetheless that these developments are taking place independently of, and in opposition to the US, the Saudis' long-time protector, to Europe - and to post-imperial Britain, reduced to has-been hanger-on. This evolution, marking a significant break with the western-led, post-1945 world order, is part of an eastwards power shift.

Alongside the Syria disaster, the western powers' failure to make the Iran nuclear deal stick has further undermined regional credibility. As always, Iraq provides a toxic legacy. And then there's their longest-running failure of all - the unfulfilled promise of Palestinian statehood.

Palestinian civilian suffering has intensified as Israel, unchecked by Arab governments or the west, has lurched to the extreme right. The West Bank has seen more than 100 killings by security forces this year. One outrage

among many: last weekend, an EU-funded Palestinian primary school was torn down; 58 more are threatened with demolition.

Meanwhile, renewed Gaza-related violence is claiming more innocent lives, predominantly Palestinian. Yet many western politicians, media and commentators behave as if this isn't happening. This is what normalisation truly means in the Middle East. The killing of civilians has become routine.

Arab leaders are no better. For them too, self-interest and narcissism blind them to a common humanity. Assad's victims, Iran's women protesters and oppressed Palestinians can expect no help from that quarter, either.

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 250 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at observer.letters@observer.co.uk

This evolution, marking a break with the western-led, post-1945 world order, is part of an eastwards power shift

Too tired to cook. Too easy to open a packet. It's not our fault we eat junk

Rebecca Seal

We live in a toxic food environment, and Big Food has extremely clever marketers and food scientists. That all of us eat a lot of Big Food's produce means those people are very good at their jobs. It doesn't mean we have failed if we eat what the industry makes.

In the UK, about 50% of the average adult's diet, and 65% of a child's, is ultra-processed. As Dr Chris Van Tulleken's latest book, *Ultra-Processed People: Why Do We All Eat Stuff That Isn't Food... and Why Can't We Stop?*, points out, that means much of what we eat includes newly invented substances that humans haven't eaten before and we know very little about how they interact with us, or each other.

Such foods are likely to be made by companies such as Unilever, PepsiCo or Nestlé. The UK food industry spends £1.14bn a year on advertising and, as the ex-Big Food marketer Dan Parker has pointed out, it uses manipulative tactics such as associating foods such as chocolate with positive things like relaxation (KitKats, Maltesers) or emotional openness (Cadbury's "Give A Doubt"), while normalising over-consumption with ads showing one - always small - person eating a family-size bar (think Audrey Hepburn in the Galaxy advert).



▲ Ultra-processed foods hide in plain sight ... they mainly come in a packet and are made with preservatives, stabilisers, colours or flavour enhancers. Photograph: Jamie Grill/Getty/Tetra RF

Criticising ultra-processed foods (UPFs) is not necessarily the same as shaming those who eat them. But we do shame and blame people who eat UPFs, including, often, ourselves, and that should stop. (We also have a nasty habit of demonising foods that are important to specific cultures, such as fried chicken.) Shame is never motivating and what we eat is not a cipher for morality. Although almost all of us eat a lot of UPFs, we tend to think of it as a problem that mainly affects people who live in poverty. It is absolutely not constructive to vilify the diets of people

already living in highly stressful situations. But it's also a mistake to assume this doesn't affect "us", whatever your socioeconomic position might be.

UPFs hide in plain sight. Definitions vary, but they mainly come in a packet and are made with preservatives, stabilisers, emulsifiers, colours or flavour enhancers. They include everyday items such as shop-bought hummus, stuffed pasta, hot sauce, curry paste, ready meals, some jams, most peanut butters, most breads, vegan meat alternatives, almost all cereals, most cured meats, burgers and sausages, soft drinks, sweetened or low-fat yoghurts, many free-from products, dairy replacements, and almost all the ice-creams, desserts, crisps, crackers and biscuits in the supermarket. If your trolley doesn't contain a fair chunk of that list, then there are few possibilities: you have superhuman levels of willpower; you are very wealthy and/or have your own from-scratch cook; you are lying.

Many UPFs are cheap, but those that are not often come branded with a health halo, as with plant-based meat alternatives, cereal bars or protein powders. In reality, consumption

of UPFs of all types is associated with an increased risk of all sorts of health issues, including various cancers and weight gain.

UPFs are very convenient, and are carefully marketed as a way to make our busy-busy lives easier. Those who criticise UPFs are therefore often seen as having a go at people who already feel harried by the way we've arranged society.

But the problem isn't with us. The problem is structural. Arranging society so that people don't feel they have enough time or money to make themselves a meal is a dystopian nightmare. Selling us cheap food that might harm us, but is framed as being helpful or healthy, is a dystopian nightmare. And, as Henry Dimbleby notes in his new book, *Ravenous*, so is urban planning, which means more than three million people cannot access shops that sell fresh produce.

Our hysterical fear of fatness has led us to individualise responsibility for what we eat, while also failing to take account of the highly nuanced relationship between body size and health. Even though 59 types of obesity have been identified, the UK's (noticeably unsuccessful) approach to weight management is still variations on the theme of eat-less-exercise-more, plus the new and wildly hyped semaglutide weight-loss drugs, Ozempic and Wegovy (originally created to treat diabetes), about which outlets from the *Economist* to *New York magazine* have

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gushed (often containing a throwaway line about gastric side effects and the associated risk of pancreatitis and possibly cancer).

These are trying to solve the wrong problem: we should not be living in a food environment in which a sizeable number of people need (or want) to be drugged in order to cope with it.

The popularity of UPFs is symptomatic of something much bigger, and

not just that Big Food is great at marketing and making irresistible, energy-dense foods. It's about the primacy of work, long hours, low pay, hustle culture, structural inequalities, poverty and precarity. For most of us, it's almost impossible to make so-called "good" food choices.

This is particularly the case if you are stressed, exhausted or labouring under any kind of scarcity or insecurity, all of which have been shown in many studies to affect not just our food choic-

es but also how our bodies metabolise food. And who isn't feeling the pressure of living in perma-crisis Britain, to some extent?

Solving the problem isn't about manufacturers changing formulations (although that might help). It's much harder than that. Our problems with food are just symptoms of other social problems, which is why it's ridiculous to pretend any of us, individually, can solve them. If there is a moral question to be answered, it's by those who make

UPFs, not those who eat them.

Every time we make an individual body - ours, or someone else's - the site for a conversation about "good" and "bad" food choices, weight or shape, we look at the problem upside down. We make our food choices into a moral maze instead of saying: it's food that is broken and needs to change. Not us.

• Rebecca Seal is a freelance writer and editor

Arranging society so people don't feel they have enough time or money to make themselves a meal is a dystopian nightmare

When De Niro is having a child at 79, it's time to cut older mothers some slack

Arwa Mahdawi

Meet the (much older) parents

In a world where US birth rates were declining, one man decided to embark on a heroic journey to father as many children as he could. That man is called Robert De Niro and he has just had his seventh child at the grand old age of 79. His new daughter is around half a century younger than his oldest kids.

While he may be on the extreme end of things, it's not just De Niro who is having kids later in life. American parents, in general, are getting older. A 2017 study by Stanford researchers found that the average age of a new dad in the US rose from 27.4 to 30.1 in the years between 1972 and 2015. The percentage of new dads in their 40s doubled during that time, to almost 9%. And the percentage of new fathers aged 50 and above increased from 0.5% to 0.9%. Germany and England are seeing similar trends in advanced paternal age.

Mothers in rich countries are also getting older. In 2022 the median age of women giving birth in the US rose to 30 for the first time. In recent decades birthrates have declined for women in their 20s and increased for women in their late 30s and early 40s. And women with the resources to use surrogates and reproductive technology are having kids even later: Naomi Campbell recently had her first child at the age of 50.

While both men and women may be waiting longer to have kids, women tend to be judged a lot more harshly for it. There is still a ridiculous amount of stigma attached to "older" mothers. A 2021 study out of Canada analyzed the language in policy documents, guidelines and government reports and found older mothers were represented as "risk-producing subjects, as unnatural mothers, and as irresponsible reproductive citizens". If you get pregnant past the age of 35 in the US



▲ Robert De Niro: a dedicated breeder despite his advancing years. Photograph: Benjo Arwas/Contour by Getty Images

then you're basically treated like you're on death's door. Phrases like "geriatric pregnancy" and "advanced maternal age" are bandied around and your pregnancy is automatically considered high-risk.

The same stigma, the same guilt, doesn't attach to older fathers: most men in their late 30s aren't fretting about their biological clocks and wondering whether they ought to freeze their sperm. And yet the risks associated with declining sperm quality are very real: studies show that men over 45 can put their partners at risk for increased pregnancy complications and infants born to older fathers are at greater risk of birth defects.

Having said all that, I should point out that news of De Niro's new baby hasn't exactly been greeted with unanimous high fives and cheering for his virility. The Daily Mail, for example, published two op-eds essentially calling him a creepy old man who wasn't going to live long enough to see his

kid grow up. And the Daily Mail, not exactly a bastion of gender equality, even called out the gendered hypocrisy around when it's acceptable to have a baby. Sexist double standards when it comes to parental age are very real but it seems that when you start having kids over the age of 75 things start to even out.

Linda Yaccarino named CEO of Twitter

Yaccarino is the former chairman of global advertising and partnerships of NBCUniversal and she is very, very good at what she does. If Musk wants to regain trust with marketers and start pulling in ad dollars again, he probably couldn't have picked a better person. However, this does look suspiciously like a "glass cliff" scenario. Women - and ethnic minorities - are often given leadership positions or promotions when the odds of success are very low and the organisation is facing a crisis. Musk appointing a fall woman is very on-brand.

Spain women's race apologises for food processor gift

Ángela Rodríguez Pam, Spain's secretary of state for equality, noted in a tweet that the winner of the seven-kilometer race had received a food processor and other participants were given 0% fat products: "If you win: housewife and if not at least you'll lose weight."

A year after Shireen Abu Akleh was killed, there has still been no justice

Thursday marked one year since the trailblazing Palestinian-American journalist was killed by Israeli forces while reporting on a military invasion of a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank. Since then nobody has been held accountable - although, after initially saying they had nothing to do with it, the Israel Defense Forces have finally said "sorry". The apology may have been prompted by a recent report from the Committee to Protect Journalists which found no accountability

was taken by the Israeli military over its killings of at least 20 journalists, 18 of whom were Palestinian, over the past two decades. The Biden administration, meanwhile, has kept shamefully silent about the killing of an American citizen; Biden didn't even bother mentioning Abu Akleh while talking about the importance of protecting journalists at the recent White House Correspondents Dinner.

Abortion clinics saw significant increase in violence and threats post-Roe

A new report from the National Abortion Federation (NAF) found that arson at abortion clinics was up 100% in 2022 compared to the year prior. The increase in incidents of stalking of abortion providers, patients and staff in the year since Roe v Wade was overturned is up 229%. "Their ultimate goal is to eliminate abortion facilities across the country, by any means necessary," a NAF executive said.

In Philly? Come watch me in conversation with feminist thinker Kristen R Ghodsee

Next week I'm going to be talking to Ghodsee about her new book, Everyday Utopia: a series of thought experiments on how to create a more just and equitable society. Ghodsee is also the author of Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism, which examines the myriad ways in which capitalism is bad for women.

The week in paw-triarchy

Happy birthday to Bobi, a purebred Rafeiro from Portugal, who just celebrated his 31st birthday and is officially the oldest dog in the world. No news yet on whether he's considering fathering any more pups.

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our letters section, please click here.

Trump rages after sexual abuse verdict but legal woes have only just begun

Chris McGreal in New York

If the outcome of Donald Trump's sexual assault trial wasn't a foregone conclusion, his response to a jury find-

ing he attacked the writer E Jean Carroll was all too predictable.

The former president lashed out at the judge as biased and the jurors as "from an anti-Trump area", meaning liberal New York, after they believed Car-

roll's account of the millionaire businessman attacking her in a department store changing room in the mid-1990s. The jury ordered him to pay \$5m in damages for "sexual abuse" and for defaming Carroll by accusing her of "a

made-up SCAM" for political ends.

Trump has taken a similar tack against the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg, after pleading not guilty last month to 34 criminal charges over the payment of hush money to

the porn star Stormy Daniels before the 2016 presidential election. Trump called Bragg, who is Black, an "animal" and a psychopath, and characterised

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the prosecution as purely political.

All of this goes down well in sections of America.

An audience of Republican voters at a CNN town hall with Trump on Wednesday laughed when he described his assault of Carroll as "playing hanky-panky in a dressing room" and called her a "whack job".

But in the coming months it's going to get a lot harder for the former, and possibly future, American president to spin his legal problems as political persecution by Democratic elitists. Investigations against him are mounting, and even more troubled legal waters lie ahead for Trump - and some of his acolytes.

Indictments in conservative Georgia are coming down the line and many of the key witnesses against Trump will be his fellow Republicans, including some who helped him try to rig the 2020 election.

Similarly, investigations by a justice department special counsel into Trump's actions leading up to the 6 January 2021 storming of the Capitol, and the stashing of classified documents at his Florida mansion, are being built on the accounts of aides and political associates who are potential witnesses against him.

Norman Eisen, a former White House special counsel for ethics and government reform, said that as a result Trump's legal troubles have only just begun.

"He's running into a buzzsaw and it's called the rule of law. So he can go on and rant and rave up to a point but the legal authorities are in the process of holding him accountable," he said.

Leading the way is a prosecutor in Atlanta who is stacking up witnesses against the former president, almost all of them Republicans, over his attempt to rig the 2020 presidential election result in Georgia. They include some who tried to help Trump steal the vote but who have been persuaded to give evidence against him to save their own necks.

The Fulton county district attorney, Fani Willis, has spent more than two years investigating the "multi-state, coordinated plan by the Trump campaign to influence the results".

Willis convened a special grand jury that sat for eight months and heard evidence from 75 witnesses before it recommended charges against more than a dozen people. The grand jury forewoman, Emily Kohrs, strongly hinted to the New York Times in February that Trump was on the list.

Asked if the jurors recommended prosecuting the former president, Kohrs said: "You're not going to be shocked. It's not rocket science."

"It is not going to be some giant plot



▲ Donald Trump leaves Trump Tower in midtown Manhattan in April. Will he be a convicted criminal by the time of the election in November 2024? Photograph: Angela Weiss/AFP/Getty Images

twist," she added. "You probably have a fair idea of what may be in there. I'm trying very hard to say that delicately."

Willis had been expected to charge Trump and others this month, but indictments are not now likely before mid-July as prosecutors put together immunity deals to lure the former president's Republican co-conspirators to testify against him and his top aides. Kohrs said prosecutors offered one witness immunity from prosecution in return for cooperation right in front of the grand jury.

Then there are the Republicans who do not have to be coerced to tell the truth in court.

Willis's investigation initially focused on a tape recording of Trump pressuring Georgia's Republican secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, to "find" nearly 12,000 votes to cancel out Biden's win in a state that, at the time, looked as if it might decide the outcome of the entire presidential election.

Trump has called the Georgia official an "enemy of the people" because he wouldn't commit electoral fraud. But a jury might find Raffensperger all the more credible because not only is he a Republican, but he voted for Trump.

The Georgia secretary of state spoke to the special grand jury for several hours, including about a call he recorded from Trump at the beginning of January 2021 pressuring him to manipulate the vote. While he has not commented publicly on his testimony, Raffensperger wrote a book, *Integrity Counts*, in which he details Trump threatening him.

Other witnesses are more reluctant but may be all the more credible for that reason, including Georgia's governor, Brian Kemp, who also came under pressure from Trump and his allies to overturn the election result.

One of those on the phone to Kemp was Mark Meadows, Trump's former chief of staff, who was also summoned to answer the grand jury's questions.

Willis expanded the investigation as more evidence emerged of Trump and

his allies attempting to manipulate the results, including the appointment of a sham slate of 16 electors to replace the state's legitimate members of the electoral college who do the formal business of selecting the president. The fake electors included the chair of the Georgia Republican party, David Shafer, and Republican members of the state legislature who have been warned that they are at risk of prosecution.

Earlier this month it was revealed that at least eight of the fake electors have done a deal to give evidence in return from immunity from prosecution, although Shafer is not included.

Eisen said the immunity deals are a sign that charges are in the offing.

"We know that multiple fake electors have received immunity. That is another indication of trouble for Donald Trump because those deals are extended by prosecutors typically when they are preparing to bring a case, and they believe they have a case to bring," he said.

"So it's a sign of prosecutorial seriousness. And it's a sign that the district attorney can mount an effective case because these immunised fake electors can serve as tour guides for the jury into the plot, which we know ran all the way up to the Oval Office."

Ronald Carlson, a leading Georgia trial lawyer and professor at the University of Georgia's law school, said prosecutors do not offer immunity lightly and any deal signals that witnesses will provide significant testimony against Trump and his team.

"This is very, very much a straw in the wind. Immunity almost always comes with a requirement that the immunised witness provide testimony in a future criminal trial," he said.

"I think the electors will be very descriptive on how they were called together, what they did during their meeting, and then the end result, which was certifying a result for Trump."

Willis's investigation also probed a seven-hour hearing at the Georgia state senate a month after the election orchestrated by Rudolph Giuliani, the

former New York mayor and Trump's personal lawyer and adviser.

In what Georgia Public Broadcasting called "a series of fantastical claims and statements from various and sundry people touted as experts", Giuliani led the way in falsely claiming that the state's voting machines were rigged, thousands of votes were illegally cast, and suitcases of fake ballots were used to tilt the count in favour of Biden.

Giuliani also urged the Georgia legislature to create the slate of fake electors, providing a direct link between what prosecutors are expected to portray as a criminal attempt to steal the election and Trump. At the same time, Giuliani led a blitz of legal challenges to the election result in courts across the country, all of which failed.

Kohrs said that when Giuliani appeared before the grand jury he invoked attorney-client privilege to avoid answering many questions.

Another Trump lawyer, John Eastman, was called as a witness to a plan to pressure the then vice-president, Mike Pence, to block the declaration of Biden's win by Congress. The grand jury also called Sidney Powell, a Trump lawyer and conspiracy theorist who pushed false allegations that voting machines were rigged for which Fox News paid nearly \$800m to settle a defamation suit.

Several witnesses tried to avoid testifying. Senator Lindsey Graham went all the way to the US supreme court in a failed attempt to avoid appearing. Trump's former national security adviser, Michael Flynn, who attended meetings about invoking martial law and seizing voting machines, had to be ordered by a Florida judge to answer the grand jury's questions.

Carlson said that a parade of Republican witnesses, reluctant or willing, could prove very damaging to Trump.

"As a prosecutor, if you can call witnesses who were close to the crown, so to speak, that impresses the jury," he said.

"What happens very, very frequently, especially in a mob case, is they'll give immunity to one of the lower-echelon people to testify against the big boss. He doesn't want to do it, but he's got immunity and if he continues to resist, he can be held in contempt of court. Whether they want to do it willingly, or whether they are forced to do it under a grant of immunity, Willis is building a case that has a host of witnesses."

Eisen said the Georgia case is likely to be all the stronger for being largely built around the evidence of other Republicans.

"The fact that his overtures were rejected by staunch Republican officials, Brad Raffensperger, the secretary of state, Brian Kemp, the governor, makes



▲ Jean Carroll leaves court after hearing Trump was liable for \$5m in damages for sexual abuse. Photograph: Andrew Kelly/Reuters

a difference. Just the sheer weight of the evidence of election interference in Georgia is material. The Georgia case is a very powerful one, the most powerful we've seen to date," he said.

Meanwhile, the special counsel appointed by the US justice department, Jack Smith, is conducting two criminal investigations involving Trump that again draw in Republicans whose testimony could be condemn the former president.

The New York Times reported earlier this month that investigators probing Trump's mishandling of classified documents have won the cooperation of someone who worked for him at his Mar-a-Lago mansion in Florida.

Like Willis, the justice department is using subpoenas to force grand jury testimony from those who witnessed Trump's actions including whether he had classified documents moved in order to hide them once it became known they were illegally stored in Florida.

Again, Trump's team has dismissed the investigation as a "politically motivated witch-hunt" aimed at keeping him from returning to the White House. But the former president didn't help himself at the CNN town hall when he undercut his own lawyers by claiming that he had "every right" to take the documents from the White House.

"I didn't make a secret of it," he said.

So will Trump be a convicted criminal by the time of the presidential election in November 2024?

"That is entirely possible," said Eisen. "It's also possible that with court delays and appeals, he may not face incarceration until after the next election. But what matters is that the charges are being brought. And that cues the issue up for the jury of the American people in the primaries and then in the general election."

He's running into a buzzsaw and it's called the rule of law

Norm Eisen

'I miss the sex': Why are the sexual needs of the bereaved still a taboo?

Kat Lister

Pauline and I first met at a book event last year; a small gathering in a London arts club that marked the paperback release of the memoir

I'd written, chronicling my young widowhood in my 30s. Pauline sat inconspicuously at the back of the darkened room and, when the Q&A was over, she quietly introduced herself, quickly drawing attention to the section she'd most connected with, the chapters where I explored self-pleasure

and sex in the early months of my grief.

Younger people like me "got it more", she told me, referring to her thirst for physical intimacy as a newly widowed 72-year-old. More often than not, people didn't get it: "They don't imagine that you've had a sex life." But why, she asked? And what did that sig-

nify for others her age? A few days later, she sent me a Spotify link to an early 90s Bruce Springsteen song - *Human Touch* - describing how his melodious yearnings for "somethin' to hold on to" summed up her recent frustrations as a more mature widow, a year after her husband's death. The

electrical wires were humming again, but she was increasingly feeling as if she had been put on mute by everyone around her.

"In the first few weeks, people recognised that I was bereaved, they

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came at me with all sorts of platitudes," Pauline tells me, months after our first meeting, over the clatter and din in a central London café. "But I soon realised nobody recognised that what I was missing was the physicality of Peter as well as the psychic and emotional sharing that we had. The feeling of him, and his solid body, was what I craved." We're meeting again, in a noisy coffee shop, because Pauline feels like her sexuality, in her early 70s, is being silenced in ways she's unhappy with. And if Pauline is feeling this way, then perhaps others are, too.

When Peter, her husband of 31 years, died of leiomyosarcoma - a rare type of soft tissue sarcoma - after a short illness in 2021, Pauline was left grieving for many intimate things. A dog-eared Sunday supplement left out for her on the kitchen table was one. But the physicality they shared was undeniably another - and not something she felt encouraged to share. "We enjoyed an active and happy sex life throughout our marriage, which was only cut short in the weeks prior to his decline," she recalls. And yet when he died: "I couldn't say, 'Oh God, I wish I was in bed with him, entwined together, with his arms around me, kissing, and doing the things we used to do.'"

One friend recommended she take up gardening more frequently, wholly unaware that what Pauline was most in need of wasn't a pair of secateurs. "Some of them seemed quite shocked when I said I wanted to buy a vibrator," Pauline smiles as she talks. Masturbation soon began bookmarking Pauline's days, morning and night; a welcome respite that briefly lassoed her out of her grief. "I looked forward to it. I found I could be quite noisy and I'd never been noisy before. I would liken it to that feeling of being transported somewhere." She was owning her desires in a way she had never experienced before.

"There's still something 'funny' about people having sex in older age, it's like a joke," neuropsychologist Alice Radosh says, on a Zoom call from her home in New York, as we discuss these intersecting lines in widowhood, and the ways in which they can convince older women like Pauline that their desires should be suppressed. "You're up against a real brick wall in terms of making people feel comfortable," she says, delving deeper into the taboo, "because we're not often given the message that we are able to talk about this, not only following the death of a partner, but just generally, as women and men age."

Radosh speaks from experience. When her husband of 40 years died



▲ 'We don't stop being a sexual being when we lose someone.' Photograph: Kellie French/The Observer

of multiple myeloma in 2013, she was perfectly capable of handling the bills and repairs, but what she really struggled with was the loss of sexual intimacy after decades of physicality with her longterm partner. To add insult to injury, the literature she sought for guidance totally missed the mark. One study suggested she get a dog. Another, to hug her grandchild. But the one that pushed her over the line was the sage advice that she should visit her hairdresser. "Anyone who thinks Bart was anything like my hairdresser really doesn't know what he was like in bed," she laughs.

In this void of research, Radosh did what any researcher in her predicament would: she decided to co-author her own study in 2016. Surveying more than 100 older women (55 years and above), her findings showed that she

wasn't alone in what she called her "sexual bereavement". Not only did the majority say they'd definitely miss sex if their partner died, an equal number revealed they'd want to talk about it when the time came. And yet, in spite of this, 57% of participants admitted it would not occur to them to initiate a discussion with a widowed friend. "Before I did my survey, I spoke to friends and a number of them said, 'Well that doesn't matter any more.' The feeling was that that's in the past." What Radosh's survey proved beyond all possible doubt was that this was a myth and a damaging one at that: sex wasn't a past tense activity - and it did matter.

"We had such a spicy and satisfying relationship that I thought, why is this a secret?" Joan Price, an author and advocate for ageless sexuality, says of her and her late husband's marriage, on

a Zoom call from California, echoing Radosh's findings. "I never heard that people at our age could be so much in love and have so much exhilarating sex. Why was this under the covers?"

Determined to shake up this ageist narrative, Price started writing about senior sex at the age of 61. Head to her Twitter and she'll introduce herself to you with an equally spicy. "Glad to meet you. I'm Joan Price, and I talk out loud about senior sex."

She's been doing it for more than 18 years now: writing books (*The Ultimate Guide to Sex After 50* and *Naked at Our Age* are just two), reviewing sex toys and giving webinars with the help of gynaecological props, such as the 3D clitoris she's holding in front of her webcam right now. She uses this silicone aid to help her illustrate the vast intricacies of the female anatomy to se-

niors who come to her seeking advice. If knowledge is power, then there are many women out there who remain disenfranchised through a lack of basic anatomical understanding of how their own bodies work. Price is on a mission to change that.

When her husband died in 2008, Price was faced with yet another taboo that no one was talking about: sex after grief. "Men and women are being told they're 'doing grief wrong' if they try to come back to partnered sex too soon," she says. "We don't stop being a sexual being when we lose someone. It may take a break. The break may be days, years or decades - but we can always come back to it when we're ready. And dammit, people need to stop telling us we shouldn't."

Price's tireless advocacy doesn't come without its trolls and dismissals. "When I was starting out, I got a lot of what I call 'the ick factor,'" she says. Which goes something along the lines of: "Ewww! Seniors having sex? Disgusting!" It's raw and unpleasant - and she still gets this kind of feedback. Just recently, for instance, a journalist told her that despite respecting her work, he couldn't imagine his own mother having sex at her age. To which she replied, "At what age do you plan to retire your genitals?"

Why do we still treat seniors as if they're some kind of alien species, asks Price: "We're expected to be under a rock about our sexuality. We're expected to keep it quiet if we're feeling it. I say no. No, we don't have to be done with it." Like both Radosh and Price across the pond, Pauline isn't done with it either. She's having sex again. Not only that, it's the best she's ever had. Granted, it hasn't always been "plain sailing" (her varicose veins, for instance, were initially "an area of embarrassment to be negotiated"), but she talks openly with her new partner and, as a result, the experience has turned out to be a life-affirming one.

The clock is ticking, she says - and she wants to live in the moment. "I never thought anyone would look at me without my clothes on again," Pauline says - but she was wrong. "I'm on the crest of a wave and it's no holds barred. I've always been very inhibited, but now I feel I can do anything I want..." she looks up at me with a smile. "I can even walk around naked if I want."

Some of them seemed quite shocked when I said I wanted to buy a vibrator

The face of cruel Britannia: who is the real Suella Braverman?

Andrew Anthony

The Tory party conference in Birmingham last October was a bizarre affair by any reckoning. Liz Truss's leadership had already been self-torpedoed, her chan-

cellor, Kwasi Kwarteng, was just about to be thrown overboard, and there was a palpable need for someone to rally the troops.

The home secretary, Suella Braverman, was a month into the job and hardly a household name. A diminutive figure with a bloodless style of delivery, she wasn't an obvious candidate to

raise spirits. Addressing the conference in a true blue dress against a royal blue backdrop, she didn't exactly stand out, and her speech was a predictable mixture of foreign criminals and system-gaming lawyers that brought dutiful applause from the hall, rather than outright acclaim.

But like Martin Luther King, she

had a dream, although it was later at a discussion organised by the Daily Telegraph that she chose to share it.

"I would love to be having a front page of the Telegraph with a plane taking off to Rwanda," she announced to the small gathering. "That's my dream, it's an obsession."

That was the speech that made

the headlines, and she hasn't stopped making them since. Last month was a typically busy one. It started with her vow to stamp out grooming gangs, which she described as "almost all British Pakistani", and ended with her linking small boat migrants to drug deal-

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ing and prostitution. In between she renewed her attacks on Just Stop Oil, introduced new legislation against protest tactics, and oversaw the passage of the national security bill. Among all this activity she also found time to admonish Essex police for seizing golly dolls from a pub.

Essex police later claimed that the home secretary had made no such complaint, but the story was out there, and Braverman had let it be known that she was furious with the police for confiscating dolls, although she would later have nothing to say about police holding peaceful protesters in custody for 16 hours during the coronation.

Gollygate was another tactical skirmish in the ongoing culture war in which Braverman has become the Tory party's frontline commander. As home secretary, she has turned herself into the darling of the Tory membership and liberal Britain's chief bête noir. And she's done it with such attention-stealing conviction that it's almost as if her predecessor, Priti Patel, never existed.

The Irish journalist Clar Ni Chonghaile has suggested that Braverman "embodies a strange brand of cruel", and sometimes it has seemed as if her main motivation has been to get up the noses of what she calls "the *Guardian*-reading, tofu-eating wokerati" - ie anyone to the left of the Tory party.

But there are also Conservatives who think that she's gone too far. Last December, Nimco Ali, the social activist and godmother to Boris and Carrie Johnson's son, quit her post as a Home Office adviser, saying that Braverman was "normalising" the politics of Nigel Farage. Ali felt that Braverman showed a lack of humanity by locking "people up in places with no beds, in order to look tough on immigration".

The former co-chair of the Conservative party, Baroness Warsi, has said that her "use of racist rhetoric" shows that she is "not fit to hold high office". And another former Tory minister has simply called Braverman a "real racist bigot".

On top of those voices, last week during a heated debate in the House of Lords on the illegal migration bill, the Archbishop of Canterbury called the proposed legislation "morally unacceptable".

These are not trivial accusations; yet if, as seems likely, the Conservatives lose the next general election, she could well become the new party leader. One former Tory minister, who speaks of her "gormlessness" and "fanaticism", thinks such a development would be "completely catastrophic" but nonetheless highly plausible. For more than any other politician, Braverman is a polarising totem of our times.

Sir John Hayes, the Conservative MP to whom Braverman sent the email containing confidential cabinet information that prompted her resignation from Truss's beleaguered government, says she is "the intelligent voice of the unheard".

Like many who know her, he rejects the idea that she is cruel, and instead extols her decency. "She is deeply kind, very bright and remarkably brave," he says.

The question is: how and why did this low-key, quietly spoken planning law barrister come to be the most divisive figure in British politics?

Braverman is from a strong Conservative background, although not

the sort rooted in the shires. Her parents were members of the Indian diaspora that was a legacy of the British empire Braverman stoutly defends. Her mother, Uma, came from Mauritius and her father, Christie Fernandes, from Kenya (or "Keenya", as Braverman pronounces it). They arrived in the UK in the 1960s, during a period of strong anti-immigrant sentiment, "with absolutely nothing," as Braverman has said, "and it was Britain that gave them hope, security, and opportunity."

Determined to adopt British culture, the Fernandeses named their daughter after a character in the most popular show on TV in 1980, Sue Ellen from *Dallas*. To saddle your only child with the moniker of a neurotic, gun-wielding alcoholic may seem an odd choice for such an upstanding couple, but in the event Braverman's schoolteachers began using "Suella" and it stuck.

She grew up in Wembley. Uma, who twice stood unsuccessfully to be an MP, worked as a nurse for the NHS and as a Conservative councillor. The family, say friends, was and remains a tight one, and although they were not wealthy, Braverman was sent to the fee-paying Heathfield school in Pinner on a partial scholarship.

A friend of Braverman's from her teens is Alan Mendoza, executive director of the foreign policy thinktank the Henry Jackson Society. Back in 1995,

university Conservative Association. While she was president, the student newspaper *Varsity* did what Mendoza calls a "hit job", running a front-page story accusing Braverman of political corruption. How she faced down her accusers, says Mendoza, demonstrated a resilience that has served her well in high-level politics.

"People underestimate her at their peril," he says.

After Cambridge, where she became friends with Robert Jenrick, now minister for immigration, she took advantage of the Erasmus programme (discontinued after Brexit) to gain a master's degree in European and French law at the Pantheon-Sorbonne University in Paris. During a stint in America, she also qualified to practise law in the state of New York.

The headteacher and education reformer Katharine Birbalsingh recalls meeting Braverman on a tube shortly after the 2010 Conservative party conference. They got talking and Birbalsingh invited her to take part in the free school she was planning to set up in Wembley Park.

"She joined the board and she was really committed. She would visit sites with me, go to primary schools and deliver leaflets. None of this was paid. She was just a lawyer at the time, so she wasn't doing it to be recognised."

When she became an MP for Farnham in Hampshire in 2015, Bra-



▲ Suella Braverman gives a thumbs up after her speech to the Conservative party conference in Birmingham, 4 October 2022. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

when many teenagers were fans of either Blur or Oasis, the pair of aspiring young Conservatives followed a very different kind of cultural figurehead, the then 70-year-old former headmaster turned populist rightwing MP for Brent North, Sir Rhodes Boyson.

"We were both a little abnormal in being involved in party politics," admits Mendoza, who says that he and Braverman not only leafleted for Boyson but also read his books.

With his trademark mutton-chop sideburns, Boyson enjoyed a prominent media profile in the 1980s and 1990s, and was seldom shy of expressing his opinions - anti-immigration, anti-comprehensive schools, pro-corporal punishment. He was also pro-Clause 28, and believed that Aids was "part of the fruits of the permissive society".

It was his readiness to hold forth on such topics that led him later to appear on *Brass Eye*, discussing with Chris Morris whether Batman was a vigilante role model, and on *Da Ali G Show* lauding the benefits of "getting caned" in school. To Mendoza and Braverman, however, he was not an object of satire but a political hero.

"I certainly think that both she and I would have been called Boysonites at the time," says Mendoza, "and I don't think she's departed much from that."

Braverman gained a place at Queens' College, Cambridge to study law, and became president of the

verman stepped back from what had become the Michaela school, but Birbalsingh was impressed by her determination and conscientiousness.

"She's a really nice person," she says. "She says things now that I don't agree with, but in terms of character, she's very friendly and warm and helpful."

Charles Falconer, who shadowed Braverman for more than a year when she was attorney general, echoes the latter point.

"She was always nice," he says.

It was one of two traits that stood out for him. The other, he says, is that "she absolutely hated face-to-face conflict".

However, that reluctance to discuss differences of opinion has in no way inhibited her from voicing her own. Her early days in parliament were dominated by the approaching referendum on the European Union. Peter Bone, an active Eurosceptic on the Tory right, remembers courting her support in the Commons' tea room and being surprised by how forcefully she offered it. Unlike many new MPs at the time, she made "a very strong argument", he says, which, given her dependence on David Cameron's patronage, appeared to run counter to her career interests.

In fact, once she became deputy chair of the influential European Research Group in 2016 and then chair the following year, her anti-EU stance almost certainly turbo-charged her

ascent. Since Brexit the ERG has exerted hefty leverage on the Tory leadership, pushing for the hardest of Brexit and jumping on any conciliatory moves.

Braverman's first role in government, under Theresa May, was parliamentary under-secretary of state for exiting the European Union. After less than a year she quit that post in protest at May's draft Brexit deal, further enamouring herself to the emboldened Eurosceptic right.

It was in the same year, 2018, that she married Rael Braverman, a manager at Mercedes-Benz. He is Jewish, while Braverman is a member of the Triratna Buddhist order, a sect whose founder has been accused of being a serial sexual predator. She attends the London Buddhist Centre once or twice a month. The couple have two young children.

It was Johnson who appointed her attorney general, the chief legal adviser to the government, a job that involves attending cabinet. That Braverman went from novice backbench MP to such a critical position in so short a period of time is as much a reflection of the turbulent political times as her own talent and ambition.

Brexit had shifted the parliamentary landscape, accounting first for Cameron and then May, before Johnson gained control - if that's the right word for the chaos that ensued. Alarm bells instantly went off for one former Tory minister.

"I had my doubts that she had the aptitude for the job," he says.

For her shadow, Lord Falconer, it was her indifference to the law that was most striking. He admonished her after she tweeted in support of Dominic Cummings, who was being investigated by the police for breaching Covid restrictions.

"I said: 'You can't do that, you're the attorney general,'" Falconer recalls. "You've got to remain a bit aloof when there's a criminal justice issue.' She sounded upset when I said that. She was polite but didn't want to engage on the issue."

In many respects, says Falconer, Braverman was well qualified for the job. She had more experience of public law than most attorneys general of recent times.

"She is a clever lawyer," he says. "Whatever people say to you, she is not at all stupid."

Yet, he says, she would routinely put politics before the law, and on matters like protecting the independence of the CPS or what Falconer calls "the constant law-breaking of Boris Johnson" she "just didn't want to know".

"She showed a total lack of interest in the law," he concludes. "She was a terrible attorney general."

For many observers, a worrying new precedent was established when she advised Johnson that it would be legitimate to contravene international law by breaking the agreement he made with the EU about Northern Ireland and the internal market.

"Her position as attorney general on the internal markets bill was utterly untenable," says one dismayed ex-senior minister. "Ninety-nine per cent of lawyers knew it was untenable. She appeared to have no understanding of other people's points of view whatsoever."

Alternatively, perhaps she understood perfectly well the seriousness of advising the prime minister to break a legal contract, yet didn't think that the opposing viewpoint mattered. After

all, the party was changing, moving rightwards, becoming more populist, and respect for the rules was not a characteristic that was conspicuously valued in Johnson's government.

There was in any case a kind of purge under way of what might be termed elitist or metropolitan thinking. As one of Braverman's supporters puts it:

"We managed to cleanse ourselves at the last election of unreconstructed remainers like Dominic Grieve and Anna Soubry and other curious people," he says. "But it's like an infestation: you don't necessarily get all the pests out in one go."

He speaks of the party absorbing a lot of "the white working-class vote that was always rightwing but tribally Labour". And it is with this constituency - often seen as anti-immigration - that Braverman, he says, has forged an important connection.

One of the successes of the modern Tory party is its racial diversity. Not only is it the first party to boast a female prime minister (three) and first minority ethnic prime minister (two, if you count Disraeli), it's also the first to have a minority ethnic chancellor of the exchequer (four in three years), the first to have a minority ethnic foreign secretary, and the first to have a minority ethnic home secretary (three in four years).



▲ Protesters in Westminster on 9 November 2022. Photograph: Stephen Chung/

But it's a diversity that tends to focus on patriotism and sidesteps the challenges that many members of minority ethnic communities face. As the columnist and author Sathnam Sanghera phrased it: "You can make it to the top in Britain as a person of colour, as long as you agree to argue that racism is not a problem, and as long as you're willing to propound actual racism in your politics."

Braverman's supporters reject this analysis, arguing that she is merely presenting Conservative positions and her skin colour has nothing to do with it. Indeed, they say, to deny her the right to voice her politics as a result of her race is itself a pernicious form of racism. Yet the way that one of her camp expresses this sentiment is in itself revealing.

"There is an invisibility about her race," he says. "She's as English as I am."

Never has Braverman appeared quite so English as in her role as home secretary. She was appointed to the job by Truss, after Braverman had showed her ambition by standing in the leadership contest.

"What previous attorney general has ever gone for the leadership of the country in the way that she did?" asks Falconer. "She's got enormous political courage."

Home secretary was the consolation prize for supporting Truss in the leadership run-off. She has since spent much of her time and energy on the issues of asylum seekers and illegal migrants. Although she inherited the small boats problem and the Rwandan resettlement policy from her predecessor, Patel, Braverman has heartily

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embraced the issue, placing it at the very top of her strategic to-do list.

"Whether it's personal ambition," says Falconer, "or a profound belief that she has the pulse of the nation, she's doing it in the context of a very clear and determined desire to be the leader of the Conservative party, and the prime minister."

Last October, a day after a migrant detention centre was petrol-bombed in Dover, Braverman spoke of "stopping the invasion on our southern coast". It's this kind of provocation that led Baroness Warsi to say that "Braverman's own ethnic origin has shielded her from criticism for too long".

In truth, she's received plenty of criticism, but perhaps it's more accurate to say that her ethnic origin has helped her circumvent the issue of racism, and thus served to legitimise an anti-migrant discourse.

One friend thinks that the flak she has received as a rightwinger, in particular about betraying her migrant roots, may have served to push her still further towards an embattled mentality.

"She didn't strike me as someone who was going to take on a whole bunch of haters," says Birbalsingh. "I imagine that that has happened to her because she's being attacked so much."

When he replaced Truss as leader, Rishi Sunak immediately reappointed Braverman as home secretary, a week after she had been forced to resign for

leaking cabinet discussions on immigration to Hayes. If the transgression was worthy of expulsion one week, it's hard to see why it wasn't a barrier to re-employment the following one. But politics had grown so feverishly weird by the time Sunak entered No 10 that any eventuality seemed possible.

"I'd have preferred not to see her reappointed," says one well-placed Sunak sympathiser, "but I am mindful of the fact that the prime minister has an enormous problem, as he has about 60 MPs who probably shouldn't be in the Conservative party."

For their part, Braverman's supporters are quick to point out that the policy on migrants is endorsed by Sunak, and they certainly won't let him forget that he has tied his fortunes to hers.

If Braverman is callously targeting migrants, the concern about the small boat Channel crossings is not entirely concocted, for, according to Bone, it's the complaint that comes up most often with his constituents.

"If the government doesn't fix it," he says, "I think we have very little chance in the next election."

More than 45,000 people made the Channel crossing last year, which is a substantial number. But it's also within the context of net migration to the UK last year of more than 500,000 (with an estimate of a record 700,000 for this year).

"The system is broken," said Braverman six months ago, after almost 13

years of her party being in power.

One of the tensions that deepened between Braverman and Truss is that in her push for growth, Truss needed high levels of immigration to compensate for lost labour following Brexit. The Tory right was split between Truss's economic libertarians, who wanted the market to decide on migrant numbers, and Braverman's supporters, who demand strict controls.

Braverman still wants to see numbers coming down to the tens of thousands, but as that is not going to happen anytime soon, it leaves her with the emotive issue of refugees – or illegal migrants, as she prefers to call them. In reality, it's easier to demonise the occupants of the small boats than it is to prevent them from coming. The threat of a fraction being sent to Rwanda won't discourage those desperate enough to take to the sea.

As David Normington, a former chief civil servant to the Home Office, noted last month: "Even if they know about the Rwanda policy in general terms, today's asylum seekers are not going to be deterred by the theoretical threat – or, if it comes to pass, the practice – of deporting a few hundred people a year to Africa."

"What you need to do is get asylum seekers processed in a reasonable time," says the former Labour home secretary Alan Johnson, for whom Normington worked. "By the time we left office, 80% of them were being processed within six months."

The backlog on asylum cases is currently 160,000 and growing, with the system getting slower and less efficient. Of course, dealing with all that and persuading the French to halt people traffickers, much less addressing the international instability that causes refugees and migration, requires a combination of quiet determination and effective diplomacy, neither of which have been in abundant supply in government in recent years.

The paradox is that Sunak, who presents himself as the understated technocrat, is reliant on a crude, headline-grabbing policy to maintain his credibility. For Braverman it's more like a win-win situation. If her Rwandan dream comes true, and if the small boats are somehow thwarted, then she can claim the plaudits. But if the whole thing never gets off the runway, the lawyer can blame the law and Sunak's unwillingness to confront, or remove the UK from, the European court of human rights.

"A big problem the party has," says a former senior minister, "is that its membership is now at very significant variance in their attitudes to the people who vote for it. If they selected Suella as the leader of the party, the rupture would be very considerable."

Yet Braverman's team, one told me, calculate that Tory voters are now to the right of the membership, and it's the MPs who are out of touch. The Tories could be poised to enact the kind of grassroots revolt that brought

Jeremy Corbyn to power in the Labour party, though not, they may care to recall, in the country.

That Braverman takes pride in saying things that a more temperate or empathetic politician would never think to express is beyond denial. But it would be wrong to assume that it's a cynical career manoeuvre, or that she has adopted racist rhetoric so as to make her own racial identity acceptable to the Tory right.

As confounding as it may be to liberal ears, those who know her all agree that she genuinely believes what she says. Her mentor, Boyson, once wrote a book calling for the end of all immigration except refugees. That, more or less, has always been this daughter of immigrants' position. The only difference is that, Ukrainians and Hong Kong citizens aside, she no longer sees refugees as an exception.

One former minister thinks her becoming leader would be 'completely catastrophic' but nonetheless highly plausible

'I'm pleased as pie!': Jason Sudeikis on Ted Lasso – and lessons in kindness

Tim Lewis

Jason Sudeikis felt, weirdly, not that weird when he stepped into the Oval Office of the White House, back in March. Before he was the creator and star of Apple TV+'s feelgood global sensation Ted Lasso, he spent almost a decade writing and performing sketch comedy on the US show Saturday Night Live. One of his beats was impersonating politicians, and Sudeikis made recurring appearances as George W Bush and Joe Biden, when he was vice-president to Barack Obama, in a mocked-up version of the same room. So while his Ted Lasso colleagues were losing their minds – Brett Goldstein, the British actor who plays hard-nut ex-footballer Roy Kent, later admitted he was freaking out about what to do with his hands and spent the whole time trying not to swear – Sudeikis remained calm, somewhat.

"I'd been in a fake Oval Office a number of times," says Sudeikis today, a few weeks on, "and so there's a little bit of me that's nonplussed by it and just holding my shit together. And I'd met the president when he was vice president and he's a very warm guy. It's like meeting your good friend's father or your young friend's grandfather. He just makes you feel at home and that home just happened to be the White House for that afternoon."

Still, if Sudeikis had any doubts over how deeply and widely Ted Lasso has resonated, they were definitively answered that day. When the show first



▲ 'It's nuts, man': Jason Sudeikis. Photograph: Julian Broad/Contour RA

aired, in the Covid summer of 2020, it seemed to be a fairly traditional, knock-about sports comedy about a clueless American coach who is head-hunted to take charge of a fictional English Premier League football team, AFC Richmond. But now, three seasons in, Ted Lasso is an altogether more ambitious and outspoken proposition: one recent episode flipped between a slapstick gag where the players did a training drill with long lines of red string tied around their bits and an impassioned critique of the British government's "stop the boats" campaign.

Meanwhile, in a move no one predicted, Coach Lasso has become a guru for our age: a case study of kindness

and decency triumphing in a cynical modern world. Sudeikis and the rest of the cast had been invited to the White House to discuss mental-health strategies. Someone – presumably not President Biden himself, but you never know – had taped up a blue and yellow sign reading "BELIEVE", the motto of AFC Richmond, above the door to the Oval Office.

"It's nuts, man," says Sudeikis, shaking his head. "I haven't even looked at the pictures of the White House yet because I want it to just live up there for a while" – he taps his forehead – "as this amazing fireworks show rather than saying, 'Oh, boy, why did I wear sneakers?' Haha, on the day I got a text from

my mom saying, 'Make sure you don't wear sneakers to the White House.' I was like, 'Too late, Mom.'

It is a very Ted Lasso move to turn up at the White House in sneakers and a sweatshirt, but also in keeping with Sudeikis himself. This morning, in a hotel room in London's Soho, the actor, 47, wears Nike running shoes, faded jeans, a mint-green hoodie and a baseball cap. Lasso's trademark squirrel's-tail moustache has been allowed to grow out into a patchier, salt-and-pepper beard. Sudeikis looks a little bleary-eyed after flying in from Los Angeles with his children, Otis and Daisy, aged nine and six, but he is assiduously polite and attentive. His language can be quaintly anachronistic: "I'm pleased as pie!" he exclaims at one point.

Where Lasso begins and Sudeikis ends has become a recurring fascination over the past few years. When the series first aired, Sudeikis would make a joke of the comparison, saying something along the lines of: Lasso was like Jason Sudeikis, but after two beers on an empty stomach. At the White House, Sudeikis referred to Ted Lasso – the show and the man – as "wish-fulfilment". "You know, Be the change you want to see in the world," says Sudeikis now, paraphrasing Mahatma Gandhi. "Well, how about, Write the change you want to see in the world? Part of the joy of getting to do this neat job I've got to do is the wish-fulfilment. Not just getting to play the characters, but also, what do you want to put out there into the world?"

As Ted Lasso approaches the climax of its third – and, Sudeikis insists, final –



▲ 'I don't think my midwestern sensibilities would even allow my wildest imagination the opportunity to think the thing would become what it's become': Jason Sudeikis. Photograph: Julian Broad/Contour RA

season, the stakes are higher than ever before. But Sudeikis is clearly thinking beyond that: can his little show about a fish-out-of-water football coach leave a lasting legacy of compassion on those who watched it? "Richmond is, metaphorically, like a form of utopia," he says. "And yet it has to honour the fact that not everywhere else outside that utopia is utopian. And so, how would you deal with these conflicts? From back in 2015, when we were first thinking: 'What is this thing?' I just knew inside that this guy was real. He's complicated. He's not perfect. He's going through stuff. But this is who he is. He actually is nice."

Niceness is intrinsic to the Sudeikis brand these days and it's clearly an ideal he believes in. "It's the way most of us were born," he says. "I'm lucky, both my kids are naturally kind. They can get a little surly, sure, Otis more than Daisy. But at the end of the day, they're just nice folks. And I was raised by nice folks."

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Those folks are his parents, Dan, who worked in business development, and Kathryn, a travel agent who happens to be the older sister of Norm from *Cheers*, George Wendt. Sudeikis was born in Virginia, the eldest of three children, but grew up in Kansas, and Lasso has a sing-song version of his own midwestern accent. They also appear to share the same humility. Sudeikis, who has won two Emmys and a pair of Golden Globes for his performance, still seems a little bemused by the fanaticism the show has inspired. "The reception to it?" he says. "No, I don't think my midwestern sensibilities would even allow my wildest imagination the opportunity to think the thing would become what it's become. Never, never in a million years."

Sudeikis was a talented athlete at school and college - mainly in basketball - but his uncle's success also made him aware that a career in performing was possible. Eventually, he chose to pursue comedy, working for years in improv groups before *Saturday Night Live* took him on in 2003. "I didn't realise my folks were worried about me when I was taking improv classes in my 20s," says Sudeikis. "But when I got the job writing at *SNL*, now they could tell their friends, 'Oh, our son writes on *SNL*. Now it's something!'"

After *Saturday Night Live*, he had a very decent career in Hollywood, landing lead roles as a disenchanted account manager in the 2011 comedy *Horrible Bosses* and its 2014 sequel, as well as cameos on *30 Rock* and *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*. At 6ft-plus, with soulful, dark eyes and alpha-male vibes,

he tended to get cast as handsome, sometimes morally dubious, characters. Off-screen, he married the screenwriter Kay Cannon in 2004; they separated four years later. Afterwards, Sudeikis was routinely linked with A-listers, such as Jennifer Aniston and January Jones, and, in 2011, got together with the actor and director Olivia Wilde. They became engaged two years later and had children.

It was while he was having dinner with Wilde in around 2015 that Sudeikis wondered if he could revisit a character called Ted Lasso that he had created for a comedy skit two years earlier, and maybe take his own career in a different direction. The original Lasso was more broadly comic - "belligerent," Sudeikis calls him - so why make the new version so warm and fuzzy? "It was the culture we were living in," explains Sudeikis. "I'm not terribly active online and it even affected me. Then you have Donald Trump coming down the escalator. I was like, 'OK, this is silly, and then what he unlocked in people... I hated how people weren't listening to one another. Things became very binary and I don't think that's the way the world works. And, as a new parent - we had our son Otis in 2014 - it was like, 'Boy, I don't want to add to this.' Yeah, I just didn't want to portray it."

Rightly or wrongly - well, probably wrongly, you'd have to say, on balance - the line between Sudeikis and his saintly creation have become blurred over time. In November 2020, he and Wilde split: that the news echoed one of the main storylines from the first season of *Ted Lasso*, where Lasso separated from his wife, in part because of his time spent in the UK, was a detail that

did not go unnoticed by tabloid editors. An initial statement said Sudeikis and Wilde were parting "amicably" but, over time, sustaining the *Lasso* spirit in real life has not always been straightforward for the pair.

Two months after their break, Wilde was photographed holding hands with the singer Harry Styles, whom she met on the set of her film, *Don't Worry Darling*. Then, in April 2022, Wilde was handed a manila envelope while she was onstage giving a speech about *Don't Worry Darling* at the CinemaCon convention in Las Vegas. "This is for me?" she asked. "Is this a script?" Nope, it was custody papers from a process server hired by her ex. Sudeikis apologised and made it clear he had not authorised the ambush, but Wilde fired back that it was an "outrageous legal tactic". *New York* magazine's Vulture blog called it, "A messy move for king of kindness Ted Lasso."

There's been more: a "bombshell interview" from their former nanny (Sudeikis and Wilde then united to refute her claims as "false and scurrilous"). But reps for Sudeikis request not to go there today, to avoid stirring the pot further.

The end of *Ted Lasso* is now in sight: if you are watching it as the episodes are released, every Wednesday, there are three left. Sudeikis has not ruled out that there could be spin-offs from the series, but he's also been adamant that the show, in its current form, ends here. "That was one thing we spoke about on our final day of filming," he says. "The show may be over, but what we learned here... It's not like Vegas: what happened here, stays here.

No, what happened here, take it, take it to your village, take it to your family, take it to your next project. For real. Aren't funerals not always to celebrate the dead, but also to remember you're alive?"

As for what's next for Sudeikis, he's not sure. But it's clear he has options: "One of the great things is that *Ted Lasso* has granted a tremendous amount of creative autonomy," he says coyly. The experience has also taught him to pick his projects carefully: "It's nice it happened later in my career, too. I've had the good fortune of working in a bunch of places and having some things go well, some things not go as well and to realise how important the alchemy of the people you work with is."

For much of the past three years, Sudeikis has lived mostly in west London, and his children went to school here: Otis even developed a Dick Van Dyke twang. Now, they are back in Los Angeles, where Wilde lives (she has since split from Styles), and he joined them after *Ted Lasso* wrapped in November last year. "I don't think it's the ending of something," says Sudeikis, of his time in the UK, "as much as now we've added three or four charms to the bracelet of our lives."

Sudeikis still follows the Premier League, managing somehow to support both Arsenal and Manchester City: "Well, Man City's my team, but Arsenal's my club," he sort of explains. He has also been tracking the progress of Wrexham AFC, the National League team now co-owned by American actors Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney, who recently won promotion back into the football league. "I haven't spoken to

Rob and Ryan about it directly," he says. "But when I watched them respond to the final whistle of the match the other day, and I just saw their bodies slump, and then the way they turned to find each other and hug, I get it, 100% get it."

As for what is coming "down the pike" for *Ted Lasso*, Sudeikis doesn't go in for spoilers, but he does drop some clues. "I only did the Boy Scouts for a little bit, but I always loved that notion of: leave the campsite better than you found it," he says. "So if *Ted Lasso* is the American Mary Poppins, he wants to leave the Banks kids, and probably most importantly Mr Banks, with the appreciation of flying a kite. And what I would wish for anyone involved with the show is: don't cry that it's over, but smile that it happened."

It's a very *Ted Lasso* - and Jason Sudeikis - sentiment. Both of them have had a wild few years, of professional highs and personal lows. Both try to confront adversity with a conviction that decency will prevail. Both are doing OK, right now. "Until I'm faced with being on a plane that's supposed to go down," says Sudeikis, "or some biopsy brings back some bad news or some other major shift happens in my life or someone near and dear to me's life, I have no reason not to be as optimistic as the character I've been lucky enough to portray for the last three years."

Then, with an air of defiance, he adds, "I have no complaints. Leave that to the experts."

● *Ted Lasso* is on Apple TV+

The UK has a PR plan masquerading as an industrial strategy

Larry Elliott

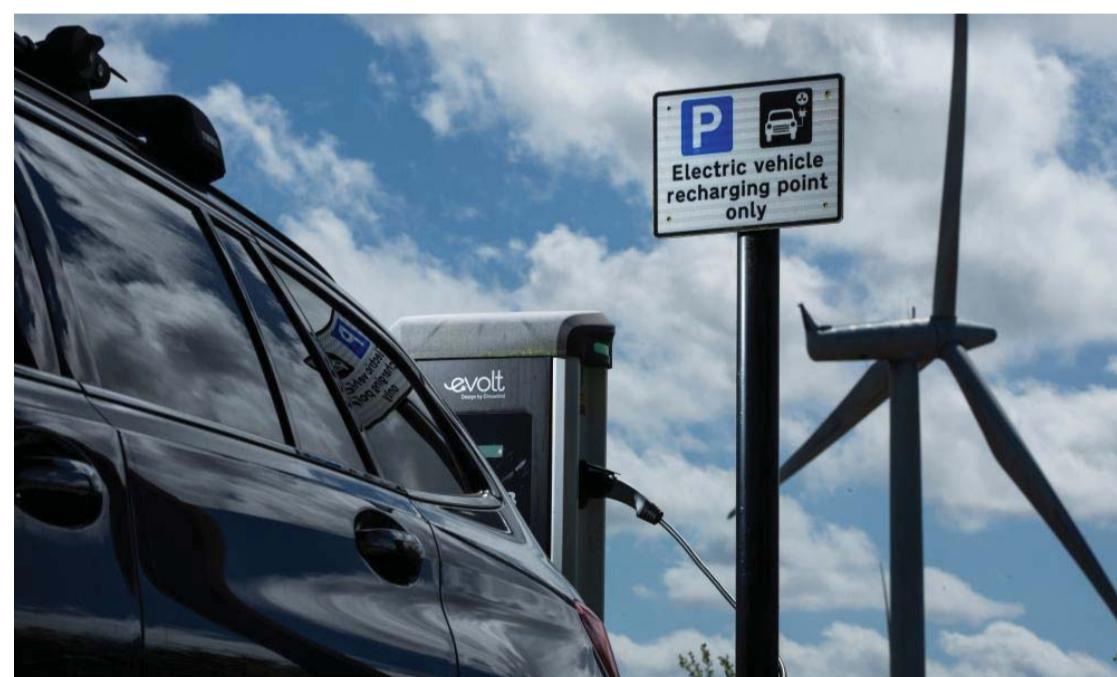
Countries that are serious about manufacturing have industrial strategies. The US and China have one. So do Germany and France.

Britain does not have an industrial strategy. Rishi Sunak talks about turning the UK into a "science and technology superpower" but that's all it is: talk. It is a PR strategy masquerading as an industrial strategy.

Faced with the challenge presented by Joe Biden's inflation reduction act (IRA), the government says it has no need to respond to the package of green subsidies being provided by Washington because Britain has already established a thriving renewables sector and the Americans are playing catch-up. The complacency is staggering.

Andy Haldane, once chief economist of the Bank of England and now chief executive of the Royal Society of Arts, had this to say last week. "The world is facing right now an arms race in re-industrialisation. And I think we're at risk of falling behind in that arms race unless we give it the giddy-up."

China, Haldane added, has been focusing on green technology for many, many years and had forged ahead in tech such as solar and batteries. "The west has belatedly woken up. The IRA is throwing cash to the wall on that.



▲ Britain believes, somewhat complacently, that it has a thriving renewables sector. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

The cost of that [is] almost certainly north of half a trillion dollars. Possibly north of a trillion. The EU is now playing catch-up, [and] the UK currently is not really in the race at any kind of scale."

A quick glance at the latest trade figures shows that Britain has some way to go before it can be considered a manufacturing "superpower". That was true once, but no longer. Manufacturing's share of the economy

shrunk from more than 30% to less than 10% of national output during Queen Elizabeth II's reign. The goods deficit, which has not been in surplus since the early 1980s, stood at £55bn in the first three months of 2023, with imports more than 50% higher than exports. A £40bn quarterly surplus in services was not enough to close the trade gap.

Those who supported Brexit say the UK now has the freedom to export

more to those parts of the world economy that are growing faster. Those who opposed Brexit say exporting to the EU has become more burdensome. Both are right, but both are missing the point. Before Britain can take advantage of export opportunities, it has to have stuff to export. The fact is the UK is no longer a first-rank manufacturing economy and hasn't been for decades.

The recent announcement by

Dyson is unhappy about plans to make it possible for new recruits to request to work from home from day one of their employment, something which is incompatible with the hands-on, learning-on-the-job approach required by a high-end manufacturing business.

Only part of the company's reluctance to manufacture in the UK is due to the recent jump in corporation tax, although the increase in the budget wipes out any benefit from tax breaks for research and development. It is also the planning system, the lack of enough trained engineers, the disdain shown for science and technology, and government interference in the way businesses are run.

Dyson is unhappy about plans to make it possible for new recruits to request to work from home from day one of their employment, something which is incompatible with the hands-on, learning-on-the-job approach required by a high-end manufacturing business.

The company says the UK will remain a key centre for R&D, and will invest £100m in a new tech centre in Bristol for software and AI research. But the idea that Britain can do all the clever, high-value-added, brain-power stuff while other countries do

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the production is an illusion. Increasingly, Dyson's R&D is happening in Singapore - where it has its global HQ - and in the Philippines.

Dyson is by no means alone. A report by the lobby group Make UK found that six in 10 manufacturers thought government had never had a long-term vision for manufacturing,

while eight in 10 considered the absence of a strategy put their company at a competitive disadvantage compared with other manufacturing countries.

Stephen Phipson, Make UK's CEO, said last week the US was spending 1.5% of national output on the IRA. The equivalent sum in the UK would be £33bn. It is not just the money, though.

"A lack of a proper, planned, indus-

trial strategy is the UK's achilles heel," Phipson added. "Every other major economy, from Germany, to China, to the US, has a long-term national manufacturing plan, underlying the importance of an industrial base to the success of its wider economy. The UK is the only country to not have one. If we are to not only tackle our regional inequality, but also compete on a global stage, we need a national indus-

trial strategy as a matter of urgency."

One option is to treat manufacturing as a niche sector and concentrate instead on sectors where it does have global clout: financial and business services, for example. In that case, the pretence has to stop that levelling up will be delivered by spanking new factories turning out world-beating products. The government can either make Britain an attractive place for manufac-

turing companies to invest or it can decide not to compete. Judged by its actions rather than by its rhetoric, it seems to have chosen the latter option.

Haldane, Dyson and Phipson are right. There is no plan and there is no strategy. There is just industrial-strength bullshit.

The Observer view on Liz Truss's intervention in Taiwan

Observer editorial

To Liz Truss's many failings must now be added an apparent prejudice against Rutland. Not unlike the island of Taiwan, England's smallest historic county has fought hard over the years to maintain its independence from a larger, overbearing neighbour. For China, read Leicestershire. Now its Conservative MP, Alicia Kearns, has become the target of a nasty geopolitical sneer. If you hail from landlocked rural Rutland, Truss's spokesperson superciliously implied last week, you probably don't understand international affairs.

This insulting inference was made after Kearns had the temerity to question the wisdom, utility and motivation of Truss's unofficial visit to Taiwan last week. The disgraced former prime minister says she plans to speak out in "solidarity" with Taiwan's people in defiance of Chinese intimidation. But Kearns dismissed the trip as a vanity project to help Truss "keep herself relevant" and as "the worst kind of Instagram diplomacy". Truss's confrontational antics could make things worse for Taiwan, she warned.

The response was snotty. Truss "has been invited to visit by the Taiwan government. They are better placed to know what is in the interests of the Taiwanese people than the MP for Rutland," her spokesperson condescendingly replied. Yet Kearns, no Rutle-



▲ Liz Truss delivers a speech at a symposium of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), in Tokyo on 17 February 2023. Photograph: Androniki Christodoulou/Reuters

yokel she, is well-qualified to speak on this issue. She chairs the Commons foreign affairs select committee. And given Truss's record of causing chaos, her concerns are valid. Like many Tories whose political life expectancy was drastically shortened by last autumn's Trussian revolution, Kearns has learned to distrust her ex-leader's judgment.

Self-promoting Truss was already a bit of a martial joke before entering Downing Street. As foreign secretary in

2021, she was mocked for posing, Margaret Thatcher-like, atop a tank in Estonia. As prime minister, she mimicked Boris Johnson's Winston Churchill tribute act over Ukraine. After her forced resignation, she resurfaced in Tokyo, rebooting herself as a China hawk and unguided missile. Britain should arm Taiwan, join a "Pacific defence alliance", help deter "totalitarian" China and thus save the "free world", Truss boldly declared.

More simplistic, dangerously belli-

gerant verbiage can be expected this week. What the Taiwanese, and China, may make of it is worrying. Diplomatically isolated and constantly menaced by Beijing, the last thing Taiwan's people need is "help" from Truss. As last year's destabilising visit by senior US Democrat Nancy Pelosi showed, gratuitously provoking Beijing can be seriously counter-productive. Truss's clumsy intervention could also be read as a bid to influence January's Taiwanese national elections.

That's problematic, since the ruling, pro-independence Democratic Progressive party faces a tight race with the more Beijing-friendly Kuomintang opposition. Truss's anti-China rhetoric may be mistaken for official British policy. As foreign secretary James Cleverly explained recently, the government is trying hard to balance justified criticism of China with the "robustly pragmatic", constructive pursuit of beneficial ties. Truss doesn't help.

Another problem with this bull-in-a-china-shop blundering is dreadful timing. In the real world, far removed from rightwing Tory feuds and petty personal ambitions, the US - the only truly capable guarantor of the Taiwan status quo - is actively attempting to patch up strained relations with China. Delicate talks in Vienna last week, the most significant bilateral contact since the "spy balloon" blow-up earlier this year, reportedly made cautious progress.

It is in Britain's interest, and the world's, that these two competing superpowers find ways of living amicably with each other - and maintaining channels of communication that prevent more Ukraine-style disasters. Indulging her hubris and pique, the serially irresponsible MP for South West Norfolk is doing her country another disservice. She owes Rutland an apology, too.

The Observer view on Brexit: Tories are paying the price for their dishonesty

Observer editorial

Brexit was sold to voters seven years ago on the basis it would be the answer to myriad problems. It would address Britain's laggardly growth by putting rocket boosters under the economy. It would free up money to spend on an underfunded NHS. It would boost wages in low-paid jobs by reducing immigration levels. And it would reinvigorate our parliamentary democracy by returning sovereignty to Westminster.

None of this was ever going to materialise and recent years have only served to underline just how false these promises were. Last week, the government finally put to bed the idea it is feasible to scrap thousands of re-



▲ Boris Johnson during the run-up to 2019's general election. Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images

tained EU regulations in one swoop when Kemi Badenoch juked the profoundly undemocratic sunset clause in the retained EU law bill.

This bill was introduced by Jacob Rees-Mogg during Liz Truss's premiership. It would have automatically revoked all EU regulations that were converted into domestic law at the end of the Brexit transition period at the end of this year, save those specifically exempted by ministers.

It is a totally unworkable piece of legislation. The government has not even been able to produce a comprehensive list of regulations that it covers; even the total number of 4,000 it is assumed it would apply to is just an estimate. The time allowed by the government - just a few months - to review



▲ Doctors strike to save the NHS. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Shutterstock

and recodify huge swathes of domestic legislation, covering areas as diverse as employment rights, consumer protections and the environment, was completely unrealistic. The bill also gives huge discretionary powers to ministers to make changes to the law without any parliamentary oversight or consul-

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tation with the businesses, organisations and people whose lives could be deeply affected by them. The verdict of one eminent King's Counsel is it would violate key constitutional principles in the UK, including the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, separation of powers and the rule of law, by "transferring parliament's essential role, law-making, into the hands of ministers".

Put simply, it would enable ministers to make sweeping changes to the laws that affect people's everyday lives - like how much paid holiday they are entitled to, or minimum air quality standards - with absolutely no democratic scrutiny at all. It certainly does not increase parliamentary sovereignty as the government has claimed and as Brexit was meant to do; rather, it represents a massive power grab by ministers. It

has also created huge legislative uncertainty for businesses who could not know what regulations would apply in a few months' time.

The scrapping of the sunset clause means retained EU legislation will be preserved unless ministers actively revoke it. But the bill would still enable the government to amend the law with no parliamentary scrutiny and end the "supremacy" of EU law by encouraging the courts not to take into account precedent from court judgments based on EU law. The Law Society says this would "compromise the legal clarity and certainty businesses and individuals rely on".

This false claim - that the government is restoring parliamentary sovereignty while it is actually driving this key constitutional principle into the ground - is just the latest in a long line of lies Conservative politicians have fed voters about Brexit. It started with the

Vote Leave campaign: the claim that leaving the EU would free up £350m a week for the NHS that has been ruled a "clear misuse of official statistics" by the UK Statistics Authority, and the suggestion that staying in the EU would mean Britain would be set to share a border with Syria and Iraq. It continued under Boris Johnson's premiership, with his false statement that the Northern Ireland protocol he had negotiated would involve no customs checks on goods moving between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. Dishonesty runs through every aspect of the Brexit pitch because the honest case for the ideological pet project of the Tory right is so unappealing that voters would never have endorsed it.

Now the Conservative party is starting to pay the political price. Getting Brexit done was the slogan that handed a handsome parliamentary majority to Boris Johnson in 2019, but it no longer

has the political salience it once did with voters. The local election results show they are more than willing to punish them for the consequences. People are experiencing a toxic mix of high inflation, rising interest rates and stagnating wages: some of that is due to global factors, but the UK's new status as a growth laggard is the main outcome of Brexit. Meanwhile, NHS waiting lists are at record highs and patients are being treated in dilapidated buildings.

The populist pretence that leaving the EU was the magic fix for all the country's woes has had terrible consequences. It has made us all poorer, absorbed huge amounts of diplomatic capital in attempts to resolve the issues it created in Northern Ireland, and cheapened our politics by normalising the spread of misinformation by those who should know better. It has also exposed the Conservative party as di-

vided and lacking any coherent sense of mission.

Little wonder that opinion polls show that most people think Brexit was a bad idea. But the clock cannot be turned back; this once-in-a-generation decision will haunt us for decades to come.

The honest case for the ideological pet project of the Tory right is so unappealing, voters would never have endorsed it

Sunday with Belinda Carlisle: 'I only have three vices left: coffee, chocolate and salt'

Lara Kilner

Up early or a lie-in? I was up all Saturday night and in bed until 3pm back in the good old days. Now it's the extreme opposite: my body clock wakes me at 4am.

First thing you do? I have a whole thing to get done before 6am. I study Eckhart Tolle and do chanting and pranayama breathwork and meditation. It takes about two hours, and I'm on a year-long meditation now, so it has to be every day. I can't miss it, it keeps my gas tank full.

Sunday breakfast? I don't eat a lot of Mexican food, even though I live in Mexico City. But there's nothing like fresh corn tortillas with butter.

Sunday morning? I do pilates and my husband, Morgan, and I go for a big walk or bike ride. We live near Chapultepec Park. There's a lot of nature here, which always surprises people, and the lifestyle is pretty pure. Families are together and people are actually talking to each other, not staring at phones. It's like the 90s, I've missed that.



▲ I love the flea markets for collecting ceramics. I've found some amazing treasures: Belinda Carlisle. Photograph: David Livingston/Getty Images

Handy in the kitchen? I've got an amazing kitchen here, but I'm vegetarian and there's only two of us, so

it's pretty limited. I've mastered burnt brussels sprouts, and I make a good berry cobbler.

Sunday afternoon? I love the flea markets for collecting ceramics. I've found some amazing treasures. There

are more museums here than in Paris, so there's always stuff going on. Sometimes I take a little disco nap if there's a party or a gallery opening to go to.

Sunday drinks? I only have three vices left: coffee, chocolate and salt. I'll never give those up, not a chance. I drink Topo Chico, the local sparkling Mexican water. It's kind of trendy in the States.

Sunday sounds? Boring as it sounds, I mostly listen to kirtan music, the Hindu devotional chants. They're very powerful.

Sunday wind-down? I get into bed and stare out of the window. I have to light a candle every night and I always take my makeup off - even when I was high and drunk I'd take it off. In 30 years of doing drugs, I only remember once passing out in my coat, still wearing makeup. I go to sleep early - by the time 8.30 comes along I'm exhausted.

Belinda Carlisle's EP, *Kismet*, is out now

Måneskin review – wall-to-wall Italian pop charisma

Kitty Empire

Roman band Måneskin have a thing for bucking trends. They should be one-hit wonders but aren't. They're often credited with reviving rock, a moribund genre. Perhaps most remarkably they've managed to export Italian pop. Throughout a show that's both too long and more entertaining than it has any right to be, this bilingual glam rock four-piece gleefully pile tired trope upon antiquated rock cliché - and somehow remain doggedly likable too.

The schoolfriends burst into renown in 2021, having won Euro-

vision with Zitti e Buoni (Be Quiet and Behave), a hard-hitting Italian rap-rock song. Charisma, great hair and the band's louche, vintage rock fashion sense were key supporting factors. Tonight, Måneskin dispense with that hit early on.

As singer Damiano David stalks the stage in leather trousers and a fishnet shirt, suited-and-booted guitarist Thomas Raggi plays his instrument behind his head. A cheer goes up every time bassist Victoria De Angelis, draped in a black feather boa, appears on the screens. Both bassist and guitarist will crowdsurf at least three times each before the night is over, playing their

instruments all the while.

Contrary to most precedents, Måneskin have stayed in renown. Few European groups since Abba have parlayed a Eurovision success into an international career. Few Italian musicians other than a couple of tenors, the late Ennio Morricone and, arguably, Giorgio Moroder have made such a transatlantic splash as this outfit. Tonight's sold-out 20,000-capacity O2 Arena show follows a sold-out European tour, with a world tour to come and more European dates being added. Last year, Måneskin played approximately 80 shows internationally; they're on about 72 so far this year and it's only May.

Their third album, *Rush!*, produced in great part by pop powerhouse Max Martin and released in January, has only cemented their viability with a rash of lurid earworms.

Their viral load is hefty, too: Måneskin's 2017 cover of the Four Seasons' Beggin' sparked a rash of more recent TikTok reels; it has been streamed more than 1bn times on Spotify. David, now bare-chested, sings the northern soul staple gutsily; the overall tattooed effect faintly suggests Amy Winehouse fronting the Black Keys.

The US website Pitchfork's despairing 2/10 review of *Rush!* noted Måneskin's penchant for songs that

sound like stadium chants. Once heard, the proximity of their thumping drums and earwormy guitars to the White Stripes' Seven Nation Army is hard to unhear, even though the parallels are more in spirit than in detail.

But that magpie versatility is key to Måneskin's consolidation. They may dress glam, with David's heels being higher than De Angelis's, but tonight they prove their command of melody and riff across genre. Their soft-rock ballads - such as Time Zone and The Loneliest - sound like an emo take on Aerosmith. Heavier, sulkier tunes,

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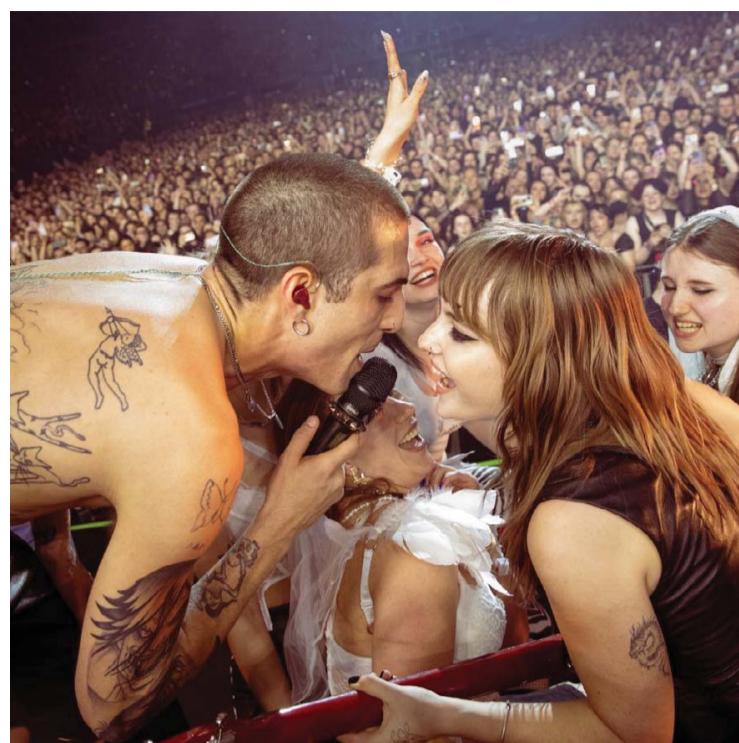
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most often in Italian, effectively channeling Rage Against the Machine.

In English, David's lyrics often deal with desire: one of the most retro, and the most Italian, things about them is their willingness to hump microphone stands, write songs about how sexy sex is, or, in the case of De Angelis, play her bass on her knees while the gurning Raggi takes a solo. Tracks such as *In Nome Del Padre* and *La Fine*, however, grapple with traditional Italian conformism and David's personal struggles, erudite in a way the English-language songs can't match.

The hoary old rock v pop binary is a cause Måneskin are happy to take up – even though to some critics they can seem like a pop band cosplaying rock for a largely non-rock audience. On the cringe Kool Kids, David sets his band apart from the "trap and pop" in currency now. Amusingly, Bla Bla Bla namechecks the Smiths and channels the early 80s – bands such as DAF – more than it does hard rock.

Måneskin, then, seem wildly popular with an overlapping set of constituencies. There's a lot of love for them among LGBTQ+ fans. Drummer Ethan



▲ 'Larger-than-life extroverts with fine bone structure': Måneskin's Damiano David and Victoria De Angelis, and fans, at the O2. Photograph: Fabio Germinario

Torchio identifies as queer; so does De Angelis, who has her own cult following. When 30 or so fans come on stage for Kool Kids, a devoted crush

of girls forms around the bassist. The crowd tonight is brimming with expat Italians.

Måneskin – larger-than-life extro-

verts with fine bone structure – sound familiar and fun; and thanks to K-pop and the Spanish-language influence on the US charts, the foreign language barrier is less high than it once might have seemed. They are also whatever people need them to be. They're retro, but progressive (the two straight male band members shared a kiss on stage in Poland in 2021 to protest that country's rising levels of homophobia). They are also, weirdly, regressive: *Rush!*'s ill-judged album cover sees the band looking up a young girl's skirt with varying reactions.

They are rock, but also pop, plastic (dressed by Gucci, happy to break bread with Max Martin) and organic, having busked regularly after forming at school. Their offering is louche, but the band are wallflowers in an era-appropriate way, keen to avoid associations with hard drugs. The band's Eurovision win was marred by accusations of cocaine use, which David swiftly rebutted by taking a drug test. Most pertinently, though, with just a tiny bit of stage fire and a dynamic lighting rig overhead, they keep an arena rapt for two hours. When the band played Florence the other week, they went go-karting afterwards.



▲ When from Rome... Victoria De Angelis of Måneskin crowd surfs at the O2. Photograph: Fabio Germinario

One of the most retro, and Italian, things about them is their willingness to hump microphone stands

So pleased to meet you: why it's never too late to make close friends

Barbara Zitwer

There's an assumption in life that by the time you've reached your more seasoned years, you've made all the close friends you need. Surely you've accumulated enough through school, university and work. But I've learned that close friends can be made at any age. In my case, one of my most meaningful, profound friendships was formed when I was in my mid-50s. It is a unique bond that crosses cultures, languages and continents.

The first time I met Kyung-sook Shin I was unbelievably nervous. I was 56 and she was 10 years my junior. I was a New York literary agent and she the most famous author in Korea, comparable to JK Rowling. Her groundbreaking novel, *Please Look After Mother*, was all about a mother who sacrificed everything for her family only to be discarded by them. When it came out in Korea in 2009, it was the bestselling book that year.

Kyung-sook's novels often concentrate on the marginalisation of women, giving a voice to those otherwise ignored. This has earned her a huge, loyal readership among women, as well as men, all captivated by her poetry and emotional depth.

At the time, nobody outside Korea had heard of Kyung-sook Shin or Korean literature but, in my heart and mind, I knew the value of it. I sent her a long and detailed letter outlining my plan for her book and how I could help it become a global sensation with translations in every language. When Kyung-sook turned down all the major New York agencies and chose me, I was overjoyed, but also nervous. Now I would have to deliver on what I had promised.

By the time we first met in person, it was 2011 and she was in New York for her US publication. Two years



▲ 'Thanks to our friendship, I am now less reactive and more patient': Barbara Zitwer with Kyung-sook Shin. Photograph: Allison Michael Orenstein/The Observer

had passed since first writing to her and *Please Look After Mother* had sold around the world.

We had agreed to meet for dinner and soon the panic set in. To me, she was a true literary god. What restaurant was special enough for her? I had to pay respect and honour her properly. Also, I don't speak Korean and she doesn't speak much English. My Korean agent, Joseph Lee, agreed to act as an interpreter.

I chose Asiate, the five-star restaurant on the 35th floor of the Time Warner building, overlooking Central Park. When we finally met, Kyung-sook took my hand in hers and we walked into the dining room side by side. It was such an intimate gesture and I wasn't used to such warmth from someone I had just met.

Curiously, we didn't talk much about her books or her career, but

rather the tasting menu and what we would eat. I quickly learned that we had a lot in common: we love travel, literature (of course!) and fine dining.

Kyung-sook insisted we share our food, cutting small pieces off all the dishes on her plate and handing each one to me. "Taste this. Taste that, Barbara!" She genuinely rejoiced in the meal, which lasted for hours and included many bottles of wine. It was only later that I learned how Koreans value good food and about the importance they place on sharing and bonding over meals.

Afterwards, as we left the restaurant, Kyung-sook again took my hand in hers and we meandered along Central Park South in the cool breeze of an autumn evening.

Fast forward 12 years and we have forged a friendship that feels as if it has existed for a lifetime. While

our relationship has taught me many things, maybe the most important is that you can build some of your most supportive, life-altering friendships at any stage.

Kyung-sook is soft-spoken, delicate and she moves and speaks gracefully. I am a fast-talking New Yorker born in Brooklyn who talks with my hands. (Only this year I discovered that Koreans consider using hand gestures while speaking incredibly rude.)

We have polar-opposite personalities and not just because we live in different worlds and cultures. Kyung-sook is reserved, she keeps her hurts and suffering to herself, while I, when responding to wrongs, come out punching like a prize fighter. Though Kyung-sook writes powerfully about injustice, she is not someone who will stand on a street corner protesting like me.

I am the kind of person who never

takes "no" for an answer. When I first discovered Korean literature my international colleagues, publishers, editors and even my family couldn't understand my passion. I doggedly persisted, but it was a very long time before Korean culture broke onto the global stage. It took me 10 years to sell *The Vegetarian*, which later won the Man Booker International Prize. Throughout this tough period in my life, Kyung-sook always supported me and my mission.

She showed me a very different approach to dealing with a professional or personal setback: she doesn't fight, she accepts. She regroups to heal and focuses on restoring her inner strength instead of allowing outside forces to suffocate her. At first, I couldn't understand what seemed like emotional surrender, but as I got to know her better, I began to appreciate and eventually to emulate her Korean ways. She has taught me that everything is not always a battle.

I never believed in destiny before I met Kyung-sook. I assumed I had complete control over my fate and it was up to me to make everything I tackle in life a success or failure. But Kyung-sook often tells me that each book has its own destiny and that I shouldn't worry. I'm beginning to think she is right. There are limits to what we can control, and there is something else – call it mystical, magical, metaphysical – that does affect our lives.

Thanks to our friendship, I am less reactive and more patient. I finally understand that you can't fight your way out of your destiny. This attitude shift has given me a serenity I never had before.

Lately, my husband, family and friends have remarked how calm I seem and how much I have changed.

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They were used to impatient and volatile Barbara. I would let my intense emotions burst out, causing conflicts with others and making myself more unhappy. The changes I recognise in myself seem long lasting. I think unconsciously I have re-programmed my mind. I have a new sense of longevity and realisation that everything doesn't have to be taken care of or responded to instantly. My husband used to say to me, and still does sometimes, "Who's chasing you, Barbara?" Now, I laugh and calm down because no one is chasing me, except myself.

Over the past 12 years, I have visited Korea many times and travelled with

Kyung-sook the length and breadth of the country. One particularly memorable trip was to Unmunsa, the Cloud Gate Temple. Eight hours by train and car from Seoul, hidden in the mountains, it is the largest training college for Buddhist nuns in Korea. The director had invited Kyung-sook to give a talk to the students. Watching a group of novice nuns, seated on the floor in a semicircle around their favourite author, listening enraptured, was an unforgettable highlight.

On another trip, Kyung-sook took me to the famous Bomunsa Temple, where a Buddha is carved into the hillside. Legend suggests if you make your wish at the beginning of your 1,000-step ascent to the Buddha, it will come

true. Mine was that I could make it to the top without my bothersome knees giving way under me. Kyung-sook, who is fit and raised on hiking in the Korean mountains, took my hand and led me slowly. She didn't make me feel like an out-of-shape couch potato, but instead chose the moment to give me my first lesson in the Korean language. By the time we reached the summit, I had learned my first word - "kamsahamnida", which means in English "thank you". She promised that one word would be my passport to Korea, and indeed it has been.

In April, Kyung-sook published her first novel in 11 years - *I Went to See My Father*. For me, the publication bookends *Please Look After Mother* and

is also a testament to our everlasting friendship. We have weathered many storms individually and together - not just in publishing but in our personal lives, too. But here we are, as we began, celebrating and rejoicing yet again.

My friendship with Kyung-sook is based on exploration, curiosity and learning new things. She has showed me how to think more positively about life and has inspired me to write my own book, *The Korean Book of Happiness*. When I finished the last page and read over what I had written, I realised I had incorporated into my own life a Korean way of being that Kyung-sook embodies. I feel rejuvenated, excited, and more myself than I have ever felt. Kyung-sook brought out the au-

thentic me. This is something we can all do as we grow older: we can shed our frustrations, disappointments and regrets. We can all let go to begin anew.

The Korean Book of Happiness: Joy, Resilience and the Art of Giving, by Barbara JZitwer (Short Books, £12.99), is available at guardianbookshop.com for £11.43

I wasn't used to such warmth from someone I'd just met

'You sometimes feel like Noah': the London zoo team bidding to save doomed species

Robin McKie Science Editor

News that a Socorro dove in London Zoo had produced a hatching two weeks ago provoked joyous celebrations among conservationists. *Zenaida graysoni* is extinct in the wild, its captive population having been reduced to a single breeding pair in the last century.

Numbers have been rising slowly and the birth of a new chick raises hopes that the doves, which once thrived on Socorro island, 600km (373 miles) off the west coast of Mexico, before being eradicated, could be restored to their former homeland.

"We await results of a DNA test of its feathers. That will tell us its sex," said Gary Ward, curator of birds at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL).

"If it is male, that is fine. But if it turns out to be female, she will instantly become the most important bird in London Zoo - for she will then be able to play a key role in restoring Socorro dove numbers."

The project is part of a campaign which aims to perfect techniques needed to rewild many other animals, insects, fish and birds which today survive only as captive occupants of zoos or wildlife collections.

In addition, scientists say numbers of these populations are destined to rise as climate change and habitat destruction leave more and more species extinct in the wild.

"One day we will be faced with the task of returning these species to the wild - and we need to start preparing



▲ DNA testing of the new Socorro dove hatching at London Zoo will determine its sex. Photograph: Charlotte Bleijenberg/Getty Images/iStockphoto

for that now," said John Ewen, of the ZSL's Institute of Zoology. "We need to learn how best to rewild populations."

As part of this programme, scientists at Whipsnade, ZSL's other main zoo, are collaborating with other zoos on two key projects. The first will involve the Socorro dove. The second will focus on three different species of pupfish. These tiny freshwater fish were once endemic to Mexico until the springs in which they lived were destroyed by climate change and farmland expansion.

Housed in tanks in Whipsnade's main aquarium, La Palma pupfish, Charco Palma pupfish and Potosi pupfish are being tended by zoo staff - along with several dozen other endangered or extinct-in-the-wild species - prior to their release. "We will either ship them out as adult fish or send them to Mexico as eggs," said ZSL fish expert Alex Cliffe.

"We are still working out which method to choose. We are going to be laser-focused on getting this right. The lessons we will learn will be crucial in rewilding other fish species."

To date, only a relatively small number of species have been successfully returned to their natural habitats after becoming extinct in wild.

"The Arabian oryx, the Przewalski's horse and the Guam rail are good examples," said Ewen. "Crucially, conservationists have learned a lot from these projects."

One critical lesson has been the need to pinpoint exact causes of a species eradication in the wild so that this threat can be removed and an animal returned to its native habitat in safety. In the case of Socorro, ensuring that feral cats have been eradicated from the island will be vital, says the Whipsnade team.

However, it is not always poss-

ible to remove a particular threat. The brown tree snake which was accidentally transported to the Pacific island of Guam was responsible for killing off its native flightless bird, the Guam rail. The snake is now established on the island and would simply kill off reintroduced birds. So a new population of Guam rail, bred from captive birds, has been established instead on nearby, snake-free Rota and Cocos islands.

"The crucial point is that you have to prepare for all sorts of contingencies when it comes to reintroductions," added Ewen.

"It is very easy to wipe out a species - but it is very, very difficult to return it to the wild."

This point was backed by Ward. "We face an inevitable tidal wave of species being lost in the wild," he commented. "You sometimes feel like Noah and his ark. Which animals can you throw on the ark before the wave comes?"

The problem is worsened by the fact that most extinct-in-the-wild species are held in only a handful of institutions.

"That is a very precarious state to be in. An accident or disease outbreak at one could have devastating consequences," added Cliffe.

"We need massive investment to ramp up the care we provide for these populations so they can be in a place where we can keep them safe and harvest them for release."

The uncertainties that face conservationists is demonstrated by the Socorro. It was first bred at London Zoo in 2006. The bird was named Arnie, after Arnold Schwarzenegger, with ref-



▲ Gary Ward, bird curator at ZSL. Photograph: London Zoo

erence to his "I'll be back" line in the film *Terminator*. Only later was it discovered that Arnie was a female.

Conservationists will be hoping for a similar designation for London's latest Socorro, added Ward.

"There are 156 Socorro doves alive in collections across the world today," he said, "and only about 30 are females of breeding age. So another young female would be a tremendous boost for the continuing viability of the world's population of Socorro and their return to the wilds of their native land."

We are going to be laser-focused on getting this right. The lessons we will learn will be crucial in rewilding other species

Svalbard: the Arctic islands where we can see the future of global heating

Joseph Phelan

Svalbard, the Norwegian archipelago that lies deep inside the Arctic Circle, is on the frontline of global heating. This remote, largely barren cluster of rock, glacial ice and snow is experiencing observable, unsettling climate-induced

transformation.

Studies suggest Svalbard is warming six times faster than the global average, with some researchers predicting that, by 2100, its glaciers will be losing ice at double the current rate, regardless of whether global climate targets are hit. "The climate on Svalbard is altering dramatically," says

Andrea Spolaor, who studies environmental chemistry at the Italian National Research Council. "This is a worrying situation for the archipelago, but at the same time provides a case study for understanding the effects on the environment. To understand change one must measure it, and Svalbard is, unfortunately, a good example."

For scientists and researchers, there is no shortage of perturbing phenomena to assess: retreating glaciers, decreased snow cover, extreme precipitation, disappearing sea ice, avalanches, imperilled flora and fauna. No part of Svalbard, it seems, is immune to its climate predicament.

"The thawing permafrost and the

landslides in Longyearbyen [Svalbard's largest town] are very obvious signs of change," notes Lars Smedsrød, a professor of polar oceanography at the University of Bergen. "It [global heating] will hit the local ecosystems hard. With the current warming and ongoing

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emissions of CO₂, Svalbard and the rest of the Arctic will continue to warm."

Svalbard is strongly affected by Arctic amplification, a feedback mechanism where sea-ice retreat and atmospheric warming make each other worse. This is, in part, why Svalbard is seeing such alarming change, and is why its glaciers – which represent 6% of the planet's glaciated area outside Greenland and Antarctica – are swiftly melting away.

"Glacier retreat after atmospheric warming is not instantaneous, but happens with a delay of years or decades depending on the size of a glacier," says Ward van Pelt, an associate professor at Uppsala University in Sweden who focuses on changing climate conditions in the Arctic. "The strong glacier retreat observed in Svalbard today is the result of past climate change. Warming has accelerated further in recent years, and will continue to do so in the coming decades, which is bad news. The future for glaciers in Svalbard does not look bright."

Many of Svalbard's glaciers are at relatively low elevations, meaning they are more sensitive to warming. What's more, Van Pelt's predictions suggest that the loss of sea ice, and the resulting increased evaporation of seawater, will result in increased levels of precipitation, which will probably fall as rain rather than snow. Snow cover acts as a barrier, and plays a role in minimising glacial melt, but it is now falling with less regularity.

"Some of the additional rainwater may refreeze in snow, but this buffering capacity will vanish when permanent snow areas disappear. Furthermore, shrinking snow areas cause even more glacier melt. Our modelling results suggest that, even in the case of a relatively low emission scenario, glacier mass loss will strongly accelerate in the coming decades."

Svalbard is, according to researchers at the University of Gdańsk's Institute of Oceanography, also experiencing a severe "fast ice" decline, with its coastal areas losing about 40 square miles (c 100 sq km) a year in the past four decades. Fast sea ice anchors to shores or ocean bottoms, and gathers in fjords, around islands, and in shallow coastal waters. As well as acting as a bar-



▲ Mountains nearly devoid of snow stand behind a road and a polar bear warning sign during a summer heat wave on Svalbard archipelago in 2020. Photograph: Sean Gallup/Getty Images

rier against erosion, this ice has, for thousands of years, been a cornerstone of healthy Arctic ecosystems. "The links between life in the sea and on land are particularly close in the Arctic," says Maria Dance, a guest PhD student at the University Centre in Svalbard. "Nutrients and energy flow from the sea to land through sea birds fertilising the tundra below their nesting cliffs. Foxes and polar bears move over land and the sea ice. Reindeer use sea ice to move between Svalbard's islands. Without it you have a fundamentally different marine ecosystem, where everything from plankton to fish, seals to sea birds are impacted. But life on land is also affected."

The effects of vanishing sea ice can also be seen below the water, according to Kim Last, a marine biologist at the Scottish Association for Marine Science. "The waters around Svalbard are becoming more akin to conditions at lower latitudes. With this we see a reduction in fauna such as polar cod, but an influx of more southern species such as the blue mussel and some types of jellyfish previously unknown this far north. As with all change, there will be winners and losers. Svalbard will probably be free from all sea ice in 50 years' time. All the organisms that rely on the ice will either migrate, adapt or go extinct."

The loss of sea ice in the Arctic is liable to be detrimental to numerous species – and potentially beneficial to others – but one creature could well find itself hit harder in the long run than any other: the polar bear.

"Svalbard is an interesting area for polar bears and climate change," says

Andrew Derocher, a leading polar bear researcher and professor at the University of Alberta. "We're not seeing major changes in the population yet, but there are good reasons for this."

Derocher says that the effects of global heating are currently "somewhat mediated" in Svalbard by the interaction between sea-ice loss and the loss of ice over the continental shelf. Because the shelf habitats have higher biological productivity, and are therefore ripe hunting grounds, the loss of sea ice – a hub for ringed seals, the bears' primary food source – has yet to hit these particular populations hard. But, Derocher says, this is a temporary situation.

"The major concern for Svalbard's polar bears is that sea-ice loss is happening at a faster rate than for other polar bear populations. It's just a matter of time. We can expect to see the same impacts as have been noted in other areas: changes in sea ice, a drop in the body condition of polar bears, lower reproductive rates, lower survival for young and old bears, and, eventually, a decline in abundance. Much of my study area in Svalbard when I worked for the Norwegian Polar Institute is no longer polar bear habitat: there's just not enough ice left," Derocher adds.

A Canadian government report released in 2022 revealed that, between 2016 and 2021, the polar bear population in western Hudson Bay dropped by 27%, a fall largely attributed to the loss of sea ice. What's more, a 2021 study published by the Royal Society found that, with less sea ice being formed each year, many polar bear populations were becoming increasingly fragmented. The result was less mating between different groups and, consequently, an increased likelihood of inbreeding, which could hamper the bears' ability to successfully adapt to the changing environment.

Derocher adds that another issue for Svalbard's polar bears will be one of habitat loss. "We have lost some areas that were major maternity denning habitats: they're no longer accessible in the autumn when pregnant females are seeking places to den. While they can shift to other areas, it's an erosion of habitat that is ongoing."

Derocher also says that this loss of habitat is altering polar bear feeding habits. "Eggs, birds and reindeer have been a part of the polar bear diet for a long time, but we're now seeing more of these eating behaviours. It's challenging to be optimistic about polar bears anywhere, and particularly so in Svalbard. I very much doubt they will persist long in that part of the Arctic. I wouldn't be surprised if the polar bear abundance in Svalbard drops suddenly in the coming years."

Spolaor says: "The climate [on Earth] has changed in the past and nature has always adapted, but the difference with the period we are currently experiencing is that the speed of change is much faster. It is difficult to say how nature will react."

Paul Wassmann, an environmental biology professor based at the Arctic University of Norway, agrees. "The challenge is the rapidness of change. Some mammals will increase, some decline. Arctic species will hide in pockets and recolonise Svalbard when the climate gets colder. The archipelago is changing, not dying."

Life is, and long has been, resilient. Our planet has experienced periods of temperature fluctuation for millions of years, and the hardest, most adaptable life always clings on. However, this fact is unlikely to be reassuring for those species seeing their environment deteriorate and melt away year after year. The future of Svalbard, nearly all research suggests, will be one of warmer weather, less sea ice, fewer polar bears and more rain. There will, of course, be species that emerge stronger, that will flourish in the warmer climate, but many of Svalbard's current residents will be handed a simple ultimatum: adapt or perish.



▲ A vessel carrying researchers plies a route through sea ice off Svalbard. Fast ice – that which is grounded at the shore – has been declining at a rate of 40 square miles (c100 sq km) for decades around the archipelago and species from further south are appearing in coastal waters. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

"Across the Arctic, we're finding that plants are 'greening up' earlier in spring, and tundra vegetation is taking advantage of the warmer summers by expanding to cover the once bare ground," says Isla Myers-Smith, chair of climate change ecology at Edinburgh University. "Certain species, such as shrubs, grasses and sedges, are becoming more common, and as a result the biodiversity of plant life is shifting. Shrubs are growing more in warmer summers, an indication that they are a 'winning' species."

Tundra ecosystems are carefully adapted to the cold, so warming and associated climate events such as icing can upset the balance of life, with repercussions across Arctic food webs."

Naturally, winners cannot exist with losers, and Myers-Smith believes Svalbard's immediate future will be one of dramatic, unprecedented upheaval.

"Tough times lie ahead for the planet, and in the Arctic rapid and accelerating warming is now locked in. "We are just beginning to see the types of changes that will play out with Arctic climate change in future. Because Svalbard is warming more than anywhere else in the Arctic, it could be a sentinel of change for what's to come for the Arctic as a whole."

"I feel a strong sense that we have only seen the tip of the iceberg in terms of the changes that are coming for these ecosystems."

● The standfirst of this story was amended on 14 May 2023 to correct an editing error. It incorrectly stated warming was taking place four times faster than average rather than six.

Monty Williams fired by Phoenix Suns after second straight early playoff exit

Associated Press

The Phoenix Suns fired Monty Williams on Saturday, two years after reaching the NBA finals and a year after he was the overwhelming choice as the coach of the year, two people with knowledge of the decision said.

The people spoke to the Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the team had not announced the decision.

Williams had great success in his four regular seasons in Phoenix, winning 63% of his games. But three consecutive years of playoff frustration was likely too much for the Suns to overlook – especially after two straight



▲ Monty Williams, right, speaks with Kevin Durant during a March game. Photograph: Brian Westerholt/USA Today Sports

years of Phoenix trailing by 30 points at

halftime of elimination games at home.

ESPN and the Athletic first reported the decision.

The Suns had a 2-0 lead in the 2021 NBA finals, only to lose in six games. They lost in the second round in each of the last two seasons, both times in an embarrassing finale – last year to Dallas, this year to Denver.

"Neither day feels good," Williams said after the loss earlier this week to Denver, when asked to compare last season's debacle to this year's season-ending loss.

Saturday likely didn't feel good either.

The Suns now become yet another high-profile coaching opening, after Toronto fired Nick Nurse and Milwaukee fired Mike Budenholzer. Nurse won the

2019 NBA title with the Raptors, while Budenholzer was the coach who overcame Phoenix's 2-0 lead in the 2021 finals.

It's the second major decision made by new Suns owner Mat Ishbia in about three months since the closing of the sale that gave him control of the club. In February, Ishbia green-lighted a blockbuster trade that brought Kevin Durant to Phoenix and gave the Suns a core – him, Devin Booker, former No 1 pick Deandre Ayton and Chris Paul – that the team hoped would be enough to deliver a title.

It just didn't work, at least, not this year. Paul got hurt in the playoffs to

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continue his run of bad luck on the health front in the postseason, Ayton sat out the finale and Booker and

Durant simply looked gassed by the time it was over.

Williams, after the season ended, blamed himself.

'I take that personally, not having

our team ready to play in the biggest game of the year,' Williams said. 'That's something that I pride myself on and it just didn't happen. ... That's something I have to take a deep look at, everything

I'm doing.'

Ishbia clearly took a deep look as well, and decided to make the change.

It's anyone's guess what other changes are coming. The roster surely

will change, and so will the system with a new coach in place.

'It means a lot': Brittney Griner plays first game since detention in Russia

Reuters

Brittney Griner strolled down the sideline about one and a half hours before the Phoenix Mercury played Friday night, giving hugs and high-fiving her teammates, coaches and opposing players.

Then it was a little stretching, a little shooting and a little agility work to prepare for a basketball game.

Just like old times.

"I'm grateful to be here, that's for sure," Griner said. "I'm not going to take a day for granted."

Griner returned to game action for the first time since a nearly 10-month detention in Russia on drug-related charges ended with a prisoner swap in December. The seven-time All-Star, who missed the entire 2022 season because of the detention, finished with 10 points and three rebounds in a WNBA preseason game against the Los Angeles Sparks.

The 6ft 9in Griner looked good, especially considering the long layoff, casually throwing down a one-handed dunk during warmups. She stood with her teammates while the national



▲ Phoenix Mercury center Brittney Griner yells to a team-mate during a preseason game against the LA Sparks on Friday. Photograph: Patrick Breen/USA Today Sports

anthem was played and received a loud ovation from the home crowd when she was introduced before tipoff.

"Hearing the national anthem, it definitely hit different," Griner said. "It's like when you go for the Olympics, you're sitting there, about to get gold put on your neck, the flags are going up and the anthem is playing, it just hits different."

"Being here today ... it means a lot."

Mercury coach Vanessa Nygaard said the anthem and introductions

were emotional for the entire team.

"We looked at each other and we just had chills," Nygaard said. "We were here last year for all of it. I'm getting emotional about it now. Just to see her back out there - it's an absolute miracle. It was amazing. It's giving me chills again."

Once the game started, the 32-year-old Griner immediately went to work, scoring on a turnaround jumper early in the first quarter. A few minutes later, she was fouled on another turnaround

and sank both free throws.

She even had a cameo with the medical staff in the third quarter. Teammate Sophie Cunningham went down with a knee injury and Griner helped carry her off the court so she didn't have to put weight on her leg.

"When one of us goes down, we're always right there," Griner said. "That's one thing about this team — we're always there for each other. We've got each others' backs, big time."

Griner's return to the Mercury rekindles hope the franchise can make another run to the WNBA finals. The former Baylor star helped the franchise win its third title in 2014 and has averaged 17.7 points and 7.6 rebounds during her nine-year career. She was runner-up for Most Valuable Player in 2021, when the Mercury also played in the Finals but lost to the Chicago Sky.

Griner said she was more rusty on the court than expected. But given the trials and emotions of the past 18 months, it was a pretty good night.

"Not where I want it to be, but on the right track," Griner said. "We're making the right moves."

Phoenix opens the regular season in Los Angeles next Friday.



▲ Mercury center Brittney Griner smiles during the first half of a Friday's preseason game. Photograph: Matt York/AP

The extra exposure from being detained in Russia for having vape cartridges containing cannabis oil in her luggage has given Griner a platform to advocate for other Americans being detained abroad. She was already an LGBTQ+ activist since publicly coming out in 2013 and became the first openly gay athlete to be sponsored by Nike.

Griner announced in April that she is working with Bring Our Families Home, a campaign formed last year by the family members of American hostages and wrongful detainees held overseas. She said her team has been in contact with the family of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, who is being detained in Russia on espionage charges.

Philadelphia Eagles star Jalen Hurts earns master's degree from Oklahoma

Reuters

As if leading his team to the Super Bowl and signing a massive contract extension weren't enough, Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts decided to add to his stellar year by earning a master's degree.

Hurts, 24, from Oklahoma on Friday, as a university vice president, Dr David Surratt, posted to social media.

Hurts started his college football career at Alabama, where he earned a bachelor's degree in communication and information sciences after only three years. He transferred to Oklahoma in 2019 and began working on his master's degree.

The 24-year-old Hurts has said in interviews that he was inspired by his mother, who was a special education teacher around the time of his freshman year of college but saw colleagues around her being laid off and decided to be proactive.



▲ Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts received his master's in human relations from Oklahoma on Friday. Photograph: Matt Rourke/AP

"She went back to school, and she got her master's to become a counselor," Hurts told Essence in April. "That's a living testimony for me."

Earning his master's degree caps off an eventful first half of 2023 for the Houston native.

In February, Hurts led the Eagles to Super Bowl LVII in Glendale, Arizona, where they lost to the Kansas City Chiefs. The game included a controversial call against the Eagles with less than two minutes left that opened the door for the Chiefs to win, 38-35.

In April, Hurts signed a five-year contract extension worth \$255m, making him the highest paid player in NFL history on a per-year basis.

The Eagles open the season 10 September on the road against the team they beat to win Super Bowl LII, the New England Patriots.

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'The goal is No 1': Gauff at crossroads after hitting first speed bumps

Tumaini Carayol at the Foro Italico

Halfway through her third-round tussle with Paula Badosa in Madrid this month, Coco Gauff's mind was elsewhere. Errors sprayed from her racket and she could barely land a forehand inside the court. Gauff haemorrhaged game after game, sharing grim expressions with her team. She was dismantled 6-3, 6-0.

"I mentally wasn't engaged in that second set. I let something happen in the first, maybe one or two bad points. I just stayed down," said Gauff this week in Rome.

Last year, the clay court season was the site of the most meaningful result of her career: her first grand slam final at the French Open. It was a moment. Gauff has shouldered so much hype and attention since arriving on the tour aged 15 years old at Wimbledon in 2019. Reaching a major final was validation that she remained on the right path.

During her still short career, Gauff's progression has been continuous and deeply impressive. She is ranked fifth, 49 places above the second-best of her age group, Linda Noskova. She is still so far ahead of the curve that until last summer when she faced Robin Montgomery, a 294-ranked wildcard, and Noskova this year, Gauff had never played against a younger opponent.

This year, however, the 19-year-old seems to have reached a notable inter-



▲ Coco Gauff in action against Yulia Putintseva in the second round in Rome. Photograph: Alex Pantling/Getty Images

section. Recent weeks have not been easy - she lost consecutive matches to Anastasia Potapova, striking more than 50 unforced errors during her straight-sets defeat to the Russian in Stuttgart. Then came Madrid.

These difficulties have coincided with off-court turbulence. Last month, her coach, Diego Moyano, ended their collaboration due to personal reasons, meaning she has been travelling with her father as her coach. While decisions were previously made for her, she is now embracing her role as an employer and interviewing prospective coaches.

"It's a different process," said Gauff, smiling. "I don't know if I like it or not. It's something you have to do. I just hope who the next person is, I get to keep them for a while because I don't like interviewing people. It's so awk-

ward."

For Gauff, these first speed bumps in an otherwise smooth progression have highlighted the need for her to make meaningful changes to her game and approach. "This year we can really change the way I play. It's a crucial year for me. So I want to relearn and retrain myself to be aggressive," she said.

As things stand, Gauff is one of the best athletes on tour. She is armed with an enormous first serve, her backhand is faultless and she is an intelligent player with ample variety. But her forehand is one of the more obvious weaknesses inside the top 10 and now every player looks to break it down.

Much of Gauff's senior career has additionally been spent playing the role of a counterpuncher, as she uses her supreme defence and intelligence to

provoke errors from opponents while waiting patiently to attack. She has performed extremely well against lower-ranked opponents but when she has been forced to step up and impose her game in high-quality, high-stakes matches, she has often lacked the tools to execute.

Frequent meetings with top-ranked players have underlined that. Gauff has not won a set against Iga Swiatek in their six meetings, including in last year's French Open final, with Swiatek invariably trapping Gauff in forehand exchanges and picking it apart. Gauff is 3-14 against the top 10 since the start of 2022 and in her most recent top-10 encounter, a solid quarter-final run in Indian Wells ended with a brutal 6-4, 6-0 loss to Aryna Sabalenka.

While some may shy away from public self-evaluation, Gauff's maturity remains one of her most impressive traits. She initiated discussion of her enormous goals and perceived shortcomings without hesitation. She believes her current counterpunching game style is linked to her precocity and that she needs to be more attacking in order to be successful.

"I wouldn't say I was weak for a 15-year-old, I was pretty strong in general, but [I lacked] certain things. Transferring from the juniors to pros, the balls come a lot faster. I just resorted to being behind the baseline and running everywhere and being aggressive when I can, whereas in juniors I was pretty much running people off the court," she



▲ A dejected Coco Gauff after her defeat in the French Open final to Iga Swiatek last year. Photograph: Yves Herman/Reuters

said.

The progression of Gauff's forehand is likely to play a large role in the level she can reach. Gauff says she is working on shortening her elaborate motion, but the challenge is also mental. While it can be difficult for players to make changes while trying to maintain their form, Gauff's dreams are far greater than her already considerable achievements. She understands that, at such a young age, this is the period of her career when her game is most malleable, where possibilities are still endless, and that she should do everything she can in service of those goals.

"I've been pretty successful playing the way I've been playing," she said. "But the goal isn't to be top 10 for ever. The goal is to be No 1 and win grand slams. To get to that next level, I feel like that's the decision I have to make, so it's almost retraining my mind to make those decisions."

Chelsea agree terms with Mauricio Pochettino to take over as manager

Jacob Steinberg

Mauricio Pochettino has agreed to take over as Chelsea's new head coach after extensive talks with the Stamford Bridge club.

Chelsea have been looking for a new manager since firing Graham Potter last month. Pochettino will be the third permanent manager to work under the Todd Boehly-Clearlake capital ownership since they bought the club last year. Nothing has been signed yet but confirmation of the Argentinian's appointment should come soon.

Pochettino, out of work since leaving Paris Saint-Germain last summer, emerged as the favourite after Chelsea held talks with the former Barcelona and Spain manager Luis Enrique and Julian Nagelsmann, who was sacked by Bayern Munich in March.

The former Tottenham manager will need patience as Chelsea look to rebuild after a difficult season. The 51-year-old will inherit a bloated squad at Stamford Bridge. Chelsea, who will not



▲ Mauricio Pochettino pictured in May 2019 after reaching the Champions League final with Tottenham. Photograph: Adam Davy/PA

be in Europe next season, have spent close to £600m on new signings in the past year. They will need to sell players

this summer.

Chelsea hired Potter from Brighton after firing Thomas Tuchel - now

are facing the prospect of finishing in the bottom half, ended up installing Frank Lampard as interim head coach last month. Lampard lost his first six matches before winning at Bournemouth last weekend then drawing at home to Nottingham Forest on Saturday.

Pochettino, who played 20 times for Argentina, moved into management in January 2009 with Espanyol, for whom he had played more than 250 times. Just under four years later he was sacked but quickly took over at Southampton. He kept them up then delivered an eighth-placed finish in 2013-14, which attracted the attention of Tottenham.

He achieved third place in 2016 and second 12 months later. He followed that up by taking Spurs to the 2019 Champions League final but they lost that 2-0 to Liverpool and he was sacked five months later. He joined PSG in January 2021.

The series of poor decisions that sent Saints marching out of Premier League

Ben Fisher

They say fortune favours the brave. Not always, as Southampton have discovered to their detriment. Relegation to the Championship ends a largely positive 11-year stay in the Premier League and erases their image as a model club, though in truth that was beginning to be scrubbed away a few years ago.

From radically overhauling the squad with an influx of youngsters to replacing Ralph Hasenhüttl mid-season with Nathan Jones, untested at the elite level, on the merit of metrics and then giving Rubén Sellés the job until the end of the season on the back of a surprise win at Chelsea, a series of bold decisions by the club's owner, Sport Republic, have badly backfired.

"We have no problem admitting mistakes," Rasmus Ankersen, the Sport Republic chief executive and former co-director of football at Brentford, said this year. There might be a few to cover off in the close season.

Southampton's captain, James Ward-Prowse, recently acknowledged how the shift in approach has contributed to their decline. "We all know the changes that happened at the start of the season have had an impact," he said.

Armel Bella-Kotchap, who was part of Germany's squad at the World Cup, and Roméo Lavia have burnished their reputations but too many signings have not worked. Theo Walcott, now 34, has been one of Southampton's best performers in recent weeks.

The data, Ankersen said, suggested Jones would improve Southampton's record at defending set pieces and deliver more clean sheets. With two games left to play, the numbers make grim reading: Southampton have kept



▲ Lyano of Southampton looks dejected after their 2-0 defeat by Fulham condemned them to relegation. Photograph: James Marsh/Shutterstock

a league-low four clean sheets from 36 matches and only three teams have a worse defensive record at set pieces. They have won once at home in the league since August and lost seven of their past eight matches, with relegation confirmed after defeat against Fulham.

Southampton supporters knew this was coming, long before Saturday's result. They were dipping into their diaries as soon as the English Football League confirmed key dates for next season on Wednesday. Many would argue the writing was on the wall after they won one of their final 13 matches last season to stumble to 15th.

Southampton debated sacking Hasenhüttl last summer but stuck with him and instead revamped his staff, with the former goalkeeper Kelvin Davis among those replaced. Most feared the worst after they failed to sign a proven striker for the new season, after moves for Cody Gakpo and Gonçalo Ramos, among others, did not materialise. The burden on Ché Adams was always likely to be too great.

There were various warning signs throughout the season, too. Victory at Bournemouth in October, Hasenhüttl's last win in charge, papered over the cracks that were exposed two weeks later in a 4-1 hammering at home to Newcastle that cost the Austrian his job. Southampton supporters were incandescent by the end of Jones's reign and wide-eyed when the 49-year-old, who worked wonders across two spells at Luton, was hired as Hasenhüttl's replacement last November.

Things looked ominous for Jones from the moment Southampton squeaked past Lincoln in the Carabao Cup, his first home game. They lost the following three matches, the last of which was to Nottingham Forest, whose sole league away win to date came at St Mary's. Last month Southampton lacked gumption as they slipped to a 2-0 home defeat to Crystal Palace. A home defeat by Grimsby of League Two in the FA Cup in March was another alarming episode.

Galling for fans - and doubtless Sport Republic - is that the one time

Southampton have significantly invested in their squad in recent years, things have ended in tears. The club have spent £127m across the past two transfer windows, more than Liverpool, twice Fulham's outlay and triple Palace's. But such cash was misspent, especially in January.

Mislav Orsic, part of the Croatia team that finished third in Qatar, has been conspicuous by his absence, playing just six minutes in the league since signing from Dinamo Zagreb. Kamaleen Sulemana and Carlos Alcaraz have shown flashes of talent, while Paul Onuachu, a 6ft 7in striker signed on deadline day, has barely featured. The arrival of James Bree, a full-back Jones knew from Luton who cost £750,000, peanuts by Premier League standards, is indicative of Southampton's disjointed thinking. Seventeen days later Jones was sacked. Bree has played once since.

A raft of key figures have trickled out of the door over the course of a miserable season. Joe Shields, who joined as head of recruitment last summer and was influential in the arrivals of Gavin Bazunu, Juan Larios and Samuel Edozie from Manchester City, where Shields worked previously, joined Chelsea in October. Matt Crocker, the club's director of football, is joining the US Soccer federation as sporting director. Toby Steele, the managing director, is working his notice period. The former chief commercial officer David Thomas was replaced by Charlie Boss in January. Other high-profile exits are expected behind the scenes across what will be another summer of change.

Southampton's relegation will invariably raise concerns but the club are on a sound financial footing and have



▲ Nathan Jones lasted just three months as manager. Photograph: Ryan Pierse/Getty Images

owners who have pledged their support. "If the worst happens and we end up getting relegated we are fully committed to the club, it's a long-term investment for all of us involved," Ankersen said at a fans' forum in February. "We believe in the club and will do everything we can to come back as quickly as possible."

The expected departures of Ward-Prowse, Lavia, Adams, Bella-Kotchap and Kyle Walker-Peters could feasibly collect more than £100m.

It is easy to catastrophise Southampton's predicament but at the end of last season, midway through his final commentary for BBC Radio Solent at St Mary's, the former Southampton manager Dave Merrington gave an impassioned half-time speech on the pitch that should be ringing in the ears of supporters as they face up to a first relegation since dropping into League One in 2009, when a 10-point penalty for entering administration sealed their fate.

Three years later they were back in the big time. Merrington took charge of the mic, his message booming over the stadium speakers. "These boys are tomorrow's future, the future of the club," Merrington said last May.

"But just remember this, you," he said, pointing to the fans. "You are the heartbeat of this club."

Leeds fan charged with assault by police after shove on Newcastle's Eddie Howe

Louise Taylor at Elland Road

The Leeds fan who confronted Newcastle manager Eddie Howe during Saturday's 2-2 Premier League draw has been charged with assault by West Yorkshire Police.

Leeds have banned the supporter for life after he climbed out of the stands at Elland Road and entered the technical area where the altercation with Howe took place, before he was quickly led away.

West Yorkshire Police have confirmed that the man has been charged with assault and will appear before magistrates in July. A statement from the force read: "Police have charged a

man with assault and entering the field of play following an incident at Elland Road football stadium during the Leeds United versus Newcastle United football match yesterday. The man has been bailed to appear before magistrates on 21 July."

Leeds face a Football Association investigation for the incident and Newcastle's manager has called for safety surrounding coaching staff and players to be stepped up.

Although two burly security men swiftly intervened to drag the offender away, everyone was initially caught unaware. "I'm OK," said Howe. "But moments like that do make you think about the safety of the staff and players in the Premier League and Football

League. To me, it's paramount. We need to be mindful of it. Security is so important."

Indeed, Howe urged a thorough review of security arrangements at high-profile matches. "No one should have to face that playing a sport we love and trying to entertain the country," he said. "No one should feel like their own personal safety is violated. It's something for us to reflect on."

"It was such a strange thing because you don't expect it to happen. He confronted me and said something that I can't repeat. I actually can't remember him pushing me and I don't know if I had time to be fearful because it was all over in a flash and he was led away. But it certainly makes you think 'what if'."

Moments like this should make people look and analyse how we can improve safety for staff and players."

Newcastle's manager was frustrated that, largely courtesy of a much-improved Leeds performance in Sam Allardyce's second game in charge, Newcastle could not win a game featuring three penalties and a red card.

The Leeds left-back, Junior Firpo, was sent off after a second yellow card late on, Callum Wilson scored two penalties for the visitors, while Patrick Bamford missed his for Leeds.

"I needed two Valium when we came off to calm me down," said Allardyce, joking. "I was nervous beforehand but the lads gave me some hope going forward. In the end a draw was satis-

fying. I hope the relegation fight goes right to the wire. I hope there's something to play for against Tottenham."

"It's not in our hands so we have to keep our fingers crossed. All we can do is do what we did today, just even better."

With three games remaining - at home to Brighton and Leicester and away at Chelsea - Newcastle's Champions League hopes remain in their own hands. "It was a strange game," Howe said. "At 1-0 down and a penalty conceded you are fearing the worst but we managed to get ourselves in front and are ultimately disappointed not to have won."

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Australian bruise brothers Jason and Andrew Moloney one step closer to twin titles

Guardian sport and Agencies

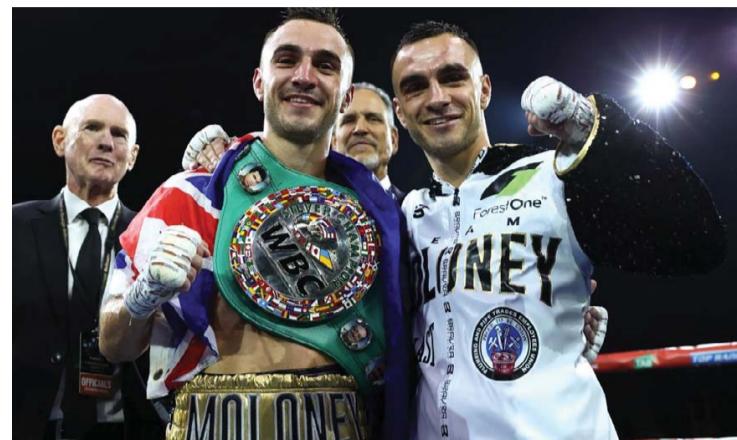
Australian bruise brothers Jason and Andrew Moloney went hunting history this week as they aimed to become the first Australian twins to claim world boxing titles.

And Jason Moloney has completed the first leg of what could be a historic double, securing a majority decision victory over Philippines' Vincent Astrolabio to win the WBO bantamweight world title on Sunday in front of 16,000 fans at Stockton Arena.

Having failed in his previous two world title shots, the 32-year-old Jason overcame a broken hand "in the third or fourth round" to dominate the fight with his left jab and movement, rarely allowing his power-punching opponent to land anything significant, and eventually claim a 114-114, 115-113, 116-112 victory.

Jason's Californian world title fight was a "make or break" moment that would define his career. A loss, five years after the first of two other world title fight defeats, would effectively have meant the end of the road.

Now he has the win, it potentially sets up an epic \$2 million showdown with Nonito Donaire on home turf, ideally on a powerhouse card featuring twin brother Andrew.



▲ Jason Moloney with twin brother Andrew. The Melbourne twins are fighting to win world titles on consecutive weekends. Photograph: Mikey Williams/Top Rank Inc/Top Rank/Getty Images

Jason's win now piles the pressure on Andrew's world title fight in Las Vegas next Sunday, on a card headlined by Devin Haney and Vasiliy Lomachenko. Andrew lost his title defence of the WBA Super Flyweight in 2020, suffering two perforated ear drums, a fractured nose, and cuts inside his mouth and eye in the COVID-era defeat.

Melbourne-born and raised, the Moloney brothers have mostly plied their trade in the United States but, after discussions with promoter Top Rank's Hall of Fame boss Bob Arum, are planning a blockbuster double-header in Australia if this week goes to plan.

"These guys already do massive numbers in the US; they have big profiles here but there'd be nothing bigger," their manager Tony Tolj said. "The first Aussie brothers to have titles at the same time ... they could fill a stadium."

Both Moloney brothers boasted a 25-2 professional record going into this week and know their profile on home soil could go stratospheric if they both bring home world title belts. Jason has done his bit, now it's up to Andrew.

"Fighting overseas, you get a bit forgotten about, we're not in the media as much as other Australian boxers," Jason said. "This is the start of what we want

to create, a big following. Once we bring these two belts home it goes to a whole other level."

Jason Moloney and the Manny Pacquiao-managed rival Astrolabio (18-3) both weighed in less than one pound under the 118-pound limit on Saturday (AEST). The division had been vacated thanks to Japanese superstar Naoya Inoue's move up to the 122-pound division. Inoue beat Moloney in Las Vegas three years ago, but the Australian was one of a few to take rounds off the undefeated, undisputed champion.

Jason's only professional losses were in world title bouts: to Emmanuel Rodriguez in 2018, and to Inoue, considered the best pound-for-pound boxer in the world, in 2020. Jason, nicknamed "Mayhem", has subsequently won four straight to earn the No 1 ranking in the WBO division. Now he has the world champion belt as well.

Both brothers have come a long way from the youngsters who had to wait so long to have their hands raised in victory. Jason lost his first three fights while Andrew was 0-7 before he claimed victory in the ring. Only when the boys gave away playing AFL to concentrate 100% on the sweet science did their fortunes - and results - turn around.

"It never felt like we were never not going to do well, but it started rockier



▲ Andrew Moloney poses during the weigh-in for the WBA Super Flyweight title he lost in 2020. Photograph: Mikey Williams/Top Rank Inc/Top Rank/Getty Images

than we thought," Jason says. "The sport was harder than we initially thought, but we both had a belief we could be good at it. That rough start spurred us on to try even harder and stick at it. In the long run, it was a bit of a blessing."

Blessings were in the mix this weekend too. Jason and Andrew both received blessings from a US archbishop, a dedication organised by famed American boxing commentator Colonel Bob Sheridan, who is close to the fighting brothers.

It worked for Rocky Balboa, who famously pulled up outside the church of Father Carmine for blessings on his way to a fight and it worked for Jason who says he appreciates "anyone who wants to say a prayer for me... but the result is up to me."

Mariners sink Adelaide in A-League Men semi to break playoff drought

Australian Associated Press

Central Coast Mariners, with goals from James McGarry and Jason Cummings, have sunk Adelaide United 2-1 in the first leg of their A-League Men semi-final.

The Mariners broke a nine-year drought with a stylish triumph on away turf at Adelaide's Coopers Stadium on Saturday night - their first win in the playoffs since a 2014 elimination final.

After the Reds took a fourth-minute lead via a Craig Goodwin penalty, the visitors crafted a handy buffer ahead of the second leg in Gosford next Saturday night.

The winner on goals aggregate will meet either Melbourne City or Sydney FC in the June 3 grand final in Sydney. City and Sydney drew 1-1 on Friday night ahead of next week's deciding second leg in Melbourne.

The Mariners produced a dominant first half to down the Reds, whose Japanese frontman Hiroshi Ibusuki hobbled off with another calf problem - he was starting his first match since suffering the same injury.

"The first half, we probably could



▲ Central Coast Mariner star Jason Cummings sets up to score against Adelaide United in the A-League Men's Semi-Final at Coopers Stadium in Adelaide. Photograph: Matt Turner/AAP

have finished the game off with the amount of chances that we created," Mariners coach Nick Montgomery said. "I knew in the second half they would throw everything at us and they did ...

(but) the boys stood big."

Adelaide's first attacking sortie, inside two minutes, resulted in a penalty when Goodwin's cross struck the extended right forearm of Mariner Brian Kaltak. Goodwin converted from the spot with a low shot into the right corner.

Adelaide's lead was brief, with McGarry levelling the scores in the

15th minute with a super strike - he launched from just outside the area and the ball sailed into the top left corner.

Central Coast soon went close to adding two more - Sam Silvera blasted onto the crossbar in the 25th minute and Cummings was denied at close-range by Gauci's reflex right glove six minutes later.

But the Mariners' dominance was justly rewarded in the 37th minute when they sliced through the midfield, Ben Nkololo found Cummings and the striker beat Gauci with a low right-footer from about five metres out.

The Reds' best chance of equalising before a parochial 15,771-strong crowd came in the 71st minute when a forceful header from substitute Nestory Iran-kunda was instinctively saved by Vukovic.

Reds coach Carl Veart said the Mariners "were much better than us in the first half".

"We were a lot better in the second half than what we were in the first," Veart said. "And I suppose we were a bit unfortunate not to get a second goal but that's finals football. We just weren't quite sharp enough in the first half."

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European football: Bayern stay top after hitting Schalke for six, Spezia stun Milan

Reuters

Bayern Munich powered past struggling Schalke 6-0, with two goals from Serge Gnabry, to close in on their 11th straight Bundesliga crown with two games remaining.

Thomas Müller, whose future at the club has been in doubt since his benching with the arrival of Thomas Tuchel in March, opened their account in the 21st minute and Joshua Kimmich doubled their lead eight minutes later with a well-struck penalty.

Bayern picked up where they had left off after the break and Gnabry drilled in his shot in the 50th after João Cancelo's superb early work in the box.

Gnabry then made it 4-0 with a dizzying sprint in the 65th before the substitute Mathys Tel also got on the score-sheet from a Jamal Musiala assist. Tel then turned provider for Noussair Mazraoui in stoppage time to make it half a dozen goals for the hosts.

Bayern are on 68 points and have two games left to play. Their closest rivals, Borussia Dortmund, sit one point behind on 67 after beating Borussia Mönchengladbach 5-2 in the day's late game.

The hosts went in front after five minutes when Donyell Malen nodded in from close range. Jude Bellingham slotted in a penalty in the 18th minute before Sébastien Haller's spectacular backheel flick made it 3-0 just two minutes later.



▲ Joshua Kimmich celebrates with Leroy Sané, Serge Gnabry and Thomas Müller (left to right) after scoring Bayern Munich's second goal against Schalke. Photograph: Alexander Hassenstein/Getty Images

Haller added another goal with a well-timed volley from Malen's cutback before Ramy Bensebaini pulled a goal back with a penalty in the 75th minute.

Glück further cut the gap with Lars Stindl's low drive five minutes before the end but Gio Reyna struck again for the hosts with the last kick of the game. Dortmund travel to Augsburg next weekend while Bayern face Champions League hopefuls RB Leipzig.

Two second-half goals secured lowly Spezia a shock 2-0 home win over Milan in Serie A on Saturday, condemning Stefano Pioli's side to their first league defeat in two months and denting their top-four hopes.

The defender Przemysław Wąsiewski and the midfielder Salvatore

Esposito helped Spezia earn their first win in nine games and move them closer to safety.

Milan, who lost 2-0 at home to Internazionale in the first leg of their Champions League semi-final on Wednesday, had clear chances to take the lead in an entertaining first half when Sandro Tonali hit a post and a powerful shot from Theo Hernández was saved by Bartłomiej Dragowski.

Spezia took a surprise lead in the 75th minute after a corner, when Kelvin Amian's header bounced off the post and Wisniewski netted the rebound. Esposito sealed the win for Spezia with a stunning free-kick that flew into the top left corner five minutes from time.

Two goals by Romelu Lukaku helped Internazionale to a 4-2 win over

mid-table Sassuolo, lifting them up to third with three games remaining.

Lukaku fired home from long range to give Inter the lead late in the first half before Sassuolo defender Ruan Tressoldi doubled Inter's lead with an own goal.

Lautaro Martínez made it 3-0 from distance but Sassuolo pulled two goals back through Matheus Henrique and Davide Frattesi to keep Inter on their toes until Lukaku sealed the win with a close-range finish one minute from time.

Inter moved on to 66 points, one ahead of fourth-placed Lazio and five more than neighbours Milan.

Atalanta dropped one place to seventh after losing 1-0 at 15th-placed Salernitana who sealed the win in stoppage time through the midfielder Antonio Candreva.

Marco Asensio's goal earned Real Madrid a 1-0 victory over lowly Getafe in La Liga as they rested key players before their Champions League semi-final against Manchester City on Wednesday. The win lifted Real to 71 points, two ahead of Atlético who play at bottom side Elche on Sunday but 11 behind leaders Barcelona.

Meanwhile Real have lost a €400m (£350m) court battle with the Abu Dhabi sovereign investor Mubadala over the proposed sponsorship of the Santiago Bernabéu, sources with knowledge of the case have told Reuters.

Madrid had claimed the money because it said Mubadala had failed to



▲ Jude Bellingham scores from the penalty spot to increase Borussia Dortmund's lead against Borussia Mönchengladbach. Photograph: Ralf Treese/DeFodi Images/Shutterstock

honour a sponsorship deal under which it would acquire rights to name the stadium for 20 years. An arbitral tribunal under the court of international trade in Paris has ruled that delays and changes in the redevelopment of the ground meant the sponsorship deal had expired, the source told Reuters.

Paris Saint-Germain edged closer to a record 11th French title when they beat AC Ajaccio 5-0 at home, sending the Corsican side into Ligue 2 as Lionel Messi faced the wrath of the Parc des Princes.

Messi, who started after a club-imposed suspension for missing training last month, was booed by the fans before and during a one-sided encounter that took PSG to 81 points with three games left, thanks to goals by Fabián Ruiz, Achraf Hakimi, a double by Kylian Mbappé and Mohamed Youssouf's own goal.

Both teams finished with 10 men after Hakimi and Ajaccio's Thomas Mangani were sent off late in the game.

'I prefer me now I'm older': Guardiola on dealing with Manchester City pressure

Will Unwin

Pep Guardiola has barely had a season in his managerial career when he was not fighting for trophies but the Manchester City manager says he is able to cope better with the pressure that comes with battling for silverware than when he was younger.

The 52-year-old will win the 11th league title as a manager if City secure maximum points from their final four

matches, starting with a trip to Everton on Sunday. The fixture at Goodison Park lands in between the two legs of City's Champions League semi-final against Real Madrid.

Should Madrid be overcome, City would be one step closer to winning the treble, with Manchester United to come in the FA Cup final next month, the week before the Champions League final in Istanbul.

"I prefer me now I'm older," Guardiola said. "The first years, when I was

at Barcelona, it was more difficult for me to handle it. Now I'm a bit better at knowing how to. At the end I learned many times at stages when I have lost - especially in the Champions League - that in the end you will be criticised for one day, two days.

"Then, the next day, you start preparing for next season. And you also realise that nothing much changes whether you win or lose in the end, honestly. Of course in that moment it is important to try and do it, and get it,

but still we are here."

An Everton side fighting for survival will offer different opponents to those City faced in the Bernabéu. Guardiola said: "The players are so humble and respectful to the opponents. They know exactly how difficult it is against Everton, because they live it and they know it and what they are playing for. I don't know what is going to happen but I am pretty convinced there will be incredible focus at Goodison Park."

Kyle Walker, who has started four of

the past five league games, impressed in Madrid. He was regularly left out because of tactical reasons earlier in the season but is showing his worth again. "It does not matter if he plays or not," Guardiola said. "They [players] are here, getting taken care of really well and when the team needs them, they will be ready. Kyle has been that."

Ipswich's Kieran McKenna: 'It's more satisfying because it's not been easy'

Nick Ames

Kieran McKenna smiles as he recalls the fixation that took root early and never slackened. "I was the eight-year-old sitting up watching a League Two game in the spare room while the rest of the family had the TV on elsewhere," he says of a County Fermanagh youth

spent soaking up every available detail. "I know so many children are passionate about the game but I was the one watching every single second of football, day and night."

Little has changed in almost three decades, although McKenna may have fewer opportunities to dwell on the lower divisions now. He has lifted Ipswich from the doldrums, winning pro-

motion from League One in his first full season, and that is hardly the entire story.

They scored 101 goals, lost only four games and prospered with a sophisticated, dominant brand of football virtually alien to the third tier. More experienced heads had failed to reignite Ipswich but McKenna, who turns 37 on Sunday, arrived with a plan in Decem-

ber 2021 and executed it perfectly. It is hard to think of a more exciting young manager working in the country.

"When you have a club of this size and history, the only one in a big county, there's massive potential," he says, sitting in his office at the Suffolk club's training ground. "We've had really powerful momentum, incredible support, and it's a great place to be. We

know there's a lot of hard work to do but it's nice to be in this position and there's a real chance to push onwards and upwards."

Ipswich are backed by Game-changer 20, which makes little secret of its ambitions to restore the club's glorious past. The US-led consortium

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Soccer

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outwardly took a risk when appointing McKenna, a rising star as first-team coach at Manchester United who had yet to go it alone, but were rewarded by a show of sheer self-belief.

McKenna's plan was to take Ipswich up by playing from the back, trusting in their technical and structural superiority over opponents who usually wielded blunter instruments. It meant paying little heed to doubters and convincing sceptics. "I had a lot of discussions with people in football along the lines of: 'That's going to be very difficult' or: 'I'm not sure if it'll be possible,'" he says.

"I also had them with one or two of the players who were here last season, saying they thought it would be difficult getting out of League One playing a brave brand of football where you open the pitch up, play with the ball on the floor, try to make sure it stays in play, build from the back and look to open space up."

"There was certainly a narrative that it was not the recipe to get out of the division. It took a lot of conviction in our beliefs, conviction from the club to back us, conviction from the players to buy into it. For me, that makes the achievement all the more satisfying because it's not been easy."

McKenna took on a squad that mixed well-paid signings with those who had been around longer and seen various approaches fail. But he carried them with him, persuading them to "not over-obsess about results" and trust dedication to their approach would reap due rewards.

They overwhelmed their opposition on most metrics and, in the final third of the season, reached the peak that



▲ We've had really powerful momentum, incredible support, and it's a great place to be. The Ipswich manager, Kieran McKenna. Photograph: Joshua Bright/The Observer

took them up with the champions, Plymouth: Ipswich won 13 and drew two of their last 15 games, scoring 45 and conceding four. Under McKenna they have never let in a goal through errors passing out from defence. "That's something we did take pride in," he says.

As that football-obsessed child, McKenna saw his family create an award-winning project of their own. His father had been a car mechanic in London and his mother a nurse; they decided to buy the Manor House Country hotel, located by Lough Erne to the north of Enniskillen, and built up a venue that is consistently named among Ireland's best. "Seeing the work they've put in, the hours, the way they managed people, the passion they put into it, definitely influenced me," he says.

"My dad pretty much lived in the hotel in the way some might say I live at this football club. I'd see my grandad come over from London on his holidays and within a day he'd be up a scaffold painting the top of the hotel or fixing tiles on the roof. It was a life's work from

the whole family."

Now football is his. McKenna, a gifted player as well as a diligent student, left home at 16 to join Spurs' academy and was close to the first team when a hip injury hit. It forced him to retire in 2009, when he was 22, but perhaps his course was already set.

"I remember Jimmy Neighbour and Mike Stone, my youth-team coaches, telling me three or four months into my first year as a scholar that I'd be the one who became a manager. I didn't know what they meant: I'd never thought of it, never seen it in myself. As a player you're so focused. It was only around the time of the injuries that I looked back at those conversations and thought: 'Maybe this is something I could use.'"

Spurs immediately gave him a role on their under-18s coaching staff and he would have happily stayed. But John McDermott, who headed up the academy, persuaded him to gain broader experience by studying sports science at Loughborough and coaching simultaneously. "At the time it felt a

step backwards," he says.

"You're coaching Loughborough in step eight of non-league or Nottingham Forest's under-nines and you're thinking: 'Six months ago I was working with Spurs' youth team.' But it was an excellent move. You're taking in such a bigger breadth of knowledge, experience and critical thinking. It gave me a chance to step back, hone my beliefs and work with people from different fields."

A job was waiting for him at Spurs on finishing his degree but, until his success at Ipswich, he was best known for a role occupied in between. In 2016 he joined Manchester United, the club he supported, to coach their under-18s but within two years José Mourinho had spotted a precocious talent and promoted him to the first-team setup alongside Michael Carrick. There he remained, subsequently serving under his friend Ole Gunnar Solskjær and briefly Ralf Rangnick, before Ipswich called. It was a useful grounding in public scrutiny, particularly during lower moments. Solskjær's staff, in particular, were often subjected to the microscope.

"If you can block out the noise in that environment and still concentrate on delivering good sessions to help the players, while staying true to who you are as a person, then you feel you can go anywhere and do it," he says. "Not many places will have more intensity than there and you need a thick skin. That experience was massive for me. There was a lot of good stuff done over that period and I know how that was recognised and received internally. I was always proud of the work we did there."

Carrick has since thrived at Middlesbrough. Both men seemed destined



▲ Ipswich's players thought it would be 'difficult getting out of League One playing a brave brand of football,' says Kieran McKenna. Photograph: Joshua Bright/The Observer

for a return to the top as managers but the quietly spoken McKenna, who lives in Ipswich with his wife and two young children, will never court the spotlight. "I don't have any interest in fame or external validation. My family, my close friends, my coaching staff, those are the important things and that won't change."

"When you come home from getting promoted against Exeter and your daughter wants donkey rides around the living room within two minutes, and then you're up at 6am watching cartoons, it keeps you grounded. You know where your reality is."

Ipswich hope to continue soaring under McKenna. His methods should translate easily into the Championship and, with money available, there are grounds to expect a swift adaptation. "No one wants to put a ceiling on what this club can achieve," he says. "But we need to stay really humble."

"It's a big thing for me. To get out of League One we needed to be more humble in terms of how we thought, how we embraced the challenge, and next season has to be the same. It's going to be a big step up for everyone. We have big aspirations, no upper limit, but we will continue to work hard and build this club in the right way."

'Immensely proud': the years of work behind sold-out Women's FA Cup final

Sophie Downey

The fervour and excitement of the crowds milling around a packed Olympic Way. The music from Boxpark Wembley reverberating around as fans of all ages gather in the fan zones and beyond, full of anticipation for the 90 minutes ahead. These scenes, rare less than a decade ago, are now customary in women's football as the sport continues to go from strength to strength.

Another landmark will be reached, another record broken with Sunday's Women's FA Cup final. For the third time this season, Wembley will be sold out for a women's game. Chelsea and Manchester United will walk out in front of about 90,000 fans, almost double the previous record for the final, set last year.

This feat comes a year ahead of the target set by the Football Association in 2020. "We are immensely proud to have achieved this sell-out," says Marzena Bogdanowicz, the FA's head of marketing for women's football. "[It's been] a team effort across the whole of the FA and also the two finalists, who have showcased the importance of the fixture and the occasion to their fans."

Building such an audience has not happened overnight. It is the result of



▲ Chelsea fans celebrate a Sam Kerr goal in last year's final against Manchester City. Photograph: Naomi Baker/The FA/Getty Images

years of work done both at FA and club level to understand the best strategy to market the sport. Since bringing the final to Wembley in 2015, attendances have been building, helped by England's success on the international stage.

"A home Euros with sold-out matches, even before the tournament began, allowed us to build from a base of some previous successes," says Bogdanowicz. "The incredible achievement of the Lionesses was then a major catalyst in the incredible interest we are currently seeing."

"We were confident internally that

we'd see a shift in perception and engagement following the tournament triumph and there was infrastructure in place to help sustain it. We have developed a really dedicated workforce who have looked to capture the momentum that has been generated and highlight what's special about the women's game."

"We've really wanted to market it to a broader audience and ensure there is something for everyone ... the fan experience on the day is one of the best at Wembley. Whether it is the fan zones pre-match, the music, half-time show or the atmosphere, it all scores very highly on our post-match surveys.

We adapt our fan engagement and marketing to the audience that attends, we learn from the insights we gain each year and improve wherever we can."

This focus on fan engagement is crucial. Attendances have risen across the board, with all but one Women's Super League club hosting matches in their main stadium. Successes include Old Trafford, Goodison Park, Stamford Bridge and, of course, the Emirates, where Arsenal sold 60,000 tickets for their recent Champions League semi-final.

Arsenal are another example of an organisation working cohesively to capitalise on the interest in and success of the team. With support from the top, the club's wider marketing apparatus has been involved in eight Emirates matches this season (the initial promise was six).

Anticipating a boost after the Euros, they opened sales for the north London derby between the semi-final and final, resulting in 16,000 tickets sold in the week around England's victory. That crowd would then set a WSL record of 47,367. This forward-thinking was repeated when the club put tickets for the Wolfsburg semi-final on sale as soon as the team beat Bayern Munich. This resulted in the sale of 8,000 tickets in just 24 hours, and a full sell-out in around a



▲ Arsenal sold 60,000 tickets for the Women's Champions League semi-final against Wolfsburg. Photograph: Stuart MacFarlane/Arsenal FC/Getty Images

month.

Data capture and insights have been conducted between games, giving them a deep understanding of their audience, tapping into their community and strengthening connections with their supporters. Excitement and interest around women's sport in general is clearly on an upward trend.

Capitalising on this and having the structures in place to maximise its accessibility are, as organisations such as the FA and Arsenal show, crucial. Sunday's Women's FA Cup final, another watershed moment, will be a prime example of how this hard work on building foundations behind the scenes can pay off. The fervour and excitement of the crowds milling around a packed Olympic Way.

Notts County beat Chesterfield in playoff to return to Football League

Ed Aarons at Wembley

What an emotional rollercoaster for Notts County's long-suffering supporters. But after twice seeing their side battle back from the jaws of defeat thanks to equalisers from John Bostock and Rúben Rodrigues that both required a large slice of fortune, it was all worthwhile as Luke Williams's side returned to the Football League after four years away largely due to the heroics of the substitute goalkeeper Archie Mair.

The giant 22-year-old on loan from Norwich was brought on with seconds of extra time remaining for only his fifth appearance for the club and produced two brilliant saves in the penalty shootout to deny Darren Oldaker and Jeff King, with even a fluffed Panenka from Bostock unable to stop the party for the fans in black and white who made up the majority of the 38,000 crowd. It was a devastating way to lose for Chesterfield, who may have finished a whopping 23 points behind their opponents during the league season but were minutes away from claiming victory themselves on two occasions.

"It was horrific," admitted the Notts County manager Williams. "But we want to go on a longer journey and to do that we need to take a breath and come through these challenging situations. I'm so pleased for the players."



▲ Notts County captain Kyle Cameron celebrates with the trophy as Notts County seal their return to the Football League. Photograph: Zac Goodwin/PA

Only 26 miles separate these two clubs, who had both spent the vast majority of their existences in the Football League until falling through the trapdoor in the space of 12 months of one another. But while Notts County have finally earned promotion having reached the playoffs in each of their four seasons as a non-league club, all of Chesterfield's supporters were long gone by the time the Wrexham owner Ryan Reynolds tweeted his congratulations. "What a game, what a season, what heart," wrote the Deadpool star. "We will see you in the EFL next."

Chesterfield's impressive season under Paul Cook - the former Portsmouth and Wigan manager who

returned for his second spell at the helm last year - included reaching the third round of the FA Cup and they ended the campaign with five wins from their last seven matches, beating Bromley after extra time in the semi-finals. But after also requiring a last-ditch extra-time winner from Jodi Jones against Boreham Wood to reach the final, it was Notts County who showed their ability to pick themselves up off the canvas after the disappointment of being pipped to the title by Wrexham despite scoring a club record 117 goals.

For most of this encounter it appeared that their campaign was doomed to end in failure, especially

when Chesterfield were handed the initiative inside the opening 60 seconds in a nightmare start for their goalkeeper. Only Sam Slocombe will know what was going through his mind when he decided to take a goal kick to himself, although the 34-year-old slightly redeemed himself by blocking the resulting indirect free-kick. There was no escaping his second error when a flailing kick at Andrew Dallas as the Chesterfield striker attempted to shoot was immediately penalised, with Dallas making no mistake from the penalty spot.

This was the first time this game has taken place at Wembley in three years, with only 21,000 at West Ham's London Stadium to see Grimsby's promotion last year. That figure was easily surpassed by the Notts County supporters on their own as they filled out the whole of the lower and middle tiers, although they were forced to watch their side struggle to contain repeated Chesterfield attacks. Slowly but surely, however, Bostock started to make things tick for Williams's side. Macaulay Langstaff even managed to outscore Wrexham's Paul Mullin - working as a television pundit for this match - with a National League record 42 goals for the season and he would surely have taken the chance that fell to Sam Austin after he was set up by Aaron Nemane, only for the midfielder



▲ Archie Mair is the hero as he saves from Jeff King in the shootout. Photograph: John Walton/PA

to blaze over.

Connell Rawlinson then headed wide before Liam Mandeville could have wrapped it up after a poor clearance from the unfortunate Slocombe and Chesterfield were made to pay a heavy price when Bostock squeezed his free-kick under the despairing Ross Fitzsimons with just three minutes of normal time remaining. Their fans were given reason to celebrate again when Armando Dobra curled home a fantastic effort at the start of extra time and jumped into Cook's arms on the touchline. Yet again, however, their joy was shortlived as Rodrigues equalised two minutes into the second half of extra time with a volley that bounced over Fitzsimons before Mair came off the bench to steal the headlines.

Advantage Sunderland after Hume seals narrow first-leg win against Luton

Jonathan Wilson at the Stadium of Light

Could Sunderland be about to be promoted by mistake? For a long time, it has felt as though no matter what they did, it would all go wrong. Relegations, defeats at Wembley, misfortune with average points, pratfall after pratfall.

"Why," as one tearful fan filmed for the *Sunderland Til I Die* documentary asked as she left the 2019 playoff final defeat to Charlton, "can it never be us?" Except suddenly it looks as though it might be. Unexpectedly and almost despite themselves, it looks as though the rise that began with victory over Wycombe at Wembley last year might be about to continue.

The second leg will not be easy. Luton, as the Sunderland manager, Tony Mowbray, said, are "really athletic, really powerful... well-coached". They have had a fine season and to be so close to the top flight less than a decade after returning to the Football League is in itself an achievement.

They will surely get the ball into the box more than they did here, and because of the injuries that left Sunderland with one 6ft-plus outfielder and a back three comprising a converted winger, a converted full-back and Luke



▲ Trai Hume celebrates scoring the second goal for Sunderland against Luton. Photograph: Greig Cowie/Shutterstock

O'Nien, who has played pretty much everywhere with the same baby-faced ruggedness, that should represent a major threat.

It was no great surprise when Luton struck with their first corner of the game, Elijah Adebayo firing in after Anthony Patterson had saved from Alfie Doughty. But thereafter Sunderland, with Pierre Ekwah dominant in midfield, restricted Luton's delivery into the box.

"We lost a goal to a set play which we knew we were vulnerable from," said Mowbray. "It's hard if you're 5ft 10in and trying to win headers against some-

body 6ft 5in. We lack physicality but I thought we competed really well all over the pitch - snarling dogs, if you like. And Ekwah showed what a class act he is."

But on a smaller pitch at Kenilworth Road, the second leg could become a barrage. "In terms of physicality, everybody's making a big thing of that, but they compete really well," said the Luton manager, Rob Edwards. "You don't have to be 6ft 5in to win a header but it will be slightly different on Tuesday. But if we go too direct too soon the game becomes a bit more transitional and you're giving their best play-

ers more space."

Having started well, Sunderland struggled to find their rhythm, but they are a side with individuals who can provide inspiration without much warning, nobody more than Amad Diallo. Six minutes before half-time, he added to his catalogue of remarkable left-footed strikes whipped into the top corner, this time with a free-kick. If Charles Reep had watched only him, he would have concluded the position of maximum opportunity, far from being an area about six yards from the back post, was a sliver of turf roughly 15 to 25 yards out just to the right of goal.

Diallo, on loan from Manchester United, has been the outstanding player this season, but in a season in which thigh and achilles injuries restricted Ross Stewart to only 11 starts, Ellis Simms was recalled by Everton. Corry Evans has not played since January and centre-backs have become as endangered as drummers in Spinal Tap, the key has been resilience. Mowbray appears simultaneously bewildered by how good some of his squad is and by how miserable luck seems never to faze them.

For a time in the second half, as Sunderland began to put together the long skeins of passing that have characterised them at their best this season,



▲ Amad Diallo celebrates after scoring Sunderland's equaliser against Luton. Photograph: Alex Dodd/CameraSport/Getty Images

the red-and-white waves began to flow.

It was only for about 10 minutes but it brought a most unexpected thing: a Sunderland goal from a corner, something they had previously achieved this season only in the FA Cup at Shrewsbury. It was not - obviously - just slung into the box, but tidily constructed, Diallo at the heart of it, before Clarke crossed for Trai Hume to nod in. If you are role-playing as a centre-back, you may as well go the whole hog.

Like Luton, Sunderland have been much better away from home than they have at home. They will again, in the second leg, be patching a defence together from any players they can find who are not wingers. It shouldn't work but somehow, at the moment, that doesn't seem to matter.

Awoniyi and Sterling both double up as Nottingham Forest save point at Chelsea

Jacob Steinberg at Stamford Bridge

Nottingham Forest did not know whether to celebrate the comeback or rue the wastefulness. A point gained or two dropped? It was their seventh on the road this season and, given this game could have run away from them after Chelsea found a sudden burst of energy at the start of the second half, the optimists in the away end were entitled to feel positive when the host's hopes of a second consecutive win were ended by Taiwo Awoniyi heading in his fourth goal of a productive week.

There was character from Forest, resilience when they trailed, and this draw could be vital in the final reckoning. Yet if there was a worry for Steve Cooper, it will be his side's failure to secure their second away win of the campaign. Forest, who had led after Awoniyi punished an error from Édouard Mendy, could have moved five points clear of the bottom three with two games left; indeed they probably would have done if Moussa Niakhadé had put them 2-0 up shortly after half-time.

Only time will tell if Forest come to regret Niakhadé's miss. Chelsea were there for the taking before a brief lively



▲ Nottingham Forest's Taiwo Awoniyi scores their second goal against Chelsea. Photograph: Andrew Boyers/Action Images/Reuters

spell, Raheem Sterling producing quality finishes twice in the space of seven minutes, and Cooper knew a chance had slipped away.

A touch more composure in the final third, plus more knowhow when Chelsea stirred, and Forest would have been within touching distance of securing their survival.

As it is they remain too close for comfort to Leeds in the final relegation spot and the pressure could grow once Arsenal have visited the City Ground next Saturday. Forest, who visit Crystal Palace on the final day, are still putting a lot of strain on their impressive home

form.

"We've been what we've been away from home," Cooper said. "It's a point that could be valuable but we've got to make the most of that."

Forest did not make the most of visiting Chelsea. The hosts were missing key players and created little despite enjoying 74% of the possession. Frank Lampard, who has one win in his eight games as interim head coach, accused his side of not having enough killers in the final third. Forest, who have not kept a clean sheet since 11 February, were rarely pulled apart in their unconventional 5-2-2-1 formation. Serge

Aurier and Renan Lodi were disciplined on the flanks. Ryan Yates and Orel Mangala screened in midfield, while Danilo and Morgan Gibbs-White pushed up to support Awoniyi.

Cooper's decision to drop Brennan Johnson and bring Joe Worrall into a packed defence was effective. Forest's threat came from high balls, Felipe heading wide in the fourth minute. They looked to outmuscle Chelsea and they led when Enzo Fernández lost out during a midfield scramble in the 13th minute, Danilo emerging with the ball and finding Lodi on the left.

The wing-back had space to cross and another Chelsea calamity unfolded. The rust showed when Mendy, making his first start since December, came off his line. The goalkeeper's presence merely spread confusion, Benoît Badiashile and Thiago Silva offering little resistance as Awoniyi headed into the empty net.

Chelsea's response was limited to Worrall denying Sterling and João Félix heading at Keylor Navas. Their problems grew when Mateo Kovacic limped off for Ruben Loftus-Cheek. Lampard had already ruled N'Golo Kanté, out of contract in the summer, out for the rest of the season.

The mood was low and Chelsea were booed off at half-time. Forest



▲ Raheem Sterling fires in his second goal to put Chelsea 2-1 up. Photograph: Ian Tuttle/Shutterstock

pushed. Felipe flicked on a corner and Niakhadé failed to make decisive contact at the far post. Chelsea capitalised. Out of nowhere Noni Madueke and Trevo Chalobah cut Forest open on the right. Sterling clipped home from Chalobah's cutback and Chelsea poured forward. Loftus-Cheek drove forward and found Sterling. Felipe slid in but the winger swerved inside and bent a fine shot into the far corner.

Now it was Forest's turn to show resolve. Four minutes later they sent a long throw into the area. Silva's clearance was weak and Mangala found Awoniyi, who headed in from six yards. Forest, who later saw Lodi twice go close to a winner, had their point. They were unsure what to make of it, though.

Aston Villa steal march on Tottenham in race for European spot

Ben Fisher at Villa Park

Who can really blame the supporters in these parts for returning to the well to sing the name of Unai Emery? The Aston Villa manager has changed what was deemed plausible inside six months. Villa preyed on a wishy-washy Tottenham to move level on points with the visitors, an early strike by Jacob Ramsey and a second-half free-kick by Douglas Luiz sufficient to kill off Spurs. For Villa, this deserved victory was a 2-1 trouncing.

Until Harry Kane lashed a penalty past Emi Martínez with a minute of normal time to play after the Villa goalkeeper was deemed to have fouled the striker following a VAR review, Villa were a third goal away from leapfrogging Spurs into sixth.

Villa then had to survive seven minutes of added time, when Son Heung-min had an equaliser chalked off for offside, to secure a win that guarantees a top-10 top-flight finish for the first time in 12 years.

It is staggering to think that in November 14 points separated these sides. Spurs were third, three points off the summit, and yet could now miss out on European football next season. At that point Villa were 16th, a point



▲ Jacob Ramsey shows his delight after giving Aston Villa the lead. Photograph: Shaun Botterill/Getty Images

above the relegation zone.

Emery's succinct response when asked whether he felt qualifying for the Europa League was a possibility when taking the job said everything about what has been a remarkable turnaround. "No, no," he replied.

Sixers have not won away from home since January and outside of London since October. "It is not good enough for a club this size," said Tottenham's interim manager, Ryan Mason. "You cannot expect to compete where we want to compete with that sort of record. It needs to improve."

Villa built on their commanding

start by taking the lead on eight minutes. Ramsey converted Leon Bailey's cutback on the edge of the six-yard box, capping a beautiful team move. Villa shifted the ball from left to right, Ramsey helping the ball on to Bailey before driving into the box to send Villa in front. Things did not improve for Sixers. Almost every lull was greeted with chants against the under-pressure chairman, Daniel Levy.

"We've had a disappointing season in terms of where we are in the table but many other things as well," Mason said. "There probably has not been that consistency, that alignment

and that togetherness throughout the whole club."

Villa could and probably should have headed down the tunnel at half-time with a greater advantage. Four minutes before the interval Ollie Watkins's diving header from an Álex Moreno cross dropped wide of the goal. Emi Buendía then sent a fine, first-time shot against an upright from Ramsey's neat pass. Sixers struggled to stem the bleeding and, worryingly, they seemed shocked at the gusto and speed with which Villa attacked.

Technically, Tottenham did not register a first-half shot. Kane had to work overtime just to try to get sight of the ball such was Villa's dominance. Son and Richarlison were even more peripheral. Son had seven first-half touches, Richarlison eight. That does not include the moment midway through the first half when Son feinted to shoot before rattling a post after racing clean through on Martínez's goal. The problem for Son and Sixers was that he was well offside.

Kane should have scored seven minutes into the second half. Villa were a little lax when playing out from the back and Douglas Luiz got bumped off the ball, presenting Kane with a clear shot at goal. But Kane leathered his shot straight at Martínez, who repelled *



▲ Douglas Luiz lifts a free-kick over the Tottenham wall to give Villa a 2-0 lead. Photograph: David Klein/Reuters

the England captain's strike.

A couple of minutes earlier Fraser Forster made a two-handed save to prevent Villa from doubling their lead. Buendía cut inside Clément Lenglet but Forster read his shot.

The Sixers substitute Dejan Kuljevski went close to an equaliser three minutes after replacing Richarlison but after chopping inside Moreno his left-foot effort fell inches wide.

It would have been a travesty if Sixers departed anything but empty-handed and Douglas Luiz wrapped up the three points for Villa on 72 minutes. He flighted a right-foot strike towards the top corner, which Forster could not keep out with his left hand. Every outfield player celebrated in front of the delirious Holte End, who sensed that European nights might be coming back to Villa Park.